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## PAID MOTHERING IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: DUTCH DINNER LADIES AND THEIR DIFFICULTIES

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When mothers in developed welfare states took up paid employment, relationships between public and private domains transformed radically. In former welfare arrangements there had been clear dichotomies between work and family life, between men as wage-earners and women as caretakers, between businesslike succinctness and the emotions of private life. This clarity has blurred over the past decades, with confusing consequences as a result.<sup>1</sup>

This essay addresses the issue of 'putting out to nurse', one aspect of this confusion. It discusses how in the 1970s, mothers in the Netherlands made a start on organizing lunches at school. In doing so, they have modeled lunch-time arrangements according to familiar domestic mother-child patterns. The article demonstrates the consequences of this imitation, in three areas: in terms of the labor position and competences of the 'supervisors' during lunch time (later referred to in this article as 'lunch-time assistant' for school children); in terms of the behavior of the children and their interactions with each other and with the assistants; and thirdly, in terms of the relations between parents, schools and the government.

Although an increasing number of children stay at school during the lunch-break, Dutch schools have so far not been adapted for this purpose. There are no canteens, no kitchens, no cooks; nor are there facilities for recreation and sport. The children take their lunch to school with them, usually packed in a plastic box, sometimes containing substantial sandwiches, sometimes simply tasty nibbles. They eat their lunch in their own classroom. Their parents have to pay for the mealtime drinks, bought and distributed by the assistants.

The organization (or rather, lack) of school lunch in the Netherlands shattered my suppositions about the Dutch welfare state as a regulated and ordered system. School lunch is far less regulated by the government than time-honored institutions such as schools themselves; and surprisingly, even less regulated than comparative newcomers like nurseries and child-care arrangements for after-school hours. These arrangements were established with considerable difficulty, with slow beginnings in the 1960s and 70s, gaining speed in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the differences in organization and formalization between various sorts of child care arrangements, I consider the problems that I encountered during the lunch break to be typical of institutional child care in the Netherlands. These problems are extreme cases of broader phenomena that in a less blatant form are equally discernable in the organization of other arrangements for child care.<sup>3</sup> The lunch-time arrangements may illuminate larger issues, dilemmas and contradictions that are characteristic of the metamorphosis of caring relations that comes about when children are looked after collectively by paid assistants rather than by their own mothers. First and foremost, the informal organization

of the school lunch may be seen as characteristic of the downward delegation of child care that takes place as mothering becomes paid work.<sup>4</sup>

The lunch break applies ideals and practices from the domestic sphere to the collective setting of the school lunch. This mixing of the public and the private domain is reminiscent of the observations of Arlie Russell Hochschild in *The Time Bind*. Hochschild writes about reversed worlds: home that has become work and work that has become home. She demonstrates how in the United States private concerns and emotional needs, which in former times were satisfied in familial circles, are now projected onto the work setting. In this new model of family and work life, offices foster an environment of trust and cooperation, shaping an emotional culture in which coworkers bond like members of a family.<sup>5</sup> Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe found other mixtures of personal and non-personal relations in the United Kingdom, especially in the domain of child care. They noticed in their study of child care at home that nannies were involved in a process of professionalization, while at the same time functioning as mother-substitutes. Nannies were seen as employees in terms of wage labor, but they were also regarded as would-be family members. Gregson and Lowe speak in this respect of 'false kinship'. Eline Nievers, who studied paid child-minders in the Netherlands, found similar blends of personal and non-personal relationships.<sup>6</sup>

This article is based on research I carried out in 2002 and 2003, when working as a lunch-time assistant during the lunch break, at three primary schools in a big city in the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup> My research was propelled by a mixture of astonishment and disbelief about the actual practice of the collective lunch and the way domestic ideals were projected onto it; about the boredom of the children, about their uncontrolled behavior towards each other and their insolent attitude towards the assistants at the school lunch; about the condescension of teachers and school directors towards the assistants; about the organization of the collective school lunch in the informal margins of the labor market; and about the lack of involvement by government and politicians.

Apart from my own observations, I used the following resources: interviews with fellow assistants and their coordinators, and with school directors; observations at other schools; debates on the Internet, carried out by parents in 2002; minutes of the lunch-time committee at one of my research schools, over the years 1991–2003; political debates in the Dutch Parliament in 2001–2003.

### Collective childcare in a 'breadwinner welfare state'

For a long time now, do-it-yourself mothering has been characteristic of family relations in the Netherlands. During the seventeenth century, known as the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic, the conjugal family became more and more important as a social group. Men and women acquired more freedom to regulate their relations, while the overlapping of families and communities with the small conjugal unit diminished. Nuclear families became discrete, private and revered social units, with domesticity and inner-directedness as ideals and guiding principles. This process of privatization went together with the strengthening of emotional attachments between members of the family, especially be-

tween mothers and their children. Child care was seen as a nuclear-family affair, particularly as an important and valued task of the mother.<sup>8</sup>

Starting among the merchant and ruling classes, and gradually filtering through to other social strata, a discrete, withdrawn family life developed, featuring strong emotional ties. This model of relations between men and women, and between parents and children, became one of the pillars of the typical Dutch 'breadwinner, paternalist welfare regime', as it was framed in the first half of the twentieth century. Under this regime the starting point became the task division between parents, and between demarcated families and public life. Nursing and caring tasks were assigned to families, especially to housewives and mothers.<sup>9</sup> The state kept its distance from this intimate family arrangement. Using the structure of its social security scheme and the introduction of the 'living wage', it enabled mothers to stay at home without having to earn money in the labor market. It created the conditions for further expansion of this inner-directed family life.

