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Title: Disposable Nannies? Some Questions on the Role of Domestic Servants in the Political Economy of South Africa.

by: Jackie Cock

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DISPOSABLE NANNIES? *Some Questions on the Role of Domestic Servants in the Political Economy of South Africa*

by Jackie Cock

This paper offers some tentative and exploratory comments on the problem of how to locate domestic labour within the totality of social relations in the South African social formation. The precise relation of domestic labour to capital has been the subject of much controversy within 'the domestic labour debate'. All the contributors have stressed the importance of housework - previously neglected because of its' social invisibility and privatized nature. However, the debate has been conducted at a very high level of theoretical abstraction, although many of the questions raised within it - such as the relation between domestic labour and the value of labour power - are questions which can only be posed at the level of concrete class practices within a specific social formation. Furthermore, many contributors have reduced a materialist analysis of women's subordinate position under capitalism to an analysis of domestic labour. To avoid this narrow economism Molyneux has effectively argued the case for moving "beyond the domestic labour debate" to include "a consideration of the broader significance of the household and the relations within it for the wider society, without losing sight of the specific position of women within these structures". (Molyneux, 1979:22). This is the insight this paper attempts to build upon. It attempts to show that the household is the site of important contradictions and that domestic servants are 'bearers' of some of the characteristic antagonisms of the social formation as a whole. It suggests that the reproduction of labour power which takes place within the household is a crucial subject of struggle: what constitutes

adequate reproduction for the various categories of the working class, is a subject of class struggle; the fact that women perform most of the domestic labour involved in the reproduction of labour power is a subject of feminist struggle.[1] The relation between class and feminist struggle is the main point of contention in current marxist-feminist analysis.

In South Africa class relations define the forms of patriarchy to which women are subject. The existence of a cheap, unorganised black working class means that the responsibility for menial domestic labour can be largely displaced from members of the dominant classes onto women of the subordinate class. In South Africa black women do the bulk of all domestic work. Through this labour they maintain existing workers and reproduce new workers. Black women perform this labour on a dual level; they are responsible for these functions in their own households, and fulfil a large part of these functions in the households of the dominant classes as domestic servants.[2] Their double load implies a double exclusion: there is a sense in which domestic servants are squeezed between two households, their own and their employers. Their subordinate status as servants and the long working hours exacted by their employers means that they are full members of neither.

Neither the domestic labour they perform as wives in their own households, or as servants in the households of the dominant classes, is productive labour. The domestic servant is subject to the discipline of the wage but

> .. not every wage labourer is a productive worker. Whenever labour is purchased to be consumed as a use-value, as a service and not to replace the value of variable capital with its own vitality and be incorporated in the capitalist process of production - whenever that happens, labour is not productive and the wage labourer is no productive worker. His work is consumed for its use-value.. The money that he (the capitalist) pays for it is revenue, not capital ... The money functions here only as a means of circulation, not as capital. (Marx, 1976:1041)

The domestic labour of the wife or servant does not create value because its immediate products are use values for immediate consumption within the household.

> .. the cook does not replace for me (the private person) the fund from which I pay her because I buy her labour not as a value-creating element but purely for the sake of it's use value. Her labour as little replaces for me the fund with which I pay for it, that is, her wages, as for example, the dinner I eat in the hotel in itself,

> enables me to buy and eat the same dinner again a second time. (Marx, 1968:165)

The employers of domestic servants are engaging in unproductive consumption.

While domestic servants are unproductive workers, the institution of domestic service has a special importance. The structures which control the distribution of power and resources in South Africa define the relationship between whites and blacks as "a master servant relationship in all spheres, enforced through a variety of effective controls and sanctions". (Johnstone, 1970:136) There is thus a very real sense in which the institution of domestic service is a microcosm of the inequality which is refracted through the entire social order. The institution also contributes to these inequalities through reproducing the existing relations of domination and subordination.

Firstly, domestic servants provide services which are essential for the reproduction of labour power, both on a daily and a generational basis for which there are no substitutes provided in a comparably cheap form by either capital or the state. Daily reproduction (the maintenance of the current work force) involves numerous tasks of domestic labour such as cooking meals, washing, mending, cleaning and shopping. Generational reproduction (replacement of the work force) includes child care. It has been suggested that unpaid domestic labour is 'productive' (Dalla Costa and James, 1973), or even if unproductive, it produces 'value' (Seccombe, 1974) because the product of domestic labour is a commodity - labour power.

Labour power has three special qualities as a commodity:

(i) It creates value and is thus the crucial element of productive capital;

(ii) It is produced outside capitalist relations of production, though in a manner determined by them; and

(iii) its value "contains a historical and moral element" because the subsistence level of the working class is subject to historical and cultural determinants. Marx wrote,

> The value of labour power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour time necessary for the production and consequently also the reproduction of this special article ... Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he

> requires a certain quantity of the means of subsistence. Therefore the labour time necessary for the production of labour power is the same as that necessary for the production of these means of subsistence; in other words, the value of labour power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of it's owner. (Marx, 1976:274)

Marx appears to make the determination of the value of labour power on the basis of the value of the commodities which would be necessary to maintain the health, strength and historically defined standard of living of a worker - i.e. the value of the commodities produced by the worker during necessary labour time. But these commodities are not immediately in consumable form when they are purchased with the wage. Additional labour must be performed upon them before they are transformed into regenerated labour power. It has consequently been argued that while domestic labour is unproductive, it creates value which is embodied in the commodity, labour power. For when the domestic worker (in this case the housewife)

> acts directly upon wage purchased goods and necessarily alters their form her labour becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in labour power. The value she creates is realised as one part of the value labour power achieves as a commodity when it is sold." (Seccombe, 1974: 8)

Seccombe claims that this

> is merely a consistent application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour power itself - namely that all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the market place with other commodities. (Seccombe, 1974 : 9)

However, as Smith shows, Seccombe's formulation, far from being a mere application of Marx's theory of value, as he claims,

> represents a serious challenge to it in that it suggests one commodity, labour power, is always sold below its value, since this would be equivalent to the value of the means of subsistence bought with the wage *plus* the value said to be created by domestic labour. (Smith, 1978 :202)

As Smith argues, it is not 'all labour' that produces value, but labour performed within the social relations of commodity production which takes the form of socially necessary, and

abstract labour. Thus Smith's argument is that domestic labour transfers the value of the means of subsistence to the replenished labour power but does not add to that value.

