Portraits of Women's Paid Domestic-Care Labour: Ethnographic Studies from Globalizing India

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Abstract

Our introduction to this Special Issue draws out themes from all four articles which focus on India's domestic-care economy: women's paid domestic labour, care work and surrogacy. Through fine-grained ethnographic detail, all the articles nuance questions around agency and resistance, and actively challenge the 'passive victim' stereotype that continues to be the primary imaginary in many representations of domestic-care workers. We describe how the articles detail the intimacy, emotional labour and complex spatial dynamics inherent within a sector that often involves working in the homes of others, caring for children, and complex relationships with employers. Additionally, we show how care workers encounter quotidian forms of bodily control, distancing, segregation, authority, stigma, coercion, punitive sanctions and stark exploitation embedded in the intersections of class, caste, gender and ethnicity. To provide a wider framing for the articles, we utilize this introduction to situate them within broader historical and geographical contexts. Thus, we consider how Global Care Chains (GCCs), labour markets, migration, and colonial/postcolonial considerations interplay in shaping the everyday lives of domestic care workers in contemporary globalizing India.

Keywords

India, domestic-care labour, surrogacy, class, women

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This Special Issue presents intimate portraits from the everyday lives of women employed as domestic-care workers in India. The collection derives from an international conference entitled '*Redefining Labour Roles in a Globalizing India*' held at the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG), New Delhi, in January 2016. The theoretical impetus for interrogating India's domestic-care economy lies chiefly in its increasing feminization and heightened demand both within India and globally (ILO, 2017; Neetha, 2008, 2013). The four articles in the Special Issue address characteristics of domestic-care labour and master-servant relations that have hitherto been unexplored. We draw attention to wide sets of informal contractual relationships, hidden forms of unpaid work and degrees of formality within which paid domestic-care labour is negotiated today.

Our ethnographic contributions foreground livelihoods that are not readily framed by terms like 'domestic' or 'care.' Instead, the articles demonstrate the prevalence of segmented labour markets constituted through a variety of employer cohorts and identity-based niches (Tsing, 2009). Separate labour markets are being consolidated through eclectic skill sets with gendered associations, migrant labour, and slippages between 'domestic', 'care' and other forms of paid work. For instance, we bring in medical surrogacy as a visible service provision that closely intersects with the domestic-care economy. Moreover, unlike much of the contemporary literature on India's domestic-care sector, we do not restrict our analytical inquiry to those employed in the service of India's middle-classes, but also incorporate other hiring cohorts. These include Muslim industrial factory owners, transnational commissioning couples, Western expatriates, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), cosmopolitan elites, in addition to the more proverbial spaces of Indian upper and middle classes. This broad set of employers introduce facilitates angles for theorizing class relations and elite lifestyles. Additionally, this focus takes us on rich

ethnographic journeys to comparative segmented markets (local and global), including work-places such as tea plantations, corporate sites, international destinations and industrial milieus.

While employers' and their viewpoints are vital for unraveling power dynamics, the female domestic-care employee remains more central to our empirical engagements. By prioritizing bottom-up perspectives, the articles attend to how domestic-care workers perceive employer conduct, the spatial dynamics involved in entering the homes of others, giving birth as a surrogate, and the intimacy or kinning which may develop with the families in whose homes they labour. In parallel, all the articles prioritize workers encounter quotidian forms of bodily controls, distancing, segregation, authority, stigma, coercion and punitive sanctions. In acquiescing to or resisting unequal relations of servitude, workers' gendered subjectivities are given careful attention by the contributors. For instance, the articles highlight worker constraints, individual aspirations and social mobility, motivations around migration and other notable ambiguities.

Collectively the articles exemplify how domestic-care workers are not subservient, but capable of articulating their reasons for joining a low status and stigmatized occupation, and active in creating imaginaries of past and future employment and life. Against this background the Special Issue rethinks how domestic-care workers and surrogates challenge 'ideals' of silence, passivity and invisibility. These points of reference dispute essentialized representations of hired help and servants as 'passive,' although by no means are we suggesting either a consensual or a stable picture. On the contrary, decisions by the workers involved are inevitably made against a structuring background skewed by gender, class, caste, community, ethnicity, religion and other identity-based factors. At the more intimate level, too, workers become embroiled in, and constitutive of, the quotidian politics of their domestic employers' homes. Simultaneously, workers themselves engage in complex projects of self-making within their own families and areas of

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residence. Thus, all four articles deploy relational, ethnographically driven and reflexive approaches for studying women's participation in the domestic-care economy.

