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## **Still Crazy after All Those Years...: Feminism for the New Millennium**

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# Still Crazy After All Those Years . . .

## Feminism for the New Millennium

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**ABSTRACT** The author argues for passing on a particular brand of feminism to next generations. The cultural archive (after Said) to be passed on should be transnational, intersectional, interdisciplinary, relational and reflexive. In particular, the author focuses on processes and practices of racialization as they impact on and are practised within the discipline. In the current backlash against feminism and women's studies in different parts of Europe, frequently divisionary tactics are deployed, by which women are pitted against each other, based on assumed immutable differences which are conceived of as either 'raciological' (after Gilroy), ethnicized or as cultural, in such a way that 'race' enters again through the back door. The author argues that we need a European brand of feminism that is not complicit with the legacies of modernity, which continue to construct 'race'. That is, we should be deeply concerned with thinking through the parameters of a viable anti-racist European women's studies. By analysing various case studies, taken from the everyday Dutch reality at the beginning of this new millennium, the author shows the necessity and inescapability of the feminism she advocates.

**KEY WORDS** gender ♦ gender and ethnicity ♦ intersectionality ♦ interdisciplinarity ♦ processes and practices of racialization ♦ reflexivity ♦ relationality ♦ transnationality

### IF WE WON'T, WHO WILL?

I would like to congratulate *The European Journal of Women's Studies* on its 10th anniversary. This is an important moment to reflect on the status on women's studies, given the current backlash in many parts of the North and the South against feminism and the new knowledges it produces. These knowledges often had a dream at their point of origin of being

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liberatory to women (and men) of different 'racial' / ethnic positionings, of different class origins and of various religious persuasions. The feminist project has always had an agenda of upsetting and breaking through received inequalities.

Before I delve deeper into the brand of feminism, the body of critical thought and practices, the 'cultural archive', in Edward Said's (1993) terms, that I would like us to pass on to next generations, I believe it is timely to engage in some modest self-congratulation. With celebrations like these, that is important, because if we won't, who will? And if not now, then when? Ours is a body of thought that is singularly impressive; feminism has, in the past 30 years, developed into an academic space for innovative knowledge and rigorous analysis. Women's studies has, nationally and internationally, grown into a discipline of its own, with a curriculum and degrees offered from the BA to the PhD levels, with its own journals, conferences, professional associations, publishing outlets and a prolific stream of publications. There is a significant labour market for women's studies graduates. Utrecht University's alumnae work in the media, at ministries, at libraries, archives and other sociocultural institutions and in education (van der Sanden, 2003). With deep roots in the first feminist wave, the ensuing quest has been for 'the many shapes and forms in which woman as subject exists, and how this subject has been reproduced and scattered across popular, corporate, political and academic cultures in relation to other social categories such as sexuality, nationality, class, religion, race and so on' (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002: 68). Feminism has also had a varying impact on different disciplines – notably in the humanities and social sciences – pointing to the inescapability of gender as an organizing principle of texts and social, psychological and political phenomena. Feminist thinkers in philosophy and the sociology of knowledge should be singled out for making explicit the implicit subject of knowledge in 'normal' science and for enabling the epistemic emergence of women's studies. None of this is to be taken for granted and this is a good time to acknowledge the hard work of the many feminist thinkers who have made 10 years of *The European Journal of Women's Studies* possible.

From a more personal angle, I occasionally think of the alienation, the excentricity I felt during my early student years in anthropology, the lack of role models, the lack of curricular matter and mere questions pertaining to women, in a discipline which owes so much to women. I also recall the routine ways in which cultures of the South were described as 'primitive' and 'simple' and the unease which those descriptions produced for me. I do not go so far as to state that this kind of loneliness does not occur anymore, but at least there are some safe havens now in the academy for young scholars, who do not fit the normative mode. I sometimes wonder what would have become of us all, if that wave of discontent, manifesting in the late 1960s/early 1970s, had not have burst on the scene. Would the

academic talents of many of us have been wasted or would we eventually have found a niche in the academy? I at least was vigorously interpellated through the various constituencies I felt affinity to: women, the anti-racist movement, postcolonial Surinamese circles in the Netherlands, the gay and lesbian movement. Feminism, this productive transnational field, has, I do not hesitate to say, saved the intellectual lives of many women.