In all western industrialized societies, mothers were expected to care for their children at home, but compared with many of these societies the Dutch succeeded exceptionally well in maintaining these family relations. Long-term trends in female labor force participation rates in different European countries between 1849 and 1990 indicate that Dutch women, especially married women, participated less often in the labor market than in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden or the United Kingdom. Until 1970 female activity rates were fairly stable, but since then the number of Dutch women entering the labor market has increased, at first slowly, then rapidly.<sup>10</sup>

In the last quarter of the 20th century, feminist women in the Netherlands who were involved in a process of emancipation, started to demand the right to earn their own salaries. They confronted fierce opposition. They faced a society satisfied with its achievements in the field of social security: with welfare arrangements that enabled mothers and fathers, the rich and the poor, to divide the tasks of care and breadwinning; and with systems that enabled the nuclear family to lead an autonomous and self-determining family life, free from government interference. Welfare arrangements were not adjusted to working mothers, while collective facilities for child care were non-existent. Besides, these women had to fight the collective mentality that held that mothers were home-workers, and considered this to be a morally justifiable situation.

But slowly a change of heart took place, and the heyday of the breadwinner welfare regime with its crystallized relations between mothers and fathers, and between family, labor market and the state, was over by the 1980s. During the 1990s, the resistance to female labor participation made an unexpected volte-face. Because of the ageing population and strong international economic competition, it became official policy to stimulate the participation in the work process of the population aged between 16 and 65, mothers included.<sup>11</sup> In line with the ambitions of feminist women, the motto of politicians of differing persuasion became: 'Work, work, and more work'. Mothers were needed to keep the welfare state going. Collective child care facilities were expanded and fiscal child schemes were initiated;<sup>12</sup> however, it proved extremely difficult to transform the finely-tuned connections between governments, families and the labor market and achieve a new balance. Not only were frictions found in the organizational

and financial sphere, they remain also discernible in the field of persisting ideas, ideals and ideologies about family life and the relationship between families and the public domain. The shift in the political ideology regarding the role of mothers in care and housekeeping has not kept pace with more general cognitive and emotional dispositions.

Besides, the work campaign had an unexpected effect. It had a negative influence on the status and prestige of the traditional role of mothers. It contained a hidden message: if people expect to count, they have to earn a wage. Or, even stronger: if people are not employed they are living at the expense of others. This reinforced the negative stigma of unpaid housekeeping and care. And this stigma was to some extent projected onto the organization of formerly informal care in the labor market: when this caring work was done for money, it was considered less important than the work of mothers; and, just like mothering at home it was not even seen as 'real work'. Putting-out child care meant its delegation to a low place in the labor market, indeed, often to the margins. It went together with the genesis of a so called 'care deficit'.<sup>13</sup> The traditional women's work is attributed to lower-class women and immigrant nurses: women with little education and limited scope on the labor market assume the role of child nurse. Because of its domestic features, the school lunch-time arrangement is illustrative of the gap between traditional mentalities and actual child care provisions. It also illustrates the problems in finding people willing to look after children, a type of work that is seen as not very attractive.

### School lunches<sup>14</sup>

In the Netherlands, collective school lunches started in a period when mothers were striving for more spare time. They found the time schedules of Dutch primary schools very restricting. Children went to school in the morning and in the afternoon. But in between, from 12 noon until 2 p.m., they came home for the midday meal, and their mothers were expected to wait at the kitchen table. Mothers were accustomed to adapting their own timetable unconditionally to the rhythm of their children, but young feminist women rebelled. They campaigned for adjusted timetables and took turns to look after their children among themselves. They succeeded in enforcing a legal measure in the law on primary education (1985), obliging schools to place classrooms at the disposal of children and their assistants during lunch; but neither schools nor the government were placed in charge of this new arrangement. The payment and the organization of the lunches at school remained the task and the responsibility of the parents.

The loose structure of this legal regulation of school lunch has meant that there is great variety in the facilities on offer from different schools, dependent on the goodwill of school directors and teachers and on the welcome they extend towards the outsiders who carry out the school lunch-break duties. Despite the lack of organization and regulation at a national political level, and despite inadequate school buildings, lack of playgrounds and absence of canteens, some schools even succeed in providing a harmonious and enjoyable midday meal and playtime. But these arrangements are exceptions.

In the early years of the school lunch only highly motivated and highly educated women made use of the opportunity to leave their children at school; but as more and more mothers went out to work, the number of children staying over for the school lunch break increased, while the number of available mother-nannies decreased.<sup>15</sup> The arrangement lost its small scale, along with its egalitarian nature and reciprocity. Looking after the children became a minimal and underpaid job. Indeed, it became a kind of marginal work, and it was increasingly difficult to find lunch-break assistants. Although the differences between the lunch arrangement at school and eating at home increased together with its size, people clung to the familiar domestic scene as their term of reference when organizing the collective lunch.

