

*Capital in the East*

*MCRG-RLS, Swabhum, Kolkata, 30 and 31 January 2018*

This is a very preliminary draft and is missing notes and references. Please do not quote.

## **The problem of reproduction: Waged and Unwaged Domestic Work**

Samita Sen, Jadavpur University

In the 1960s, the rise of New Feminism prompted a questioning of a great deal of received wisdom, including those of Marxism. This inaugurated a debate, which played on the tag, 'Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism'. In the next two decades, Marxist Feminists asked and sought to answer a range of questions on women's position in capitalism. A great deal of the focus was on what Marxism had left out—which was domestic work and generally the question of reproduction. While Marx had focused on the accumulation/reproduction of capital, which was further elaborated by Rosa Luxemburg in her *Accumulation of Capital* (1915), the Marxist Feminists turned to the question of reproduction of labour and its foundational implications for capitalism. This gave a political charge to sex (or gender), which had been missing in classical Marxism.

This paper is divided into three sections: the first will briefly look at some of what we get in the *Capital* about women's work; the second will explore some of the more recent directions in the Engelsian question on women, work and autonomy; and the third will address the question of domestic work and how it has been discussed in terms of its implications for the east.

### **Marx and Women's Work**

Marx did not speak a great deal on women as a separate group of workers. His few comments are spread across various pieces. In 1844, in discussing social transformation, he wrote of new relations between women and men.<sup>1</sup> In other articles, Marx discussed the oppressive aspects of family for women. Much of his writings on the family focused on questions of survival and maintenance, and thus family wage. Socialist transformation for Marx involved necessarily gender equality. In this, his notion of individual human value was significant. Even as he valued

the individual, Marx also makes a distinction between concept of productive labour under capitalism and concept of productive labour *as such* (where labour is valued as such if it produces something that is used by individuals and society). Marxist feminists have held that in the draft material used for Capital volume 1, Marx addressed the question of women more elaborately, which do not appear in the published form. Later, Marx included women in the First International (1860s) as equals, and his appreciation of working women's demands was evident during and after the Paris Commune, when he said (1880)-- 'the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race'.<sup>2</sup>

However, the most important aspect of his thinking is less clear in Marx's own writings. Later in Engels' *Origin*, the ideas of which he attributes greatly to scribbles left behind by Marx, there is a pioneering break with the reliance on nature and/or religion to emphasise the *historical* character of gender relations. Some of Marx's earlier writings presaged this argument, since he held that the relative positions of women and men can and should change. Marx was opposed to the nature/society dualism; his primary aim was to reclaim Man for History. In this sense, it is argued, Marx was opposed to Darwin. It was Engels rather who attempted the reconciliation of Darwin and Marx (Gareth Stedman Jones). The makes the link between Man and Nature through Labour. From this perspective labour is what makes man social and this is why alienation is such a major problem in his writings. This applied to women's labour raised new questions about the natural/biological understanding of femininity and women's role.

There is in various writings of Marx, a critique of the bourgeois family and the position of upper class women in capitalist society, including tangential comments in the *Communist Manifesto*. In what appears in the published first volume of *Capital*, however, Marx focuses on the wage work of women and children in the new industrial economy. This short section appears in the chapter on machinery. The focus is more on children than women, but the following arguments are made:

- (1) With machinery, the requirement of physical strength reduces and suppleness increases. Thus, there was a preference for 'labourers of slight muscular strength, and those whose bodily development is incomplete'. The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought for by capitalists who used machinery. Thus, machines were not in the first instance a substitute for labour 'but a means for increasing the number of wage-

labourers by enrolling, under the direct sway of capital, every member of the workman's family, without distinction of age or sex. Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of free labour at home within moderate limits for the support of the family'. (Capital 1)

