



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

**Aalborg Universitet**

## **'Male-Streaming Development', Review**

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*Published in:*  
Kvinder, Køn & Forskning

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document Version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Madsen, D. H. (2012). 'Male-Streaming Development', Review. *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning*, 1-2/12.

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# R E V I E W S

## EVEN STORY ABOUT ODD COUPLES

*Jens Rydström: Odd Couples. A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia. Aksant Academic Publishers. 2011. 248 pages. £ 23.70.*

One amazing thing about Swedish historian Jens Rydström's fine account of recent developments in the Nordic countries concerning same sex unions is how in less than a generation attitudes have changed so dramatically. This is a case where recent or contemporary history can demonstrate how small revolutions take place right before our very eyes. Almost invisibly not only gay marriage but also rainbow families have become such everyday phenomena that we now hardly remember how only a generation ago homosexuality was closely connected to "sterility, barrenness, and death" (p. 36), as a Swedish member of parliament in 1977 phrased it, explicitly reserving life, development, and the future to heterosexuals.

The story of this radical, fundamental, but yet somewhat discreet, transformation in the Nordic countries is the topic of this thorough, down-to-earth piece of scholarship. The advantages of Rydström's approach are obvious. He combines a narrative that introduces the reader to the political landscape and recent history of the five independent Nordic countries, along with Greenland and the Faroe Islands, with interesting details and behind-the-scenes commentary. The latter are based

on interviews with homosexual and queer activists and the many politicians who helped and supported the cause. Unfortunately, there are no interviews with opponents, who might have added interesting perspectives on the resistance to the law and perhaps thrown light on how and why the skeptics gradually changed their views. Instead, we get a traditional, but fascinating, story of linear progression with a fairly happy end. As is well known, when Denmark became the first country in the world to pass a law on registered partnership in 1989, it set in motion a legal transformation that would have international domino effects. Norway and Sweden followed in the nineties, and soon thereafter even conservative countries like Finland, Greenland and Iceland joined in – together with a number of European countries. The embarrassing odd man out is the Faroe Islands, the last remaining bastion of homophobia in the Nordic world. This situation was only slightly altered when the country, after much ado and pressure from abroad, in 2006 finally passed a law, although by a very slim margin, prohibiting discrimination based on sexuality. The country still opposes any kind of same sex partnership initiative.

Rydström delivers sound introductions to the political history of each of the countries and the gradual emergence and acceptance of the initiatives concerning same sex partnership, marriage, and adoption. Norway and Sweden

soon surpassed Denmark by passing gender neutral marriage laws, thus doing away with the last remnants of discrimination. Iceland and the Netherlands have now done the same. Iceland, in fact, changed very dramatically. The country now has an openly lesbian prime minister, and gay pride has become a national topic, almost a symbol of the modern Icelandic state. Finland, with its long homophobic history, has also seen profound changes in the attitude toward sexual variation in the 21st century.

Rydström mixes the big story with little stories in an interesting way; in fact, he displays a certain inclination toward the personal details, especially the private backgrounds of politicians, which makes his book a valuable resource. His analyses of details in the different but clearly interconnected processes in the various Nordic countries are convincing; however, sometimes the big picture is in danger of disappearing in details. He has a certain, rather dangerous proclivity for monocausal and sometimes oversimplified narratives. For instance, he completely dismisses Danish sociologist Henning Bech's claim that the Danish "frisind" ("mentality of liberalism and tolerance") was a factor in the introduction of the partnership law, which he considers to be "a bit far-fetched" (p. 28). Although he presents a convincing theory of the Nordic welfare state, he did not need to exclude other explanatory dimensions of the history he tells. For example, Rydström

still needs to explain why the law was first passed in Denmark and not elsewhere – in Sweden, for instance. The myth of the Danish mentality, which has a certain currency among the population as a whole, certainly played a part in leading to the general acceptance of the law. Many proud Danes saw continuity between Denmark's attitude towards the Jews during World War Two (where the majority were saved by being shipped to neutral Sweden), the decriminalization of pornography, and the law on registered partnership.