They did so as regards different aspects of the school-lunch. First, they did not see the assistance and care during lunch time as 'real work'. Second, as they saw it, anybody might possess the skills and competences of the assistants. "Isn't any good-natured person capable of pouring out a glass of milk for school children?" Thus it was assumed that no qualifications were required. Third, on the level of ideas, the assistants and some parents of the children transferred their notions about the care and affection of good mothering to this collective setting. And fourth, government and politics maintained a measured distance from the financing and organization of school lunches.

The schools where I carried out my research were all oriented towards domestic relations, but I was most struck at my first school by its outspoken imitation of the domestic scene. There, I came upon an informally organized enterprise functioning at the heart of a primary school which had about 400 pupils. Each day at 12 noon about 20 assistants arrived at the school; there they worked for one hour. They went straight to the staff room where the coordinator resided. There she sat, adjusting her administration, checking the organization, recording the attendance, improvising when necessary. This informal business operated in the same way as if the assistants were running their own households. They owned their own crockery and dishtowels and they washed up themselves. They were financially self-supporting: they collected money from the parents and they regulated all their expenses. They bought milk and apple juice, and games for the children to play. And once a month, the coordinator paid them their wage: 9 euros per hour, one day's work. Their relations with the school were few and frigid. This school gave an extreme, in some respects utterly bleak, picture of the way the assistants' work was organized. They were ignored, and the teachers and the school staff demonstrated an apparent sense of superiority towards them. Children tended to copy this arrogance,<sup>16</sup> and this attitude was reflected in their interactions with the assistants.

### ***Not 'real work'***

Just like the work of mothers, my work and that of my fellow assistants was not seen as 'real labor'.<sup>17</sup> We were not formally employed, nor did we have a contract. All the assistants—and even the coordinator—were working as 'volunteers'. Deceptively, they were given the appellation of 'mother'—a reference to the past when mothers were in charge of their own children, or supervising the children of friends and neighbors in reciprocal exchange relations. The

recruitment of these assistants reeked of serendipity. Someone had a friend, a neighbor, a sister or a niece who was looking for work. At one of my schools several married couples were both working as assistants.

Because of the scarcity of lunch-break assistants and because of a rapid turn-over among them, the coordinator was always in short supply, like most of her colleagues working in other schools. She was almost continuously advertising in supermarkets and the school magazine. She was constantly in search of people for her informal business and consequently was unable to make high demands on her personnel. Beggars can't be choosers. She relied on her intuition and experience, and recruitment was largely a personal affair, based on familiarity and trust.<sup>18</sup>

Although the activities of the coordinator were restricted by a lack of formal commitment to the school on the part of the assistants, she nevertheless performed as if she were a personnel manager. She assessed the assistants' competences; and in exceptional cases, she would 'fire' an assistant who was unable to control the vicious behavior of the children or who lost her temper with them. She tried to discipline her 'personnel' by formulating rules and regulations. But the fact that the assistants were in short supply weakened her position and restricted her ability to impose sanctions.

As for the assistants, their irregular position had various implications. A positive outcome was that they didn't have to bother with bureaucratic red tape. They could start and finish the job when they chose. They had considerable autonomy in their dealings with the children. But their prestige and their pay were low. Moreover, they had no employee's rights. They could not claim holidays, they were not paid if they were sick or unable to continue working. Nor were there clear regulations regarding their liability and responsibility for the well-being of the children. These weaknesses demonstrated the other side of the coin. Within the constellation of the school their position was at the bottom of the hierarchy. The teachers didn't regard them as colleagues, and the school directors didn't see them as part of their personnel. And many parents didn't even know who they were.

Because most assistants work under the cloak of volunteers,<sup>19</sup> they risk contravening the Dutch tax laws. For those receiving some kind of social security benefit, regulations about extra earnings are even more complicated and dependent on local ordinances. Some of my colleagues even appeared to see themselves as part of the illegal black economy. This situation contributed to their low self-esteem, made them vulnerable and prevented them from promoting their interests either in the school or in politics. Clearly, it is unthinkable that the assistants will organize themselves into a trade union, or a professional community. Such action seems entirely incongruous, especially in view of the fact that they are a highly diverse group of people, as regards age, education, socio-economic situation, ethnicity and country of origin. They include grandmothers of sixty, retired but with a long record of experience with children; young students in need of money; Dutch mothers, as well as Turkish or Moroccan mothers, some speaking imperfect Dutch and craving more autonomy and acceptance into the Dutch society beyond their home. Many sorts and conditions of people, some of them hoping for a little pin money, most of them lower-class women.

*Neither occupation, nor profession*

The work of the lunch-time assistants, in its diffuseness, is reminiscent of mothering at home. The tasks of a mother are wide-ranging and often ill-defined. Mothers perform many tasks simultaneously. They may be cooking and at the same time answering their children's questions. They help the kids hunt for a lost toy, and take the opportunity to tidy up a room. They go shopping and combine the expedition with collecting the children from school. They do housework, interrupting the dusting and vacuuming to comfort a crying offspring.

