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**Reproducing Social Identities: Employer-Employee Relationships
within Paid Domestic Labor in the Netherlands**

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Spring, 2006

KEY WORDS: ethnicity, gender, women, identity

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Abstract

My independent study project analyzes how through employer relationships with their domestic workers, whether maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, or business relationship, social statuses and structural inequalities are reproduced within paid domestic labor in the Netherlands. Using Pei-Chia Lan's concept of "boundary work" and Mary Romero's employer typologies as theoretical tools I analyzed four interviews with native Dutch, female employers, and three with immigrant domestic workers. Along with providing an overview of paid domestic work within the Netherlands, my analysis focused employers perceptions of the "Other;" conceptualization of personal relationships, and conceptualization of labor relationships. This research found that employers fell along a continuum, often expressing attitudes maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, and business relationship. Yet, within each, the employer was able to reproduce her own identity through the "Otherization" of her domestic worker and within the employer-employee relationship, social hierarchies were reproduced and maintained through daily acts of differentialization, including linguistics, gift giving, working conditions, etc.

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Introduction

It is 10:30am and I am in a meeting with my project advisor, Sjoukje, going through a list of questions I prepared for my first interview. “According to your research, how many hours do many employers do they [domestic workers] have?” According to Sabrina Marchetti’s research, she found that the majority of migrant domestic workers come from the Philippines, Colombia, Nigeria, and Eastern Europe, but did not mention any Middle Eastern nations, what did you find?” As I am checking the time and making mental notes, there is a knock on the office door. It is the Moroccan cleaning woman, wearing her work uniform that has no name tag, only the name Gom, the cleaning agency employed by the University of Amsterdam. As Sjoukje and she have a brief conversation in Dutch, I am confronted with an overwhelming sense of discomfort. I smile awkwardly as she begins to wipe down the table I am sitting at and moves to empty the trash. Sjoukje decides we should step outside of the office, to allow her to finish cleaning. “How ironic?” she states.

As the woman leaves the office, my advisor explains to me how the University of Amsterdam recently outsourced all of the cleaning work to this new company, but instead of having two cleaners like before, the building only had one man working part-time. She had been complaining to them for three weeks now about how he needed more help, so she was excited to both see the new woman and finally have her office cleaned, even if it was not as clean as she would have liked it. She then states, “You don’t think I was too rude, do you?” looking to me for affirmation. I leave the office shortly after, but there was still something unsettling about the whole experience. There was a clear distinction in status and power among the native Dutch female academic, the immigrant Moroccan woman wearing her designated cleaning uniform, and myself, the immigrant white, female student. It is one thing to talk about the subordination of

women within paid domestic labor from a safe academic distance and another thing to watch it, to become a part of it, and to benefit from it.

In my previous courses in women's studies, primarily within an American context, I have found it interesting that one goal of the second wave "women's movement"¹ was to provide agency and full citizenship rights through access to employment, entrance into the public sphere, without necessarily acknowledging which classes of women, predominantly immigrant women, women of color, and women of lower socio-economic status, they may subjugate in order to achieve this goal. In *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* Bridget Anderson argues, "Domestic labour is deeply imbedded in status relationships" (Anderson 104) and Pei-Chia Lan in her essay "Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers" argues, "A private domestic household has now become a microcosm of social inequalities in the global economy" (Lan 525). Thus, for my Independent Study Project I researched paid domestic labour, *schoonmaken*² in the Netherlands, specifically how do employers in negotiating both their socio-spacial and personal boundaries construct an "Other" and their own identity by reproducing social hierarchies?

My paper begins with an overview of the previous literature and debates on both unpaid and paid domestic labor, with an emphasis on both Mary Romero's and Bridget Anderson's work because they both provide a useful framework for analyzing paid domestic labor. I then provide a theoretical framework, drawing upon Romero and Lan in order to conceptualize boundary work within paid domestic labor, as well as my methodology for my research. Since much of this literature is focusing on either a North American or generalized European context, I

¹ I recognize that in no point in history, within any given cultural context, was there a universal women's movement with a single ideology, organization, or methodology nor has social activism for gender equality been only within two or three waves.

² The Dutch word for a house work.

present a general overview of paid domestic labor within the Netherlands, drawing upon previous research studies and interviews with Dutch academics. I have broken down my analysis into several divisions, including the perceptions of the “Other;” conceptualization of personal relationships, focusing on boundary work typologies (maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, and business relationship); and finally, conceptualization of labor relationship. Lastly, I present both my conclusions made from this research and future research topics.

Literature Review

Much of the previous literature on domestic labor has focused on the unpaid domestic and the reproductive labor women provide within the private sphere, the home. According to Marxist feminists, domestic labor produced a central commodity to capitalism: labor power. Because domestic labor was reproductive, mental, emotional, and physical, labor it produced both the current and next generation of workers. Much of the debate focused on “wages for housework,” and the gender division of household labor. According to Bridget Anderson in *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, “Feminists have tended to regard domestic work as the great leveler, a common burden imposed on women by patriarchy and lazy husbands” (Anderson 1). Furthermore, Mary Romero in *Maid in the U.S.A.* argues paid “domestic labor reveals the contradiction in a feminism that pushed for women’s involvement outside of the home, yet failed to make men take responsibility for household labor” (Romero 98). Thus, “In tying women to the private and men to the public many feminists have assumed a homogeneity of oppression, and ignored other kinds of power-not just patriarchal, but class, racialized, national, etcetera-reproduced by such dualisms” (Anderson 5). As such, an analysis of im/migrant domestic workers and their relationships to their employers, critiques such feminist ideas of universal “sisterhood” or gender oppression.

Overall, there has been less research done on paid domestic labor, in which the private sphere for one woman becomes the workplace for another, especially within the Netherlands. So, what constitutes paid domestic labour? According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) a domestic worker does any combination of the following items: “sweep, vacuum clean, wash and polish, take care of household linen, purchase household supplies, prepare food, serve meals and perform various other domestic duties” (15). Anderson states, “it is very difficult to

describe what domestic work is in terms of tasks performed...Rather than a series of tasks domestic work is better perceived as a series of processes, of tasks inextricably linked, often operating at the same time” (11). However, domestic labour is not just about physical work (12) it is “a role which constructs and situates the worker within a certain set of social relationships” (21).

According to Anderson, “newly arrived migrants are often under particular pressure to find work in order to repay the debt owed for assistance in gaining entry” (Anderson 39) which encourages migrant women to work live-in. Although, the domestic worker solves problems of housing and employment, it places him/her in a vulnerable position. Inadequate wages, lack of control of hours, and verbal and/or physical abuse are a few of the main issues addressed. Yet, from the employee side, “Live-out work is almost universally preferred to living-in” (44). Live-out is characterized by working for multiple employers, sometimes combining full-time employment with part-time employment. Time management and the fact that travel between employers is not paid are common issues. Anderson states, “The advantages of live-out work are clear. Less personal control tends to be exercised by the employer over the worker” (46) because the worker is not solely dependent upon the employer for work and accommodation.

