

## **Marriage, motherhood and masculinity in the global economy: the emerging crisis in social reproduction**

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*“Women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. They are workers in both spheres – those most responsible and therefore with most at stake, those who suffer most when the two spheres meet at cross-purposes, and those most sensitive to the need for better integration between the two”. (Gita Sen, 1995, p. 12)*

*“The degree of globalisation and the degree of market integration have provided an economic and political context for the current changes in family/household relations that is quite unlike anything that has preceded it” (Moore, 1994 p. 5).*

### **1. Introduction: the significance of ‘work’ in the context of development**

In a widely cited article at the end of the ‘first decade of development’, Dudley Seers questioned the equation of development

with economic growth and with the failure of the dominant model of growth to generate the anticipated 'trickle-down benefits' to the mass of the population of the Third World (1969 and 1979). Development, he argued, was a social phenomenon: the elimination of poverty, unemployment and inequality were its central goals while economic growth as one important means to achieve these goals. Employment had a special significance for Seers. He saw it as essential for human beings to realise their full potential: the denial of a recognised social role created chronic dependence for the basics of life on the productive capacity of others, a dependence that was incompatible with self-respect. Interestingly, he took this 'recognised social role' to extend beyond paid work to include other productive but unpaid uses of time, such as study and keeping house. While feminists have persistently sought to gain greater recognition for the value of unpaid work within the home, the evidence presented later in the paper questions whether such work does indeed diminish chronic dependence of all those performing it.

Seers was writing at a time in history when development was envisaged within what Fraser (2005) refers to as the 'Keynesian-Westphalian' framework of planned intervention within closed national economies. His basic insights remain relevant today. While more explicit attention is being paid to poverty reduction in current development discourses than was the case at the end of the sixties, poverty concerns remain confined within, and subordinated to, an over-riding concern with economic growth. And despite the greater stress on labour-intensive growth, the nature of the jobs generated have failed to curb growing inequality in many parts of the world (World Bank, 2006; SAPRIN, 2001; Cornia et al. 2004).

However, the idea of development as state-led nation-building project appears today as a vestige of a bygone era, overtaken by the widespread turn to market forces and the imperative for all countries to compete in a global economy. More suited to

contemporary reality is the work of Karl Polanyi (1944), who was also concerned with the social significance of employment but whose analysis was set in the context of self-regulating markets very similar to those that prevail today. Polanyi was dealing with the ‘great transformation’ wrought by the spread of capitalist relations in the early years of industrialisation in Britain. He pointed to the profound changes in human motivations and behaviour that occurred when markets became disembedded from social relationships and took on a life of their own, governing rather than being governed by society. ‘Profit’ replaced reciprocity and redistribution as the driving motor of productive endeavour, and forms of behaviour based on ‘non-economic’ motivations of altruism, empathy, love and care were relegated to the rapidly shrinking non-market domain of the family. An important contribution made by Polanyi’s work<sup>1</sup> was the idea that the motivations and behaviour that predominated in a society reflected its dominant institutions rather than embodying some universal set of values (Mayhew, 2001).

The other important insight emerging from Polanyi’s analysis related to the social costs of treating human labour ‘as if’ it was just another commodity. A commodity in a market-governed society was something that was bought and sold in the market place, and *produced only for that purpose*. Labour, he pointed out, was not a commodity, except in a ‘fictive’ sense. It was the term applied to human beings in so far as they were employed, rather than employers, and to their activities while so employed. Such labour is however part and parcel of labourers themselves. It is not produced for sale, but for entirely different reasons, nor can the activities it embodies be detached from the person carrying it out to be stored or mobilised at will. To reduce human beings to the status of commodities, relying entirely on their price in the market place to ensure their own reproduction, was to condemn them to perish from the effects of

social exposure; 'they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation' (p. 73).

Polanyi suggested that the threat that such a self-regulating market presented to society gave rise to the need, indeed to the inevitability, of a counter-movement on the part of society to protect itself from the naked logic of market forces. This could take a variety of forms: the rise of trade unions and other organisations of labour; the promotion of social welfare, the turn to protectionism or the passage of protective legislation. The idea of a double movement – the expansion of unregulated market forces, on the one hand, and their containment through social protection measures on the other – has begun to feature with increasing regularity in the writings of those concerned with the social implications of market de-regulation at the present time (Standing, 1999; Munck, 2002; Mott, 2004; Esping-Anderson, 1990).

However, neither Seers nor Polanyi paid a great deal of attention to the implications of gender for their analysis. While there was no reason why women could not be part of the employment scenario of one and the commodification scenario of the other, neither problematised gender inequality in the labour market and its inter-connections with inequalities within the domestic economy. Nor have these intersections been dealt with in any great detail in subsequent efforts to extend the idea of the 'great transformation' to current processes of globalisation (see, however, Beneria 2003; Bakker, 2003). Families appear to constitute a taken-for-granted backdrop to the global economy in this literature, supplying labour, demanding goods and acting as an informal safety net in times of crisis, but a realm within which market principles do not apply, where social relationships continue to be governed by principles of the 'moral economy' and where labour ceases to be a commodity and recovers its human identity.

Yet markets today not only operate on a scale that is unprecedented in history, they also penetrate spheres of life that were once considered the antithesis of market principles: the spheres of family, reproduction and the domestic economy. What Polanyi had to say about the social consequences of the liberal market economy has a great deal of bearing on the reconstitution of the boundaries between personal and economic life that is taking place in the global economy today. The aim of this paper is to address this gap by analysing these social consequences from an explicitly gender perspective. It takes as its point of departure the well-documented increase in female labour force participation across the world, one aspect of the global commodification of labour (Standing, 1999a; Howes and Singh, 1995; Mehra and Gammage, 1999; Kapsos, 2005; Elder and Schmidt, 2004). The factors behind this 'feminisation of labour' have been well documented and are summarised below. Less well documented are its implications for relationships within marriage and family, particularly in the light of pervasive and deeply entrenched ideologies of the male breadwinner. Yet if men are brought up, as they continue to be in so many parts of the world, to take on the role of primary breadwinner for their wives, children and other dependents, the process of adjusting to women's growing capacity to earn must surely be a difficult, even painful, one.

This is borne out by the empirical studies reviewed in this paper. The studies covered use a variety of different methods and approaches and we have to rely on fuzzy estimates of the behaviour of 'most' 'many' 'some' or 'few' men and women to capture some of the trends they describe. But they relate a remarkably consistent story. They remind us that the boundaries of households and families are not fixed in perpetuity but fluid and responsive to changes in the wider economy and polity. They suggest that family life has not remained untouched by the spread of market relations and is undergoing its own more hidden transformations. And finally, given

the form that these transformations are taking, they suggest an emerging crisis in social reproduction<sup>2</sup> in many regions of the world.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, I sketch out some of the main factors behind both the feminisation of labour markets across the world as well as the concentration of women workers in the more casualised segments of the global economy. Section 3 discusses the consequences of these processes of commodification for women themselves and for their relationships with dominant members of their families. It suggests that it is in the particular context of marriage that women's entry into paid work has had the greatest repercussions but these ramifications have spilt over into family relationships more generally. Sections 4 and 5 track some of the ways in which these ramifications have played out in the global economy, generating new forces of supply and demand in the labour market as well as further changes in the meanings and experiences of marriage, motherhood and masculinity for different groups of men and women. Finally Section 6 draws out some of the theoretical and policy challenges posed by the analysis.

## **2. The globalisation of the economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a major restructuring of the global economy, and of the international division of labour, with profound implications for the lives, livelihoods and life chances of people across the world. The century began with an international division of labour that was largely shaped by colonial interests, with the poorer countries exporting primary commodities to the rich while the latter specialised in the production and export of manufactured goods. The post-war era was a period of high rates of economic growth and full employment in the advanced industrialised countries. It also saw the strengthening of state-provided social protection for the

majority of workers in these countries, giving rise to different varieties of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Developing countries sought to 'catch up' through strategies of import-substitution industrialisation, building up their manufacturing capacity behind protective barriers. Many had inherited weak and highly restricted systems of social protection from the colonial era. While efforts were made to expand these measures to the wider population, the results were highly uneven. In most countries, social security measures remained restricted to the civil service and the small, male-dominated section of the workforce in formal public sector. The majority of men, and the vast majority of women, were confined to earning a living or unpaid family labour in the informal economy with virtually no statutory benefits and largely invisible to policy makers.

Since the 1970s, a combination of factors set in train the processes that led to the growing integration of the world's economies and the resulting intensification in flows of goods, services, people and ideas across national boundaries. These factors included the rising costs of labour in advanced industrialised countries together with rapid advances in information technology and transportation systems which allowed production processes to be broken down and their labour-intensive stages relocated to different regions of the world. However, politics has also played a major role in driving the pace of globalisation. The ascendance of neo-liberal ideologies, with its celebration of free market forces, within some of the most powerful countries in the world led to the liberalisation of their economies and the weakening of their welfare regimes, putting pressure on other advanced industrialised countries to do the same. The influence of these ideologies within the international financial institutions ensured similar policies were pursued in indebted Third World countries through the conditionalities associated with structural

adjustment lending as well as in the transition from plan to market in the previously socialist countries.

The processes of globalisation have seen a doubling of trade as a share of global income between 1970 and 2000 (ILO, 2004). There has been a large increase in flows and volatility of foreign capital. While official aid has declined in real terms, private capital flows have increased from less than half of total resources flows in developing countries in 1990 to about three-quarters in 2002. Surges in short term capital flows have been responsible for a great deal of the volatility but foreign direct investments have also demonstrated considerable mobility, adding to the insecurity of many countries. The increasing integration of financial markets has meant that investment flows move together in response to the same events and shocks, amplifying the effects of volatility.

Global competition has also influenced the pace and direction of change in the productive economy. It has accelerated the secular decline in the share of agriculture in national economies. Some of the older import-substituting domestic industries which had grown up under the protective barriers of the earlier era have been displaced while there has been rapid growth in the production of export-oriented consumer goods and services, including garments, shoes, electronics, exotic foods, flowers, wines and tourism.

Globalisation has led to some dramatic changes in the labour force. Along with a steady expansion in the percentage of the population in paid work, there have been important changes in the nature of paid work, the composition of the labour force and its distribution between sites and sectors. There are two, inter-related aspects of these changes in the labour market that are of particular interest for this paper.

The first is the growing informalisation of work in the economies of many regions (Chen et al. 2004; UNRISD, 2005; Standing, 1999a). This partly reflects reversals in the formal economy



and partly the rise of new forms of production. As far as reversals are concerned, these were observed, for instance, in connection with the downsizing of the public sector as a result of economic recession and structural adjustment policies in many African and Latin American countries in the 1980s. They were also observed in the previously centralised planned economies with the closure of state owned enterprises and the dismantling of formal social protection measures, including the life long employment guarantee. In all such contexts, there was an expansion of informal activities as retrenched public employees sought work in the informal economy while those still employed in the public sector tried to bolster their declining salaries with informal work.

In addition, the deregulation of financial markets and the liberalisation of trade have increased the pressure on all countries to hone their competitive advantage in the global economy through the promotion of more flexible labour markets. Flexibility refers to the ease with which labour can be drawn in and expelled from production in response to changing profitability considerations. The pursuit of flexibility has led to a shift towards various 'irregular' employment relationships which are not subject to the costs and obligations of more regularised relationships. An increasing number of activities previously carried out within the formal economy have been casualised and subcontracted to informal while international outsourcing has given rise to global production chains with various stages of production, and value-added, located in different sites across the world. Competition in global markets has also led to the loss of jobs in domestic markets as a result of import penetration.

The other change of interest here is the increased 'feminisation' of the global labour force as a result of the steady rise in female labour force participation rates since the 1970s in most regions of the world - with the exception of the transitional economies in Eastern Europe and Central/Western Asia, where there have been reversals,

and the Middle East/North Africa region where they remain low (UNRISD, 2005). Women of all ages, married as well as unmarried, have entered the labour market. The rise in female labour force participation has often been in the context of stagnant and even declining rates of male labour force participation so that women made up a larger share of the workforce in 1995 than they did in 1975 (see Table 1 in the Appendix). That this trend has continued is confirmed by more recent estimates. Elder and Schmidt (2004) note that female labour force participation rates increased slightly between 1993-2003 while male labour force participation rates declined. Economically active females per 100 males vary from the higher rates of 91 and 83 which prevailed in the transition economies and East Asia respectively to the lower rates of 36 and 44 which prevailed in the MENA region and South Asia.

The feminisation of labour markets reflects a variety of inter-related factors. Rising levels of education, declining family size, falling fertility rates and changing aspirations for themselves and their families together make it both possible and desirable for women to take up paid work. In addition, women have been 'pushed' into the labour market by the decline in agricultural production and growing levels of landlessness, the rising costs of living associated with the privatisation of public welfare services and withdrawal of subsidies and declining levels of male employment and male wages as a result of the retrenchments associated with structural adjustment programmes and the dismantling of state owned enterprises (UNRISD, 2005; Chen et al., 2004).

However, the phenomenon of feminisation is also a reflection of the informalisation of paid work and the changing nature of demand in the labour market. Women have emerged as the flexible labour force *par excellence* for the highly competitive labour intensive sectors of the global economy. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, they are generally free of the 'fixed costs' associated

with the largely male-dominated and organised labour force in what is now a shrinking pool of formal employment. Secondly, ideologies of the male breadwinner continue to justify their payment as 'secondary earners'. And finally, gender discrimination and segmented labour markets curtail their options and reduce the reserve price of their labour.

The process of feminisation has been accompanied by a shift in the sectoral distribution of female labour. Women have participated in the general movement out of agriculture, but at a slower pace than men. They now make up an increasing share of the manufacturing labour force, but it is the tertiary sector that has seen the greatest rise in women's share of the labour force (Mehra and Gammage, 1999). Despite these changes, however, gender hierarchies within the labour market remain remarkably intact. Many more women may have entered the labour market and many men joined women in insecure forms of work, but overall men continue to enjoy a larger share of employment and earnings (UNDP, 1995; Anker et al., 2003; Elder and Schmidt, 2004; Arias, 2001).

The feminisation of paid work has also been driven by rising levels of female migration, internal as well international (UNFPA, 2006). While cross border migration in earlier decades was male dominated and flowed mainly from poorer countries in the global south to wealthier countries in the north, both the sources, destinations and composition of migration flows have diversified considerably. There is now more migration within the global south itself as a response to uneven development and disparities in income and opportunities within its different regions. Women now make up around half of these flows, often migrating on their own and outnumbering men in a number of countries (eg. Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and a number of Caribbean countries).

The flow of migrant labour has added to the flexibility of labour markets, acting as a global reserve army for receiving countries, 'a buffer to even out the swings of the business cycle' (The Strait Times, Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1988 cited in Yeoh et al. 1999 p. 117). The flexibility of migrant labour lies in the fact that it too comes unencumbered by fixed costs and often on short-term contracts; it too has limited options in the markets it is leaving behind but also in those into which it is migrating. In addition, the vulnerability of migrant labour is intensified by the prejudices of the wider society of its host country and various markers of inequality, including gender, ethnic minority status and ambiguous legality (Lim and Oishi, 1996; Yeoh et al. 1999; Dannecker, 2005b; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). While women working within their own national contexts may not enjoy the formal rights to which they are entitled, they nevertheless have access to certain resources in the form of families, social networks, language ability and legal provisions, all of which give them a limited degree of room for manoeuvre in their negotiations around work (Robinson, 1991). This is not the case for most low-skilled international migrants.

