

REVIEW ESSAY

Servant Problems: Regulation, Boundary Work and Trans-Border Links

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Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity. Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16th–21st Centuries. Ed. by Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux. Peter Lang, Berne [etc.] 2004. xvi, 573 pp. € 45.00.

LAN, PEI-CHIA. Global Cinderellas. Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan. Duke University Press, Durham [etc.] 2006. xiii, 304 pp. £13.99.

COX, ROSIE. The Servant Problem. Domestic Employment in a Global Economy. I.B. Tauris, London [etc.] 2006. xi, 163 pp. £15.99.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, the vast literature on domestic service has followed a long trajectory which has not only increased our understanding of different forms of domestic service and the different conditions under which it is undertaken, but has also provided a prism into a diverse range of topics such as global inequalities and their role in shaping patterns of migration; state policies on social reproduction; the segmentation of labour markets; processes of cultural “othering” and the construction of social boundaries; public–private links; changes in consumption and life style; transformations in household structures; and individual subjectivities. Such studies show an immense diversity in time and place and also leave us with questions on how to analyse commonalities and differences.

These three publications reflect this richness in the literature on domestic service. They are different in approach, in historical periodization, and in geographical focus. However, bringing them under one

lens allows us to question assumptions that are taken for granted. The three books show the different meanings that certain common phenomena might have under different contextual conditions, and they also show the links between these different meanings. For instance, in countries which experienced industrialization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the movement of labour from agriculture to the industrial sector is considered to be a common phenomenon. The failure of the industrial sector to absorb all the labour pushed out of agriculture resulted in the increase of labour available for the domestic and other service sectors. However, when this happened, to what degree, what size the families were into which labour was absorbed, which types of workers were recruited into the domestic sector, are questions the answers to which cannot be assumed in advance. Comparisons allow us to look at commonalities and differences, but it is also important to look at what they actually mean in their historical specificities.

The volume edited by Fauve-Chamoux is a collection of twenty-five contributions focusing on different regions in Europe (and two cases of Asia), covering the period from around the sixteenth to the twenty-first century; Pei-Chia Lan's book on migrant domestic service focuses on immigrant domestic workers in present-day Taiwan, and Rosie Cox's book examines domestic service, both in the private and public sectors, in present-day London. A wide range of topics are covered by these publications but in this limited space I will concentrate on three major themes only: the role of the state in regulating domestic workers and in shaping global labour markets; the different types of domestic workers and how this affects the dynamics of employer–employee relations; and the meaning of remittances.

STATE REGULATIONS AND LABOUR MARKETS

All three books clearly show that whichever period in history is considered, whether early modern or contemporary, states have been involved not only in regulating the allocation of labour to the appropriate economic sectors but also in defining which categories of workers should fill which slots. The contributions in the volume edited by Fauve-Chamoux show the different motivations and interests behind particular state regulations. As Sogner's chapter on the legal status of servants in Norway shows, in the sixteenth century policies were introduced which aimed at guaranteeing the availability of labour for the agricultural economy. Yet at the same time there was also a concern that hidden unemployment would occur should all members of the family concurrently work on the family farm. Therefore, the law was designed to ensure that unmarried children above the age of eighteen who were redundant on the farm had to look for service work. The class

dimension of regulating labour in this Norwegian case can be seen by the ruling that able-bodied men or women “of restricted means” were obliged to take up work in service. This legislation was not abolished until the late nineteenth century.¹

The need to ensure availability of labour in the various economic sectors can also be seen in Mary-Louise Nagata’s chapter on early modern Japan.² She shows that industrialization and agriculture which developed concurrently did not compete for labour since this was tightly regulated.³ Local governments seemed to have infinite power, not only to determine for how long people were allowed to leave a particular domain but also to impose high taxes upon villagers who did not return to the area within the defined time-limit. Apart from regulating the movement of people within a specific time-frame, the domain also specified which sectors migrants were allowed to move to. Domain laws also allowed the use of workers under debt bondage, in a household. These were workers who, through economic destitution, had to borrow money from wealthier households and provide their labour as collateral. Although domain laws limited the length of service contract to three to five years, this meant that the household of the creditor could alternately obtain the labour of the household head that was in debt, his wife, and then the married son.⁴