In much of the previous literature on paid domestic labor, the researchers address the fact that “domestic work in private households is disproportionately performed by racialized groups,” (1) especially among immigrant and/or migrant groups. Yet, the racialization of domestic labour is a product of both structural and personal actions. Researchers have argued that discriminatory institutional practices, especially within structural readjustment policies and immigration legislation, have contributed to this disproportion. Far from being solely a gender

issue, Romero states, “Housework is ascribed on the basis of gender, and it is further divided along class lines and, in most cases, race and ethnicity” (Romero 15).

According to Anderson and Jane Freedman, domestic work, along with sex work, constitutes the largest areas of employment for migrant women in Europe. According to Ehrenriech and Hochschild in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers of the New Economy*, “Foreign females from countries outside of the European Union made only 6 percent of all domestic workers in 1984. By 1987, the percentage had jumped to 52” (Ehrenriech and Hochschild 7). Much of the literature addresses the underside of paid domestic labor: human rights violations, exploitation, slavery, and the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of domestic labor and/or sex work. As Jane Freedman in *Gender and Insecurity: Migrant Women in Europe* states, “Immigrant women often find themselves in particularly insecure positions because of their lack of independent legal status, the difficulty of access to adequate health and social security provision, and because of their particular vulnerability to both domestic and institutional forms of violence” (Freedman 2). On the other hand, Francesca Scrinzi in her essay “The Globalization of Domestic Work: Women Migrants and Neo-Domesticity” argues, as a result of the feminization of migration within the past several decades and because migrant women are often only employed as domestics, “the vocation is understood both in terms of gender, domestic work is ‘naturally’ female type work- and in terms of race/ethnicity-migrants have a cultural aptitude for this type of work” (Scrinzi 83).

Romero argues that women of the dominant classes transfer the stigma of housework, notions of “dirty,” or “low-skilled” labor, to other women, especially women of subordinated classes. She states, “Employers hired persons to replace labor at once considered demeaning and closely identified with family roles of mothers and wives” (Romero 100). Also, she argues, “The

employer not only wanted to escape the drudgery of doing the picking up but she sought to escape sexism by shifting the burden of her husband's behavior to the domestic" (102).

However, at the same time, one concept that is widely discussed in the literature is the notion of domestic workers being "Just like one of the family," which works to erase the contradictions and inequalities within the employer-employee relationship. Anderson argues this familial interest is often not reciprocal. According to Romero, "Although the phrase represents the epitome of the personalized employer-employee association, domestics use of the family analogy points to aspects of the emotional labor that some works are willing to accept and those that they reject" (124).

Given this previous literature, my research will hopefully address some of the gaps in the academic knowledge on the topic of paid domestic labor in the Netherlands. My independent study project analyzes if and in which ways the concepts and themes addressed by these previous researchers apply to those employing domestic labor and working as domestic laborers. Moreover, this study strives to analyze how employers construct self identities through the "Otherization" of their employees, as well as how their social statuses are reaffirmed as structural inequalities are reproduced within the employer-employee relationship.

Theoretical Framework

There are numerous theoretical frameworks that can be applied to the domestic labour debate. However, I have chosen to primarily focus on those theories that help analyze the interpersonal and labor aspect of paid domestic work. Although domestic service has historical roots in both slavery and feudalism, a structural analysis of domestic labor shows how class, race, and gender inequalities are part of and produced by capitalism. According to Mary Romero,

Marxist theorists have emphasized five aspects of the domestic labor relationship: (1) race and gender oppression is not intrinsic to the occupation; (2) the occupation is a part of capitalism; (3) domestic work usually involves physical and ideological reproduction; (4) reproductive labor is devalued because of social divisions of labour; and (5) housewives and domestic workers are both part of the reserve army of the unemployed and thus serve as a vital function in the capitalist economy” (29).

Yet, paid domestic labor is not only a site of capitalist production but, of societal reproduction. According to Louis Althusser, “the family is an archetypical ideological apparatus” (30) which unlike repressive state apparatuses, does not use force or violence, but consent and socialization, as a means of reproduction. Thus, the family works to not only physically reproduce itself but, also “of the basic ideological forms, class, race, age, and gender ideologies, societal expectations, folkways, mores, norms, and the like” (30). The domestic worker participates in this process in both her own family and those families of other classes.

In order to understand the relationships between employers and employees, it is best to analyze this dynamic from the lens of “boundary work.” Pei-Chia Lan states, boundary work is defined by “the strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories. It is an intrinsic part of the process of constituting the self: we define who we are by drawing inferences concerning our similarity to, and differences from, others” (Lan 526). In the case of migrant domestic workers, the concept of boundary work is not only about self identity and otherization, but is a part of reproducing and contesting social inequalities. She

defines two intersecting sets of social boundaries negotiated within paid domestic labor. The first being social boundaries of primarily class and ethnicity but, not excluding other factors such as gender, nationality, etc. Secondly, she analyzes “socio-spatial boundaries that circumscribe the province of domesticity and privacy” (526). For employers, who get to determine “to what extent they want to include or exclude domestic workers in the family, and whether to highlight or downplay hierarchical differences” (530), Lan divides their approaches to boundary work into four typologies: maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, and business relationship. She characterizes maternalism as highlighting class and ethnic divides but, inclusion within the family; personalism as downplaying class and ethnic divides, but inclusion within the family; distant hierarchy as highlighting class and ethnic divides and exclusion within the family; and finally business relationship which downplays class and ethnic divides and exclusion within the family.

Additionally, Mary Romero, in her research on Chicano domestic workers in the U.S, identified various models of thinking employers have towards paid domestic labor. She identifies six major models, bosses, utopian feminists, dodgers and duckers, the common victim, maternalists, and contractors. Within the “boss model,” the employer tries to get the highest level of service for the least amount of money. “Utopian feminists” argue that domestic labor is ‘exploitative and should be abolished’ yet this is not realistic (166). “Duckers and Dodgers” hire white, male domestic workers in an attempt to remove themselves entirely from the present system of stratification and oppression, while still buying the labor of a household worker” (167). Yet, she argues this does nothing to improve the situation for women, especially women of color. The “common victim” is often displayed in professional women

who argue that they too are oppressed by sexism without acknowledging their privileges or the status of other women, whom they may hire to shift the burden. Then “maternalists” often have a benevolent relationship or attitudes towards “their” domestic workers. Finally, “contractors” treat their relationship with domestic workers like a business, often not expecting emotional reproductive labor, ceremonial cleaning, or servant like behavior (170).

Methodology

As in many research studies, my interest in paid domestic labor came from a personal experience. One evening my host informed me that she had to be at work the next day and as such I would need to let the housecleaner into the house and make her coffee in the morning. In the Netherlands, I have become aware that when one has a guest over one's house it is common courtesy to offer them tea or coffee. So, I remember waking up that morning, feeling anxious because I did not drink coffee nor know how to make it properly. The buzzer rang, but my host had not shown me how to use it, so frantically I run down the hall to open the door. When Fatima came in I offered her the cup of coffee and made a comment about how I did not know if it was any good or not, but she thanked me anyway. I sat down on the couch with my bowl of granola and yogurt, eating awkwardly as she sat across from me, drinking her coffee. I tried to make small conversations about the weather and Amsterdam, but something struck me as deeply unnerving. There was a contradiction I could not resolve in my mind, knowing that I was supposed to treat her like any other guest in the house, because my host often spoke of her in terms of a friend, but also knowing that she was there to clean up after our mess. At that moment, I wondered how she perceived herself, how she perceived her employers, the relationships between them and whether or not any of my perceptions were accurate.

