

## The Global Restructuring of Care *The Third World Nanny Phenomenon*

*In the new era of colonial relations, the main resources extracted from the Third World are no longer natural resources and agricultural products, but female traditional care work. One form this transfer of care takes is the nanny phenomenon, which is a tragedy for many Third World women and their children. In order to provide money for their own children's material well-being, "nanny-mothers" must leave them, often for years at a time, to provide maternal caring and/or domestic services for First World children and parents. This situation is uncomfortable for western feminists, because they are often partakers in this arrangement and/or it supports their advocacy of women's equal participation in the public sphere. While poor women of colour and/or immigrant women labouring in the domestic sphere of other women's homes is not a new phenomenon, it occurs at a much greater rate today and is performed, in many cases, to facilitate the entrance into the professional career world of more privileged western women. Today, many feminists think we are constructing a third wave of feminism, at least in part as a response to aspects of changing times, such as the increasingly globalizing economy and its disproportionate effects on Third World women and their children, including the diversion of maternal care from the Third World. This paper is a discussion of these aspects of "diverted mothering," or the nanny phenomenon, in globalism. As such, it is a part of the feminist attempt to make the plight of these women and their children more visible.*

The gap between rich and poor countries is ... pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First World ... creat[ing today] not a white man's burden but through a series of invisible links, a dark child's burden. (Hochschild, 2002: 27)

Feminists of the second wave recognized the personal as political and, with

considerable success, worked to include women in the public world of politics and economics. Today feminists respond to additional concerns, some more significant to contemporary times. Among these concerns are the economic dislocations caused by the globalizing economy, particularly their disproportionate effects on women and children (Narayan and Harding, 1998). As a result, the personal today, in addition to being political, is increasingly seen as global (Hochschild, 2002: 30).

In this new period of colonial relations, the main resources extracted from the Third World are female traditional care work and the prominent form this transfer of care takes is the nanny phenomenon (Cheng, 2004). This is the situation where Third World women, in order to provide money for their children's material well-being, must leave them, often for years at a time, to provide maternal caring and/or domestic services for First World children and parents (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). The issue of paid domestic service is no longer confined to national borders. In globalization, motherhood has become just another resource that can be reallocated from poor to rich countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000).

This situation can be uncomfortable for western feminists, because they are often partakers in this arrangement and/or it supports their advocacy of women's equal participation in the public sphere. While poor women of color and/or immigrant women laboring in the domestic sphere of other women's homes is not a new phenomenon (Evans, 1997; Romero 1997, 2002), it occurs at a much greater rate today and is performed, in part, to facilitate more privileged western women's entry into the professional career world (Hochschild, 2002).

While there are no easy answers as how to find ways to counterbalance the systematic transfer of caring work from poor countries to rich, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) state, "Some first steps are to bring the world's most invisible women into the light" (13). This article is part of the attempt of some feminist authors (e.g., Cheng 2004; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Romero 2002) to illuminate the plight of these Third World women and their children who are severely disadvantaged by their location in the new global economy.

In the second wave of feminism, before western feminists were alerted to the impacts of encroaching globalism, liberation feminists recognized the personal was political and challenged women's exclusion from the public world of politics and economics. As a result, these feminists have had considerable impact on the lives of First World women due, in no small part, to the various public policies they brought about to enable women's participation in the public sphere (Brenner, 1993). Women's success in this area, however, has not been without costs. Many women now experience a "double shift," the situation where mothers working outside the home in a full-time job return home each evening to perform the reproductive labor that still must be performed to maintain and raise a family in the private sphere (Hochschild, 2002; Hochschild

and Machung, 2003). While the difficulty associated with women's "double shift" might be receiving more societal awareness today, it is not receiving more societal aid (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). Hence the problems associated with working mothers' additional burdens are increasingly being alleviated, on an individual basis for those First World mothers who can afford it, by employing a childcare domestic worker, often referred to as a nanny.