Nevertheless it is tempting to try and apply Seccombe's formulation to the second function domestic servants have in South Africa: releasing women, not only for a more leisurely life style, but for wage labour. In all capitalist formations, women's participation in the labour force has been increasing, but their participation differs markedly from that of men. It is structured upon their position as domestic workers in the privatized sphere of the home so that the vast majority work in 'women's jobs'. These are characterized by lower pay, training requirements, job security and levels of unionization. This discourages many women from taking up employment so that the link between domestic and wage labour operates in two directions to reinforce women's subordinate position in society.

There is an obvious contradiction between'the ideology of domesticity' which locates women in the home in their 'core' roles of wife and mother, and the increasing participation of women in the labour force. Milkman suggests that this stems from.

> a contradiction basic to the structure of capitalism. On the one hand there is the continuing need for the family, particularly women's unpaid labour in it, and, on the other hand, the tendency for an increasing amount of human activity to be integrated into the sphere of commodity production in the course of economic growth.
>
> (Milkman, 1976:73)

However, this contradiction may be more precisely located. The household is the main site of the reproduction of labour power which is necessary to the capitalist accumulation process. But the reproduction of labour power increasingly involves the transformation and consumption of commodities produced by capital. It is the purchase of these commodities that increasingly draws women into social production as wage workers. Clearly, as Braverman points out, this situation of "multiple job holding" generates strain and tensions in advanced capitalist formations (Braverman, 1974:397). In South Africa this tension is alleviated for women of the dominant classes through the employment of domestic servants. It is aggravated for the black women propelled into domestic service by the need to support themselves and their families, and who suffer most from inadequate child care provisions by the state.[3] This is the context in which the participation of women in wage labour in South Africa has been steadily increasing.[4] By 1981 white women will comprise 37 per cent of the white labour force. They are largely

employed in the service sector as sales and office workers, where their wages are considerably higher than those paid to their domestic servants.

Now Seccombe's analysis might be stretched to argue that the labour of the domestic servant becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in the labour power of her employer who is also a wage worker. Thus the value the domestic servant might be said to create, would be realized as one part of the value labour power achieves as a commodity when it is sold by her employer. But one of the difficulties with Seccombe's analysis, whether it is applied to the domestic labour of the housewife or the servant, is that "it conflates the commodity labour power with the person of the worker". (Maconachie, 1980). Under capitalism workers are not themselves commodities, as is the case under slavery. The product of domestic labour is a 'living individual' who possesses the capacity, labour power, which may or may not be sold as a commodity on the market. The servant (and wife) produce use values which are essential to the reproduction of labour power, but labour power only becomes a commodity by being exchanged on the market. As Smith points out, labour power is produced and reproduced, irrespective of whether or not it is to be exchanged as a commodity on the market. Whether this capacity of women is realized or not depends on the pace of capital accumulation as this affects their role in the industrial reserve army.

Beechey points out that because of the patriarchal family in which married women have access to a source of income other than their own wage, capital is able to draw on female labour in particular ways as a form of industrial reserve army. (Beechey, 1978:187) Female labour power has a lower value than male labour power (Beechey, 1977:51); many females are temporary and part-time workers who can be drawn into production in times of boom but are vulnerable to redundancy in periods of recession. Thus they constitute a cheap, flexible and disposable labour force.

They can be drawn into wage labour when needed, and disappear almost without trace into the family, when they are redundant. In periods of intensive accumulation of capital the amount of labour power tied to domestic work in the privatized sphere of the home is an objective obstacle. Thus Hansson has argued that in advanced capitalist formations "the development of state policies towards diminishing the amount of private domestic work aims at making more of the time formerly used in domestic work an object for capital and production of surplus value." (Hansson, 1979:182). In South Africa such state policies have not been developed on any large scale precisely because of the availability of domestic servants.

Married women form a hidden reservoir of labour power - the employment of domestic servants creates a particular flexibility in terms of which capital may draw upon this reservoir according to its needs. 'Nannies' release their

employers for wage labour and the effect is an increase in production under capitalist relations of production and hence an extension in the labour force which produces surplus value. Their role in child care arguably increases the value of labour power of their employer's children because of the extra training (private schools, universities) that the dual family income allows. Thus they expand the current work force, both directly and indirectly, and increase the value of labour power of some members of the future work force. The first function depends entirely on the pace of capital accumulation.

In the present situation of growing structural unemployment the institution of domestic service absorbs large numbers of mainly unskilled black workers. It thus takes up some of the surplus labour power of those who cannot gain wage employment in the dominant levels of the economy. It could also be viewed as a category of 'disguised underemployment' in that earnings are abnormally low, and of 'visible underemployment' in the case of domestic servants who are involuntarily restricted to part-time jobs.

This suggests that the household acts as a source of the reserve army of labour in a double sense: firstly for white married women who comprise an important part of the 'floating' relative surplus population; and secondly for black women who are part of the 'stagnant' relative surplus population, those irregularly employed in domestic service, living close to bare subsistence levels in an occupation characterised "by a maximum of working time and a minimum of wages". (Marx, 1976:796)[5] For those women in the 'homelands' mainly involved in agriculture, forming part of the 'latent' relative surplus population, domestic service in the past has represented a strategy for survival.

Thus it might be argued that there is an analogy between the homelands and the home in the political economy of South Africa. Both could be said to operate as important sites of the maintenance and reproduction of labour power, and as sources of the reserve army of labour. Both migrants and women have less training and are assumed to have access to means of subsistence apart from their own wage. Thus, Wolpe had argued in the case of migrants and Beechey in the case of married women, capital is able to pay the worker "below the cost of reproduction, because wages are fixed at the level of subsistence of the individual worker". (Wolpe, 1972:434) i.e. the value of labour power is set at the level of maintenance but not replacement. It might even be argued that both the homelands and the home are structured on the existence of non-capitalist modes of production - the home on a 'client mode' (Harrison, 1973:40) or a 'domestic mode of production'. (Delphy, 1976.) While the positing of a separate domestic or client mode or production is extremely dubious, it is clear that increasing capitalist penetration has undermined both 'economies'.

