Love and Gold

Arlie Russell Hochschild

Whether they know it or not, Clinton and Princela Bautista, two children growing up in a small town in the Philippines apart from their two migrant parents, are the recipients of an international pledge. It says that a child “should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding,” and “not be separated from his or her parents against their will...” Part of Article 9 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959), these words stand now as a fairy-tale ideal, the promise of a shield between children and the costs of globalization.

At the moment this shield is not protecting the Bautista family from those human costs. In the basement bedroom of her employer’s home in Washington, D.C., Rowena Bautista keeps four pictures on her dresser: two of her own children, back in Camiling, a Philippine farming village, and two of children she has cared for as a nanny in the United States. The pictures of her own children, Clinton and Princela, are from five years ago. As she recently told Wall Street Journal reporter Robert Frank, the recent photos “remind me how much I’ve missed.” She has missed the last two Christmases,
and on her last visit home, her son Clinton, now eight, refused to touch his mother. "Why," he asked, "did you come back?"

The daughter of a teacher and an engineer, Rowena Bautista worked three years toward an engineering degree before she quit and went abroad for work and adventure. A few years later, during her travels, she fell in love with a Ghanaian construction worker, had two children with him, and returned to the Philippines with them. Unable to find a job in the Philippines, the father of her children went to Korea in search of work and, over time, he faded from his children’s lives.

Rowena again traveled north, joining the growing ranks of Third World mothers who work abroad for long periods of time because they cannot make ends meet at home. She left her children with her mother, hired a nanny to help out at home, and flew to Washington, D.C., where she took a job as a nanny for the same pay that a small-town doctor would make in the Philippines. Of the 792,000 legal household workers in the United States, 40 percent were born abroad, like Rowena. Of Filipino migrants, 70 percent, like Rowena, are women.

Rowena calls Noa, the American child she tends, "my baby." One of Noa's first words was "Ena," short for Rowena. And Noa has started babbling in Tagalog, the language Rowena spoke in the Philippines. Rowena lifts Noa from her crib mornings at 7:00 A.M., takes her to the library, pushes her on the swing at the playground, and curls up with her for naps. As Rowena explained to Frank, "I give Noa what I can’t give to my children." In turn, the American child gives Rowena what she doesn’t get at home. As Rowena puts it, "She makes me feel like a mother.”

Rowena’s own children live in a four-bedroom house with her parents and twelve other family members—eight of them children, some of whom also have mothers who work abroad. The central figure in the children’s lives—the person they call “Mama”—is Grandma, Rowena’s mother. But Grandma works surprisingly long hours as a teacher—from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. As Rowena tells her story to Frank, she says little about her father, the children's grandfather (men are discouraged from participating actively in child rearing in the Philippines). And Rowena’s father is not much involved with his grandchildren. So, she has hired Anna de la Cruz, who arrives daily at 8:00 A.M. to cook, clean, and care for the children. Meanwhile, Anna de la Cruz leaves her teenage son in the care of her eighty-year-old mother-in-law.

Rowena’s life reflects an important and growing global trend: the importation of care and love from poor countries to rich ones. For some time now, promising and highly trained professionals have been moving from ill-equipped hospitals, impoverished schools, antiquated banks, and other beleaguered workplaces of the Third World to better opportunities and higher pay in the First World. As rich nations become richer and poor nations become poorer, this one-way flow of talent and training continuously widens the gap between the two. But in addition to this brain drain, there is now a parallel but more hidden and wrenching trend, as women who normally care for the young, the old, and the sick in their own poor countries move to care for the young, the old, and the sick in rich countries, whether as maids and nannies or as day-care and nursing-home aides. It’s a care drain.

