

Decolonizing International Political Theory:  
Emotional Imperialism and the Paradox of Value in Globalized Care

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Children matter to their parents immeasurably, of course, but the labor of raising them does not earn much credit in the eyes of the world.

-- Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002: 29)

## Introduction

This paper is driven by the call from scholars to embrace the ‘postcolonial moment’ in the study of global politics. Failure to do so, suggest Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, ‘hamstrings’ our ability to make sense of world politics generally and North-South relations in particular (Barkawi and Laffey 2006: 333). While Barkawi and Laffey are primarily concerned with the constitution of Europe and the non-European world in security studies, my interest in this paper is this relationship in international political theory (IPT).<sup>1</sup> International political theory includes a range of perspectives including liberal approaches (which often draw on contemporary analytic political philosophy in the liberal tradition), some critical IR theory (which draws on the Frankfurt School, particularly the work of Habermas), and some constructivist work (which focuses on norm development and the possibility of moral change in world politics). Much of the work in international political theory from these perspectives exhibits strong tendencies to construct the ‘weak as bearers of rights and objects of emancipation’ (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006: 333). Despite their divergent origins, all of these approaches end up at more or less the same place – advocating strongly normative, liberal cosmopolitan vision of global politics. Nation-states and their citizens are divided up into neat categories – the strong and powerful on one hand, and the weak and powerless on the other. The latter are constructed as ‘marginal or derivative elements of world politics ... at best the site of liberal good intentions’ (Barkawi and Laffey 206: 332).

In an effort to foreground the postcolonial in world politics, Barkawi and Laffey emphasize, in their article, the *relational* nature of world politics. They state clearly that ‘(r)elational processes connect the world’. Furthermore, they suggest that ‘(r)elational thinking provides inherent defences against Eurocentrism because it begins with the assumption that the social world is composed of relations rather than separate objects, like great powers or ‘the West’ (Barkawi and Laffey 2006: 349). While I am highly sympathetic to this line of thinking, I will suggest in this paper that their argument about relationality needs to be pushed further. It is not sufficient simply to assert the presence of an evident and unproblematic relationality that ‘connects the world’ (Barkawi and

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<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, an emerging post-colonial literature on global politics, both within and outside the disciplinary boundaries of International Relations. My focus here is on the particular ‘sub-field’ of International Political Theory, which, as this paper outlines, is dominated by liberal – especially cosmopolitan liberal – approaches. Existing critiques of the Europeanist character of these approaches, and their neglect of colonial and post-colonial relations, include Jahn (2005) and Jabri (2007).

Laffey 2006: 349). Rather, it is necessary to interrogate the nature and scope of contemporary neo-colonial relational processes, and to be curious about new and emerging kinds of relations that are uncovered when we look at the world through these relational lenses. A thoroughgoing relational approach will reveal the complex and multidimensional nature of contemporary neo-colonial relations; in particular, it will reveal the way that the familiar dualism 'North-South' intersects with, and is complicated by, relations of gender, race and class. 'Decolonizing' international political theory forces us to look beyond states and familiar 'non-state' actors in order to consider new and different forms of imperialism at work today.

To illustrate this argument, the paper will focus on what Arlie Hochschild has called 'emotional imperialism' (Hochschild 2002). While emotional imperialism is most often associated with global care migration, its relevance extends beyond this issue. In particular, the idea of emotional imperialism reveals the existence of multiple, diverse and cross-cutting relations among a variety of global actors – migrant caregivers; their husbands/partners; their children; the children for whom they care; their women employers; their male employers, their home (sending) states; the receiving states; and various social and political associations of migrant caregivers in receiving countries. Many of the relations among these actors span both physical and discursive geographical spaces; others, however, are located within one physical space (such as relations between husbands and wives and migrant caregivers in the space of the home). While some of these relations are between individual men and women, or individuals and collective actors such as states and their institutions, other relations implicated in emotional imperialism exist primarily at the level of structure and/or discourse. Emotional imperialism is deeply implicated in shifting gender relations as they intersect with race and class within and across households, nation-states and at the transnational level.