From the beginning, I assumed this would not be an easy independent study project and that many challenges would present itself before its completion. First, I am a foreigner, coming from the outside and looking in, which may or may not have added to an already difficult subject matter. Second, I am a native English speaker and all of my interviewees either knew English as a second language or not at all. The connotations of paid domestic labor that I had prior to this project generally involved human rights violations and extreme exploitation. And although I

would not want to make the generalization that those types of instances occur within the Netherlands, I did assume that for the most part this was not the case. Additionally, prior to conducting the interviews with employers, I assumed that I would encounter more xenophobia, anti-immigration sentiments, or stereotypical/racist assumptions, which was not necessarily the case for all of my interviewees. One of my biggest assumptions was that I believed that the majority of paid domestic workers were women, but I found evidence that there seems to be a sizable proportion of men within paid domestic labor. I had not originally conceived of this factor in my research proposal and having had a brief interview with a male domestic worker, it added another dimension to my analysis.

As many research studies and literature on paid domestic labor have noted, it was often difficult to interview paid domestic workers, especially those who are immigrants, legal or illegal. This is mostly because “domestic service is a part of the underground economy” (10) making domestic workers particularly invisible. When I managed to find domestic workers, often through their employers which were easier to locate because either of their affinity to the School of International Training in Amsterdam and/or knowledge of English, I encountered instances of distrust. In one case, an illegal Nigerian domestic worker refused to be interviewed when asked by her employer. I was later told that this woman was so afraid of being found out by the immigration officials that she often would not wash the windows of the house for fear of being recognized by someone. So it did not come as much of a shock that she did not want to compromise her situation by meet a stranger to discuss her experiences as domestic worker and her relationships to her employers, who she may or may not be dependent upon.

Although it was easier in some regards to locate employers of domestic workers, here

too I found that some individuals were hesitant or uncomfortable with being a research subject. For some it seemed as though it would have been ok if I wanted to speak solely to their domestic workers, assuming that they would agree, but when I mentioned my interest in the relationships between employers and employees, I was rejected. On the other hand, there were those who were quite willing and enthusiastic to discuss their experiences with hiring au pairs or cleaners. I assume that it was easier for employers to discuss this issue because they often had less to lose.

For my research, I felt that it was important to interview both employers of domestic workers and domestic workers themselves. Ideally, I would have liked to interview three couples, employers and employees separately in order to compare and contrast the information provided by each. Yet, this proved to be more difficult than I had originally anticipated, which resulted in my paper being primarily focused on the employer. I was able to interview two couples but, often had to interview both simultaneously which influenced the type of data I received from domestic workers. I found my interviewees because of their contact, in various forms, with the School of International Training in Amsterdam. Since my interviewees were so intimately connected with my study abroad program, I felt it necessary to keep all of these interviews confidential and as such the names that appear in my paper are pseudonyms.

The interviews I conducted took one of two forms: either email interviews or in person, one on one interviews. In the email interviews I gave a brief overview of my research project along with a list of questions, specific to whether or not the individual was a domestic worker or an employer³. The first questions were more general and became more specific. The interviewee responded in as much detail as he/she desired, although there was an instance where I emailed an interviewee more than once for clarification purposes and to pose further questions. For the one on one interviews I again had a list of questions but, the interviews were semi-

³ See appendix 1 and 2.

structured in format to allow the interviewee to guide part of the conversation. I found that once I asked one or two questions, the interviewee would generally bring up other related issues without me asking directly. The one on one interviews varied in length, the shortest lasting for around fifteen minutes⁴ and the longest over an hour. Along with the interviews, I gain some of my information from multiple observations and interactions that occurred when my host's housecleaner came to clean⁵

With employers, the interviews occurred within their homes, a presumably comfortable setting for them, which may have further allowed them to answer questions more freely. On the other hand, with the employees, the interviews occurred within their employer's home. I acknowledge that this fact may have influenced what the domestic worker was comfortable and/or able to discuss, which resulted in my analysis being primarily focused upon employers. Additionally, two of my interviewees were more fluent in Dutch than in English and since my Dutch language skills are limited, I often had to rely on the employer to translate my questions into Dutch and then translate their responses into English. This meant that not only were the employer's present during the interview, but I am unable to know whether or not everything was translated accurately. As such I found it beneficial, when possible⁶, to use email interviews for the domestic worker because it allow him/her the option to be more candid about their responses.

Interviewees

My first interview, and only interviewee who was neither an employer nor employee, occurred with my project advisor Sjoukje Botman. She is a native Dutch woman, who is a PhD

⁴ This brief interview occurred with the Polish male domestic worker who was brought over to me by my interviewee from her parent's house next door where he was cleaning. He did not have much time so I had to keep my questions short and concise.

⁵ Specifically on two occasions when the house cleaner came. The first, I was present for a little over a half hour and the second, for the full two and half hours.

⁶ This was only able to occur when the interviewee both had access to internet and fluent English.

candidate at the University of Amsterdam researching the informal market of domestic services within the Netherlands. The interview occurred in her office at Oost-Indisch huis, and lasted between thirty and forty minutes. During this interview I asked questions regarding her own research project, her findings and analysis from her thirty interviews, as well as more general questions regarding paid domestic labor within the Netherlands.

Employers:

Joanne is an older, single, native Dutch woman with two grown daughters, and a couple of grandchildren. She has been living on state pension but, has some odd jobs including the occasional modeling. A friend of hers informed her that she was eligible to receive state aid for a housecleaner because of her chronic illness. Since she often gets easily fatigued she has had a cleaner for the past six months. At first she went through four before finding her current cleaner, a Moroccan woman named Maria. She stated, “First I changed all the time because they couldn’t, or it wasn’t really clicking; now I have this one since December” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). She found her cleaner via an organization the mostly deals with elderly care and now Maria cleans her house every Friday for three hours.

Margaret is a middle aged, native Dutch, mother with two children ages fourteen and nine years old. She is a book translator and often works within her own home. Prior to having her two Polish cleaners, one male and one female, she had a series of au pairs which she often found by placing ads in newspapers or through friends. She began having au pairs shortly after her first daughter was born, on and off for several years, and then again when her second child was born. These au pairs have been from a range of countries including South Africa, Hungary, Romania, Austria, the United States, and Morocco.⁷ Currently, her two Polish housecleaners clean every

⁷ The interviewee maintained that the Moroccan woman was not officially her au pair because she worked out, but still lived within her home, cooked, and cleaned

other week, one week the man and the other week the woman for several hours. She found Peter via her mother, who also employs him as her cleaner and Nina, who she found after receiving a note in her mailbox.

Leonni is in her mid-fifties and a native Dutch woman with one grown daughter who works part-time as a social worker in a bank. She was asked by her fellow neighbor if she would be interested in having a housecleaner and has had the same cleaner for the past three years. Nina, a Moroccan woman, who lives within the same building, comes to clean her apartment every other Wednesday for two and a half to three hours.