The nanny, who as noted earlier, is usually a mother herself, is a worker created by the new global economy. She tends to be a Third World woman, usually of colour, whose severe poverty, exacerbated by more recent global economic dislocations (Narayan and Harding, 1998), has caused her to migrate to a First World country in search of low wage work caring for other women's children while leaving her own children behind. Most often the nanny does this in order to send needed money home to her own children. While the nanny's children usually are better provided for materially by this arrangement, they lack the physical presence and care of their mother on a daily basis and in too many cases do not see her for most of their growing-up years (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002).

These "nanny-mothers" and their children are the unrecognized victims of globalization and international trade policies. Among other socioeconomic disruptions, current global economic policies have the effect of facilitating "the nanny phenomenon." In the prevailing free market ideology, however, the nanny's migration is viewed as a "personal choice" and its consequences to her and her children are seen as "personal problems" (Hochschild, 2002: 27). In reality, motherhood, in this era of globalism, can become another kind of commercial resource, one reallocated from its original purpose of caring for one's own children, to caring for children in another country. Reproductive labour is thus commodified on a global scale as immigrant women from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines and various Caribbean nations, like many Mexican and Central American women, migrate internationally for work as nannies and/or domestics (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000: 161).

It should be remembered here, however, that the nanny phenomenon is not only an arrangement among women. As Ann Crittenden (2001) points out, women have continued to increase their employment outside the home, but their male partners have not increased their share of childcare and housework accordingly. This places these women in an untenable position between caring adequately for their children and the duties their jobs require. In the case of professional women, long hours are necessary to keep their careers on track, and many who can afford it turn to Third World women to perform the family childcare and domestic work.

In addition to the need for male partners to perform more of the "second shift" work, not to mention the help a single, often low-wage earning, mother needs, it should also be noted that the U.S. government has been particularly negligent in its support of motherwork (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007). While a form of maternity leave is contained in the *Family and Medical Leave Act* of

1993, it hardly provides for care giving by mothers. The basic provisions of this act allow twelve weeks of unpaid leave to both women and men to care for a family member in need, including newborns (Klingner and Nalbandian, 2003). Contrast these stringent leave provisions provided by U.S. public policy with the more humane ones in Norway, which provide one year's paid maternity leave and four weeks paid paternity leave (Kamerman, 2000), and it can be understood why many women in the U.S., who can afford to do so, turn to the questionable practice of hiring Third World nannies. This practice, suspect to begin with, has the added effect of letting the U.S. government "off the hook," so to speak, because "[m]igrant women's care labour serves as a cheap solution for the inadequacy of the public provision of care in labor receiving nations" (Cheng, 2004: 142).

### **Enlarging feminism's notions and concerns**

Feminists in the second wave envisioned a sisterhood of all the world's women (Morgan, 1984, 1996). Today, in more globalized economies, there is greater proximity of women. Also a considerable number of women, throughout the world, share the activity of trying to earn a living for their families. In the United States, for example, women are estimated to be the sole, primary, or coequal earners in over half of their families, while a large indefinite number of migrant women are sending money home to insure the economic survival of their families (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 3).

Overlapping commonalities that many of the world's women share in trying to earn a living for their families, however, are the disparate positions women occupy, in which, "less privileged women are compelled to cross borders to care for the families of more privileged women..." (Cheng, 2004: 136). As a result, the issue of women laboring in other women's homes has reappeared as an important subject for feminist analysis, albeit in broader and different ways. The issue of paid domestic service is embedded in international relations today. It is no longer confined to interpersonal relations and/or the intersectionality of oppressions within the confines of nation states (137). Correspondingly, many feminists believe we are constructing a third wave of feminism, at least in part, as a response to changing times (Mack-Canty, 2004).

Second wave feminists worked for the need to include women in the public sphere, and later second wave began to work for a general recognition of the interrelatedness of class, race, and heterosexism with sexism (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). Third wave feminists work also on matters of more recent importance to their historical times. Among these problems is the increasingly globalizing economy, with its accompanying "maldevelopment"<sup>1</sup> (Shiva, 1989) projects, particularly their disproportionate effects on women and children (Rocheleau et al., 1996: 165). To no small extent, the higher educational opportunities allowed to women by second-wave feminists' policy-making and the subsequent theorizing many of these women undertook, together with the significant contribution of women of color and/or third world women's

challenges, have contributed to the expansion of feminist theory, enabling third wave feminists' increasing awareness of and response to these concerns (Mack-Canty, 2004: 155).