The rest of this Special Issue introduction is structured around five sections. The first links our contributions and findings to contemporary global literature on domestic-care labour. The second attends to the historical background, particularly the role of colonial and postcolonial contexts in shaping the domestic-care economy in India and elsewhere. The third considers negotiations of caste, stigma, class and respectability. The fourth relates an absence recognized by all the contributors: the lack of effective legislation or organized representation to protect workers' interests. Finally, in the last section, we provide a brief overview of our contributor articles.

India and the Global Domestic-Care Economy

Worldwide, the estimated number of those classified as 'paid domestic workers' has risen from 33.2 million in 1995, to 52.6 million in 2010 (ILO & WIEGO, 2013) and to an estimated 65 million currently (ILO, 2017). Whilst much has been done in recent years by scholars, labour organizations, activists and others to render the domestic-care economy more discernable, informality, ambiguity and invisibility persist. A substantive body of feminist scholarship has long critiqued the invisible nature of women's labour in both paid and unpaid contexts (e.g. Lan, 2003; Wolf, 1992; Papanek, 1989; Young et al., 1981). With the global domestic-care sector dominated by (often migrant) female workers (Andall, 2017; Anderson, 2000), the invisibilization of domestic-care labour can be seen as being constructed against this background. Recent figures place the global ratio of women to men employed in various areas of paid domestic work as somewhere around 80:20 (ILO, 2017), with many women labouring in conditions characterized by low pay, precarity, harassment (including sexual harassment) and

exploitative relations with employers and others (Anderson, 2000 & 2007; Barber, 1997; Marchetti, 2010; Hu, 2013; Saldaña-Tejeda, 2014).

This pattern is also reflected within India where the domestic-care economy has burgeoned rapidly since the economic liberalization of the early 1990s (Palriwala & Neetha, 2010). As with international trends, the Indian domestic-care economy has become increasingly feminized (Neetha, 2008; 2013), a trajectory that runs counter to broader economic patterns in India, which has seen some decline in the overall number of women recorded as being in paid employment (Dubey, 2017; Klasen & Pieters, 2015; Naidu, 2016). The most recent available figures identified 4.75 million domestic workers employed in homes across India, of which 3.05 million were women (NSSO, 2004-5). Like the global data, these figures can be called into question, with some estimates placing the number of domestic workers in India as high as 10 million (Eluri & Singh, 2013). The resurgence of forms of servitude, within India and beyond, negate many visions of postcolonial modernity which was supposed to render domestic service obsolete through new technology and ideals of gender equality.

Whilst the constitution of the global and Indian domestic-care economy highlights the value of the Special Issue's focus on female domestic-care workers, the approach across all the articles is inherently intersectional. Class, caste, race, ethnicity, religion and other factors all play crucial roles in producing forms of domination and exploitation embedded in global and historical processes. The wide-ranging literature confirms the variegated and complex ways in which intersectionality plays out. Cheng (2004), for example, describes how Filipina maids became status symbols for Taiwanese employers. The maids were not only subjugated along lines of ethnicity and class, but the employers could also construct their own class positions in a manner which echoes ethnographic work on material culture and self-making through

consumption (e.g. Freeman, 2000; Englund, 2002). Cheng's (2004) observations are reflected in earlier research on master-servant relations in India that foregrounds the connections between the production of middle-class identities and the employment of domestic help (Dickey, 2000; Frøystad, 2005; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Waldrop, 2004).