Patricia is a middle aged, native Dutch woman with no children. She works from her home as a therapist but, also has a part-time job only on Friday's as an administrative assistant and counselor. Although her parents had Dutch cleaners while growing up, she herself did not hire a housecleaner until a few years ago, when she could afford it. She currently has a male, Indonesian housecleaner who was recommended to her by a friend. He comes to clean bi weekly for three hours on average. She has employed Mark for the past year now, but has had previous experiences with both male and female housecleaners.

Employees:

Mary is a thirty-six year old Chinese American woman who has been living in Amsterdam for the past three and a half years. Although she has a Master's of Science Degree and is trained in Chinese Medicine, she still relies upon employment as a domestic worker in order to get by financially. She has six cleaning jobs, but for several of them she has to deal with more than one employer. Three of these jobs are weekly, two are bi-monthly, and "one rather strange job that I go to when I want" (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06). She performs a range of tasks, ranging from general cleaning to shopping, which varies depending upon the employer.

Peter is a thirty year old Polish man who has lived in the Netherlands for the past seven years. Although in the past he worked for as many as thirteen homes, he currently splits his employment between cleaning houses and construction work. He often works more than fifty hours a week, sometimes during the weekends. When he arrived his Polish friends helped to find him cleaning jobs. He recently began working for Margaret when she moved into the house next door of her parents, whom he had been cleaning for, for the past six years.

Mark is a thirty-six year old native Indonesia man who has lived in the Netherlands for the past five and a half years⁸. Although he had a part-time job working within the tourism business⁹, he relied upon additional employment as a housecleaner in order to get by financially. He has worked for Patricia for the past year, but also has had several other employers, not all of whom are native Dutch, some German, Italian, Japanese, etc. During our interview, I found out that the next day he was leaving the Netherlands in order to return home and had arranged for a colleague to come by that day to become his replacement cleaner for Patricia.

⁸ During my interview he stated how he had been in the Netherlands for the past 5 and a half years, but arrived when he was twenty-nine years old and was currently thirty-six.

⁹ Since English was not his first or second language, during my interview I was not always able to clearly understand exactly what he was describing, such as what he exactly did besides being a cleaner

Overview of Paid Domestic Labor in the Netherlands

According to 2003 governmental report “1.235.000 Dutch households made use of household help, of which 85% was paid” (Marchetti 31). So what has created such of a demand, especially within the Netherlands? A combination of factors have attributed to this development including, the feminization of the labor market, the decrease of the welfare state, changing family structures, and an aging European population. According to European Trade Union Confederation’s report “Out of the Shadows: Organizing and Protecting domestic workers in Europe: the Role of Trade Unions,” Out of the total population in Europe of 450 million, there are 80 million elderly people” (ETCU 9). Moreover, in the Netherlands, “Between the 1960’s and the 1970’s the number of married women joining the workforce had risen from 7 to 31 percent and surveys showed that more would have joined had more jobs been available” (Kaplan 159). Anderson states, while “women’s participation in the labour force is rising, provisions for childcare and care of the elderly remain extremely limited” (Anderson 109). And “as women citizens are unable or unwilling to provide the unpaid care for the elderly, the young and the disabled, it is individual migrant women rather than the welfare state, who are filling in the gap” (111). This appears to be the case in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands does not accept domestic work as a reason for a residence permit. Marchetti states “Even though domestic work is a regular job for residents, with obligations and benefits, it is not recognized as a job for migrants willing to enter the country as workers (Marchetti 32). As such immigrant women often use the au pair system as a means of legal entry but, stay longer than their contracted time, becoming “illegal.” According to Sjoukje Botman, within the past year the au pair system has changed so that an individual can not be older than 27 and can’t have children in their home country. But, migrant women still use this system gain

entry into the country, often to work as a domestic. In “Slaves or Militants: A Study on Identity Formation Processes of Migrant Domestic Workers in the Netherlands,” Wieke van Dijken states, “Statistics estimate that in 1995 there were about 40,000 undocumented migrants living in the four largest Dutch cities and working in the less attractive sectors” (van Dijken 1).

Additionally, “Migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands face invisibility, lack of rights, general neglect and sometimes explicit avoidance” (Marchetti 8). Van Dijken’s research found that the majority of immigrant domestic workers come from the Philippines, Eritrea, Nigeria, Colombia, and Eastern European nations. However, she notes that there are no precise figures since most women are not registered. On the other hand, Botman stated “I found that they come from everywhere...but, I see some areas, like Latin America, who are the newest groups here” (Botman, Interview, 06/04/06). The literature describes how women often found employment through advertisements, recruitment agencies, or predominantly through informal networks. For example, according to her research, Botman found that the majority of her subjects found their domestic workers through neighbors, friends, or relatives. She states, “One is the cleaning lady of his mother, she has been their since he was a small child” (Botman, Interview, 06/04/06). Conversely, “The employees, when they start, when they come here, they don’t know anybody, so they do notes in the supermarket, in the mailboxes of people in good areas” (Botman, Interview, 06/04/06).

Although some previous literature and common perceptions note that paid domestic labor is part-time work, mostly for women, in order to help financially support their families, Botman’s research in Amsterdam found that on average domestic workers work anywhere from 30-54 hours per week, sometimes including evenings and weekends, have anywhere from 6 to 18 employers, and earn between eight and ten Euros per hour. For example, she explained, “This

one from the Philippines, only has 6 employers, but works 54 hours a week. She's got some really big contracts" (Botman, Interview, 06/04/06). Yet, she noted the advantages and disadvantages for this domestic worker, on the one hand she effectively cut down her travel time between employers, saving her money, but is more dependent upon her employers. Since the majority of domestic workers are live-out, working for multiple employers, Botman did not find any human rights violations among her research subjects. She stated, "As for human rights violations, there have been a few cases in the Netherlands, but of course there are not many live-ins here" (Botman, Interview, 06/04/06).

Analysis

Researchers argue that paid domestic labor is not only about reproductive labor, but about status reproduction. According to Anderson, “for the middle classes of the industrialized world, it [domestic labor] is bound up with the reproduction of life-style and, crucially, status” (Anderson 14). Additionally, Romero argues, “Domestic workers participate both in the physical and ideological aspects of the reproduction of labor in their own families and in those of the dominant class” (Romero 30). Hiring women of color, according to Romero, a social inferior, allows employer’s to validate and strengthen their “egos and class and racial identities” (112). This is often accomplished through actions including gift giving or charity, calling domestic workers “girl” or by their first names, uniforms, eating arrangements, or blatant discrimination. In doing so, “the employer is buying the power to command, not the property of the person, but the whole person” (Anderson 113). Thus, often paid domestic labor operates to produce and reproduce hierarchical structures within a given society and becomes reflective of that larger society.