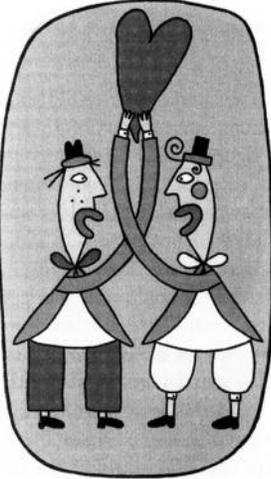
Another problem with Rydström's historical method is that it remains overly tied to the drama of political action and thus to the role of political actors. Almost everything in this narrative seems to take place as the direct result of certain people's actions, particularly politicians and gay activists. This need not have been a problem if Rydström had explicitly limited his approach to the role of actual individuals. Doing so would have been a history that is valuable and necessary and deliberately limited, hence that would then ask to be supplemented by other narratives of political changes on other levels. But Rydström does not seem open to acknowledging or accepting the necessarily restricted scope of his project. Instead, he chides French philosopher Michel Foucault for neglecting this level: Foucault, he says, "does not leave room for historical change as a result of conscious action by collective

or individual subjects" (p. 22). It is certainly possible to find arguments to support this understanding, but Rydström delivers none at all, thus, making himself rather vulnerable to the suspicion that he is unable to accept alternative historical narratives with more complexity and less focus on single individuals. This refusal to cite the relevant supporting evidence weakens the methodological reflexivity of this otherwise valuable work.

At the end Rydström has interesting theories on the possible dangers of the legislation, in particular the potential normalizing effect on a creative and subversive minority. Will queering disappear with marriages and children? "The price that same-sex couples have to pay for state recognition is that the majority now expects them to act according to the norms of society" (p. 162). This rather bombastic statement with its undefined use of "majority" is substantiated by one quote only, and even this quote (by a Norwegian liberal member of parliament) is open to interpretation. But Rydström does manage to document convincingly the differing attitudes within gay communities; lesbians and radical gay men were at first rather skeptical of and/or indifferent to the partnership initiatives. The lesbian baby boom in the nineties and the ensuing laws on step children, adoption, and insemination rights changed that, and today more Nordic women than men enter into gay marriages and partnerships.

The most telling lesson of

## Lag om registrerat partnerskap



Gäller från  
1 januari 1995

*“Law on registered partnership. In force from 1 January 1995.” The official information folder of the Swedish Ministry of Justice. Unknown artist. Print: Nordstedts tryckeri, Stockholm 1994.*

Registrerade partner får inte

- adoptera barn, varken gemensamt eller var för sig,
- ges möjlighet till insemination eller annan konstlad befruktning, eller
- utses att som särskilt förordnade förmyndare gemensamt ha vårdnaden om en underårig.



### Vilket efternamn?

Partnerna kan senast vid registreringen välja mellan att ha den enes efternamn som gemensamt efternamn eller att behålla sina efternamn från tiden närmast före partnerskapet.

En partner som har tagit den andres efternamn kan bära sitt tidigare efternamn som mellannamn. Om partnerna har olika efternamn, kan en av dem bära den andres efternamn som mellannamn.

*Inside, the folder explains that: “Registered partners may not adopt children, neither together nor separately; be given access to insemination or other artificial fertilisation; or be appointed as guardians to have joint custody of a minor.” However, they may carry the same last name. Information folder, Swedish Ministry of Justice. Print: Nordstedts Tryckeri, Stockholm 1994.*

Rydström’s work might be the drastic dedramatization of same sex coupling and parenting that has discreetly taken place within the last two decades. In consequence, Northern Europe seems to be paving the way for the ongoing and violent US American battles for the rights to marry. But in some ways the situation in America is different, as the book points out, since the resistance in the US is stronger and better organized than the resistance by Christian and conservative enclaves in the modern Scandinavian welfare states. Contrary to some predictions by frightened conservatives, same sex marriages in Scandinavia did not bring about Armageddon. Such marriages hardly shook the ground. Nevertheless, through gradual and pragmatic activism and political work, the conditions of some members of society, previously marginalized and denigrated if not scapegoated, were improved in the Nordic countries. Although not in the way the sexual revolutionaries and the radical feminists of the 70s had imagined it might happen, the heterosexual matrix was modestly democratized by the new law.

