

Nation, Family, Intimacy:

The domain of the domestic in the social imaginaryⁱ

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Abstract: The institution of domestic work and the figures of the domestic worker (the 'maid') and the employer (the 'madam') – both of which are always raced and gendered – seem to carry a powerful and affective metaphoric and symbolic load in post-apartheid South Africa. The paper explores this phenomenon as linked to the dual nature of domestic work – as both a lawful and regulated contemporary social practice and a central feature of what may be termed the apartheid *social imaginary* – an implicit social understanding of the way in which things stand between fellow citizens in the terms of Charles Taylor. Domestic work is suitable for this kind of transposition because of its association with intimacy and family – both markers of nation – as well as its location in the social order of apartheid – the domestic domain. In order to trace some of the sources and meanings attached to contested understandings of domestic work, the paper examines the representation of white Afrikaans-speaking women's subjectivity and agency in historical accounts – one of the particularistic strands through which the symbolic relationship between white female employer and black female domestic worker may be accessed. This is based on a symptomatic reading of Hermann Giliomee's account – in his book *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* – of white Afrikaans-speaking women's subjectivity and the way in which this is constructed in relation to white men and black others, as well as work by revisionist feminist authors to whom Giliomee is partly indebted.

'Domestic work is an 'institution which has been an essential part of white South Africans' way of life for generations', wrote Jacklyn Cock in the repackaged edition of her classic study on the triple oppression of South Africa's domestic workers (Cock 1989). This paper reflects on the presence of the past in the present,ⁱⁱ by closer examination of some of reasons that could assist in explaining the prominence of the figure of the domestic worker and the somewhat less visible part of the institutional relationship, the employer, in the contemporary South African public sphere. It is argued that the oft-heard popular sentiment that apartheid is not yet past, may be understood in part by examining domestic work as an institution and a practice both intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life and providing continuity between the apartheid and post apartheid social orders, and in that sense then as telling of something about this transition.

The argument put forward here is that the institution of domestic work and the figures of the domestic worker (the 'maid') and her employer (the 'madam') – both of which are always raced and gendered – seem to carry a powerful and affective metaphoric and symbolic load in post

apartheid South Africa. In one sense, then, the institution is over determined. This, I argue, is a result of the fact that domestic work may be understood not only as a contemporary social practice, that is, a lawful and regulated – albeit imperfectly and incomplete – form of employment, but also as a central feature of what may be termed the apartheid *social imaginary* – an implicit social understanding of the way in which things stand between fellow citizens in the terms of Charles Taylorⁱⁱⁱ. The suitability of domestic work for this kind of symbolic abstraction is linked to its close affinity to the family, a foundational unit in everyday and scholarly understandings of both ‘nation’ and ‘society’, and its associated relation to intimacy. Moreover, in apartheid’s rigid racial-spatial order, the domestic quarters are also spaces of exception.^{iv} In addition, domestic work is located in the household, a site of gendered domesticity that has been notoriously resistant to an understanding that construes it as a *political* domain. Finally, and linked to the previous point, the institution of domestic work speaks powerfully to the failure to account and come to terms with the past in ways that understand apartheid as interwoven in the texture of everyday life – domestic work was intimately bound up with the *way of life* South Africa offered its white middle classes, as well as large sections of the white working class. As such, the symbolic significance of the practice depends on the social meanings attached to the hierarchical relationship between black, female domestic worker and the white, female employer and their larger social significations.

The first part of the paper provides some theoretical and conceptual scaffolding for the argument. I start off by offering support for the idea of the centrality of domestic work in postapartheid, before I consider briefly the relationship between family, gender and nation, and the difficulties attached and limits to construing the household as a political sphere. Thereafter I outline Taylor’s concept of the *social imaginary* and the way in which it connects with questions about publics, the public sphere and the *imagined community* of nation

The second part of the paper traces the representation of white Afrikaans-speaking women’s subjectivity and agency in historical accounts. I argue that this is one of the narrative strands available to us through which the development of the *social imaginary* – which encapsulates the relationship between white female employer and black female domestic worker – may be accessed. To that end, I offer a symptomatic reading of Hermann Giliomee’s account – in his book *The Afrikaner: Biography of a people* – of white Afrikaans-speaking women’s subjectivity and the way in which this is constructed in relation to white men and black others, as well as accounts by revisionist feminist authors to whom Giliomee is partly indebted. Giliomee’s account culminates in

an understanding of Afrikaner women's political subjectivity under apartheid as located in the invisible domestic domain, in permanent relationship with a domestic worker. I argue that this has implications not only for the way in which white Afrikaans-speaking women (and white women more generally) emerge as a site for reparation in postapartheid, but also for the meanings attached to the manner in which the postapartheid order interpellates white women, *alongside* other categories of people, black men and women in particular, as a designated disadvantaged group.

The paper concludes with a provisional exploration of some of the implications of the way in which tensions emanating from the dual nature of domestic work – as, on the one hand both an ordinary, (increasingly) regulated practice and a site for continuing struggle and, on the other, a conceptual store (in narrative and imagery) of contested meanings and normative expectations in the *social imaginary* – oscillate between targeting for reform or unmaking the practice itself or reconceptualising and coming to terms with what it would mean if domestic work were to be not only a *social imaginary* of apartheid, but also, in a different way, of postapartheid. In particular, I try to tease out the relationship between race, family, intimacy and nation.

