

Moving maids: dynamics of domestic service and development

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The relationship between domestic service¹ and development has been little explored.² How might development (meaning economic growth and modernization) influence and be influenced by domestic service (loosely defined as housework and childcare performed by a non-relative for compensation)? In Part I, I introduce an array of potential connections between economic development and domestic service, followed by general trends in the magnitude of the domestic service industry.

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¹ Some writers lament that the label 'domestic servant' is associated with domesticity and servitude, and therefore recommend using 'home caregiver' instead. See for example, Abigail B. Bakan & Daiva Stasiulis, *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997, p. 152. In this paper, I forego this alternative because such a 'politically correct' appellation may actually depoliticize the topic and render invisible the unequal relations of class, gender, nationality, and race that characterize it.

² This obscuring of domestic service may be due in part to its nature as work that physically segregates those who carry it out. Considerably more has been written about development and manufacturing (for example *maquiladoras*), where workers are more accessible to the public eye. Additionally, paid reproductive labor in general has been largely ignored until recently.

Christine B. N. Chin, *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian "Modernity" Project*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. xii, 6, 37, 79.

Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Anchor Books, 1999, pp. 89, 115.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, pp. ix, 9.

Michele Ruth Gamburd, *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1996, pp. 26, 41.

In Part II, I briefly discuss characteristics of domestic servants and service. Moving beyond generalizations, I dedicate Part III to descriptions of patterns in domestic service, economic growth, modernization, and migration in three distinct contexts: Malaysia, Zambia, and Canada. The case studies reveal both unique and shared dynamics, and pose questions about servant-state relationships, racial relations, gender role (re-)construction, class and notions of modernity, and how these issues interface with development. Concluding observations in Part IV include the reiteration of trends evidenced in these (and other) case studies, as well as the concerns they spawn.

I. DEVELOPMENT AND DOMESTIC SERVICE: POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS

A common hypothesis is that economic growth goes hand-in-hand with a shrinking domestic service industry for at least three reasons:³

- Economic growth increases jobs, allows for higher income, and diversifies work opportunities. Compared to other jobs, domestic service becomes less desirable due to its low pay, long hours, relations of dependency and paternalism, abuse, informality, etcetera.
- Economic growth establishes material and technical conditions that may simplify housework. For example, large homes are substituted by smaller apartments. Urbanization brings closer services and supplies that aid in housework, such as laundry, food preparation, and childcare. Accompanying advances in infrastructure (e.g. electricity, piped and heated water) allow for use of blenders, stoves, washing machines, dish washers, microwave ovens, and vacuum cleaners, all said to make housework easier.
- Cultural changes that often accompany development may reduce the incidence of domestic service. For example, smaller households may not need as much domestic support, and employing a domestic servant may become “old-fashioned” or “politically incorrect”.

Other economic growth dynamics work against the more growth-less service hypothesis:

³ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 4.

Héctor Szretter, “La terciarización del empleo en la Argentina: el sector del servicio doméstico,” Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social & Secretaría de Planificación, República Argentina. Proyecto Gobierno Argentino, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, Organización Internacional del Trabajo ARG/84/029, Buenos Aires, 1985, p. 13.

- Increased urbanization and migration to urban areas often accompany economic growth, and it is precisely in urban areas and among migrant workers where domestic service flourishes.⁴
- Domestic work may provide a means of incorporating employees into a newly instituted world of wage labor, and of “modernizing” individuals from rural or less developed regions.⁵
- Women’s growing participation in the work force may require domestic help. Even with modernization, some household tasks, like cleaning and childcare, cannot be accomplished simply by buying or using manufactured goods. These activities remain just as — or more — labor intensive, given class-based trends toward environmentalism, away from convenience foods and technological fixes, toward natural fibers, etc. At the same time, standards of hygiene, home cleanliness, and childcare may increase, making these tasks even more time-consuming.⁶
- The demographic transition may increase need for home-based assistance for the elderly.⁷
- Shifts in thinking — especially regarding what it means to be “modern” — may incite people to hire domestic servants. Families may employ domestic help in order to dedicate non-working hours to activities that have become more valued during the course of modernization (e.g. middle class leisure activities).⁸ Servants may symbolize status, and/or allow people to continue a family tradition (of employing domestic help) in the face of sweeping social changes.⁹

The prevalence of domestic service over the past few decades has at least remained steady and in some contexts even increased, challenging assumptions of its decline with modernization and economic growth. Social scientists and economists have evidenced this trend in domestic service-consuming countries, including advanced industrialized economies (such as Canada, the United States,

⁴ Szretter, 1985, p. 14.

⁵ Chin, 1998, p. 147.

Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900-1985*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 4.

⁶ Szretter, 1985, p. 14. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, pp. 4-5, 23.

Nicky Gregson & Michelle Lowe, *Servicing the Middle Classes: Class, Gender, and Waged Domestic Labour in Contemporary Britain*, London & New York, Routledge, 1994, pp. 79-82.

⁷ Szretter, 1985, p. 14.

⁸ Gregson & Lowe note that in Britain, demand for domestic servants since the 1980s has emanated mostly from middle-class households with both partners working in full-time professional and managerial occupations. Middle class couples now try to work ‘quality time’ and ‘leisure time’ into their schedules, pushing them to substitute waged domestic labor for their own unwaged labor. In many of these households, cleaning is no longer perceived as an appropriate use of a middle-class woman’s time (Gregson & Lowe, 1994, pp. 7, 49, 93-98, 110-111).