Class is ever present in this Special Issue, but the ethnographic focus of the contributions actively nuances some overly deterministic structural accounts about domestic-care labour as distinctly 'feudal' and exploitative. For example, Majumdar's article (this issue) details how a surrogate-worker is often positioned by her relatively affluent employers as of similar status to a servant or domestic help. Yet, as the bearer of the future daughter/son, the surrogate-worker becomes simultaneously bound up in complex sentiments of middle-class aspiration and status through reproductive and familial success. Likewise, Grover's article (this issue) articulates how some educated and well-qualified women occupying the lower-rungs of office jobs, call centres and international organizations actively seek to move into a domestic service sector in the employment of expatriates. Here, their language skills and cultural capital prove an asset in a unique niche labour market which they see as preferable to labouring under inflexible corporate disciplinary regimes. These domestic workers (re)negotiate their class position and identity within an occupation conventionally seen as 'low status' and stigmatized in an attempt to represent domestic-care labour as skilled and respectable.

Yeoh et al.'s (1999) pioneering research on the implications of the increasing prevalence of nuclear households in Singapore discussed how the employment of migrant domestic workers enables financially stable families, particularly the women, to retain their class status, career progression and work-life balance. Anderson (2000), Lundström (2012; 2013) and Meerkerk et al. (2015) provide evidence of how in many parts of the world outsourcing household chores can

decrease intra-household conflicts amongst married couples by relieving tensions around the gendered divisions of labour. As Meerkerk et al. (2015, p12) comment: 'Employing somebody – some body – to clean the house, to look after the children, or to take care of the infirm and elderly, has become an essential part of life in many dual breadwinner families in the global north.' Correspondingly, Grover (2018), in her New Delhi study of Euro-American women, encountered expressions such as 'marriages can be saved' through good quality hired help. In this Special Issue, too, Grover expands on how skilled and educated hired helpers may be perceived as 'household managers', as 'preschool teachers' or as an enabling 'third partner' in employers' domestic lives. As with the transnational domestic-care economy, employing several domestic helpers and in certain circumstances a surrogate-worker (Banerjee and Majumdar, this issue) offers Indian middle- and upper-class households heightened domestic stability. Even so exploitative labour relations and class hierarchies are regularly masked by fictive kin terminologies and discourses of care, loyalty and affection for the domestic-care workers involved (Banerjee and Majumdar, this issue).

Central to discussions of the domestic-care economy, particularly those forms entailing international migration, has been the exploration of Global Care Chains (GCCs), through which gendered and racialized migrant labour is utilized to substitute provisioning in wealthier countries (Anderson, 2000; Guevarra, 2014; Hochschild, 2011; Liang, 2011; Lutz, 2002; Major, 2008; Parreñas, 2000; Yeates, 2009). Literature that traces the recruitment of educated Filipino maids to various parts of the world, for example, indicates that this often results in the transnational transfer of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2011; Parreñas, 2000). Maids, nannies and other care workers hand their own offspring over to their kin, whilst caring for the children of strangers overseas (Hochschild, 2011; Parreñas, 2000). Key criticisms surrounding GCCs

also underscore how the morality of female domestic workers can be called into question, leaving women open to claims of sexual impropriety. Additionally, the absence of women from gendered responsibilities of motherhood and homecare in their place of origin, often reconfiguring 'breadwinner' roles in the process, potentially leads to accusations of child abandonment or maternal failure (Gamburd, 2000; Yeates, 2012; Walton-Roberts, 2012).

The articles in this Special Issue feature respondents working in India, but also illuminate how modalities of internal migration can intersect with transnational mobility. As such, they contribute to discussions that problematize the analytical gaps between internal and international migration (e.g. Chambers, 2018; King & Skeldon, 2010; Parry, 2003), areas often treated as separate in the migration literature. Thus, Grover (this issue) highlights how domestic workers employed by Euro-American expatriates may migrate with the repatriating employer, producing particular dynamics of aspiration and imagination in the employee-employer relationship. Meanwhile Majumdar (this issue) demonstrates how surrogates-workers, are not geographically mobile yet are plugged into GCCs configured around transnational surrogacy. Nevertheless, the articles also illustrate the importance of analyzing non-transnational care chains and the networks of local domestic labour recruitment. Banerjee (this issue) presents the trajectories of domestic workers in New Delhi who have migrated from the tea plantations of West Bengal. Chambers and Ansari (this issue) examine a localized system of recruitment where Muslim female workers are 'coopted' from the factory floors of a woodworking industry into the homes of their employer to perform domestic service tasks.