The various chapters in this volume show that changes in legislation affecting domestic servants until the nineteenth century primarily served a double purpose: they attempted to regulate the supply of labour so that it would be equally distributed in different sectors; but at the same time they were also closely linked to fears of vagrancy, a phenomenon common in many areas. The fear of people being idle, which was considered subsequently to lead to criminality, is also illustrated by Lundh’s chapter on Sweden. Lundh shows that anybody who did not own or lease land or possess other sources of income had to find employment as a servant.⁵ In Spain, this distrust was manifested in laws that regulated from whom one was allowed to buy goods, as illustrated in the chapter by Casares. Those

1. Sølvi Sogner, “The Legal Status of Servants in Norway from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century”, in Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux (ed.), *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity: Understanding the Globalization of Domestic Work, 16th–21st Centuries* (Berne, 2004), pp. 175–188.

2. Mary-Louise Nagata, “Domestic Service and the Law in Early Modern Japan”, in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 211–234, 180.

3. Nagata states that it was only in the early twentieth century that local governments felt the shortage of women who were willing to work as domestic servants. This was then resolved by employers through changing the contractual relations from live-ins to casual wage labour; Nagata, “Domestic Service and the Law”, p. 225.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

5. Christer Lundh, “Life Cycle Servants in Nineteenth Century Sweden: Norms and Practice”, in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 71–86.

who bought goods from servants could receive a fine; and servants who sold goods to others were liable to physical punishment.⁶

Another reason for introducing legislation regarding the hiring of domestic servants was the need of the ruling regime to regulate the distribution of the symbols of power. For instance, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, as Casares' chapter shows, legislation on servants was, among other things, designed to protect the king from competition from aristocrats. Since a large number of (especially male) servants was a sign of affluence and power, this could be regarded as a threat to the legitimate authority of the king. Therefore, legislation also regulated the number of staff in service. Any family could have up to eighteen servants in different positions in the domestic hierarchy. The different ranks among the nobility also determined how many servants were allowed in each position within the household. The average noble household, for instance, could not have more than two lackeys or grooms, whereas Spanish *grandees* could keep up to four lackeys. If one deviated from the rule one would be penalized. However, the penalty for lords and servants was clearly different; lords had to pay a certain amount of money whereas servants could be banned from service for a year.⁷

Casares also shows that, despite these strict regulations, there were various ways in which they were defied, although in hidden ways. For instance, in some cases masters passed their servants off as relatives, close family, or protégés, which would mean that they would not be registered as servants.⁸ Since the legislation itself took notice only of those who were in the higher positions of the servant hierarchy and disregarded slaves or women working in the kitchen, there is also a question as to what extent blurring of the boundaries allowed masters to employ more servants than they were allowed.

Together with these attempts to define the boundaries of "the other", there were also deliberate policies of partial inclusion on the basis of categories that could be seen as safe and desirable. Some cases in this volume show how religion was often used to "purify" certain members of society or guarantee the obedience of the marginal groups. Casares shows that different ethnic groups coming from adjacent areas outside Spain's

6. Aurelia Martin Caseras, "Domestic Service in Spain: Legislation, Gender and Social Practice", in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 189–210, 200. This fear is also related to the fact that during certain periods in history male servants were much more visible and dominant in the homes of the wealthy. In his study on fifteenth- to sixteenth-century Italy, Romano stated that it was these male servants who were seen as "purveyors of deceit, insolence and presumption", yet at the same time as symbols of wealth. See Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400–1699* (Baltimore, MD, 1996), p. 55.

