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# Gender, Migration and Domestic Work

## Masculinities, Male Labour and Fathering in the UK and USA

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with

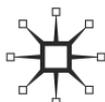
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# Preface

We completed this book in the early summer of 2012 as a number of European societies were buckling under the heavy weight of austerity programmes introduced in response to the ongoing global financial and economic crisis. While many of the consequences of such unprecedented cuts in public expenditure in Europe and the USA are yet to become apparent, one – unemployment, especially among young people – has already reached devastating levels in many countries. Arguably, therefore, to have a job is a fortunate position to be in. Such ‘fortune’ can be double-edged, however, as in neoliberal economies bosses and governments now add the fear of unemployment to their disciplinary armoury. Of course, this is affecting workers differently depending on where they are positioned within the employment structure and depending on what role work plays in constructing and maintaining their subjectivity.

For the professional and managerial men that form part of this book’s enquiry, the disciplinary whip is one of time and commitment. The job pays handsomely, but invades ever deeper into their lives, assuming in fact, the non-existence of life beyond work. While some men enjoy the all-encompassing nature of their jobs, many also realise that it is not free of cost, and in particular puts at risk their ability to meet the competing expectation for active and involved fathering, as well as imposing penalties on their female partners who are expected to organise their own jobs to fit around those of their husbands. But as this book demonstrates, the costs extend further than their own households, as buoyed by their rising earnings (even in the midst of economic crisis) and increasing income inequalities, these households outsource the domestic work traditionally done by men. Other men (handymen and gardeners) and women (cleaners, carers and cooks) become part of the ‘coping strategies’ of the well-off. In the context of globalization and the uneven patterns of development that ensue, those ‘other’ men and women are increasingly migrant workers. Migration is ‘their’ means of ‘coping’ with the inequalities wrought by globalization, and as we show in this book, this coping strategy frequently works, in that better livelihoods are secured. But, this too is not a cost-free strategy. The status of migrants can be used as a disciplinary whip to enforce low pay, long

hours and insecurity, putting at risk other dimensions of well-being, including the capacity for family life.

The well-being of families, regardless of country of origin, therefore, is increasingly constituted through transnational social relations. To be sure, these are not equal relations; because of their privileged economic and geopolitical positioning, the well-off families who outsource their domestic labour are the main beneficiaries. But migrants, their families and their countries of origin, albeit to lesser degrees, can benefit too. These private resolutions show just how resourceful people are, but they are partial, because they do not challenge the inequalities of global capitalism nor the prevailing understandings of masculinity that contribute to making these difficult choices necessary. At the time of writing it is deeply worrying, therefore, to see politicians across Europe and the USA deploy the 'anti-immigrant card' in the face of economic crisis and rising joblessness. Without doubt, this will lead to worsening conditions for migrant workers and their families. The experiences of migrant workers and middle-class families that employ them add evidence that strengthens demands for reform of economic and social policies in order to achieve more balanced and fairer lives.

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