Diffuse and simultaneous activities also characterize the work of the school assistants. Their work is not specialized, like teaching, or football coaching. Their role is an undefined mixture of care and supervision, hampering a succinct definition of the qualifications required to fulfill their tasks. The point of reference for all parties concerned, whether they be parents, teachers, school directors, the assistants themselves, or the coordinator, is the image of 'the good mother'.

But 'good mothering' is something else than supervising children during their lunch break. For specific reasons, that is a difficult job. The break is intended to be a time of relaxation from the concentration required during school lessons. Children do not have to sit still in one place, they do not have to write or to read. The lunch assistants want to give the children 'free time', without too many restrictions imposed. They would like them to feel just as they do in their own homes. But being at home is quite a different matter from dealing with 25 noisy and excited individuals in a crowded and cramped classroom, letting off steam after their lessons. The break is less controlled than the lessons, and this leads the children to feel free to behave with less restraint. The meal part of the lunch is meager: some children have already eaten their lunch during the morning; some children didn't bring anything along with them, and the rest aren't very interested in their meals. That means there is plenty of aimless, tedious time to fill. And in the meantime the same group dynamics of the school class will play a part. Fidgety pupils don't stop being fidgety. Children continue preoccupied with the worries and concerns of the morning, they carry on with their rivalries and quarrels.

That is why keeping order is so difficult. And these order problems are exacerbated by the marginal position of the assistants within the school. Children are sensitive to such signals and react immediately. If the school staff and the parents do not appreciate the assistants, why should the children obey them? Their frequently condescending attitude is supported by the knowledge that undisciplined behavior during the lunch break is seldom punished. School directors often fail to support the assistants and do not impose sanctions against pupils showing undesirable, aggressive or offensive behavior. Many children see the lunch break as a nuisance. They are bothered or bullied by other children, while the assistants are not able to get between them. They are prevented from retiring and relaxing, while the assistants are not able to protect them. This kind of incapacity undermines the position of the assistants in the eyes of the children, and reinforces the low status that is given to them by the school personnel.

Another point to consider is that frictions between teachers and assistants are not only caused by lack of competences of child minders without paper qualification. They also have to do with a demarcation of tasks and rivalry between

professionals with different credentials.<sup>20</sup> The assistants are seen as intruders in the school, squeezing in between the established school professionals. They are seen as outsiders who have to lasso a niche in the labor market for their relatively simple specialism—the support and care for the children.

The assistants do not have the necessary training to help them maintain order in a class and they lack means to coach and control the children. Because of their different backgrounds they have widely varying ideas about the best way to solve behavior problems. These ideas are linked with the knowledge and skills they use in their daily work as mothers. Partly, their ideas are derived from do-it-yourself books about child care and education. But they do not share a solid body of professional expertise, nor do they have a common professional identity that could support them in their contacts with school personnel and parents.

During the last decade, from time to time, complaints appeared in Dutch newspapers about the collective school lunch. Huge headlines are splashed across the page, screaming, 'Chaos at school lunch break.' The uproar lasts one or two days and then simmers down. During the past few decades MPs of different political parties have occasionally posed critical questions in parliament.<sup>21</sup> Various Dutch governments have made some feeble and faltering attempts to intervene and improve the quality of this branch of child care.<sup>22</sup> And in doing so, time and again politicians have emphasized the meager capabilities and the low quality of the work done by the lunch-time assistants. The major reason for problems during the school lunches is alleged to be inexperienced assistants. Such considerations as the political organization, the financing, or the legal basis of the lunch arrangements, the hardware of the school buildings, and the inadequate playgrounds, are consistently ignored. The idea of professionalization is bandied about like a magic formula, but acquires a narrow definition, namely "improving the skills of the assistants." Subsidizing short training courses and exercises is seen as the solution to the varied problems of the lunch break, but as long as the assistants have no status as formal employees radical improvements can not be expected.

Roughly speaking, two strategies are performed to influence the behavior of the assistants. The first is to draw up rules and codes of regulations for the lunch break, and try to implement them. These bureaucratic, often quite ineffectual exercises, carried out and supervised by the coordinator, some professionals or the schools, are actually intended to limit the discretionary competences of the assistants, their freedom to act and to decide.<sup>23</sup> These are meant to regulate their activities and bring them more in line with the teaching staff. It is hoped that a protocol could create continuity between school and lunch time, uniformity in the daily activities of teaching, eating and recreation. Besides, it could provide handles for managing troublesome children.<sup>24</sup> Such written procedures and behavioral codes may be seen as compensation for the lack of professional knowledge and skills of the assistants. But many of them disregard these regulations and continue their habitual customs and procedures.

While attempts to regulate the assistants by establishing bureaucratic procedures are directed at external control of their behavior, the second strategy in professionalizing them consists of training programs, directed at expanding

their knowledge and changing their attitudes and behavior, their cognitive and affective dispositions. These programs aim to influence them by transmitting theoretical and practical understanding and by teaching them to believe in the power of knowledge, insight and self-control.