Unfortunately, the Swedish government chose to introduce the law on registered partnership to the general public in a most disturbing way. The focus in the official information folder is on what is not allowed; worse, the homosexual couples are trivialized as nonthreatening clowns! “According to the Swedish Justice Department in 1995,

the homosexual couple was blond and barren” (p. 11-12).

*Dag Heede, Associate Professor, Institute of Literature, Culture and Media, University of Southern Denmark*

#### MALE-STREAMING DEVELOPMENT

*Andrea Cornwall, Jerker Edström & Alan Greig (eds.): Men and Development – Politicizing Masculinities, Zed Books, 2011, 247 pages. Price: £22.99.*

The old slogan ‘the private is public’ is being re-vitalised with this new book – not just as an endeavor for women but with the specific focus on the role of men and masculinities. The book aims at unveiling the structures shaping the norms of masculinities and adds to the growing body of literature on men and development. It includes contributions and dialogues from development researchers and practitioners from African, Asian, Latin American and European contexts. In the words of the editors the collection takes its point of departure in the following statement: ‘A concern with men and masculinities has been taken up selectively by development agencies to pursue a very partial gender agenda. This has involved the avoidance of certain topics for the fear of ‘scaring off’ the men, and a selective emphasis on certain issues and areas at the cost of addressing the structural inequalities at the

root of gender equality. At the same time the field itself has developed in a way that has re-treated from a more critical analysis of men’s attitudes and behaviors, neither politicizing the personal nor exploring the interpersonal dynamics of power and privilege within broader struggles for gender justice’ (introduction by Cornwall, Edström and Greig: 6). More complex analyses of the power relations influencing the gender agenda are left out of current development thinking and practice. The recognition of differences among men – intersectional perspective on the study of men and masculinity – based on class, ethnicity, sexual orientation et cetera has been excluded. Also a focus on the patriarchal structures shaping economic and political power at the top level has been excluded. The collection aims at making up for these shortcomings and is quite successful in doing so – it is a welcome nuanced and refreshing input in the debate on men in development.

The introduction sets the overall framework and describes the role of ‘men in development’ starting with the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development followed by the Beijing Fourth World Conference with the call to address gender inequality in partnership with men and emphasizing their responsibility in the domestic sphere. Later this has been followed by UN events on HIV/ AIDS and the role of men in spreading the disease and their role in stopping it.

Despite of the focus on partnership with men these points of departure seem to draw on stereotypical notions of masculinity with negative views on men as a problem without asking ‘what’s in it for men(?)’. In line with this, the general message in the collection is that gender and masculinities are socially constructed and as such can also be *re-constructed*, and that it is important to highlight the costs of certain forms of masculinity to men and avoid blaming the individual man for the existing patriarchal structures.

#### *Masculinities and sexuality*

Exactly because of the focus on men and development in questions like HIV/AIDS the first section of the collection entitled ‘Embodiment and Transgressions’ addresses the norms of masculinities prevailing in the areas of body, gender and power. With contributions from Izugbara and Okal, Sluggett, Khanna, Overs and Edström more ‘invisible’ aspects of masculinities are discussed such as transsexuals, homosexuals, male sex workers and pimps and the influence of norms on ‘hegemonic masculinities’ for these and other groups. Thus, Izugbara and Okal describe how risky sexual behavior with transactional elements, multiple partners, ‘easy girls’ and unprotected sex become a consequence of the ideals of manhood among young men in Malawi. As a consequence anti-HIV messages undermining their ideals of being a ‘true man’ without

focusing on the alternatives have had a very limited effect and need re-thinking.

