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Summary

In old houses along the canals of Amsterdam one can often still see the servants' entrance underneath the large stairs to the main entrance. These double entrances illustrate the social inequality of earlier times. A comparison with this past arises when one studies the current market of paid domestic labour. Around 1900, well to-do households in the Netherlands employed a variety of domestic servants, particularly in large cities. These servants came from poorer, usually rural families, and provided full-time, live-in service. In recent times, domestic work is performed by a growing number of undocumented migrants, particularly in urban areas, as shown by international research. In these studies on the recent appearance of paid domestic labour, the phenomenon of domestic work is referred to as that of 'modern maids'.

The renewed growth in the personal services sector during the late 20th century has been described in many international studies. These analyses often pay considerable attention to the emotional aspects of paid domestic labour and to issues such as exploitation and inequality. At the same time, the economical aspects of the relationship between private employers and domestic workers are too often neglected. Yet without a clear view of the economic characteristics of the employment relationship between employers and domestic workers, the nature and organisation of the market for domestic work cannot be fully understood. Therefore, the starting point of this study is the economic relationship between employers and domestic workers.

This study is about supply and demand on the market of paid domestic labour, about domestic workers, the employers of domestic workers and the employment relationship between them. The central research question is: *how is the market of paid domestic labour organised in Amsterdam?* The aims of this study are to provide insight into a common but complex and difficult to measure phenomenon, to create a better understanding of the employment relationships, terms and contents of employment in this sector. 'The organisation of the market' also refers to the political, social and global context of paid domestic labour. The answer to the research question therefore also contributes to a better understanding of urban economies and the position of the players within it.

The central research question concerning the organisation of the market of paid domestic labour is specified into five sub-questions:

1. What is the historical and political institutional context in which the market of paid domestic labour has developed in the Netherlands?
2. Who are the domestic workers, why do they do this work and what is the degree of autonomy in their work?
3. Who outsources domestic work, why do they outsource it and how do they deal with the inequality that is involved in this kind of outsourcing?
4. How do both parties become employee and employer of one another?

5. What happens on the work floor and what characterises the employment relationship between employees and employers?

Chapter 2 describes the answer to the first sub-question and demonstrates similarities and differences between the past and the present. This chapter is based on existing literature on paid domestic work, whereas the other chapters are based on the empirical data collected in this study. Chapter 3 deals with the supply side of domestic work and seeks to answer the second sub-question by describing the characteristics of the group of domestic workers in this study, their motives for performing this type of labour and their degree of dependence or independence within their employment. Consequently, chapter 4 seeks to describe the employers. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the realisation and development of a employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers, the organisation of the market, and the roles of employee and employer. These two chapters answer the final two sub-questions. In particular, a distinction is made between a more business-like approach to the employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers and a more personal approach to this relationship.

Theoretical framework and relevant themes

Paid domestic work has a number of specific characteristics. Firstly, domestic work is traditionally characterised by inequality and servitude. Secondly, domestic work has a low status. It is work that requires no training and is physically demanding. Thirdly, domestic work takes place in the private sphere of the employer. In this private sphere, employers wish to maintain a certain degree of distance between themselves and the domestic worker.
Around 1900, emphasizing class differences was a common way of distinguishing between the employer and the servant whereas nowadays, many individuals find it difficult to deal with social inequalities in the private sphere. These characteristics, specific to domestic work, largely determine the organisation of paid domestic labour, as described in this study.

This is done by using four themes arising from existing literature, which are relevant to the market of paid domestic labour. The first theme stems directly from the specific characteristics of paid domestic work and can be described as *distance and closeness* in the personal employment relationship. The domestic worker and the employer have to shape the employment relationship as two private parties in the intimacy of private life. In contemporary society, there is no strong ideology regarding how one should deal with household personnel. This lack of clarity in the employment relationship influences and shapes the organisation of paid domestic work to a large extent.

The second theme arising from existing international literature on the recent phenomenon of domestic workers is that of *inequality and exploitation*. In this band of literature, it becomes clear that paid domestic work is increasingly carried out by migrants.