Significant among the feminisms considered third wave today, and of importance to this discussion, is postcolonial feminism,<sup>2</sup> which regards the continuing ill effects of our colonial/imperialistic history, particularly as articulated by its Third World practitioners, an appropriate focus for contemporary feminism (Narayan and Harding, 1998). Theoretically, postcolonial feminism works to extend the analysis of the intersection of sexism and multicultural identity formation, to include the negative effects of Western imperialism that still exist today (Schutte, 1998: 65). Recent phenomena, such as the capitalist global economy, with its attendant development projects in the Southern Hemisphere, are viewed, in the postcolonial discourse, as neocolonial. They can be seen as "...a continuation of the European expansion begun in 1492" (Harding, 1998: 154; LaDuke, 1993). In the next section, through the studies of feminists who work to build theory from the voices of third world women, I relay some of the experiences of both women and children with what Sau-Ling Wong (1994: 69) refers to as "diverted mothering" in postcolonialism.

### **Experiences of nannies and their children**

Diverted mothering, through which the care labor of women of color is diverted to the children and families of employing white women, away from the rightful recipients based on kinship of community ties is not a new phenomenon. Among the earlier household workers and/or nannies in the U.S. were African slave and free black women (Evans, 1997: 90, 109). After Emancipation, but before U.S. Civil Rights Movement, when most employment still was not available to African American mothers, they continued to labor, in large numbers, in white women's homes as domestics and childcare workers (Evans, 1997: 272; Ortiz, 1994: 14-15). In an essay titled, "Who Takes Care of the Maid's Children: Exploring the Costs of Domestic Service," Mary Romero (1997) explores the impact of this domestic service on the workers' families, relaying, through interviews with the workers' adult children, how race and class privilege, including unequal access to mothering care, was bestowed on middle- to upper-class white children at the expense of lower-class people of color.

One African-American male Romero (1997) interviewed grew up in South Carolina in the 1940s. He said that he only got to see his mother from about "5:30 to 8:00 at night and the little white kids got to benefit from her all day" (153). He went on to relay feeling jealous and angry, when at a very young age, he witnessed the son of his mother's employer crying and clinging to his mother as she tried to leave work. He said, "I had been taught never to cry when my mother left me, because that was something she had to do. Now I was watching this little white brat crying his eyes out and making it difficult for my mother to come home with us" (157).

In these kinds of cases, according to Romero (2007), a mother's interaction with the employers' children also served to teach her own children class and race differences. Class distinctions were not limited to differences in income, but included the white kids' privilege of being able to receive constant care and nurturing from black children's mothers, while black children were being "deprived" of her care (168).

African-American women have developed their own affirmative strategies to help mothers and children in their communities. bell hooks's (1984) discussion regarding the need to be responsible for all children is illustrative here. Drawing on her experience of growing up in a working class African-American environment, she finds collective parenting, as exemplified by the African saying that it takes an entire village to raise a child, to be a positive alternative to individuals bearing the entire responsibility for raising their children. hooks's affirmative theme is the strength of the ongoing inclusive mothering or mothering by "other mothers" practiced in a considerable part of the African-American community. She notes how this kind of mothering is often seen as a response to slavery's legacy and the resulting Third World status many black mothers experience.

Affirmative strategies, though, are more difficult for today's migrant nanny to undertake. Today's nanny, in contrast to African-American women of the last century, tends to be isolated in her boss's home and not in a position to create community with other nannies. Additionally, the geographical distances between most nannies and their children today presents an almost insurmountable barrier to physical contact between them on any kind of natural basis. According to Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), most mothers feel this separation acutely regardless of whatever arrangements they make for their children.