⁹ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 7. Gregson & Lowe, 1994, p. 58.

and Britain), newly industrialized countries of Asia (like Malaysia), and oil-rich nations of the Middle East.¹⁰ In a number of developing countries (including Zambia),¹¹ persisting and even growing domestic service rates also defy predictions of its demise. Statistics from domestic servant-supplying countries, including many Latin American and Caribbean nations, also indicate steady and swelling ranks of domestic servants, accounting for impressive proportions of their labor force.¹²

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMESTIC SERVICE

While domestic service refers to a highly historical and ever-changing phenomenon, a few general characteristics may be gleaned regarding domestic workers, domestic service, and migration.

A. *Characteristics of domestic servants*

In some places, domestic service is identifiable with a fairly homogeneous group of individuals, such as migrant women of color in the United States. In others, like Britain, there is no such tight association between ethnicity and domestic labor.¹³ Domestic service does tend to be gendered. In most places, it is almost exclusively a female occupation, although in a few regions (such as Zambia), it is a nearly completely male activity. The age of domestic servants varies, although there are regional and historical patterns of higher frequencies for certain age ranges, making children, adolescents, young adults, or older adults preferred employees. Limited formal education is a near constant; however, there are instances of educated individuals who perform domestic service despite the deskilling it implies (such is the case for some foreign workers in Canada). Many domestic servants are from poor, marginalized families.

In some places (such as Malaysia and Argentina), few domestic servants work for more than one year for the same employer, while in others (like Zambia), many spend years — even a lifetime — working in one household. Some regions' domestic workers tend to also be heads of their own households (as in Zambia), while servants in other places (such as Malaysia and Canada) are prevented from

¹⁰ In order of countries listed: Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Gregson & Lowe, 1994; Chin, 1998; Gamburd, 1996.

¹¹ Hansen, 1989.

¹² Chaney & Castro conservatively estimate that one fifth to one third of the paid female labor force in Latin American and the Caribbean is engaged in domestic service.

Elsa M. Chaney & Mary García Castro, *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988, p. 3.

¹³ Gregson & Lowe, 1994, pp. 123-124.

forming and/or living with their own families. In either case, basic needs in their own homes tend to remain unsatisfied, such that domestic workers make crucial contributions to their own household sustenance. Domestic servants are subject to paternalism, dependency, ambiguous roles, abuse, long hours, and low salaries. Few have retirement benefits, medical service, or other social benefits.¹⁴ Recent literature has begun to focus on the organization of domestic servants and the domestic service sector, yet the obstacles to such activity abound.¹⁵

B. Forms of domestic service

Domestic service assumes a variety of forms. Historically, a very common arrangement has been live-in work, the servant living where s/he works, and therefore available during long and imprecise workdays for a wide range of tasks. The live-in domestic usually earns a salary, supplemented by rent, food, utilities, and clothing. In contrast, live-out or day work means sleeping in one's own home. Servants in this arrangement may earn just food, a salary only, or a combination of the two. A third form is daily or hourly commercial contracting in different homes. These workers usually have relatively concrete tasks (such as cleaning, ironing, cooking) in each place and are paid in wages. Commercial contracting can be more attractive to workers who have their own children, while others usually live-in.¹⁶

Over time, live-in domestic work has tended to decrease while the other two forms increase. Reasons for shrinking demand for live-in workers include economic cost, simplification of housework, reduced household size and living space, desire for privacy, and urban lifestyles. Reasons for decreased supply include preferences for jobs offering more freedom and social respect. Despite this tendency, recent arrivals to urban areas working in domestic service are nearly always found in the live-in arrangement, and in many places the shift from live-in to live-out or contracting is very difficult.¹⁷

¹⁴ Szretter, 1985, pp. 27-29, 35-38.

¹⁵ For example: Chaney & Castro, 1988, pp. 271-362; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 119-164; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, pp. 210-234.

Jacqueline Andall, *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: The Politics of Black Women in Italy*, Aldershot, England, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 231-285.

¹⁶ Szretter, 1985, pp. 30-31; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 28.

¹⁷ Szretter, 1985, p. 31; Hansen, 1989, p. 19; Andall, 2000, pp. 146-148; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, pp. 16-17.

C. Domestic service and migration

Domestic work is much more prevalent in urban areas than rural zones. In urban labor markets, domestic service plays an important role as a point of entry for migrants from agricultural or less developed areas of the country or from other (usually) less developed countries. Migrants from poor areas — who arrive in cities with little knowledge of work and lifestyle, and are often reliant upon the help of relatives and friends — tend to find the easiest opening to the labor market in domestic work. In regions where urbanization outpaces industrialization, and in urban areas without infrastructure or employment for all recent immigrants, the domestic service industry tends to be strong.¹⁸ Migration into domestic service in many cases becomes serial or chain migration, meaning that one person already working arranges for friends and family in her/his home country to follow.¹⁹

Domestic servant migration must be seen within the context of global migration, which has accelerated due to changes in global capitalism and the distorted development in labor-sending Third World countries. Labor is second only to oil as the most important ‘primary commodity’ traded globally.²⁰ International labor migration is increasingly feminized, as well.²¹ Because domestic work is ‘site-specific’, it cannot follow the export production path to areas of cheap, non-unionized labor; on the contrary, the labor has to come to it, such that a large proportion of migrant workers are domestic servants.²² Transnational migrant domestic servants are predominantly Caribbean, Mexican, Central American, Peruvian, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, Eastern European, and Filipino women. An “international division of reproductive labor” is developing, with these countries providing domestic service for other consuming countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Italy.²³

¹⁸ Szretter, 1985, pp. 26-27, 38-39; Andall, 2000, p. 117; Chin, 1998, p. 79.