Slugget demonstrates how norms of 'hegemonic masculinities' are influencing ideas of sexuality amongst female to male transgenders in India perhaps even to a larger extent than hetero-normative and maintaining traditional gender norms and male dominance.

Edström challenges the binary constructions implied in the notion of 'vulnerabilities' associated with femininity and passivity and opens the debate by questioning if women do not have multiple partners(?) and if men have not been exposed to violence in conflict situations? Thereby problematizing stereotypical understandings of masculinities.

#### *Men at the top and at the bottom*

In the second section of the collection entitled 'Structures – Inequalities, Violence and Power' masculinities are explored through looking into economic and political structures shaping them. It includes contributions from Connell, Silberschmidt, Dolan, Chopra and a dialogue between Robert and Penny Morell. In the contribution from Connell men at the top of society reproducing forms of 'hegemonic masculinity' in Australia are studied. In this contribution the linkages between individual and societal levels are established with the focus on masculinity in the top of the financial sector as 'mainstream' with the example of a white, family

man, breadwinner and in a male dominated environment with female subordinates, long working hours, a competitive environment and an ever increasing pressure from superiors for reaching profit oriented goals – described by Connell as being in a 'fishbowl' swimming within a closed system and being watched by everybody without any awareness of the structures and the consequences of the neo-liberal system one is a part of. In addition Connell describes the 'glamorization of violence' in society and asks questions concerning the broader effects of decisions made in such companies in terms of debt service embedded in broader systems and agendas of global inequality. In contrast Silberschmidt focuses on masculinities at the bottom of the society in an East African context questioning the statement that men have been the main beneficiaries of development so far and the view of men as the problem and women as the victims. Rather her analysis on masculinity includes the effects of colonialism, with wage labour and related migration, the ideal of a male breadwinner and the female households, as contributing to the current situation of tension where men in this context due to unemployment are unable to support their wives and engage in extramarital affairs to the dissatisfaction of their wives. Men are increasingly being disempowered and unable to live up to the prevailing patriarchal norms and try to compensate in other ways related to sex

and alcohol – hence the need for a renewed focus on empowerment of men (too). These imbalances also contribute to sexual risk taking demonstrating that they are 'real men' in line with the experiences from Malawi. As a consequence Silberschmidt suggests that men's role-based identity needs to be strengthened – also because of its inter-related effects on women.

#### *The way forward*

The third section entitled 'Engagements – Changing Masculinities' includes contributions from Hearn, Barkers (and others), Gang and Xiaopei, Welsh, Greig and a dialogue between Cornwall, Armas and Botha. More specifically, some of the contributions provide good examples of how targeted campaigns and training on gender equality in violent communities can have an impact even beyond the individual drawing on other aspects of masculinity (Barkers and others, Welsh). In his contribution Hearn puts forward that men's engagement in gender equality may have reasons and not all of them point in a progressive direction – from anti-feminists indicating that gender equality is not needed to pro-feminists in support of gender equality and in-between those the view 'the gender agenda as opportunities to benefit men'. These positions influence strategies for change and whether these are about strengthening men's power versus women or the other way around. Several au-

thors including Hearn advocate for a broader agenda on social justice inspired by pro-feminist and queer strategies. However, it demands establishment of broader alliances with the women's movement and other civil society groups expanding those alliances made on violence against women mentioned in the collection and take them further. As mentioned by Cornwall in the dialogue: 'Let's take it into the workplace, Let's take it into the streets, Let's take it into the political institutions and value and make visible alternative ways of being a man...'

The collection is recommendable for a broad group of readers – researchers as well as practitioners – interested in the field of gender equality (although different parts of it may appeal more to different groups) despite of its more specific focus on 'men and development'. And hopefully its call for change will be taken on board by agents of change – men as well as women. As some of my students who worked on men and development suggest in their concluding part 'it would be more effective to change the name to Men And Women In Development (MAVID)'.