The movement of care workers from south to north is not altogether new. What is unprecedented, however, is the scope and speed of women’s migration to these jobs. Many factors contribute to the growing feminization of migration. One is the growing split between the global rich and poor. In 1949 Harry S. Truman declared in his inaugural speech that the Southern Hemisphere—encompassing the postcolonial nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America—was underdeveloped, and that it was the role of the north to help the south “catch up.” But in the years since then, the gap between north and south has only widened. In 1960, for example, the nations of the north were twenty times richer than those of the south. By 1980, that gap had more than doubled, and the north was forty-six times richer than the south. In fact, according to a United Nations Development Program study, sixty countries are worse off in 1999 than they were in 1980.2 Multinational corporations are the “muscle and brains” behind the new global system with its growing inequality, as William Greider points out, and the 500 largest such corporations (168 in Europe, 157 in the United States, and 119 in Japan) have in the last twenty years increased their sales sevenfold.3

As a result of this polarization, the middle class of the Third World now earns less than the poor of the First World. Before the domestic workers Rhacel Parreñas interviewed in the 1990s migrated from the
Philippines to the United States and Italy, they had averaged $176 a month, often as teachers, nurses, and administrative and clerical workers. But by doing less skilled—though no less difficult—work as nannies, maids, and care-service workers, they can earn $200 a month in Singapore, $410 a month in Hong Kong, $700 a month in Italy, or $1,400 a month in Los Angeles. To take one example, as a fifth-grade dropout in Colombo, Sri Lanka, a woman could earn $30 a month plus room and board as a housemaid, or she could earn $30 a month as a salesgirl in a shop, without food or lodging. But as a nanny in Athens she could earn $500 a month, plus room and board.

The remittances these women send home provide food and shelter for their families and often a nest egg with which to start a small business. Of the $750 Rowena Bautista earns each month in the United States, she mails $400 home for her children’s food, clothes, and schooling, and $50 to Anna de la Cruz, who shares some of that with her mother-in-law and her children. As Rowena’s story demonstrates, one way to respond to the gap between rich and poor countries is to close it privately—by moving to a better paying job.

Even as the gap between the globe’s rich and poor grows wider, the globe itself—its capital, cultural images, consumer tastes, and peoples—becomes more integrated. Thanks to the spread of Western, and especially American, movies and television programs, the people of the poor south now know a great deal about the rich north. But what they learn about the north is what people have, in what often seems like a material striptease.

Certainly, rising inequality and the lure of northern prosperity have contributed to what Stephen Castles and Mark Miller call a “globalization of migration.” For men and women alike, migration has become a private solution to a public problem. Since 1945 and especially since the mid-1980s, a small but growing proportion of the world’s population is migrating. They come from and go to more different countries. Migration is by no means an inexorable process, but as Castles and Miller observe, “migrations are growing in volume in all major regions at the present time.” The International Organization for Migration estimates that 120 million people moved from one country to another, legally or illegally, in 1994. Of this group, about 2 percent of the world’s population, 15 to 23 million are refugees and asylum seekers. Of the rest, some move to join family members who have previously migrated. But most move to find work.

As a number of studies show, most migration takes place through personal contact with networks of migrants composed of relatives and friends and relatives and friends of relatives and friends. One migrant inducts another. Whole networks and neighborhoods leave to work abroad, bringing back stories, money, know-how, and contacts. Just as men form networks along which information about jobs are passed, so one domestic worker in New York, Dubai, or Paris passes on information to female relatives or friends about how to arrange papers, travel, find a job, and settle.

Today, half of all the world’s migrants are women. In Sri Lanka, one out of every ten citizens—a majority of them women—works abroad. That figure excludes returnees who have worked abroad in the past. As Castles and Miller explain:

Women play an increasing role in all regions and all types of migration. In the past, most labor migrations and many refugee movements were male dominated, and women were often dealt with under the category of family reunion. Since the 1960s, women have played a major role in labor migration. Today women workers form the majority in movements as diverse as those of Cape Verdians to Italy, Filipinos to the Middle East and Thais to Japan.

Of these female workers, a great many migrate to fill domestic jobs. Demand for domestic servants has risen both in developed countries, where it had nearly vanished, and in fast-growing economies such as Hong Kong and Singapore, where, write Miller and Castles, “immigrant servants—from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea and Sri Lanka—allow women in the richer economies to take up new employment opportunities.”