Perceptions of the “Other”

According to Bridget Anderson “The employment of a domestic worker is often presented as a strategy for enabling middle-class women to enter ‘productive employment’” (Anderson 16) which “enables the negotiation of contradictions, not just the public/private divide, but gendered identities and the consequent tensions and demands placed upon women” (19). After my four interviews with female employers, I found that hiring a housecleaner was not necessarily about enabling them to work outside of the home¹⁰. However, paid domestic labour does become a visible sight within Dutch society that “demonstrates the process of establishing,

¹⁰ Only for Margaret was hiring an au pair or cleaner a necessary condition in order for her to work outside of the home and still raise her two young children.

reproducing, and contesting social boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Lan 525). Yet, in order to reproduce and maintain a social hierarchy which places the white, Dutch, female employer in a superior position and her immigrant, (often illegal) domestic worker in a subordinate position, an “Otherization” process of the latter must take place. This “Otherization” may take various forms. As Anderson notes, “She [the domestic worker] may be the ‘window to exotica’” (Anderson 145). The domestic worker may be identified as a culturally different and/or “dangerous Other.” Or he or she may be presented as a victimized “Other.” In most cases, the “Otherization” of a domestic worker fell along a continuum of all of these. Thus, in this section I will analyze the ways in which the four employers perceive their domestic workers as an “Other” and how this differentialization works to both produce the self and social inequalities.

The “Common Victim”

According to Romero the “common victim” stand point is often displayed in professional women and characterized by the argument that they too are oppressed by sexism. Yet, they often go without acknowledging their privileges or the status of other women, whom they may hire to shift the burden. For example, during my interactions with Leoni, she often expressed a “common victim” feminist model for both conceptualizing her relationship with her housecleaner and conceptualizing her housecleaner’s identity. Although noting that she herself is and should be able to clean her own home, she avoiding acknowledging her own status and privilege, by focusing on the “victimization” of the “Other.” She conceptualize her hiring of her cleaner as was a way of enabling and instilling feminist values, such as independence, in her cleaner, who she identified with because they were both women, who suffered the same types of discrimination. She stated, “Now she is able to have money for herself, for her children” (Leoni, Interview, 18/04/06).

Yet, while using the “common victim” discourse, Leonna also reflects her own sense of privilege in relation to her “victimized” domestic worker. She detailed a story in which she found a newspaper article about a law in Morocco granting women the right to divorce, which she translated to her cleaner, who then presented the information to a friend, who was having a difficult relationship with her husband. Likewise, Joanne stated, “She [Maria] wants to work more, but I say your husband is working, but she says she wants to save for her driver’s license. This is very good I think” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). In perceiving the housecleaner as a victimized “Other,” and themselves as a “common victim,” the employer is able to make a differentiation between herself and her cleaner, allow her to be placed in a more “emancipated” status.

Exoticization and Anti-Muslimness

A common theme that presented itself during my interviews with employers was a relentless differentialization between native, Dutch employers and their Muslim, often Moroccan, employees. This differentialization was a cross between exoticization and anti-Muslim sentiments, expressing both appreciation for and out right distain of the “Otherness” of their domestic workers. For example, Joanne stated, “Dutch cleaning women are, if you say “if you want a cup of coffee?”, they can sit for a half and hour, then they aren’t working so hard...They are really doing their best those Moroccan women because it is well known that in their own house it is spick and span, it’s fantastic” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). On the other hand, Margaret clearly expressed distrust and uncomfortablity with her live-in, Lisa. Not only did she express how she was anti-religion, that she did not like Muslims, that she found their values “stupid,” she refused to acknowledge that Lisa was her domestic worker. She stated, “But, I’ve never had a Muslims clean for me, I only had Lisa living with me, she was the only

one, but she stayed in my house and very little contact with the other Moroccans. So that was very nice for her I think” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06). Even though Lisa lived with the family, cooked several meals a week, and took care of the housework, she was the only person the Margaret did not view as an au pair or as a housecleaner. If neither of those, then what was she? Lisa’s Muslim identity, her visible “Otherness” allowed for Margaret to construct a foil which allowed her to disassociate herself from their labor relationship.

Conceptualization of Personal Relationships

In order to understand how within domestic labor, both the self and the “Other” are produced it is important to analyze how employers conceptualize their both their personal and labor relationships. As such I will be analyzed my interviews with employers by looking at various domestic models (maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, business relationship) which either highlight or downplay gender, ethnic, or class divides and either use inclusion or exclusion as a way of maintaining family boundaries and reproducing self identities. However, these are only typologies and are often expressed in combination or along a continuum.

Maternalism

Maternalism in relation to paid domestic labor is a common domestic model addressed by previous research studies and literature. According to Anderson, “Maternalism is based on the superordinate-subordinate relationship, with the female employer caring for the worker as she would a child or a pet, thereby expressing, in a feminised way, her lack of respect for the domestic worker as an adult worker.” (Anderson 144). Paid domestic work is often defined as an intimate relationship of maternal benevolence which Romero argues “maternal practices define workers as needy, immature, and inadequate to master their own lives, while strengthening the employers perceptions of themselves as generous, thoughtful, and superior moral guardians” (Lan 533). Lastly Lan, in her analysis of boundary work, characterizes maternalism as both highlighting gender, racial, and class divides within the relationship but, inclusion within family boundaries.

During my interviews with four women who are employers of paid domestic labor, I noticed various indicators of materialistic attitudes and practices, including assuming familiarity, inquiring about personal lives, giving of advice (solicited and unsolicited) which highlight power

differentials. Often employers knew a great deal about the inner lives of their domestic workers and appeared to inquire often about their personal lives, especially around topics of relationships and sex. For instance, in discussing her experience with Lisa, Margaret stated, “‘Oh you know I’m going to marry my aunt’s brother’ and I say ‘No, you’re not.’ She married him, she went over to Morocco, I saw the pictures, she kissed someone for the first time in her life, she was twenty seven, she slept with someone for the first time. I asked her, ‘So, how was it?’ ‘The best week of my life,’” she says (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06). Although, this highlights a certain aspect of intimacy within their relationship, I have found that is not always reciprocal. For example, an employer does not discuss her lesbian relationships with her housecleaner but, does have conversations about the housecleaner’s family and children.

Often employers felt it was acceptable and normal to give “motherly” advice to their employees about their personal problems, especially problems regarding their families, husbands, and particularly children. For example, Leoni discussed how her housecleaner, Nina was having difficulties with her eldest daughter. Her advice to her was not to only criticize her daughter for the things she did not always do but, also to praise her when she did well. Similarly, during my interview with Joanne she described the conversation topics she had with Maria. She said, “Her daughter is very disobedient. Not cleaning the room. I said, ‘Ok you stop doing it and see what’s happening’”(Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). There is an assumption on the part of the employer, that they know what is best and that their advice should if not must be taken seriously. Moreover, this exchange is often not reciprocal also. From my interviews with both employers and employees, I did not find any evidence that the employee, the domestic worker, offered personal advice to their employer.

Within a maternalist framework, gender, ethnic, and/or class differences are often

highlighted. However, I found most often that ethnic differences between both the employer and the employee were stressed the most. This was especially prevalent if the domestic worker was a Moroccan woman. For example, in discussing the role Lisa plays within her own family, Joanne stated, “I notice she has nothing to say in the family. A mother. A mother is just for cleaning and for cooking. There are still many differences” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). The difference lies with the Moroccan Muslim woman, not with the employer, who views herself as a more enlightened, emancipated individual. Similarly, Margaret stated,

In the beginning it was very difficult, I don't like Muslims, I don't like religion and she was there with her scarf all the time. And my kids would be, ‘Oh the door bell, Melinda, Lisa, your scarf’ because in the house she wouldn't have to wear it because there were no men in the house. She would have to put her scarf on before she could open the door. I hated it” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06).