The collapse of the homeland economies has eroded the economic basis of cheap, migrant labour power. Capitalist penetration in the home has increasingly drawn women into wage labour in a direct and visible relation with capital. This has eroded the material basis of the patriarchal family.[6] The result is that the social control functions of both the homelands and the home is increasingly important.

In this respect the institution of domestic service has an ideological function which operates in two opposing directions. On the one hand it socializes whites into the dominant ideological order. Often it is the most significant interracial contact whites encounter, and they experience this relationship in extremely asymmetrical terms. Many white South African children learn the attitudes and styles of racial domination from domestic relationships with servants, particularly 'nannies'.[7] It might be thought that servants are similarly socialized into subordination, and in this sense domestic service would operate to reinforce existing class relations. Certainly they are subject to numerous practices and rituals of inferiority - 'servant's rations' and 'servant's blankets' are synonymous with cheap products of inferior quality; uniforms and vastly inferior living quarters underline their subordinate place in the household; the prohibition on using the same toilet or bath as their employers express the latter's fear of contamination. However, the servants' response to these practices is the precise opposite of what might be expected. It will now be argued that servants - as well as the wives who are their employers - are both in an extremely dependent position; that this dependence is secured through the state and through an ideology of subordination to which wives and servants respond very differently.

The pivotal point of the relationship between employer and servant is their mutual dependence. Employers are dependent upon their servant's labour, but with unemployment rising most sharply among black women, an individual servant is easily replacable. Servants are dependent upon their employers for most of the necessities of life to support themselves and their children.[8] This dependence of the servant on her employer is secured through the state. Servants are bound to their employers through influx control and a system of national labour bureaux. Influx control is the major instrument whereby the state controls black labour. But unlike other black workers, domestic servants (as well as agricultural workers) are situated in a legal vacuum within this coercive structure. They are not protected by any legislation; there are no laws stipulating the minimum wages, hours of work, or other conditions of service. The lack of disability and unemployment insurance, maternity benefits and paid sick leave, imply that they are an extremely insecure group of workers. They are vulnerable to instant dismissal by their employers who often fail to observe the common law provisions.

> "No matter if I work here for one hundred years I can be dismissed for breaking a cup and get nothing. Not even a thank you."

Dismissal increasingly means endorsement out of a prescribed urban area or from a white owned farm to the homelands.

The tightening up of influx control since Riekert had intensified this dependence of the domestic servant on her employer. Announcement of the state's decision to strengthen influx control by increasing the maximum fines from R100 to R500 on employers of illegal black workers resulted in many domestic servants - particularly in the Western Cape - being dismissed. On the Rand thousands of illegal workers flooded to pass offices to be registered. After near panic the Minister of Co-operation and Development announced a three month moratorium until 31 October 1979, to enable employers to 'regularise' their position. The concessions granted applies only to people who have worked for one employer for at least a year, or for more than one employer over three years. Before workers can be registered proof of accommodation has to be presented. This is a major obstacle in view of the desperate shortage of housing in most black townships, and means that servants' accommodation on their employer's premises is especially valued. But even those workers who do qualify for registration do not gain permanent residence rights. They will be registered under Section 10 1 (d) of the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, thus becoming migrants on one-year contracts. As long as they remain in the same job their contract may be renewed annually. As with other migrants, changing jobs requires that the new employer make a special application to the administration board proving that no local labour is available. Thus the effect of the new legislation is effectively to bind workers to their present employers. As Sheena Duncan points out the concession "will help many people to be registered in the jobs they already hold.. It is very welcome in the present unemployment crisis, although one must realise that it ties workers to their present employers". *(Sunday Times*.22.7.1979.) In the case of domestic servants these ties may be especially onerous.

This dependency relationship has other ramifications. Both wives and servants are domestic workers. Even where servants are employed to perform the majority of manual tasks, the sexual division of labour within the home lays most administrative responsibility for household consumption and organisation on the wife.[9] In the Eastern Cape study the majority of married respondents said their husbands never helped with with domestic work. Some resented this,

> "He should occasionally cut himself a slice of bread, or pull up a chair".

But the employment of servants reinforces the exclusion of men from domestic labour.

> "Men should help if there are no servants. On farms here we usually have lots of servants, so it's not necessary."

In addition to their responsibility for domestic labour both wives and servants are isolated in the privatized sphere of the home and have a subordinate status within it. Both are subject to extensive control which involves a submission to personal authority. By analogous terms that servants are bound to their employers through labour contracts and influx control, wives are bound to their husbands through marriage contracts.

The marriage bond is a subordinating one for women and secures their economic, legal and sexual dependence. For instance the father is the sole legal guardian of children born in wedlock. More than half white South African marriages are in terms of community of property with inclusion of the marital power. Under this system the husband acquires guardianship of the wife and she is considered a minor even if she is over 21. Having the marital power means for example that a wife cannot enter into any binding contract, even a hire purchase agreement, or open a credit account, without the prior permission of her husband. Immediately upon marriage the wife comes into possession of half the joint estate of the two spouses, but she has no control over her half share until the termination of the marriage. As far as black women are concerned, those married by a marriage officer without an antenuptial contract are automatically married out of community of property. But the husband retains the marital power, which means they suffer the disadvantages of both the present marriage regimes. The marriage contract also secures a wife's sexual dependence in that a husband cannot be convicted of raping his wife; the implication is that she is a form of sexual property to which he has the right of access.

Many working class housewives - both white and black - are separated not only from the means of production, but also from the means of exchange. They are therefore dependent upon the redistribution of their husband's wage which is conducted in private between them. Their position thus involves an economic dependence. Over a third of the married women interviewed in the Eastern Cape study did not know their husband's incomes. When I asked how the family finances were arranged I was told,

> "I've never been able to find out his income. I have to ask him for money".
> "He gives me pocket money when he feels like it".

The fact that the cash income of both wives and servants is often given as 'pocket money' underlines the economic dependence of both types of domestic workers.[10]

Such economic dependence promotes 'deference' from wives. The relationship between husband and wife has been described as a deferential one in that it is hierarchic, traditionally legitimated and embedded in a system of power. (Bell and Newby, 1976:164) Most of the white middle-class wives I interviewed accepted the relations of male domination and female dependence as natural and inevitable. For instance,

> "A woman is a womb - her primary function is to be a good mother."
> "Our submission to men to God's law."
> "The man should be the head of the house."