7. Caseras, "Domestic Service in Spain", pp. 201–202.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

territorial boundaries in the first half of the sixteenth century were allowed to enter and become domestic servants in the homes of the nobility or wealthy classes. Even though some groups, such as north Africans (with Berber and Arab backgrounds) were allowed to retain their respective religions, they nevertheless had to be taught “the Christian way”. Others, such as the Moriscos, who were originally Spanish Muslims, were converted by force to Christianity.⁹

To what extent can we see differences in state interventions in the past and present, particularly the period before the twentieth century and the period after that? As Lutz and Schwalgin argue in their chapter on domestics in Germany, the globalization of domestic work is not a new phenomenon. It was common for European working-class women to choose employment as domestic work within and outside Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹⁰ or it can also be added, since before the eighteenth century as slaves from different parts of the world filled the roles of domestics in foreign countries. Indeed, conventional world-system theorists would argue that international migration for the most part occurred as a movement from non-industrialized or less industrialized countries to more industrialized ones. However, others have shown that the flows are much more complex and diverse. Migrant flows have occurred between non-industrialized countries, as in the case of Indian workers going to South Africa or the West Indies, or Chinese workers going to south-east Asia or to South Africa to work in the construction, plantation, or mining sectors; or between industrialized countries such as European migration to the United States in periods when there is a slump in one country and an expansion in another.¹¹ The colonial or trade links between countries allow an easier flow of migrant groups; and in some cases, with the introduction of family reunification policies even if at sectoral level, the recruitment of workers for the industrial, plantation, or mining sectors may also imply a supply of domestic workers as family members are also taken on board.

The difference between the past and present may lie in the nature of global politics, state power, and also the nature of labour within and

9. However, after the Morisco revolt (between 1569–1671), each household was only allowed to have one Morisco domestic worker/slave so as to prevent the emergence of any form of solidarity amongst them, and therefore to protect the masters from any kind of danger; *ibid.*, p. 199.

10. Helma Lutz and Susanne Schwalgin, “Irregular Migration and the Globalization of Domestic Work: Migrant Workers in Germany”, in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 297–316.

11. For a critique of the conventional world-economy approach with regard to international migration flows, see Carl Strikwerda and Camille Guerin-Gonzales, “Labor, Migration and Politics”, in Camille Guerin-Gonzales and Carl Strikwerda (eds), *The Politics of Immigrant Workers: Labor Activism and Migration in the World Economy since 1830* (New York, 1993), pp. 5–10.

outside the family. In the post-World-War-II period, when in many parts of the world colonialism was formally abandoned and labour became relatively freer to move between different countries and occupations, the role of the state has changed too. Also with the changes generated by the feminist movement and the opening up of labour markets to women, women are in general not unequivocally tied to the household, at least for many European countries.

In the same volume, Jaehrling's chapter on political reforms in contemporary Germany shows the changed role of the federal government as it introduced a tax deduction scheme in 1989 for households employing a domestic worker.¹² Therefore, whereas in the past tax was imposed on those who had servants, the reverse has become the case in many parts of contemporary Europe. The tax regulation was primarily to relieve the burden of the mother which would therefore, in theory, allow her to enter the labour market. The discerning strategy of the welfare state where certain occupations were given priority over others, can also be seen in the chapter by Lutz and Schwalgin who refer to "guest workers" caring for elderly people, as those given a maximum working permit of three years.¹³

In addition to perceptions regarding what kind of work was needed, and also what kind of "skills" were allowed to enter the country, states have often adjusted their immigration policy in response to bilateral relations with other countries. This is seen in the chapter by Magat which shows that Italy opened its doors to Filipina women in 1974 in conjunction with Philippine's overseas employment policy, also launched in the early 1970s, to find a solution to unemployment and to inject foreign currency into the Philippine economy by sending its citizens abroad to work.¹⁴

Rosie Cox's *The Servant Problem*, concentrating on the situation in London, shows the historical shifts in the composition and backgrounds of domestic servants who came to serve in the homes of the English middle-class and wealthy families. Starting with domestics who came from rural areas in England, to those groups who were linked to the British colonial past, and later on to the Filipina, Sri Lankan, and Indonesian workers, the waves of migration and immigration followed changes in government policy regarding those who were allowed to enter and into what kind of jobs.

In many other countries outside Europe, the role of the state is also strongly seen in its function as gatekeeper. Pei-Chia Lan's *Global Cinderellas*,

12. Karen Jaehrling, "Political Reform in the Domestic Service Sector: Aims and Impact", in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 235–246, 240.