An investigation of this nature has to proceed delicately and cautiously, and can only tentatively open up some of the various ways in which (1) individual experiences are linked to broader social understandings, (2) the past inhabits the present and becomes the subject of revisionist interpretations, and (3) actual practices are abstracted into symbolic representations. The move between practice and symbolic abstraction and back again to practice is empirically and conceptually slippery, as well as contested and a number of caveats are required. The first of these, and which I offer here, relates to the fact that the paper does not deal at all with the ways in which domestic workers, both former and current, understand and articulate their experiences, nor with the experiences and interpretations of employers of domestic workers. This is because the argument turns in part on the idea that the representation of practices in the *social imaginary* does indeed amount to an appropriation of the practice in ways that exceed the control, experiences and intentions of both actual domestic workers and actual employers of domestic workers. But such a move would have been reductionist in the extreme, were it not for an existing and current rich seam of studies in which the institution of domestic work, the experiences of domestic workers and their self-understandings (and sometimes also those of employers) are taken as the point of departure. In particular, the key shifts that have taken place in the institution of domestic work in

the post-apartheid era and the contradictions thrown up by the manner in which domestic workers were brought under the protection of the new father-state and the way this is articulated by domestic workers, are skilfully outlined by Shireen Ally in *From Servants to workers*. It is precisely her imaginative analysis of the interplay of power relations between domestic workers, employers and the state and its manifestations in the intimacy of the private home that make it possible to raise a somewhat different set of questions. In particular, I argue, it asks us to account for the articulation between the experience of actual domestic workers and their conditions of work with the place that domestic work seems to occupy in the *social imaginary*.

The omission nonetheless comes at the cost of shifting out of focus the actual struggles of and interpretations thereof by domestic workers, but also, the perspectives and experiences of employers.

The 'overdetermination' of domestic work in postapartheid

The extent to and manner in which domestic work and the relationship between domestic workers, domestic employer and their respective families surface in the public domain in contemporary South Africa suggests that domestic work is deeply inscribed with social meanings that are powerful in the present and that the institution of domestic work seems to have a specific quality that allows it to carry and encapsulate something of the apartheid moral order that goes beyond the actual practice. As an entry point into the discussion, I refer to four examples.

The first example illustrates the way in which the actual raced and gendered figures of domestic worker and female employer may stand in tension with an abstract symbolic figuration of this relationship. This could be seen from the intense debate that developed at the congress of the South African Sociological Association in 2009 when a paper was presented by Xoliswa Dilata (2009) about exploitative practices of 'black madams' in the postapartheid era (see Mngxitama 2009, Mapadimeng 2009; Naidoo 2010). The debate, spearheaded by Mngxitama, was focussed on matters of epistemology and scale, and was concerned with the way in which findings of ethnographies and micro-studies are interpreted without reference to the broader context, thereby erasing the reality of white domination. Yet, the thematic of the paper that sparked the debate is not incidental. What is it that makes this institutional practice so difficult and contested, and to what extent is what is at stake the possibility of a betrayal of the social understanding of apartheid through the practice of naming black female employers 'black madams' and detailing 'black-on-

black "exploitation" of black 'maids'? (Mngxitama 2010). In short, it seems that for some at least, the continued and largely intact presence of the institution of domestic work supports an understanding that the past is not yet over; whilst the idea that the institution has changed in some respects and have been appropriated and adapted in a number of ways risks wiping out the past for which it stands and leads to a position of moral equivalence in the present that Mngxitama finds untenable. In this view, the institution of domestic work seems to be a container of some understanding of the nature of white domination per se, which is always also linked to the past – that is to apartheid and colonialism – that threatens to leak once the same conceptual apparatus is deployed to understand black and white employers of domestic workers.

A second example is the major public debate that ensued over a video recording produced by white residence students of the University of the Free State, in which cleaning staff from the residence were asked to perform humiliating acts for satirical purposes. When the video became public, these staff members were confronted with the knowledge that the joke was directed against them, in more than one way, as the video concluded with the caption: 'This is what we think of transformation'. The staff members involved were residence cleaners, but the manner in which the transgressions were understood and represented in a broad-ranging set of debates were intricately bound up with the relations of domestic work and social understandings of that practice, which at times tend to cast domestic workers as mothers of a special kind to children in the family of employment; and which are often bound up in and defined by familiar patterns and repertoires of racial-paternalism, emanating from the contradictions of racial intimacy and domestic care work in what was a society structured around deep social and lawful racism. This is perhaps at the heart of the way in which domestic work figures in the contemporary *social imaginary* – that is, as a symbolic instantiation of the relationship between citizens in postapartheid South Africa.

The third set of debates relates to anecdotal references made by black South Africans to the experience of growing up with a mother who was a domestic worker, of having a mother who was away, taking care of white children. Such statements are hard to map, but seem to crop up in both the political and institutional arena and in private conversations. These are, of course, in the first instance references to biographical facts. They are also statements that suggest the long way travelled from humble beginnings. To what extent does such invocations also allow for a broader identification rhetorically expressed as a collective experience? In other words, can such references also do the work of standing in as a powerful shorthand for what apartheid was –

the experiences, deprivations and corrosion of life chances of black South Africans more generally?

Fourth and finally, in identifying the discursive threads that tie domestic work to a broader social understanding, we would need to consider also the silences. Given post-apartheid state intervention into the domestic work sector and efforts to regulate the sector and set in place minimum conditions of service, it would seem as if the continued social significance attached to domestic work and the exploitation of domestic workers are over-determined in relation to other categories of marginal work. This includes, for instance, office cleaners and security staff, as well as other casual and subcontract labourers in many sectors of the economy, whose working conditions are indeed dismal and precarious and whose presence is intimately woven into the fabric of daily life. There is yet another marked silence. In contrast with domestic workers, again provisionally stated, it seems that the social and structural position of gardeners have attracted neither the same kind of sentiment nor systematic scholarly attention. Does it suggest, therefore, that the gardener emerges therefore as a much more ambiguous, albeit stable, figure in the landscape of apartheid marked by urban sprawl and leafy white suburbs?

