

**“Household work is women’s work!”** The experiences with “the little bit of household work” have not changed all that much over the years. Even in the communal living arrangements of the seventies (that claimed to be revolutionary), male contributions to household work left something to be desired, and today things still haven’t changed that much when your partner says, “dear, I’ll do the housework today.” With the growing number of available electric household appliances, the expectations regarding quality of life in the home have increased as well, thus bringing about an even more intense level of household work. In addition, it is accepted – even expected – that the wife and mother is also employed away from the home. And that means: household work must be delegated – usually to other women.

Professionals and singles have an increasing need for household help; this need is met by a growing number of female migrants who agree to the working conditions. These migratory patterns move from Asia to Eastern Europe, from Eastern Europe to Germany. Female migrant workers take on a wide variety of tasks in our families, commonly referred to by the slogan, **“Cleaning, Cooking, Caring”**. Much of this employment takes part in the so-called “shadow economy,” in which female immigrants voluntarily work illegally – known as “moonlighting”. Often, illegal migrants have no choice. In their land of origin, this often leads to a **“brain drain”**, that is: the loss of qualified, in part academically trained women who now perform work that is far below the qualifications they actually have.

A further loss in their countries of origin is the **“care drain”**. Entire villages have practically no women left. The children are left without mothers and the old without care givers.

This situation is portrayed as part of our exhibit. It starts with a historical review towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, as co-habitants of the castle Burgfarrnbach we gave a voice to the domestic help of the lords of this castle. Since the Victorian era it has been a given that the honorable wife and mother has to take care of the children and the household. Didactic books on subjects such as the proper approach to the care of kitchen, health, dress codes, and the care of children were written for the emerging middle class. The upper class employed maids for these jobs; these were girls from the country side who “went into service.”

Employing cultural comparisons, we take a look at the situation of the “Bonnes” in West Africa. Here too it is the young girls from the countryside who go into the big cities to “take up service.” Translated, “La Bonne” means “the good one:” Still, these young girls are situated on the lowest rung of the service ladder“, something like “the girls do everything that nobody else wants to do”. The fact that 9 – 12-year old girls already live under such working conditions is a consequence of poverty. The families have one less mouth to feed and hope for a portion of the girls’ income.

Historically, there are efforts to improve the situation of the domestic maids and to legalize their work. In 1906, Helene Grünberg founded the first household maids’ union in Nuremberg. August Bebel – among others – developed a plan to organize domestic work in the form of a cooperative so that there would be no more household “slaves,” and no more “Mistresses/Ladies” (who “owned” the “slaves,” so to speak). Today, cleaning personnel take to the streets to demand guaranteed minimum wages. The employment agency offers a simple way to legalize the work of household help with small income. In Dakar syndicates have also been formed to free “Les Bonnes” from their lawless situation; they also want the name “Bonne” to be changed to “employée domestique.”

Aside from explanatory texts and objects, the exhibition also features interviews with maids/domestic helpers who movingly speak about their experiences and hopes. In addition, we show several short films with a humorous take on the subject.

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