

Opinion

The Job of Maidservant

Ilka Oliva Corado

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As of late human rights defenders call us domestic helpers, to lessen the blow, but call a spade a spade: we are maidservants, our function is to serve.

From there on, we can break down the gamut of abuses experienced for those of us who work in domestic service and maintenance. No matter the country, the reality of the servants is the same everywhere. We are not going to feign innocence, and to point an accusing finger at the United States as the cause of all our ills. In India, there are castes, in Latin America, the colonized minds, and so we got every country and continent, each with its own evils.

It is not about skin color, nationality, or language, it is about who has the power, because who has power abuses and discriminates, against anybody. The job of nanny and domestic helper is the same, only the name changes: in both the job is to serve. And I say serve with all the weight of the word: day and night. When the children are in school or in private classes, we the babysitters take charge of cleaning the house, playrooms, cooking, and washing clothes: the housekeeping. The job of the maid is the same, and both are treated like old furniture. Because one cleans dirty diapers and the other dirty bathrooms, both working amidst the shit.

Nannies are the moms' substitutes, we are there all the time, because moms are in their yoga classes, having tea with friends or traveling around the world. Some of them, just a few, have a job. Then the nannies unwittingly, as a result of our work, dispense hugs, understand emotions, take care of diseases, tell stories and stay up late at night, and give moral support to children who we learn to love as our own, and who in the future when they realize about our role at home and in society, will treat us like disposable old furniture. Because it is the pattern, because they are part of capitalism culture circle.

We the maids, know the intimacy of the families, even what they don't want anyone to learn about, we know temperaments, vices, fears, boastings, voids and pretensions. Because we are there all the time, invisible, old furniture which are moved around, from one place to another, so they do not get in the way. We work in silence, so as to go unnoticed because, what does a maid have to tell? How can a maid interact with her employers, especially when they have a cradle of gold, and diplomas, and rub shoulders with the cream of society? In no way, the maid does not feel, does not think, has no emotions, is there to serve, she's never seen as a person, does not exist as a human being.

We don't get tired, we never have the right to get sick, to be depressed, to yearn, to miss, we have no right to labor benefits either, holidays are for others not for us. We are not entitled to emergencies because then, who will clean the rooms, wash the dishes, iron the master's shirt, make breakfast and mop? Who will get the mail, the bread and go to the supermarket? Who will take care of the children's fever? Who will clean the vomit of the man of the house who came drunk early in the morning?

And if in spite of the abuse everything goes beyond inconceivable extremes, domestic helpers are also sexually abused by the employer, his children and his friends, and all this under the cover of the housewife who turns a blind eye. Because, after all, men are like that, thirsty for pleasure all the time, and better to fuck the maid than a sex worker who can infect them with a disease.... And in most cases that maid is a girl younger than 12 years.

We the domestic helpers, have no right to menstrual cramps, because we are machines, and also not to

get distressed when our children are sick at home or in the nursery where we leave them in order to go to work. We have no right to long for our parents and brothers who we left in the village when we went to the capital, or immigrated to another country. We have an obligation to be whole to serve our employers, we live because of them and for them, our lives do not exist, they have no right to exist. Neither our birthdays, nor the Christmas season, nor the holidays, we are on duty every day of the year, at all hours.

The domestic helpers keep intimate secrets that any friend of our employers would give everything to learn about. They never express their gratitude for our ethics, what can a bathroom cleaner know about ethics? What can she know about painting, art, reading, wine, fine cheeses and gourmet foods? It's one thing to cook and serve them, and another to interact.

What can a maid know about brand-name clothes, expensive perfumes and smart phones? Perhaps nothing, but she is the one that takes care of the most prized the employers have: their children. They would never give the car keys to a maid to go to the supermarket or the pharmacy, but they do entrust their children to her all day, and the house keys. A car can be damaged, but what value do their children have, to leave them with a complete stranger who does not know the language, or how to dial an emergency number, and on top of it undocumented, if she is a migrant. How can they entrust their children to an ignorant woman lacking basic knowledge to survive in a society of ego and opportunism?

They would never lend to her their brand new car, but permit her to do the cooking, and clean their rooms, and take the kids to school. That she finds the dildos lying on the floor or between the sheets and wash them, and place them in the drawers where they are kept. Intimacies known only by us domestic helpers. And we have no right to become attached ourselves, because the furniture does not feel, those children are not ours, one day they will grow up and they will remember us with a kick in the ass, and with a dismissal without warning, from one day to the next. As if all of a sudden one could forget the memories, cut off the affection and assimilate that one was only an old piece of furniture to which the time to be dumped has come.

What rest will need a pariah working like a mule? None, because for that she was to be born, generationally she was born for that, to serve as a mule.

That's why they are so surprised when a domestic helper breaks the circle and spreads the wings and flies. With sacrifice she studies and becomes a professional, she immerses herself in the world of the arts, becomes a businesswoman, or returns to the fields from which she came, to make them flourish. But for every maid who manages to escape the hell, there are thousands who wither and die slowly victims of the abuse and exclusion. And they all have a proper name, families, root, identity, dreams. And they all feel in the depths of their being, and have passions, and they love and create, because they are human beings.

Have any of you, dear readers, ever talked to a domestic helper, looking into her eyes, and have you treated her as an equal? Have you ever put yourself in her place, and wondered what would become of your life if you had been working in the domestic service? That being the case, what would you change? Why do you not change it for others? And let's not talk about guts; let's talk about humanity and humility.

@ilkaolivacorado
contacto[AT]cronicasdeunainquilina.com
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Translated by Marvin Najarro