Outside of the political sphere, then, it seems that there are few other social categories that arouse the strong emotions and intense public debate associated with domestic work – with the exception perhaps of farmers, farm workers, and illegal immigrants.^v Arguably, the institution of domestic work in South Africa forms part of an implicit and undeveloped but largely shared ‘social theory’ that is instantiated in the practice itself, but not reducible to it. Its suitability as a kind of shorthand for social relations based on race is linked to its association with the family form and its metaphorical qualities. I will discuss this aspect first, before moving on to Charles Taylor’s notion of the *social imaginary*, a concept that is deployed to flesh out how the manner by which domestic works may be understood as forming part of an implicit but undeveloped ‘theory of the social’.

Family metaphors and the domestic domain

Part of the reason why the institution of domestic work carries such a heavy symbolic load is because of the way in which it is associated with the notion of family in multiple ways. There are particular reasons why the family as a metaphor is both powerful and productive in providing an understanding of social relations but also dangerous.

On the one hand, the family is the smallest political unit of the nation, with associated limited powers of explanation. Moreover, following McClintock, the family proper is generally excluded from the domain of the political. 'Nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies' (McClintock 1995: 35), but according to a pattern by which 'the family as *metaphor* offer[s] a single genesis narrative for national history', whereas the 'family as *institution* becomes void of history and excluded from national power' (McClintock 1995: 357). The family itself (conventionally the domain of private female space) is figured as outside the realm of politics (McClintock 1995: 360).

On the other, the idea of the family is also the nation's metaphoric embodiment. Moreover, the very fact that familial metaphors so regularly stand in, mnemonically, for nation, indicates that the nation-state, at least on some level, is constructed of intimacy (Herzfield 1997: 13).

Narrating the nation through the trope of family brings into play its twin legacies of metaphoric and embodied practice in a manner that insists on a connection between the two. Historically, the invocation of metaphoric language of family and body has been a powerful tool for representing unity where there is difference and highlighting and legitimating specific relations of power (see, for example, McClintock 1996). Metaphors of body and family therefore frequently appear in nationalist discourse – often these are the very terms in which nationhood is expressed.^{vi} The close affinity between family relations and notions of kinship based on 'blood' relations and racial purity has led scholars such as Zimitri Erasmus (2008) to argue for abandoning this kind of understanding as the basis for imagining social relations. However, familial metaphors are also used in more general sense as metaphors for society, including in various strands of social theory. Moreover, as Homi Bhabha reminds us, the image of the family or the body as *analytic* is indeed productive, as it enacts a reading of the nation as cultural signification, shifting the analysis away from the polity to social life (Bhabha 1990).

However, the family and the body are not only metaphors of nation, but also 'real' entities, in which actual individuals relations are embedded. The family and household are also subject to forms of control and regulation by the nation-state (Eley & Suny 1996:259). The centrality of the idea and symbolism of family and the figure of the mother – both of which are discursively invoked in relation to domestic work – to all nationalisms, coupled with the understanding of the family as the domain where the nation is reproduced and as a realm of intimacy and intimate relations, connect the institution of domestic work very powerfully to anxieties about the foundations of

South African nationhood and the remainder of the past in the present. For this reason, I argue, that representations of the institution of domestic work, expressed as a set of interpersonal relationships, take a prominent place in what Charles Taylor calls the *social imaginary*.

Social imaginaries, fractured publics and imagined communities

Charles Taylor deploys the term *social imaginary* to refer to the 'ways in which people imagine their social existence, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations' (Taylor 2005: 23). The *social imaginary* comprises, among others, an understanding of the moral order at the same time as the *social imaginary* normalises and legitimises that moral order. For Taylor, a *social imaginary* cannot be reduced to a set of beliefs or doctrines imposed by some on others in a society, as it is the way in which 'ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and ... it is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories and legends' (2005: 23). It is therefore not a set of ideas that can be juxtaposed against the practices and institutions of society, but rather 'it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society' (Taylor 2005: 2). The latter point is crucial, as the relationship between the *social imaginary* (seen as a limitless background understanding) and practice is not one-directional: 'If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding' (Taylor 2005: 25). As such, the *social imaginary* is constantly subjected to a series of transitions. Taylor's project is to trace what he terms the development of the 'Western social imaginary' and the way in which the idea of moral order gets extended over time, marked by a series of transitions. The kind of institutions that Taylor situates in relation to the *social imaginary* are, for example, the electoral system and protests march.

There are clearly a number of problems with Taylor's notion of a singular, unfolding, expanding and universalising 'Western social imaginary', which is the result of both his disciplinary location and particular style of liberalism and North America multiculturalism understood as inclusion. So too would his notion of the *social imaginary* as a limitless background understanding captured in stories and images need to be unpacked. Finally, his assumption of a shared public sphere and shared production of and access to the same stories, imagines and legends that make up the *social imaginary* does not always hold up to critically or practically.

Nonetheless, I regard this work and his conceptual apparatus as particularly productive. In order to make it more sociologically workable therefore, and more open to accommodating intense contestation, fractured publics and parallel public spheres, it may be useful to take a few steps back and situate Taylor's work in relation to some of his interlocutors. This kind of analysis offered here depends on the move from Benedict Anderson's *imagined community* to Taylor's *social imaginary*, but the latter retains by and large the assumptions of the former – albeit stripped from a 'national character' and endowed even more fulsomely! In formulating his notion of the modern social imaginary, Taylor draws directly from the work of Anderson, but also the scholarship of Jürgen Habermas (from whom he has perhaps inherited some of the problems that beset his project), Michael Warner and Pierre Rosanvallon.