Elizabeth Kuznesof, “A history of domestic service in Spanish America, 1942-1980,” Chapter 1 (pp. 17-36), in: Elsa M. Chaney & Mary Garcia Castro, *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1988, p. 30.

¹⁹ Licia Brussa, “The TAMPEP Project in Western Europe” (Chapter 23, pp. 246-259) in: Kempadoo, Kamala & Jo Doezema (eds.), *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, New York & London, Routledge, 1998, p. 247.

²⁰ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 20; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 17; Gamburd, 1996, p. 25.

²¹ Kempadoo, 1998, p. 17; Gamburd, 1996, p. 35.

²² Andall, 2000, p. 14. For example, in 1981, 52% of Sri Lankans working abroad were women; in 1992, 68% were women; and by 1994, 79% were women. Of these women, consistently over 90% migrated to work as domestic servants (Gamburd, 1996, p. 35).

²³ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 19.

III. CASE STUDIES OF DOMESTIC SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT

Such generalizations about domestic service are only valuable when analyzed alongside data from specific temporal and spatial contexts. How has domestic service contributed to and changed with development in concrete cases? Case studies from Malaysia, Zambia, and Canada reveal shared as well as unique aspects of domestic service and development in different societies. Each case description is organized around development-related motives behind the *demand* for domestic service, and reasons for *supply* of domestic workers, at both macro/country and micro/individual levels.²⁴

A. Case of Malaysia

As a rapidly developing and industrializing nation in which domestic service rates are rising,²⁵ Malaysia challenges the more growth-less domestic service hypothesis. Christine Chin posits domestic service as a key element of the Malaysian modernization project.

1. Development and *demand* for domestic service in Malaysia

Chin contends that the root source of importation (from the Philippines and Indonesia) of domestic servants into Malaysia is the country's export-oriented development scheme. She explains that, in the 1960s, the Malaysian state began to see development as resting on their export economy. This policy was articulated in a series of government plans (starting in 1971), aimed at molding the Malaysian middle class to facilitate export-oriented development.²⁶ Domestic service has played a variety of crucial roles in this strategy.

First, development led to increased employment and education opportunities for Malaysian women, and domestic servants freed women to work both in manufacturing and in feminized government jobs. As employment opportunities grew, young men, who had been the preferred domestic workers through the nineteenth century, were replaced by female Malay workers,²⁷ whose places were subsequently filled by migrant women. Most foreign women domestic servants arrived in Malaysia during the New Economic Policy (NEP) era (1971-1990) to

²⁴ The distinctions between supply and demand and between macro/country and micro/individual are often blurred; the separation is a purely heuristic device in this analysis.

²⁵ Chin, 1998, p. 1.

²⁶ Chin, 1998, pp. xiv, 34, 46, 56, 58, 91-92.

²⁷ Replicating this shift from male to female domestic servants, in the Western United States of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Asian immigrant men were among the first domestic servants, but were later replaced by immigrant women and their US-born daughters (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 15).

perform time- and energy-consuming housework, enabling Malay women to work in the formal economy.²⁸

Second, domestic servants allow middle-class women to (re)produce the Malay population of workers and consumers. Midway through the NEP period (1980s), the state attempted to redomesticate recently educated and employed middle- and upper-middle class Malaysian women. The government rewarded families in which wives performed housework or employed others to do so. It simultaneously took a pro-natalist position articulated in the National Population Policy (NPP) (1984), encouraging Malay women to have more children in order to meet projected labor demands. Chin explains, “The NPP was formulated under the assumptive equation of more babies=more workers=more purchasing or consumptive power=more development”.²⁹ Today, the Malaysian state and its economy require women to have children *and* work outside the home.³⁰ Domestic workers are employed as surrogate caretakers of the next generation of Malay workers and consumers.

Third, domestic servants provide a means for and object of middle-class consumer participation. With domestic help, families can employ the resources earned by *both* spouses to consume goods and services. In addition, servants became valued objects of consumption themselves. Membership in the Malaysian middle class depends on keeping up with the proper “lifestyle”, which is defined in part by the presence of a live-in servant.³¹ The middle class employment of domestic servants is part of the state’s promotion of consumption of goods and services as symbolic of personal and national progress. Chin dubs this “modernity via consumption”. In this scheme, domestic servants are socially constructed as status symbols distinguishing the middle from the working classes, and also as commodities that are imported, exported, and traded as consumer goods. In fact, 90% of the middle-class employers interviewed by Chin perceived employing Filipino and Indonesian servants as similar to owning material things (such that servants are dehumanized and objectified on the basis of their economic utility).³²

Fourth, domestic servants enable the state to obtain political allegiance from the Malay middle class. The presence of foreign domestic servants was to be read as evidence that development had benefited Malaysians. For example, key to the defense of the NEP in the 1980s was state promotion of in-migration and employ-

²⁸ Chin, 1998, pp. 2, 18, 51-53, 82, 89, 109.

²⁹ Chin, 1998, p. 172 (also pp. 166-170).

³⁰ Chin, 1998, p. 174.

³¹ Chin, 1998, pp. 183-185.