- (2) The employment of women and children, ie, the whole working class family cheapens the labour of the male head of the household as well as breaks down the resistance of male workers to the despotism of capital by opening up an unlimited supply of labour.
- (3) When the workman sells his own labour-power, he disposed it nominally at least as a free agent. When he sells the labour of his wife and child, he becomes 'a slave-dealer'. He connects child labour to race and slavery in the USA.
- (4) Interestingly, because of this, the notion of contract was undermined and provided the state with a reason to interfere with labour conditions (not left to the market). Thus, the first state regulation in factories in conditions of work of women and children.
- (5) He argues physical deterioration of women and children through such labour and cites high mortality figures. High death-rates were 'principally due to the employment of the mothers away from their homes, and to the neglect and maltreatment, consequent on her absence, such as, amongst others, insufficient nourishment, unsuitable food, and dosing with opiates; besides this, there arises an unnatural estrangement between mother and child, and as a consequence intentional starving and poisoning of the children.'
- (6) He notes that the same phenomenon occurs in the countryside because of an industrial style of working introduced in agriculture where married women, boys and girls, were included in gangs. A lovely quote: "These gangs will sometimes travel many miles from their own village; they are to be met morning and evening on the roads, dressed in short petticoats, with suitable coats and boots, and sometimes trousers, looking wonderfully strong and healthy, but tainted with a customary immorality and heedless of the fatal results which their love of this busy and independent life is bringing on their unfortunate offspring who are pining at home."
- (7) He emphasizes both physical deterioration and moral degradation caused by the capitalistic exploitation of women and children. '[T]he intellectual desolation artificially produced by converting immature human beings into mere machines for the fabrication of surplus-value' compelled, he argued, the English Parliament to make elementary

education a compulsory condition to the “productive” employment of children under 14 years, but of course manufacturers evaded the laws. He wrote at great length on the poor quality of the education and the absence of regulatory mechanism.

I take from these discussions two important issues, which have been developed in later feminist writings. First, the description of the male head of the household as ‘slave-holder’ selling the labour power of women and children indicates an understanding of the family in which the husband/father owns his wife and children. How does this work in terms of understanding gender relations within the working class? Second, he poses the separation between home and work as a health and a moral problem. Both these issues were developed much further by Engels. The latter has been the basis of Marxist Feminist formulations of the interaction between patriarchy and capitalism and has formed the basis of what is called the Dual Systems Theory. There have been considerable critique of such formulations but some of their basic insights have proved very durable. In the two sections that follow, I will discuss the relevance of some of these for discussions on women’s work in the Indian context. The third section will focus on domestic work in particular.

### **The Engelsian Question of Autonomy**

Engels’ emphasis on industrialization creating the conditions of women’s liberation by drawing them into commodity production has probably been one of the most enduring issues in discussions of women’s work in relation particularly to industrialization and modernisation. The transformation of the production structure holds the key to social change in these accounts. The engagement with the Engelsian question of the liberatory possibilities women’s participation in waged work has shifted only a small ground in that we have had other similar terms instead. Amartya Sen, in a controversial formulation has linked ‘freedom’ to women’s paid employment; others have used the term ‘autonomy’ to indicate a bargaining advantage vis a vis structures of power within the family; the term ‘empowerment’ is perhaps the most used, one may even say overused, in this context.

Given that empowerment is relative and incremental and is also amenable to measurement, this shift has provided more space for formulations that seek to trace feedback from production to

reproduction. By posing the question in degrees rather than in a work/family binary, we ask a lesser and in many ways easier and more answerable question. Thus, work may prove to be somewhat empowering in without leading necessarily to liberation in any absolute sense. But this has not necessarily helped us out of the impasse that the question posed and the rocks in the way which have tripped us up since Ivy Pinchbeck (1930s) first tried to answer the question in the affirmative.

The current context of this debate is globalization— the increasingly close linkages of trade, communication and ideas across countries, on the one hand; and, on the other, a widening disparity in distribution of resources and wealth with ‘unprecedented opulence’ and ‘deprivation, destitution and oppression’ coexisting within countries as well as between rich and poor countries. In *Development as Freedom* (1999), Sen is deeply negative about development as it has unfolded and he makes a powerful argument for a different kind of development, which will give women ‘freedom’, which he connects with agency. Among many social and economic freedoms, he considers the freedom to work outside the home to be crucial since it enhances freedom in other domains.