Anderson (1991) gave substantiation to our understanding of the relationship between textuality and the category of the nation. Perhaps more important, though, he provided us with an understanding of political community that is embedded in both social and symbolic relations, which does not rely on essentialist understandings of national and cultural identity. Instead, the construction of an imagined community is presented as a historical process mediated through cultural forms and ingredients – in particular the combination of the use of vernacular languages, literary production, and print capitalism. Hence the notion of imagined community develops from a reading community centred around the literary products of print capitalism. Over time these readers, who sediment into a public, come to understand themselves as fraternally linked, even though they have not met in person. Moreover, through their access to shared texts, they are increasingly sharing a symbolic domain, which in turn informs everyday practice – thereby providing a social constructionist argument for the development of shared culture as foundation for the imagined community of nation.

The masculinist language in which it is expressed aside – Anderson and Taylor have a central point in common. For Anderson, love for the nation is indistinguishable from relations of affect for the imagined community – which is in turn understood as a relationship of affinity for and solidarity with people one has never met. For Taylor, too, moral order and the extent to which our normative expectations are met in society (rather than nation) are stated in terms of the way in which we perceive the relations between 'fellows' – irrespective of whether these are mediated and regulated by the state. Both posit the nation or society as a social relation, deriving its moral

foundations from interpersonal ethical relations between self and other, rather than an *a priori* political community.

If a symbolic abstraction of the relationship between domestic worker and employer can be argued to form part of a background *social imaginary* in which the apartheid moral order is expressed as a particular relation between 'fellows', it is possible to map, in a very specific context and point in history, how the transformation of that *social imaginary* takes place in and through changes in everyday practice and/or how changes in the *social imaginary* informs shifts in the practice. This would help us to make sense of a larger historical pattern as well as to interrogate understandings of the normative foundations of post apartheid society as this is understood in an ordinary sense. Such an analysis starts at the point where the changes are occurring, so that for the actors 'it begins to define the contours of their world', but before the point at which it 'come[s] to count as the taken for granted shape of things, *too obvious to mention*' (Taylor 2005: 29, my emphasis).

However, in order to this, one needs to take account of the twofold problem with the notion of the *social imaginary*. First, the idea of a shared public sphere, to the extent that it had ever existed in a full sense, has increasingly come under pressure. This has been intensified by globalisation, multiple media offerings coupled with US media dominance, the particular forms of contemporary capitalism and consumption, the scale-back of the state, the emergence of new social and sub cultural identities that challenge some of the more established identity forms and cut across geographical and other boundaries, and new media forms and platforms that challenges older understandings of publics and audiences. Second, the apartheid social order was crafted on what Aletta Norval's terms (1996) its double logic – race *and* ethnicity. As a result, the 'national' public sphere in South Africa, to the extent that it exists, is fragmented and fractured along the lines of race, class and ethnicity. It may be more appropriate to talk about a series of public spheres and publics that in many instances run parallel to each other, overlapping only intermittently, and producing what may be termed publics founded upon and produced by particularist understandings of both *imagined community* and the *social imaginary*. Developing a deep *social imaginary* that is broadly shared is therefore a long, slow process. In addition, deep contestations develop around the interpretations attached to the narratives and images stored in what can be seen as a shared *social imaginary* precisely because the *social imaginary* is seen to encapsulate the relationship between citizens and but also because the meanings often seem to be self-evident

In such a context, an access point to an analysis of the *social imaginary* and the place of the relationship between white female employer and black female domestic worker in such an imaginary, is to examine the complex ways in which white women have been portrayed and understood in relation to the domestic domain. In this case, I will be following a particularist narrative strand, and a particularist history – that of white Afrikaans-speaking women – but as I have suggested in the discussion on Taylor – this may be precisely the appropriate way into such an analysis given fragmented and fractured publics that need to be reconstituted – even if only at a minimal level – in order to produce the imagined community of nation.

AFRIKANER WOMEN'S SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY IN THE DOMESTIC DOMAIN

In *Die Afrikaners – Biography of a people*, the title itself referencing both the story form (a key feature of the *social imaginary*) and a domestic and familial metaphors, Giliomee opens his substantial postapartheid tome on the historical development of Afrikaner 'identity' and nationalism by identifying as one of the gaps in its scholarship the limited focus on the role of Afrikaner women. The strong language Giliomee deploys to *voice* this silence is telling:

So, too, the role of Afrikaner women, who enjoyed more independence than their counterparts in most other European colonies, has been underplayed. Afrikaner women, *the most determined participants* of the Great Trek, *urged* their menfolk to fight to the bitter end in the war against Britain in 1880-81 and again in 1899-1902. In the aftermath of the war they *took the lead* in the rehabilitation of the Afrikaner poor and in Johannesburg and neighbouring towns *they were amongst the most militant* of the working class. But after the Afrikaner nationalists won power in the mid-1920s the political militancy of women dwindled and they played almost no role in agitation for the franchise of women.

(Giliomee 2003: xvi-xvii, my emphasis).

It is not difficult to identify in these words a measure of overstatement, of exaggeration, of mythologizing practice. Strong accounts of Afrikaner women's powers, their strength and determination, are present in many references to women in Giliomee's text. It is as if the decisive actions and strong sentiments ascribed to Afrikaner women in the period prior to Afrikaner

nationalism stand as corrective for their political absence at the moment of nationalist victory. However, a close reading shows that this sharp distinction hides another silence. In the entire volume of 698 pages, few passages refer to (Afrikaner) women; just more than a dozen white Afrikaans women are listed in the index. Given this absence, the strong language Giliomee uses functions possibly as a mechanism for accentuating the presence of women where they do appear in the historical account, and offers symbolic reparation for their general absence. Moreover, a systematic analysis of Giliomee's account of women and their positioning in the narrative of nation shows a specific logic at work, which I will briefly outline.

