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Laura Humphreys, *Globalising Housework: Domestic Labour in Middle-Class London Homes, 1850-1914*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2021, pp. xii + 222, h/b, £120, ISBN 978 03676 26679

This is a hodge-podge of a book, a term I was surprised to discover is not of Old Dutch, Anglo-Indian, or American origin but comes from Middle English and thus cannot be attributed to the globalizing tendencies of the age which are at the centre of this book. The abstract on the half-title page states that the 'book shows how international influences profoundly shaped the "English" home of Victorian and Edwardian London'. The author is a museum curator and, as this might lead one to expect, she pays much more attention to objects than is common in labour history. Chapter 3 is about food and cookery, particularly the influence of French chefs, French cookery books, and French cuisine. Chapter 4, about 'cleaning London homes', is, as we shall see below, a hodge-podge within a hodge-podge. Chapter 5 is again something of a mélange with three sections: one on Indian *ayahs* in London, another on French and German governesses, and another on the kindergarten which was, of course, an innovation of German origin. Chapter 6 concludes.

Readers of this *Review* are likely to be most interested in the discussion of domestic labour and the most sustained discussion of this opens the book in chapter 2, following the introduction. The author begins by arguing that domestic labour in Victorian and Edwardian England was surrounded by failings and anxieties, writing at one point of 'turmoil' (26) affecting the 'nation' at home, the evidence for which is found in the volume of the domestic advice literature published at the time, supplemented by commentaries found in travel writing and memoirs. The author takes the 'servant problem' proclaimed by the contemporary literature, written mainly for or by the servant-employing middle-classes, largely at face value. This, she admits, was largely the mistresses' problem of hiring and

retaining servants (29); the servant's problem of finding a liberal and well-paying mistress finds only the briefest of discussions (37, 44). The author argues that the mistresses's problem was a particularly metropolitan problem on the basis of census statistics showing the proportion of domestic servants, both residential and non-residential in the population of 'London' falling continuously from 1851 to 1921 (Table 2.2 and 54, note 3). Quite how 'London' is defined in this context is not explained and the possibility remains that the data show only the suburbanization of servant-employing households, moving from what we would now regard as central or inner London to what was, at the very end of this period, becoming the 'Metroland' of Middlesex and the Chilterns, to Surrey, and the other Home Counties. The chapter ends with a survey of published commentaries and other literature on English domestic life by foreign writers, and a survey of the domestic life of 'Anglo-Imperial returners'. The foreign writers utter a chorus of criticism on the conservatism of English households centered in particular on the qualities of English cooking in comparison with the French and even the German. The returners, predictably, suffered disillusion and experienced an alienation from what they had called 'home' in their long years abroad. These final passages, though saying little about domestic labour, are of real originality, value, and interest.

Chapter 3 is concerned with cookery. While the author remarks that '[t]he work of the kitchen was ... one of the most central components of domestic labour', the focus of the chapter is not on domestic labour. It is on 'health and wellbeing' (of the mistress and her family, not the servants), the communication of taste and identity, on meaning, on the 'rhythms and traditions' of the home, on gender roles, on food as a 'form of expression', especially of social aspiration, and on food as a signifier of wealth, status, and national identity (55-6). The author admits that the 'voice of the English cook' is a particularly difficult one to draw out of the archive (57) and she returns to the sources we have seen

already: domestic advice manuals, foreign commentaries, and the periodical press written for the middle-class household mistress. Many of these sources suggest one of the major failures of the English market in residential domestic service: the absence of any training available to aspiring cooks and chefs other than that provided by their own parents, or the occasional mistress who was kind enough, or desperate enough, to train a 'plain cook' into one capable of attempting the classics of French cuisine. Nevertheless this problem is never clearly identified here and forms no part of the author's discussion.