*Diana Højlund Madsen, Assistant Professor, FREIA, Aalborg University*

#### FEMALE THAI MIGRANTS SELLING SEX IN DENMARK

*Marlene Spanger: Destabilising Sex Work & Intimacy? Gender Performances of Female Thai Migrants Selling Sex in Denmark. PhD Thesis No. 63/2010, Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, 2010, 197pp*

During the last decade, human trafficking, as one aspect of the sale of sex, has emerged as a central issue within the policy field of prostitution in Denmark. Despite this observation studies on contemporary discourses on migration and sex work are quite rare within Danish social science research. It is therefore gratifying that there is now a study which remedies this void. Moreover, this is done in an innovative way. The author, Marlene Spanger, uses the perspectives of gender, culture, migration, social relations and sexuality. The aim of her PhD thesis is to capture the complexities and ambiguities of how the sale of sex relates to female Thai migrants and how these different relations destabilise as well as reproduce the comprehension of female migrants selling sex in the policy field of Danish prostitution.

Women who migrate from Thailand and sell sex in Denmark are in different ways related to the practice of sex work also in other parts of their lives. This can for example be due to the fact that they are migrants, mothers, wives and/or lovers. In prostitution policies, as in research on mi-

gration and sex work, there have always been different discourses about the sale of sex. Today these discourses are often characterized by a dichotomy between, on the one hand, a view upon the sale of sex as 'sex work' and consequently upon women who do this as 'workers', versus, on the other hand, a view upon this practice as 'prostitution' and upon the women as 'victims'. Life itself is rarely this dichotomous, and it is therefore interesting to read a study which attempts to enlighten us on how also less obvious parts of the lives of the involved women can produce the motivations for their choices in life. Following this, the question as to what could be conceived of as a problem and for whom and what could not, becomes highly relevant.

#### *People and policies*

The thesis consists of two parts. Part one contains the framework, while part two consists of four articles. Spanger has conducted interviews and participant observations and studied documentary text material. She has used the poststructuralist feminist theories of Judith Butler and Carol Bacchi in her analysis, thereby placing both the agency of individuals and the policies on prostitution in focus.

The first article is entitled 'Human trafficking as lever for feminist voices? Transformations of the Danish Policy Field of Prostitution' and has subsequently been published in the journal *Critical Social Policy* (November 2011 31:

517-539). Here, Spanger analyses the thinking that lies behind policies on prostitution. She identifies ruptures and discursive struggles which lead to transformations of the policy field. From 1906 until 2010 religious, juridical and medico-scientific discourses have been influential, but also social policy discourses (which are still dominating the field). By means of the discussion on human trafficking which has emerged during the last ten years, feminist discourses have also become more prominent.

This is clearly one of the most interesting contributions of the study. Spanger highlights not only how different formulations of problems have influenced policies on prostitution throughout Denmark's political history, but in the remaining three articles, she also shows how discourses such as these today influence the everyday lives of female Thai migrants who sell sex.

In the second article, entitled 'Transnational and local motherhood of sex workers: presence and/or absence?' Spanger and co-author Hanne Marlene Dahl discuss how motherhood is performed within the group of female Thai migrant sex workers. The authors show that regardless of the residence of the children (Thailand or Denmark), the female Thai migrants have obtained some sort of financial security for themselves and their children by means of migration (and by selling sex). The performance of motherhood is at the same time complex and ambiguous and calls

for differentiated policy solutions concerning the women's citizenship rights to care-giving. This second article contributes to our knowledge about global care chains and was also published as a chapter in a book on the topic (Isaksen 2010).

The third article 'Doing marriage and romantic love in the borderland of sex work: female Thai migration to Denmark' focuses on the ways in which female Thai migrants construct romantic love by ascribing to it different meanings through narratives on sex work, migration and marriage. Spanger discusses how the women sometimes describe the selling of sex, just as gifts and money, as signs of love. These narratives can also be read, she argues, as counter strategies to avoid the whore stigma or the 'Victimised Third World Prostitute' stigma. Well aware of the financially unequal premises in their marriage to their Danish husbands (who sometimes expect them to sell sex), they often give this strategy a central position in order not to appear cynical or helpless.