Giliomee argues that Dutch women at the Cape occupied a higher status and had more power than many of their European counterparts, because of Dutch Roman Law and its associated practices of common inheritance and joint decision-making in matters of business. He characterises the domain and range of female powers as located in the family, where they could prevent their sons from marrying outside the European community and their husbands from bringing illegitimate half-caste children into the family (Giliomee 2003: 38). Following Giliomee, Dutch women's power and control were situated at the intersections of race and reproduction. A central part of this power was exercised in the relationship between slave woman and female owner, which Giliomee describes as the most stable form of paternalism in South African history. The importance of this relationship, and the way in which it underpins representations of these women's political consciousness, is underlined when Giliomee gives voice to Anna Steenkamp, Piet Retief's niece, about her reasons for leaving the Cape colony:

Her principal objection was that slaves had been 'placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and religion ... wherefore we rather withdraw in order to preserve our doctrines in purity' (Giliomee 2004: 151-152).^{vii}

Giliomee's first reference to Dutch-Afrikaans women's exceptional determination comes from an account of a British settler about the burghers' move further into the interior: '[T]hey fancy they are under a divine impulse ... the women seem more bent on it than the men' (Giliomee 2003: 169). Giliomee underscores the fact that these women were not mere *adjuncts* of their husbands: they helped in decision-making and *enforced discipline over servants* (Giliomee 2003:169, own emphasis). Giliomee also cites Susanna Smit's famous declaration that 'they [Dutch Boer women] would walk out the Draaksberg barefooted, to die in freedom, as death was dearer to them than

the loss of liberty' (Giliomee 2003: 169).^{viii} On the annexation of Natal by British forces, Giliomee refers to the commander who noted that 'opposition to British rule was particularly strong among Afrikaner women', to the extent that "if any of the men began to droop or lose courage, they urged him on to fresh exertions and kept alive the spirit of resistance in him" (Giliomee 2003: 169). For his account of Dutch-speaking women's role in political resistance against the British in the North at the end of the nineteenth century, Giliomee relies on Olive Schreiner's perspective:

The Transvaal war of 1881 was *largely a women's war*; it was from the *armchair besides the coffee-table that the voice went out for conflict and no surrender*. Even in the Cape Colony at the distance of many hundred miles Boer women *urged* sons and husbands to go to the aid of their northern kindred, while a *martial ardour often far exceeding that of males* seemed to fill them (Olive Schreiner as quoted in Giliomee 2003: 231, own emphasis).

'Married life on an insecure and isolated frontier further strengthened the position of women', the text continues:

[Women] bred and fed the children, made their clothes, taught them the religion and traditions of the culture in which they were born, and faced death side by side with their men when attacked by indigenous people or wild beasts (Giliomee 2003: 231-232, paraphrasing Schreiner).

Again, it is household labour, cultural and biological reproduction and the spectre of race for and against which women's power is exercised. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant, but thin, representation of Afrikaner women in Giliomee's version of the story of the nation is that of agitator for and believer in political acts of war and migration, agent in the home exercising power over servants and children, arbiter of the racial purity of the family, and domestic labourer.

In Giliomee's account, Afrikaner women's singular strength and determination finds its highest expression during the Anglo-Boer war:

The *indomitable resistance* of the Boer women was the decisive factor in the War, as Olive Schreiner had predicted. The *great suffering and*

privation that they were prepared to endure *baffled* men, both Boer and British (Giliomee 2003: 236, own emphasis).

The focus in Giliomee's representation of women after the war shifts to middle-class Afrikaner women's welfarist efforts. In Giliomee's account, these efforts have a political component, although the emphasis falls on the productive aspects.^{ix} We now see the emergence of the figure of the Afrikaner organisation woman, labouring in the kitchen – no longer solely for the benefit of the family but in aid of the *volk*, the family of the nation. Giliomee offers only two more accounts of Afrikaner women as politically powerful and militant in the public domain. In both cases, the working-class position of these women is important, as white women's earning power was key to the livelihood of the white working class and lumpen proletariat, while it simultaneously created a gender crisis in poor households. Giliomee's first account is the radicalisation of Afrikaner women during the white mine workers' strike in 1922, where women were said to have played an active role in attacks on scab labourers. The second reference is to the militant Transvaal-based white Afrikaans-speaking trade unionists in the Garment Workers' Union.^x

The important role Afrikaner welfare organisations such as the ACVV played in the 1930s in relation to white poverty is highlighted, and Giliomee points to the organisations' direct support for and concern about maintaining racial purity. In that sense, he signals the political consciousness of its members. Beyond this, however, he argues that Afrikaner women took no part in politics and played no significant role in political agitation for the franchise. After the National Party came to power in 1924, Afrikaner women increasingly became:

full time wives, and mothers, staying at home and employing a servant.

They abandoned many of the tasks that had once occupied their time:

cooking, slaughtering, making clothes and educating their children

(Giliomee 2003: 376).

Increasingly, Afrikaner women's efforts would be directed at political domesticity through cultural and biological reproduction in the sign of the *Volksmoeder* and according to the programme of the Federation of Afrikaans cultural organisations (FAK) aimed at creating an 'authentic Afrikaans spirit in the houses in which we live' (Giliomee 2003: 402), which was circulated in magazines such as *Die Boerevrou*.

In his account of the years after 1948, Giliomee makes almost no mention of Afrikaner women as a group or class, and few references to individuals.^{xi} Their absence from public life, one presumes, was the effect of nationalist victory and women's subsequent retreat into their households with their families and domestic workers.