Our justified pride in the forging of an academic discipline out of a social movement should not occlude the fact that there is still a lot of work ahead of us, if we want to make feminism responsive to the plight of the majority of women on this planet. We need to be self-critical and acknowledge some persistent and serious shortcomings that plague the discipline. There are certain culturally constructed blind spots, located in the legacies of modernity and the imperial project, which were both significantly propelled by ideas about 'race', this pernicious fiction, which is so very real in its consequences. I want to focus on the continuing legacy of 'race' within the Dutch context, by analysing three knotted configurations, which are shot through with the discursive construction of 'race'. First, I explore recent statements by the Minister of Social Affairs, who is responsible for governmental emancipation policy, in which 'race' is unproblematically taken as an indicator among women of the extent of their emancipation. Second, I want to explore the work that 'race' does in dominant Dutch self-representation, and third, by extension, how the epistemic emergence of Dutch women's studies and the organization of knowledge production about the category 'women' in three separate arenas have been subject to the same racialized knowledge regime. Subsequently, I argue for passing on a particular brand of feminism to next generations. The cultural archive to be passed on should aim at becoming European, it should be transnational, intersectional, interdisciplinary, relational and reflexive. I conclude by showing the value of such an analysis through a short case study on middle-class female employers and their Eastern European au pairs.

## BACKLASH

We are currently up against a storm of forces, both inside and outside the academy, which want to turn back the gains we, as a movement bent on change, have made, and thus it is important to our survival to reflect on where we currently stand, what we have learned and what it is we want to pass on to next generations. As Adrienne Rich reminded us long ago:

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (Rich, 1980: 35)

In the Netherlands, various forms of this backlash can be identified. Significant factors which have contributed to the backlash are '9–11' and the emergence of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), the populist party led by the flamboyantly gay sociologist Pim Fortuyn. His anti-immigrant, especially anti-Muslim, and racist bravado and his divisionary tactics towards women, won LPF 27 seats in parliament at the elections of 2002. The triumphal and swift march of Fortuyn's insights and ideas, across the political spectrum, after his death, gives pause for thought. It lends credence to the suspicion that dominant Dutch self-representation, as anti-racist, proverbially hospitable to foreigners and refugees and conducive to the emancipation of women, is in dire need of revision. The tales we, as Dutch persons, like to tell ourselves about who we are, turn out to be too self-flattering, they need to be questioned and complicated.

The Minister of Social Affairs, de Geus, who is responsible for governmental emancipation affairs, officially proclaimed in November 2003 that the emancipation of 'autochthonous', read white, women had been accomplished. Much evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, de Geus has maintained this position and unfortunately he is not the only one expressing this opinion. Now is the time to devote all our energies to the emancipation of 'allochthonous', read black, migrant and refugee women. In pitting white women against black, migrant and refugee women, several feats are accomplished.

First, this message provides a powerful justification for the enormous cutbacks in women's sociocultural, political and health organizations. At the same time, there is no evidence available that one of the other important aims of governmental emancipation policy during the past 30 years has been reached. That is, that 'general' institutions in the fields of sociocultural and political activities or health have been successfully 'gender mainstreamed'. A more elaborate and complex brand of mainstreaming that would take additional parameters of diversity, such as class or ethnicity, into account, has proved to be too much to ask over the past decade (Wekker, 1996). The Directorate of the Ministry of Social Affairs, responsible for emancipation policy, understands its task quite literally as being accountable for gender, not for ethnicity or class, thus naturalizing whiteness and middle-class status.

Second, the familiar tradition-modernity binary is given a new purchase, by representing white Dutch women as the epitome, the teleological endpoint of emancipation, the example for black, migrant and refugee women, who apparently still have a long way to go before they can measure up. Simultaneously, this gesture has to erase the fact that in some important respects, e.g. labour market participation, Surinamese women, regardless of their private situation, participate disproportionately more than their white counterparts. A recent report of the Central Bureau of Statistics spelled out that while Surinamese women have a

labour market participation of 43 percent, for white women it is 39 percent (CBS, 2004). Such data, which upset, in Toni Morrison's words, 'the sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains' (Morrison, 1990: xi), do not generally form part of the social imagination.