³² Chin, 1998, pp. 15-16, 94, 112, 167.

Shellee Colen, “‘Just a Little Respect’: West Indian Domestic Workers in New York City,” Chapter 9 (pp. 171-196), in: Chaney & Castro, 1988, p. 180.

ment of foreign domestic workers as evidence of state “concern” regarding middle class needs.³³

Finally, domestic workers allow the state to leave undisturbed the Pandora’s Box of intra-domestic patriarchy, so often questioned with development. Hiring a domestic servant allows wives to “safely realize the image of the modern liberated woman without necessarily challenging their husbands’ patriarchal attitudes”.³⁴

In sum, Malaysia’s successful economic growth has both required and resulted in the demand for foreign domestic servants. These migrant female domestic workers serve as substitute homemakers, surrogate mothers, symbols of achievement of middle-classhood, and signs of a successful Malaysian development scheme.

2. Development and supply of domestic workers in Malaysia

On a macro-level, Chin argues that waves of foreign female servants immigrating to Malaysia are not only a result of Malaysian demand, but also a consequence of labor-sending states’ responses to changes in global and regional economies.³⁵ Governments of labor-sending states may actively support domestic servant out-migration in order to reduce local unemployment and bring in much-needed foreign exchange.³⁶ For example, the Philippines and Indonesia, among other countries, reacted to global and regional economic restructuring by institutionalizing the out-migration of their able-bodied or productive citizens.³⁷

Domestic service is a strategy on the part of individuals, as well. Many female domestic servants in Malaysia decide to do domestic work to escape socio-economic powerlessness, a result of capitalist and/or patriarchal oppression. Women often dream that domestic work is a road to higher pay, material status markers, and a comfortable life.³⁸ Although frequently disillusioned once they enter this occupation, Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysia do indeed contribute to the livelihood of their families in their respective countries of origin:

³³ Chin, 1998, pp. 89-91.

³⁴ Chin, 1998, pp. 179-181.

³⁵ Chin, 1998, p. 196.

³⁶ Gamburd, 1996, p. 43.

³⁷ Chin, 1998, pp. 95-98. Chin contends that these labor export policies are often morally justified from an utilitarian stance. On the labor-sending side, there is an ethical presumption that the out-migration of domestic workers will bring the greatest good to society and the economy of labor-sending countries. On the labor-receiving side, the utilitarian perspective is derived from the notion (described above) that domestic workers contribute to the modernity project. These utilitarian motives govern the policy toward immigration, exemplified by state-designated short-term contracts (2-3 years) that deny domestic workers the right to change employer without approval, keep wages low, and facilitate their repatriation to the sending countries during economic downturns in Malaysia (Chin, 1998, pp. 109, 201-202).

³⁸ Chin, 1998, p. 119.

The continuing out-migrating stream of Filipino and Indonesian female domestic workers contributes to sustaining the economic livelihood of their families and/or to conspicuous consumption. More than 90% of the women in this study remitted a portion of their salaries, anywhere from one-fifth to one-half of monthly earnings — whenever possible — to families back home... Interviewees said that remittances were used to purchase anything from construction costs for housing, to basic necessities (food and clothing) and the most modern consumer items such as cameras and compact disk players.³⁹

In other words, supply is bolstered by the facts that these foreign domestic servants contribute not only to the modernization of Malaysia and their Malay employers, but also to the development of their home countries and their own families.

B. Case of Zambia

For decades, domestic service, along with mining and agriculture, has dominated the Zambian labor market.⁴⁰ Karen Hansen's case study of Zambia suggests that, as in Malaysia, national development has been accompanied by increases in domestic service.

1. Development-related *demand* for domestic workers in Zambia

Hansen's study begins in 1900 with analysis of domestic service and colonialism. The numbers of domestic workers in the early part of the century are impressive. For example, in the 1930s and 1940s, servants were second only to miners in the number of people employed in mining towns; in settlements away from the mining areas, they comprised the single largest category of wage workers. Servants were needed not only to do housework and assist as porters, but also to mediate contacts between employer-colonizers and locals. In the 1950s, political mobilization and the struggle for independence did not result in many tangible benefits, and the majority of domestic servants remained in their jobs. During the post-colonial period, Zambia has developed, but, except for mining, most work is still labor- rather than capital-intensive. The large reserve pool of labor has lowered wages so that it is cheaper to hire people than to use machines, including for

³⁹ Chin, 1998, p.121. Gamburd notes that the purchase of consumer items such as expensive electrical goods and jewelry is not only a form of conspicuous consumption, but also a form of savings. These items can be worn, used, and displayed in times of prosperity, and sold in times of need. These objects do not depreciate in value as fast as local currency, nor are they likely to be borrowed and not returned by needy relatives and friends (Gamburd, 1996, p. 43).