13. Lutz and Schwalgin, "Irregular Migration", p. 302.

14. Margaret Magat, "Women Breadwinners in the Margins: Filipina Domestic Workers in Rome, Italy", in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 351–268, 352.

which looks at domestic workers in Taiwan, contributes to our understanding of the role of the Taiwanese state but also its relationship with neighbouring countries in the region. Even though in the 1980s Taiwan was one among the four Asian countries referred to as newly industrializing countries (NICs), both Taiwan and South Korea, compared to Hong Kong and Singapore, were quite late in allowing the entry of foreign workers into their borders.¹⁵ An interesting point brought up here is the political and economic interests underlying the open-door policy for certain groups and the preference of allocating them to certain kinds of jobs.

In her case study Pei-Chia Lan shows that the decision to allow workers of certain nationalities in and to prohibit entry to others was based on the link between what was seen as workers' qualifications and ideas about how society should be constituted. Both these reasons are politically and racially tinted, apart from being gender- and class-based. In the case of Taiwan, for historical reasons and because of the fear of political contamination, Chinese migrants from the mainland were not allowed entry. Only migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia were, whereas those from Sri Lanka and India were not. Also workers who were to care for the elderly were given higher priority to enter the country than those looking for work as domestics in middle-class households. Apart from this, workers have also been distinguished according to their assumed skills and characteristics. Thus, quite often Philippine workers have been considered to be the best type of domestic, the Indonesians second in the hierarchy, and the Sri Lankans at the bottom. This ranking can also be seen in the wage differentials that exist between them.

Interestingly, Pei-Chia Lan points out that it is not only workers from different nationalities that are hierarchically ranked. Domestics also rank their host countries according to an order of preference. She states that receiving countries, in the eyes of the migrants, can be divided into four tiers: the Middle Eastern countries are located at the lowest tier, Malaysia and Singapore are ranked above that, and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Canada are placed in the highest tier, where wages are considered to be the highest and there is a possibility of permanent residence. It is important to note that the levels of hierarchy seem to be different for different workers, a fact that is not discussed by Pei-Chia Lan but brought out in other reports. Thus, for Indonesian workers for instance, with regard to official wage rates determined by the host government, Malaysia is seen to be at the lowest rank, Singapore and the Middle East are considered to be much higher than Malaysia, whereas Hong Kong and

15. As both Pei-Chia Lan and Rosie Cox point out, Taiwan officially allowed entry of foreign workers in 1992, whereas South Korea only introduced its immigration policy in 2002.

Taiwan provide wages five times higher than in Malaysia.¹⁶ These differences can be seen also in the placement fees extracted from workers, where going to Hong Kong and Taiwan involves placement fees three to four times more than going to Malaysia.¹⁷

Thus, it is quite clear that labour markets are not defined by the free entry of labour but that the categories that are allowed to enter (or to leave) are determined by a combination of various factors such as: state policy with regard to internal markets and their international relations with other states; colonial links and the historical experience with particular groups; and the stereotypes circulating in society.

DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTIC WORK AND DYNAMICS WITHIN THE HOME OR IN CARE SERVICES

The way in which domestic work is officially defined quite often depends on how it is connected with other kinds of jobs needed to run a household or to help with other occupations that the employer is involved in. Much has been written, for example, on the great fluidity of the boundary between domestic service and other types of work conducted on the farm. What have made the distinctions more complicated are the hierarchies involved in domestic service itself. According to Wall (in the Fauve-Chamoux volume) in Britain there is a dividing line between the period before and after 1800. Before 1800, within their life-cycle, individuals worked as servants to become apprentices to move on to other jobs or before they got married. Relations with employers were often as social equals and afterwards the servants would become employers themselves or housewives who later on would employ servants of their own. However, according to Wall, after 1800 domestic service became increasingly a class- as well as an age-specific type of employment. Once someone had become a servant, then it would be difficult to find any other occupation.¹⁸

In her chapter on domestic service in Japan, Nagata shows that, throughout much of the nineteenth century, live-in domestic servants were employed as shop assistants and many young women were working in inns, or as kitchen help in restaurants or tea houses, as well as those helping with farm work. In the twentieth century there emerged a stricter definition of domestic servant – someone who helps with or does housework including cooking, sewing, and child care but only within a household.¹⁹ Therefore, each country or region may have different historical timings in

16. World Bank Fact Sheet, January 2006, *Female Migrant Workers Research Team*, p. 3.

17. See World Bank Fact Sheet 2006.

18. Richard Wall, "The Social and Economic Significance of Servant Migration", in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 19–42, 21.