Third, the homogenizing of white women, on the one hand, as uniformly emancipated and black, migrant and refugee women, on the other, as collectively backward, provides an instance of an – as yet – unaccomplished project of feminism, that is to break down one of the legacies of modernity, which has 'race' continue as one of its ordering principles, silently and deleteriously.

I next illuminate two other instances of the silent but powerful work that 'race' does in Dutch society, including in women's studies.

## DOMINANT DUTCH SELF-REPRESENTATION

Dominant and cherished Dutch self-representation is characterized by a series of paradoxes, which should be taken into account when we want to consider the general Dutch climate. Until relatively recently, this climate could be summed up by a reluctance to talk and to deal openly with ethnic/'racial' difference. In Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) terms, a decided colour- and power-evasive discourse was operative, while Toni Morrison's (1990) words that talking about race was considered uncivilized, like talking with the hunchback about his hump, also rang true in the Dutch context. In the past three years, the avenue to talk about ethnic difference has increasingly been limited to an essentialized notion of culture, unchanging, fixed and thought to be capable of explaining and predicting the behaviour of migrants, especially Turks and Moroccans. Thus, to a large extent, culture is doing the work of 'race' (Hall, 1997). Even though the dominant discourse of the Other has changed perceptibly, the paradoxes about the Self have remained in place. The Netherlands is a multiethnic society, but, as has become abundantly clear, it is decidedly resistant to becoming (critically) multicultural.

One paradox in this situation is that the majority of the Dutch do not want to be identified with migrants, although one in every six Dutch people has migrant ancestry (Lucassen and Penninx, 1997). Whether it is Huguenots, Belgians, Spanish and Portuguese Jews, Hungarians, Indonesians, Surinamese, Antillians or Turks and Moroccans, the Netherlands is a nation of (descendants of) migrants. That is, however, not the dominant self-image that circulates. Whereas in the private sphere stories may be woven about a great-grandmother who came from Poland, in the public sphere such stories do not add to one's public persona but are rather a curiosity. Belonging to the Dutch nation demands that those

features which the collective imaginary considers as non-Dutch – i.e. 'exotic' dress and convictions, non-Christian religions, the memory of oppression – are shed as fast as possible and that one tries to assimilate. In the public sphere the assimilationist model of mono-ethnicism and mono-culturalism is so hegemonic that all signs of being from elsewhere should be erased. Of course, those who can phenotypically 'pass for' Dutch, i.e. who are white, are in an advantageous position. It is migrants with dark skin colour who do not succeed in enforcing their claim on Dutchness or have it accepted as legitimate (Phoenix, 2001).

A second paradox in dominant Dutch self-representation involves the recent past. The dominant self-image is that of innocent victims of German occupation, during the Second World War. That the Netherlands was a perpetrator of excessive violence against the jewel in the Dutch Imperial Crown, Indonesia, which was fighting for its independence in roughly the same period, does not form part of Dutch self-image. The euphemistic term 'policional actions' as a Dutch substitute for 'dirty wars', speaks volumes about a self-image that embraces innocence and constitutes itself as a small, but just nation, providing international, ethical leadership. In a recent presentation, I have called this syndrome 'innocence unlimited'.

The third, overriding paradox involves the more distant past: from the 16th century, the Dutch had a major imperial presence in the world, but this is almost totally absent in the Dutch educational curriculum, in self-image and in debates about Dutch identity. Knowledge about Dutch overseas expansion is quarantined in a separate specialization of the discipline of history; it is not an element of Dutch national history. Judging by curricula at various educational levels – from grade school to university level – it is a well-kept secret that the Netherlands has been a formidable colonial nation. University students in my women's studies' classes are always surprised and appalled when they hear about the Dutch role in the slave trade and colonialism, often for the first time.

There are few models to deal with ethnic/'racial' difference, but while the Dutch colonial past has virtually been excised from collective memory – except for the largely Tempoe Doeloe stories, the stories about the good old times in Ons Indië (Our Dutch East Indies) – some of the older models still operate implicitly. There is an often unspoken, but inherent sense of superiority towards people of colour that assumes that they will either be assimilated into Dutchness or they will be segregated.