Clearly, the dependence and control of wives is not only mediated through the state, but also through an ideology of subordination which they internalise.

These 'deferential wives' also accept the relations of racial domination as natural and inevitable. Sixty eight per cent of those interviewed regarded blacks as indubitably inferior.

> "They're stupid and irresponsible... in short, very raw."
> "They've just come out of the trees."
> "Putting them into European clothes does'nt make them civilised."

The common equation of blacks with children provides an ideological space for turning middle aged domestic servants into family dependents. Thirty per cent of the employers interviewed described their servants as "one of the family." They are widely viewed as 'loyal', 'obedient' and 'deferential' workers who accept the legitimacy of their own subordination in the social order, and defer to their 'natural' superiors. Research in the Eastern Cape suggests that the deference attributed to the domestic servant is more apparent than real. 'Deference' is a mask which is deliberately cultivated to shield the worker's real feelings. It is a protective device generated by the powerlessness of her situation which blocks any overt expression of dissatisfaction.

Of course subordinate groups within society do 'accept' their position to some extent. But there is an important distinction between "pragmatic acceptance, where the individual complies because he perceives no realistic alternative, and normative acceptance, where the individual internalizes the moral expectations of the ruling class and views his own interior position as legitimate." (Mann, 1970:425) Evidence from the Eastern Cape research suggests that domestic servants show a 'pragmatic acceptance' of their subordinate position in society, but their occupational socialization involves the adoption of a mask of deference in order to conform to employer expectations and manipulative practices.

In the work place the disparity in income and life-style between worker and employer is highly visible. The work situation acts as a model of the wider society as a whole in the minds of many workers; the inequalities of power and wealth they experience at the micro-level at work, are reflections of general inequalities. Most domestic servants interviewed reject the legitimacy of these.

The great majority thought the difference between their living standards and those of their employers was "unjust".

> "It makes me angry to look at their gardens and the food they buy for their dogs. It is better than what they buy for us. And the dogs eat off their dishes but we don't."

All showed a sense of relative deprivation and thought they should be paid at least double their present wage.

> "Because I work hard ... I look after the house and even the dogs, cats and chickens. I have to sort the eggs very carefully and check if they are first grade."
> (This woman was earning R7 a month in 1979)

All thought that blacks and women were not treated fairly in South Africa.

> "We are dying like flies because of poverty.
>
> "The whites are standing on our necks with their boots."

However some seemed to have a sense of personal superiority to whites:

> "We are more capable than whites. That is why they try by all means to keep us under their feet."
>
> "You can put a black person in the forest and just leave water with him or her. We can manage because there is a lot we can do."

Their dependence on their white employers does not appear to be transformed into a sense of collective weakness. Perhaps their employer's dependence on their labour operates to reinforce their sense of their own capabilities. Several comments emphasized the helplessness and weaknesses of employers:

> "She is lazy. She sits a lot on the stoep outside while I have to rush around."
>
> "She could'nt manage without a slave like me."

Perhaps this is a device for maintaining a sense of dignity in a demeaning role - a subtle inversion of the asymmetrical nature of the relationship.

All thought that domestic servants as a group are "badly treated," and some consciousness of a community of interests emerged here,

> "We are all singing one song. We need the same help with low wages and bad treatment."

Fundamental change was seen as inevitable, but, as one women expressed it,

> "it will take time. It is not easy to take a piece of meat out of your mouth and share it."

The question must then be posed, does the institution of domestic service contain tensions in this society through the promoting of deference relationships which exact feelings of loyalty and gratitude? If this were the case domestic service could be said to undermine solidarity among the oppressed by linking them as individuals to their oppressors. It might then afford a fragile bridge across the contradictions of a society based on racism and exploitation.[11] However the Eastern Cape research suggests that the institution of domestic service inflames rather than dissipates such tensions.

Nevertheless the political potential of this should not be overestimated. Giddens has suggested that the most important factor advancing conflict consciousness is visibility of class differentials. (Giddens, 1973:116). Close and immediate exposure to the class differential can almost be described as the essential job experience of the domestic servant. However 'revolutionary consciousness' involves not only a perception of the existing socio-economic order as 'illegitimate', but "a recognition of modes of action which can be taken to reorganise it on a new basis.. The experience of deprivation ... is simply one element in the picture; feelings of resentment of a diffuse nature only take on a revolutionary character when they are fused with a concrete project, however vaguely formulated, of an alternative order which can be brought into being." (Giddens, 1973:116). The only 'concrete project' formulated - by a single informant was,

> "What we need is a chance to kill all these whites."[12]

What this section has attempted to argue is that the dependence and control of both types of domestic workers - wives and servants - is not only mediated through the state in the form of marriage contracts and influx control,but also through an ideology of subordination to which wives and servants respond very differently. However the analogy between wives and servants cannot be stretched too far. In South Africa black women are coerced into an occupation none of them

would choose. The privatized nature of the work, it's monotonous and repetitive character, the close control and supervision it often involves, the length and irregularity of working hours, low wages and demeaning treatment,were among the reasons cited by respondents for the unpopularity of domestic service. None of the servants interviewed said they enjoyed their job or derived any sense of fulfillment from it.

> "You never knock off."
> "The worst thing is cooking the dog's food and not eating it."
> "I never sleep at home with my husband and children Even if I have a half day off I have to come back and sleep here at night."
> "The children are rude. They don't count us as people. They think one belongs to their parents."
> "She tells me to do one hundred things a day."

The fact that the mother of two out of every three respondents in the Eastern Cape sample were domestic servants suggests that the occupation involves a degree of ascription in a quasi-caste status. At the very least they are trapped workers caught up in structure of constraints which creates their vulnerability and dependence on their employers.