This paper will argue that emotional imperialism is a product of the effects of neo-liberalism on economic and social policy at the domestic and global levels; these effects include the commodification of social life, the phenomenon of 'time-poverty' and the outsourcing of intimate activities, and the gendered, racial and geographically-segregated bifurcation of people as fit for either 'work' or 'care'. The relations associated with emotional imperialism reveal the wide-ranging and profound effects of the ideology and practices of neo-liberalism on everyday life. An analysis of emotional imperialism exposes the need to reconsider both the value of care – for caregivers, the 'consumers' of caring labour, and the recipients of care -- and the implications of this for our understanding of power in world politics. How can we explain the 'paradox' of care? Why are careworkers and their activities simultaneously 'honoured' and 'despised', and how has this paradox of value deepened in the new global care economy? What does this reveal about gender, race and postcolonial relations in contemporary world politics?

Critical approaches to ethics in world politics – including feminist ethics and poststructuralist understandings of ethics -- question the epistemologically secure versions of moral universalism found in mainstream IPT. They remind us that ethics cannot be separated from politics and power; rather, ethics function *through* power in any and all given social contexts. This questioning reveals the ways in which liberal ethical arguments – including those based on conventional liberal understandings of human rights – fit comfortably with the ideologies of neo-liberalism and individualistic liberal democracy. By contrast, Foucauldian analysis reveals liberalism as an ‘ethos of government that attempts to govern life through its freedom’ (Duffield 2007: 6); feminist ethics focus on the gendered aspects of global politics which, ‘in being presented as necessary, are either not ‘seen’ at all or are seen as unquestionable (Hutchings 2000: 123). Relying on these understandings of ethics and power, I will argue that an international political theory of care can help us understand emotional imperialism by providing a thoroughgoing account of relationality and destabilizing the dichotomy between a ‘benevolent, autonomous global North and a dependent global South’ (Robinson 2010: 141).

## **International Political Theory**

While the term ‘international political theory’ may have only recently entered the lexicon of social science, political thought focused at the global level is hardly new. Enquiry into the justice and injustice of war, for example, has a nearly continuous history that stretches back to the ancients. Today, international political theory cross-cuts the disciplinary divides of IR, political theory and moral philosophy, and produces work on such varied topics as Just War theory and its relation to terrorism, humanitarian intervention and civil war; the distributional consequences of global economic and political structures; the political theory of sovereignty; transnational and global citizenship; the ethics of immigration policy; global environmental philosophy (Wendt and Snidal 2009: 3). In their editorial piece launching the new journal *International Theory* in 2009, Wendt and Snidal describe international political theory as work that theorizes the ‘role of norms and values at the international level’ and ‘engages concepts such as justice, rights and duties’ (Wendt and Snidal 2009: 3).

International political theory is dominated by the political philosophy of liberalism. Liberal international political theory – which includes both ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘communitarian’ variants -- is primarily interested in the articulation of theories of justice at the global level. Cosmopolitan approaches claim that there are global principles of justice that apply to individuals (Caney 2010: 152). While cosmopolitan thinkers may take consequentialist, rights-based or contractarian approaches, underlying this diversity is a common conviction – that membership of a nation or state is not morally relevant to a person’s entitlements, and the distribution of burdens and benefits (Caney 2010: 153). Communitarian approaches, by contrast, argue that cultural affiliations and

collective nation-statehood are, indeed, morally-relevant. While the implications of this claim vary for communitarian thinkers, there is a broad consensus around the importance of the principles of self-determination and non-intervention. These principles are important not only for reasons of order, but for reasons of justice.