A considerable body of literature on women’s work in the context of globalization, especially in the South, had concluded exactly the opposite. Given the highly exploitative conditions of work, many scholars argued that the question of its liberatory potential is now irrelevant. The crop of scholarship that followed the new international division of labour and Guy Standing’s influential thesis on feminization of labour emphasized the disadvantages of the double burden and the politically disempowering consequences of women’s incorporation in the labour market. There have been three strands in these debates, which need particular attention for the purpose of this discussion. First, the liberatory potential of wage work for women applied to the proletariat in Engel’s formulation and the debate has by and large been in relation to working-class women. In the Indian case, the relationship between proletarianisation, the formation of the working-class and women’s wage work has followed rather different trajectories. The conditions of gendered migration that constituted the urban working class, for instance, suggest also divergent gender trajectories in patterns of proletarianisation. There are thus somewhat different assumptions at play in the debates regarding the consequences of wage work for women in India. Second, some

of these issues speak to the predominance of informality in labour regimes. Given that formal wage employment represents a very small part of the economy, women's waged and unwaged contribution to familial reproduction is critical. Moreover, the family's relationship with the means of production is not as a unit; the differentiations in individuals' production relations within the family run most often on the axis of gender. Third, the question is almost always addressed within the binary of family and work. The subject of 'freedom' is not the individual woman but the woman-in-the-family and whichever term we use, autonomy, empowerment or freedom, the woman's advantage from paid work is conceived in terms of the increase in her bargaining advantage within her primary location in the family. The family-household is thus the context, even when social development may be more widely conceived.

In an early intervention in the feminization debate, Jayati Ghosh iterated the negative consequences of the increasing employment of women, which were almost entirely in the informal sector. Such increase, she argued, was associated with loss of jobs in the organized sector. While this affected men more, women too lost regular, protected and better-paid jobs. Their increasing incorporation into the informal sector was facilitated by their social vulnerability outside the protective framework of trade unions.<sup>3</sup> Employers were able to exert a downward pressure on wages, and more women were forced to accept the most exploitative terms of employment, which men often refuse to do. Ghosh considered such work to be an addition to the existing burden of unpaid domestic work and the expansion of women's employment as having deeply negative consequences on lives of poor women. The quality, recognition and conditions of work and its economic benefits have to be judged as well as its potential for women's autonomy, she argued.<sup>4</sup> Nandini Gooptu made a more complex argument for the industrial belt of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. The decline in male employment in the organized sector in the late 1990s forced women into paid work- in part-time self-employment or in a large number of cases in domestic service. While this meant a move away from the role of dependent housewife, limiting family size, accessing local organizations and associations, neighbourhood groups or community self-help groups, the men responded negatively to this increasing assertiveness by their women. They attempted more control of women's movements, sexual jealousy led to increasing violence, and initiatives were taken to organize home-based work to keep women under familial surveillance.<sup>5</sup> Chandra Mohanty

wrote of Third World women in the South and in the North as emblematic of capitalist exploitation and domination and any notion of development as mystifying (1997). Indeed, the term feminization came to stand for informalisation and the spread of exploitative conditions of work.

The many case studies compiled since the 1990s suggest complex ambiguity in the relationship between work, family and freedom. In a study on retrenched workers in the electronics industry in Delhi, authors found that women did resent having to move into the informal sector, but this is because their earlier work was in fact empowering. Women workers did value their status and identity as skilled workers, enjoying physical mobility and economic independence. Many of the younger women, married and unmarried, were forced to undertake low paid or home-based jobs after retrenchment, which they saw as demeaning. In the 1990s, there was also considerable discussion on the transformations of family in the experience of female garment workers in Bangladesh. Despite lack of security, considerable gender discrimination in wages, long hours and deplorable work conditions, women were found to have a positive attitude to wage employment in the industry. They were supposed to have benefitted, not only in intangibles like autonomy, self-confidence, improved conjugal lives, matrimonial relationship but also in decreased fertility, increased age of marriage and reduction in dowry demands. Perhaps the changes were not quite as dramatic as portrayed by some scholars at that time; the insecurity of their working conditions have come into public focus in the past few years; nevertheless the better performance of Bangladesh in many social indicators remains a strong argument in favour of women's employment in its garment industry.