[They] ... express guilt and remorse to the researchers who interview them. One migrant mother who left her two month-old babe in the care of a relative states, "The first two years I felt like I was going crazy. You have to believe me when I say that it was like I was having intense psychological problems." Another migrant nanny, through tears, recounted... "I left my youngest when she was only five years old. She was already nine when I saw her again, but she still wanted me to carry her." (12)

Mary Romero, in addition to her study regarding the effects of African-American mothers' absence on their children, due to their maid/childcare services in white women's homes, undertook an earlier discussion of the nanny/domestic phenomenon and Latina women. In her landmark book, aptly titled *Maid in America*, (1992), reprinted under the title *Maid in the U.S.A* (2002), Romero first asks the disturbing question many feminists (Cheng, 2004; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Rogers, 1998) are now also asking: "Who is taking care of the maid's [nanny's] children?" Romero presents the issues facing domestic

workers by drawing on the descriptions of the women themselves regarding their undesirable situations: low pay, long hours, insensitive or defensive employers, worries about their own children, and their personal strategies for survival. In so doing, Romero shows us the need to question the way our society is organizing caregiving, together with the relations of race, class, and gender on which domestic work relies.

Today, the situation Romero first described 15 years ago has become more prevalent. In Los Angeles alone, there are now a hundred thousand Latina women, documented and undocumented, performing mothering/house-keeping duties for First World families, according to a Public Broadcasting System Special (November 29, 2005) of the film, *Maid in America*. This film brings the lives of these women to us. As its title indicates, it is an extension of Romero's original work on the topic. The film offers the audience a look at some of the personal lives of Latina immigrants living in Los Angeles and working as nannies and housekeepers. It introduces the audience to Judith, who is from Guatemala. She has not seen her four daughters since she left two years ago, but she hopes to give them a better future by sending half her income to them. The film also introduces the audience to Thelma from El Salvador, who works for a middle- to upper middle-class, African American family. Thelma has cared for their now six-year-old child, on a daily basis, since he was a baby and in many fundamental ways has become his mom. Her work also enables his biological/legal mother to keep her career on track. The film movingly discloses the nanny phenomenon through the Latina nannies' own stories. It shows us the personal tragedy experienced by these Latina women whose economic plight forces them to assume nanny roles, outside their own countries, and the toll their separation from their own children takes.

Nowadays the migrant nanny eases the "care deficit" that has been occurring in rich countries in large part because so many women have entered the paid labor force. However, relieving some of this "care deficit" means domestic services are moved from low-income countries to high-income countries, resulting in the poor countries experiencing a care crisis. Similar to, but usually worse than, the situation created by the practice of African American domestic workers in pre-civil rights days, it is the nanny's children who are the biggest losers, as they are deprived of a most basic human right, access to their mothers. As Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) observe,

While the migrant mothers suffer, their children suffer more. And there are a lot of them. An estimated 30 percent of Filipino children—some eight million—live in households where at least one parent has gone overseas. These children have counterparts in Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union.... Compared to their classmates, the[se] children ... [were] more frequently fell ill; ... more likely to express anger, confusion, and apathy ... performed



particularly poorly in school ... [and] show a rise in delinquency and child suicide (22).

It must be also be noted here that some immigrant nannies suffer particularly difficult conditions. Joy M. Zarembka (2002) relays stories of some of these women's experiences at the hands of exploitive employers. A woman from Bolivia, for example, came to the U.S. in 1997 to be employed in Washington D.C. by a man who was a *human rights lawyer* for the Organization of American States. Upon the woman's arrival, the employer immediately confiscated her passport, forced her to work twelve or more hours a day, and did not allow her to leave the house without being accompanied by him or his wife. When a friend of the employers raped the woman, she was not allowed any medical treatment (142-143). In another case, a West African woman was approached by a wealthy relative who worked for the World Bank. He promised her a house and a car if she would serve as a housekeeper and nanny to his five children in suburban Maryland. Instead, upon her arrival she found out she had to sleep with his pair of one-year old twins, in effect providing 24-hour care, with no days off. The employer and his wife repeatedly beat her and ignored her requests to return to West Africa (143-144). Like many immigrant nannies these women were isolated in their employers' home, had no friends or relatives in U.S., and did not speak English. This kind of situation enables unscrupulous employers to keep these women in slave-like conditions. When these women are mothers, then in addition to being separated from their children and having to deny their children the mothering all children deserve, their ability to send their children money is also curtailed, as they are often not paid.