⁴⁰ Hansen, 1989, pp. 221-222.

housework. Capital has hardly moved into the service industries and has not commercialized private domestic service.⁴¹

Postcolonial capitalist developments in Zambia are remodeling domestic service, but not so much in the sense of technological advances. The availability of piped water, electricity, refrigeration, and flush toilets influenced the reorganization of domestic service, but labor-saving devices did not, as servants were not allowed to use them, and many were out of order. The nature of domestic service has evolved, as once-separate tasks have been merged into the work of one person, today's typical "general servant". While one old specialty continues (the cook), a new one has arisen: the female nanny. The servant-employing population has also seen sweeping changes: more employers are Zambian while fewer are white. Class, not race, is now the decisive factor influencing who hires domestic servants and who does not. Hansen's study of employers found that 42% were black Zambians, 33% were whites, and 25% were Asians. The majority of men worked in middle- to upper-level executive, managerial, technical, and consultant positions, most in government and parastatal companies, jobs that flourish in post-industrial societies.⁴²

As in the case of Malaysia, a primary incentive to hire a domestic servant in Zambia is to perform household work so that women can enter the labor force. In her survey, Hansen found that more than half of the Zambian wives worked away from home, mainly in teaching, medical, and clerical positions. These women employ domestic servants at a wage below their own in order to both cover housework responsibilities and still pocket a profit from their extra-domestic jobs.⁴³

A second factor elevating contemporary demand for domestic servants in Zambia is the need for childcare. Traditionally, male domestic servants in Zambia have not been expected to care for children; rather, their assistance in other tasks has allowed women to dedicate more time and energy to childcare. Recently, however, employers have begun to seek women's services as nannies. The work of domestic servants aids the employing classes in that it provides low cost child care and household labor, two services that neither the state nor private business have been able or willing to furnish.⁴⁴

Third, in Zambia, as in Malaysia, employing a domestic servant is a *sine qua non* of social and economic position. Domestic servants enable those who can afford their services to pursue what they envision to be the distinctive and superior 'European way of life'. White employers in the post-war period argued, "We insist not only on the motor cars, refrigerators and telephones of the West, but also on a plenitude of domestics and other servants... In order to keep up

⁴¹ Hansen, 1989, pp. 38, 156, 193, 245.

⁴² Hansen, 1989, pp. 225-228, 245-246, 259.

⁴³ Hansen, 1989, pp. 225-228, 293.

⁴⁴ Hansen, 1989, p. 291.

with even the most average Jones...”⁴⁵ Today, Zambian employers echo these motives, and domestic service promises to continue to flourish as this ambitious employer population grows.⁴⁶

2. Development and *supply* of domestic workers in Zambia

Unlike Chin, Hansen does not mention overt state promotion of domestic worker supply. However, she does note that post-colonial economic developments have adversely affected rural livelihoods and severely depressed the wage-labor market, which in turn have attracted people to domestic work. Domestic service is an important entry-level occupation for men with few marketable skills and little formal education, and for recent migrants from rural areas. For seasoned domestic servants, leaving their jobs is not an attractive option, as Zambia’s economic growth has not been accompanied by an expansion in urban employment to accommodate the increase in labor force, so that there is little other work for them. Zambian women still have a very hard time finding waged work to begin with.⁴⁷

Given such economic precariousness, the main incentive to engage in domestic service may be the prospect of obtaining affordable housing with a job. Domestic service offers at least a regular income and a subsistence level of survival for many individuals and their families. Hansen writes that, once they have a job, servants continue to work despite the hierarchical interpersonal regime and low wages because servants are not politically organized and they fear for their jobs, knowing that they are easily replaceable. Many had been in and out of service, but eventually returned after realizing the difficulty of making a living elsewhere without savings, free time, or wage-paying alternatives.⁴⁸ As one man expressed, “Once a servant, always a servant!”⁴⁹ Servants said they would rather that their children return to rural areas to farm than follow in their footsteps, but this is an illusion, as living conditions and economic prospects in the rural regions are even more deteriorated than in urban areas. Domestic service supply in Zambia then adheres to a vicious intergenerational cycle.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Hansen, 1989, p. 176 (also pp. 2, 24). Gamburd also reports that Middle Eastern families rely on domestic servants for assistance and as status symbols. A recruiter told the author that, “Without a maid, a house feels incomplete. After a bride gets married, she wants a housemaid. Sometimes it’s even written into the marriage license itself, that she wants a house with X number of bedrooms, and a maid! It’s like having a TV or a fridge. This demand won’t stop. It is increasing every year” (Gamburd, 1996, p. 36).

⁴⁶ Hansen, 1989, pp. 6, 290-291. In place of the racially-rationalized hierarchical relationship between servant and master of the colonial period, the servant-employer distinction is today rationalized in class terms, as most servants are now employed by other Zambians (Hansen, 1989, p. 247).

⁴⁷ Hansen, 1989, pp. 222, 259, 284.

⁴⁸ Hansen, 1989, pp. 176, 222, 228-229, 256-257, 274-276.

⁴⁹ Hansen, 1989, p. 276.

⁵⁰ Hansen, 1989, p. 275. Andall also found second generation migrants working in domestic service in Italy (Andall, 2000, p. 168). According to Hondagneu, in the United States, Mexican American women and their daughters are caught in this cycle, as well (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 15).

C. Case of Canada

Bakan & Stasiulis detail the thriving domestic service industry in Canada. Issues of citizenship, race, and ethnicity are evident in the following discussion of development-related factors affecting demand for and supply of domestic service in Canada.