Some of these courses date back to the 1970s, when mothers with lunch-break experience exchanged their working knowledge with mothers who had just started organizing school lunches for their children. Since the 1990s, several professionals have specialized in courses for school-lunch assistants. Educationists, social workers and psychologists who work individually, and professionals working in a specialized institute for child care (IOS) design programs that resemble formal professional schooling.<sup>25</sup> A difference, however, is their limited scope. Some courses only involve a few mornings and have restricted targets, such as teaching the assistants how to deal with injuries, or how to react in case of teasing and bullying. Other programs are more ambitious and cover a large number of subjects.<sup>26</sup> They have practical objectives and aim to regulate the behavior and emotional habitus of the assistants.<sup>27</sup>

But these different training programs are voluntary and most assistants are permitted to do the job of lunch-time supervisor without having followed any of these courses. Their level of professionalization is often very low: they have no exclusive or expert knowledge, nor do they have a monopolistic control over their work, their training, credentials and qualifications.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Mothering in a collective setting: the persistence of ideas, ideals and ideologies***

School personnel, parents and lunch-time assistants, apply their ideas about domestic mothering to the collective setting of the school lunch. In the case of the assistants these ideas clash with the practices they are confronted with daily. At school they lack the autonomy in behavior that characterizes working in the private domain of their own home. There, practical and repetitive tasks are embedded in the close and all-embracing relationship with their children. But in the more-or-less threatening setting of school they have to cope with increased and more complicated interdependencies. Their caring tasks are more difficult, their relationship with the children remains superficial, and they lack authority. The problems that result are more than they can control. How do they deal with those tensions?

At the different schools that I visited, I heard comparable complaints. After the toilsome lunch break my colleagues would sit together drinking tea and complaining about their marginal position as assistant and their precarious place in relation to teachers, parents and school directors. They voiced their feelings of discontent about their working conditions and they were upset by the debunking attitude of teachers, school managers and parents. The school staff paid them scant attention: communication was bad, important information was not passed on to them. The assistants reproached the teachers for not recognizing the importance and the difficulties of their work. Teachers saw themselves as professionals whose jobs were more valuable than the practical caring work of the assistants. They refused to acknowledge that the assistants also had to cope with general educational problems when dealing with children.

The assistants were also upset by the lack of interest in their work on the

part of the parents. They saw this as an indication that parents failed to show adequate interest in their children. They held them accountable for the uncontrolled behavior of their offspring. In their eyes, parents were failing in their task of bringing up their children; they lacked authority and were unable to enforce standards of acceptable behavior. Parents, they felt, were too absorbed in promoting their own careers and so fell short in caring for their children. The assistants told each other horror stories about modern parenthood. About children who had to prepare their own meals in homes where there was no food to be found. About children who had acute physical problems but were never taken to a doctor.

The attitude of the assistants toward their unpleasant work experience was, above all, ambivalent. As regards their motivation to do this work, some of them were chiefly in need of pay. For others, the financial reward was of secondary importance, merely an agreeable additional income. But when asked, all of them would declare that money was not the only reason why they did the job. Their pay was, after all, a pittance, not enough compensation for creating a chaotic day. There were other considerations: all of them stated that part of their motivation was a fondness for children. Yet curiously, they were always complaining about the children, especially about the older ones. They were disobedient, ill-disciplined, rude and obstreperous. The assistants claimed they had to shout and yell at the children before they could make themselves heard. Nevertheless, their caring work retained an intrinsic value for them that they associated with the role of mother.

Every day during the post-lunch-break cup of tea, they asked each other: "Am I good enough? Could I do this job better?" Most of them doubted their own capacities and felt they were not really qualified for this difficult task, but in talking about the qualities needed to take care of the children they would always resort to their ideas about good motherhood. They measured their functioning against their standards of mothering at home. They perceived their role as child minder as a personal and individual affair, related to female biology and to the personality traits they had developed in mothering their own children. For them, these personal capabilities represented expertise and professionalism. They derived their self-respect from having those qualities: "I'll do it with what I know, what I have and what I can, because I'm not an educationist. Just a whole heap of love, that's what you have to do it with." Another woman said that she did it hoping for the best, with a little respect and trust. You should teach the children to say 'please' and 'thank you'. But sometimes she'd had enough. She admitted ruefully, "You know, they're just a bunch of hooligans."

The assistants I talked with distinguished between an appropriate inner state of mind, knowledge acquired by experience, and so-called 'book-learning'. For child care, they considered it insufficient only to have followed a course. You should have hands-on experience, you should have a knack and a feeling. It was like a vocation. Their expertise was chiefly practical and all of them were self-taught. Some of them by reading about child-rearing and child psychology in handbooks, magazines and journals; others by consulting doctors and professionals about their own children. But they had a high opinion of innate qualities, and distrusted knowledge from books. "Certificates don't say everything. Working with children suits me down to the ground." Still, they were struggling with

ambiguities. They blamed their own malfunctioning on their shortcomings in schooling and professional knowledge and skills.