Black workers generally in South Africa are among the most regimented labour forces in the world, but there is a particular edge to the domestic servant's vulnerability. The absence of protective legislation the high degree of observability in work performance, and the highly personalised relationship with her employer, the lack of collective bargaining and worker rights, all mean that she is particularly exposed - to the vagaries of employer's moods and demands. It is arguable that blacks employed as domestic servants experience apartheid in a peculiarly humiliating way. Their duties as workers force them into situations where as blacks their rights are denied or restricted. In Port Elizabeth for instance "domestic servants looking after white children are allowed on white beaches but are not allowed to swim." (Municipal Director of Parks. *Eastern Province Herald*.15.1.1977). In one case three domestic servants were charged for doing so.

Overall, as an occupational group domestic servants are trapped in a condition of subjugation and immobility within which they are subject to oppression. This oppression is subjectively expressed in the servants' sense of being slaves. This was the image most frequently used by domestic servants in the Eastern Cape to describe their situation,

> "I have been a slave all my life."
> "We are slaves in our own country."
> "Our employers should treat us like people and not like slaves."

Unlike the slave the domestic servants' existence is not guaranteed. But like the slave the servant's ability to resist oppression is extremely narrow.

Mphahlele has stressed the "non-committal antlike way in which blacks serve whites"; the employer's helplessness against her servant's "cheerful imcompetence"; the servants' determination not to be known by their employers.

> This non-committal attitude of the silent servant is his most effective weapon against the white master who has all the instruments of power on his side. Both of them know this." (Mphahlele,1962:140)

The domestic servants' silence and secret mockery of employers might thus be viewed as muted rituals of resistance. They involve a mode of adaptation that enable her to maintain her personality and integrity intact in a demeaning role. The petty pilfering in which all said they engaged, might also be seen as an expression of situational rebellion. The crucial point is that servants, as well as wives, rebel as isolated individuals. Both are atomized workers who in situations of dissatisfaction confront individuals (whether employers or husbands) in the privatized sphere of the home. A collective response is displaced by individual attempts at negotiation - men sharing more of the housework, giving more 'pocket money' in the case of wives; requesting small wage increases or a day off in the case of servants. In neither case do their actions directly contest the relations of capital. Both lack a direct relation with capital which makes it difficult for either to locate the source of their oppression beyond the immediate agent of the employer or the husband. Isolated and impotent the only weapon of a dissatisfied wife or servant who finds her situation intolerable is to withdraw and attempt to find a more congenial place. While the rates of divorce and remarriage are rising, the work histories of most domestic servants interviewed in the Eastern Cape showed a marked stability. The great majority had worked for the same employer for between five and twenty five years, the implication being that it is not a very mobile occupation.

In it's transformation into a predominantly black female occupation domestic service in fact reflects changing patterns of racial and sexual domination and control. Marx observed that capitalism

> .. develops a hierarchy of labour powers to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual labourers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function; on the other hand the various operations of the hierarchy are parcelled out among the labourers according to both their natural and their acquired abilities. (Marx, 1976:371)

'Natural and acquired abilities' are subject to racial and sexual determinations.

> Racism and sexism train us to acquire and develop certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired abilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men.
> (James, 1975:14)

In South Africa - as well as in other colonial societies - racism cuts across the sexual division of labour so as to include the employment of a considerable number of black men as domestic servants. "Dusting a room or making a bed" is then said to appeal to "the comic side of their natures." (Theal, 1919:220) But domestic labour is best suited to women in terms of both their 'innate' abilities, and vocational destination, Thus

> Domestic service provides the girl with a poor family with an opportunity of being trained in the duties of a housewife; it also suits the nature of most girls. (Carnegie Commission, 1932:xvi)

However as other occupational opportunities opened up for white women, they together with black men increasingly escaped from domestic service as black women were coerced into it. [13]

So far it has been suggested that the household and relations within it are of considerable significance in the political economy of South Africa - not only reflecting inequalities, but reinforcing them in a contradictory way. However the large - scale employments of domestic servants within white households is anomalous in two senses.

Firstly, domestic servants are anomalous in an industrial society. Katzman, in his analysis of domestic service in the USA between 1870 and 1920 characterises it as a 'non-industrial' rather than a 'pre-industrial occupation'. (Katzman, 1978:146). The occupation has a number of characteristics which define the difference between domestic servants and other wage workers. Other wage workers sell their labour power as a commodity for a definite period of time in exchange for a money wage. Work relationships are impersonal and involve a clear separation between work place and home,both in temporal and spatial terms. The domestic servant by contrast frequently works irregular hours, she receives part of her payment 'in kind' and the 'live-in' domestic servant is accommodated at the work-place. Employer control often extends into the servant's 'private life' - for example the regulation of visitors and the inspection of servant's rooms and goods. The highly personalised nature of the servant's relationship with her employer and the low level of specialization in domestic roles, are both anamalous in a modern industrial society moving towards specialized and impersonal work relationships.

Secondly, the large-scale employment of domestic servants is anamalous in capitalist society. While the work they do in the maintenance and reproduction of labour power is essential to capital, their employment as wage workers is not. Braverman writes,

> .. the multitude of personal servants was, in the early period of capitalism, both a heritage of feudal and semi-feudal relations in the form of a vast employment furnished by the landowning aristocracy, and a reflection of the riches created by the Industrial Revolution in the form of similar employment furnished by capitalists and the upper middle class. (Braverman, 1974:363)

The number of domestic servants in South Africa is similarly a heritage of feudal relations and is a reflection of the high standard of living enjoyed by most whites. But here many white working class households employ black women as domestic servants.

There are two ways of looking at this: it could be argued that cheap, black domestic labour subsidizes the white working class in South Africa, enabling their necessary means of subsistence to be cheaper than it would be if creches and day nurseries were provided by the state, or if commodities had to be purchased in an immediately consumable form within the capitalist sector. The implication of this is that through her labour the domestic servant cheapens, for capital, the cost of maintaining and reproducing white labour power. Domestic servants would thus have the same function as the informal sector arguably has for the black working class. (Mare, 1980: 37). On the other hand, the widespread employment of domestic servants by the white working class could be argued to mean that the necessary means of subsistence of the white working class is more expensive than it would be if the housewife was solely responsible for domestic work. The implication is that the price of white working class labour power is increased and capital's profits are correspondingly lowered.