We are still a long way away from understanding the complex relationships between the Dutch global, imperial role and the internal erasure of this role, on the one hand, and the current revulsion against multiculturalism. The past forms a massive blind spot, which barely hides a structure of superiority towards people of colour. As long as the Dutch colonial past does not form part of the 'common', general store of

knowledge, which coming generations should have at their disposal, as long as general knowledge about the exclusionary processes involved in producing the Dutch nation is not circulating more widely, multiculturalism cannot be realized. 'Allochtonen', the official, supposedly innocuous term, meaning 'those who came from elsewhere', produces and racializes as Other people of colour until the *n*th generation, making it virtually impossible for them to belong to the Dutch nation, where whiteness and Christianity are still the implicit markers (Wekker and Lutz, 2001).

These elements, forgetting, glossing over, 'colour-blindness', an assumed inherent and 'natural' superiority towards people of colour and assimilation, are, broadly speaking, the main Dutch repertoire for interaction with "racial"/ethnic Others. An innocent, fragile, emancipated white Dutch self is constructed vs a guilty, uncivilized, barbaric Other, which in past decades has been symbolized mostly by the Islamic Other, but in the recent past black people have also occupied that position. Obviously, Islamic men and women occupy different, gendered positions within this construction. Blacks, migrants and refugees in the Netherlands are confronted with a difficult paradox. The implicit and infernal message, the double bind, that is offered, all the time, is: 'if you want to be equal to us, then don't talk about differences; but if you are different from us, then you are not equal' (Prins, 2000).

## THE EPISTEMIC EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

The delinking of Dutch national history from colonial history has consequences for knowledge production, which is obvious in a discipline like history but also is operative in women's studies. A postcolonial approach to knowledge would start from the recognition that the system linking the Netherlands, Suriname and Indonesia was the colonial empire. Colonialism was not only a political and economic, but also a social and cultural system.

The cultural system, which was the outcome of this political and economic system, is most obviously represented by language, but it also includes a mass of variations of common institutions ranging from administrative and religious practices to architecture, from university curriculae to literature. (King, 1995: 15)

The culturally constructed blind spots in the discourses dealing with ethnic/'racial' difference are present in common sense thought as well as in the academy. The designation of disciplinary boundaries and the reaching of consensus on what the subject matter of a discipline is to be, is not a natural or neutral practice. In the academy, women's studies is complicit in dividing the marked and problematic category of 'woman'

into three subarenas: women's studies, ethnic studies and women-in-development studies (Wekker and Braidotti, 1996). Women's studies is the largest of these three disciplinary groups and for a long time its subject and object of study unproblematically were white women, without the necessary caveats that would make that limitation clear. The study of women from ethnic minority groups is precariously situated in ethnic studies, while the equally problematic 'group' of Third World women has found a roof under programmes for 'women-in/and-development'. This division of labour, shaping, ordering and staking out the new discipline, took place in the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, after the decolonization of the major Dutch colonies and with 'development cooperation' as the new discourse ordering the previously outright colonial relations between the Dutch Self and the Other. The Dutch nostalgia for empire, after the loss of Indonesia (1949), found an emotional and economic outlet in the new discourse of development cooperation, in which the Dutch could and did distinguish themselves, becoming champions of aid to the Third World, from the 1970s and 1980s onwards. In this discourse, there is no longer any space for an outright and offensive white Dutch superiority over people of the South. Nominally, stressed in the term 'cooperation', egalitarian relations are envisioned, but simultaneously there is an implicit teleological expectation that, with the right – educational and financial – inputs from the North, the South will shape up.

In close collaboration between practitioners of the discipline, university boards, national education advisory boards and the Ministry of Education, the new discipline, in its three-pronged manifestation, took off. In the Dutch case, we still need studies to bring to light the connections between Cold War preoccupations and the shaping of the academic landscape, as Kaplan and Grewal have so elegantly shown for the US academy and the ways in which women's studies came to fruition (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002). We can be fairly sure, however, that in the Dutch case, the colonial archive, the unexamined and unproblematized assumptions about 'race', must have been operative: whiteness is no 'race' or ethnic positioning but stands for the universal and the general; 'race' supposedly only pertains to people of colour; women of colour are evaluated depending on their proximity to the white 'model'. It is clear that the criterion that is operative in making this division is 'race'. The precise configurations in different countries, in which women's studies were launched, are an important topic for further study, and I agree with Kaplan and Grewal that these configurations 'are generated by specific political and ideological needs and practices' (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002: 68).