Concerns regarding representations of national and international GCCs as exploitative have resulted in exposés, reportage and campaigns on the conditions of those working in the domestic-care economy (Anderson, 2000, 2007; Grover, 2017a). In response, some governments

and policy makers have improved legal protection for domestic-care workers (Poblete, 2018; ILO, 2013). Ethnographic engagements, however, provide a rather different picture of GCCs and other forms of labour migration as merely exploitative. Writing on the 'trafficking' of young women from Nepal for domestic employment in Kuwait, O'Neill (2001) maintains that the narratives around 'trafficking' produced by NGOs, Nepalese media and the state positioned young women as 'objects of state protection' and stripped them of agency and decision-making capacity. This contrasted to the men who, whilst situated as exploited, were also seen as active participants and as not requiring the same level of state intervention.

O'Neill, however, falls into a binary trap by foregrounding inclusion in transnational labour markets as a positive flip-side to exclusion, although his analysis highlights the significance of a broader body of ethnographic research on domestic workers which problematizes the 'passive victim' stereotype (e.g. see Chen, 2015; Johnson & Werbner, 2010; Yeates, 2009). Johnson & Werbner (2010), for example, describe how the adoption of more pious modes of being among Muslim female domestic workers in the Gulf allowed them to attend religious gatherings and Islamic classes and to connect with others employed in the sector, thus negotiating the isolated spatial context in which most of their labour took place. In a case study of Filipino workers in Hong Kong, Chen (2015) focuses on domestic workers' utilisation of their Sunday "rest day" to participate in beauty pageants and talent performances, which enabled the construction of, and participation in, a supportive community. Writing on domestic workers in Mexico City, Howell (2017) describes how accessing the domestic labour market enabled one of her respondents to leave an unhappy marriage and provide the schooling for her daughters which their father had denied them.

In line with the above examples, the Special Issue attends to more agentive aspects of domestic-care labour, especially the critical perspectives and actions of the workers themselves. Banerjee (this issue), for example, traces how domestic workers who were previously tea pluckers could undermine middle-class notions of childcare by constructing their 'traditional' mothering practices as authentic and superior. Grover (this issue) describes how some well-qualified lower-middle-income women turned to domestic service with expatriate families to escape from desk-jobs and call centres, employment which often involved monotonous work and concerns over safety. Even within the exploitative and restricted work relationships constructed through forms of neo-bondage that feature in Chambers and Ansari's article (this issue), women did find ways to negotiate conditions by withdrawing their labour. Majumdar (this issue) provides an interesting counterpoint to the other articles in this Special Issue by conveying how some surrogateworkers saw their occupation as a comfortable way of earning 'good money' quickly, and in opting out of domestic labour employment which they regarded as more demeaning.

Whilst we situate the Special Issue within an analytical framework that incorporates agency, we also avoid problematic constructions of 'choice', 'resilience' or 'entrepreneurialism,' which can reify domestic-care workers as ambassadors of (neoliberal) economic growth and forms of self-making (e.g. Morokvasic, 1993). Instead, our ethnographies demonstrate how everyday experiences of domestic-care work are constituted within a global 'domestic labour regime' enabled through "government ideology and policies, cultural or social norms, and modes of production" (Hu, 2011; p.10). Chambers & Ansari's (this issue) article, for example, connects the use of 'neo-bondage' by wood factory owners with literature exploring how such regimes

undermine labour power, stymie class consciousness and produce varying degrees of coercion. (e.g. Carswell & De Neve, 2013; Mezzadri, 2016).

Whilst the Special Issue articles focus on everyday ethnographic detail rather than a broader labour regime analysis, connecting with important debates on exploitation, agency and resistance allows the contributions to engage with domestic-care labour research in various parts of the world. Yet, there are notable features which configure the Indian domestic-care economy in different and distinctive ways from within Asia. For East and Southeast Asia, for example, 'live-in help' (full-time) seems to be more common (Chen, 2015; Lundström, 2012 & 2013), whilst parts of urban India are moving towards live-out (part-time) modes of domestic labour, a shift that has intensified the workers' precarity but also resulted in employers ceding some control over their domestic staff (Dickey, 2000; Ray & Qayum, 2010).