Liberal-cosmopolitan positions accounts stress the necessity of establishing universalizable principles in order to achieve a just world order. While communitarianism is usually constructed as the antithesis of liberal cosmopolitanism, the two positions are similar in many respects. Both traditions retain an ontological and normative commitment to the autonomy of the individual, with communitarianism fleshing out the liberal framework with a conception of the 'good society'. In international relations, moreover, the apparent dichotomy between inside (state) and outside (global) has been resolved through the idea of state sovereignty. As Walker argues,

the principle of state sovereignty already expresses a theory of ethics, one in which ontological and political puzzles are resolved simultaneously. It affirms that the good life, guided by universal principles, can occur within particularistic political communities (Walker 1993: 64).

Communitarianism's faith in the nation-state as an inclusive community often overlooks the extent to which citizenship is, in fact, marked by exclusions and inequalities. It is certainly true that the 'conventional nation-building narrative, within which every individual is an undifferentiated sovereign citizen-subject' dominates the discursive terrain of contemporary democratic politics. Yet critical voices, those generated 'outside the spaces authorized' by this narrative, have demonstrated that – at various times and in various contexts – indigenous peoples, migrants, ethnic minorities and women --have all been excluded from the 'coherent' nation, and thus, from full citizenship (Shapiro 2009: 224).

Another key strand of international political theory is informed by Habermasian discourse ethics. Building on Habermas, Andrew Linklater's approach to international political theory defends the rights of individuals to be consulted about decisions that may affect them adversely (Linklater 2005: 141-145). The dialogic community represents the achievement of the third and final stage of morality. It is at this stage that participants are able to judge the universal validity of their principles and, potentially, agree on universalisable principles which will provide the basis for the development of free social relations, and the emancipation of all human beings (Robinson 2011b: 848).

Discourse ethics has been roundly critiqued for the substantive liberal assumptions that hide beneath its guise of procedural neutrality. Linklater's work, in particular, has been the subject of a scathing critique by Beate Jahn, who rejects Linklater's claim that (European) political thought has developed progressively towards higher stages, that is, more universality (Jahn 1998: 628). She questions the possibility of establishing any kind of 'equal communicataion'

with peoples whom we have been told beforehand they are, unfortunately, 'morally backward' (Jahn 1998: 641).

Four hundred years of colonial and imperial history are presented here as the breeding ground of the most universal and highest form of morality available to the modern world – interspersed with a few misdemeanors which are deplorable but do not affect the value of this overall development (Jahn 639).

By discarding the requirement of producing historical and holistic analyses, and retaining only a vague commitment to the 'emancipation of the species', Jahn argues convincingly that Linklater's work no longer retains the basic requirements of a critical theory (Jahn 1998: 619, 637)

The emphasis in this variety of critical theory is on the inclusion of more and more people into those dialogues that affect their well-being. Little consideration is given, however, to the cultivation of values, attitudes and skills required to engage in dialogue with weaker or more dependent others in ways that are neither demeaning nor paternalistic. Effective dialogue, for example requires learning how to listen effectively. This is a moral practice that is learned and developed through relations with others (Robinson 2001: 855-856).

A third approach to international political theory has recently been articulated by a group of constructivists. This group of scholars seeks to claw back the terrain of 'progress' from liberal and critical theory of International Relations, whose 'champions in different ways have laid claim to the moral high ground in pointing the ways to positive moral change' (Price 2008: 2). These scholars argue that their own approach – guided as it is by the careful empirical study of the role of norm development and moral change in world politics – avoids the 'utopianism' of liberal and critical (Habermasian) IR theory (Price 2008: 2).

Constructivists argue that their methodology differs from that of critical theorists insofar as it is prepared to recognize incremental progress, rather than seeking only 'wholesale revolution' (Price 2008: 38). Interestingly, Price admits that, most of those engaged in this kind of constructivist analysis share a 'humanitarian, cosmopolitan vein' (Price 2008: 3). It is suggested that this may be partly because most constructivists to date have mostly studied the origins and operation of 'happy' international norms (such as the abolition of slavery) rather than 'bad' norms (such as, say, slavery itself) (Price 2008: 35). Although Price insists that constructivists are very well placed to identify some of the morally undesirable implications of erstwhile progressive developments, I would suggest that it is unlikely that they will. This is because contemporary slavery is not a 'bad' norm – indeed, it is not a norm at all. It is the byproduct of a set of structural, ideological and material forces and practices that constrain and limit the behaviours of individuals and groups in the contemporary global economy.