The last article 'Gender performances as social acts: (fe)-female Thai migrant sex workers in Denmark' addresses how Thai migrant sex workers reproduce and subvert heterosexuality through the performance of gender in different spaces. The terminology of 'female Thai migrants selling sex in Denmark' could be claimed to be a clumsy terminology, especially when it is used repeatedly. This article shows however how being a sex worker is

dependent on performing the 'right' femininity in terms of being a desirable heterosexual object and thereby for example explaining the need to talk about 'females'. For social workers the understanding of femininity in sex work is often inconsistent with the femininity of an active, responsible and caring mother, despite the economic and material security which may come with the work and which is prioritised by the mothers. Danish prostitution policies which only address 'Third World Female Victims of Human Trafficking' miss the practices of female Thai migrant sex workers as breadwinners with financial responsibilities for their children. Also, whereas female-born subjects and transgendered subjects (m-t-f) are dominating among Thai migrants who sell sex, cross-dressing females are rather invisible and socially marginalised. Despite this observation, only female-born subjects are intelligible within the Danish policy field of prostitution, leaving other categories without counselling and help.

### *Intersectionality of gender, sexuality... and 'race'?*

This is a PhD on an important topic. Its strength lies in the fact that Spanger has focused primarily on the agency of the female Thai migrants, and she does a good job in letting us get acquainted with their motivations and lives. She also shows her knowledge of the theoretical field of poststructuralist feminism, and she has a

good discussion of the intersection between gender and sexuality. The results are useful for both practitioners and scholars of migration and sex work.

What I am less impressed by is the use of language (sometimes the argument is difficult to follow), but especially the lack of focus on issues of nationality, ethnicity and 'race'. The ways in which stereotypical conceptions of Thai women play a role both for the women and in the policies are obvious and also mentioned by Spanger. Her choice to not prioritise any analysis of the intersection of race with gender and sexuality (see pp 11 and 30) seems therefore unfortunate. Hopefully this will be remedied in a follow up of the study, as Spanger indicates (p 87).

*Pauline Stoltz, Associate Professor, FREIA, Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University*

#### LITERATURE

· Isaksen, Lise Widding (ed.) (2010): *Global Care Work. Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies*. Nordic Academic Press, Lund

#### WOMEN THAT WORK FOR YOU

*Lise Widding Isaksen (ed.): Global Care Work. Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies. Nordic Academic Press. 2010. 240 pages. £28.45*

Gender scholars have challenged the notion of migration as a "male phenomenon". They have identified women as accounting for almost half of the migrant population globally. Migration, they have argued, should be understood as a gendered process affecting diverse groups of women and men differently. A new international division of reproductive labor has occurred, these scholars further suggest, one that is based on new forms of colonial/racist appropriation; through the transfer of resources from the Global South to the Global North. Scholarship on this phenomena has generated a vast feminist literature, posing diverse research questions from the link between migration, labor and gender, to the experiences of transnational families, to the exploration of what citizenship (or the lack of it) means.

The originality of the anthology lies in posing these and other questions in the context of the "Nordic model", a model internationally recognized by its entitlement to gender equality and shaped through self-representations of these nations, as paladins of social justice. How and in which ways are discourses on gender equality interweaved with the employment (and even the

overexploitation) of migrant women doing the "dirty work"? The anthology provides a solid and rich empirical material from the Nordic countries that both answer and further develop these questions.

The book consists of ten chapters divided in three sessions: "Domestic Work and Images of Equality", "Transnational Experience and the Labor Market" and "The Nation, Citizenship and Democracy". The introduction written by Lise Widding Isaksen provides the research frame and even what is, in my opinion, a central finding of the book: the fact that gender equality in the private sphere is "outsourced" to the global market (p. 11). In other words: gender equality politics (or, again in my opinion, discourses on gender equality that do not challenge male domination within the heteronormativity of nuclear families) can contribute to new social inequalities (p. 14).