Much regarding India's domestic-care economy is still to be explored, but recent studies include Neetha (2004, 2008, 2009) and Sen and Sengupta's (2016) accessible writings on the unregulated nature of domestic service and its consistent growth. Chopra (2006) and John's (2013) reflections of male servitude and caste-based labour relations respectively, argue for new research methods to better understand servitude in the Indian context by deploying biographical and autobiographical approaches. Of late, a spate of doctoral and postdoctoral fieldwork being conducted by scholars in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata suggests an exciting diversification of methodologies and themes. These include unionization and domestic worker empowerment (Barau, forthcoming), kinning through domestic labour (Tabuchi, 2018), explorations of 'becoming' and 'personhood' (Vasundhara, work in progress), workers' everyday commutes in the city (Wilks, forthcoming), and Scandinavian expatriates negotiating their privileged identity (Schliewe 2017 & forthcoming). For this Special Issue, however, the historical background of

domestic-care labour also requires some elaboration, especially given the colonial era's intersections with the present-day Indian milieu and the production of labour markets, notions of femininity, 'women's work' and gendered spatial configurations.

Colonial and Postcolonial Configurations

For India it may be assumed amongst certain audiences that the 'precolonial', 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' are distinct epochs where making connections about class inequalities, employer practices and servant identities is untenable. There is now, however, a scholarly momentum for incorporating long-term temporal changes,[4] and 'post-colonial continuities in relation to people, practices and imaginations' (Fechter & Walsh, 2010, p1197). With some exceptions (e.g. Dickey, 2000; Ray & Qayum, 2010), anthropological writings on master-servant relations in India makes only fleeting reference to the colonial era. Yet colonial legacies and enduring forms of privilege, such as nationality and class, continue to affect postcolonial societies (Fechter, 2007; Fechter & Walsh, 2010; Lundström, 2012, 2013; McClintock, 1992; Meerkerk et al., 2015; Sen. S, 1999; Sen. I, 2009; Stoler, 2002), with constructions of 'post' often ignoring the longevity of international imbalances based on race and class among women of different backgrounds (McClintock, 1992).

For India, research has explored the classist and caste-based conceptions expressed by Indian elites in Delhi, which associate servants with criminality and dirty contaminated bodies (Waldrop, 2004). However, more recent work has also turned to the lifestyle choices of white

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[4]For example, the European Research Council Project undertaken by Nitin Varma (Humboldt University, Berlin) and Nitin Sinha (Centre for Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin), titled, 'Servants Past.' For details see https://servantspasts.wordpress.com/.The authors' forthcoming two-part edited volumes (title undecided) covers first the period of early modern to early colonial, while the second situates itself from the 19th century to the contemporary era.

single female sojourners (Foulkes & Madsen, 2014) and explorations of how Westerners encounter Indians through the colonial imagination (Korpela, 2010). Expatriate on-line forums, for example, have been shown to contain a variety of representations and stereotypes of both 'the Indian' and 'the servant' (Grover, this issue; cf. Miller, 2008). These include enthusiastic adverts and reference letters by repatriating Euro-Americans stating a mission of 'protecting domestic staff from bad Indian families'. Grover (this issue) habitually heard similar comments from expatriates who were not only condescending to her as a local anthropologist (see Korpela, 2010), but also regarded themselves as more 'benevolent' and 'fair-minded' than Indian employers while ignoring the tenuous ties expatriates had with their household help. This nationality-based 'better employer image' not only rendered Indian employers as 'backward', but situated domestic help as requiring the paternal protection of the expatriate almost in the tone of a white saviour ideology. Such critiques of the nationality-based 'better employer image' have not been limited to India but have also been probed and challenged by scholars in other postcolonial settings such as Singapore (Lundström, 2012 & 2013) and Kenya (Latava, 2009).

Whilst the articles in this Special Issue concentrate on the contemporary period, colonial and postcolonial concerns form an important background. Banerjee (this issue) outlines how tea plantation workers had originally been recruited by colonial employers who established highly exploitative working arrangements which persist into the current postcolonial milieu. For the surrogateworkers featured in Majumdar's article (this issue), the postcolonial space echoes colonial discourses concerning *āyahs* (nannies) and *dāī*s (wet-nurses). Drawing on Sen (2009), Majumdar details how colonial constructions of care and nurturing concerning *āyahs,* and pollution and dirtiness concerning *dāī*s, intermingle in the production of 'surrogates' in the imaginaries of those who employ their services.