They were disappointed by the children, but they were always looking for arguments that could serve as an apology for bad behavior. In this way they clung to the positive identity that motherhood represented for them. By sticking to familiar domestic and intimate ideals and corresponding social relations, they shielded themselves from the hurtful reality at school. In their reactions, habitus, knowledge and skills they fell back on their own experience, on the way they mothered their own children. They held the status of 'caring mother' in high esteem; it belonged to a position outside the hierarchy of paid employment, even beyond everyday life. As mothers, they felt themselves superior to the educated women or career women who were neglectful of their children. And many working mothers held the same opinion: the 'simple' caring women had qualities they themselves had lost, like emotional warmth and patience.

As far as the assistants play a mothering part, they represent one of the most ambivalent roles in western societies: highly valued and at the same time widely despised. But the setting of the school permits only a restricted definition of mothering, in which a division of tasks has occurred: the positive, affective and enduring aspects of the relationship with the children are retained by the parents, while the monotonous chores are done by the paid child minders. Because of this dichotomy, the assistants miss the intimacy and affection which they know from their own children, while they lack the authority to arrange a pleasant and harmonious collective lunch break.

#### ***A changing welfare state: domestic mothering in a collective setting***

During its heyday, until the 1980s, the welfare state created the conditions for a kind of autonomous family life, where parents were responsible for the care and education of their children; where the government organized schools, but apart from that did not meddle in private, family relations. Until well into the second half of the twentieth century, there were few working mothers in the Netherlands, but their recent, and growing entry into the labor market has shattered this established relationship. The absence of good quality child care facilities was one of the largest problems. And this scarcity had a counterproductive side effect, that was related to a preference for child care at home by parents, grandmothers, sisters and friends. It meant that many working women—though also men—took on part-time employment, which is not marginalized in the Netherlands.<sup>29</sup> This may be seen as advantageous for young parents, since it gives them the opportunity to spend a good deal of time with their small children. However, the increased incidence of part-time employment diminished the urgent need to create sufficient high-quality child care facilities. As for the collective school lunch, the responsibilities for the arrangement, organization and financing of this amenity failed to crystallize, while the quality remains faulty.

The present neo-liberal political climate in the Netherlands, framed in a globalizing economy, is not favorable to the organization of collective forms of child care. In Scandinavian countries good child care arrangements arose in a booming stage of the economy, but nowadays welfare states in post-industrial societies

are diminishing, social conditions tend rather towards privatization, a free market, and making people responsible for their own general well-being.<sup>30</sup> The promotion of female employment, as part of the restructuring of the Dutch 'breadwinner welfare state' takes place according to these contemporary neo-liberal principles. The attempts that are being made to encourage the institutionalization of child care are part of this faltering regime. As regards collective child care, social policy is still highly tentative.

In shaping school-lunch facilities, the child care of mothers for their own children and in their own home remains the reference point for all groups involved. This viewpoint represents a common interest for the government, the school staff and the parents. The government remains aloof, just as it used to do when dealing with families, and leaves the spadework to the parents and the schools. The schools see this new arrangement as an additional burden and meet their legal obligations with reluctance. Many working parents have no choice: they are not able to look after their children during the lunch break. They prefer to close their eyes to this chaotic and unregulated slice of the school day. They are accustomed to sound and steady welfare arrangements, supervised and inspected by the government, and they find it difficult to imagine that they are themselves responsible for this arrangement. And in the meantime, lunch-time assistants do the supervision under difficult circumstances, while many children are feeling weary. They misbehave, they develop the tricks of 'Might is Right' and they learn to pooh-pooh the work of care-givers.

As regards the school-lunch facilities some recent political efforts are made to improve this arrangement. In August 2006 schools in the Netherlands were slated to become legally accountable for the organization of the lunch-time arrangement; but the government maintains its distance and neither establishes nor guarantees standards of quality. The collective lunch arrangement is seen as the concern of schools and parents, who have to cooperate in organizing this facility. Such general problems as the activities of the children, their meals and their drinks, the spatial design of canteens and playgrounds, the labor conditions, training programs and qualifications of the assistants, are not under debate and are not seen as the province of the government. Not only are penetrating analyses of these issues lacking, so are imagination and vision. Long-term plans have yet to be made, and professional training for those who have to supervise children's meals, who carry out extra-curricula or extra-mural activities with them, has been put on the back boiler.

## Conclusion

Methodologically, this article has taken extreme cases as its starting point. Building on its traditionally privatized family life, the Netherlands has been presented as an extreme case of a 'breadwinner welfare state'. Within the spectrum of collective child care in the Netherlands, child care during lunch time is, in its semi-informal organization and in its irregularity, an extreme case of the projection of ideas about family relations onto collective child care. However, the problems that accompany this configuration are neither exclusive to the Netherlands nor to the school lunch break. Every western country has a heritage of domestic mothering, of a task division between bread-winning males and caring

females. And every western country wrestles nowadays with adapting its welfare schemes to a situation in which both men and women participate in the labor market. The implication here is that every western welfare regime has to struggle with comparable problems and ambiguities. The tensions caused by the shifting boundaries between the public and the private domain, between work and home, between institutional conditions and family relations, can be found in one form or another in all these countries. And in the Netherlands, even the better organized child care facilities share features with their irregular sibling, the school lunch.