In focusing exclusively on norm development and moral progress, constructivists overlook the structural and discursive logics that govern these norms.

All three of these approaches to international political theory – liberalism, discourse ethics, and constructivism -- start from the perspective of moral universalism and explain why this premise requires that wealthy nations do more to protect human rights or provide humanitarian aid to people living in less developed countries (Kohn 2010: 201). They seek ‘moral progress’, defined in terms of the ‘emancipation’ of individuals from political and religious tyranny, and the spread of norms, values and institutions associated with liberal democracy. Critics of these approaches, however, call for greater attention to the histories and processes of imperial subjugation and the resistance it has so regularly generated’ (Barkawi and Laffey 2006: 348). Barkawi and Laffey describe, for example, the effacement of Cuba from analyses of the Cuban Missile Crisis, WWII as an ‘inter-imperial’ war, and Al-Qaeda as constituted out of hierarchical relations of interconnection with the ‘modern’, Western world (Barkawi and Laffey 2006). While these insights are of great significance, they reproduce the traditional focus on ‘national’ security, state and ‘non-state’ actors. Furthermore, despite their emphasis on relationality, Barkawi and Laffey’s repeated use of the terms ‘the strong’ and the ‘weak’ to describe the members of the ‘European’ and ‘non-European’ worlds reifies the dichotomies that IR has produced. While their general argument is important and persuasive, their call for ‘relational’ analysis fails to explore fully what relationality means – especially in terms ethics and power. An analysis of the processes involved in ‘emotional imperialism’ can help us to think more clearly about both relationality, and post-coloniality, in contemporary global politics.

### **The Postcolonial Moment? Reflections on Emotional Imperialism**

Given the preoccupation in IR with traditional security concerns, it is perhaps unsurprising that global care migration has gained little attention in analyses of ‘imperial subjugation’ and resistance.<sup>2</sup> Care and carework are likewise rarely considered to be the stuff of political theory. As Eva Kittay has argued, political theories are ‘intended to capture the conditions for justice. The relationships of dependency and care are viewed as standing outside these public domains’ (Kittay 2001: 47). Global care migration refers to the flow of (mainly women) caregivers from income-poor to income-rich countries in response to the increased demand for domestic and carework as more women engage in paid labour outside of the home. Women in developing countries are

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<sup>2</sup> Notable exceptions are Anna M. Agathangelou (2004), *The Global Political Economy of Sex: Desire, Violence and Insecurity in Mediterranean Nation-States*. New York: Palgrave, and K. Chang and L.H.M. Ling (2000), ‘Globalization and its Intimate Other: Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong’ in Marianne Machand and Anne Sisson Runyan, eds., *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*. London: Routledge.

taking up these positions in order to support their families financially. But these changing patterns of postcolonial migration are also structured by the policies developed by income-rich nation-states. Migration rules construct the legal, social and civil rights of migrants in different ways, and employment policies may serve to deregulate the economy and increase the casualization of labour. All of this, moreover, is governed by the 'ongoing reconstitution of social relations of gender, care and domestic service; of hierarchies of ethnicity and nationality; and of differentiated means of, and rights to, citizenship' (Williams 2011: 21).

While the forms of power governing transnational care migration may be described as neo-colonial, they are markedly different from the coercive power of nineteenth-century imperialism. As Arlie Russell Hochschild argues, while the sex trade and some domestic service are brutally enforced, in the main the new emotional imperialism does not issue from the barrel of a gun (Hochschild 2002: 27).