1. Development and *demand* for domestic workers in Canada

As does Hansen, Bakan & Stasiulis begin their description with the colonial era. During the early years of Canadian settlement, British women were actively recruited to migrate to Canada as domestic workers. These women, however, were viewed as essential future wives and mothers of the Canadian nation, in other words as nation-builders. The need for “mothers of the race” was also built on the perception of white women’s civilizing influence, lack of which was believed would result in irresponsibility and immorality on the predominantly white male colony.⁵¹

In the post-war period, as efforts to import domestic servants from the preferred regions of in Western Europe failed, Canada tapped first into Eastern and Southern Europe, and then into the ‘pot of colored women’ as a last resort. In the 1950s, for example, Canada agreed to accept migrant domestic workers from Jamaica and Barbados. Since the early 1970s, Third World (mostly Filipino and Caribbean) women have predominated among Canada’s migrant domestic servants. The ‘Foreign Domestic Movement’ (FDM, later renamed the ‘Live-in Care-giver Program’ or LCP) is a Canadian federal government program to facilitate recruitment of migrant domestic workers. Between the institution of this Program in 1981 and 1990, over 67,000 domestic servants were admitted to Canada, the origins of whom reveal regional shifts in source countries from Europe to the Third World.⁵²

The demand for foreign domestic servants in Canada has remained high into the new millennium, and is related to a variety of structural trends detailed by Bakan & Stasiulis. First, an increase in employment options for Canadian women, raising women’s labor force participation (especially of married women) has culminated in the need for surrogate homemakers and child caretakers. The authors suggest that this trend is likely to continue due to the growing dependence of families on two adult incomes. Second, the lasting unequal division of household labor between men and women has meant that women are still responsible for these tasks, translating into demand for female assistance, rather than demand for more male participation. Third, in Canada, the authors note a

⁵¹ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 54, 61.

⁵² Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 31, 73-78, n. 49.

serious shortage of alternative childcare options, as well as inadequate child-care subsidies, especially for middle-income families. Finally, key to maintaining high demand for household help is the intolerable nature of the working conditions characteristic of domestic service. These conditions make the occupation unattractive for Canadian women having other employment opportunities, thus increasing the demand for foreign, usually Third World women workers.⁵³

2. Development and *supply* of domestic workers in Canada

Bakan & Stasiulis contend that the supply of domestic workers in Canada is due both to pre-colonial imperialism in the Third World as well as to contemporary international debt dynamics. The current supply of foreign domestic workers in Canada is provided mostly by the English Caribbean and the Philippines, and this migratory relationship is directly related to the conditions of (under)development within these countries. On a macro/country-level, the debt crisis prompted national elites working with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to enact structural adjustment policies, which have exacerbated landlessness, poverty, and unemployment, such that migrant labor became one of the few options for subsistence. Individuals seek better lives in more developed states, even if their migration requires deskilling to the level of domestic servants.⁵⁴

Labor-supplying countries are also complicit in promoting the Canadian domestic service industry, their governments encouraging migrant domestic service in order to quell chronic unemployment and debt crises. For example, Bakan & Stasiulis explain that the Philippine state has maintained a dual approach to economic development, supporting foreign and local investment in export processing zones (EPZs) on one hand, and exporting labor on the other. In the 1970s, migrant workers were mostly men who traveled to the Middle East to work in construction, manufacturing, and technical services. However, when the industrial construction industry declined and household employment opportunities rose, this country began sending more women migrants to work in households abroad. The Philippine government now depends on the receipt of migrants' remittances as key economic inputs, giving the state a clear interest in exporting labor.⁵⁵

⁵³ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, n. 25, 41.

⁵⁴ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 40-41. In a related analysis, Enloe (1989) (in Gregson & Lowe, 1994, p. 70) integrates international and individual forces driving supply:

The debt crisis is providing many middle-class women in Britain, Italy, Singapore, Canada, Kuwait and the United States with a new generation of domestic servants. When a woman from Mexico, Jamaica or the Philippines decides to emigrate in order to make money as a domestic servant, she is designing her own international debt politics. She is trying to cope with the loss of earning power and the rise in the cost of living at home by cleaning bathrooms in the countries of the bankers.

⁵⁵ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 21, 40-41, n. 23-24.

The authors argue that migrant domestic work, regardless of its very regressive features, is sustained by nation-to-nation accords that link Canada to labor-supplying countries: “This neocolonialism survives because poor nations such as the Philippines benefit in certain respects from this otherwise unequal relationship with Canada. By far the greatest benefit to the Philippines is the conditional benevolence of the Canadian state in accepting the surplus female workers from their labor force, the concomitant return of financial remittances, and a relationship which yields opportunity for trade, foreign investment and aid from Canada.”⁵⁶

Domestic servants, then, become key political links for less developed nations seeking economic relations with Canada. Because the labor-sending countries have not voiced objections to the treatment of their out-migrants, the authors argue that this dynamic may be characterized as “a quiet process of benevolent duplicity between nations”.⁵⁷ Four instances of these bi-national domestic service-related relationships are: 1) when Canada recruited migrants to strengthen and continue the white race in Canada, which benefited Britain’s economy; 2) when Canada accepted displaced persons from Eastern and Southern Europe, aiding WWII-ravaged countries; 3) when Canada accepted black Caribbean domestic workers in 1955 in order to improve trade and political relations in the Caribbean; and 4) when Filipino women were received in exchange for continued acceptance of Canadian business immigrants in the Philippines in the 1960s.⁵⁸

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Domestic service, while evolving in form, continues to exist and is even growing in some areas. The facts that servants are increasingly migrants from other regions and countries, and that numbers of illegal domestic workers are growing⁵⁹ reveal sustained supply of and demand for this service. The case studies highlight the myriad factors spurring supply and demand, which boil down to the crucial role of domestic service in economic and political terms for both individuals and nations.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 82.

⁵⁷ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 102.