The shifting movements of capital and labour across national boundaries have thus served to internationalize and make more visible a hierarchical division of labour that is structured along lines of class and gender but also race, ethnicity and geographical location. While the more educated women in higher growth economies have moved into professional occupations, working class women in these economies have moved into clerical and manufacturing jobs, leaving the less desirable form of work (dirty, difficult, dangerous and often demeaning) to members of socially excluded ethnic minorities, often migrants.

Women's work force participation is clearly not a new phenomenon. In certain regions of the world, and for certain groups within particular regions, women have 'always' worked, playing an active role in household productive activities along with men. What

is new is the increasing monetisation and diversification of women's activities so that women are increasingly included in estimates of paid economic activity across the world, often in contexts in which men's employment opportunities have stagnated or declined. Labour, including female labour, is becoming a global resource even though the global market for labour remains hedged with restrictions and controls. And while processes of globalisation have impacted on structure of work opportunities for men and women in different parts of the world, their responses to these opportunities have in turn shaped the forces of demand and supply of labour in the global economy. The reconfigurations of market forces and the processes of social reproduction are taking on an increasingly trans-national character.

### **3. The commodification of female labour in the local economy**

#### ***3.1 The contradictory nature of the work experience for women***

Views about the implications of women's entry into paid work vary considerably. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish between optimistic and pessimistic readings of this phenomenon. Although the causalities posited differ widely, the optimists include those working in the tradition of Marx and Engels, modernisation theorists, the World Bank and other mainstream development agencies as well as many feminist researchers. A more gloomy prognosis, on the other hand, is offered by structural dependency theorists, neo-conservatives, critics of globalisation as well as many feminists. In an influential early article about the impact on women's lives of new economic opportunities in the global economy, Elson and Pearson (1981) argued that (like other forms of social change), women's

experience of entry into paid work was likely to be an essentially *contradictory* process, generating gains as well as losses<sup>3</sup>. However, their focus was, and has remained, on the more negative aspects of this change (see Elson, 1999; Pearson, 2004).

Yet even a preliminary reading of the plethora of empirical studies that have been carried out on women's entry into paid work in different contexts suggests that we would do well to keep Elson and Pearson's original insight in the foreground of our analysis. These studies suggest that women's experience of commodification, whether working for domestic or global markets, has not only differed from that of men but has varied for women themselves. It has also been far more contradictory than Polanyi's conceptualisation of the process would suggest.

An important source of these contradiction relates to the fact that the large scale entry of women into the paid labour force across the world, a new phenomenon in many contexts, is occurring at a time when these labour markets are undergoing the processes of informalisation – and that women tend to be concentrated in the most casual and exploitative forms of work within this informalised economy. There is a large body of empirical research which documents the unfavourable conditions under which women have entered the labour market. It deals with their low wages, long hours of work, insecurity of their jobs, irregularity of returns to work, fines for 'misdemeanours', restricted toilet breaks, the stress of meeting deadlines, the health hazards associated with many jobs, the monotonous nature of the work, the long hours spent in the same position, the lack of respect shown by supervisors and managers and the reproduction of gender hierarchies within work relationships and in the wider economy (Ross, 1997; Ong, 1987; Siddiqi, 1991 ; Mather, 1985; Lee, 1995, Tjandraningsih, 2000; Greenhalgh, 1991; Kabeer and Van Anh, 2006; Hossain et al. 1990; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004 ). Migrant women, as we noted earlier,

imagine, face additional problems related to the ambiguity of their legal entitlements, the cultural barriers that they face, the isolated nature of the work they do and the status of 'the other' that they occupy in the countries in which they work (Yeoh et al. 1999; Yeoh and Huang, 1998; Chin, 1997; Essim and Smith, 2004).

Yet this is only one part of the story that emerges from the literature. The other part testifies to the many positive changes that women have experienced in their personal lives as a result of these opportunities. It points to the paradox of subjectively favourable evaluations of work carried out in objectively unfavourable conditions (Wolf, 1992). These positive evaluations are not necessarily confined to jobs generated by the global economy. Many of the activities that were taken up by women in response to the economic recession and to the austerity measures associated with structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America were geared to the local economy while in south Asia, the spread of microfinance services have contributed to women's involvement in home-based piece work or own account enterprise for a largely domestic market. In such cases, it is paid work *per se* rather than work generated by the global economy that accounts for the impacts in question. In other cases, it has been the expansion of economic opportunities associated with the opening up to the global economy that has been the main source of change.

Clearly, women have not experienced these changes in uniform ways. There is, as various studies have pointed out, a 'geography of gender' which differentiates the structure of family and kinship, principles of inheritance and descent, marital practices and organization of work in ways that spell very different parameters within women are able to exercise agency (Momsen and Townsend, 1987; Kandiyoti, 1989; Kabeer, 2003). The cultural acceptability of paid work, particularly when it is outside the home, the varying effects of life course, the situation of their households, the motivations

which led women to take up work, the kind of work they do and their status as workers, whether they are self employed or waged labour, migrant or national labour, will all differentiate the work experience for women in different parts of the world. To control for some of these differences, the focus of the paper is largely on women workers from lower income households in mainly developing and transitional country contexts, although some reference is made to the OECD countries as well. We begin our discussion in this section by examining the literature on working women within their own national contexts, differentiating between unmarried and married women. In subsequent sections, we turn our focus to migrant women workers.

### ***3.2 Young women and the expansion of life chances***

By and large, evaluations of the entry of young unmarried women into paid work have tended to be positive. One common theme that runs through this literature is the greater sense of control over their own lives that their entry into paid work has brought these women. In many, but not all cases, they had migrated into urban areas to take up this work, thus moving out of the watchful surveillance of family and community into the relative anonymity of the urban locale and the possibility of some autonomy.

However, a comparison by Wolf (1992) of 'factory daughters' in Java with those in Taiwan reminds us of the extent to which cultural constructions of family life, gender roles and filial obligations vary, even within the Asian context, and mediate the impact of paid work for women. There appears to be a much stronger emphasis on filial obligation as the rationale for working daughters in Taiwan than among Javanese families in Indonesia. Taiwan is part of the East Asian regional belt which is characterized by strong son preference and it is the interest of sons that appears to have been



paramount in parental strategies. Factory daughters in Taiwan are described as more subject to parental control and to manipulation in the interests of the larger family (see also Greenhalgh, 1985).

Indonesia, along with other South East Asian countries, is not characterised by a culture of marked son preference. There are also differences in controls exercised over young women in West Java where local Islamic leaders colluded with employers to discipline young women inside and outside the factories (Mather, 1985) and Central Java, the location of Wolf's study, where their lives were less circumscribed. The young Javanese women she interviewed were well aware of the exploitative conditions under which they work, but reported that their work gave them greater room for manoeuvre, both geographically and personally, in a situation where their life chances were severely limited (p. 256). These changes were not apparent among village daughters who had remained in agricultural and domestic work. Wolf concluded, 'Clearly, a greater ability to choose one's own spouse or buy clothing does not greatly alter structural relations of oppression and exploitation. Nevertheless, these changes in movement, friendships, consumption, family decision-making, and marital choice are important to them' (p. 256).

Davin (2004) writes about the thousands of young, single women who migrated from the Chinese countryside to live and work in the export-processing zones of southern China. While the assembly line jobs on offer ranked low in the occupational hierarchy by urban residents, they were fiercely competed for by rural female migrants, many of whom had previously worked as unpaid laborers on family farms. As Davin points out, "we cannot dismiss as meaningless the voices of the many young women who affirm a sense of achievement and pride in the lives they make for themselves as factory workers.....And hardship may be a price worth paying if the cash they earn allows them to change something they disliked in their past or that they wish to avoid in their future (p. 82)."

Lee (1998) found that the most common explanation for their migration given by young SEZ workers in China was poverty, but that this constituted the 'respectable' explanation. They later admitted their desire to escape from family restrictions and to experience a new life. They retained links with their families, sending remittances home and helping others to migrate, but they also enjoyed some purchasing power of their own and a greater degree of personal freedom. A few sought more fundamental freedoms, avoiding unwelcome betrothals by distancing themselves from home while others were paying off bride price in order to obtain divorce from their husbands.

In Malaysia, Ong (1987) documents the new subjectivities emerging among young factory women, a self-determination and ability to resist parental authority in areas such as choice of husband and timing of marriage, a personal life separate from that of the family, the ability to leave home to escape intolerable domestic situations, a greater sense of responsibility in dealing with the consequences of their own action and a widening of social horizons through their daily association with workers of different ethnic identities.

In Turkey, Eraydin and Erendil (1999) found that many of the young women working in clothing factories no longer defined their work purely in terms of their familial roles, to be abandoned when they got married or had children, but as a more permanent way of life. The overwhelming majority had made their own decision to enter factory work for reasons that varied from wanting to make use of their skills to seeking to escape the control exercised by family and neighbors.

In Bangladesh, studies suggest that access to relatively well-paid work opportunities in export garment factories had lessened the pressure on young women to get married as soon as possible. Some used these opportunities to save for their own dowries, thereby

lessening their burden on parents, others to exercise some independent purchasing power and greater consumer choice. Their entry into factory work brought new friendships and a greater possibility of choosing who they would marry as well as giving them a longer period of freedom from the responsibilities that came with marriage and children (Kabeer, 2000; Newby, 1998; Kibria, 1995 Amin et al, 1998).

In her study of small knitwear workshops in Santiago, Mexico, Wilson (1993) found that these presented young women with work opportunities as well as the opportunity 'to see themselves in a different light from the contradictory images given by their mother's generation, first as 'child brides' and later as 'suffering mothers' (p. 78). Women fought for better conditions and greater respect in the workshops. At the same time, they tried to negotiate with parents and brothers for a little more freedom and autonomy, at least for the right to spend part of their wages on themselves: "They demanded a 'youth' between childhood and marriage and they actively engaged in discussions with prospective husbands as to a just financial settlement after marriage..." (p.79). And Guzman and Todaro (2001) concluded on the basis of their analysis of studies of working women in Latin America that while labor-market deregulation had brought women into the paid work force in increasing numbers, and while the jobs they entered were largely casual and insecure, they had nevertheless brought about important changes in women's lives: 'Women now have the right to choose their destiny as individuals not only as family members' (p. 19)<sup>4</sup>.

### ***3.2 Negotiations over married women's entry into work***

However, the picture that emerges from the literature is much more ambiguous and contradictory when we shift out attention to married

women who are reported to encounter much greater resistance to their attempts to enter paid work from their husbands than do unmarried women from the main authority figures within their families. It seems clear that the balance of power within marital relations relies to a far greater extent on female dependence than in other forms of gender relationships within the family. Studies from the widely differing contexts of Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia all provide examples of husbands refusing to give their wives permission to go out to work, despite household poverty or their own unemployment.

In Bangladesh, resistance by husbands was found to reflect fears about public opinion, anxieties about wives' sexual fidelity, concerns about possible neglect of their own and their children's wellbeing and the conviction that access to an independent income would threaten to destabilise their authority (Kabeer, 2000). In India, income earning on the part of both unmarried and married women presented a threat to a man's masculinity and to family's social prestige if it belongs to middle income groups (Vera-Sanso, 2000; Blomqvist, 2004).

In Chile, Bee and Vogel (1997) reported that men's fears rose of a pervasive 'machista' ideology that their partners might earn more than them and undermine their position within the household, while others in the community might think that a man who allowed his wife to work was incapable of providing for the family on his own income. Certain kinds of work were also viewed as promoting wives' infidelity to their husbands. In Kenya, Francis (2002) noted the reluctance on the part of many men towards wives taking up trading activities reflected the fear that greater financial independence on the part of women was a threat to their authority and to the unity of the household. In Tanzania, Sender and Smith (1990) pointed out that husbands strongly resisted their wives entry into wage labour in order to maintain their own control over the household economy.

It was largely female household heads who were reliant on their own labour efforts for survival who joined the waged labour force.

In some contexts, wives had been able to overcome their husbands' resistance, making strategic use of local discourses of domesticity as well as their own intimate knowledge of their husbands to reassure their anxieties. Widely observed was what Villareal (1990) described as the strategy of 'wielding and yielding' where women gained their husbands' permission to take up paid work in return for some concession on their part. In Mexico, Gates (2002) found that women sought to offset the threat to male authority represented by their desire to work with various kinds of 'offers' which reaffirmed this authority, including the 'offer' of their waged contributions to the household economy. In Bangladesh, married women often handed over their wages to their husbands so that his role as breadwinner remained symbolically intact (Kabeer, 2000). Others presented the desire to take up paid work in terms of children's welfare, redefining motherhood to include the purchase of basic essentials, treats or education for their children as well as the more conventional provision of care

However, the most commonly observed form of 'yielding' was in the area of housework with women assuring their husbands that they would not neglect their domestic chores – and their husbands' comforts. Married women working in garment factories in Bangladesh reported that they woke before dawn to make a start on their households chores and went to bed after other family members in order to complete them. Similar findings are reported in Chile's agro-export sector, where wives and mothers had to convince husbands that their paid employment would not disrupt the fulfilment of the household responsibilities (Bee and Vogel, op cit). In Mexico, Gates found that the 'offer' to ensure the housework got done was one of the ways in which wives and daughters obtained permission to work. As one woman explained, her job made little difference to

her husband as long as the house was clean and his meal ready when he came home.

Despite the compromises that married women were observed to make in order to take up paid work, there is evidence that their access to earning opportunities and the opening up of horizons through work outside the home have led to important shifts in the domestic balance of power. Quantitative studies from contexts as widely divergent as Bangladesh (Newby, 1998; Salway et al. 2005; Hashemi et al. 1996) India (Jejeeboy, 2000; Holvoet, 2005) Mexico (Adato et al. 2000), Zimbabwe (Becker, 1997) and Egypt (Kishor, 2000) all testify to increase in women's influence in strategic areas of household decision-making as result of their access to paid work in the labour market or through access to microfinance. In some cases, the shift in decision-making was from 'norm-governed' to 'negotiated' decision-making, in others from male-dominated to joint or female dominated decision-making (Kabeer, 2001; Holvoet, 2005; Adato et al., 2000). Quantitative studies also show other evidence of change. Working women were more likely to report their own savings in Bangladesh, higher levels of public mobility and lower levels of physical violence from husbands (Salway et al., 2005); to seek out ante-natal care for themselves in Zimbabwe (Becker, 1997) and to both vote and to consider that they have considerable influence with their government in Honduras (Ver Beek, 2001).

Qualitative studies support these findings. In Bangladesh, for instance, the fact of women's paid work meant that their views and preferences were more likely to be taken into account by husbands, regardless of who 'controlled' the wages (Kabeer, 2000). Husbands were now more aware that not only were their wives earning enough to support themselves but it was becoming socially more acceptable for women to set up independent households, at least in urban areas.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Bryceson (2000) reports that 'increasingly peasant women no longer see themselves as economic dependents, but as economic supporters with dependents' (p. 57). In Kenya, Francis (2002) noted that the initial reluctance of men to their wives' independent trading activities often diminished in the face of the incomes women were able to bring home: 'Women who traded regularly often had much more authority. Their command of a cash income gave them a greater voice' (p. 180). Sender and Smith (1990) note in their study in rural Tanzania that it was the availability of waged employment as an alternative means of survival, whether on small holder farms or large tea estates, that allowed women an escape route from oppressive, and often physically violent relationships with men (p. 66)

Cornwall's (2002) ethnographic study from urban West Africa dealt with a context where married women have long been expected to contribute to household provisioning and work as traders and in food processing, but where men were finding it increasingly difficult to discharge their financial obligations to provide 'feeding money' to their wives and children. Unable to enforce 'obedient servility' through the sanction of withdrawing their contributions to wives who might be earning more than them, men complained at the 'waywardness' of women and the ease with which women 'packed out' when the going got rough. However, given polygamous marital practices which allowed men to take another wife at any time, thereby increasing the competition for his limited resources, but given also the costs of going it alone, women were not using their incomes to leave their husbands but to build positions of 'virtual autonomy' from them. They built their own houses and invested in their own social networks as a safety net against this eventuality.