In stressing ethnic difference, the employer is able to establish a socio-spatial boundary, firmly placing them in superior position and reproducing the “otherization” of the domestic worker.

Yet, while this difference was highlighted, there were a couple of employers who displayed inclusion of the domestic worker within the family. Although Margaret often commented about Latina's “Muslimness,” on one of her cabinets with family photos, there was a picture of herself, her children, and Lisa. Likewise, Patricia in discussing her childhood with her parents and their cleaner mentioned how she ran into their cleaner's oldest son recently. She stated, “He said, the pictures of you as children were always in the sleeping room of my parents. We were like a second family. Her children were further up and then the photographs of our family were further down. It was really a life long relationship” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Again, as in much of the previous literature, the notion of being “part of the family” arises. Yet, as Anderson states, “But which part of the family are they, one is attempted to ask?”

(Anderson122). In perceiving the relationship between employer and employee as “part of the family,” the employer is attempting to manage the contradictions of power and status. If the domestic worker is “a part of the family,” then how can their often subordinated status be justified?¹¹

Personalism

According to Lan, “the distinction between personalism and maternalism is yet a fine line, given the inherent status hierarchies in the employment of foreign domestics” (Lan 536) yet, a major aspect of personalism is a feeling of guilt or uncomfortability on the part of the employer towards his or her employee. Although a “prime motivation for hiring a servant is the enhancement of the employer’s image as a superior being” (Romero 15), it has been widely noted that there are deeper psychological factors in hiring a woman or man of subordinated class as a domestic worker. According to Susan Tucker:

Many women certainly must feel some discomfort, even when paying a decent wage, about the possibility of such a motivation...There are many conflicting principles and traditions surrounding the employment of a socially and economically disadvantaged woman who goes daily into a wealthy home. One might feel discomfort if one were aware of a number of different types of ideas, feminist, egalitarian, religious” (Romero 15).

When I asked the employers whether or not they felt discomfort in hiring another woman to do their housework, only one expressed an inner conflict with this situation. Leonni described feelings of guilt, which could be attributed to society’s socialization of women into gendered

¹¹ Although employers may take a maternalistic approach to their housecleaners, this does not necessarily mean that the domestic workers do not wish to have such a relationship. It would be a mistake to forget the agency of and the choices made by domestic workers. For example, when describing her housecleaner, Joanne revealed that she would like Maria to be more independent but, “She likes it when I still stand next to her, to still say now you have to do this” (Joanne, Interview, 24/04/05). Similarly, from the domestic worker’s perspective, Mary chooses to have outside social contact with some of her employers and expressed her fondness of one particular female employer. She stated, “We will sit and talk (in Dutch) before I start and somewhere in the middle of my shift. I like and admire her” (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06). Additionally, another employer, she states, “We have an interesting relationship. It feels like we are friends and that gets a little tricky sometimes” (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06). Even when a domestic worker chooses to be on friendly terms with his or her employee, it is interesting to note that Mary still has to negotiate the difference between their possible friendship and her employment relationship.

roles, feeling guilty about not doing the work herself, or knowing that another woman of a subordinated class is cleaning up after her. Noting that her apartment was not very big but, she did work, Leoni stated, “I can do the work” (Leoni, Interview, 18/04/06). In trying to rationalize if she could do the work, then why hire another woman to clean her house, she listed a number of ways in which this relationship has benefited Nina, such as enabling her to earn extra money for herself. In using a feminist model, her hiring of Nina is allowing Nina to be more independent; an ideal that she can relate to herself. As such, she is able to erase the inequalities within their relationship and her complicity in maintaining them. As Anderson argues, this can be “ particularly insidious because it seems to offer some kind of equality between domestic workers and employers as women, whereas in fact it is precisely that commonality which works to deny, reinforcing superiority and inferiority” (Anderson 145).

On the other hand, the other three employers did not express any discomfort in hiring another woman or man clean their homes. In response to a similar question, Joanne stated, “I feel I have the right” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Patricia stated, that it did not make a difference whether it was a man or a woman cleaner her house. She stated, “I just see it as people wanting to have labor” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). In fact, she described hiring a housecleaner “a real gift to herself” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Rather than seeing that some individuals because of structural inequalities are more likely to have to provide the labor and others are more likely to purchase it. For my interviewees age, marriage status, having or not having children, nor education seem to have affected whether or not the female employer feels discomfort in hiring another woman to clean her home or the idea of reproducing social inequalities.

Distant Hierarchy

According to Romero, “Confirmation of an employer’s status [or identity] is not always accomplished by the mere physical presence of a woman of color; it frequently requires daily practices of deferential behavior that continually affirm and enhance the domestic’s inferiority” (Romero 114). Employer-employee relationship reflecting distant hierarchy is based in a daily differential behavior often taken in the form of linguistics. The term “girl” or in the case of some of my interview’s “boy” is “a classic example of linguistic deference” (Romero 115) which has its history rooted in both the history of colonialism and race relations within the United States. For example, during my interview with Patricia, she stated “Well, I have the feeling that this *boy* has more energy. He works harder” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06), even though her cleaner is thirty-six years old. Likewise, during a conversation with Leoni, she stated, “She is such a nice *girl*” (Leoni, Interview, 18/04/06), although she then corrected herself by acknowledging that she was a grown woman with two children. In using the term “girl” or “boy” rather than “woman” or “man,” let alone their actual first or last names, the employer is able to differentiate themselves, is able to place the employee in a subordinated status. In Patricia’s case, while referring to her previous female housecleaner a “woman” and calling her current housecleaner “boy,”¹² she is able to place a man, who because of his gender is entitled to certain privileges, into a subordinated position.

Although Romero notes that another common practice is to address domestic workers by their first name and their employers by their last name, I found in my interviews that both employers and employees referred to each other by their first names only. However, during interviews with employers, they often omitted the name of their housecleaner, au pair, or domestic worker by referring to only their nationality. For example, during my interview with

¹² Both of whom are immigrants from South East Asia, the woman from the Philippines and him from Indonesia.

Margaret she stated, “So I got an Ecuadorian cleaning lady of my sister, but she sent her husband.... So then I asked my mom’s cleaner, he’s Polish” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06). Out of the seven au pairs she had she only mentioned the first names of two of them. Likewise, in describing her experiences with housecleaners, Joanne stated, “Most of them are Moroccan women. Oh, and there was a Suriname boy” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Thus, national identities or ethnic identities become one of the main descriptive markers of paid domestic workers for employers. Their actual names are less important.

Another facet of distant hierarchy is the issue of control, control over one’s home and over one’s housecleaner. During my interviews, control was often manifested in whether or not the employer a) was present when the housecleaner was working b) whether or not the employer dictated what tasks were to be done, often the most dirty, tedious, or degrading. Yet, there was a bit of range depending upon the employer¹³, which could be attributed to the amount of intimacy and trust¹⁴ within relationship to the domestic worker. For example, Patricia is always present

¹³ Joanne is also present when Maria arrives, but stated, “I say don’t ask me, just see if it is dirty and just do it” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Leonni was always present in order to let Nina into the house, but then would either stay or go depending up on her schedule, allowing Nina to clean whatever was necessary. Margaret gave her housecleaners the key to her home and allowed them to clean whatever they felt was necessary. She stated, “They do what they like. I’m not organized enough to tell them what to do” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06).