Vastly more middle-class women in the First World do paid work now than in the past. They work longer hours for more months a year and more years. So they need help caring for the family. In the United States in 1950, 15 percent of mothers of children aged six and under did paid work while 65 percent of such women do today. Seventy-two percent of all American women now work. Among them are the grandmothers and sisters...
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who thirty years ago might have stayed home to care for the children of relatives. Just as Third World grandmothers may be doing paid care work abroad in the Third World, so more grandmothers are working in the First World too—another reason First World families are looking outside the family for good care.

Women who want to succeed in a professional or managerial job in the First World thus face strong pressures at work. Most careers are still based on a well-known (male) pattern: doing professional work, competing with fellow professionals, getting credit for work, building a reputation, doing it while you are young, hoarding scarce time, and minimizing family work by finding someone else to do it. In the past, the professional was a man; the “someone else” was his wife. The wife oversaw the family, itself a flexible, preindustrial institution concerned with human experiences the workplace excluded: birth, child rearing, sickness, death. Today, a growing “care industry” has stepped into the traditional wife’s role, creating a very real demand for migrant women.

But if First World middle-class women are building careers that are molded according to the old male model, by putting in long hours at demanding jobs, their nannies and other domestic workers suffer a greatly exaggerated version of the same thing. Two women working for pay is not a bad idea. But two working mothers giving their all to work is a good idea gone haywire. In the end, both First and Third World women are small players in a larger economic game whose rules they have not written.

The trends outlined above—global polarization, increasing contact, and the establishment of transcontinental female networks—have caused more women to migrate. They have also changed women’s motives for migrating. Fewer women move for “family reunification” and more move in search of work. And when they find work, it is often within the growing “care sector,” which, according to the economist Nancy Folbre, currently encompasses 20 percent of all American jobs.9

A good number of the women who migrate to fill these positions seem to be single mothers. After all, about a fifth of the world’s households are headed by women: 24 percent in the industrial world, 19 percent in Africa, 18 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 13 percent in Asia and the Pacific. Some such women are on their own because their husbands have left them or because they have escaped abusive marriages. In addition to these single mothers, there is also a shadow group of “almost” single mothers, only nominally married to men who are alcoholics, gamblers, or just too worn down by the hardships of life to make a go of it. For example, one Filipina nanny now working in California was married to a man whose small business collapsed as a result of overseas competition. He could find no well-paid job abroad that he found acceptable, so he urged his wife to “go and earn good money” as a lap dancer in a café in Japan. With that money, he hoped to restart his business. Appalled by his proposal, she separated from him to become a nanny in the United States.

Many if not most women migrants have children. The average age of women migrants into the United States is twenty-nine, and most come from countries, such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka, where female identity centers on motherhood, and where the birth rate is high. Often migrants, especially the undocumented ones, cannot bring their children with them. Most mothers try to leave their children in the care of grandmothers, aunts, and fathers, in roughly that order. An orphanage is a last resort. A number of nannies working in rich countries hire nannies to care for their own children back home either as solo caretakers or as aids to the female relatives left in charge back home. Carmen Ronquillo, for example, migrated from the Philippines to Rome to work as a maid for an architect and single mother of two. She left behind her husband, two teenagers—and a maid.10

Whatever arrangements these mothers make for their children, however, most feel the separation acutely, expressing guilt and remorse to the researchers who interview them. Says one migrant mother who left her two-month-old baby in the care of a relative, “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. I would catch myself gazing at nothing, thinking about my child.”11 Recounted another migrant nanny through tears, “When I saw my children again, I thought, ‘Oh children do grow up even without their mother.’ 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.”

Many more migrant female workers than migrant male workers stay in their adopted countries—in fact, most do. In staying, these mothers remain
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separated from their children, a choice freighted, for many, with a terrible sadness. Some migrant nannies, isolated in their employers’ homes and faced with what is often depressing work, find solace in lavishing their affluent charges with the love and care they wish they could provide their own children. In an interview with Rhacel Parreñas, Vicky Diaz, a college-educated schoolteacher who left behind five children in the Philippines, said, “the only thing you can do is to give all your love to the child [in your care]. In my absence from my children, the most I could do with my situation was to give all my love to that child.” Without intending it, she has taken part in a global heart transplant.