Having identified that the role of women was underplayed in Afrikaner historiography and that more research is required, Giliomee's attempt at a biography of a people sensitive to this gap produced a number of effects, some of which were probably unintended. Because little can be said about Afrikaner women, but their importance has to be underscored, a certain kind of essentialism creeps into the representation, whilst these women remain largely invisible.^{xii} As a result, Afrikaner women are at the same time underrepresented and overrepresented. Stylistically, this simultaneous overrepresentation and underrepresentation creates an ironising effect (Hutcheon 1994:156). The figure of the Afrikaner woman that emerges from this 'story' is neither fully formed nor entirely benign. There is something disconcerting and caricature-like in these sporadic representations of Dutch-Afrikaans women as agitators – armchair instigators who do not have to fight wars – of singular strength and resolve, joining their men in decision-making and ruling over their servants, followed by large silences in the record.^{xiii} In Giliomee's story of nation, the representation of Afrikaner women is less differentiated than that of Afrikaner men, and more resistant to historical, geographic, and class variations. Giliomee overestimates men's power and dominance in the period of nationalism, if only because he does not sufficiently analyse power relations in the household and institutional structures in the earlier period. Finally, we see here too the limits of the historical narrative. Because women played a limited role in politics and public life, or at least a role difficult to retrieve from the historical record, they are invisible, always a project for recovery and recuperation, whilst the domain of the household, which is seen as the theatre of their struggle, lies outside of the story and of history.

I have presented here a symptomatic reading of Giliomee's account and representation of Afrikaner women. This should not suggest that Giliomee is the only object of analysis. He is not the sole author of the silences and the exaggerations that he produces and reproduces.^{xiv} Whilst some of these must be for his account – particularly given his claim to biography, which invokes intimacy and requires the straddling of the public and the private – he is constrained by *genre*: the historical record and gaps in existing research. Giliomee's enthusiastic descriptions of women also cannot be seen merely as patronising. A good number of the strong accounts of women's powers

he provides, especially from the South African War onwards, are based on the work of feminist revisionist scholars, though he draws on this body of literature perhaps without due attention to its spirit.

Much more attune to the complex and contradictory position white women occupy in South Africa's racial modernity, feminist scholars of Afrikaner nationalism have been at pains to tackle the difficulty of providing an analysis of Afrikaner women's double role as oppressed and complicit in the oppression of others, which is sufficiently nuanced to account for the complex ways in which gender, race, class and culture are interwoven and takes account of the analytical pitfalls of projects of reparation and recuperation. For example, accounting, in Anne McClintock's terms, for race and class as articulated categories – remains difficult, particularly in the face of a desire to 'compensate for the absence of women in history' (Kruger 1991: 337).

In a growing scholarship on white Afrikaans-speaking women, focused mainly on Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation in the first four decades of the previous century, a central point of departure is the trope of the *volksmoeder*. The *volksmoeder* – literally, the mother of the people – is an older, idealised form of Afrikaner womanhood that, through a particular set of historical processes, was refashioned into Afrikaner nationalism's version of the mother of the nation, incorporating, or operating alongside, other constructions such as the *Voortrekker* mother, the *Afrikaner* women, and the *Boer* women. Much of this work is underpinned by a paradox of representation Du Toit identifies in Afrikaner nationalist historiography: 'Did Dutch-Afrikaans women claim space for unprecedented political activity in the exceptional circumstance of war at the turn of the twentieth century – only to acquiesce in a nationalism forged by men in its aftermath?' (Du Toit 2003: 159). As a result, key areas of contestation are (1) the sources and content of the *volksmoeder* construction, and whether it was a man-made imposition on white Afrikaans women or claimed and moulded by women themselves; (2) the symbolic representation of white Afrikaans-speaking women; and (3) the extent to which 'Afrikaner' women played an independent political role in nationalism.

Helen Bradford (2000) wrote about the exceptional political activity of Boer women during the war, but Elsabé Brink (1990) – who initially traced the genealogy of the heroic portrayal of Afrikaner women in historiography, which resurfaces in Giliomee's account – was most influential in typifying the *volksmoeder* discourse that emerged after the war as a man-made, nationalist imposition on women. In this period, she argues, the *volksmoeder* construction was expanded beyond the

idealised notion of Afrikaner womanhood and took on a symbolic political character: Boer women were now interpellated as mothers of the nation, in addition to their role as mothers of the household. Yet, she notes, there was a disconnect between the glorification of Afrikaner women in the nationalist imaginary and the lives of ordinary white Afrikaans women. Research conducted, but not widely publicised, 'creat[ed] a picture of Afrikaner women far removed from the heroic, rather one-dimensional rendering of their male counterparts' (Brink 1990: 285).

If Brink has been accused, somewhat unfairly, of supplementing the glorified representation of Afrikaner women with a reductionist representation of the women of Afrikaner nationalism, Anne McClintock, whose work probably has been most influential in scholarship on Afrikaner women, takes a much less nuanced position. McClintock regards nationalism in the twentieth century to have been produced through spectacle rather than Andersonian print capitalism. Her interpretation of the symbolic ox wagon trek of 1938 is that Afrikaner women became a commodity spectacle in the symbolic representation of the 'family of the nation'. In McClintock's account, the Afrikaner women of the trek are, quite literally, in white traditional dress, boundary-markers of racial exclusivity and sexual purity (McClintock 1996). Her representation of Afrikaner women renders them publicly visible but vacuous. Whilst she alludes to women's resistance against this positioning and concedes these women's complicity in nationalism as a project of racial domination, these perfunctory statements are not supported by evidence.^{xv}

Against this background, much of the recent scholarship on Afrikaner women sets out to claim a fuller subjectivity and greater agency and political involvement for nationalist Afrikaner women, in opposition to Brink's man-made women and McClintock's commodity spectacle. Even if she concurs with Brink about the limits of women's agency, Kruger (1991) shows how the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism and the *volksmoeder* was circulated by middle-class women in popular form in the magazine *Die Boerevrou*, and how an Afrikaner woman, Mabel Malherbe, for complex reasons, was instructive in writing Afrikaner women out of history. The work of Marijke du Toit (2003) and Louise Vincent (2000, 1999) examine the independent organisation of women in the women's nationalist parties and Christian welfare organisations such as the ACVV. In particular, they are interested in women's involvement in the construction of the *volksmoeder* discourse and the claims women made in that name. They also examine the reasons why this discourse appealed to women, and the way in which women negotiated between nationalist and feminist interests. Importantly, both Du Toit and Vincent show how Afrikaner women actively supported and

articulated ideas of racial purity and the extent to which they were co-producers of the *volksmoeder* ideology. Yet, whilst Afrikaner women in organisations were able to deploy the discourse of the *volksmoeder* in order to obtain the franchise for white women, Vincent argues that they were ultimately constrained by its terms.