Discussing these debates, Christine Koggel (2003) concludes that there are both tendencies. She argues for an empirical consideration of the question: 'There is no single effect of economic globalization women's participation in the workforce or on their freedom and agency' (179). The outcomes of women's participation in the labour market are determined by the complex interplay of local conditions, such as grassroots activities, with national and international policy. She cites the example of SEWA to show that a different imagination and the formation of collectives may indeed provide women the political leverage to gain greater benefits from paid work. While the SEWA is universally acclaimed, the proliferation of micro-credit schemes and

self-help groups, typically associated with arguments about 'empowerment', has met with some stringent criticism from feminists. In an early critique, Maria Mies argued that translating 'labour' into 'activity' as in 'income-generating activities' was a displacement with profound legal and economic implications (1988). These developments expanded household labour and increased the burden on women. Extending this argument, Mary John wrote of the poor woman being transformed into 'managers of poverty'. While the effects of local and global conditions are often deeply negative, the freedom to work can have ambiguous and contradictory impact. Indeed, for many women, the decision to access the labour market may not be 'freedom' at all but rather a coerced decision, directly in the form of family pressure or indirectly compelled by the ideological imperatives of reproduction.

In 1980s and 1990s, 'family' emerged as the chief explanatory of feminine dependence and obstacle to achieving autonomy from work. Even in familial terms there can be no homogenizing brush to understand women and work. The very different implications of work for middle class, working class and rural poor women cannot be unified in the familial idiom.

### **Luxemburg and Enlarged Reproduction**

The connection between reproduction and the colony, or the post-colony, has been drawn most often from Rosa Luxemburg's thesis on accumulation. She argued that search for constant capital drives capital to imperialisms characterized by plunder and theft. The outside, however, remains the outside- the external environment is not internalized into capitalism. The non-capitalist in her formulation is territorially defined- mostly the colonies. It can be argued that there was an 'outside' within capitalist countries too, domains that were not incorporated such as that of familial reproduction in which women were workers trapped in non-capitalist relations. Maria Mies strengthened this connection by arguing that women are like the colony but they are not 'outside' capitalism; capital accumulation is premised on various relations of which wage labour is perhaps the most privileged one. Claudia von Werlhof extended this further to argue a three-tier rather than two-class schema for capitalist exploitation: capitalists, wage workers (mostly white and male) and non-wage workers (mostly women but including subsistence producers in the colonies). These combination of relations enabled a process of on-going primitive



accumulation. These debates of the eighties have acquired new significance in the context of changing forms of work, heightened migration and new global chains of exploitation.

The theorisation of it as 'outside' had followed from the implication in Marx's theory that reproductive labour was not abstracted labour. It did not relate to commodity production because it was not separable from the act of production. As such, it remained locked in use value and outside the domain of exchange. The inclusion of reproduction in explanations of capitalism by feminists focused on non-wage workers but also included the phenomenon of wage workers in the domain of reproduction. From the middle of the twentieth century, swathes of reproductive activity were being drawn into the market and this process has been accelerating in the last few decades. The rapid readjustment in social reproduction is at present perceived as a crisis. Current theorization suggests that in the contemporary stage of capitalism, the older binaries are collapsing.

The concern with reproduction arose from trying to understand women's work in that domain- its familial/household nature, its persistent non-market character and the consequences for its workers, i.e., that it was not only unpaid but devalued and largely unrewarded. That the household/market divide is historically linked but not coeval with non-wage and wage labour is now generally recognized, especially in colonial and post-colonial societies. Even in the history of advanced capitalisms, moreover, there was a major exception to the assumptions of the dual system, in the person of the waged domestic worker. The history of this exception is now becoming increasingly relevant with the blurring once again of production and reproduction, both now in the domain of the market with the development of service economies around reproductive activities.

New scholarship thus urges us to rethink our terms. It is argued that in the current phase of capitalism, the connection between work and wages has begun to defy previously assumed rationality (Gorz 1989). There is increasing blurring between use and exchange value and thus, between economic production and social reproduction, the binary on which the dual systems theory was constructed. This has complicated the use of terminology, which uses wage as the classificatory principle and thus, in the case of women, poses an intractable problem. The

housewife question reappears, but from a different direction. In the 1980s, Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen wrote of 'housewifization', which resonates with the later use of the term 'feminization'. In one meaning of the term, feminization is informalisation, more work in the economy like women's work. To work like a 'housewife' is to respond, as Nirmala Banerjee argued, to respond to the imperatives of the family rather than the market. Even then, they argued, in the pattern of women's work, production and reproduction were linked, since a woman will do any work, however poorly paid, if required for household subsistence.