The question at issue is how the white worker's necessary means of subsistence comes to be defined. Since the earliest colonial penetration this has included the employment of cheap black labour. The implication is that because of the particular form colonial domination has taken in South Africa, "the white proletariat built the price of a black servant into the cost of reproducing itself." (Van Onselen, 1978:21). Obviously such an economic concession to white workers is a relatively small burden to capital - the wages of servants being so low, and black workers being the large majority upon whose exploitation capital is dependent.

This illustrates the point that there is no invariant relation between domestic labour and the value of labour power. It has been widely argued within the domestic labour debate

that there is; that domestic labour invariably lowers the value of labour power.[14] As Molyneux writes,

> .. the value of labour power.. is subject to a variety of cultural and political conditions which establish what the standard of living for different strata and categories of the working class might be. It not only varies according to the different categories of labour, (skilled/unskilled, black/white, male/female), but also according to the different circumstances which affect the bargaining position of labour at any given time, such as labour supply and the level of class struggle. (Molyneux, 1979:10)

Molyneux has pointed out that it is only possible for women to remain in the home as housewives where the value of labour power of the male worker is sufficiently high to cover the cost of maintaining the entire family.

> The maintenance of the domestic sphere as the main site of biological reproduction under capitalism is economically possible only where the value of labour power is sufficiently high for wages to cover the cost of the family's reproduction. (Molyneux, 1979:5)

By the same terms it is only possible for the wife to employ a substitute - in the form of a domestic servant-where the value of white working class labour is sufficiently high for wages to maintain the enlarged household. In the same way that the ability of a section of the working class to maintain a wife at home has come to represent a particular index of working class power, the ability of the white working class to maintain a servant is an index of their privileged position in South Africa.

Domestic servants are caught up in a pincer-like movement here. In South Africa the value of black male working class labour power is not uniformly high enough to cover the costs of maintaining a wife and family, (i.e. replacement). And this propels black women into wage labour largely as domestic servants. But because of the particular form class struggle has taken in South Africa, in the past, with the exception of the depression years, the wages of the white working class were uniformly high enough to cover the costs of both maintenance and replacement. This might go some way towards explaining the low participation of white women in the labour force. With the expansion of the service sector, current inflation and the increasing discrepancy between the 'needs' of family consumption and the wages of the individual male worker this is changing, so that to maintain it's income the white working class family is increasingly obliged to send women into the labour force. This has the potential for

decreasing the economic dependence of women on men, and so weakening the basis of patriarchy within the family. (Kuhn, 1978: 189) Thus while patriarchy has a specific effectivity within capitalism, capitalist expansion generates contradictory effects for patriarchy.

This question of the 'family wage' is an important line of tension between the two structures which work together to define the matrix of women's subordination. It was the product of class struggle but in effect maintains women in a dependent position in the home. Marx wrote,

> The value of labour power was determined not only by the labour time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also be that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery by throwing every member of that family onto the labour market, spreads the value of the man's labour over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour power. (Marx, 1976:518)

In nineteenth century Britain the working class demand for a family wage can be seen as an attempt to avoid the worst excesses of child and female labour abuse. But this demand can also be viewed as an expression of patriarchal ideology. For example, "wives should be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world." (Quoted by Foreman, 1978:120) The implication is that labour power is a male capacity and the wage should reflect that fact. The crucial question at issue with respect to the value of labour power is the unit of measure; is it the individual male worker, the working class family, or the working class as a whole. It could be argued that the working class as a whole gains from being able to keep its female members at home, because it means less members of the working class are directly exploited by capital. But this also secures women's economic dependence. For this reason McIntosch has suggested that the family wage was not only a product of class struggle, but also of a struggle in which the interests of women and men were opposed. (McIntosch, 1979:163) On the other hand, in South Africa a family wage would be a considerable advance for the black working class as a whole. Clearly the relation between class struggle, feminist struggle and the family wage is a problematic question, and a crucial one in any attempt to situate domestic labour within the totality of social relations under capitalism.

The other crucial line of argument which needs to be taken up is the question of the 'social wage! Here the distinction Gardiner (1975) makes between the value of labour power and the overall standard of living of the working class might be useful. A definition of standard of living includes those benefits received by the working class as a result of the interventions of the capitalist state - the educational, health and welfare benefits which go to make up the social wage.

Now the social wage represents one aspect of the progressive socialisation of domestic labour that has taken place in capitalist societies over the last century and a half. By the socialisation of domestic labour is meant, "the replacement (and at the same time the transformation) of the work done in the home by goods and services produced for the market or provided by the State." (C.S.E. 1975:13). In fact domestic labour involves,

> .. the production and reproduction of the capitalists' most indispensable means of production: the worker ... The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self preservation and propagation. (Marx, 1976:718)

The implication is that the question of the maintenance and reproduction of labour power is relegated to a private, peripheral sphere. Again, the question turns on the unit of analysis. While the individual capitalist is not concerned about the conditions in which the worker reproduces his labour power, it has become a matter of some importance from the point of view of capital as a whole. Thus McIntosch writes of Britain, "capitalists as a class have done much to sustain the appropriate household institutions, through state policies concerned with marriage and the family." (McIntosch, 1979:156). This might be thought to imply an instrumentalist view of the state. We have to distinguish between "the economic requirements of capital on the one hand and the political pressures on the state of the other since the two are not the same and do not always work in the same direction." (C.S.E. 1975:25). However state involvement in the reproduction of labour power is a product of these two opposing forces, but in this case working in the same direction:

(i) the growing demands on the worker from capital, as regards both the quantity and quality (qualifications) of labour power; and

(ii) the growing demands of the working class on the state.

Consequently during the last one hundred and fifty years in what are now advanced capitalist societies there has been a replacement of some aspects of domestic labour by state services. For example the state has taken over tasks such as the teaching of the young and the care of the sick which were previously performed by women in the home. In South Africa state institutions for the reproduction of labour power have mainly benefited the white working class. In fact the state is only marginally involved in the maintenance and reproduction

of the black working class, and the inadequacy of education, housing, welfare and health services for blacks is evidence of this.