This global trade in domestic labour is frequently interpreted in the light of exploitation and inequality: economic inequality between countries, inequality in citizenship rights within countries, inequality in employment opportunities and an abuse of the vulnerable position of domestic workers. In my research, I chose not to form an opinion about exploitation beforehand. Under specific conditions, domestic workers can obtain and experience autonomy and opportunities.

In order to obtain an economic perspective regarding labour relations in paid domestic work, two additional themes are used in this thesis: *entrepreneurship in urban economies* and *employment relationships*. Entrepreneurship in urban economies refers to gaining insight into the entrepreneurship of migrants and the informal economy. Employment relationships on the other hand, refer to the distinction made by labour sociologists between a 'contract of work' and a 'contract of employment'. In addition, I interpret the organisation of work and the development of the employment relationship as shaped by domestic workers and employers in terms of the degree of professionalism.

Methodology

An invisible phenomenon like paid domestic work is best studied by use of an intensive, qualitative approach. In fact, the few studies available on paid domestic work in the Netherlands often overlook a large proportion of domestic workers as a result of the choice to rely on survey research. In particular, these studies overlook the importance of domestic work in large cities. Moreover, the informal economy, where a large proportion of paid domestic labour takes place, cannot be found in statistical data based on survey research.

The empirical data collection in this qualitative, descriptive study consisted mainly of face-to-face interviews. Informal meetings, conversations and observations were part of the data collection as well. A total of 47 formal interviews were conducted with 21 domestic workers and 19 employers. Respondents were recruited in various ways to maximize variation in the research population. The interviews took place at the respondents' own homes as much as possible and had an open character with a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were coded, processed and analysed using the qualitative software package Atlas-ti.

Findings

During the last decades of the 20th century, the economy was characterised by a growing service sector. The renewed outsourcing of domestic work is therefore often described as a typical post-industrial phenomenon. But the sector of domestic work also blossomed around 1900. Therefore, in chapter 2, the history of (paid) domestic work is described in three periods of time to determine what is new about current appearances of the domestic work sector.
The first period refers to the period around 1900, when domestic workers were called 'servants'. Well-to do households owed it to their class position to employ one or more servants. As domestic work was seen as inferior, outsourcing it increased the status of the

family. Historical studies that focus on this period demonstrate that paid domestic work was never fully perceived as real labour. In 19th century society, domestic service was seen as good preparation for working class girls for their marital life. The Dutch government also did not perceive domestic service as labour and repeatedly excluded it from labour regulations developing at the start of the 20th century. During this period, paid domestic work was, to a large extent, characterised by subordination and servitude.

The second period is a period in which outsourcing domestic work almost entirely disappeared. After WWII, the model of housewifery flourished in the Netherlands. During the 1960s, full-time housewives derived self esteem from a well-run household, the standard of what is 'clean' also increased and the nature of household work changed due to technological innovations. During this period, in which the lady of the house performed all household work on her own, strong ideologies on how to run a household *with* domestic servants disappeared.

The third period then is the slow return of the outsourcing of domestic labour, visible from the 1980s onwards. When outsourcing returned, it was a mixture of outsourcing and housewifery, whereby housewives continued to do some tasks while outsourcing others. The renewed outsourcing of domestic work is often attributed to the lack of time for household work caused by the increase in women's labour market participation. This is only partly true. Because even today, outsourcing inferior domestic tasks can be seen as a way of confirming one's status.

The empirical findings of this study are discussed in Chapters 3 through 6. Chapter 3 describes the domestic workers in this study and contextualizes the composition of this research population by comparing it to what is known about domestic workers in other countries. Many international studies show that domestic work is increasingly performed by undocumented migrants. These migrants are mostly women, who sometimes leave their children and flee the poor economic conditions in the country of origin. These studies also show that, in particular, *live-in* domestic workers can suffer from a lack of autonomy. Live-in domestic workers are rare in the Netherlands. Here, domestic service shifted from *live-in,* full-time 'servants' around 1900 to *live-out,* part-time domestic workers today. In popular discourse, one does not speak of 'servants' anymore, rather a domestic worker is called 'the help' or 'the cleaning lady'.