This body of scholarship, for compelling reasons, maintains a strong focus on the 'organisation women' of Afrikaner nationalism, that is, those women playing an active role in a range of political, cultural and charitable organisations, despite an attempt to straddle the public and the private dimensions of women's lives. Given the poverty of the historical record and the difficulties of historical work on intimate spaces, relations in the family and household remain largely out of view and outside the analysis. What happens inside the household remains largely out of view, and becomes the subject of literature perhaps, rather than scholarly analysis. There exists virtually no scholarship on Afrikaner women after nationalist consolidation in the 1950s. The women's nationalist parties were incorporated into the National Party. The importance of welfare organisations declined as (unequal) opportunities became available for women to take up professional careers in welfare and the nationalist state took on the welfarist role. With an increase in the income of white Afrikaans families, particularly in the 1960s, many Afrikaner women increasingly found themselves in a position to embrace this particular form of domesticity. I would like to point to three aspects of this analysis, before moving on to the conclusion.

First, I hope it is possible to see from this analysis the manner to which the account offered by Giliomee makes possible an abstraction of Afrikaner woman, but also of the black women with whom she is in a relationship, in way that allows for a range of historical instantiations to bleed into a singular concept. The Dutch women of the Cape, the pioneer women of white migration to the interior, the boer women on the farms, the *volksmoeders* of Afrikaner nationalism, and the *madam/miesies* and *mevroue* of the apartheid years are represented as always already in a relationship with a black woman.^{xvi} Giliomee describes this relationship as the most enduring form of racial paternalism in South African history – without a hint of irony.

This allows, of course, for a seamless bleeding of the various instantiations in which black women surface in the text – slave, object of desire and taboo, servant, inboekseling, domestic worker) – as well – although I have not offered this analysis here. Contemporary relations between 'maids' and 'madams', at least to the extent that this relationship becomes abstracted from individual cases, can be seen as intricately linked to this.

Second, the depth and nature of the structural social and economic impositions on white women under apartheid have not been discussed; nor has apartheid class structure of whiteness. These are important, and specific, cannot be swept away with a version of white female domesticity enhanced by paid domestic labour.

Third, none of the accounts discussed here suggests in any way that Afrikaner women as a class rejected or resisted racial oppression – quite the opposite.

At the close of nationalist rule, Afrikaner women were not represented as perpetrators at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. As individuals and as a class, they hardly feature in South Africa's new museums of terror. Post 1994, the Afrikaner woman was rediscovered and inherited, on the basis of ethnicity, a *koeksister* monument in the marginal private Afrikaner homeland of Orania, in recognition of her not insignificant labour in the name of the 'nation'. At the same time, she was interpellated, in the name of gendered whiteness, and as a victim of nationalism, as a category of the designated disadvantaged in employment equity legislation and thus became a beneficiary of the post-apartheid state. With her middle-class status largely consolidated, although under decided pressure at the lower end, she is still most often with a domestic worker, but in a relationship that is now contractually constituted and mediated by the state. These facts are both evidence of the remarkable foundations of the postapartheid order, the inherent contradictions in the way in which the past has been 'dealt with', and sources of major and enduring tensions. Such an analysis calls for a close analysis of the domain of the private as a site of politics and to pay closer attention to understandings of moral order that derives from the idea of nation or society as encapsulated in ordinary relations between 'fellows'.

CONCLUSION

In Homi Bhabha's terms, there is a need to analyse 'the relationship between the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people' (Bhabha 1990:2). Taylor's notion of the *social imaginary* pushes us towards accounting in a different language for the way South Africans come to understand and experience their relations to each other and to the past. The idea of domestic work – the relation between 'maid' and 'madam' – is a form that is at once intimate and abstracted. Such an understanding constitutes the domestic domain – the domain of family and of reproduction – as a political domain in a Levinasian sense – as the domain of ethics – the first politics. If we understand this as a symbolic relation in the *social imaginary*, rather than actual relations of

domestic work, then it is highly commensurate with Anderson and Taylor's notion of symbolically mediated intimacy as a foundation for an understanding between 'fellows'. Of course, such an analysis offers the possibility of imbuing the white Afrikaans-speaking woman (the particularist version of the abstracted category of the white madam) with a greater sense of historical agency and the capacity to inflict harm – the foundations for a fuller subjectivity. At the same time, there is a limit to the usefulness of the singular, abstracted version of the moral subject and ideas of moral accountability in relation to the concrete practice in the present.

Perhaps more importantly, given the concern of this paper with anxieties about the nation, my sense is that the significance of the symbolic loadedness and prominence of domestic work in public discourse points towards the idea that in order to be properly understood – which is impossible – apartheid requires a narrative or an image that can hold or capture the social, intimate dimensions of apartheid – as opposed to the political-structural dimensions which were the focus of, for example, the TRC. The relation of domestic work functions as one such holder in the *social imaginary*. It explains some part of the lived experience of apartheid – the way in which things were between citizens. The gendered form of this narrative or image is not incidental. This gives to domestic work this double signification, so that it becomes in postapartheid a site of reparation and symbolic fixing. The dilemma is the tension between domestic work as a story or image in the *social imaginary* that stores the past, and domestic work as a practice in the present.