⁵⁸ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁹ In many countries, such as Canada and Italy, while restrictions on the legal entry and residence of Third World immigrants have become tighter, demand for domestic servants has actually increased. The result is an increase in the illegal domestic worker market, and a growing supply of undocumented migrant workers (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 39, 104; Andall, 2000, pp. 115, 148-149).

⁶⁰ Latin American domestic servants in Los Angeles aptly characterize domestic service as the bedrock of American culture and economy when they joke that if they called a strike, it would take just three days to shut the whole city down, as households would fall into chaos, and their employers — professionals, managers, office workers — would be unable to perform their own work (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. ix).

A. *Exploitation and abuse*

Neither demand nor supply, however, ensures that employment conditions, working environment, and the status of this occupation are favorable. In fact, nearly all of those who have written about domestic service are prolific about the difficulties of this type of work, which frequently include little time off, long hours, lack of privacy, strenuous work, and substandard pay. Domestic service is seen as a low status job, which is menial, humiliating, and oppressive. Further, the physical (including sexual), emotional, economic, and political exploitation and abuse of domestic servants has been well-documented. Although it is hard to estimate the frequency of abuse, Chin posits that for each documented case of abuse, there are between five and ten undocumented cases. Additionally, illegal employment is often used to impose excessive forms of exploitation on servants who already find themselves in precarious, coercive, and asymmetrical positions vis-à-vis employers and the state. Domestic service, then, is an enduring site of oppression based on class, race, gender, nationality and citizenship.⁶¹

B. *An anachronism?*

Its abusive and exploitative nature has prompted many authors to label domestic service as ‘anachronistic’ and/or ‘premodern’ in this age of oft-lauded modernization and globalization. Chin, for example, underlines how live-in domestic service has long been — and continues to be — associated with enslavement. Some workers in Malaysia have to repay transport debts by giving up wages for months, and domestic servants’ personal documents are held by the employment agency or their employer, preventing their freedom of movement in and out of the country.⁶² Bakan & Stasiulis also point out the severe restrictions on the personal freedoms of live-in domestic workers in Canada, which has prompted the characterization of “feudal-like” or “indentured labour” situations.⁶³ Similarly, Andall discusses “the continuation and expansion of the archaic and oppressive institution of live-in domestic work” in Italy, which one of her informants characterized as “a type of subjection which recreates real conditions of servitude which we thought we had overcome forever in this country”.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Andall, 2000, pp. 129, 153, 160; Hansen, 1989, p. 291; Chin, 1998, pp. 104-107; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 21. In a survey conducted in Peru (Heyman, 1974), women viewed only two other occupations lower in desirability than domestic service: begging and prostitution (Chaney & Castro, 1988, p. 4).

⁶² Chin, 1998, pp. 4, 80, 114, 120, 118, 193 ; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. x.

⁶³ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 17-18. Bakan & Stasiulis chastise the labor-receiving country — Canada — for continuing abuse despite having constructed an image of itself as a highly developed, liberal, and democratic society. The authors liken the social and political status of foreign domestic servants in Canada to that of workers in less developed, less liberal, less democratic societies (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 7).

⁶⁴ Andall, 2000, p. 292 (first quote) and p. 238 (second quote).

While Hansen coincides with the accounts of exploitation, she argues that the persistence of domestic service should not be described as the survival of premodern characteristics into the new millennium. She finds fault with this analogy for aligning asymmetry and dependence with specific modes of production, when, in reality, they can develop in a range of socioeconomic contexts. Further, the author asserts that such pre-industrial and feudal analogies blind us to the new guises in which domestic service is appearing and the processes that are bringing them about.⁶⁵

Whether we label domestic service as an anachronism or not, the occupation and associated abuse exist today, and this existence is explained by the fact that it plays crucial political and economic roles for individuals of all walks of life and for entire countries all along the development continuum. These same factors explain why the abuse remains largely unchallenged.⁶⁶

C. Domination: patterns of change and continuity

Domination, exploitation, and abuse continue, but their forms evolve. As Andall observes, “domestic service is a social institution which reflects changing patterns of domination”.⁶⁷ Some trends in domination evident in contemporary studies of domestic service are:

- Domination exercised by one *race/ethnicity* is giving way to domination by another, such as in Zambia, where black Zambian employers now outnumber white and Asian employers.⁶⁸ In Los Angeles, too, while most employers are white, an increasing number of people of color are hiring domestic servants.⁶⁹ The race/ethnicity of the servants, too, is shifting, for example in Canada and Spanish America, domestic service has changed from an occupation in which most servants were white Europeans, then African and Caribbean blacks, and now Asian and Latin American.⁷⁰
- The Zambian case also illustrates the trends in domination organized around *origin*, such as the shift from foreign colonial employers to native-born or

⁶⁵ Hansen, 1989, p. 294. A parallel accusation has been made of prostitution, which has been labeled as “a modern form of slavery.” Alison Murray, “Debt-bondage and Trafficking: Don’t Believe the Hype,” Chapter 2 (pp. 51-64), in: Kempadoo, 1998, p. 55.

Minubal, *et al.*, call it “an inhuman and barbarous trade.”

Minubal, *et al.*, “The Wind of Change is Whispering at Your Door: The Mahila Samanwaya Committee,” Chapter 17 (pp. 200-203), in: Kempadoo, 1998, p. 202.

⁶⁶ Chin, 1998, p. 105.

⁶⁷ Andall, 2000, p. 292.

⁶⁸ Hansen, 1989, pp. 225-228.