As Chapter 3 shows, domestic workers in this study, situated in Amsterdam, all live out. They have multiple contracts with up to 35 employers and therefore have greater autonomy than live-in domestic workers. The research population in this study varies in gender, age and the motives for performing domestic work. For example, domestic work is not only performed by women; male domestic workers are also represented in this study. However, all domestic workers in this study are undocumented migrants. Furthermore, in international research it is often stressed that domestic work is performed by women who leave their children in the country of origin, but this study shows more variety among domestic workers. In Amsterdam, domestic workers are also young people working to build their own future, for example to study or to start a business in their country of origin.

It should also be noted that in the Netherlands it is often assumed, for instance by the government, that the supply side of domestic labour consists of native Dutch women who use domestic work to earn *additional income.* That is not the case in this study; all domestic workers interviewed work full-time to obtain an *income to survive*. These full-time domestic workers are much more dependent on their work than native women, who use domestic work to earn extra money.

After looking at the group of domestic workers, Chapter 4 goes on to consider the employers of domestic workers in this study. This group is more homogeneous than the group of domestic workers. Most employing families are a one-and-a-half earning household, where the man works full-time and the woman part-time, with one or two young children. There are also dual income couples and single households without children among the employers of domestic workers, but they are a minority. All employers are highly educated, having obtained the equivalent of a bachelor's or master's degree. In addition, the employers of domestic workers represent the more affluent residents of the Netherlands. In that sense, there is a similarity between contemporary employers of domestic workers and the richer households employing servants in the early 20th century. A significant difference, however, is the wide distribution of incomes among households that outsource domestic work nowadays. Further, Chapter 4 shows a broad variety in motives for outsourcing domestic tasks. In addition to the well known motive of a lack of time, this study describes three other motives: the low popularity of domestic tasks, the outsourcing of conflicts about domestic tasks between men and women (based on who is responsible for what) and the continuation or confirmation of a certain lifestyle and status. However, most employers do not want to acknowledge the luxury aspect of hiring a domestic worker and stress firmly that they continue to do a lot of household work themselves. In this instance, the empirical material demonstrates the continued legacy of the housewifery model. Dutch women cannot or will not detach themselves from the image of being able to do it all - both household tasks and paid work outside the household. They outsource domestic work for a limited amount of hours and what is not done through outsourcing, they will do themselves.

Having discussed the supply and demand sides of the market for paid domestic work, this study continues by looking at the organisation of domestic work in chapters 5 and 6. Here the relevant questions are: how do both parties recruit one another? What agreements do they make? The market for domestic work is organised informally between private individuals, without the intervention of a company or the government. Employers and employees have to recruit one another and come to an agreement about tasks to be carried out and the fee that is to be paid as private individuals. This organisation requires trust and the recruiting strategies employed by both sides are strongly related to this concept. The embeddedness of the employment relationship in a social network is a low cost, flexible way to establish trust.

In Chapter 5 a distinction is made in recruiting strategies between strategies that are network based and autonomous strategies. Autonomous recruitment strategies used by

domestic workers consist of advertising on the Internet, advertising in supermarkets and delivering small advertisement notes in people's mailboxes. Autonomous strategies are mostly used by domestic workers who are just starting out. The advantage to these strategies is that there is no dependence on others and they are large in scope. The disadvantage, however, is the anonymity: domestic workers do not obtain any information about possible new employers, for example, regarding their trustworthiness. Recruitment strategies based on networking, in contrast, increase the likelihood of good and reliable work addresses. Recruitment strategies based on networking can consist of mediation by some third party who knows of prospective employers, taking over the tasks of another domestic worker at their previous address of employment or the snowball method: obtaining one employer via another.