In Colombia, women working in the cut flower industry used the resources at their disposal to negotiate their freedom of movement with their husbands, their right to work for pay and

freedom from domestic violence (Friedemann-Sanchez, 2006). One woman walked out on her husband, leaving him with their children, in the hope that withdrawal of her domestic labour would force a change in his abusive behaviour. She returned when he had accepted her conditions and seven years later, the conditions still held. Another gave up on her husband and was living with her mother till she could afford to buy a house for herself and her children: *'Here, there is no one humiliating me and saying, 'Be thankful that I feed you, be thankful for this, be thankful for that'. Don't you think it is better to drink agua de panela (sugar water) with tranquillity than to eat a chicken with bitterness?'* (p. 261). As Sanchez-Friedemann pointed out, "Wage income was the indispensable factor providing women with the means to support themselves and their children".

Married women workers in Chile valued work for the added financial security it gave them as well as the break it offered from domestic routine (Bee and Vogel). In the Dominican Republic, women who worked as unpaid family labour on their own farms as well as waged labour on other farms began to claim part of the proceeds on the family farm as a form of 'wage' (Raynolds, 2002). It is noteworthy that similar claims were not made by women whose only experience was as unpaid family labour on the farm.

However, not all negotiations resulted in outcomes that could be regarded as positive. Moore's comment on the African context appears to have a wider relevance: 'conjugal conflicts over income and household decision-making has been greatly exacerbated as men transfer their anxieties about loss of their jobs and their declining contributions to household resources into the domestic domain' (p. 20). Diminished self-esteem, frustrations at their declining position and the threat represented by their wives' paid work have given rise to a range of hostile behaviours on the part of husbands (Chant, 2002a and b; Johnson, 2005; Mayoux, 2001; Francis, 2002; Kapadia, 1996; Kabeer, 2000; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Chant and



McIlwaine, 1995; Bryceson, 2000; Vera-Sanso, 2000; Silberschmidt, 1992 and 2001). In some cases, husbands simply left, often to set up new households with other women or to return to the natal home where they could be looked after by their mothers, sisters and other female kin. Others used their wives' entry into paid work as a pretext to withdraw their contributions to the collective welfare of the household. Still others opted for unemployment rather than low status work, leaving their wives to shoulder the full responsibility of breadwinning (Bryceson, 2000). However, as Francis (2002) points out from her Kenya fieldwork and Mayoux from the Cameroon (2001, women who took on breadwinning responsibility did not necessary escape the male authority of husband or other kin.

Elsewhere, studies show that men's resistance to their wives' paid work have taken the form of appropriation of their wives' earnings, drinking away their income, extra marital affairs and resort to violence in their attempts to enforce their authority within the household. Sometimes, male resistance has taken a collective form. In Qua Qua, South Africa, where newly set up factories recruited a largely female labour force, there were riots among unemployed men who attacked women factory workers and demanded that jobs should be given to men (Nihaus, 1994).

It is in the former Soviet bloc that the loss of the traditional male breadwinner role appears to have had the most dramatic impacts. Despite high rates of female labour force participation during the socialist era, gender difference and women's association with domesticity was 'relentlessly naturalised'. Men's ability to cope with economic reform and the erosion of their breadwinner status has been particularly bleak in the light of its contrast with the security of employment they had enjoyed in the socialist era: 'when we were kings'. Their difficulties have been exacerbated by the uncompromising calls in the media and public debate since the onset of economic reform for a return to the traditional model of the family,

with women taking on primarily domestic and family oriented roles and men to take on the role of the primary provider (Kay, 2005).

The rapid transition to the market economy and the stresses associated with the loss of their breadwinning roles is thought to underlie the far more drastic rise in male mortality rates in the immediate aftermath of reform in this region. For instance, women's life expectancy in Russia fell from 74.3 in 1991 to 71.2 in 1994, men's already lower life expectancy fell from 63.5 to 57.6 (Gavrilova et al. 2000). Increased levels of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related diseases were found to be among the contributory factors in rising mortality rates for both women and men, but while men were more likely to respond to the growing economic and social instability with suicide, women were more likely to be victims of homicide. 30-40% of serious violent crime takes place within the family in Russia: 'each year approximately 14,000 Russian women die at the hands of their partners, a figure which those working in the field of domestic violence have compared with the 17,000 fatalities which occurred during the ten years of the war in Afghanistan' (Kay, 2005: p.1).

Ashwin and Lytkina (2004) report on a qualitative study of 17 men who had lost their primary breadwinning status during a two year study they carried out. Only four were found to be coping well with their situation, of which three had found alternatives to 'work-centric' self-definitions of masculinity: One had made repair and improvements on the family home his main occupation; one was a pensioner who found reward in his new role as grandfather and a third had opted for full time responsibility for housework and care of their two adolescent sons while his wife worked. The remaining 13 were suffering from intense demoralisation expressed as depression and drunkenness.

### ***3.3 Negotiations over the domestic division of labour: evidence of change***

One theme that cuts across most studies of negotiations over married women's entry into paid work, regardless of whether the final outcomes were judged to be positive or negative, is the significance of the gender division of unpaid domestic labour as a flashpoint in the negotiation process. As Chant (2000) observes, based on her work in Costa Rica, men were often reluctant to give up their masculine privileges despite having lost, or abdicated, their responsibilities as primary breadwinners has wider relevance – and exemption from unpaid domestic chores appears to be one of the privileges most strongly defended.

There is clearly some sense in which gender identities are understood, internalised and negotiated that makes men unwilling to take up a larger share of unpaid domestic work even in the face of women's willingness to share their breadwinning responsibilities. Yet there is nothing biologically preordained about male resistance, and powerful as cultural norms may be, they are not immutable. It is therefore worth looking for evidence of exceptions to the rule as possible pointers to the possibility of change – before going on to consider what evidence for the absence of change might signify. The literature search carried out for this paper offers some interesting, though tentative insights, into the circumstances under which such exceptions might occur and what this tells us about the possibility of more widespread change in the future.

A first set of exceptions appear to resonate with neo-classical accounts of rational behaviour. In her comparison of a flower growing region of Ecuador from one with traditional agriculture, Newman (2001) found that married women worked longer hours in household tasks in all the households she surveyed but that there were differentials between households where women worked and

those where they did not. In general, women put in longer hours in domestic work if their husbands *did not* work than if they did but they worked fewer hours if they themselves were employed than if they were not. The difference was particularly striking for the flower growing areas where men and women earned similar wages. She found that married men in these areas spent twice as much time in housework than did married men elsewhere. Women in these jobs also spent less time in housework than women elsewhere<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, even the most egalitarian division of domestic labour - those households where both women and men worked in the flower industry - the imbalance was striking: men worked *76 minutes* a day while women worked *221 minutes*. While men put in more time in paid work than women, women had longer working days, regardless of whether or not they worked.

Cravey's (1998) comparison of two industrial sites in Mexico offers insights into how the changing organisation of production may also help to initiate changes in how housework is shared within the home. One site was characterised by factory regimes that had emerged in association with the earlier import-substituting period of industrialisation and had an older, better paid, educated and largely male labour force. The other was characterised by the new maquiladora (assembly line) system of production and a younger and more mixed labour force. She found that the older industrial regime had helped to structure largely nuclear households which survived on the wages and benefits of a single male household head. In the new industrial zones, however, lower wages and less security of employment had led to a greater diversity of family forms, including many more extended families made up of siblings, cousins and friends, as well as sub nuclear families. Most households had more than one earner.

The two sites were associated with differing divisions of domestic labour with much greater fluidity in the new zones: over

two-thirds of the households reported some male contribution although one or more female members continued to take primary responsibility. There were reports of men who regularly assumed responsibility for some domestic tasks. Husbands and wives often alternated their work schedules, one working the day shift and the other the night shift so that some one was at home to look after the children. Cravey suggests that these findings indicate challenges to long-standing gender norms, 'amounting even to a renegotiation of gender itself' (p. 176).

A study of 20 households in Santiago, Chile by Almeras (2000) found a weak relationship between women's contribution to household income and the gender division of unpaid work. While working women bore a greater proportion of the domestic responsibility among couples when they earned less than 45% of the income earned by their spouse, an increase in their contributions did not result in greater equality in domestic responsibilities. Only in two households in which women earned *considerably* more than their husbands (121% and 336% more) did men assume a greater share of reproductive work than women. In the rest of the households, factors other than the relative contribution to household income explained variations in men's share of domestic work. One factor was the youth of the couple, suggesting change may be underway among the younger generation. The other was family history: men who had received early socialisation in household chores from their mothers entered marriage with the expert knowledge of domestic tasks and took pride in it. As Almeras points out, family socialisation was proving more effective than the existing system of formal education in constructing new models of masculinity.

Gutmann's ethnographic study of low income neighbourhood in Mexico City (1996) also pointed to some of the ways in which notions of masculinity have been changing among working class men, including taking a larger share of housework in many cases. He too

identified men's own experiences as children along with the growing importance of women's paid work as factors bringing about change. In addition, Gutmann suggests that it is growing feminist consciousness among working women themselves and their willingness to bring pressures to bear on their husbands and brothers that has brought about some of these changes.

Finally, a number of studies suggest that another, less immediately obvious, explanation for the apparent resilience in the gender division of domestic labour might be that it conceals changes than we are not aware of because of a tendency to under-report. The fault may lie with the researchers who expect to find the absence of men from housework. Thus Gutmann notes that the elite model of female domesticity in Mexico has tended to colour how researchers view the domestic division of labour in working class households as well.

Alternatively, it may reflect concealment or under-valuation by men themselves. Men often gloss over their contributions to housework in order to preserve their masculine image. For instance, Searle-Chatterjee reports how men of the Sweeper caste in Benares hide themselves from public view when they cook or clean pots (cited by Jackson, 1999). Almeras points out how one of her male informants who cared for his children on a regular basis, while his wife worked in the factory sought to downplay his sustained domestic labour 'as if it contradicted his ideal self-image'. Alternatively, they may, as in the case of the male retrenched workers in urban China interviewed by Cook and Jolly (2001) fail to notice - or simply discount - any housework they may have done. One male interviewee told them: 'Before I didn't even know how to cook soup. Now I can cook everything...tidy up, wash clothes. I don't even need to use a washing machine, just a washing board. I can wash clothes, no problem. I just stay at home every day, don't work anything out. It feels awful just to stay there'.

### ***3.4 Negotiations over the domestic division of labour: men's resistance and women's responses***

However, these reports of fluidity in domestic gender roles appear to be the exceptions that prove the rule. Many more studies testify to what Pearson describes as 'the impressive resistance of men to an equal involvement in domestic work' (2000, p. 225), making evidence that women are working a "double day" or a 'second shift' among the least controversial findings in studies on women's work in different parts of the world (Koch Laier, 1997). Male unemployment does not necessarily shift this pattern: Safa (1999) noted that almost none of the retired or unemployed men in a study set in the Dominican Republic provided regular help with child care or housework to their working wives. Newman's study (cited earlier) found that women's hours of domestic work increase when men are unemployed, regardless whether they themselves are employed or not. Nor is male resistance to domestic work confined to less industrialised countries. Data from an OECD study (2001 cited in Hassim and Razavi, 2006) suggests that women employed in full time paid work nevertheless put in more hours of unpaid work than men: the ratio of women's time in unpaid work to men's varied from a low of 1.3 in Canada (1998 figures) to a high of 3.6 in Italy (1989 figures). A study of 50 couples in the United States reported that unemployed husbands of employed wives tended to do less housework than the employed husbands of employed wives (Hochschild and Mauchang, 1990).

Women have often colluded with men's reluctance to participate in housework. In some cases, this can be an active choice on their part. Gender identities are relationally constructed and women may have their reasons for not wanting some dimensions to change. As Chant (2002a) points out, they may resist male help because it suggests that they do not have a 'real' man for a partner

or because they have traditionally derived social legitimacy through taking charge of reproductive tasks. The paramount role that mothering occupies in their lives may mean that “employment ... has not replaced the centrality of domesticity for women but simply been incorporated into an ever-expanding portfolio of maternal obligations’ (p. 467).

However, as our earlier examples show, more often than not, the unfair distribution of domestic work appears to be the price that many women have to pay if they want to take up paid work *and* stay married. Their options are curtailed by the risks associated with the kinds of work available to them, risks generated by the volatile nature of market forces in the global economy and the absence of any form of social protection for the kinds of informal activities in which most of them earn their living. In the absence of public safety net measures to offset the risks of commodification, it is understandable that women, particularly those with young children, will endeavour not to disrupt the primary protection they have against full commodification: their families and the wider social networks within which they are located. This means that they will seek, as far as possible, to defuse the threat that their paid work might represent to male breadwinner identity.

On the other hand, we would not expect all women to acquiesce without protest to the compromises required of them. Many of the women working in the flower industry in Colombia expressed their dissatisfaction with the unfair distribution of labour, pointing out that the unreciprocated additional physical labour and emotional work entailed made living with men a burden. One woman had chosen to live apart from the father of her child so that she would not have to cook, iron and clean for him: *‘Just like this we have a life of husband and wife ... except he does not control me or order me around.’* (Friedemann-Sanchez, 2006. 260). Working women in the Dominican Republic often preferred to live with their



parental family than with partners because they could expect more help with their child care and domestic responsibilities.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, Bryceson (2000) notes the tensions set up by the shifting balance of power as women's increased access to cash earnings put them in a position to decide on its disposal, particular when men failed to live up to their traditional duties of meeting the bulk of household monetary expenses. While many men admitted the necessity of their wives' earnings, they remained resentful, sometimes turning to alcohol, wife beating or marrying another wife. However, female resentment surfaced as well. Despite their enhanced cash earning roles, women were still expected to perform all the household work, with little help from husbands with childcare or the arduous tasks of African domestic life: water and firewood collection, cooking and cleaning. Wright's research in Lesotho shows strains set up by divergence between material contributions and domestic power relations. Men's resistance to sharing authority despite women's primary breadwinning roles in over a third of her sample probably contributed to the growing numbers of women not marrying at all.

In her study of the Kisii in Kenya, Silberschmidt (1992) traces the growing disjuncture between the model of the 'ideal family' regularly promoted by radio broadcasts, newspapers and church organisations and the ability of all but a handful of men to live up to its image of the household head: ' (he) has several wives, many children, a great deal of land and a lot of cattle and that he is the decision-maker who commands economic resources and power'. Men in the poorest economic strata were least able to conform to this image, but often turned to alcohol to deal with their frustration. Women complained that they could not rely on either financial support or the labour of their menfolk and that having a man in the home was like having an 'extra baby' (p. 240). The increasing importance of women's groups set up by development organisations

represented a further source of resentment for many men. Though intended to generate income, these groups also provided a forum for women to come together as a force within the village community. 'Men' according to one Kenyan commentator cited in Silberschmidt (1992) 'had been lions in the past but their teeth had been pulled by women's liberation'.