The other aspect of the socialisation of domestic labour is the replacement and transformation of some of the work done in the home by goods and services produced by capital for the market. Domestic labour has been atomized and different functions mechanized in the form of the vacuum cleaner, washing machine, dishwasher and so on. In this process "the personal and living domestic slave was replaced by the socialized and dead machanical slave." (Mandel, 1978:386) The development of labour saving devices and services, such as laundromats, convenience foods and nappy services, are among the reasons why domestic work to-day is less arduous than one hundred years ago. However it is arguable that standards of home and family care have also risen so that housework remains extremely time consuming. For example in the USA it has been found that the majority of housewives, particularly those not employed continue to spend as many hours doing household tasks (55 a week) as women did fifty years ago. (Vanek, 1978). The growth in women's employment in wage labour has meant a doubleshift for increasing numbers of women because this has not been accompanied by any significant socialisation of child care or any notable shift in the sexual division of labour within the home. But whereas in advanced capitalist societies, such as Britain and the USA there has been a progressive shift away from the employment of full-time, 'live-in' domestic servants to the employment of 'chars' and a reliance on labour saving devices, in South Africa this has not occured partly because of the exploitability of black labour which makes cheap domestic labour easily available.

Yet in South Africa domestic service is no longer an expanding sector of employment. A trend has been reported away from the employment of full time servants whose numbers decreased by eight per cent in 1979, and an increase in the number of part-time servants by thirty per cent in 1979, compared to the previous year. (Markinor, 1979). In the eleven metropolitan areas of South Africa the number of white households with no domestic servant at all in their employment increased by four per cent between October 1977, and October 1979. (Department of Statistics, 1979). At the same time a twenty five per cent increase in the sales of labour saving devices has been reported since June 1979. (Chairman of Damsa. 1980). Are over one million domestic servants becoming redundant?

There is a danger of economistic analysis here. Research done in the Eastern Cape found that many white households contained both servants and labour saving devices. Several employers were reluctant to allow their servants to use these - a pattern that was also reported by Shindler in her Johannesburg study. (Shindler, 1980:) The importance of this is that it underlines the non-economic reasons for employing servants.

Servants are an important component of the social display of dominant class lifestyles. Several employers in the Eastern Cape cited social reasons for employing servants. For example, 'security', "I don't feel safe on my own during the day"; or to overcome a sense of social isolation, "I feel very alone in the world when the servants go off in the evening." In addition many servants take considerable responsibility for child care.

> "She gets the children up in the morning, gives them their breakfast, walks the youngest to nursery school, has our lunch ready for us when we return."

This responsibility for child care involves one of the central contradictions in the institution of domestic servants.

Several servants interviewed stressed that they had to look after two families and neglect their own in the process.

> "We leave our children early in the morning to look after other women's families and still they don't appreciate us."

> "We have to leave our children and look after our madam's children. We have no time to look after them even when they are sick."

One respondent said that the employment of domestic servants explained "why white people's children don't grow up criminals." It is not from having everything they need, but "having nannies who watch them every minute of the day" and instill discipline. Often the person looking after the servant's children is a daughter who is kept out of school to do so. This perpetuates a vicious circle of poverty, inadequate child care and interrupted education.

While the reproduction of labour power can be increasingly achieved by means of commodities produced by capital or provided through the agency of the state, this has not yet included the provision of child care on any large scale.[15] Molyneux emphasizes that it is the work of child care which "is of the most benefit to the capitalist state." (Molyneux, 1970:25) Child care is expensive if it emphasizes child development rather than custodial care. Therefore in advanced capitalist societies "the only large scale possibility that could bring about the socialisation of child care would be for the state to expand it's provision." (C.S.E, 1975:14). But state organised institutions for the reproduction of labour power are financed by state expropriation of parts of the total amount of surplus value produced by capital. Thus since the state provision of child care centres, kindergartens and creches would add to the costs of reproduction of the labour force borne by capital, "this would only be likely

to occur in a boom situation in which there was rapid accumulation of capital and consequent productivity increases". (C.S.E., 1975:14) In such a situation it would be to the advantage of capital to release women for wage labour which would mean an extension in the labour force which produces surplus value. But in South Africa the availability of cheap, black domestic labour creates this flexibility whereby women can be incorporated and expelled from the labour force accoring to the pace of capital accumulation. Hence this is not a demand likely to be made on the state by the white working class. The only possible exception to this pattern is a war situation - this was the only period in Britain, for example, in which the socialisation of child care occurred on any large scale.

In summary then, there are seven possible trends in the future which could affect the employment of domestic servants:

(i) The increasing militarization of the South African state. In an escalation of conflict, increasing racial distrust may make white women reluctant to employ black servants, and demand the state provision of creches, day care centres and nursery schools. This would both release them for wage labour and extend the control of the state over the early ideological formation of children.

(ii) The increasing involvement of white women in an expanding service sector of the economy who remain dependent on servants for domestic work, particularly child care.

(iii) The increasing employment of domestic servants by a relatively affluent and privileged urban black middle class which the South African state and capital is committed to creating as a buffer against progressive change.

(iv) The progressive socialisation of domestic labour by capital could mean the increasing employment of black women in precisely those areas of domestic production which have been socialised. While the domestic servant is an unproductive worker, the same woman employed in a commercial restaurant or laundry would be a productive worker producing surplus value for capital. (At least according to Braverman's formulation of productive labour). However many of these industries are highly mechanised.

(v) The spiralling inflation rate could affect consumption patterns. Women could substitute their own labour power for domestic servants and purchaseable commodities such as expensive dry and frozen

convenience foods. This together with increasing unemployment could lead to an ideological offensive to convince women that their place is in the home.

(vi) The organisation of domestic servants to increase their bargaining power could make their employment more expensive. However unionization is unlikely to succeed because of their atomized situation as workers, and the fact that they do not have any bargaining position from which they could launch demands. The organisation of domestic servants into co-operatives of skilled workers who corporately owned the mechanical equipment with which they worked would not cover child care.

(vii) The further penetration of monopoly capital. This is becoming dominant in all sectors of production and relies to a large degree on the use of capital-intensive, sophisticated technology, the operation of which requires a small, semi-skilled stable work force, rather than a large, cheap migrant labour force. This is one reason why black unemployment is rising. In this situation losing their jobs could mean the permanent exclusion of domestic servants from employment.