Chapter 4 is concerned with household cleaning. Advertisements for cleaning products are analysed and found to be suffused with racist imagery. A case study of the carpet-sweeper is used to show that advertising for the product shifted from emphasizing American innovation to British manufacturing quality. Whether it led to an easing of the house-maid's work or only to more frequent carpet cleaning, as the 'paradox of housework' (helpfully reviewed by Jonathan Gershuny, 'Domestic equipment does not increase domestic work: a response to Bittman, Rice and Wajcman', *British Journal of Sociology*, 55 (2004), 425-31) warns us would have been a possibility, is not discussed. It is argued that British standards of personal cleanliness were improved by the example of Anglo-Imperial returners who had become accustomed to daily bathing after long days perspiring in warm climates without the possibility, for most, of adopting indigenous dress. There is then a discussion of washing the laundry which focuses on the contrasting practices of undertaking the work at home and sending the work out to washer-women working in *their* homes or to a laundry company organized along industrial lines. The diffusion of industrial laundries under the influence of American practices, themselves influenced by scarce labour and high wages, is noted. The author suggests that metropolitan homes were often among the first to adopt innovations in domestic technology, a point which she connects with the

supposedly extreme 'servant problem' in London. It may instead, or also, have been related to the relatively high household incomes in the metropolis.

Chapter Five moves on to childcare and is concerned to demonstrate the internationalization of childcare and education in late nineteenth-century London. It is a chapter of three parts, one concerned with London *ayahs,* another concerned with foreign governesses, and the third with the introduction of the kindergarten from Germany. The kindergarten, based on principles enunciated by Friedrich Fröbel of Germany in the 1840s, reached London in 1855 and became a familiar form of nursery schooling in the 1870s. Nevertheless, although the popularity of the kindergarten in certain circles fed a demand for nursery governesses trained in the system, those governesses were not necessarily German (or Swiss)-born, or German-speaking. Indeed, a training college for those wishing to learn the system was established in London in 1892 and presumably recruited mainly English students. Humphreys' argument that this is an aspect of domestic globalization is therefore based simply on the point that the system originated in Germany and was thought to be specifically (and objectionably) Germanic in some of the contemporary advice literature. The context for this is missing from Humphrey's account. English pedagogy had been globalized long before Fröbel, through its origins in classical Greek thought and through its long-standing domination by the English Church, which of course professed religious doctrines imported from the Middle East, and the contestation of that domination by Nonconformist churches some of whose doctrines originated in Bohemia (Jan Hus), Germany (Luther), and Switzerland (Zwingli, Calvin). To find a purely indigenous English, or rather Anglo-Saxon, pedagogy one would have to go back to the time of Alfred the Great. In this context the contribution of Fröbel seems a minor adjustment in a very long-standing interaction with internationally diffused cultures and ideas.

More generally, one notes an absence from this book of any discussion of what globalization is and what its chronology has been; was it, as Marx and Engels suggested in the *Communist Manifesto*, a then recent phenomenon closely connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie, or had it originated in the European discovery of the 'New World', or could its beginnings be traced back even further, to the trading links of the Silk Road, first travelled in the second century BCE, or the trans-Saharan caravans carrying gold and salt, established, according to the most conservative current historiography, in the eighth century CE? In practice, Humphreys implicitly assumes that globalization was a phenomenon of the period she discusses: from 850 to 1914.

French and German (or Swiss) governesses were often wanted because of their assumed ability to teach their mother tongue. Humphreys' discussion is based largely on contemporary classified advertisements. These demonstrate that mistresses often required French and German governesses to be professed Protestants, although this seems not to have been in order that they might teach their charges their religion.

The material on *ayahs* is fascinating, although the author does little with it, concluding only that '[t]hey were a significant, and thus far underestimated, community of women of colour ... who brought empire into the home and the nursery' (171). The author implies that *ayahs* usually arrived in London after being hired to look after the children of a returning Anglo-Imperial on the long sea voyage home. Many, but not all, would be dismissed on landing, a fate so common that commercial and later charitable *ayah's* homes existed in London, the first founded in 1825. Rosina Visram's earlier research (*Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, London, Pluto, 1986) suggested that 'the' Ayah's Home, meaning that owned by the London City Mission from 1900, had about 30 rooms with about 90 *ayahs* passing through in an average year (148). Press reports suggest that *ayahs* were a familiar sight in late nineteenth-century London, though not

elsewhere in England (152). What happened to them? Census records confirm their presence working as *ayahs* looking after English children but reveal little else. They appear to have been typically unmarried on arrival in London; it is not clear whether they were able to marry later and establish an independent household; nor is it clear what proportion returned to India. The last appearance of the 'Ayah's Home' in the current *British Newspaper Archive* is a brief report in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (16 November 1929) reproducing one from the *Daily Dispatch*, reporting the retirement of the Mrs Thomas who had managed the home until that point. Whether the home survived this upheaval I do not know.