19. Nagata, "Domestic Service and the Law", p. 225.

which the shifts from diffuse to more specialized jobs occurred, but in general this shift can be seen to have happened. This reflects a general change in the structure of employment and also a more strict separation between working and living space. These shifts, however, were also place-bound since, for instance, rural areas would show different degrees of separation of the private and public or between the different occupational sectors, than urban areas.

Views regarding those who are most suited for which jobs are also historically and culturally constructed. In the European past, male servants were more commonly found in aristocratic or wealthy households and their presence symbolized high status. The feminization of domestic service came with the shrinking of household structures. The preference for either English or Irish housemaids, or for Philippine, Indonesian or Sri Lankan domestic workers, is also a historical process shaped by a combination of macro and micro links rather than by certain inherent attributes of the workers themselves.

Although the size of the household and the number of servants within a household have influenced the kind of relationships emerging between employer and servant, there is always a dynamic where social distance is maintained, which Pei-Chia Lan refers to as “boundary work”. This boundary work is performed both by employers and by domestic servants and may involve a variety of behaviours. From the point of view of the employer, Pei-Chia Lan mentions strategies such as “distant hierarchy”, “maternalism”, “familialism”, “personalism”, and “business only”. On the workers’ side, she mentions “seeking patronage”, “keeping distance”, and “highlighting status similarity” as the strategies used by workers in dealing with their employers.²⁰

Among the contributions in Fauve-Chamoux’s edited volume we can see a number of cases which refer to employer–servant relations. In her chapter on Athens before World War II, Hantzaroula refers to the “technologies of domination” employed by both sides to regulate their relationships and therefore make them more manageable. These “technologies of domination” involve two dimensions: “technologies of entering” and “corporal mechanisms of subordination”. “Technologies of entering” refers to the establishment of the rules of communication – tone of voice and the obedience test (which is seen as a sort of rite of passage). “Corporal mechanisms of subordination” involves the training of bodies in the service of others, such as dress, gestures, postures, facial expressions.²¹ Despite the strategies involved in boundary work, other studies have underlined the ambivalent nature of

20. Lan, *Global Cinderellas*, p. 202.

21. Pothiti Hantzaroula, “The Dynamics of the Mistress–Servant Relationship”, in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 379–410, 386.

the mistress–maid relationship as gender solidarities within the household may at times transcend class differences.²²

Another interesting dimension to domestic labour relations is brought up in references to public and private care systems, beyond domestic workers. Cox's *The Servant Problem*, mentions the au pair scheme and the “working holidaymaker” scheme. Although both are thought of as a cultural exchange and education programme for young people she points out that these schemes have now expanded and become an important source of live-in domestic help.²³ Other interesting alternatives are mentioned by Isaksen in the *Domestic Service* volume, who shows that in Norway one alternative solution has been “to export elderly patients to the Mediterranean countries”.²⁴ This seems to have been given some priority in Norway since eleven municipalities are working on building apartments for the elderly in Spain. Another solution has been to import qualified staff from other countries. Many of the workers who provide child care in Norwegian homes are young girls from eastern Europe.²⁵ These developments provide a new dimension to the study of domestic work and although there are already studies on nursing homes, the combination of old-age care with domestic service brings additional questions to this subject.

REMITTANCES AND HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIES

Household studies have in the past viewed the allocation of resources and income within the family or household as an unproblematic process. The critique of the “household-strategies” approach has shown that power relations within the household involve a number of negotiations and bargaining processes among household members regarding the pooling of income. In her chapter on domestic service in Turkey Ozyegin shows that income and other financial resources are not always pooled and reallocated according to the family's collective well-being. The relationship between women's earnings and claiming decision-making power is far from direct and simple. Indeed migrant mothers who maintain transnational networks with family members at home are often seen as ridden by guilt because of their absence from day-to-day household responsibilities. However non-Western constructions of motherhood do not measure a good mother according to her direct involvement in the upbringing of a