Today's north does not extract love from the south by force: there are no colonial officers in tan helmets, no invading armies, no ships bearing arms sailing off to the colonies. Instead, we see a benign scene of Third World women pushing baby carriages, elder care workers patiently walking, arms linked, with elderly clients on streets or sitting beside them in First World parks (Hochschild 2002: 27).

Given our association of empire with these familiar images of coercion and violence, the power at work here hardly seems like power at all. At first glance, the term 'emotional imperialism' may seem oxymoronic, even benign. Commodifying and extracting 'emotions' can surely cause harm to no one; surely we all have plenty of emotion to 'go around'?

Rhacel Salazar Parrenas provides vivid illustration of the pain of 'transnational parenting' in her book, *Servants of Globalization* (Parrenas 2001). Her research shows that most migrant Filipina domestic workers are overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness: they are trapped in the contradiction of feeling the pain of physical separation and having to give in to their family's dependence on the material rewards granted by this separation (Parrenas 2001: 119). The emotional strain of this 'transnational parenting' can include feelings of anxiety, helplessness, loss, guilt and loneliness' (Parrenas 2001: 120). Many of these feelings are also experienced by the children left behind. Parrenas found that many of these children are racked with 'loneliness, insecurity and vulnerability' (Parrenas 2001: 131). Although many children seem to recognize the efforts of their mothers to provide material support from afar, they have an ingrained desire for their mothers to return home. Parrenas argues that this desire is due partly to socialized expectations of traditional mothering – of mother as 'nurturer', and father as 'provider' (Parrenas 2001: 143, 146). Yet migrants continually suppress the emotional tensions by overriding emotional



costs with material gains, or by emphasizing the temporary nature of their sojourns and living for the day of return (Parrenas 2001: 149).

These contemporary postcolonial relations invite a consideration of governance and power in global politics. They raise questions about the technologies of competition, individualization and 'self-improvement', the commodification of daily life, 'time-poverty', and the gendered and racialized discourses of 'care' and 'work'. Migrant careworkers' subjectivities are produced, at least in part, by and through the regulation, structures and techniques of power that govern their day-to-day activities. Our daily performances –which construct us as primarily 'workers' or 'carers' – are disciplined by regulative discourses of gender, race, class and geopolitical location. Filipino women who take white children to parks in upper-middle class, mainly white neighbourhoods in Canada are immediately identifiable as migrant careworkers. As Joan Tronto has argued, when immigrants are care workers, they become marked with the stigma of care work. They are 'clearly designated as appropriate to do servile work and are marked by race, colour, religion, creed, accent, national origin, and so forth' (Tronto 2011: 173). These designations determine how and why the needs of migrant careworkers are often taken to be different from the needs of what Tronto calls the 'mainstream' population (Tronto 2011: 173). Their own needs for emotional and physical care, their entitlements and rights, and their human security are either disregarded or actively threatened, especially when their work is governed by the regulations of state-sponsored caregiver programs.

Migrant caregivers are constructed in multiple and often contradictory ways by the neo-liberal global economy and its institutions. First, and most obviously, they are constructed as 'workers' for the purpose of legitimizing their labour migration. As individualized units of labour, they are filling the demand for care work in income-rich countries. Their emotional well-being, and their emotional skills, form no part of this supply and demand equation. When they arrive, however, these women are simultaneously constructed as 'carers' who must respond – with patience, attentiveness and even love – to the demands of other peoples' children. Second, Safri and Graham describe how a 'victim portrayal' of migrant caregivers co-exists with a 'national hero identity' invoked by the Philippine state to inspire migrant workers to remit foreign currency. This dualism, however, obscures the multiple and overlapping identities and experiences of these women (Safri and Graham 2010: 106). Indeed, the women themselves resist these dichotomies, refusing to see themselves only as 'breadwinners' who have abandoned the role of mothering. Indeed, migrant caregivers resignify motherhood; in doing so, they contribute to the emergence of the transnational family and the global household as crucial macroeconomic categories (Safri and Graham 2010: 105).