This vulnerability makes any reforms to alleviate the oppression of domestic servants problematic. Protective legislation such as restrictions on hours of work, the provision of annual leave, paid sick leave, confinement leave, overtime pay, and paid public holidays would be difficult to enforce. The effect of minimum wage rates are debatable.[16] Callinicos has recommended "benefit societies in which the advantages of collective organisation can be practically demonstrated and solidarity can be developed."

"Clearly" she writes, "such a pressure group would push for the introduction of protective legislation which is necessary to bring domestic workers into the wider working class movement." (Callinicos, 1980: 88). But such a movement must eventually aim for the disappearance of domestic servants.

The importance of domestic workers - both wives and servants - lies in their role in the reproduction of labour power - the maintenance and most especially the replacement of the current work force. A necessary condition for the liberation of women is that this work should be collectivised. The implication is that the feminist struggle is inseparable from the struggle against capitalism. Under socialism,

> Cooking, cleaning, washing, repairing, child care etc... would no longer be done by single households and living

> groups. It would either be shared in collective households and living groups or it would be more formally and publically performed by brigades of workers, *men and women* (my emphasis), in nurseries, playcentres, laundries, restaurants etc, and by cleaning and mending brigades who could service whole streets, but whose labour would be regarded as essential as any other and comparably rewarded. (C.S.E., 1975:32).

But for men to undertake their part in this necessary labour a specifically feminist struggle has to be waged.

It is widely recognised that there is a structural crisis in the position of women in advanced capitalist societies to-day. In Britain since the 1870's the cut in the budget of the welfare state and reduction of state services has meant not only that women have to shoulder more of the burden of the reproduction of labour power (patients sent home from hospitals earlier, extension of nursery schools halted, school meals reduced) but their employment within these services has become threatened.[17] In South Africa there is a different but analoguous structural crisis in which black women are trapped. They are most vulnerable to unemployment, and have to shoulder most of the burden of the reproduction of labour power - in the homelands, in their own homes and in the homes of the dominant classes as domestic servants. The phrase 'disposable nannies' attempts to encapsulate both their specific vulnerability and the most important aspect of their role.

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FOOTNOTES

1. McIntosch points out that the entire domestic labour debate has begged this question of the sexual division of labour within the home. McIntosch, 1979: 175.

2. According to figures calculated from the 1970 Census 88.9% of all domestic servants are black, and 88.4% of all black domestic servants are women. Overall domestic service accounts for 38% of all employed black women. Department of Statistics, *Population Census, 1970. Occupations.* Report No. 02-05-04. (The data is flawed by the fact that enumerators were instructed that a woman who gave her occupation as a domestic servant and who was unemployed had to be classified as employed as a domestic servant. As Simkins points out this procedure means that the number of domestic servants is overestimated. (Simkins and Clarke, 1978: 45).

3. In 1975 there were 412 registered creches providing day care for 20,228 white children and only 81 creches for black children. D. Wessels, 'A Review of existing pre-primary educational facilities for South African children'. H.S.R.C. 1977. Quoted by the Study Group on Women in Employment, 1978: 33.

4. The total number of 'economically active' women increased from 907,450 in 1951 to 2,723,995 in 1970. Department of Statistics, *South African Statistics, 1978.* (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1978), 'Table of economically active population', p. 75.

5. In the random sample of 225 white households investigated in the Eastern Cape during 1978-9 'full-time' wages ranged from R4 to R60 a month with an average cash wage of R22,73. The average cash wage paid to full-time domestic servants in the rural areas was R11,35 a month. No strong positive correlation was found between wages paid and hours worked; full-time servants worked an average of 61 hours a week, ranging up to 85 hours.

6. Of course homeland production while originally a mode of production, now remains only as a pre-capitalist form of production. Domestic labour is also a form of production. But an important point of difference is that married women have no access to production external to capitalist production, besides intensified domestic labour (e.g. mending more clothes, shopping more carefully, cooking more from scratch). They are dependent on the value of the commodities produced by the male worker during his necessary labour time for subsistence.

7. According to one apologist for the status quo, from 'negro' servants American children "learned about loyalty to people other than one's own,dedication to service, humility, poverty and unmercenary values". (Bossard and Boll, 1966: 124).

8. In the Eastern Cape study each domestic servant had an average of 5,5 dependants and in 58% of the cases was the sole breadwinner.

9. Despite claims made for a trend towards more egalitarian marriage there has not been any significant shift in the sexual division of labour within the home. See Oakley, 1976; Moore and Sawhill, 1978. This, plus women's increasing participation in wage labour, means that femininity is being redefined to include new levels of competence. Shirley Conran's 'Superwoman' is advised to "be unobtrusive about your work and never expect your husband to help you do it; that's really baring your breast for the dagger".

10. In fact "... the housewife role under capitalism can frequently become monetised in a sort of parody of the wage relation: secrecy by the husband about the size of his wage packet and a weekly tussle over the size of the housekeeping money". (C.S.E., 1975: 12).

11. Genovese (1975) has analysed the paternalism of the American slave-holding south in these terms.

12. It should be pointed out that the domestic servants quoted were interviewed by a black Xhosa-speaking woman who is herself a part-time domestic servant.

13. See Chapter Six, 'Domestic Service as a Reflection of Changing Patterns of Domination' in Cock, J., *Maids and Madams* (Ravan Press, 1980).

14. For example, "... if all the goods and services required for the maintenance and reproduction of labour power were to be purchased as commodities the magnitude of the wage would presumably have to be increased, or the standard of living of the working class reduced. Thus domestic labour ... enhances capital accumulation in that the necessary labour time within the wage-good industry is reduced by the payment by capitalists of wages unequal to the actual costs of production and reproduction of labour power. Hence the value of labour power to capital is lowered, and correspondingly the relative rate of surplus value is increased through the productive efforts of somen in the household". (Deere, 1976: 14).

15. In Britain today there are fewer nursery school places than in 1900. (Adamson, 1976: 2).

16. On the basis of Botswana's evidence Lipton suggests that "rising minimum wage rates damage employment prospects especially for the unskilled, the rural and the female", and for this reason he argues against their extension to farm labour or domestic servants. (Lipton, 1980: 53)

17. It has been estimated that in Britain in 1976 the rate of increase in female unemployment was three times the male rate. (Foreman, 1978: 146).

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