The new shift is more encompassing, since there are altogether new forms of labour, modes of alienation, and exploitation. According to Negri, this is linked to newly emerging 'spaces of self-valorization' (Negri 1999, 21) and the Foucauldian notion of biopower, both articulated to reproduction. Hardt and Negri identify three new forms of what they term immaterial labour, one of which is affective labour, which requires human contact or care or labour in the bodily mode. The term affective labour resonates with reproductive work and draws on Marxist Feminist conceptions of invisible labour. It calls for a new theory of value as an abstraction but rather different from the Marxian abstract labour. Affective labour, or more broadly, immaterial labour, is not amenable to standard measurements of labour (because it is not bound to production time) or to classical rules of exchange value. In affective labour- which operates by the 'creation and manipulation of affect'- indeed, labour becomes affect or finds its value in affect. The erosion of the singular signification of 'production' as the operational site of abstract labour, helps to fuzz (though it does not dissolve) two binaries of classical Marxism- between labour and the labourer and between production and reproduction. In case of both intellectual and affective labour, there is a renewed focus on the laboring body, and thus on the labourer in her/his singularity rather than as a unit of a homogeneous mass. Conceptually then, affective labour is linked to but is not only reproductive labour- it arises from a convergence of productive and reproductive labour- even though, in empirical terms the two are really difficult to distinguish. In another conception, 'affective value' (Spivak) is neither quite use or exchange value but a third category of value, entangled in emotions and corporeality, cultural rather than economic but vulnerable to exploitation by capital. In such theorization, the old theory of value loses its command and the focus is no longer the struggle between labour and capital, which has shifted the focus away from 'class', analytically and politically.

These new theoretical shifts have major implications for earlier arguments anchored in commodification, which has informed studies of sex work, beauty industry, media and advertisement as well as new debates around surrogacy.

Along with the challenge posed to theory by rapid strides in technology and the creation of new forms of labour, there is also a new terminological repertoire. The term carework, for instance, has gained considerable currency. It is more flexible than affective labour and, unlike it, has no clear Marxist lineage, even though its early enunciation included the ‘commodification of affect/emotion’. Yet, in its various deployments, carework marks more continuity with debates over reproductive work, including its two major strands— domestic work and gender segregation of labour markets. It is typically associated with childcare, education and health services, though in recent years its contours are expanding to include a range of other kinds of work. In one conception, ‘care’ is a quality associated with work, which imbues all work and is therefore the basis of market economics (Sabine O’Hara 2014). According to Nancy Folbre, credited with the introduction of the term, it is drawn from ‘everyday vocabulary’ and seeks to emphasise the common features of unpaid and paid work and the complementarities between them. It is considered to be between a description and a category and has lent itself to a presentist analysis ignoring its complex histories. By itself ‘care’ in relation to work is not a new idea. The term came into prominence in the 1970s amidst a perceived crisis in the West occasioned by the breakdown of family-based systems of care, especially for the elderly (Shanas Robert W. Kleemeier Award lecture. Social myth as hypothesis: the case of the family relations of old people, *Gerontologist*. 1979 Feb;19(1):3-9). These issues extended to childcare and disability care in the 1980s (Brody 1981; Gillian Parker, *Who cares?* 1985), and research showed that rhetoric such as ‘care in the community’ in most cases translated into women’s unpaid labour in the family. These discussion were in consonance with wider feminist debates about women’s work (only some of which is care work) being unpaid because it is familial, i.e., premised on prescribed gender roles in the family. The term found its way into bureaucratic and judicial discourses too in many countries of the West.<sup>6</sup>