As work outside the home become more and more all-consuming for all adult members of households in income-rich countries, these adults are lacking not only the time to care. They are also being stripped of the emotional and

moral capacities to care. They are losing, in Iris Murdoch's words, the ability to focus attention on others whom we can recognize as 'real'. On this view, morality is not just about action, but about learning how to wait, be patient, trust and listen (Murdoch 1997: 357-358). These trends are usually viewed as the results of 'personal choice' on behalf of 'working women', as is the movement of women from their homes to take up care work positions in income rich countries. The consequences of this migration are seen as 'personal problems' (Hochschild 2002: 2007). Unrecognized are the structural power of global capitalism and the relations of gender which constrains and limits the choices of these women, as well as the regulative dichotomies of 'work and care', 'mind and body', 'autonomy and dependence', 'victim and hero' which discipline their 'choices.

This is not to suggest, of course, that busy working parents in the income-rich global north do not 'care about' their children. Most of these parents love their children deeply and want the best for them. Indeed, the upbringing of their own children – including the music, dance, and sports lessons, the competitive programs, the best schools, the arranging of 'playdates' and elaborate birthday parties – preoccupy many parents. But many of these parents recognize their own lack of time and emotional skills required for parenting. Migrant women who are seen to lack these pressures – in part because have left their own children behind – are regarded as having both the time and the emotional disposition to be better caregivers. The hiring of domestic workers is frequently determined by racial and ethnic preferences that are based in prevailing stereotypes regarding certain groups. These preferences, and the stereotypes supporting them, have changed over time:

For example, between the nineteenth century and World War I, the majority of the domestic workers in the Southern United States were African-Americans, whereas in the North the domestic labor sector was dominated by immigrants. ... Lately immigrants hailing from Latin America seem to be considered as the ideal candidates to take care of the needs for domestic service of the families in the United States (Labadie-Jackson 2008: 78).

Hochschild quotes the director of a San Francisco nursery that employs central American staff because they "know how to love a child better than middle-class white parents. They are more relaxed, patient and joyful ... these professional parents are pressured for time and anxious to develop their kids' talents" (Hochschild, quoted in Bunting, 2005). But while some practices of care – such as food preparation and cleaning – can be commodified, others, such as responding with genuine concern and even love when children sick, sad or scared, cannot. Commodifying these activities turns them into something else – the 'acting out' of concern and love. While many migrant caregivers do feel much genuine affection and even love for the children they look after, it is rare

that these feelings are not mixed with feelings of loss and guilt regarding their own children.

Is emotional imperialism the 'new' imperialism? Is it, as journalist Madeline Bunting describes, a form of 'asset-stripping', but where this time the asset is not oil or diamonds, but care (Bunting 2005)? It could be argued, of course, that care is completely unlike oil or diamonds; while the latter are extremely valuable, the latter is notoriously undervalued. Moreover, it seems to remain so despite the growing demand for it. As Hochschild argues, the low value placed on caring work results neither from an absence of a need for it nor from the simplicity or ease of doing it. Rather, she suggests, the declining value of child care results from a cultural politics of inequality (Hochschild 2001: 29).

Just as the market price of primary produce keeps the Third World low in the community of nations, so the low market value of care keeps the status of the women who do it – and, ultimately, all women – low (Hochschild 2001: 29).

Why do we place such a low value on care work – and on the well-being of the people who do it – while at the same time valuing so highly the well-being, security and development of the children that require this care?

### **Race, Power and the Paradox of Value in Globalized Care**

'Peace, like mothering, is sentimentally honored and often secretly despised'

-- Sara Ruddick (1995:137).