⁶⁹ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Kuznesof in Chaney & Castro, 1988, p. 8; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 49.

indigenous employers.⁷¹ The flip situation also exists: foreign-born (immigrant) entrepreneurs and workers in Los Angeles are increasing relative to native-born Americans as employers of domestic servants. Despite sharing a country of origin, these employers and employees interact from very unequal positions of power.⁷²

- Domination exercised through employment of domestic servants by the upper *class* has been compounded by that of the middle class. Such is the case in Malaysia.⁷³ In Los Angeles, too, employers, once purely elite, now include apartment dwellers with modest incomes, factory workers, and even other domestic workers.⁷⁴
- Relations of domination resting on *gender* have also shifted. The dynamic of female domestic servants dominated only by men has been supplanted by one of some women workers being dominated by both employers — the man and (especially) the woman. Because women are most often responsible for hiring and supervising domestic workers, they become “managers” of female domestic servants. In this position, these female employers take advantage of the racial and class inequalities between themselves and their female servants in order to mitigate against their own gender disadvantage.⁷⁵
- Another possible shift in domination might be an *age*-related transformation from the dynamic of older employers dominating younger employees to younger employers dominating all employees, young and old. In Los Angeles, for example, college students now employ domestic servants, some of whom are much older than themselves.⁷⁶
- Finally, there appears to be a shift from *local* to extralocal or *global* control over policy pertinent to domestic service. This type of domination is passing from the hands of politicians within a particular region or country to those of international stakeholders, such as the IMF.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Hansen, 1989, pp. 225-228.

⁷² Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 9. “In fact, some Latina nanny/housekeepers pay other Latina immigrants — usually much older or much younger, newly arrived women — to do in-home child care, cooking, and cleaning, while they themselves go off to care for the children and homes of the more wealthy” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 9).

⁷³ Chin, 1998, pp. 166-167.

⁷⁴ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Rollins, 1985, quoted in Gregson & Lowe, 1994, p. 58. Hondagneu argues similarly of the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, pp. 22-23). Goldsmith, too, writes of Mexico, quoting Rosario Castellanos (1982): “When industrial development of the country obliges us to go work in factories and offices, and attend to the house and the children and our appearance and social life, and etc., etc., etc., then we’ll get down to the nitty-gritty. When the last maid disappears, the little cushion on which our conformity now rests, then will appear the first enraged rebel.”

Mary Goldsmith, “Politics and Programs of Domestic Workers’ Organizations in Mexico,” Chapter 11 (pp. 221-245), in: Chaney & Castro, 1988, p. 221.

⁷⁶ Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Gamburd, 1996, p. 234.

In this way, overlapping the lenses of domestic service and development illuminates many shifts in relations of domination and subordination.

There are, however, two relationships of domination that seem to remain fairly constant across time and space: employers over employees,⁷⁸ and more developed countries over less developed countries. These two types of relationships, one at the site of individuals and the other located in rather large aggregates of individuals, can even be said to parallel each other. Bakan & Stasiulis conceptualize the construction of domestic servants in Canada as parallel to the construction of underdeveloped countries in the global environment:

The socio-political construction of the 'foreign domestic worker' replicates within Canada elements of the unequal and exploitative features of global relations between developed and underdeveloped states. Ideologies associated with 'domestic labor,' 'the family,' and the distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' are both racialized and gendered. Such ideologies aid in the re-creation, in microcosm, within the private Canadian home, of the hegemonic relationship of Canada to the domestic worker's Third World home country.⁷⁹

D. Change

Hansen posits that the solution to employees' and developing countries' problems would require radical changes in the development dynamic, including increasing productivity, distributing the social product in an equitable manner, and allowing indigenous institutions to relate to the developed centers of the global economy on equal — rather than dependent or subordinated — footing. The author continues: "In this ideal world, everyone would be productively engaged and earn a living wage without having power wielded over them by those richer than they, and women would not be dominated by men. The availability of alternative labor opportunities would make the servant market a sellers' market, and householders would have to pay living wages for whatever services they contracted. These utopian conditions have not been achieved anywhere..."⁸⁰

While the authors were uniform in their outlooks that realization of such a utopian scenario is highly unlikely, they did express hope that contemporary definitions of development and modernization shift toward more humanitarian ground. For example, Chin envisions a key shift in perspective: a retreat from

⁷⁸ This is not to say that domestic servants are powerless, nor that they do not resist such domination. However, they tend to end up in the position of less power. See for example: Chin, 1998, pp. 125-164; Chaney & Castro, 1988, pp. 271-362; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, pp. 119-164; Andall, 2000, pp. 231-285; and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001, pp. 210-234.

⁷⁹ Bakan & Stasiulis, 1997, p. 40.

⁸⁰ Hansen, 1989, pp. 289-290.

the conviction that modernity equals consumption. This traditional equation, she asserts, precludes decency and respect. Chin urges all "...to strive to build and maintain societies in which 'service' is given to humanity, not to capital".⁸¹ This hope is also expressed by Amartya Sen, who proposes defining development as freedom.⁸² Sen's proposal would have to be taken up with much care, such that employers and labor-receiving countries alike realize that the freedom they assert by exploiting a domestic servant or a labor-sending country — for personal or national 'development' — is not true freedom.

⁸¹ Chin, 1998, p. 206 (also p. 28). See also: Hansen, 1989, p. 290; Andall, 2000, pp. 290-291.

⁸² Sen, 1999, p. 3.