The recruitment strategies of employers are primarily based on their own network; employers hardly use autonomous strategies to recruit a domestic worker. Employers are concerned with being able to trust a stranger in the privacy of their own home, which is much easier to realise when someone else has already tested the trustworthiness of the domestic worker. Terms of employment are often also 'inherited' from that same reference. Consequently, there is a negative side to the social embeddedness of the employment relationship: both parties have only limited room for negotiation. Tasks, hours and prices are adopted from the reference. This keeps transaction costs low; however, individual wishes and expectations are not specified in the new employment relationship. By using this recruitment strategy and the subsequent adoption of employment agreements, employers can avoid acting like an employer. For domestic workers, social embeddedness of a new employment relationship means it is extremely difficult for them to demand a higher price for their services.

The importance of networks and trust is also demonstrated in how both parties relate to the role of employer or employee. In Chapter 6, I distinguish the degrees of professionalism both parties show in the organisation of domestic work and I consider the different styles maintained by employers and employees that vary across the degree of professionalism. In general, domestic workers show a high degree of professionalism and shape the employment relationship in a business-like manner. Domestic workers have a much clearer view about the exchange of labour for money. Employers on the other hand are often vague and unclear about the tasks they want done. The domestic worker "just has to clean". When it comes to fringe benefits, both employers and employees are vague and not very business-like; rather they shape this aspect of the employment relationship in a personal manner. Agreements about taking breaks and holidays are virtually non-existent. The lack of clarity in expectations, wishes and responsibilities on both sides causes frustration in the employment relationship, and this affects employers much more than domestic workers. Employers hire only one domestic worker, whereas domestic workers have anywhere from six to 35 different employers. In this respect, employers are more dependent upon their domestic worker than vice versa.

Differences in the degree of professionalism are reflected in the various styles adopted by domestic workers and employers. For domestic workers, I distinguish three successive

employee styles: an instrumental style, an egalitarian style and a style of servitude. A majority of domestic workers take up an instrumental, autonomous style in their employment relationships. Their degree of professionalism in shaping the employment relationship is high, they accept the inequality that these employment relationships imply and they emphasise the financial opportunities and the freedom domestic work provides. For employers, I also distinguish three separate employer styles: a style of professionalism, a style of familiarism and a style of avoidance in the employment relationship. The latter is most common among employers. Employers struggle much more with the inequality evident in the employment relationship. As a response to those feelings, most employers avoid being an employer in the actual sense of the word and thereby avoid the inequality of the employment relationship. This leads to unclear, vague agreements with the domestic worker because they actually feel uneasy with hiring someone else to do the dirty work.

Following the empirical analyses, the central findings and conclusions are presented in Chapter 7. One of the main findings is the mismatch of styles adopted by domestic workers and employers in shaping the employment relationship. A lack of professionalism among employers in essence strengthens the low status of domestic work. Clear agreements on terms and contents of employment would decrease the inequality inherent in domestic labour. Because of feelings of uneasiness and shame and the adopted style of avoidance, employers actually enhance the inequality inherent in domestic work and do not acknowledge the domestic worker as an entrepreneur.

Chapter 7 also considers a number of policy implications. This study shows that attempts undertaken by the Dutch government to formalize the market of paid domestic work do not correspond to the phenomenon of domestic work in urban areas. Policy schemes such as Service at Home (*Dienstverlening Aan Huis*, DAH) and Private Cleaning (*Regeling Schoonmaak Particulieren*, RSP) are based upon a formal supply of individuals performing domestic work part-time. This study describes a supply-side consisting of undocumented migrants performing full-time domestic work. Existing policy schemes are also based on a demand side that consists of employers with a high degree of professionalism in their attitude toward outsourcing domestic workers, while this study shows most employers lack professionalism. Employers want to trust a stranger in the private sphere and the informal organisation of paid domestic work provides this trust and flexibility. Moreover, the informal organisation of domestic labour provides domestic workers with autonomy and the freedom to act like an entrepreneur, which decreases the low status of domestic labour. However, it would be a positive development if migrants employed in domestic work could become eligible for valid residence and work permits. In addition, from the side of employers, much could be gained in terms of information and education. They are poorly informed about their rights and obligations as employers of domestic workers. Finally, a hallmark used to indicate the quality of domestic service being offered would enhance the transparency of the market of domestic labour and would additionally have an emancipating effect on domestic work.