As much as these 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. How are these children doing? Not very well, according to a survey Manila’s Scalabrini Migration Center conducted with more than seven hundred children in 1996. Compared to their classmates, the children of migrant workers more frequently fell ill; they were more likely to express anger, confusion, and apathy; and they performed particularly poorly in school. Other studies of this population show a rise in delinquency and child suicide. When such children were asked whether they would also migrate when they grew up, leaving their own children in the care of others, they all said no.

Faced with these facts, one senses some sort of injustice at work, linking the emotional deprivation of these children with the surfeit of affection their First World counterparts enjoy. In her study of native-born women of color who do domestic work, Sau-Ling Wong argues that the time and energy these workers devote to the children of their employers is diverted from their own children. But time and energy are not all that’s involved; so, too, is love. In this sense, we can speak about love as an unfairly distributed resource—extracted from one place and enjoyed somewhere else.

Is love really a “resource” to which a child has a right? Certainly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child asserts all children’s right to an “atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding.” Yet in some ways, this claim is hard to make. The more we love and are loved, the more deeply we can love. Love is not fixed in the same way that most material resources are fixed. Put another way, if love is a resource, it’s a renewable resource; it creates more of itself. And yet Rowena Bautista can’t be in two places at once. Her day has only so many hours. It may also be true that the more love she gives to Noa, the less she gives to her own three children back in the Philippines. Noa in the First World gets more love, and Clinton and Princela in the Third World get less. In this sense, love does appear scarce and limited, like a mineral extracted from the earth.

Perhaps, then, feelings are distributable resources, but they behave somewhat differently from either scarce or renewable material resources. According to Freud, we don’t “withdraw” and “invest” feeling but rather displace or redirect it. The process is an unconscious one, whereby we don’t actually give up a feeling of, say, love or hate, so much as we find a new object for it—in the case of sexual feeling, a more appropriate object than the original one, whom Freud presumed to be our opposite-sex parent. While Freud applied the idea of displacement mainly to relationships within the nuclear family, it seems only a small stretch to apply it to relationships like Rowena’s to Noa. As Rowena told Frank, the Wall Street Journal reporter, “I give Noa what I can’t give my children.”

Understandably, First World parents welcome and even invite nannies to redirect their love in this manner. The way some employers describe it, a nanny’s love of her employer’s child is a natural product of her more loving Third World culture, with its warm family ties, strong community life, and long tradition of patient maternal love of children. In hiring a nanny, many such employers implicitly hope to import a poor country’s “native culture,” thereby replenishing their own rich country’s depleted culture of care. They import the benefits of Third World “family values,” says the director of a co-op nursery in the San Francisco Bay Area, “This may be odd to say, but the teacher’s aides we hire from Mexico and Guatemala know how to love a child better than the middle-class white parents. They are more relaxed, patient, and joyful. They enjoy the kids more. These professional parents are pressured for time and anxious to develop their kids’ talents. I tell the parents that they can really learn how to love from the Latinas and the Filipinas.”

When asked why Anglo mothers should relate to children so differently than do Filipina teacher’s aides, the nursery director speculated, “The Filipinas are brought up in a more relaxed, loving environment. They aren’t as
rich as we are, but they aren’t so pressured for time, so materialistic, so anxious. They have a more loving, family-oriented culture.” One mother, an American lawyer, expressed a similar view:

Carmen just enjoys my son. She doesn’t worry whether... he’s learning his letters, or whether he’ll get into a good preschool. She just enjoys him. And actually, with anxious busy parents like us, that’s really what Thomas needs. I love my son more than anyone in this world. But at this stage Carmen is better for him.