Such a division of the marked category 'woman' should give feminists food for thought for a variety of reasons.

In the first place, discursive systems are not only reflections of unequal

social relations, they also generate and reproduce those asymmetrical relations. It is only from a Eurocentric worldview that such a division is thinkable, possible and makes sense. Stam and Shohat (1994) describe Eurocentrism as endemic in common sense and academic thought: it is present in culture, everyday language, the media, the organization of our knowledge systems and it generates a fictive belief in the natural, inborn, superiority of cultures and people who are associated with Europe. Eurocentrism looks at the world from one, privileged point of view, it divides the world into binary hierarchies such as 'The West and the Rest', which implicitly flatter Europe: our nations, their tribes; our religions, their superstitions; our defence, their terrorism (Stam and Shohat, 1994: 296).

Second, it is a naive and dangerous fiction to think that this division of the category 'woman' is innocent, benevolently diverse and value-free. This discursive construction contains a strong normalizing and hierarchizing impulse, which makes white women the teleological endpoint of development: liberated, autonomous, in control over their own lives, the model to be attained, superior (Mohanty, 1991). In this model, women from ethnic minority groups and the South are monolithically constructed as en route, unfree, oppressed and inferior.

Third, this division of labour, which separates knowledge production about women at the root, does not enable the best possible conditions either for knowledge production itself or for political change. When 'race' and ethnicity can continue silently to operate as organizers of our realities, they continue to construct the dominant ethnic position in society, as emptiness, as invisibility, as insignificant, in short as a non-ethnicity. This silent ethnic positioning holds enormous power within a racialized hierarchy. These issues have not been fundamentally thought through and counteracted by the discipline of women's studies in many parts of Europe. Thus asymmetrical relations between women are maintained and resurrected on a daily basis, by the academic structures, in which women's studies is located. An adequate theory about gender is simultaneously a theory about 'race'/ethnicity, class, nation and sexuality.

## FEMINISM FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

I have implicitly been arguing for passing on a particular brand of feminism to the next generation. I now want to make those characteristics explicit. Feminism for the new millennium should be:

1. A feminism that works hard at coming to terms with the specificities of what it means to become *European women's studies*. It is in the interest of European knowledge production, but ultimately also of women's studies in other regions, that a firm European variety of

- women's studies should burgeon (see Griffin and Braidotti 2002). Much as feminisms owe to US women's studies, US global dominance serves to obscure the specificities of the European situation. In light of Europe's coming into being through the imperial project, we urgently need to revisit those historical processes, as they were played out in each region of Europe, and their current consequences.
2. It should be *transnational*, that is to say a feminism that can address the asymmetries of the globalization process, the asymmetries of culture and capital. This brand of feminism knows that it is not free of asymmetrical power relations, yet involves 'forms of alliance, subversion and complicity within which asymmetries and inequalities can be critiqued' (Kaplan and Grewal, 2002: 73).
  3. Feminism should be *intersectional*, i.e. be aware that gender, in isolation from other important axes of signification, does not adequately explain the world. We should work from the insight that gender, 'race' / ethnicity, class, sexuality and nation co-construct each other and perhaps there are other significant factors at play (Lutz, 2002).
  4. This brand of feminism is characterized by a *relational approach*, that operates at once within, between and beyond the nation-state framework, enabling us to understand the connections among nations, patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms and feminisms. Instead of talking about comparative study, which 'compares regions, nations, locales and cultures that have been generated by a colonial episteme', a notion of linking is preferred. We are all connected to each other and feminism should be attentive to the nature of the relational linkages between us (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Kaplan and Grewal, 2002; Shohat, 1998).
  5. Feminism for the new millennium should be *interdisciplinary*; i.e. it should destabilize, critique and challenge rigid methodological practices. In doing this, it should be aware of the genealogies of and the arbitrary divisions in academic knowledge production.
  6. It should, finally, be *reflexive*, in the sense that women's studies' practitioners should be aware of their own positionings along a number of significant axes and how those sites privilege particular knowledges. The aim is to be transparent and accountable about one's knowledge claims (Haraway, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990).

By way of illustration, I present a case study, culled from an article in a progressive Dutch weekly, which sketches an everyday reality for untold numbers of women. The article serves as a reminder of the relational, contingent positioning of both privileged Northern women and less privileged women from the South and Eastern Europe.