The late Sara Ruddick's widely misunderstood and under-recognized book, *Maternal Thinking*, explores the (complicated) relationship between the practices of mothering and the politics of peace (Ruddick 1995). While the book is loaded with nuggets of 'intellectual gold', I am particularly interested in her claim that both peace and mothering are 'sentimentally honored and often secretly despised'.<sup>3</sup> What might this mean? How might it come to be that an idea, or set of practices, could be both honoured and despised? Might it be that not just 'mothering', but the activities and work of caring more generally are also

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<sup>3</sup> In honoring Sara Ruddick with a Distinguished Woman Philosopher Award from the Society of Women in Philosophy, Hilde Lindemann Nelson so described Ruddick's contribution to philosophy: "Like a medieval sage in possession of the philosopher's stone, Sally has taken the dishonored dross of the work of mothering and turned it into intellectual gold" (2003). This phrase inspired the title of the 2012 International Studies Association panel '*Maternal Thinking' as Intellectual Gold for International Relations: A Panel in Honor of Sara Ruddick (1935-2011)*'.  
<http://sararuddick.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/panel-ias-san-diego.pdf>

subject to this paradox? Finally, might this paradox be in some way heightened or magnified in the context of the contemporary racialized, transnational care regimes?

Feminists of almost all stripes have been highly critical of the nuclear family and its role in maintaining the subordination of women. The relegation of women to the private sphere of the home and family has enormous consequences for women as citizens as participants in the paid labour force. Feminist economics has demonstrated the ways in which women's unpaid social reproductive labour produces labour power for the formal ('productive') economy. Unpaid social reproductive labour has no economic value, because it does not pass through the market. But it is also seen as having little value - requiring no or little education or training, and demanding a very low wage when no 'free' labour is available. Yet, at the same time, the value of women 'staying home' with their families is often seen as priceless. This view is especially evident in, but not limited to, groups and individuals on the religious and political right, including many women's organizations, who uphold the traditional nuclear family and women's roles as carers, cooks and cleaners in the home. Public care outside the home is regarded as part of the disintegration of the family and its traditional gender roles; the limitations or poor quality of some public child care facilities are widely seen as inherent rather than a function of gender inequality, under-resources or inadequate social policy. The globalization of care, moreover, is usually deplored, but not for the inequalities it creates. Rather, the response is in line with the general backlash against migrants of colour, mapped onto specific fears about the effects on traditional families of having 'our children' cared for by 'their women'. Thus, while idealizing care work done by mothers in traditional families settings, these groups perpetuate the feminization and privatization of care work, maintaining the invisibility and shielding it from political scrutiny (Robinson 2011: 35).<sup>4</sup>

Hochschild argues that the value of the labour of raising a child - always low relative to the value of other kinds of labour - has, under the impact of globalization, sunk lower still (Hochschild 2002: 29). She suggests that when middle-class housewives in America raised children as an unpaid, full-time role, the work was 'dignified by its aura of middle-classness' (Hochschild 2002: 29). It was, in other words, 'sentimentally honoured'. But, Hochschild continues, when the unpaid work of raising a child became the paid work of (racialized, migrant) child-care workers, its low market value revealed the abidingly low value of caring work generally - and further lowered it (Hochschild 2002: 29).

It is crucial that these shifting of relations of race and class, which emphasize crucial neo-colonial inequalities among women -- do not serve to

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, the particular, contemporary relationship between quiet disdain and formal valorization that seems to characterize the activities of mothering and caring in many of liberal cultures of the global north cannot be said to be universal. The ways in which different cultures 'honour' their mothers - often constructing them as mothers not only of children but of 'the nation' as well - shift over time and in relation to social and political change.

mask the extent to which care remains a gender issue. While forces of global capitalism lead to the labour migration of domestic workers, the demand for their labour results from gender inequalities in receiving nations (Parrenas 2001: 78). Although in most families women still bear primary responsibility for housekeeping and childrearing, nowadays they perform these tasks indirectly, by means of supervising and controlling the domestic worker's employment conditions (Labadie-Jackson 2008: 70). While individual men may be involved in care work and other reproductive labour, the norms which assign these tasks to women are resilient to change. The feminization of the so-called domestic sphere continues despite the apparent liberation of many women in the global north. The transnational movement of women of colour from income-poor countries to perform care work and domestic labour, and the marketization of that labour, has not altered the view of this work as 'not really' work (and therefore not subject to labour regulation). As Fitzpatrick and Kelly argue,