¹⁴ One of the first acts of trust for employers is during the hiring process. Interviewees noted that it was more preferable to hire someone who had been referred to them by a friend or relative than from an advertisement. When asked about hiring a housecleaner, Patricia explained, “I just talk to them first...Maybe you want to see if it is someone who is trustworthy. Then again, when they come from someone else, who is ok with somebody, then you know, then it is easier than finding someone from an address” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Often the amount of trust an employer had with his or her employee was predicated upon previous experiences. For instance, when asked if she had ever had any problems with her housecleaners, Patricia stated, “Yeah, I had a woman from the Philippines. But, when the last time she was here, I had taken out some money from the atm to buy a gift for someone and I left my purse in the kitchen. Later, when she was gone, I missed money” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Patricia expressed a sense of betrayal after having helped her housecleaner in various ways. She noted that “Yeah, it was not nice that I could not trust her. There was always trust in my mother’s home with her cleaner” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Although not explicitly stated, the difference between the two housecleaners was their ethnicity. Her mother’s cleaner was Dutch and “a part of the family” whereas, her previous cleaner was Filipino and clearly there to only provide labor. On the other hand, Margaret expressed almost no feelings of distrust with her au pairs or housecleaners. She stated, “I never, I’m never scared of those kinds of things. I’ve never had people steal...I have the impression no body had ever stole from me...I’ve known a lot of people who complain, who say people steal from them but, maybe I’ve been lucky all the time” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06).

with her housecleaner and tells him exactly what he must do because she believes that if she doesn't he will miss or skip over something important. She stated, "But, then again, I don't know if it is personal or a man thing, I think it is *personal*, he doesn't see what is dirty..." (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Yet, her mother's Dutch female cleaner did not have this "personal" issue, which calls into question if it is not because he is a man then what is this personal characteristic exactly? I would argue that from her perspective, even if she does not vocalize it or may not be completely conscious of it, his inability to see what is dirty is based both on the fact that he is male and that he is racialized, ethnic "Other." In establishing this type of control over her immigrant, male domestic worker, she is able to simultaneously reaffirm her white Dutchness and subordinate his masculinity.

Business Relationship

The Business Relationship operates to establish definitive lines between the employer and the employee; a quintessential "us" versus "them" without explicitly revealing so. According to Lan the business relationship model recognizes "status disparity between employers and employees" and "minimizes personal interactions" (Lan 537) in order to clarify the worker's

Intimacy was expressed in various ways by employers. Often employers would discuss the ways in which their employees allowed themselves to feel comfortable with them in their homes. This was particularly important for those employers who had Moroccan housecleaners, who most visibly were constructed as an "Other." This type of intimacy was often displayed by the removal of a veil or discussing sex. For example, Joanne describe how after a few months with Maria, she finally felt comfortable enough to take off her veil while working. She stated, "She has a veil, now, one time she says, she was so hot and she takes it off. Oh, what beautiful hair. Now more often she takes it off inside. But, outside she has two" (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Moreover, she stated, "We talk now more about sexual things. It is quite something. Because like gay people, it is out of the question. Also sex before marriage" (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). In sharing these details, the employer is able to define herself in relation to her domestic worker through their differences and commonalities.

Another key indicator of trust and intimacy within the employer-employee relationship was whether or not the employee felt comfortable enough to speak Dutch or in one case English with their employer. Again, Joanne stated that Maria confided that "With you, I dare to talk Dutch, but not with anybody else" (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Likewise, Patricia not only spoke with her housecleaner in Dutch, but she stated, "Mark is a little insecure about his English but, if you speak slowly or you can try in Dutch" (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Mark was in fact much more comfortable speaking in Dutch with her, than speaking English with me. He stated, "My English is not good anymore. I still have a lot of vocabulary. Sometimes it is not good to use the grammar. This is not good English" (Mark, Interview, 01/05/06). Additionally, he often laughed nervously when I was along with him, but seemed to open up more as soon as Patricia entered the room.

position i.e., employee rather than friend. Yet, ideally, as my interviews proved, “Most employers attempt to achieve a balance between a trustworthy personal relationship and a hassle-free business relationship” (538). Since employers tend to fit along a continuum, they often expressed notions of wanting a personal relationship but, also maintaining a business like relationship also. For example, although Joanne expressed her fondness of her housecleaner and how she likes it when Maria “comes in and asks how are you? How are your children? How is your health?” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06), she later stated, “We don’t have them for coziness” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). On one level, it was important to be on friendly terms with one’s housecleaner, to express some commonality [i.e. asking about one’s children] but it was equally as important that they do what they are their for, to clean one’s home. On another level, employers desire an intimate “Other,” who is both different from and the same to them.¹⁵

¹⁵ On the other hand, I found that domestic workers tried or wished their relationship to their employer was of a “contractor relationship” because it would allow them to maintaining boundaries. In describing one employer, Mary confided that “His attachment to me is often a burden. I feel some fondness for him, but I am mostly kind to him out of pity” (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06). Additionally, she also appreciated it when employers maintained a business relationship. She described one job as “heaven” (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06) because she was able to be left alone during the job. Moreover, her contact with her employer was limited to “sms and notes” and although they are “both very friendly towards me, but it is mostly business” (Mary, Interview 20/04/06).

Conceptualization of Labor Relationship

Within paid domestic labor, there is a fine line between the personal and labor aspects with the employer-employee relationship and often it should be noted that topics such as wages and working conditions are deeply embedded in both. As Anderson states, “Labor is social, not simply an economic process” (Anderson 113). Therefore, any analysis labor relations must take into account these nuances. Anderson asks us, “How does the female employer raises her own status by degrading her domestic worker?” (Anderson 17). In this section, I will analyze both how employer’s of domestic workers often structure their labor relationship in particularly demeaning ways in order to preserve their own sense of self. This is often accomplished through acts of perceived benevolence such as gift giving and employment finding, but as well as delegating which tasks their domestic worker will perform.

In the words of Anderson, the tasks employers require their domestic workers to undertake are often ones “that it is unlikely that any woman with a choice would be prepared to undertake”(16) themselves. Moreover, employers are able to delegate those tasks which they perceive as the most demeaning or “dirty” onto the domestic worker, who for one reason or another is more suited for such work¹⁶ For example, Patricia states, “So I let him do what is the most dirty or what I hate the most. Ah, today I asked him to put the garbage out. And I always ask him to clean the toilets. And to vacuum the stairs especially, every time he does the carpet” (Patricia, Interview, 01/05/06). Additionally, Joanne described how she if she spills or drops something, she leaves it on the floor for her housecleaner. Romero makes a distinction between

¹⁶ “Bakan and Stasiulis have examined how the racialization of domestic work means, on the one hand, the construing of a ‘fictive, universal, nonwhite, female, noncitizen ‘other’ who is in some way naturally suited to domestic work, but, on the other, the hierarchising of women by distinctions such as skin colour, ethnicity, religion and nationality, as being appropriate for different types of domestic work and as meriting different levels of wages” (Anderson 152).