22. See, for instance, Karen Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia (1900–1985)* (Ithaca, NY, 1989).

23. Cox, *The Servant Problem*, p. 32.

24. Louise Widding Isaksen, “Gender, Care and Globalization as Seen from Norway”, in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 455–470, 457.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

child or her symbiosis with it. According to her, the fusion of maternal altruism and self-interest in the definition of migrant women's identity underscores the need for conceptual frameworks that accommodate contradictions in women's lives.²⁶ Lutz and Schwalgin, following Parreñas, refers to the concept of "commodified motherhood", which means that the tie between mothers and children is mostly expressed in material terms. This function can be handed over to a "social mother".²⁷

Just to get an idea of the amount of money sent home, Magat, in her study on Philippine domestic workers in Rome, states that at the national level remittances from the millions of "overseas contract workers" (OCWs), who are obliged to send home 50–70 per cent of their salaries, brought in about \$7 billion to the Philippines in 1999.²⁸ What would this mean to the household members at home? Although her study of Turkey does not involve transnational labour, Ozyegin argues that the decision-making power of women increases when their financial contributions to the household increase and is the same or still less than the earnings of the husband. But when the women's earnings are more than the husband's then the threat of losing his patriarchal prerogative is often responded to by attempts to safeguard or increase it.²⁹ What happens when an absent migrant wife or mother's earnings stream into the household? How does her material and social position change when she goes back to her family? These questions are not addressed in any of the studies reviewed here, but other studies and observations have shown that migrant women often have no say in what happens to their money, and because of this realization they will try to put aside money for themselves and quite often convert it into gold.³⁰

We must also remember that transnational migration often involves various trajectories, which Liebelt refers to as an "on-and-on" process and not a "back-and-forth" one, which may result in even further complications in income allocation but may also be the result of these tensions.³¹

26. Gul Özyegin, "Calling the Tune: Domestic Worker's Earnings and Intra-Household Gender Relations in Turkey", in Fauve-Chamoux, *Domestic Service*, pp. 317–350, 346.

27. Lutz and Schwalgin, "Irregular Migration", p. 346. See also Rachel Parreñas, "The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy", in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russel Hochschild (eds), *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York, 2002), pp. 39–54.

28. Magat, "Women Breadwinners", p. 352.

29. Özyegin, "Calling the Tune", p. 346.

30. For an interesting account of the whole cycle of migration experienced by Bangladeshi workers who go to Malaysia as factory workers and then come back to Bangladesh, see Anja Rudnick, "Temporary Migration Experiences of Bangladeshi Women in the Malaysian Export Industry from a Multi-Sited Perspective" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2009).

31. Claudia Liebelt, "On Sentimental Orientalists, Christian Zionists and Working Class Cosmopolitans", *Critical Asian Studies*, 40 (2008), pp. 567–585.

CONCLUSION

The various studies covered by these three books allow us to look at how states have always been involved in shaping labour markets and the place of domestic work in them. At the same time we can also see how states have responded to the particular economic and political conjunctures of the time. Views regarding who should fill which occupations in the labour market reflect stereotypes which are ethnic, racial, class- and gender-based. But how these configurations are played out is historically and spatially specific. As states devise more formal links with other states to regulate the flow of workers, regulations are also designed to determine who is allowed in and who is not. However, this does not necessarily guarantee total control of the movement of workers.

Social hierarchies in the past differ from hierarchies in the present and so do gender relations. These differences, enhanced by technological developments in the contemporary period, allow for different strategies by workers and employers to deal with physical proximity and social distance. The process of “othering” has always existed in whichever period in history; however, the social and cultural tools to endorse this process differ from place to place and through time.

Technological developments have also played a major role in how remittances are sent and how they are consumed. The movement of workers involves not only a “moving back and forth” as used to be the case in the past. It also means a movement “from one place to another and yet another”, as better opportunities appear on the horizon. These developments have also involved changes in the meaning of family ties and motherhood, of remittances, and the consumption needs of household members. Globalization is indeed not a new process, but the meaning of it has changed, as has the meaning of domestic work and workers’ mobility.