Tracing Indian middle-class obsessions with cleanliness, Dickey (2000) discusses how they originated from colonial British discourses of public health and hygiene. Her ethnography in the south Indian city of Madurai examines the class anxieties of her employer-respondents and the morality of upper-class 'hygiene' in opposition to lower-class 'habits'. Similarly, Blunt (1999) analyzes popular imperial household guides for second generation British middle-class housewives in India, highlighting the persistent infantilization of servants, along with the 'racial anxieties' and 'racial distancing' that resonate with forms of servitude in India today (e.g. Dickey, 2000; Frøystad, 2005; Ray & Qayum, 2010; Waldrop, 2004). Contemporary domestic service in India is, then, tied in with a postcolonial trajectory that impacts not only domestic workers employed by expatriates but also those employed by the Indian upper and middle classes. The next section discusses the dynamics of caste, class, stigma and respectability.

Negotiating Caste, Class, Stigma and Respectability

Previous scholarship (Frøystad, 2003; Grover 2017b) highlights the role of caste in the reproduction of unequal master-servant relations and shows how 'stigma' is bound up in notions of 'purity' and 'pollution' produced within the caste system. Domestic labour and, most conspicuously, sweeping and cleaning as an occupation is allied with persistent forms of low-caste 'untouchable' labour (Grover 2017b).' Thus, both class relations and caste identity act to enable employers to exercise their authority, privilege and control. By 'othering' servants and ensuring that they use separate utensils and domestic spaces such as segregated entrances, caste (along with class) has been identified as a potent marker of servitude. However, research on Indian domestic workers also demonstrates how they may make their caste position explicit in

private homes by refusing work that does not align with their own caste status (Sharma, 2016a; 2016b). As Sharma clarifies (2016a, 2016b), many domestic workers distinguish *rasoī kā kām* (kitchen work) from *bathroom kā kām* (cleaning toilets etc.), seeing the former as 'clean work' and the latter as 'polluting.'

Our articles provide little evidence that caste hierarchies are diminishing but instead indicate how persisting inequalities become blurred in a variety of ways. Banerjee's (this issue), for example, details how low-caste migrant woman find themselves associated with certain tasks based on their gender and caste identity. However, she also reveals that within the Indian upper and middle-class milieu, paid childcare (exclusively looking after children) somewhat escaped caste stigmatization as it often involved emotionally charged exchanges and articulations which fostered affective bonds. Still the significance of purity and pollution can be paradoxical. In Chambers & Ansari's article (this issue), Muslim women were coopted into domestic labour by factory owners but low-caste Chamār women peers were not. This was partly bound up with religious identity, but it also resulted from Muslim employers' perception of Chamār women as potentially polluting because of their caste status. On the other hand, the educated and English-speaking domestic workers who feature in Grover's article (this issue) claim that caste is less relevant in expatriate households. They explicated this through depictions and narratives of sitting with children on beds, eating with the employer at the dining table, and therefore their own willingness to perform all-round tasks (even those that are conventionally regarded as polluting), as positive aspects of this type of employment. Nevertheless, even in expatriate households, class hierarchies may be ambiguous: Grover's domestic worker-respondents also alluded to discrimination, such as being denied a glass of water and the use of a toilet, or a holiday on a religious festival.

Accordingly, the domestic-care workers featured in this Special Issue encounter routine forms of overt stigmatization. Even surrogate-workers (Majumdar, this issue) can find themselves relegated to a private domestic space, as the pregnant body must be hidden from wider society. For those involved in domestic-care labour, the lived experience of stigma has implications. It could mean concealing one's identity, facing the loss of kin support, a vicious village boycott, or migrating so as to be untraceable in order to avoid shame (Banerjee, this issue). The Muslim women featured in Chambers & Ansari's article (this issue), constantly negotiated shame and stigma when labouring as employees in woodworking factories. Here, the vernacular of *chāl-chalan* (behaviour/persona/demeanour – how one is seen by others) articulated these concerns. Yet, it was coopted domestic labour in the homes of factory owners, not manufacturing, which spurred greatest anxiety for female factory workers in terms of upholding one's *chāl-chalan* and retaining a sense of agency. Even domestic staff working in New Delhi's embassies and affluent expatriate colonies often tell kin and neighbours that they work in shopping malls, offices or give tuitions in private homes (Grover, this issue). For these workers, trying to achieve their middle-class desires and aspirations for social mobility conflicted with doing 'dirty work'. Consequently, the stigma associated with live-in or part-time domestic work, childcare, cooking and cleaning needs to be managed, hidden and negotiated tirelessly.