“serving” and “waiting” within paid domestic labor, in which “picking up” after an employer retains the degrading “work structure previously labored by housewives” (Romero 102).

Within paid domestic labor Anderson argues, “Power may be manifested over others, by helping them as well as hurting them...Through kindness, pity, charity, an employer asserts her power” (110). This power over the domestic worker is symbolically manifested in gift giving. Yet, gift giving is not only material items, but also finding their domestic workers other employment, assisting with legal documents, speaking with them in Dutch, and/or simply personal contact. Based on my interviews, employers often exchanged “gifts”, as a means of gratitude, kindness, or a means of supplementing wages. For example, in describing her relationship with Maria, Joanne stated, “It is such a nice thing to have this woman here, oh my god. Oh if I spill something, oh she will come tomorrow or in two days, I leave it on the floor. I love it. I gave here old clothes. I talk with her” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). In exchange for cleaning up after her, along with wages, Joanne compensates Maria not only with old items but, her personal attention. Her personal interactions become an act of generosity. Similarly, for one of her au pairs, Margaret stated, “A friend of a friend of mine, she’s rich and has lots of rental apartments, after three years, when the fake marriage was over, and she could find an independent apartment, this friend immediately gave her an apartment” (Margaret, Interview, 24/4/06). As Romero states, “Gift giving is domestic worker’s almost universal experience...which is used to ‘buy’ and bond’ the domestic” (Romero 109). In setting up her au pair with an apartment, she is bound to her former employer.

More often than not, the most common gift was further employment finding. Since employers are more likely to find their employees through friends and relatives, domestic workers are reliant upon their employer’s as references and good graces. For instance, Margaret

refused to help find a Moroccan neighbor of hers further employers when she found out that the woman would not work for a man. She stated, “Then I thought I’m not going to look for houses for you because if you are that stupid that you can’t clean a house because of a man then don’t [clean houses]” (Margaret, Interview, 24/04/06). Similarly, Joanne tried to find her housecleaner additional employment. She stated, “Now I help her to, with a form in another elderly house to work, on the internet, because she can’t read Dutch” (Joanne, Interview, 20/04/06). Thus, this type of gift giving becomes vitally important for the domestic worker and reinforces the domestic worker’s sense of loyalty and co-dependency to his or her employer.

However, for the domestic worker, gift giving is an important part of the underground economy and although it may have maternalistic undertones, sometimes it benefits the domestic worker. For example, Mark stated, “He was really nice to me. He always give me much money. [In a stereotypically Asian voice] He say, “Oh, thank you very much” fifty Euros” (Mark, Interview, 01/05/06). Moreover, sometimes the domestic workers also give gifts to their employers. Mary stated, that not only has she received gifts such as extra money, wine, chocolates, although “nothing too extravagant or personal” (Mary, Interview, 20/04/06), she has also given gifts including, flowers, souvenirs, etc. Leoni also had received material gifts from her housecleaner including a duet cover for her sleeping bag for when she travels abroad. Yet, it is important to note, that when the domestic worker gives a gift it is not embedded in the same power relations, it does not bond or buy the employer, nor does it undermine the hierarchical nature of the paid domestic labor relationship.

Conclusion

As many theorists have argued, paid domestic labor is not only about physical reproduction but, societal reproduction. If the family works to not only physically reproduce itself but, also “of the basic ideological forms, class, race, age, and gender ideologies, societal expectations, folkways, mores, norms, and the like” (Anderson 30), then paid domestic labor participates in this process as well. Domestic work is not only an institution that constitutes the global organization of social reproduction (Marchetti 9) but, an “intimate interaction of different power systems of domination and subordination” (14). Thus, as Mary Romero stated, “Domestic workers and their employers are caught up in a complex dialectic in which they construct and reconstruct social identities around the organization of housework” (Romero 43).

Through the “Otherization” of the domestic worker, using “ethnicity, together with age and class, as ingredients of the distancing or bonding” (Marchetti 10), the employer is both able to affirm and reproduce her own identity and social status along with that of her employee. As my analysis has shown, female employers of domestic labor in the Netherlands use a myriad of boundary work typologies, including maternalism, personalism, distant hierarchy, and business relationship, and a number of tactics including gift giving, linguistics, etc., in order to negotiate their boundaries; boundaries of inclusion or exclusion, of belonging or otherness, or of “us” versus “them.” And in doing so, these employers, whether intentional or conscious, often reproduce and reinforce the structural, societal inequalities within the home; reestablishing the white, Dutch woman near the top of the socio-economic hierarchy and the immigrant, ethnic, male or female domestic worker near the bottom. Patriarchal ideologies, colonial histories, capitalist structures can not only be held accountable for this situation, for women too play an

active or complicit role in constructing, maintaining, and reproducing dominant paradigms around gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

Paid domestic labor within the Netherlands has only recently gained scholarly attention, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. As such there are still many topics that need to be explored, researched, and conceptualized. Possible future independent study projects and questions include:

- The paradox between anti-immigration sentiments and demands for a cheap, foreign labor supply within the Netherlands.
- The feminization and racialization of male domestic workers in the Netherlands.
- A comparison study between Dutch domestic workers and immigrant domestic workers.
- Identity formation for Moroccan female domestic workers in the Netherlands.
How are gendered identities constructed within their own home and the homes of those the dominant classes?
- How do domestic workers struggle to better their working conditions? What types of strategies and techniques of resistance to they employ? How do they express agency and choice?

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Housecleaners:

How old are you?

Are you an immigrant to the Netherlands? If so, from which country?

Which county or countries do you have citizenship? Are you a legal resident?

How long have you lived in Amsterdam?

Are you married, divorced, single, etc.?

Do you have children? How old are they?

What is your educational background?

Could you please describe to me the nature of your current employment?

How did you find your current employment? How long have you been employed as a housecleaner (domestic laborer)?

How do you feel about your job?

Are you currently employed anywhere else?

Have you experienced any discrimination (sex, gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc) in the labor market? If so, could you please describe when, how, and in what ways?

Describe to me your relationship with your employer? How many employers do you have?

Can you describe to me your feelings towards your employer(s)?

Can you name three differences between you and your employer, as women?

Can you imagine that the two of you could be friends?

Have you ever received gifts from employers?

Have you ever experienced any discrimination from your current or past employers?

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

Employers:

How old are you? Where were you born?

Are you employed? If so, then where?

What is your educational background?

Are you married, divorced, single, etc? Do you have children? How old are they? Who performs childcare responsibilities?

What is your ethnic identity?

Why did you decide to hire a domestic worker?

How long have you employed housecleaners?

How often do you employ your housecleaner?

How did you find your current and/or past housecleaners?

Describe the responsibilities of your housecleaner?

Describe your relationship with your housecleaner? What do you know about your housecleaner's personal life? Do you know her citizenship status?

Can you describe your feelings towards your employee?

Do you think it would be different if she were native Dutch?

Which qualities of hers do you like and dislike?

Can you name three differences between you and your employer, as women?

Could you imagine the two of you becoming friends?

Tell me your thoughts on paying for domestic labor?