As a result of conflicting expectations and realities in conditions of economic stress, marriage appears to have become increasingly unattractive to both women and men in many parts of the world (Chant, 2002b; Francis, 1998 and 2002, Silberschmidt, 1992 and 2001). In Latin America, where a great deal of marital life among the popular classes has historically consisted of a succession of consensual unions, the initiative for break up of a relationship now appears to rest as much with women as with men (Safa, 1999). Poorer women may still be more likely to be abandoned than wealthier ones, but many more are now taking the step to leave their husbands on their own or their children's account. This may be a factor in explaining the strong association between the 'feminisation' of household headship in Latin America and the rise in women's labour force participation (Chant, 2002; Jelin and Diaz-Monoz, 2003).

Commenting on evidence from the African context, Moore points out: 'Increasing numbers of women are refusing to marry because marriage provides little security for them and their children while adding to their vulnerability through the demands husbands can make on their wives' labour, time and income'. On the other hand, more and men are refusing to marry and/or acknowledge paternity because they do not have the resources...to enter into family commitments' (Moore, 1994: 20). In East and South East Asia, as well, there is evidence of rising rates of divorce but also increasing numbers of women and men delaying marriage or not marrying at all. We will return to this trend in later section of the paper but note here that it is part of a growing diversity of family

forms evident in many different parts of the world. (Moore, 1994; Francis, 2002, Niehaus, 1994; Chant, 2002; Jelin and Diaz-Monoz, 2003): children remaining with parents into late adulthood; co-residence of adult, unmarried siblings; residential arrangements involving grandparents and grandchildren and extended three generation families are all noted alongside rising female headship.

In those parts of the world, such as the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, family structures continue to be organised along tighter-knit corporate lines and the incidence of both divorce and female headship appears to be generally lower. In South Asia, where marriage remains the universally prescribed destiny for women and men, and women on their own are socially vulnerable, women do not generally have the option of setting up independent households. In Madras, for instance, Blomqvist (2004) found that suicide was commonly talked about by women workers as the only way a woman could leave her husband, even if she was economically self-sufficient. Where separation did occur, it generally reflected extreme circumstances of alcoholism or abuse rather than quarrels over the domestic division of labour.

However, it is oweer possible that national data may not be capturing the strains of marital relationships among the poor. National data from Bangladesh presents a remarkably constant picture of marital stability but micro-level studies offer a very different picture, documenting much higher levels of male desertion and divorce, particularly among the poor (Kabeer, 1989; Alam (1985). Some evidence of this discrepancy is evident in a recent panel survey from Bangladesh (Kabeer, 2004). Only 1.5% of women aged 15+ described themselves as divorced or separated compared to 0.3% of men. However the study found noted a dramatic rise in female-headship between 1994 and 2001 among households who had either remained poor during this period or declined into poverty. While the overwhelming majority of these female heads described themselves

as widowed, it is unlikely that adult male mortality rates had risen sufficiently rapidly during this period as to account for this effect. It is likely that many of the female heads were in fact divorced.

Agarwal (2003) posits a similar possibility for India. Noting low, but rising rates of formal divorce, she notes also that estimates of formal divorce do not capture the vast numbers of desertions and men remarrying without divorce. Given the high levels of vulnerability faced by women on their own in much of South Asia, marital breakdowns continue to be initiated largely by men. This may be changing in some contexts. Many of the women who migrate to urban areas in Bangladesh are leaving behind abusive husbands to set up a household on their own or with other extended kin (Kabeer, 2000). As Islam and Zeitlyn (1989) note, this has given rise to a strong matrifocal pattern to households in Dhaka's urban slums.

#### **4. The commodification of care and cleaning in the global economy**

It will be seen from the preceding discussion that a rise in the labour force participation of women has not done a great deal to challenge inequalities in the gender division of unpaid domestic work, particularly among married women. Whether women remain with their husbands, are left by them or choose to leave them to head their own households, an invisible 'feminisation of responsibility'<sup>6</sup>, as Sylvia Chant puts it, appears to be accompanying the more visible 'feminisation of paid work' documented in the literature (2007). This has clearly offset some of the positive effects of such work for their status and well-being and helps to explain some of the more pessimistic conclusions about the impacts of women's access to paid work within the literature.

Working women have sought to cope with these dual responsibilities in various ways, often entailing adverse consequences

for themselves or for their children. Some have left their husbands as a way of cutting back some of their work loads but they must still cope with dual responsibilities of caring for their children and earning a living. Some put in longer hours of work to cope with the 'double shift', leading to exhaustion or 'burn out' (Moser, 1989). Some take their children to work with them: studies report children accompanying their mothers to factories, building sites, roadsides and fields. Sometimes the children work alongside them. Some leave their children locked at home because they have no one to care for them. Some rely on older children, most often daughters, but also other, usually female, relatives to share the burden: siblings, their own mothers and so on. Still others hire in domestic help.

There is, of course, a class dimension to these responses. While working women at the lower end of the economic spectrum across the world generally turn to family, kin and neighbours for assistance in their domestic responsibilities, working women at the higher end turn to the market for paid help. This latter response has a long standing history in many countries, with women migrating from the countryside to take up domestic service in middle class homes. However, today the market in domestic work and child care is a global one and the women who migrate are crossing national borders in their search for work. It is this strand of the global feminisation of paid work that will be discussed next.

#### ***4.1 The politics of housework and the trade in 'maids and nannies'***

The growth in the global demand for 'nannies and maids' reflects both the economics and demographics of affluence (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Caottte et al. 2006; UNFPA, 2006). Wealthier countries have undergone an extended period of fertility decline. The resulting ageing of their populations has brought with it an

increasing demand for elderly care which offsets the decline in care responsibilities for children. In addition, these are generally countries where, along with declining fertility rates, there has been a rise in education levels and aspirations among the general population and a steady increase in labour force participation by women. As more and more educated women move into work, it is not only the elite, but also middle class women, who come to rely on women from poor and marginalised groups and ethnic minorities within their own countries and now, increasingly from abroad, to take up their domestic responsibilities. As a result, domestic service, which had nearly disappeared in the West, has returned in a significant way.

We see similar processes at work within the rapidly growing regions of the south as well. As the local populations of Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea move out of less desirable forms of work on the construction sites, farms, plantations and, of course, domestic service into jobs with better-pay and working conditions in the manufacturing and service economy, less educated migrants from neighbouring countries fill the jobs they have vacated. In Latin America, women from the poorer countries of Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay go to work for families in the more affluent neighbouring countries of Argentina and Chile. Given the absence of any social support for working women's responsibilities in the care of children and the elderly, and a largely intact gender division of roles and responsibilities within the home, women in these countries have turned to the paid labour of migrant women from other poorer countries in the region. Much of this labour is on short-term contracts but engages in repeat migration so that periods of absence from home can add up to several years.

The growth in the flow of migrant domestic workers into Western Europe and North America as well as Japan, Taiwan and other higher growth countries in Asia and Latin America has thus closely mirrored the rise in female labour force participation,

particularly among educated married women, within these countries. In the US, for instance, the proportion of mothers with children under 6 in paid work rose from 15 percent in 1950 to 65% by the end of the century. Three-quarters of mothers of children under 18, and two-thirds of those with children aged one or less, now works for pay. A 1999 survey reported that women did an average of 30 hours of housework a week in 1965, declining to 17.5 hours in 1995 with rise in dual earner families (Ehrenreich, 2003). While the early years of this decline reflected some relaxation of standards and redistribution of chores<sup>7</sup>, by the 1990s, it reflected an increasing reliance on paid domestic labour. Between 1995 and 1999 alone, there was a 53 percent increase in households using cleaning services at least once a month.

In Singapore the average participation of married women in the labour force increased from 29% in 1980 to around 45% in 1994. It was accompanied by a steady rise in the number of foreign maids as local women preferred to work in factories. While it took around ten years for the number of maids to reach 20,000 from the limited numbers allowed in 1978, numbers doubled the following year to 40,000 and rose steadily to current estimates of 150,000. This represents one foreign maid in every 8 households in Singapore (Yeoh et al., 1999). Similar trends are to be found in Kuwait (Shah et al. 1991). The increase in the participation of Kuwaiti women in professional and technical occupations from 22 percent in 1965 to 51 percent in 1985 was accompanied by a rise in the percentage of Kuwaiti households with at least one maid from 13 percent in 1977/79 to 62 percent in 1986/87. Data from the 1985 census showed that 84% of Asian women migrants in the Kuwaiti labour force were in domestic service compared to less than one percent of Kuwaiti women.

The supply of a migrant labour force willing to do the difficult, dirty and dangerous work that citizens of wealthy countries shun

reflects the existence of wide, and widening, global disparities in wages and living standards. In the 1990s, Filipina migrant women earned an average of \$176 a month as teachers, nurses and clerical workers in the Philippines but \$200 a month in Singapore, \$450 in Hong Kong, \$700 in Italy or \$1400 in LA in the less-skilled categories of nannies, maids and care service workers. While the search for higher earnings provides the overarching explanation for migration flows, micro-level analysis suggests a greater diversity of motivations on the part of women. Educated women leave in search of markets that do not discriminate against them as severely as the ones they leave behind, less educated women in search of higher returns to unskilled labour than those prevailing in local markets. Enterprising young women migrate in response to the rosy picture of the life they could lead, a picture culled from TV images and recruitment agencies, or in a spirit of adventure, to see the world and broaden their horizons. For some women, migration represents a form of escape: from the prospect of arranged marriages, abusive husbands or, more generally, from the patriarchal traditions of their communities (see, for instance, Ryang. 2003; Blanchet, 2005; Oishi, 2005).

However, as Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) point out, the global trade in women's domestic services should not be seen in terms of a simple synergy between the needs of affluent women for paid help at home and the needs of poorer women for paid work. It is also a reflection of the politics of reproductive labour within the home which we touched in the earlier section. Women's increased earning power may have failed to bring about a more egalitarian distribution of domestic workloads or greater public support for their care responsibilities but it has given some families the option of hiring in the services of other women to take up some of this workload. "So strictly speaking the presence of immigrant nannies does not enable affluent women to enter the workforce; it enables affluent *men* to continue avoiding the second shift' (p. 9). Intra-



household conflicts over the distribution of domestic responsibilities are thus increasingly resolved through resort to the market for domestic labour. One cleaning service in the US reports that it closes 30-35% of sales by making follow up calls on Saturday mornings, 'the prime time for arguing over the fact that the house is a mess' (Ehrenreich, 2003: p.90).

Paid domestic service thus has the utilitarian function of relieving women of their unpaid domestic responsibilities. It also has a symbolic role, contributing to particular constructions of women and family life in different contexts. In the US, it is claimed that paid domestics are required to remain invisible in order to maintain the fiction of the high-achieving professional woman who can do it all (Hotchschild, 2003). Elsewhere, however, they are valued for their *visibility* since they are also a form of conspicuous consumption (Chin, 1997). Shah et al. (1991) found that the presence of maids in Kuwaiti households was only weakly related to the work status of female members. There was an average of 3 maids to a household in UAE while between 80-90% of women interviewed in Kuwait and Oman reported that they could not do without domestics: 'Maids, it seems, have come to be 'consumed' for social status and other reasons in addition to carrying out domestic and childcare duties for working women' (p, 471).

#### ***4.2 Trans-national families and marital relations***

The trade in paid domestic workers thus contributes to particular constructions of marriage, motherhood and family life among those who purchase their services. It also contributes to changing notions and practices of family life and motherhood among those who supply these services. The separation of international migrants from their families for frequently recurring or extended periods of time has given rise to the phenomenon of trans-national families whose

members are separated by national boundaries but united by contemporary forms of communication. Texting, telephones and cheaper travel costs which allow frequent interactions and occasional return visits maintain the ties of trans-national family life in the absence of the possibility for family re-unification overseas ((Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Jolly, 2005).

Migration studies offer mixed findings about how families cope when it is female members who migrate. The migration of daughters appears to cause the least disruption and is often undertaken as part of a joint family strategy in a number of countries. Parents often encourage their daughters to migrate to take advantage of the prospect of wage employment in the city in the expectation that daughters will be more likely than sons to remit money after migration. This is borne out by some studies from both Thailand and the Philippines (National Statistical Office, 1988 cited in De Jong and Richter; see also Semyonov and Gorodsiesky, 2005).

However, married women, with or without children, who migrate on their own experience the process of migration very differently from both single women and from men as a category. While men's ascribed breadwinner responsibilities makes migration more socially acceptable, these women are more likely to be seen to have transgressed socially ascribed roles of wives and mothers which require them to stay with their families. Their experience is therefore coloured to a greater extent than that of men by how their families and communities deal with their sojourn abroad. There are reports in the literature of husbands who become more respectful of their wives in the face of their capacity to earn abroad. There are also cases where the remittances sent by women provided the basis of co-operative economic ventures between husband and wife (Sidiqqui, 2001; Oishi, 2005). In-depth studies from the Philippines found that many of the men who juggled paid work and domestic labour in their wives' absence expressed greater appreciation for

the work customarily done by women. A few had opted for full time care-giving role (Asis et al., 2004).

The bulk of studies, however, paint a less harmonious picture. They suggest that while migration by men seems to have little effect on their marriages, migration and marital dissolution are closely linked in the case of women, although the direction of causality is not always clear (Hania Zlotnik, 1995: 265). In some cases, migration was a practical solution to coping with a failed marriage and the need to provide for children without a male breadwinner. As a Latina migrant in Israel told Raijman et al. (2003): *'In Bolivia, I used to sell jewellery but I only made \$60 a month... When I decided to separate from my husband, I realised that migration was the only available alternative for me in order to earning a living for me and my children. Since my arrival I have been working in domestic service. It is hard for me... It is even harder to be away from my children. But for me it is the only possible way to economic independence'*. Oishi (2005) reports how some of the Filipina women in her study migrated in order to become financially independent enough to leave oppressive relationships with their husbands or in-laws. One did not inform her husband of her decision to migrate until after she had reached Dubai.

In other cases, marriages break down as a result of the wives' prolonged absence or of the husbands' responses to her absence. It appears that husbands often find it difficult to cope with their wives' migration. A study of Lao migrant workers found that adaptation to altered roles implied by women's absence put a considerable strain on marital relations (Caoette et al., 2006). Husbands reported their feelings of inadequacy at not having been able sustain their families without their wives going abroad and their shame at having to do housework. Gamburd (2003) observed that in Sri Lanka, a wife's overseas employment appeared to pose a serious threat to the husband's masculinity, leading to compensatory behaviour on his part in the form of drinking, gambling and womanising: "Many men

feel a loss of self-respect and dignity when their wives become breadwinners. Such men only reluctantly take over the 'women's work' of child care and cooking; if possible, they arrange to have female relatives assume these duties in accordance with strongly felt local gender roles' (p. 190).

Similarly, Oishi (2005) reported that husbands of migrants from Bangladesh, Philippines and Sri Lanka spent as much of the remittances on gambling, drinking, monkey business (womanising) and general 'merry-making'. She cites the case of a Sri Lankan migrant who had sent monthly remittances back to her husband for the four years she worked in Lebanon only to find, on her return, that her husband had wasted it on alcohol. When she later emigrated to Saudi Arabia, she sent back only 50% of her savings, putting the rest in a bank account in her name.