Meanwhile, using the model of domestic mothering as a mould for collective child care, disregards its specific demands and the ways in which it differs from the home situation. The domestic model of care is ill-adapted for institutionalized and paid child care arrangements. Consequently, the school lunch arrangement functions in the margins of the employment market, partly in the informal sector, halfheartedly organized, a watered-down professionalism. Such is the picture of the problematic farewell to traditional, domestic mothering and the search for a new *modus vivendi*.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York, 1998).
2. Between 1965 and 1975 their number increased from 185 to 2504. L.E. van Rijswijk-Clerkx, *Moeders, kinderen en kinderopvang: veranderingen in de kinderopvang in Nederland* (Nijmegen, 1981), but together with the United Kingdom, Ireland and the southern European countries, the Netherlands has always been a child care laggard. The percentage of state-subsidized child care for children in the age group 0 to 3 was 2 in the period between 1985–1990; 8 around 1995; 19 around 2000. Monique Kremer, *How Welfare States Care. Culture, Gender and Citizenship in Europe* (Utrecht, 2005).
3. C. C. Ragin, "Introduction; Cases of 'what is a case'," in C.C. Ragin and H.S. Becker (eds), *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge, 1992), 1–17.
4. Robert Dingwall, "In the beginning was the work . . . ' Reflections on the genesis of occupations," *Sociological Review* 31 (December, 1983): 605–24.
5. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind. When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York, 1997).
6. Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe, *Servicing the Middle Classes. Class, Gender and Waged Domestic Labor in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1994); Eline Nievers, 'We moeten

haar koesteren'. *Over de relatie tussen ouders en de betaalde kinderoppas aan huis* (Utrecht, 2003).

7. Rineke van Daalen, *Overgebleven werk. Kinderen tussen de middag op school* (Amsterdam, 2005).

8. Johan Goudsblom, *Dutch Society* (New York, 1967); Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Utrecht, 1985); Rineke van Daalen, "Family Change and Continuity in the Netherlands," in *Successful Home Birth and Midwifery. The Dutch Model*, Eva Abraham-Van der Mark, ed. (Westport, Connecticut, 1993), 77–94.

9. Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1990); Gøsta Esping Andersen, Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemerijck and John Myles, *Why We Need a New Welfare State?* (Oxford, 2003); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers. The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Harvard, 1992).

10. In 1961 the labor force participation of the female married population of working-age was 7%; in 1970 17%; in 1980 32%; in 1990 47%; in 1996 55%, in 2003 55%. Hettie Pott-Buter, *Facts and Fairy Tales about Female Labor, Family and Fertility. A Seven-Country Comparison 1850–1990* (Amsterdam, 1993), 201; Jelle Visser, *De sociologie van het halve werk* (Amsterdam, 1999), 14; Wil Portegijs, Annemarie Boelens and Linda Olsthoorn, *Emancipatiemonitor 2004* (Den Haag, 2004), 64; Janneke Plantinga, *Een afwijkend patroon. Honderd jaar vrouwenarbeid in Nederland en West-Duitsland* (Amsterdam, 1993).

11. Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Een werkend perspectief. Arbeidsparticipatie in de jaren '90* ('s Gravenhage, 1990); Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, *Doorgroei van arbeidsparticipatie* ('s Gravenhage, 2000).

12. The introduction of a new fiscal regime dates to 2001 Monique Kremer, *How Welfare States Care. Culture, Gender and Citizenship in Europe* (Utrecht, 2005).

13. In *Global Woman. Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild edited a collection of articles revealing that affluent and middle-class families in the First World come to depend on migrant women from poorer regions for their household and their caring tasks. Ehrenreich and Hochschild draw attention to the global re-division of traditional women's work—caring and home-making—where the richer parts of the world have to turn to poorer regions for fresh supplies of emotional resources. This new and intimate connection mirrors in some ways the traditional relationship between the sexes: the First World in the role of the old-fashioned male, the poor countries playing the traditional woman's role. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild Russell, "Introduction," in *Global Woman. Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild Russell, eds. (New York, 2002). See also: Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents* (New York, 1998).

14. Maria Cornelia Meijvogel, *Geen kruimels tussen de boeken. Schooltijden, overblijven en de ontwikkeling van buitenschoolse opvang* ('s Gravenhage, 1991).

15. Before 1975 lunch arrangements at school did not exist. But in 2001 579.000 children were staying over during the lunch break, around one third of the primary school pupils: 34% of the four to six years old, 37% of the seven to nine years old, and 25% of the ten to twelve years old. These percentages are higher at schools in big cities than in the countryside, while both percentages are increasing.

The amount of assistants increased as well, although it is impossible to give accurate numbers. Assistants are nowhere registered. In 2002/2003 their estimated amount was 76,000. Rineke van Daalen, *Overgebleven werk. Kinderen tussen de middag op school* (Amsterdam, 2005), 207; Anne Ketelaar, Ton Klein, Ron van Wonderen, *Evaluatie van de subsidieregelingen scholing overblijfskrachten 2002 en 2003* (Leiden, 2004).

16. Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Children as Eavesdroppers," *The Commercialization of Intimate Life. Notes from Home and Work* (Berkeley, 2003), 172–81.