## THE EASTERN EUROPEAN AU PAIR AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

While preparing for this conference, my attention was caught by an article in the progressive weekly *De Groene* of 10 January 2004. It made me instantly take note of the necessity of the insights of women's studies and how much the discipline has to offer in terms of understanding the everyday problems, under conditions of globalization, of many contemporary women. Middle-class women in the North and working-class women from the South and Eastern Europe are bound in an invisible but tight network, a global care chain. Many Northern women, in their thirties and forties, are trying to cope with working outside the home and running a household with young children. Under the heading 'I Love Children', journalist Margreet Fogteloo recounts her traumatic experiences with a procession of Eastern European au pairs in her family, consisting of herself – holding two jobs – her partner and three children, of whom the youngest is three. In the past eight years, Fogteloo has seen six au pairs come, but more importantly, go. The heading on the cover sets the tone: 'Au Pairs: The Drama in a Guest Family'. In the article, Fogteloo wants to break with the dominant representation of au pairs as poor, exploited creatures, subject to every whim of their employers and having no legal position, by disclosing another side of the situation, in which whole families are terrorized and traumatized by 'pedagogically untrained, uninterested types, who under the banner of "loving children so much and wanting to get to know another country" have totally different plans' (Fogteloo, 2004: 14). Her au pairs originate mostly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Plaintively, Fogteloo states that it is not easy to have an au pair; at moments when one would rather be alone, the au pair is there, not speaking Dutch; there are the cultural differences and it is always a big risk to find out who you are actually taking into your home.

Several aspects of this article merit comment, but I limit myself to three issues here, which illustrate the characteristics of the brand of feminism I am advocating. First, it is striking that not much love is lost between Fogteloo and most of her au pairs. With some qualifications, she sketches an, in her eyes, characteristic picture of Eastern European au pairs as showing

. . . little own initiative, being sneaky (that is, they never openly talk about what they think or do), they complain easily and are often tired, they have a different food pattern (they eat little, do not like vegetables, but like to eat candy a lot) and are totally indifferent towards the culture of the motherland [meaning the Netherlands, I presume]. (Fogteloo, 2004: 17)

The article offers a rich portrait of a particular brand of white, female

middle-classness and of the Eastern European female Other. This discourse not only, in familiar fashion, culturally homogenizes all Eastern European au pairs, it also represents all of them in an extremely negative way, whereas allegedly Fogteloo also had good experiences with some of them. Moreover, the article does not show any awareness of the structural and asymmetrical global linkages that bring Fogteloo and the au pairs together. The different interests and different positionings of the two women are not taken into account. In an interesting turn, Fogteloo represents her own and her family's position as that of the victim, exploited and harassed.

Second, the partner in this story remains entirely opaque. We do not learn how she, but more probably he, copes with the situation, nor is there any indication that Fogteloo has problems with their division of labour, which seems rather uneven; we learn nothing about what, if anything, he does in the household. This reader perceives him as part of the problem, rather than as part of the solution. The silence surrounding him points to the correctness of the diagnosis, summarized by the concept of the 'global care chain' (Parreñas, 2001). (Predominantly white) middle-class women have solved their double burden by enlisting the aid of an Eastern European or a Third World woman, while their male partners have barely contributed anything more to household labour, in the past decade. As an important aside, much more attention should be given to the late capitalist development of the acceleration of the pace of Northern life, where people are working more instead of fewer hours per day.

Third, and finally, no attention is given to the interests of the various nation-states involved. The remittances from the au pairs to their families may be the cork that keeps those households afloat, freeing Eastern European states from assuming fuller responsibility for their citizens. The Dutch state, on the other hand, always already negligent in providing affordable childcare, benefits from the cheap social reproduction costs offered by the foreign au pair. These insights place this seemingly highly personal tale in a global political and economic framework, in which women, be it from radically different positions, continue to bear the burden of social reproduction.

The analysis of this everyday tale alerts us to the interlinking of women's lives and starkly illustrates how European women are positioned in ways that are oppositional, in the service of a dominant, ethnicized gender order, which is underwritten by the Dutch state. This order serves to keep a traditional sexual division of labour in the household intact.

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