Studies from Bangladesh confirm the association between female migration and marital instability. Oishi found that Bangladeshi women who migrated had higher rates of divorce and separation than the rest of the population at departure (8% compared to 1% in general population) and even higher rates upon their return (17%) or among those who were still abroad (19%). Of 222 female Bangladeshi migrants followed up after their return, Blanchet (2005) found that while 14% had been already divorced or separated when they first migrated, 24% were divorced/separated after their return. Qualitative research revealed some of the reasons for subsequent marital breakdown. Interestingly (for the Bangladesh context) Blanchet found that most women had taken the initiative to leave the marriage, unhappy at the waste of their savings by husbands or simply to end an oppressive relationship: 'these women claimed that the loss of fear, the ability to take decisions and the control of financial assets, all gains which were the result of their migration, permitted them to take such a decision' (p. 14).

### **4.3 *Trans-national families and motherhood***

While women may be able to come to terms with leaving their husbands behind, and may even have sought to migrate in order to do so, it is a very different story when it comes to leaving behind their children. Working mothers who migrate have had to abandon the ideology of 'family in one place' based on the practice of unpaid and privatised mothering in favour of new models of trans-national mothering which emphasise their breadwinning roles (which are, ironically, often geared to caring for the children of others). Like other working mothers, they must find ways to balance the demands of their paid work with their mothering responsibilities, but their options are complicated by the physical distance between their work location and their home. While European and American women commute to work in an average of 28 minutes a day, women from the Philippines and Sri Lanka must cross the world in search of jobs (Ehrenreich and Hothschild, 2003).

The arrangements that women migrants make for the care of their children in their absence echo those made by other working women, but their implications are complicated by the distance between their work and home. Some female migrants may earn enough to hire domestic labour in their home countries. This was the case among migrant Filipinas working as domestics in Los Angeles and Rome (Parrenas, 2001). However this is an option open to very few migrant mothers<sup>8</sup> and most turn to the family and extended kin networks.

Husbands do not feature prominently in these arrangements. They may be unable to provide primary care if they are themselves in full time employment or they may reluctant to do so. In any case, given the deterioration in marital relations often associated with women's migration, it is not surprising that migrant women from a diversity of contexts try to leave their children with 'other mothers'

within the extended family, with their own mothers often their most preferred option (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997; Hochschild, 2003). A study of Sri Lankan female migrants found that grandmothers made up 50% of primary carers (Save the Children, 2006). Fathers made up 26% and the rest were made up of other female kin<sup>9</sup>. Other studies suggest that children are left with their grandmothers, aunts and fathers in that order with orphanages sometimes used as a last resort.

'Mothering' as Glen points out, 'more than any aspect of gender – has been subject to essentialist interpretation: seen as natural, universal and unchanging' (1994: 3). Migrant mothers who leave their children behind present a challenge to public perceptions of the ideal family and are singled out for unfavourable, often morally loaded, comment. The media vilifies them as unnatural mothers or 'promiscuous, selfish, pleasure-seeking women who neglect their husbands and children (Gamburd, 2003: 191). Staff from NGOs working with families of migrants report cases of children becoming estranged from parents and seeing them only as sources of gifts and money or blaming them for problems such as delinquency, drugs and premarital sex (Bryant, 2005). Researchers have suggested children of migrants are spoilt and wasteful, in some cases, or lonely and resentful in others. However these views do not always control for the fact that similar problems may occur among children of non-migrant families. The few comparative studies have been carried out report mixed evidence.

In the Philippines, Battistella and Conaco (1996; 1998) found that children of migrant parents lagged behind in school grades to children with both parents present and were less well adjusted socially. Children of migrant mothers reported lower grades and poorer social adjustment to other children. However, they did not find evidence of greater psychological problems among children of migrants compared to those of non-migrants: measures of anxiety found

migrants' children performing better while they were identical on measures of loneliness.

A 2002 study by the University of the Philippines (cited in Byant, 2005) found that children of migrants were healthier (as far as ability to do physical activities and reports of illness were concerned) than children of non-migrants and displayed similar academic performance. It also found children of migrants had no more problems with relationships or emotional states than those of non-migrants, although they were more likely to mention marital problems among parents.

A study by the Scalabrini Migration Centre (2003) reported that more than half the children said they accepted their parents' decision to migrate while 35-39% said they found it difficult but were coping. Around 3% of children were against their parents' migration, rising to 6.5% when it came to mothers' migration. The study did not find any systematic difference in terms of verbal, sexual or physical abuse and found similar ratings of parents' marriages – except for children of migrant mothers. The study noted however that with divorce impossible and legal separation difficult, migration may be the only way for women to escape from a failed marriage. A study from Thailand (Jones and Kittisuksathit, 2003).found little evidence that migration created social problems among children. Meeting material needs was widely viewed as the most important precondition for meeting other goals such as family harmony and international migration was seen as an effective way for meeting basic needs. However, a study by Save the Children (2006) in Sri Lanka did find that the educational performance of children of migrant mothers was lower than that of children in two control groups: children of working mothers (who were the highest scorers) and children of non-working mothers. This was despite the fact that migrant mothers had higher levels of education than non-migrant mothers. School attendance was also higher among children of

working mothers and lowest among children of migrating mothers. Caregivers reported some emotional problems among children after the departure of mothers: 22% of children under five as far as loss of appetite, 20% of children of all ages showed increased temper tantrums and 10% of older children (15-18) showed lower levels of concentration.

There are a number of reasons why children of migrants may not be any more at risk from emotional and other problems than children of non-migrants (Bryant, 2005). Poverty is often at the root of many family problems and migration is seen as an effective way of addressing this problem. The support of the extended family also makes a difference in ensuring that children and parents do not have to cope with the effects of migration on their own and filling in some of the gap left by absent parents (Parrenas, 2003). Nevertheless, it remains the case that the mothers' absence is often more keenly felt than fathers' and that the extended family finds it more difficult to fill in for absent mothers. Studies suggest that children view the departure of fathers very differently from the departure of mothers. Fathers are seen to migrate as an extension of their breadwinning roles, mothers out of need. While many children express the preference that fathers migrate rather than mothers, they also are aware of their mothers' efforts on their behalf. One study reported greater sadness and worry on the part of children when mothers were absent than fathers (University of Philippines, 2002).

From the mothers' perspective, the decision to migrate is not an easy one. They are caught between the need to secure their children's future and the loss of the daily intimacies of bringing up children. Some of the difficult trade-offs that they face were spelt out by the Latin American migrants to Israel (Rajzman et. Al., 2003): *"You have to decide either to go out, fight for life and making a living or stay at home with the children but without the possibility of having a better future. It is especially difficult if you are a single or*



*divorced mother as in my case. If I had a husband to share the burden with me, it would have been a completely different story. I would never have left'. (p. 742).* Yet as the authors points out, despite the 'self-redeeming discourses' that trans-national mothers may adopt, their decision to migrate remains a source of distress and ambivalence. As one of their respondents maintained, no mother can be at ease with having left her children behind: *'the love of a mother cannot be replaced and yet, I am afraid that she will forget me. There is always the fear that time and distance will make her forget me' (p. 744).*

Nevertheless, despite the many risks and costs associated with the migration experience for women, and the particular nature of the costs experienced by migrant mothers, migration has also had a positive aspect for many women. While many female, and male, migrants report a decline in status in receiving countries, taking on jobs far below their actual qualifications would merit, they also report an increase in prosperity at home. It is this hope, one that appears to be more often realised than not in the light of the scale of remittances to developing countries, that sustains them through their period away from home. For marginalised groups, migration provides the opportunity to free themselves from the constraining features of their societies at home. A study of female migration in Nepal (Hausner, 2005) pointed out that while Nepali migrants were looked down in India, they were also able to free themselves of the rigid social hierarchies of the home society, to be simply regarded as 'Nepali': 'the national need to identify which caste or ethnic group they belong to disappears in the wider context.

As Zlotnik (1995) notes, the well documented association between female migration and marital breakdown embodies multiple and contradictory experiences: 'Often the dissolution of marriage implies not only that women must support themselves and their kin, but also that they gain freedom of action. Similarly, separation or divorce is more likely upon a woman's return not only because of

the strains associated with migration but also because through migration, women gain the self assurance needed to leave their husbands. Thus, Filipino women whose marriages are failing tend to opt for migration to assert their independence and minimize the stigma attached to separated women, especially since divorce is not possible in the Philippines' (265). Indeed, migration is often referred to as the Filipino divorce (Parrenas, 2003).

Dannecker (2005a) found that while male Bangladeshi migrants reported problems with different ethnic groups in Malaysia, Bangladeshi women provided positive accounts of their factory work and social interactions outside their own community. Their trans-national experience gave them a different vantage point from which to view the culture of their own country: they had felt less constrained as women and become more critical of attitudes at home and the restrictions on women's work options. Blanchet (2005) suggests that migration abroad entails an 'irreversible process of individuation' for Bangladeshi women: 'out of *desh* and out of family purview, without guardians and without support, but also with a new freedom they experience themselves as individuals. They had made difficult decisions, coped with hardships, bore secrets regarding what could and could not be revealed at home...' (p. 123). Many had begun their migrant careers by getting cheated, reacting and learning rapidly how to safeguard their interests: 'That is why their experience of migration, on balance, is positive' (p. 124).

A similar widening of horizons is reported by Paguadan's study of Filipina migrants(2006). The women migrants themselves acknowledged the contributions that their period abroad had 'on their self confidence, their adaptability and flexibility to apply themselves to unknown situations and unfamiliar surroundings' (p.79). For some of them, 'work abroad has provided the opportunity to escape from otherwise oppressive personal and cultural circumstances that might have otherwise trapped them forever in

lives of subordination and subjugation. Living abroad and exposure to different cultures has immensely widened women workers' worldviews' (p. 79). They had learnt to live independently, to interact with others and many had formed their own organisations.

Salvadorean women in the US, many of whom had experience of paid work before migration, felt less 'watched' abroad than they did back at home. "While they often found the new environment difficult or challenging to negotiate, and their reconstituted roles a source of insecurity or discomfort, being forced to function in it also resulted in feelings of increased confidence and self-assuredness" (Zentgraf, 2002: p. 636). They also believed that the law in the US was on the side of women when it came to domestic violence: 'Imagine, you can say that your husband is mistreating you and then they'll take part in the issue. There [in El Salvador] they can leave you all bruised and hidden, and nobody can find out' (p. 639).

## **5. The commodification of love and sex in the global economy**

### ***5.1 The politics of marriage and the rise of the mail order bride industry***

While the demand for paid services in care and housework is largely generated by *women* seeking to purchase substitute labour to take over their own unpaid responsibilities within the household, the market demand for sex and marriage is largely generated by *men* who, for a variety of reasons, are willing to pay for emotional and sexual services that have conventionally been provided on an unpaid basis within the social relations of marriage. And it is largely women and girls who provide the supply of these services, although the percentage of men and boys appears to be increasing and is certainly larger than generally documented. We focus here on the mail order bride

phenomenon before turning in the next section to the trade in sex work.

The trade in mail order brides began in the 1960s and has grown since. Mail-Order Brides have been described as a “modern form” of mediated marriage arrangements which have been practiced since early times in many societies’ (Kojima, 2001: p. 199). Customary matchmaking is generally conducted for compatriots or individuals of the same nationality either through informal networks of family, friends and distant relatives or formally through the services of paid professional match-makers. The rise in mail order bride phenomenon represents the growing commercialisation of this search for partners. New forms of advertising for marital partners through newspapers, magazines and the Internet allowed men and women to expand their search beyond the circle of friends, acquaintances and traditional matchmakers and beyond national borders. The growth of the mail order bride industry has been enabled by some of the same factors which have driven globalisation in other sectors of the economy: the spread of computerised technology, advances in communication systems and increasing international mobility of people.

The early demand came primarily from men in the advanced industrialised countries of Europe, North America and Australia while the supply of women came mainly from South East Asia. By the 1980s, the demand and supply patterns had diversified with demand now also emanating from the wealthier countries of East Asia, mainly Japan and Taiwan, while the sources of supply now also include Latin America and Eastern Europe. Some countries, like Japan, are both a source of mail order brides, as Japanese women seek husbands from the West, as well as generating demand from Japanese men seeking wives from East and South East Asia.

The steady rise in the demand for mail order brides reflects, at least in part, some of the tensions and contradictions associated

with the large-scale entry of women into paid work and their growing financial independence. As we described earlier, men have responded to this phenomenon in a variety of ways. Among the more negative reactions, we noted the reluctance to take on a fairer share of child care and domestic responsibilities, extra-marital affairs, alcoholism, withdrawal of support to the family as well as abandonment of wives and children. In addition, it is apparent that large numbers of men have turned to the mail order industry in the belief that women from other cultures might conform more closely to traditional feminine roles.

The difficulties of negotiating a fairer distribution of resources and responsibilities within marriage may have also contributed to the supply of mail order brides. Some women have coped with the double shift of paid and unpaid work by working longer hours or relied on other family members or paid domestic help to share the burden. Others have left their husbands to bring up children on their own. Some younger have sought to delay marriage in order to enjoy some of the benefits of having an independent income and freedom from domestic chores. Others have opted not to marry at all, creating a pool of men from their own cultures who must seek brides elsewhere. And some have themselves turned to mail order options for husbands in the belief that men from other cultures might have the desirable qualities that men from their own cultures lack.

Evidence of shifting marital patterns and declining rates of fertility have been widely discussed in advanced industrialised economies of Europe and North America and we noted earlier the rising rates of divorce, female headship, single motherhood in Latin America and Africa as well (see St. Bernard, 2003; Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2003; Jelin and Diaz-Monoz, 2003; and Cliquet, 2003). Marital patterns are also changing in South and South East Asia in unexpected ways. While here too there has been a rise in divorce rates, more striking is the fact that the percentages of women in

their thirties and forties who remain unmarried has been rising more rapidly than men, particularly in urban areas. This trend has been found in Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines since the 1960s (Jones, 2004; Quah, 2003). Given that these are all countries where marriage is regarded as a universal norm and non-marriage an aberration, there is considerable debate as to the explanation for this phenomenon.

Quah (1998) suggests that it reflects the failure on the part of certain groups of women and men to find suitable partners as a result of a number of developments in the region, including rising levels of education and labour force participation among women. The persistence of traditional attitudes about what makes a desirable bride or groom have left certain categories of women (the more educated who are reluctant to marry 'down') and men (the less educated who are reluctant to marry 'up') 'stranded' in the marriage market.

However, there are also other explanations which bear more closely on some of the phenomena we have been describing in this paper. These suggest that the rise in the percentages of women and men delaying marriage or not marrying at all reflects changing life choices on their part. For men, particularly those in urban areas, Jones (2003) argues that being single poses less of a problem than it previously did. Its increasing prevalence has made it less of an aberration. In addition, the practicalities of living can be met by continuing to live with their families or by purchasing the services associated with marriage from street vendors, fast food outlets, domestic servants and commercial sex workers. Furthermore, intimate relationships outside marriage are now more acceptable in many of these contexts.