This brings us to female workers reputation and character. Women manage their honour in part by justifying their work to the outside world. All the articles address this through women's multi-layered articulations, specifically how they rationalize choice, options and decisions. Whether pursuing domestic labour, exclusive childcare, factory work or a surrogacy arrangement, the negotiation and anxiety over female respectability becomes vital. Ideal

femininity and male breadwinner ideologies alike are tied to familial honour and the threat husbands feel about their loss of control over women's sexuality (cf. Ray & Qayum, 2010). As with accounts of agency and resistance that feature in the broader literature, our ethnographic contributions show how negotiations of reputation and character are limited by broader economic and social pressures. The following section turns to these limitations, specifically the relative absence of labour organisation and effective legislation.

The Absence of Effective Legislation, Policy and Unionized Organization

Whilst highlighting acts of everyday resistance, the articles in this Special Issue also delineate how the domestic-care economy in India remains largely characterized by informality, poor labour rights and little in the way of worker representation. The articles do indicate some elements of formalization, with recruitment bureaus acting as mediators, some domestic staff undergoing formal skill-enhancement training (cf. Gooptu, 2013) and proposed labour laws seeking to add a degree of organization to the sector. However, sustained, unionized or other types of labour organization are notable only in their absence. Even for educated domestic workers employed by affluent expatriates, access to mediation procedures were limited and employees had little recourse when faced with discrimination (Grover, this issue). This lack of redressal is visible in all the articles but is perhaps most potently felt by female Muslim woodworkers, where the inherent informality of 'coopted domestic labour' leaves space for only very minor everyday forms of resistance (Chambers and Ansari, this issue). For migrant domestic workers (Banerjee, this issue) and surrogates (Majumdar, this issue) alike, the story is no different: labour laws, prosecution of sexual harassment cases, union interventions, NGOs or

activists seemed to have little bearing on the narratives or lived experiences of workers themselves.

Some legislation has been enacted by the Indian state in recent years aimed at addressing forms of discrimination. Since 2013, the minimum wage requirement has been fixed at ₹8,086 per month for unskilled workers and at ₹9,802 for skilled workers. A proposed 'Draft National Policy for Domestic Workers' aims to bring the domestic labour sector under existing labour laws. Additionally, the Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act of 2008 intended to improve conditions, provision for holiday and sick pay, and curtail sexual or other forms of harassment. Enforcement, however, has been limited, with this being amplified not only by the prevalent informality of the sector but also because of ambiguities around treating private homes as workplaces (Neetha & Palriwala, 2011).

It is worth mentioning some novel approaches to addressing these issues in other parts of the world. Argentina, for example, recently enacted legislation which assumed that all households above a certain income and asset threshold employ domestic staff, thus making their homes automatically classifiable as workplaces. Known as 'presumption of a domestic worker', the policy required that within a specified period, homeowners had to formalize the presence of domestic staff, prove they had none, or face punitive consequences (Poblete, 2018). The policy operated between 2016 and 2017 with relative success but is currently suspended following complaints that indicators were inaccurate (Poblete, 2018). Whilst this Special Issue is primarily intended to be an ethnographic contribution, rather than a policy intervention, all the articles offer crucial considerations for those involved in improving conditions for domestic-care workers in India and elsewhere. The nuancing of questions around agency and resistance is a contribution to the augmenting literature which challenges the 'passive' stereotype of domestic-

care workers. Before providing a summary of the articles, however, it is pertinent to remind the reader to consider not only that which is present but also that which is absent, not least the lack of forms of organization capable of sustaining meaningful transformations beyond everyday acts of resistance.