### **What is to be done?**

Economic development, that often impairs women's ability to provide basic needs for their children and themselves, raises important questions about how Western First World feminists should understand and engage with the persistence of neocolonial economic and political relationships (Narayan and Harding, 1998: 1). In what follows, I list a few selected examples of feminists' responses. In some cases, these feminists are women of colour and in the cases of Mary Romero (2002, 1997) and Patricia Hill Collins (1994) draw upon their families' immigrant experience and the legacy of slavery, respectively.

Romero's work, in the early 1990s with Latina domestics, and the more recent work of Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) present nannies' and their children's stories to us, increasing our awareness of a largely invisible situation. While there are no easy answers as how to find ways to counterbalance the systematic transfer of caring work from poor countries to rich, Ehrenreich and Hochschild state, "Some first steps are to bring the world's most invisible women into the light" (13).

Additionally, many of our concepts regarding feminism need to be reexamined and/or expanded as additional knowledge becomes available. Amrita



Basu (1995: 2), for example, discusses the need to understand that women's movements are not only the result of modernity, industrialization, and the creation of a middle class. They are also composed of poor women's concerns. Relatedly, Collins (1994) explains why the notion of motherhood itself needs to be expanded. She contests the grand narrative of a normative motherhood which is frequently based on the experience of Western, white, middle-class women. Instead she argues for the recognition that, "[f]eminist theories of motherhood are ... valid as partial perspectives but cannot be seen as theories of motherhood generalizable to all women (62). In a similar vein, Shu-Ju Ada Cheng (2004), "argues that, in the era of globalization, the critical analysis of motherhood needs to transcend national boundaries and be broadened to include the ramifications derived from the global restructuring of care" (136). Cheng advocates activism that works for the concerns of mothering in globalism and speaks to the "necessity for building alliances within and across national borders ... for the joint pursuit of local and global justice" in this area, while "...point[ing] to the urgency of collaborative local and global feminist interventions in the pursuit of motherhood as a transborder concern" (142).

In the public policy arena, childcare provision in the U.S., which ranks almost last among industrialized countries (Henderson and Jeydel, 2007), needs to be recognized and acted upon as an important communal responsibility instead of the current practice of shifting this responsibility onto poorly paid migrant women. Furthermore, migrant women need access to citizenship that increases their status while reducing their exploitability. In this regard, the U.S. feminist interest group, The National Organization of Women (NOW) (2007) is to be commended for work in support of immigration reform for women. They actively support the inclusion of provisions in any immigration reform legislation that would offer a path to residency and citizenship for the undocumented women living in the United States.

## **Conclusion**

Considerably more discussion and analysis is needed regarding these aspects of mothering. What is not being accounted for in global arrangements is how female care giving labor is being transferred from poor countries to wealthy countries, to the detriment of the migrant nanny and her children. Today, we are witnessing a new era in colonial relations in which the main resources extracted from the Third World are no longer natural resources and agricultural products, but female traditional carework. The phenomenon of the nanny illustrates the kind of havoc the global economy creates for mothering (Cheng, 2004: 137), arguably the most local and essential endeavour humans enact (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). It is a tragedy for Third World women who, in order to provide for their children's material well-being must leave them, often for years at a time, to provide maternal caring and/or domestic services for the children of those who are much better positioned in the new global economy.

Considerable feminist work is now required this area. Its beginnings can be seen in the recognition of problem itself, together with attempts to make the situation of the nanny and her children more visible.

<sup>1</sup>Maldevelopment is a notion that expresses a mismatch between the socio-economic conditions and the needs of the people. The term was coined by Vandana Shiva (1988).

<sup>2</sup>The roots of postcolonial feminism extend back into the second wave of feminism. Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) and bell hooks (1984) are examples of women calling for the recognition of the differing meanings for feminisms in non-western cultures, in the past.

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