For women, on the other hand, the decision to delay marriage or not marry at all appears to reflect a somewhat different set of considerations. These relate to inflexibilities within marriage around

the division of roles and responsibilities combined with the inhospitality of the work environment for working mothers and the absence of any public support for child care (Truong, 1996; Jones, 2003). The appeal of marriage is certainly not enhanced for women by the cultural expectations in the region that women will continue to do most of the housework, child care and care of ageing in-laws, even if they work full time (ESCAP, 1999). Rising levels of divorce make marriage a less secure option for women while attachment to the labor force represents an alternative form of insurance. In addition, the cultural image of marriage in the region is also likely to lessen its appeal to many women. Educated Chinese or Thai women may be growing less tolerant of socially accepted patterns of men keeping mistresses or visiting brothels and massage parlors, particularly in an era of HIV-AIDS (Jones, 2004). Unfavorable stereotypes of married life abound in the Japanese context: 'One is of the salary man who leaves early for the office, returning towards midnight from an evening of business-related carousing, expecting his home-bound wife to deal with all the household chores and raise the children ....while giving little to her in terms of intimacy. Another is of the *kyioku* mom(education mom) who devotes her entire life to her child's educational credential-gathering, seeking a vicarious sense of achievement through her child, but who, we are now told, may be responsible for many of the pathologies emerging in Japanese children's behaviour (p. 18).

These various factors appear to have made marriage less appealing to women, even in cultures where it was seen as the fulfilment of their destiny. This is particularly likely to be the case for a generation of women who have other options. According to Retherford et al. writing about 'late and less marriage' in Japan, 'large proportions of single persons, particularly women, live with their parents, contribute little to household expenses while earning good salaries, and are able to enjoy a relatively carefree and

comfortable life style' (Retherford et al. 2001, p. 98). Survey data confirm that there has been a marked shift in attitudes (cited in Jones, 2004). A survey from the late eighties showed a sharp fall in the proportion of Japanese women who felt that 'women ought to marry as their happiness lay marriage' and a sharp increase in the proportion expressing discontent with the traditional division of labour between husbands and wives. 1994 data reported that young Japanese women viewed the institution of marriage far more negatively than men. In Korea, changing attitudes were evident in the results of a 1994 survey which found that over 50% of men and around 40% of women in the 50-54 age group disagreed with the proposition that women could have a full and satisfying life without marriage compared to only 13% of women aged 25-29.

## ***5.2 Fantasies about 'the other' in the mail order industry***

The growth in the global mail order bride industry appears to be linked to these various and contradictory shifts in relationships between women and men within different national contexts. One strand of the demand for mail order brides comes from men 'stranded' in local marriage markets who are turning to commercial arrangements to find brides from other countries. For instance, in rural areas in northern Japan, the absence of any stake in the land and the unwillingness to take on the hard physical labour on farms together with the appeal of jobs in the city led many young women from these areas to migrate to urban areas, leaving a severe shortage of women in the marriageable age group. Elsewhere, the 'missing women' phenomenon and the resulting shortage of brides in parts of India, China, Taiwan and South Korea has led to a growing trade in brides within and across national borders (Blanchet, 2005; Tsay, 2004; Zhao, 2003; Duong et al. 2005; Kaur, 2004). . And finally, a more generalised source of the demand for mail order brides reflects



the search on the part of men for wives who are likely to be amenable to a more traditional division of roles and responsibilities (Truong 1983, p. 538; Kojima, 2001).

The kind of men who advertise for mail order brides varies according to the factors which gave rise to their demand. The 'stranded' categories of men tend to be characterised by some form of disadvantage relating to rural location, age, lack of education, poverty, disability or simply a poor reputation. They are seeking brides who can carry out the roles and responsibilities ascribed to women within marriage. In addition to bearing and looking after children and other family members (ageing in-laws feature a great deal in the Asian literature), it may also include agricultural labour on the farm or family enterprise. Practical considerations dominate this end of the commercialised marriage market (Piper, 2003; Kaur, 2004).

In other sections of the market, these practical needs appear to be strongly overlaid by romantic as well as erotic fantasies. The picture emerging from studies of male clients of mail order websites in the US found them to be educated, in their late thirties, predominantly white, financial successful and politically and ideologically conservative. The reasons why such men would seek women from poorer countries as their wives and sexual partners, according to Hothschild and Ehrenreich (2003), are because they are thought to embody the traditional feminine qualities of nurturance, docility and eagerness to please and thus resonate with nostalgia on the part of many men for a bygone way of life. As they point out, "Even as many wage-earning Western women assimilate to the competitive culture of 'male' work and ask for respect for making it in a man's world, some men seek in the 'exotic Orient' or 'hot-blooded tropics' a woman from the imagined past" (p. 10).

However, as they go on to add, the women from the 'exotic Orient' or the 'hot blooded tropics' who register with mail order agencies are not necessarily driven by economic desperation. MOBs

are drawn from all social groups and many have college education and internet access. They include comfortable middle class women perceiving a shortage of suitable mates in their own societies as well as extremely poor women seeking to escape intolerable lives. In many cases, the supply of mail order brides reflects the failure on the part of the women in question to challenge the patriarchal restrictions of their own societies. For instance, Takahashi (cited in Piller, forthcoming) found that it was their serious dissatisfaction with Japanese society, and particularly with Japanese men, and their experience of severe bullying or divorce from a cheating partner that led large numbers of Japanese women to pursue the mail order option.

In seeking partners abroad, MOBS have their own fantasies about what they seek. Increased cultural exchanges, particularly cultural exports emanating from such cultural production centres as Hollywood, Bollywood and the international music industry have shaped cross-cultural desires. For instance, images of Tom Cruise, David Beckham and Brad Pitt featured a great deal in the decision of many of the Japanese women who sought Western partners. The cultural stereotypes which pervade the desires expressed by the men and women who turn to the mail order bride option are well brought out in a study by Piller (forthcoming) which carried out a content analysis of mail order websites which sought Filipina brides for Western men. A number of different dimensions could be disentangled in the cross-cultural desires featuring on these websites. The first dimension related to representations of western men and what they desired in a relationship:

*'This site caters to the classical American gentleman. Men who understand that man and women are different, and someone a lot smarter than us made us different for very good reasons. What you are looking for is someone 100%*

*loyal and who fulfils all the other roles a traditional wife fills’.*

The second dimension consisted of representations of Western women and why they did not constitute satisfactory partners. Western women were represented as ‘liberated’ (always in quotations marks), selfish, aggressive and materialistic: *“I know many of you are tired of the U.S. or Canadian singles scene like I was. You know...insincere girls who like to play games or expect constant material gifts.... Don’t settle for a demanding and unappreciative woman. The age of the internet has opened up a whole new world of opportunity. It’s time you meet the woman you truly deserve. Life is too short to settle for a ‘6’ when you can have a ‘10’.* (manilabeauty.com).

A third dimension consisted of representations of what made Filipina women a ‘10’ rather than a ‘6’. This was defined, implicitly and explicitly, by their difference to Western women: *‘...these Asian ladies are honest, faithful, rarely lose their figures as they age, are extremely supportive and care more about your heart than your wallet. For them, nice guys finish first! I know it was for me’.*

*‘What I found is that women from the Philippines ... are more compatible with American gentlemen than American women....I’ve seen an understanding of the social order from Philippine people that I’ve not seen in any American younger than 60 or 70 years old. What this means is the Philippine people teach social and family skills that Americans have abandoned. But not all are Americans. There are still plenty of American men who appreciate and desire those skills and understanding’*

However, for mail order sites catering for specific nationalities, it was not sufficient to extol the virtues of their specific ‘products’, they must also find a competitive edge over their

competitors. Representations of Filipina women thus also encompassed what they offered over other Asian women:

*‘Our personal opinion reflects the fact that Filipina women stand out among Asian women in terms of charms, openness, intelligence, education and trustworthiness. In addition, Filipina women make excellent wives and they excel and value their husbands as their priority. They are very affectionate and romantic, and their goal is giving their man tender loving care, surpasses all the women in South East Asia...’*

However, the strongest selling points of Filipinas over other Asian women as far as Western men were concerned was their cultural affinity in terms of their Christianity, their ability to speak English and their behaviour: *‘We are different from most Asian cultures. We are loyal to family unit more than country. We are comfortable loving and marrying men of other race, while most Asians ‘lose face’ if (they) marry outside their own culture...Marry a Filipina and you do not have to eat with chopsticks or bow all the time*

The final dimensions of these advertisements were representations of Filipino men and how they differed from Western men: *‘We, being Filipinas in general, think of Western men, particularly Western European and North American men as God-fearing, hardworking and deserving of love, respect and admiration. Please understand this the right way, but frankly we take pleasure in being submissive to the reasonable demands of our husband. Western men make us feel comfortable and even protected so we naturally look to Western men for high moral and spiritual integrity....too many boys here are playboy, drinker, gambler and abuser...’*

Similar representations feature in websites offering brides from other parts of the world. As women from the former Soviet Union emerge as a new supply of mail order brides, they too have to be marketed in culturally stereo-typed terms (Hughes, 2004). . A 1995 issue of Moscow Times carried following statement from the

owner of a mail order service offering Russian brides to Western men: *“The attraction of Russian girls is that they are not so feminized, not so business minded, they think about home, kids and their appearance. Western women want to have careers, demand cash, have expensive divorces, but Russian women are very pretty, there are plenty of them, they’re not spoiled and not too demanding”* (cited in Hughes, 2004). A website linking Russian brides to Norwegian men harked back to what Norwegian women used to be like: *“Norwegian women are very independent..(they) do not need men any more...I am hoping the Russian women will be more like Norwegian women used to be. – keeping the home nice and looking after the family’* (Bhattacharya, 2000 cited in Hughes, 2004). The main competitive edge that Russian women appear to provide over their Asian competitors is that along with the family values, they are white: *‘a European face but the patience of an Asian’* (cited in Piller forthcoming). The Sydney Morning Herald Magazine described Russian mail order brides: *‘here are exotic white women who know their place’* (cited in Piller),

Explanations to Western customers as to why Russian women might be eager to marry them put forward negative stereotypes which play to the very real problems of alcoholism, unemployment and domestic violence among Russian men. According to the web-based European Connections: *(Russian women’s) views of relationships have not been ruined by feminism.. Russians are enamoured with everything Western, especially American, and the ladies consider it quite an honour to have a Western boyfriend...(Western men) represent everything a Russian man is not: sophisticated, energetic, financially secure and SOBER...all seek to extent friendship from...the darkness of an ‘outdoor prison’ to the daylight of the open, free West’* (Moscow Times, 1995, cited in Hughes, 2004). Elsewhere it was reported that *“The reasons (women) give (for signing up with the bride agencies) are that men*

*of their country are extremely lazy alcoholics who beat their women'* (Cengal, 1999).

This route to finding marriage partners is not without problems. As Visson (1998) observes, those that advertise on mail order websites view themselves as individuals but tend to see their spouses in cultural-stereotypical terms, representatives of cultural categories, setting up the strong likelihood of failed expectations on the part of both. The mis-match of expectations is pointed out in one study of mail order brides from Colombia, Philippines and Russia: "Our interviews captured the irony of situations in which women who were attempting to escape ... traditional constraints were being matched with men who were attempting to find a wife whom they believed would embrace this same lifestyle .....Thus the MOB business as it now operates may be in the perverse position of attempting to match independent, non-traditional women with very traditional Western men' (Minervini and McAndrew, 2006: p. 115).

Furthermore, the organisation of the mail order bride industry lends itself to high levels of abuse and coercion. Some NGOs regard the bride trade to be a form of trafficking in women because so much of its operations depends on the unequal positioning of men and women within the global system. Profits are generated through the recruitment of women from regions of poverty and high unemployment and marketing them on the basis of sexual, racial and ethnic stereotypes to men in higher income countries. The danger of entering abusive relations through the mail order route is high. "The mail order bride industry is poorly regulated and most of the regulations aim to prevent immigration fraud rather than protecting the women who enter a country as mail order brides, and who are dependent on their new husband in many ways, not least for their residency status. Unsurprisingly, the incidence of domestic violence in such marriage is higher than in marriages resulting from other encounters' (Piller, forthcoming).

Finally, while the market for mail order brides is, in principle, distinct from the market in the various services provided by unskilled female labour in the care, cleaning or sex industry, the globalisation of these markets and the concentration of their labour supply in the poorer countries of the world have meant that, particularly at the more hazardous, undocumented end of the market, there is a considerable, often involuntary, slippage between these markets. Illustrating this slippage is evidence that many men view the romance tours offered by mail order agencies as simply sex tours. Moreover, a number of Websites are fully integrated into the sex industry so that the same site offers brides, escorts, pornography or provide links to pornography sites. While men seeking companions and wives through the mail order route may express a desire for women interested in fulfilling traditional family roles, reviews of agency websites often reveal blatantly sexualised photographs of the women used in their advertisements. In addition, some websites function as ‘shop-fronts’ for organised crime and lure women into prostitution.

### ***5.3 The politics of sexuality and the trade in sex work***

The sex industry has been around for a long time, of course, but it has grown explosively in recent decades. Rates of growth in the 1980s and 1990s were highest in the world’s industrialised countries: Europe, the US, Australia and Japan but have subsequently spread to other parts of the world. The global sex industry is estimated to have a turnover of between \$5-\$7000 billion, greater than the combined military budget for the whole world (European Parliament, cited in Monzini. 2005). Commercial sex is one of the leading economic sectors in South East Asia today. For instance, the sex trade contributes around 14% of Thailand’s GDP, accounts for a major rise in employment and provides a valuable source of hard currency. Its profitability reflects its fit with other expanding

'transnational' sectors, including tourism, the leisure industry and the whole travel market. There has been a sharp increase in sex tourism: 2 million in 1981 to over 7 million in 1996. Two thirds of tourists were unaccompanied men: nearly 5 million unaccompanied men visited Thailand in 1996.

Explanations for the persistence of the sex trade draw heavily on biological understandings of male sexuality as an 'irrepressible urge'. As Lim (1998) points out, prostitution is explained by social beliefs that men are 'naturally sexually active and aggressive, but "respectable" women must maintain their chastity and honour' (p. 12). The 'safety valve' version of this (D'Cunha, 1997) was put forward, amongst others, by Georg Simmel, an early twentieth century theorist, who suggested that prostitution was related to the unnatural repression of male sexuality imposed by the institution of monogamous marriage and which would otherwise be directed against 'innocent' women. Prostitution would become obsolete once monogamy became obsolete (Monzini, 2005).

However, while repressive sexual norms combined with double standards about male and female sexuality may explain the persistence of prostitution in some regions of the world, this explanation is less plausible in others. As Monzini points out, the onset of a more sexually permissive society since the 1960s, and the greater willingness on the part of the general population of women as well as men to engage in sex outside marriage in most Western societies, has not only failed to end prostitution but has seen a rapid increase in its scale so that the global turnover of the sex industry is estimated between \$5-12 billion, larger than the combined military budget for the whole world, more profitable than the trade in drugs and arms (Monzini, p. 24; Hughes). The liberalisation of sexual mores is evident instead in the nature of the market with rising involvement of transsexual and transvestite prostitution and with more women



willing to pay for sex (see Jassey, 2006 for an account of female purchase of male sexual services in the Gambia).

A more plausible set of explanations, and one with relevance for the themes of this paper, attributes part of the explosive growth in the sex trade to the problematic nature of present day relations between women and men. It points to the loss of certainty about identity and place in society as a result of the redefinition of roles and expectations currently under way. Given these changes, prostitution is seen to represent 'a special sphere in which men unsure of their capacity for relations with the opposite sex can escape what they feel as a burden of responsibility' (Monzini, 2005: p. 10).

