

This book is part of Africa in the New Millennium, a series initiated by CODESRIA to present African scholarship on current policy and practice issues. More specifically, the book is “a tiny part of many more reflections to come” (p. ix) resulting from a comparative research network on “Globalisation, Migration, Citizenship and Xenophobia in South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe”, which Nyamnjoh coordinated for two years from Gaborone.

The book’s empirical focus is paid domestic service in Gaborone, especially the relation between migrant maids from Zimbabwe and the Botswana women who employ them. Much like some scholars characterized the relationship between maids and madams in apartheid South Africa as a microcosm of that country’s gender, race, and class divisions, Nyamnjoh approaches today’s employment relationship in paid domestic service as a microcosm of globalisation. The paradox of globalization, according to this study, is openness and inclusion prompted by the free flow of commodities and capital combined with exclusion. For, while capital roams the globe seeking competitive advantage, labor is denied the same principle (p. 12). Intensifying divisions between citizens and subjects within societies and between the North and the South, globalisation accentuates existing lines of gender, race, and class, extending them in new ways geographically. In short, the private household is a site where some of the consequences of globalisation play out at close range, in this case as exploitative labor practices and xenophobia.

There have been several waves of scholarly work on domestic service, including a fairly recent wave concerned with the global trade in maids that this book does not reckon with. In fact, Nyamnjoh seems more at home with wide-ranging discussions about globalization and its general discontents than with the specifics of everyday servant lives and their encompassing contexts. In the introduction and the first two chapters,

developments in South Africa receive more attention than they do in Botswana. Readers are introduced to the *Makwerekwere*, a term apparently used both in South Africa and Botswana to designate a foreign African illegal immigrant, mostly with invidious connotations concerning intelligence and morality. In chapter four, Nyamnjoh develops the notion of *zombification* to characterize “not only unthinking and routinized exploitative behavior, but also the impunity of insensitivity to the humanity of the other” (p. 142) that he found so widespread in domestic service.

Insiders & Outsiders takes a while to showcase the study of domestic service in Gaborone. Chapter three overviews scholarship on domesticity and domestic service within the southern African region and beyond, with particular attention to global trends. The coverage is spotty, some of it using newspaper write-ups where in fact social science scholarship is available. Chapters four and five discuss the study carried out in Gaborone, consisting of 80 interviews with maids and their employers conducted by Nyamnjoh and a survey of 300 servants carried out by sociology research assistants. Methodologically, domestic service is a notoriously difficult relationship to examine because of its location within the

private household. This difficulty is illuminated through excerpts from reports by the research assistants detailing issues arising from their reception in private households and permission or denial to undertake interviews. But surprisingly, Nyamnjoh does not offer any parallel insights about his own experience as a researcher, a male foreign African at that, and the kind of reception he received when wishing to interview women in an employment relationship that often is sexually fraught (as hinted at on pp. 213-214). In what languages did he interview, and did he make use of interpreters when maids spoke only Shona or Tswana?

Chapter four takes us into the servant-employing households in Gaborone. There is a hierarchy among maids, with Zimbabwean maids at the bottom, and constituting slightly more than half of the sample. Employers prefer them because of their acceptance of low wages, yet they never trust them. Unlike Botswana maids, the foreign maids can more readily be ordered around. Not protected by rules and regulations, many of them defer to their employers’ whims for fear of losing their jobs. From the maids’ point of view, in terms of pay and treatment, there is also a hierarchy among employers with Europeans and North Americans at the top and Indians and Chinese at the bottom.

Domestic Service in Gaborone

Karen Tranberg Hansen

Insiders & Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa

by Francis B. Nyamnjoh,

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Although maids are relatively powerless and very vulnerable in their relationship to their employers, they do not all defer passively. Chapter five discusses how maids try to juggle the asymmetries of the employment situation, some turning the tables on the madam by substituting her role, and others through everyday forms of resistance, including paying themselves what they consider their due through pilfering and petty theft. While there is no domestic servants’ union in Botswana, there is an NGO that advocates the improvement of labor conditions on the part of local, not foreign, maids. Both chapter four and five make use of excerpts from interviews to enliven the discussion and add personal voice to the observations. Many of these excerpts are excessively long and might have worked more effectively if they had been paraphrased. What is more, readers are only in rare instances offered the kind of detail that might have helped to flesh out the women involved as real individuals such as name, age, personal, and regional background (rural versus urban). In effect, the study is short on context. Even if maids work long hours, we learn precious little about the social lives of the maids when away from the employing household. There is less than one page about church membership, for example, a practice described as important for solidarity.

To talk about housework is to talk about power as Nyamnjoh correctly notes (p. 225). Foreign maids are not citizens. His concluding chapter makes arguments in favor of flexible notions of citizenship in a world that is “pregnant with mobility” (p. 238). At this point, foreign maids and xenophobia have become incidental to his overarching concern with “new, more flexible, negotiated, cosmopolitan and popular forms of citizenship, with emphasis on inclusion, conviviality and the celebration of difference” (p. 230).