17. This view is in line with the way people usually think about housework and child care at home. Up to the 1970s historians and sociologists also systematically failed to study women's work at home. They did not recognize the work of housewives and mothers as 'real labor' and did not see it as a relevant research topic. Industrial sociologists were concerned with employment and labour market behavior. They over-emphasized formal wage labour, and they saw individual male wage earners rather than the household as the basic economic unit. As Raymond Edward Pahl in *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford, 1984) describes, domestic work and mothering at home were—and are—not registered in official labor statistics and didn't count in the official economy. Feminists were the first to draw attention to this blind spot. They revealed the hidden nature of the work of housewives within their own home. Helen Lopata gave her book the proud title *Occupation: Housewife* (New York, 1971), while Ann Oakley's book is called concisely *Housewife* (London, 1974). These studies contained two, partly incompatible implications. The first statement was that the work of housewives was indeed a specific kind of labor. This implied that housewives were in need of recognition and appreciation. The second message was that housework and care were tedious and monotonous activities. And what's more, these chores were performed within the cage of the family home, keeping women isolated and financially shackled to their husbands. Women could only free themselves by leaving their home and entering the labor market, while education and schooling were considered to be necessary preconditions for acquiring interesting and challenging jobs, and developing a satisfying professional identity. In due course, women might obtain greater economic autonomy. In other words, feminists struggled for appreciation of the work of housewives, but at the same time they were articulating the depreciation of the role of housewife. This last element corresponds with actual labor market policy, which claims the social necessity of an increasing labor market participation of all adults, blaming them if they are economic dependent. This results in the ambivalent attitude towards mothering, that is observable in case of the paid care of children, especially in the school lunch set-up.

18. When I first went to assist with school lunches, I was not required to provide much information about my previous training and jobs. I arrived at 11.30 a.m., was given some brief instructions, and at 12 o'clock I was being 'dinner lady' for a class of 25 four-year-olds.

19. In 2002–2003 77% of the estimated 76,000 assistants worked as a paid 'volunteer', 14% worked as an unpaid volunteer, the rest of them were employees of the school; they worked for example as a school porter. Rineke van Daalen, *Overgebleven werk. Kinderen tussen de middag op school* (Amsterdam, 2005), 207; Anne Ketelaar, Ton Klein, Ron van Wonderen, *Evaluatie van de subsidieregelingen scholing overblijfskrachten 2002 en 2003* (Leiden, 2004).

20. Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism. The Third Logic* (Cambridge, 2001).

21. These questions deal for example with the quality of the school lunch and with the informal payment of the assistants who are working as 'volunteers'. See for example: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal*, 30 maart 2001, 8 oktober 2002 ('s Gravenhage, 2002, 2003).
22. In 2002 state subsidies for courses for the assistants became operative. *Uitleg*, 15/16, 19 juni 2002.
23. Andrew Delano Abbott, *The System of Professions. An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, 1988).
24. Rules for the children are written out, while assistants are given the task of enforcing them. Some examples are: "Do not spit," "Do not kick," "Do not pester," "Do not hit," "Do not swear," "Do not damage anything." Special rules concerning the conduct of assistants are also formulated. For instance: "You are not allowed to smoke in the playground," "If you are 5 minutes late, you will be fined," "Do not yell at children, do not speak in an insulting way, do not slap."
25. The earliest initiative is called 'Broodje mee'. van Daalen, *Overgebleven werk*. More recent courses are given by social workers, employees of the municipality of Amsterdam (Elly Kuit); by small offices staffed by different sorts of trainers, like Ed van Veen and Petra Schorn, who are familiar with primary education; by the institute for school-age child care (IOS), that is operative since 1989, and in 2006 has six employees. Since 2002, when the government legalized a measure aiming at schooling the assistants, these courses are financed by state subsidies.
26. They teach pedagogical, sociological and psychological topics and skills, in addition to giving instruction about healthy food, about toys for children of different ages, book-keeping expertise, and social skills in interacting with school staff.  
As regards their manners and their attitudes, they learn to suspend their judgment, to be empathetic and to take account of the ideas and feelings of their pupils, also when these are from a dissimilar cultural background. Behavioral standards of interaction with children are taught, for instance, how to develop a detached and reflective approach, or how to control one's anger.
27. These behavior standards correspond with the manners and affective dispositions that according to Norbert Elias characterize a civilized code of conduct. See: *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (Bern, 1969 (1939)); Cas Wouters, *Sex and Manners. Female Emancipation in the West 1890–2000* (London, 2004); Cas Wouters, "Manners," *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, Peter N. Stearns ed., (New York, 2001) vol. 4, section 17: 371–82; Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger. The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (Chicago, 1986).
28. Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism. The Third Logic* (Cambridge, 2001).
29. In 2003 33% of the Dutch working women were participating full-time in the labor market (35 hours a week or more). Wil Portegijs, Annemarie Boelens and Linda Olsthoorn, *Emancipatiemonitor 2004* (Den Haag, 2004), 63–90, Jelle Visser, *De sociologie van het halve werk* (Amsterdam, 1999).