Some of the interviews carried out with male clients of sex workers in a study in Italy offer support for this explanation (Corso and Landi, 1998 cited in Monzini). One client, a man in his forties, said: *'What I like most was the male chauvinist aspect of being able to choose without being rejected...It was great choosing like a feudal lord and being absolutely sure you wouldn't be rejected by the other person'* (p. 11). . According to another client, a graduate executive: *'I go with these girls because I have been pushed into it by the feminist fashion that's abolished traditional male-female relations. It makes me prefer a simple economic negotiation over the price of a service, instead of getting involved in relations which are too cerebral (and therefore turn me off sexually) or too physical (and therefore expose my great limits as a male.... Women's demands have grown and grown; they've become more and more difficult and complicated for us men'* (Corso and Landi, 1998, cited in Monzini, p. 11). The rapid growth of tourism, as Monzini notes, allows the possibility of travel to faraway places in the search by men for 'islands' in which they can defend – 'or at least have the illusion of defending' – the status of male superiority in the face of women's social skills and growing qualifications, to be 'king' for at least a week (p. 11: 'Commercial sex provides escape of a kind from increasing complexity

of intimate relationships'. Chant and McIlwaine (1995) offer insights into the some of the other motivations which lead foreign male tourists to seek out commercial sex in the Philippines: the need to prove sexual prowess to themselves and their peers , particularly as they approach middle age, pressure from their peers, the belief that their own countries were 'rife' with women who were 'too demanding' or 'not feminine enough' (p. 226).

However, the explosive growth of the sex industry has also been facilitated by the sharp rise in disposable income across the world and the growth of a consumer culture that is, as Ehrenreich (1987) puts it, 'endlessly inventive in producing new temptations and new rationales for yielding to them' (p. 181). In an analysis that calls to mind Polanyi's warnings about the social consequences of untrammelled market forces, Taylor and Jameison (1999) suggest that the rising consumption of sexual services can be seen as part of the cultural changes brought about by the liberalisation of trade, the global spread of markets and the increasing reorganisation of social life and values around the 'the sovereignty of the citizen as consumer, endlessly caught up in the marketisation and consumption of new commodities' (p. 264). Such an analysis fits with findings from a literature survey by Hughes (2004) that men who paid for sex were not necessarily any lonelier, poorer or less likely to have satisfactory sexual relationships than those who did not. They were men in search of excitement, of sex without any relationship or responsibility, of sexual encounters in which they exercised control and were free to degrade, humiliate and hurt as they wished.

Whereas pornography and prostitution were once private and surreptitious activities, men are now solicited as never before to become consumers with the internet and subscription television channels allowing greater and more discreet access to services. Moreover, thanks to the internet, the industry has become more diversified and sophisticated. In early 1995, there were around 200

websites selling erotic services and products. It had risen to 28,000 by the end of 1997. In the United States alone, pornographic material accounts for 60 percent of all material sold on the web while 70 percent of the £252 million spent in Europe on the internet went to the pornographic sites (Monzini). The internet feeds the exchange of information and services, giving rise to another set of racial/cultural stereotypes which parallel those in the mail-order bride industry: African and black women become objects of desire for the 'savage nature'; Asian women for their submissiveness and willingness to please; Latin Americans for their passion; Europeans for their lack of inhibitions and young girls for their freshness and docility (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003).

Women who enter the sex trade, like working women everywhere, are propelled by a variety of forces. For those who live in situations of great hardship and precariousness, migration into sex work may be perceived as their only opportunity to escape poverty. Women in the sex trade are largely drawn from the poorer countries of the world and from poorer sections of their populations. With the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and Russia, the spread of prostitution appears to have been one of the most immediate effects of the turn to the market economy. On the other hand, as Monzini points out, 'the same globally shared consumer myths and mechanisms that lead clients to obtain sex on a monetary basis operate to make others prepared to enter the market as sellers of sexual services' (p. 20). The more acceptable is the commodification of sex within the global economy, the more acceptable it becomes as means for those with services to sell to participate in an increasingly global consumer culture.

This means that while there may be significant overlaps between trafficking and the commercial sex industry, it is important to distinguish between those who entered sex work of their own volition, those who were deceived into it, or about the conditions

associated with it and those who were coerced into it (Hennink and Simkhada, 2003).

As McClintock (1993) points out: 'Depicting all sex workers as slaves only travesties the myriad, different experiences of sex workers around the world. At the same time, it theoretically confuses social *agency* and identity with social *context*' (cited in Brennan, 2003: pg. 155).

A considerable degree of agency is displayed by the women in Brennan's study of the Dominican Republic who had migrated to a nearby tourist town to work in the sex trade. The most decisive factor propelling many of these women into the sex trade was their status as single mothers bringing up their children on their own. Most had migrated within days of their partners' departure from the household and abandonment of financial obligations to their children. They left their children behind with female relatives, visiting when they could. Sex work paid more than domestic service and export-processing factories, the two other economic options available to women: women could charge 500 pesos for each sexual encounter while they earned around 1000 pesos a month from these other jobs. Their reasons for entering sex work was to improve their chances in life rather than as a survival strategy. Many hoped that sex work in a tourist town would allow them to meet foreign men who would sponsor their migration to Europe in a Dominican version of *Pretty Woman*. Feigning love appeared to be far less risky than some of the other means by which people left the island but as Brennan concludes, exit from poverty was rarely as permanent as the sex workers hoped (p. 168).

Bandopadhyay's account of women in Calcutta's sex industry shows that unwanted arranged marriages, violent husbands and betrayal by lovers were among the factors that explained their entry into the trade. Gangoli (2006) notes the existence of 'flying sex workers', including middle class housewives and students, who come

to Calcutta's red light area to do sex work from nearby villages and suburbs to ply the trade for the evening or the day. In her study of the casual daily labour market in Mumbai, Shah (2006) reports that women who failed to find wage labour in the morning turned to sex work in the afternoon to ensure their daily earning. Their preference for construction work over sex work appeared to be related to the lower levels of police harassment associated with the former occupation rather than with any moral considerations on their part.

Studies from south east Asia report that young female school leavers moving from rural to urban areas to earn an income often move into sex work, which generally pays more than the alternative jobs available to them, in order to afford the kind of life style and night life that they had hoped to find in the city (Lim, 1998). The line between choice and coercion begins to blur in the case of young women who enter sex work as a means of fulfilling their filial duties to the parents who brought them up. Some are 'sold' into prostitution by parents, but accept it as a way of paying back their debt to parents (Surtees, 2003). However, Bales (2003) suggests that these practices shade into coercion. He notes that among some of the poorer tribal groups living in the northern hills of Thailand, the sale of daughters into sex work or domestic service in the southern plains of the country is not new: "In the culture of the north, it was a life choice not preferred, but acceptable and one that was used regularly. In the past, these sales fed into a small, steady flow of servants, workers and prostitutes south into Thai society" (p. 210).

However, this flow has become a flood as a result of uneven industrialisation, which left the northern regions behind, combined with an increasing culture of consumerism across the society. A recent survey in the Northern Province found that two thirds of the families who had 'sold' their daughters could have afforded not to do so, but preferred to buy colour televisions and video equipment. The contractual arrangement between the broker and parents require

the money paid to the parents be repaid to the broker by the women's labour before they are free to leave or allowed to send money home. The women so purchased are required to have sex with sufficient numbers of men every night to pay off what they cost as well as contribute to their board, lodging and health care.

The line between choice and coercion is also difficult to draw in the case of young women from the former Soviet Union whose desperation for a better life leads them to leave their country in tens of thousands every year for destinations all over the world. Confronted by 'help-wanted ads specifying hip and bust measurements' in local newspapers (Bienefeld et al. nd), driven by poverty, unemployment and media images of affluent Western life styles, these women accept dubious offers of employment and marriage in the hope of finding a better life. Many end up in the sex industry, some in the hands of traffickers. In some parts of the world such as Israel and Turkey, women from Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union are so common in the sex trade that prostitutes are called *Natashas* (Hughes, 2000).

Non-governmental organisations report that economic hard times have lowered the psychological barriers that these women might have had to such work along with their self esteem and their hopes for the future. Once a woman has decided that the solutions to her problems is to go abroad, 'she will try every agency or strategy, regardless of the risk.' (p. 49). As one young woman said: *"I want to live separately from my parents. I want to buy things. I'm sick and tired of everything. Why should it be a bad experience. I will go illegally. I will be fine. Even if it is not easy, I will try..."*. (cited in Hughes, 2004: p.1) Women accept unlikely offers of unskilled jobs at high salaries with the resignation that 'it cannot be worse' than their present lives.

Recruiting agencies tend to target the most economically depressed areas in the region while the media black out leaves women

with little information on what can happen to them. Interviews with 160 young women from the southern oblasts of Ukraine, where there has been high recruitment by ‘marriage agencies’ found that two thirds of them wanted to go abroad, of whom forty percent said they knew there was a risk of being forced into prostitution but ‘were sure it would not happen to them’.

According to Interpol-Ukraine, the majority of women who set off for jobs abroad do not realise they are being recruited for prostitution. It is only when they reach their destination that they are informed that they will not be working as a nanny or a waitress. However, even those who do know where they will be working, do not know the nature of the conditions they will be working under. Hughes (2000) cites a Russian newspaper article on a young woman who was expecting a ‘Pretty Woman’ style Hollywood ending, being supported by a single man. They only find out later about the lack of control they will have, the debt bondage, the confiscation of travel documents, the violence used to ensure their compliance, the threats to family members and the small percentage of their earnings that they will actually receive. For many, the only way to escape the brutality of being forced to have unwanted sex with multiple men every day is to move from victim to perpetrator: 70% of pimps in Ukraine, according to one report, are women (Hughes, 2000).

Trafficking in women within the global sex trade has become a multi-billion dollar ‘shadow market’ but of an unknown magnitude: “The trade is secretive, the women are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous and not many agencies are counting’ (Hughes, 2000, p. 2). It is at this end of the sex trade that commodification of the kind described by Polanyi appears to be taken to its logical extreme and the person becomes the commodity that is bought and sold in the market place. The violation this represents to acceptable norms of human behaviour is evident in the question asked by an Ukrainian woman who had been trafficked, beaten, raped, put to work in the

sex industry in Israel, rescued by the police and then gaoled till her deportation: “*Can people really buy and sell women and get away with it? Sometimes I sit here and ask myself if that really happened to me, if it can really happen at all*” (New York Times, 11 January, 1998).

## **7. Changing notions of marriage, motherhood and masculinity in the global economy**

### ***7.1 The crisis in social reproduction***

As the analysis in this paper has sought to demonstrate, the large-scale entry of women into paid work across an increasing global economy is having major ramifications for the way in which women, men and children live their lives today. It raises a number of important theoretical issues and policy challenges that need to be investigated through forms of comparative research that can no longer be compartmentalised as ‘development studies’. Seers’s vision of employment as a source of dignity and self-realisation for human beings remains as relevant today as it was in his time, but as an increasingly distant goal rather than a description of the current reality. It is rather Polanyi’s analysis of the social consequences of self-regulating markets, disembedded from societal controls, that captures the important aspects of the global economy today. However, while increasing proportions of the world’s population now earn their living through the sale of their labour, it is clear that the processes of commodification have been experienced very differently by women and men in different parts of the world, thus ruling out any easy generalisations about their transformative potential for women’s lives. While the current generation of working men face more informal conditions in the labour market than did their forefathers, as a group, they continue to enjoy a larger share of



employment and earnings than do women. Working women have benefited most clearly in contexts where they were previously denied economic opportunities or where they have seen an expansion and diversification of their work opportunities. They have benefited less clearly where protections at work have deteriorated, where their opportunities have contracted or where their entry into the labour market represented a 'distress sale' of labour.

In addition, it is evident from the discussion in this paper that men's responses have played a role in shaping women's experience of work. While it is evident that many men in many contexts have welcomed women's ability to share their breadwinning responsibilities, it is equally evident that others have found the adjustment difficult, particularly in contexts where they have seen their own economic options as stagnant or declining. Such men have responded in a variety of ways including refusal to share domestic and childcare responsibilities to drinking, violence, withdrawal of their financial contributions, divorcing their wives, abandoning their families, taking second wives or returning to their natal families. It has been largely husbands rather than fathers, brothers or sons who have responded in this way, drawing attention to the precariousness of the balance of power within marital relations and its reliance on the appearance, if not the fact, of women's economic dependence.

The failure of the feminisation of paid work to eradicate gender hierarchies within the labour market may explain why so many women, faced only with the prospect of casual, irregular and poorly paid jobs, have colluded in upholding male authority and the privileges that go with it, including male exemption from housework. However, it has also led to resentment on the part of others as they struggle to reconcile their socially ascribed domestic responsibilities with their increasing responsibilities as household breadwinners. The diverse micro-level negotiations through which women and men struggle to come to terms with the implications of women's increased

breadwinning roles, and the widespread resistance by men to assuming a fairer share of unpaid domestic work, seems to have contributed to an increase in the demand for paid female labour in services hitherto provided through the unpaid relations of marriage and family. On the one hand, it has generated a demand by working women with children and other dependents for hired female labour to take up some of their unpaid workload. On the other, it has generated by a demand by men of all ages for the commercial provision of love, companionship and sexual services, often targeting women from other cultures who are considered more accommodating, more dependent and less 'feminist' than women from their own cultures. Both these demands are increasingly met by women migrants from lower income countries and from countries undergoing the traumas of transition from plan to market.

There has not been a great deal of attention in the development literature on the 'feminisation of labour' to this growing commodification of care, love and sex or to the accompanying rise in levels of trafficking, which make up the 'the dark underbelly of globalisation'. Studies of trafficking tend to be carried out under a human rights rubric rather than in the context of labour market analysis, but they bear out Polanyi's warnings about the consequences of the logic of the unfettered commodification of human beings. It is an indicator of their greater vulnerability that women and children make up a disproportionate share of these 'victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation' (p. 73).

The growing commodification of female labour has also served to bring the problematic nature of 'care work' to the forefront of feminist analysis. Despite the widespread acknowledgement that the care and love that children receive has significant implications for the kind of adult workers, citizens and human beings they will become, the work that mothers do tends to be taken for granted by society and devalued by the market: 'When performed by mothers,

we call this mothering...when performed by hired hands, we call it unskilled' (Katz Rothman, 1989, p. 42 cited in Parrenas, 2000).

Mothers do not expect to get paid because the work they do is an expression of love: they 'care about' their families as well as 'caring for' them. However, the work involved makes considerable demands on their time and energy. The evidence cited in this paper suggests that they receive very little support for it from male family members. There is clearly something about masculinity as identity in many parts of the world that makes men deeply uncomfortable about taking on care work, even within the privacy of their own homes. It may be that their sense of manhood is jeopardised at some deep psychological level<sup>10</sup>, it may be that their claims on paid labour as a male preserve will weaken if they start to share in domestic and parenting responsibilities (Chant, 2002) or it may be that they are simply protecting the remaining vestiges of masculine identity in a world where women are increasingly encroaching on their breadwinning roles: if they must share in domestic work when women take up breadwinning roles, what will be left to distinguish them from women?

Nor do women find much public policy support for their care responsibilities. Instead, the thrust of public policy in recent decades has been in the opposite direction. As we noted at the outset, the pursuit of flexible markets and the need to compete in the global economy has led to the dismantling of welfare provisions and labour market regulations where these existed and to their active discouragement elsewhere. Key elements of collective provisioning, including health, education and social security, have been privatised - in principle to markets in these goods and services. But where these markets do not exist or are unaffordable, responsibility for welfare provision has devolved to the family, and more particularly, to the invisible and unpaid labour of women. The privatisation of social services has thus added to women's unpaid work burdens at

a time when the informalisation of employment has made men's breadwinning capacity increasingly uncertain, forcing women from their households to take up paid work to make ends meet.