Filipina nannies I have interviewed in California paint a very different picture of the love they share with their First World charges. Their import is not an import of happy peasant mothering but a love that partly develops on American shores, informed by an American ideology of mother-child bonding and fostered by intense loneliness and longing for their own children. If love is a precious resource, it is not one simply extracted from the Third World and implanted in the First; rather, it owes its very existence to a peculiar cultural alchemy that occurs in the land to which it is imported.

For María Gutierrez, who cares for the eight-month-old baby of two hardworking professionals (a lawyer and a doctor, born in the Philippines but now living in San Jose, California), loneliness and long work hours feed a love for her employers’ child. “I love Ana more than my own two children. Yes, more! It’s strange, I know. But I have time to be with her. I’m paid. I am lonely here. I work ten hours a day, with one day off. I don’t know any neighbors on the block. And so this child gives me what I need.”

Not only that, but she is able to provide her employer’s child with a different sort of attention and nurturance than she could deliver to her own children. “I’m more patient,” she explains, “more relaxed. I put the child first. My kids, I treated them the way my mother treated me.”

I asked her how her mother had treated her and she replied:

“My mother grew up in a farming family. It was a hard life. My mother wasn’t warm to me. She didn’t touch me or say I love you.’ She didn’t think she should do that. Before I was born she had lost

four babies—two in miscarriage and two died as babies. I think she was afraid to love me as a baby because she thought I might die too. Then she put me to work as a ‘little mother’ caring for my four younger brothers and sisters. I didn’t have time to play.”

Fortunately, an older woman who lived next door took an affectionate interest in María, often feeding her and even taking her in overnight when she was sick. María felt closer to this woman’s relatives than she did to her biological aunts and cousins. She had been, in some measure, informally adopted—a practice she describes as common in the Philippine countryside and even in some towns during the 1960s and 1970s.

In a sense, María experienced a premodern childhood, marked by high infant mortality, child labor, and an absence of sentimentality, set within a culture of strong family commitment and community support. Reminiscent of fifteenth-century France, as Philippe Ariès describes it in *Centuries of Childhood,* this was a childhood before the romanticization of the child and before the modern middle-class ideology of intensive mothering. Sentiment wasn’t the point; commitment was.

María’s commitment to her own children, aged twelve and thirteen when she left to work abroad, bears the mark of that upbringing. Through all of their anger and tears, María sends remittances and calls, come hell or high water. The commitment is there. The sentiment, she has to work at. When she calls home now, María says, “I tell my daughter I love you.” At first it sounded fake. But after a while it became natural. And now she says it back. It’s strange, but I think I learned that it was okay to say that from being in the United States.”

María’s story points to a paradox. On the one hand, the First World extracts love from the Third World. But what is being extracted is partly produced or “assembled” here: the leisure, the money, the ideology of the child, the intense loneliness and yearning for one’s own children. In María’s case, a premodern childhood in the Philippines, a postmodern ideology of mothering and childhood in the United States, and the loneliness of migration blend to produce the love she gives to her employers’ child. That love is also a product of the nanny’s freedom from the time pressure and school anxiety parents feel in a culture that lacks a social safety net—one where both parent and child have to “make it” at work because no state policy, community,
or marital tie is reliable enough to sustain them. In that sense, the love María gives as a nanny does not suffer from the disabling effects of the American version of late capitalism.

If all this is true—if, in fact, the nanny’s love is something at least partially produced by the conditions under which it is given—is María’s love of a First World child really being extracted from her own Third World children? Yes, because her daily presence has been removed, and with it the daily expression of her love. It is, of course, the nanny herself who is doing the extracting. Still, if her children suffer the loss of her affection, she suffers with them. This, indeed, is globalization’s pound of flesh.

Curiously, the suffering of migrant women and their children is rarely visible to the First World beneficiaries of nanny love. Noa’s mother focuses on her daughter’s relationship with Rowena. Ana’s mother focuses on her daughter’s relationship with María. Rowena loves Noa, María loves Ana. That’s all there is to it. The nanny’s love is a thing in itself. It is unique, private—fetishized. Marx talked about the fetishization of things, not feelings. When we make a fetish of an object—an SUV, for example—we see that object as independent of its context. We disregard, he would argue, the men who harvested the rubber latex, the assembly-line workers who bolted on the tires, and so on. Just as we mentally isolate our idea of an object from the human scene within which it was made, so, too, we unwittingly separate the love between nanny and child from the global capitalist order of love to which it very much belongs.