The anthology provides a solid and rich empirical material from the Nordic countries that both answer and further develop these questions. This analytical intervention together with interesting, original and well researched chapters makes the book an important contribution not only to Gender, but also to Ethnic and Labor Studies. The theoretical framework of the anthology provides fruitful ways of transcending methodological nationalism within studies of social policy in Europe and also provides an active identifying

of the intersections between the local and the Global. A global/transnational perspective on the role of nation states is provided by Helle Stenum in her article "Au-pair migration and new inequalities. The transnational production of corruption".

The empirical material evolves from a qualitative study of au-pair migration from the Philippines to Denmark. The author explores the paradox of the increase of female migration from the Philippines in a context where the Danish migration policy is based on the rejection of non-white, non-western, Muslim, low skilled migrants. Another (fundamental) paradox is explored by Ellinor Platzer who convincingly argues that at the same time as migrants (in their condition of racialised working class) are among those that suffered more from the deterioration of the welfare system, migrant labor is central in the creation of the surplus value that makes rich countries richer (p. 168). The legal situation of in-between is systematically and thoroughly analyzed by Catharina Calleman in her contribution "Cultural exchange or cheap domestic labor? Constructions of "au pair" in four Nordic countries". The article provides an interesting reading of the feminist exploration of the private/public dichotomy showing how relations between au pairs and their employees are located at the crossroads between public migration legislation and private (employment) law. Hanne Marlene Dahl and Mar-

lene Spanger analyze the experience of transnational families and motherhood, in a context where migration policies do not allow migrant workers to bring their children with them. The strength of the authors' chapter is their reflexive and theoretically inspired efforts to both underline the agency of the female migrants and the potentially negative effects of global care chains. (For a different and in my view much more problematic analysis see Mariya Bikova's article on au-pairs in Norway, arguing that the employment possibilities are good opportunities for young women from poor countries, a first step into a better future). Action and support in terms of solidarity response towards (and together with) migrant domestic workers is the topic of Lise Lotte Hansen's "Global Domestic Workers in Denmark". The author identifies the impact of neo-liberal globalization on the historically strong Danish unions, analyzing another paradox, namely the inability, these powerful unions have had in organizing vulnerable groups of workers, an inability the author locates within union cultures that depart from white males as the norm.

The anthology is uneven regarding theoretical (and political) points of departure. While some of the contributors are well engaged with academic debates on neoliberal transformation and on race and racism, others are not. These dissimilarities raise some concerns. The first one is the tendency (in some articles) to

speak of the Nordic model, conceptualizing these national regimes as social-democratic, obscuring the radical neoliberal changes in the reorganization of labor and in state policies regarding welfare that have taken place in the last thirty years. It also lacks an understanding of how these changes have been accompanied by cultural transformations with an emphasis on individual accomplishment and normative notions of success. To define the Nordic model as a social-democratic welfare state model based upon core values such as gender equality, social equality and international solidarity (p. 10) gives the reader not only an ahistorical and monolithic understanding of these countries, but also very few elements to explain the emergence of a new racialised precariat. The second one is the tendency (in some articles) to untheorise racisms in general and European specific forms of racism in particular, forms of racism that are fundamental for the creation and reproduction of cheap racialised labor. An engagement with the theoretical challenge posed by the pioneer work of Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1985; 1992) would have provided a more stringent analysis regarding the intersections of class, gender and race regulating the practice. A colonial and post-colonial labor system regulated by racisms is central in the understanding of the position of racialised women within reproductive labor.

Explaining the expansions of domestic work in the Nordic

countries as an issue of changing gender roles and the needs of flexibilisation within middle class (hetero) families marginalizes the central role of old and new forms of racism, where women as the embodiment of white privilege legitimize the exploitations of migrant labor. It also marginalizes the systematic (for the Swedish context) neoliberal inspired deterioration of the welfare system, that through its ineffective and male function opens up for the privatization of reproductive work.