The departure in naming ‘care work’ as it is in use at present lies in the attempt to revalorise its emotional content, which is a transactional surplus. Such a formulation seeks simultaneously an

ideological valorisation of femininity, associated with care in the rendering of personal service, and the question of its valuation in market transactions. Folbre argues that the decision to care for someone should not be treated as a random and accidental choice. The aim is to validate ‘emotional skills such as ability to feel empathy for others’.<sup>7</sup> Commonly, paid and unpaid carework are approached from rather different theoretical perspectives. In considerations of unpaid carework, the focus is on the creation of social wealth or the provision of public goods, the building of social or human capital, that is to say, reproduction. The approach to paid care work has been more varied. The devaluation theory focuses on care penalty, which resonates with earlier studies of gender segregation. The shift from the earlier reproduction debates is in the emphasis on ‘commodification of emotion’, which is at the heart of the notion of carework (Hochschild). Folbre uses the term to challenge the binary of the family and the market—the notion that women do things for love and men for money, often named the ‘love and money’ theory.<sup>8</sup> By extension, the responsibility of care places its workers at a bargaining disadvantage in the ‘prisoner of love’ formulation.

One immediate context for the enthusiastic adoption of the term is the revival of paid domestic work in the West and the expansion of such services in countries such as India. It is but inevitable that inequalities other than gender, such as class, race (and caste) should be part of these discussions. In the 1990s, Evelyn Nakano Glenn wrote of an ‘international division of reproductive labour’ to indicate the transnational character of the relational net of inequalities in paid domestic work.<sup>9</sup> In other words, this is the ‘global care chain’, which highlights the inequalities embedded in migration and paid domestic work in the context of globalization. There has been less exploration of how domestic work may be analysed as carework within intersections of class and caste in the Indian situation. Drawing on arguments about the dominance of familial ideology mentioned in the previous section, one may argue that while the fusing of care and work is helpful for explaining expansion in paid domestic service in the West, in the culture of domestic servitude obtaining in India there may be greater analytic dividend in separating care from work. Let me explain this briefly in the context of Bengal.

Historically, there have been more domestic workers in this region than others in the country—in early twentieth century, for instance, Calcutta had a higher percentage of domestic workers in comparison with other major cities. Swapna Banerjee’s book shows that the employment of

domestic servants in colonial Bengal became part of the construction and articulation of a new middle class identity (Banerjee 2004). Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum argue that these connections linger and domestic servitude is integral to Indian modernity. The *nature* of domestic work distinguishes it from all other kinds of work. Ray and Qayum analyses the worker-employer relationship in a globalised economy in relation to class formation and domestic servitude. They argue that paid domestic work is not just work; it is an institution. They find no linear cause and effect relationship between middle class women's labour force participation and employment of domestic servants- economic structure changed, family patterns changed, but domestic work remained outside the debate of work for a long time (Ray and Qayum 2009). Others have argued that the increasing importance of paid domestic work as a significant source of occupation for poor rural women is due to the increased demand from middle class urban households. Most scholars have shown, in line with Ray and Qayum's arguments, that domestic work is deeply embedded in status relationships, some of them overt, but others less so (Anderson, 2002). Pankhuri Tandon (2012) stated that as home is not seen as a workplace, a typical domestic worker is not recognized as a worker, but as a servant who takes care of the household (Tandon, 2012). The unique feature of their workplace, which is the home of their employer, makes women domestic workers vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Despite a tradition of low workforce participation of women in the region, in West Bengal educated middle class women and domestic workers have exceptionally higher proportionate employment compared to the rest of the country. Even when middle class women do not undertake paid work, they employ domestic workers to undertake most of the manual labour in the home. There is a greater propensity in this state for substituting middle class woman's housewifery and mothering activities with paid domestic labour. The employment of domestic workers is one of the easiest and cheapest status-raising strategies of the upwardly mobile; expansion of the middle classes has also meant an increase in the market for domestic workers. Even though there is market and institutional substitution as well, such as crèches, restaurants, laundries and so on, the availability of cheap labour has allowed home-based solutions to predominate. The absence of conflict over housework-sharing in middle class households resulting from the increase in women's employment (as it has happened elsewhere) may be attributed to the ease of access to paid domestic labour. Middle-class men have been spared the ignominy of having to help in the house as the price of having a double income to spend.