The author concludes that 'London houses were truly global homes' (175) and it is implicit that this was true of the whole period from 1850 to 1914. This is not a surprising conclusion. By 1850 the whole British economy was suffused with the products of international trade. By 1850 London was one of the world's largest international ports. By 1850 London was the political centre of an Empire which stretched east to Singapore and Hong Kong, south to the Cape Colony, west to the Caribbean, and north to the Hudson Bay. With this trade and this imperialism came some migration both inward and outward. But the development of this migration was much slower than the development in trade in commodities and in the international exchange of science and culture. Even in 1911, 96.5 per cent of the people living in England and Wales had been born in England or Wales, another 1.0 per cent had been born in Ireland, and another 0.9 per cent in Scotland. Only 1.0 per cent had been born in foreign countries and 0.4 per cent in India or in the colonies (with the remainder born in the 'islands in the British seas' or at sea). The largest communities of foreigners in London in 1911 were Russians and Russian Poles (63,000), followed by Germans (about 18,000) (University of Portsmouth and others, *A Vision of Britain Through Time*, Census of England and Wales, 1911, VII: Birthplaces, notes on Table

CIX, https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/EW1911GEN/8 (accessed 2 April 2022)). That the overwhelming majority of these foreigners lived in the East End suggests that they were poor and that consequently few would have had any personal influence on the British middle classes. Though some individuals did have a major impact, Marx and Engels for example, this was hardly on the domestic lives of the London middle classes: Marx is not famous for his cook books and few middle-class couples followed Engels's example of refraining from marrying his wife. If one focuses on housework, it is hard to get away from the fact that the overwhelming majority of London residential domestic servants had been born in the UK, knew no other country, and spoke no other language than English. The globalization of the British middle-class home came hardly at all from the globalization of domestic labour, that is labour by workers of global, and not British, origins. The globalization of the British middle-class home came from the consumption of things and the acquisition of cultures and knowledge from and about the rest of the world, not from the use of global labour.

One needs to only remember the familiar features of middle-class homes in Victorian and Edwardian England to see the truth of this. The average middle-class family of London was almost always English-born and, if it hired any servants at all (not all did so), would have hired perhaps one, two, or three servants (only the very wealthiest would have hired more) who would almost always be English-born as well (Quentin Outram, 'The demand for residential domestic service in the London of 1901, *Economic History Review*, 70(3) (2017), 893-918). But they might eat off willow pattern crockery bearing scenes of China, and wash their evening meals down with glasses of French claret or German hock, followed, for the gentlemen, by Cuban cigars or Virginia tobacco. More sober and abstemious families might instead drink more of the tea from China, India or Ceylon that had sustained them all throughout the day. They might sit and eat at mahogany furniture

fashioned from timber harvested in the West Indies, or possibly, Central or South America. In the drawing room, pride of place would be given to a piano with its black and white keys distinguished by veneers of ebony, perhaps from west Africa, and ivory, perhaps from the Congo Free State, Kenya, or Zanzibar (Clive A. Spinage, *Elephants*, London, 1994). The family may have been inspired to play and to practice by concerts given by pianists such as Mlle. Sandra Droucker of St Petersburg (not French, but the daughter of a Russian mother and a German father) at the Bechstein Hall (built by the German piano manufacturer, Carl Bechstein; now the Wigmore Hall) in the West End in December 1901who gave a recital featuring works by Chopin, Grieg, Liszt, and Schubert and from which the works of English composers were absent. On the floor beside the piano might be a 'Persian' carpet. The girls and women of the household may have adorned themselves with clothes featuring the Persian motif known ironically in Britain as a 'Paisley' pattern; the men may have worn silk waistcoats over shirts made of linen or American or Egyptian cotton and, when out and about, top hats made with silk plush. The very richest of the women may have worn Middle Eastern pearls, Indian sapphires, or Siamese rubies. It would be hard not to see in such a household that London was already at the centre of the world, or, as we would say nowadays, at the heart of a globalized economy and a globalizing culture, despite the London accents of its domestic servants.

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