Domestic work is an ordinary, (increasingly) regulated practice and a site for continuing struggle, but also of socially important work. It is also a conceptual holder (in narrative and imagery) for an apartheid *way of life* and a failure by white South Africans to meet the normative expectations that members of a society have of each other. However, by virtue of the fact that the practice itself spans the apartheid and postapartheid eras, the story cannot be neatly concluded; cannot be told as something that is past. As such, this tale therefore becomes constitutive too of the *social imaginary* of postapartheid – and turns it into a contemporary symbolic abstraction – in narrative form – of the kind of society South Africa is, the *way of life* it offers its middle classes, and the extent to which we are meeting the normative expectations we have of each other. This is in part why the particular form of this story and image (that is, the relationship between 'black maid' and 'white madam') is so contested.

For Taylor, practice informs the *social imaginary* and vice versa. The result is an oscillation between targeting for reform the institution of domestic work and stripping it of its messy apartheid racial-paternalist baggage; moving towards unmaking the practice itself because the stigma attaching to it has become unbearable, or retelling or reconceptualising the meanings of domestic work in the *social imaginary*. The latter means coming to terms with what it would mean if domestic work were to be not only a *social imaginary* of apartheid, but also of postapartheid. But what would be, then, the holder in the *social imaginary* of the intimate betrayal that was apartheid? And how would the institution of domestic work need to be reformed in order to meet the normative expectations we have of each other?

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ⁱⁱ See Bernhard Schlink's, *Guilt about the past*.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Citizens' is my insertion here – Taylor uses 'fellows'. I am not deeply invested in a debate that understands 'society' or 'publics' as constituted on the basis of citizenship – but given the framing of this paper, which turns on the idea of the 'nation', it is not inappropriate at least to start off with this vocabulary.

^{iv} Domestic work was central to the apartheid social order and its racial modernity. Domestic quarters for black females in white residential areas and on top of tall apartment buildings in the country's metropolises – the 'locations-in-the-sky' (Beavon 2004:134) – were permanent, formal and normalised spaces of exception in amidst an obsessive drive to uphold firm racial boundaries and create racially pure enclaves, provided that they housed single black women.

^v The symbolic relationship between the domestic worker and these other figures of the postapartheid social imaginary are not incidental, and require further exposition (see Du Plessis, forthcoming).

^{vi} Nonetheless, the tropes of body and family are not deployed solely in relation to 'nation', but also more generally, and perhaps universally, because of their ready availability and imaginative power to make sense of or to imagine larger entities (Herzfield 1997: 5).

^{vii} Giliomee explains that Steenkamp in all likelihood referred to official complaints made by slaves against their masters and the fact that in the Cape Colony slaves were permitted to testify against their masters in court (Giliomee 2004: 151-152).

^{viii} Giliomee does note, however, that Susanna Smit never made the trek.

^{ix} For example, one of only a few references to Afrikaner women is to the fetes, bazaars, concerts and dinners organised by women in numerous towns as part of the activities of the Helpmekaar-vereniging to raise funds for the Boer rebels of the 1914 rebellion (Giliomee 2003: 386).

^x The language Giliomee uses is again important. Giliomee quotes Elsabé Brink who wrote that these women 'displayed singular solidarity, tenacity and endurance, courage and fortitude in meeting such strikes and always stood loyally by their leaders' (Giliomee 2004: 426).

^{xi} There are some exceptions. Giliomee writes with admiration of Rykie van Reenen, a 'perceptive journalist', who he describes as 'undoubtedly the most outstanding Afrikaans journalist of the century (with Pienaar a close second)' – apparently without noticing the ironic twist in meaning provided by the comment in parentheses. Elsa Joubert and Jeanne Goosen's texts are credited with helping to undermine apartheid. Elisabeth Eybers and Antjie Krog are briefly mentioned. Erika Theron's Theron Commission is discussed in some detail. MER (Miems Rothman) is the only woman who receives significant attention.

^{xii} It reminds one of a remark by Miems Rothman, key member of the ACVV and columnist for *Die Burger*, in one of her columns in 1924: 'They still regard us as a different sort of human being, and they prove this by constantly praising us, and telling us, and repeating, and telling us again, how good and bright we are, and how much better than themselves ... Do men also praise each other like this? ... It is of course extremely pleasant to hear all that lovely appreciation; one feels so flattered and so good, so noble and so ideal; but when you get home – where nothing has changed – then you don't really know' (Du Toit 2003: 171)

^{xiii} I am not passing judgement on Giliomee's claims about Dutch-Afrikaans and later Afrikaner women's courage and determination. Rather, I maintain that the case is overstated and oversimplified, and that the gaps in representation dwarf the available evidence. This has specific consequences, if perhaps unintended.

^{xiv} An analysis of this kind would have been near impossible had I chosen, instead, to examine another recent study of Afrikaner nationalism, that of Aletta Norval (1996). As Norval takes as her point of departure the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, with a bounded focus on the texts of the intelligentsia, it would be difficult

to find in her work even a trace of Afrikaner women. In Norval's study, women are thus stripped of voice, agency and responsibility almost by definition.

^{xv} Despite McClintock's reductionist account, there is no doubt that white women generally, and Afrikaner women specifically, were positioned symbolically as boundary-markers of 'nation'. In the first few decades of the previous century, white women's sexuality became the site of political controversy in relation to the black peril discourses that punctuated the period. During the 1922 strike, white women, through their reproductive relations, were portrayed as boundary-markers of race and nation (Giliomee 2004: 334). It would find its fullest expression in 1938 when the election was contested, at least in part, on the issue of white women's sexuality and fears of miscegenation (Hyslop 1995).

^{xvi} Unsurprisingly the Klerewerkersunie's members don't fit as snugly into this chain of symbolic signification