Similarly, there is little public denunciation of the deleterious effect of women's work on home and children— again, largely because these concerns have been accommodated by paid domestic workers. What implications does this have for the working conditions of domestic service providers?

Anuja Agrawal argues that the economic value of domestic work is realized only when it is removed from its original location within the households of which women are primary members. The long-standing feminist debate on domestic work is therefore revived on a new front (Agrawal 2010). The global care chain is an argument about a 'care-deficit' consequent upon the immigration of women, leading to an internationalisation of the sexual division of labour. Given that a large segment of domestic workers in cities in India are also rural, often inter-state migrants, similar questions may be posed for the organization of paid domestic work in the local contexts.

The ideological valorization of women's domesticity operates more powerfully in the middle classes. This has never quite applied to manual tasks of domesticity— even as the *bhadralok* defined itself by abjuration of manual work, the *bhadramahila* (much like the leisured lady of Victorian England) acquired status by relegating the manual aspects of housework to paid 'help'. The opposition between domesticity and work was thus sustained and, simultaneously, complicated. On the one hand, the aestheticisation of domestic work, cooking, home decoration and childcare, distanced it from connotations of work. I have argued elsewhere that the 'art' and 'craft' of housewifery and motherhood was elevated by association with nation-building. Thus, nowadays, when middle class women expand the remit of the paid domestic worker, they deploy an extant strategy— they do not relinquish their own feminine identity centred on housewifery and mothering roles, but redefine these as managerial and, increasingly, through the new discourse of care. There is an implicit conflict; a potential for competing claims on the ideological high ground of femininity. Such possibilities are contained by the social distance between the mistress and the maid and also by the conditions of employment. Paid domestic work remains highly informal, defined as unskilled and governed by extremely flexible contracts. These allow the social invisibility of unpaid domestic work to extend to paid domestic work too, which confers on middle-class women a double advantage. They are able to substitute

their unpaid domestic labour without relinquishing the most highly-valued virtue of feminine domesticity, i.e., ‘care’.

The double advantage of the mistress becomes the double jeopardy of the maid. While domesticity may be more powerful in the context of the middle classes, in its contrivance as well as its compulsions, it operates across classes. The domestic worker inhabits two domains of domesticity— as wife and mother in her own family, which she is unable to substitute when she enters paid work; and, the domestic roles she plays as a paid worker substituting the woman employer. As a paid domestic worker, there is expectation but rarely satisfaction of ‘care’, which remains the domain of the mistress. The paid domestic worker is paid to undertake the manual labour of the home. If she is a live-in worker or a commuter or a single migrant— and sometimes even if she is not— both her domains of domesticity are invisibilized. The question is whether we can conceptualize these differences as simply two kinds of carework, of the mistress and the maid, or as a tension within the term carework wrought by class and caste inequalities. The ideologies of femininity, which the term carework seeks to foreground, cannot themselves be understood without reference to inequalities that structure the relationship between mistress and maid. The maid experiences manual domestic work as demeaning rather than as elevated by connotations of care. In hierarchical societies with converging inequalities of class and status, the valorisation of a singular feminine may be deeply problematic; in such contexts, care is itself constructed by simultaneous avowals and exclusions. The basic point may be made; terms and categories that emerge in western contexts need re-examination in the context of cultures and capitalisms of the post-colony. But of course, the specificities of my hypotheses need detailed ethnographic research, which may be an agenda for the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> Meera Velayudhan, Paper presented at Com. Sridhar Study Centre Seminar, ‘Commemorating 150 years of Marx’s Capital’ and held in Kollam, 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Ghose, ‘Gender Concerns in Macro-Economic Policy’.

<sup>4</sup> Ghosh, ‘Informality and Women’s Workforce Participation’

<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Live-in Caregiver Program in Canada was introduced in 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Mascarenhas, Care Work in America: An Interview with Nancy Folbre.

---

<sup>8</sup> Care Work in America: An Interview with Nancy Folbre by Rohan Mascarenhas, Russell Sage Foundation, September 17, 2012. <http://www.russellsage.org/blog/care-work-america-interview-nancy-folbre> accessed on 9.6.2014.

<sup>9</sup> Glenn, 'From Servitude to Service Work'.