The notion of extracting resources from the Third World in order to enrich the First World is hardly new. It harks back to imperialism in its most literal form: the nineteenth-century extraction of gold, ivory, and rubber from the Third World. That openly coercive, male-centered imperialism, which persists today, was always paralleled by a quieter imperialism in which women were more central. Today, as love and care become the “new gold,” the female part of the story has grown in prominence. In both cases, through the death or displacement of their parents, Third World children pay the price.

Imperialism in its classic form involved the north’s plunder of physical resources from the south. Its main protagonists were virtually all men: explorers, kings, missionaries, soldiers, and the local men who were forced at gun-

point to harvest wild rubber latex and the like. European states lent their legitimacy to these endeavors, and an ideology emerged to support them: “the white man’s burden” in Britain and *la mission civilisatrice* in France, both of which emphasized the benefits of colonization for the colonized.

The brutality of that era’s imperialism is not to be minimized, even as we compare the extraction of material resources from the Third World of that time to the extraction of emotional resources today. Today’s north does not extract love from the south by force: there are no colonial officers in tan helmets, no invading armies, no ships bearing arms sailing off to the colonies. Instead, we see a benign scene of Third World women pushing baby carriages, elder care workers patiently walking, arms linked, with elderly clients on streets or sitting beside them in First World parks.

Today, coercion operates differently. While the sex trade and some domestic service is brutally enforced, in the main the new emotional imperialism does not issue from the barrel of a gun. Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose it because economic pressures all but coerce them to. That yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home. But given the prevailing free market ideology, migration is viewed as a “personal choice.” Its consequences are seen as “personal problems.” In this sense, migration creates not a white man’s burden but, through a series of invisible links, a dark child’s burden.

Some children of migrant mothers in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Mexico, and elsewhere may be well cared for by loving kin in their communities. We need more data if we are to find out how such children are really doing. But if we discover that they aren’t doing very well, how are we to respond? I can think of three possible approaches. First, we might say that all women everywhere should stay home and take care of their own families. The problem with Rowena is not migration but neglect of her traditional role. A second approach might be to deny that a problem exists: the care drain is an inevitable outcome of globalization, which is itself good for the world. A supply of labor has met a demand—what’s the problem? If the first approach condemns global migration, the second celebrates it. Neither acknowledges its human costs.
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According to a third approach—the one I take—loving, paid child care with reasonable hours is a very good thing. And globalization brings with it new opportunities, such as a nanny’s access to good pay. But it also introduces painful new emotional realities for Third World children. We need to embrace the needs of Third World societies, including their children. We need to develop a global sense of ethics to match emerging global economic realities. If we go out to buy a pair of Nike shoes, we want to know how low the wage and how long the hours were for the Third World worker who made them. Likewise, if Rowena is taking care of a two-year-old six thousand miles from her home, we should want to know what is happening to her own children.

If we take this third approach, what should we or others in the Third World do? One obvious course would be to develop the Philippine and other Third World economies to such a degree that their citizens can earn as much money inside their countries as outside them. Then the Rowenas of the world could support their children in jobs they’d find at home. While such an obvious solution would seem ideal—if not easily achieved—Douglas Massey, a specialist in migration, points to some unexpected problems, at least in the short run. In Massey’s view, it is not underdevelopment that sends migrants like Rowena off to the First World but development itself. The higher the percentage of women working in local manufacturing, he finds, the greater the chance that any one woman will leave on a first, undocumented trip abroad. Perhaps these women’s horizons broaden. Perhaps they meet others who have gone abroad. Perhaps they come to want better jobs and more goods. Whatever the original motive, the more people in one’s community migrate, the more likely one is to migrate too.