The quote from Gita Sen at the start of this paper can be used to make a strong argument about the *benefits* of taking women's reproductive responsibilities seriously in policies intended to promote pro-poor growth and human development (see, for instance, Kabeer, 2003). The analysis in this paper draws attention to the *costs* of not doing so. The supply of affective labour by women, apparently assumed by policy makers to be endlessly elastic (Elson, 1991), has been stretched to breaking point by the dual pressures of care and work for many women. It is clearly snapping for many others, leading to declining rates of marriage and fertility as well as increasing numbers of women who opt to remain childless. It is in this sense we can talk about the emerging crisis in social reproduction, although the form it has taken varies across the world.

In many industrialised countries, it has taken the form of a 'birth strike'. The fall in fertility rates to below net replacement levels in some of these countries has been serious enough to warrant newspaper headlines about fears of de-population. Italy has drawn particular attention in this literature because, despite having one of the more traditionally pro-natalist cultures in Europe, its fertility rates today are among the lowest in the Western world, with growing percentages of women opting to remain childless<sup>11</sup>. Studies exploring this decline in fertility rates in Italy highlight the importance of the domestic division of unpaid labour as a critical factor. For instance, Tanturri and Mencarini (2005) found that Italian women were more likely to opt to have a second child if their husbands shared in childcare tasks. Of women who had opted to remain childless, subsidised child care and paid maternity leave were the two policy measures most likely to persuade them to consider having a child. It is evident that private decisions which impinge on processes of social

reproduction are taken in the context of public policies that influence how the costs and benefits of such decisions are likely to be distributed. Italy spends 3.5 percent of its GDP on child related social spending compared to an EU average of 8 percent. At the other end of the social spending spectrum, the Nordic countries report the paradoxical combination of higher fertility rates than much of Europe combined with higher levels of female labour force participation.

Statistics from different regions of the world, both developed and developing, all testify to major shifts in patterns of marriage, motherhood and family life, including rising rates of divorce, declining fertility rates, the postponement of marriage, refusal to marry, the spread of consensual or visiting unions in place of formal marriage, female-headed households, same sex marriages, sibling based families, multi-generational families, single person households and the transnationalisation of families and motherhood<sup>12</sup>. Clearly not all the changes observed can be attributed to the phenomena discussed in this paper: war, political disturbances, forced migration, internal displacements and the spread of HIV-AIDS have also played a role. Nevertheless, the paper has argued that the expansion of economic opportunities for women, together with rising levels of education, the spread of contraceptive technology and high levels of exposure to new values and aspirations in an increasingly connected world have combined to open up new possibilities for how they live their lives and the kinds of families they want to it live in.

These changes in the patterns of family life, and the growing deviations they represent from whatever constituted the ideal family type in different contexts, have led to an emerging discourse about the 'crisis in the family' (see Moore, 1994; Chant, 2002). However, the greater diversity of family forms does not necessarily speak of a decline in the significance of the family, once it is accepted that the boundaries of the household are not necessarily co-terminous with

the boundaries of the family. The evidence cited in this paper speaks of the continued importance of family ties in the lives of women and men in variety of different ways: the return to the natal family in the event of marital breakdown; the reliance by female household heads on wider kinship support; the formation of multi-generational families to cope with crisis and recession; the role of grandmothers and other extended family members in caring for the children of working mothers, including those who have migrated and so on.

As Jelin points out, the discourse of 'the family in crisis' is most strongly articulated by those for whom there is only one ideal family type: 'the monogamous heterosexual couple and their children, established once and for all'. She suggests that what we may be observing is not such much a crisis in the family as a crisis in patriarchal authority within the family and the transition to more democratic family forms, to families of 'choice' rather than fate. However, the transition is not a costless one and choice is not its only driving force. Female household heads may have greater control over the resources that they generate, and devote a greater share of their resources to the welfare of their children, but they also tend to be disproportionately represented among the poorer sections of the population. Similarly, the growing numbers of elderly people who live alone may do so out of choice and a desire for independence – single person households in the Latin American context are far more frequent in upper income groups – or it may reflect the hardships endured by families in lower income strata and their inability to care for all their dependents.

The evidence cited in this paper does speak more directly to the 'crisis in masculinity' discourse (see Chant, 2000; Nurse, 2004). It is clear that the automatic privileges associated with the role of the primary breadwinner can no longer be taken for granted in the face of stagnating employment opportunities for men and of the greater willingness or ability of women to find paid work. The spread

of feminist ideas through the media, through development interventions and through feminist activism is also likely to have contributed to the greater willingness of women to press for greater justice in family life and to take the 'exit' option from abusive, violent or unfair relationships with men.

It is also clear that it is largely men from poorer and less privileged groups who are most affected by the 'crisis in masculinity' since they are least able to live up to hegemonic models of masculinity which promote the idea of men as the power brokers, providers and household heads of society. To that extent, they are as oppressed by the absence of multiple models of masculinity as women are by the secondary status assigned to them. Nurse (2004) points to the costs imposed on men by the pressures to live up to social expectations: decline in their breadwinning roles has been accompanied by a loss of self-esteem and associated problems of marital and domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse. Mohler-Leim (2003) draws attention to the high rates of suicide and premature death<sup>13</sup> among men compared to women, particularly among the young and middle aged. Ratios of committed (as opposed to attempted) suicides by females to males is around 1:2 in Western societies rising to a high of 1:6 in the United States (Murphy, 1998). WHO data on youth suicides for 51 countries from around the world show that rates of suicide for young men are almost invariably higher, sometimes considerably higher, than those for young women<sup>14</sup>. The largest disparities were to be found in the Russian Federation where rates per 100,000 were 48.8 for men and 9.0 for women. Germany with a median value reported 13.9 for men and 3.7 for women. Higher male than female suicide rates were also noted for the few Asian and Latin American countries included in the list. The ratio of male to female suicide rates were : 11: 5.9 for the Republic of Korea; 25.1: 9.4 for Mauritius; 12:5.1 for Japan; 7.6: 2.4 for Chile and 5.9: 1.3 for Mexico.

There are, of course, a variety of reasons why young men might kill themselves with greater frequency than young women but Mohler-Leim suggests that 'traditional masculinity is a key risk factor for male vulnerability promoting maladaptive coping strategies such as emotional unexpressiveness, reluctance to seek help or alcohol abuse'. Her conclusion is based on studies from advanced industrialised and transitional economies and it is possible that the forms of masculinity that prevail in some of the contexts we have been discussing may allow men greater scope to express themselves or seek help. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the disjuncture between dominant forms of masculinity and what is available to men from lower income households has brought out various forms of 'maladaptive coping strategies' which we have discussed in this paper.

Mohler-Leim's comments throw an interesting light on some of the discussion around policy responses to women's unpaid work burdens to be found in the recent literature. One set of suggestions focus on giving value to women's unpaid care work through citizenship entitlements. The 'cash for care' allowance promoted by conservative parties in Norway is one example. Pearson (2000) questions this approach on the grounds that it will do little to challenge the entrenched gender division of labour within the domestic domain while Jackson (2000) suggests that as long as there is a broad symmetry in the efforts that men and women invest in the collective welfare of their families, there does not seem any obvious rationale for insisting that they do identical tasks. However, in as much masculine notions of self are premised on men's distance from caring roles, one implication we can draw from Mohler-Leim's analysis is that their greater involvement in these aspects of work may help to break down some of the rigidities of male identity and lessen their vulnerability. A greater caring role, in other words, may be good for men's health, well-being and life expectancy.



## ***7.2 The diverse strands of the counter movement***

Whatever conclusions might be reached regarding the implications of women's large scale entry into paid work for their personal lives and life choices, the continued informalisation of labour markets and working conditions raises questions about Polanyi's hypothesis that counter-movements emerge to curtail the commodification of labour in the face of untrammelled market forces. This is clearly a much greater challenge in a globalised economy in which capital is free to evade any attempts to subject its actions to societal controls while labour, particularly unskilled labour, faces restrictive, often punitive, controls over its mobility.

In the domain of policy, the issue of social protection has been rising steadily up the international development agenda in response to the anxieties generated by financial crises in different parts of the world. However, the concrete measures favoured so far are premised on the view that integration into global markets offers the most effective route to livelihood security. They offer little by way of challenge to the worst excesses of commodification and only piecemeal recognition of the synergies and trade-offs associated with women's location at the cross roads of production and reproduction. Efforts to argue for the universal provision of basic welfare entitlements and subsidised care services which would allow all members of society to build their lives and livelihoods on a shared and guaranteed foundation of security have tended to founder on the combined resistance of the international financial institutions and the powerful neo-liberal forces behind them.

It is consequently in the domain of politics that the more radical challenges to untrammelled commodification are to be found. The rise of neo-conservatism, communitarianism and religious fundamentalisms are one set of responses to the uncertainties of the age and the valorisation of the past. Sections of the 'green' movement

have sought to link the destruction of the environment and climate change to the worst excesses of unregulated market forces. Other responses come from the organised labour movement and its allies who have been divided between those who opt for a protectionist stance to defend local jobs and those who seek to contain the force of the free market through international solidarity. Feminists have been too diverse in their responses to globalisation to lend themselves to a single characterisation, but there has always been a strong internationalist strand to the feminist movement, one that has sought to link women's organisations across the world in common struggles against the darker aspects of globalisation.

Debates about the nature of social protection suited to the global economy are likely to continue into the foreseeable future since they are about the fundamental values of different societies and groups. So too will debates about the implications of paid work in women's lives. It is clear that the contradictory nature of the changes it has wrought in the lives of working women and men bear out the analysis put forward by Elson and Pearson in their early work. New forms of gender inequalities have indeed emerged as older ones have dissolved. The previously hidden racial, ethnic and gender segmentation of labour markets of an earlier era have become more visible as they have become internationalised.

However, it is also the case that women as economic actors are also more visible in the public domain and more engaged in collective struggle than they have ever been. The previous lack of organisation among women workers reflected the failure of traditional trade unions who had flourished in the era of the closed economy and who had restricted their efforts to the formal sector and to the standard forms of employment in which male workers predominated. Facing shrinking membership and growing irrelevance, some of these organisations have begun to reform themselves in order to reach out to workers in the informal economy. In addition,

new kinds of labour organisations promoted by women's organisations and networks, human rights groups, civil society activists and sometimes, political parties, are also increasingly active on the global stage.

While there have been moments of heightened activity by women throughout the course of history on a variety of issues, the combined effects of globalisation in connecting people, ideas and collective action have created an unprecedented political context for them to mobilise around their collective needs and interests. Polanyi did not subscribe to the view that those who are most directly affected by exposure to deregulated market forces will necessarily lead the counter movement, but it may well prove to be the case that it will be the organisations of the working poor, who make up the bulk of the world's working population today, that provide the countervailing collective force necessary to subordinate markets once again to the processes of social reproduction. Until that happens, however, women across the world will have to continue to make use of the more individualised forms of power at their disposal to signal their discontent at society's failure to achieve a better integration between the processes of production and reproduction.

### **(Endnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> And one that gave rise to a major debate in anthropology between the formalists and the substantivists.

<sup>2</sup> By social reproduction, I am referred to the processes by which life, capabilities and the labour force are reproduced on a daily and generational basis.

<sup>3</sup> They suggested that women's entry into the labour market could lead to decomposition of patriarchal constraints, to their re-composition in new forms as well as their further intensification.

<sup>4</sup> Translated from Spanish by Dr.Cecilia Ugaz.

<sup>5</sup> In the flower growing areas, employed married men worked an average of 60 minutes a day when their wives also worked and 40 minutes when their wives did not work. When married men worked in the flower industry, they worked 76 minutes if their wives worked and 36 minutes if they did not. With employed married women, they worked 288 minutes a day when their husbands worked and 444 minutes if they did not. Married women who were not working, worked 539 minutes a day if their husbands worked and 559 if they did not. However, when married women worked in the flower industry, they worked 221 minutes if their husbands also worked and 253 if they did not. When married men and women worked in the flower industry, men 76 minutes a day and women worked 221 minutes a day.

<sup>6</sup> Chant's actual phrase is 'the feminisation of responsibility and obligation'. I have opted for a shorter version of her phrase as it adequately captures what I would like to convey.

<sup>7</sup> Men increased their time in scrubbing, vacuuming and sweeping by 240% (bringing up to 1.7 hours a week) while women decreased their hours by 7% to 6.7 hours a week. However, most of these changes took place between 1970s and mid-eighties.

<sup>8</sup> Parrenas reports that this is more likely to happen among the more educated Filipina women who migrate to the US or Europe. However, even in the Philippines, only 2% of working women in the Philippines can afford to hire domestic help.

<sup>9</sup> However, it also found that husbands of migrants reported much higher levels of involvement in various caring activities than husbands of both non-migrant working as well as non-working women, and they reported higher levels comfort with these new roles.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Risseuw notes in the context of research in Sri Lanka that the principle that men are 'higher' than their wives permeate the actions, thoughts and emotions of both women and men. Handling dirt, faeces, cleaning toilets, being impure, doing repetitive and relatively less prestigious work, which often lacks the status of work are seen as the female expression of the principle of gender hierarchy. Not surprisingly, she reports that men cannot 'stoop down' to such activities without experiencing severe emotional stress.

<sup>11</sup> This led Roberto Marconi, labour and welfare minister in the Berlusconi government, to offer 1000 euros to every woman who had a second child. The Mayor of Laviano (where only 4 babies were born in 2002) increased the amount to 10,000 euros over 5 years for every additional baby ([www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) 18-4-2004).

<sup>12</sup> Some of these changes are statistically documented in the regional overviews of family structures produced for United Nations Division for Social and Economic Affairs ([www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications)).

<sup>13</sup> Due to coronary heart disease, violence, accidents, drug and alcohol abuse.

<sup>14</sup> Only four out of the 51 countries reported higher suicide rates among young women of which only rural China reported markedly higher rates (33 compared to 16.7). A 1994 World Bank paper estimated that 30% of the deaths among otherwise healthy rural Chinese women were due to suicide and suggests that the finding was consistent with reports of mass suicide in rural China among women forced or sold into unwanted (and often violent) marriage.

*Appendix***Table 1: Trends in adult activity rates, during 1975-95, by percentage of countries with each type of change, total and by gender.**

<i>Gender/Type of change</i>	<i>Developing Countries</i>	<i>Developed Countries</i>
Women		
Increased	74	70
Decreased	17	15
No change	9	15
Total	100	100
Men		
Increased	26	5
Decreased	66	95
No change	9	0
Total	100	100
Total		
Increased	52	35
Decreased	40	45
Compensated*	3	20
No Change	6	0
Total	100	100

Source: Standing, 1999: p. 587

\*Activity rates of men and women changed in the opposite directions, involving a fall in male and a rise in female activity rates, so that they approximately offset each other.

**Table 2. Labour force participation rates by gender and the ratio of economically active females per 100 males (2003 data).**

	Male LFPRs (%)	Female LFPRs(%)	Economically active women per 100 active men
MENA	76.8	28.2	36
South Asia	81.1	37.4	44
LAC	80.5	49.2	64
South East Asia	82.9	60.5	75
Sub-Saharan Africa	85.3	63.2	77
East Asia	85.1	73.1	83
World	79.4	53.9	68

Taken from Table 2, p. 4 (Elder and Schmidt, 2004).

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