Despite these shortcomings, the anthology is a powerful intervention for scholars and activists interested in the connection between gender, labor and social justice. The following question, posed by one of

the contributors, has accompanied me for weeks:

“In a country that imagines itself to be egalitarian, non-colonial, endowed with gender equality, non-racist, socially equal, democratic and advanced, it seems reasonable to ask why so many families can bring themselves to employ migrant live-in domestic workers, under a state regulation that allows them as the host family to pay DKK 2, 500 a month, or approximately one-fourth of the comparable minimum wage. How is this possible? “ (Stenum 2010: 38).

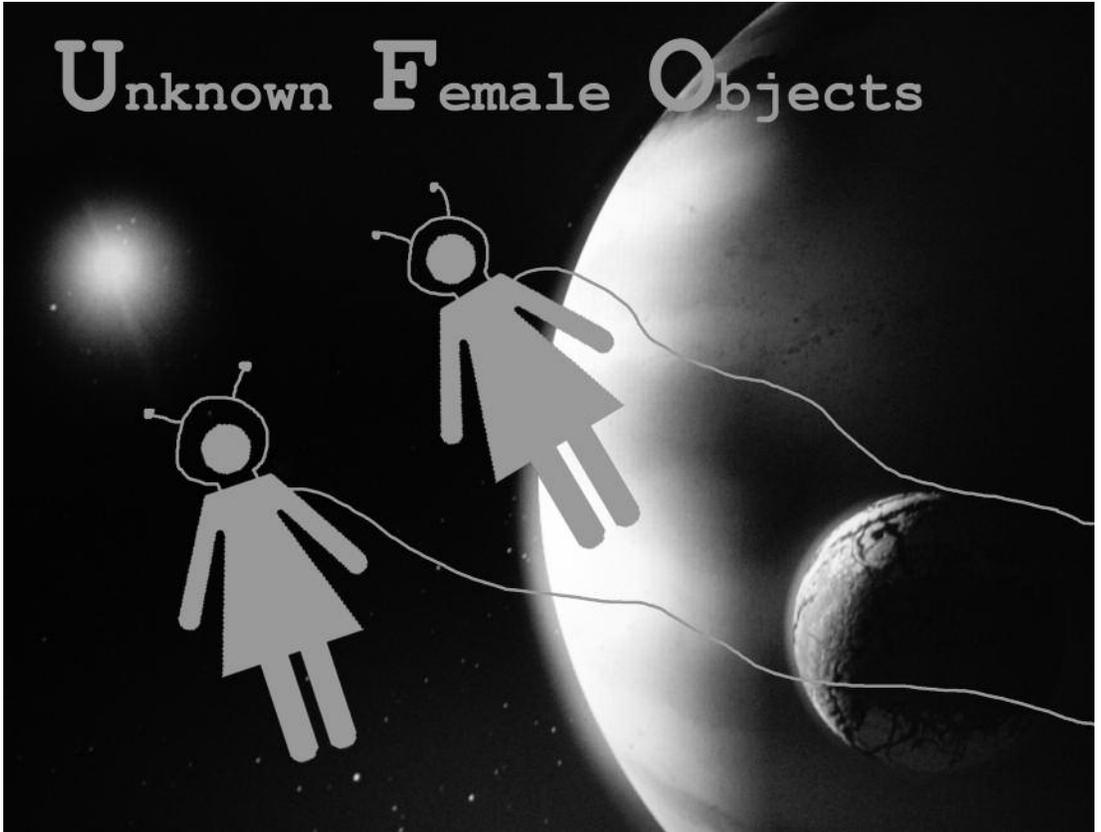
*Global Care Work. Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies* is a book that everybody should read, a question that every-

body should engage with. The anthology provides relevant clues and opens up a well needed debate.

*Diana Mulinari, Professor,  
Centre for Gender Studies,  
Lund University.*

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*Kine Ravn: Unknown Female Objects*