If development creates migration, and if we favor some form of development, we need to find more humane responses to the migration such development is likely to cause. For those women who migrate in order to flee abusive husbands, one part of the answer would be to create solutions to that problem closer to home—domestic-violence shelters in these women’s home countries, for instance. Another might be to find ways to make it easier for migrating nannies to bring their children with them. Or as a last resort, employers could be required to finance a nanny’s regular visits home.

A more basic solution, of course, is to raise the value of caring work itself, so that whoever does it gets more rewards for it. Care, in this case, would no longer be such a “pass-on” job. And now here’s the rub: the value of the labor of raising a child—always low relative to the value of other kinds of labor—has, under the impact of globalization, sunk lower still. Children matter to their parents immeasurably, of course, but the labor of raising them does not earn much credit in the eyes of the world. When middle-class housewives raised children as an unpaid, full-time role, the work was dignified by its aura of middle-classness. That was the one upside to the otherwise confining cult of middle-class, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American womanhood. But when the unpaid work of raising a child became the paid work of child-care workers, its low market value revealed the abidingly low value of caring work generally—and further lowered it.

The low value placed on caring work results neither from an absence of a need for it nor from the simplicity or ease of doing it. Rather, the declining value of child care results from a cultural politics of inequality. It can be compared with the declining value of basic food crops relative to manufactured goods on the international market. Though clearly more necessary to life, crops such as wheat and rice fetch low and declining prices, while manufactured goods are more highly valued. Just as the market price of primary produce keeps the Third World low in the community of nations, so the low market value of care keeps the status of the women who do it—and, ultimately, all women—low.

One excellent way to raise the value of care is to involve fathers in it. If men shared the care of family members worldwide, care would spread laterally instead of being passed down a social class ladder. In Norway, for example, all employed men are eligible for a year’s paternity leave at 90 percent pay. Some 80 percent of Norwegian men now take over a month of parental leave. In this way, Norway is a model to the world. For indeed it is men who have for the most part stepped aside from caring work, and it is with them that the “care drain” truly begins.

In all developed societies, women work at paid jobs. According to the International Labor Organization, half of the world’s women between ages fifteen and sixty-four do paid work. Between 1960 and 1980, sixty-nine out of eighty-eight countries surveyed showed a growing proportion of women in paid work. Since 1950, the rate of increase has skyrocketed in the United States, while remaining high in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom and moderate in France and Germany. If we want developed societies with
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women doctors, political leaders, teachers, bus drivers, and computer programmers, we will need qualified people to give loving care to their children. And there is no reason why every society should not enjoy such loving paid child care. It may even be true that Rowena Bautista or Maria Gutierrez are the people to provide it, so long as their own children either come with them or otherwise receive all the care they need. In the end, Article 9 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child—which the United States has not yet signed—states an important goal for both Clinton and Princella Bautista and for feminism. It says we need to value care as our most precious resource, and to notice where it comes from and ends up. For, these days, the personal is global.

The Nanny Dilemma

Susan Cheever

Dominique came to New York eight years ago, but she says it would take a lifetime to figure out New Yorkers. We teach our kids that money can't buy love, and then we go right ahead and buy it for them—hiring strangers to love them, because we have more important things to do. "You are workaholics, that's for sure," she tells me, in the lilting island accent she uses for unpleasant truths. "It's work, work, work with you, and money, money, money. You analyze every little stupid thing, and then you run off to some therapist to get the answers." She shakes her head and laughs, fiddling with a red plastic Thunderezord my five-year-old son has left on the table. Strangest of all, she says, we supersmart New Yorkers are afraid of our children—afraid to say no, afraid to deny them anything that other kids have. "It's hard for the nannies to adjust to our New York way," says Eileen Stein of Town & Country, an agency that has placed Dominique in several jobs. "Here children are the boss. The children run the home. The parents let the children do whatever they want."

If there's a good woman behind every great man, behind every great woman there's a good nanny. The restructuring of the American family has created a huge demand for child care. According to a 1992 Department of