Contributions to the Issue

We open with Chambers and Ansari's account of a highly invisiblized, and not previously described, aspect of the domestic-care economy: 'coopted domestic labour'. In *Ghar Mein Kām Hai'* (There is Work in the House), the authors examine the coopting of female Muslim factory workers in a North Indian woodworking industry into domestic labour in the homes of their employers. Through the spatial contexts of factory and home, the authors draw readers into an insidious domestic labour sector. The coopted domestic labour they uncover is a reminder of the deep challenges involved in regulating India's informal economy. The article is therefore an important contribution to on-going and unanswered debates around the regulation, definition, growth and feminization of the domestic-care economy. For respondents themselves, factory work and domestic labour not only required the negotiation of *chāl-chalan* (behavior/persona/demeanor) but was also enabled by factory owners' utilization of 'neo-bondage', in the form of advance payments, to control workers and leverage women from the factory floor into 'coopted domestic labour'. These empirical engagements are deepened through engagement with debates on the constitution of domestic-care labour, 'unfree labour', bonded labour and Muslim women's labour force participation.

Dealing with spatially more mobile women, but a similarly exploitative context, Banerjee examines female workers in the Delhi and Gurgaon's domestic-care economy, who have migrated from the tea plantations of West Bengal. As she unpacks binaries of skilled/unskilled, dignity/stigma and paid-work/housework, Banerjee contends that whether working as tea pluckers, general domestic workers or child-minders, her respondents remain associated with femininity, mothering, patience, and dexterity – a set of gendered norms often reinforced by workers themselves. Although Banerjee depicts a range of treatment by employers in plantations and middle- and upper-class Indian homes, her respondents considered that working as a servant involved a greater loss of personhood and intensified forms of humiliation than being engaged in tea plucking. For those employed exclusively as childminders, however, the pay was better and their labour more valued compared to other general domestic workers. This provided a more positive experience of migrating into the urban domestic-care economy. Nevertheless, former tea pluckers engaged in childcare had to learn completely novel techniques and ways of nurturing children that involved a high level of emotional labour, individualized attention and unfamiliar upper-class notions of childrearing. This generated critiques of employers' approaches to childcare and provides a rich subaltern perspective on life and employment as a live-in migrant domestic-care worker.

Continuing the theme of urban class relations, Grover investigates domestic-care workers as part of an English-speaking niche sector involving working for Western (Euro-American) expatriates. Particular skill sets, including knowledge of European languages, international recipes and expectations of managerial style multi-tasking in the domestic sphere, are markers of this labour sector. Grover describes how the entry of many well-qualified women, including those with BA degrees, to the sector since the 1990s has led to reconfigurations in gender-

specific managerial roles. She also analyses the benefits of working with expatriates, including social mobility and opportunities for migration overseas. Alongside this, however, Grover unravels how domestic workers face prejudice, insecure working lives and punitive sanctions in their encounters with expatriate families and recruitment bureaus.

Finally, Majumdar's textured account of surrogacy provides an valuable anchoring counterpoint to the previous articles. Beginning with an exposition of how some feminist scholarship (e.g. Pande, 2010, 2014) has sought to reformulate surrogacy as 'care work,' she reflects upon whether surrogacy can be integrated within the theoretical spectrum of paid domestic labour. To do so, Majumdar considers not only debates on surrogacy and domestic labour but also those surrounding sex-work. She discusses how surrogates constantly compared stigmatized occupations i.e. domestic service, sex-work and surrogacy. Bringing in the angle of class, she conveys how some commissioning couples imagine the surrogate as an extension of household help and how this intersected with the religious and caste identity of poor women. Whilst Hindu commissioning couples were generally disdainful about Muslims and lower caste communities, they depended on their intimate labour. The monitoring of poor surrogates, based on notions of (class) distrust, manifested itself through paradoxical forms. Suspicion and disdain went hand in hand with 'kinning', as commissioning couples made attempts towards relatedness not with Muslims but only with Hindu surrogates through labels such as 'sister' or 'family member.' Such kinning attempts echoed the ambivalent negotiations and intimate encounters that prevail in certain types of documented master-servant relations (cf. Dickey, 2000; Ray & Qayum, 2010). Together, then, the articles in this Special Issue offer a noteworthy contribution to the scholarship on domestic-care labour both within India and globally.

Acknowledgements

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