'(t)he traditional allocation of these (domestic) tasks to women has important and disadvantageous consequences for participants in the maid trade. Housework and child care were traditionally treated as a non-economic activity because those tasks were often discharged by housewives who do not receive cash wages. Even when unrelated women migrate to assume these tasks, the traditional devaluation of the work depresses wages and working conditions, to an extent that sometimes results in total nonpayment of cash wages (Fitzpatrick and Kelly 1998: 67).

While the contemporary global care economy is governed by particular norms, structural conditions and policies, it would be wrong to assume that the phenomenon of global care migration is new. Williams describes how, in Britain, the recruitment of health and care labour from the colonies both provided cheap labour for the new institutions of the welfare state and met a labour shortage that otherwise would have to been filled by married women. Today, the use of migrant domestic and care labour prevents the disruption of the new adult worker model of welfare, in which women are encouraged to engage in paid employment. As Williams explains, 'then and today, these were seen as cost-effective ways of security family norms and meeting care needs (even though those norms and needs have now changed). Then and today, these women's social relations and citizenship rights were inscribed with gendered and racialized inequalities' (Williams 2011: 28-29).

## **Ethics, Politics and Power: Relationality and Neocolonialism**

### *Ethics as Relational*

The dominant liberal-cosmopolitan approaches to international political theory are dependent upon highly individualized accounts of human beings as autonomous, rational actors. While liberal cosmopolitanism, in particular, is driven by a commitment to the individual as the key moral actor, both discourse ethics and 'normative' IR constructivism are based upon accounts of individuals as rational rights-holders, whose moral learning will lead ultimately to the emancipation of the 'weak', greater inclusion and progressive moral change.

Feminist approaches to ethics – in particular, the feminist ethics of care – reject this individualized model in favour of a relational ontology. They claim not only that most human beings are deeply attached to others – including the others for whom they care, and from whom they receive care – but that these attachments define and create us as ethical subjects. These claims are based not on transcendent principles of reason or human dignity, but on naturalistic and empirically-grounded arguments regarding the fundamental human need for care and nurturing, and the reality of dependence and vulnerability. This is not to deny, of course, our existence as individuals, nor to devalue aspirations to autonomy and self-sufficiency. Rather, feminist care ethics reveal networks of care and connection that lie behind, or beneath, the façade of human beings as fully-autonomous, atomistic individuals.

Liberal political philosophy relegates relations of care to the 'private' sphere of the home and the family. A fully relational feminist ontology challenges the liberal distinction between the public and private spheres by revealing the profound importance of relations of care for the maintenance of all spheres of life. These claims, of course, have important implications for our understanding of the nature of ethics and the nature of power. Ideologies of neo-liberalism and social conservatism explicitly regard vulnerability and dependence – of either individuals or states – as a pathology, a failure, and a drain on resources. But even the global liberal ethics of 'humanitarianism', human rights and cosmopolitan justice routinely ignore the essential interdependence of our embodied, often fragile, selves.

Feminist ethicists have challenged the dominant understandings of ethics – in particular, what Margaret Walker has called the 'theoretical-juridical model of morality and moral theory' (Walker 1998: 7). This model prescribes the representation of morality as a compact, propositionally codifiable, impersonally action-guiding code within an agent, or as a compact set of law-like propositions that "explain" the moral behavior of a well-formed moral agent (Walker 1998: 7-8). This view is characterized by 'intellectualism, rationalism, individualism, modularity and transcendence' (Walker 1998: 9). Feminists like Walker, by contrast, argue in favour of an 'expressive-collaborative' model which pictures morality as a 'socially embodied medium of understanding and adjustment in which people account to each other for the identities, relationships and values that define their responsibilities' (Walker 1998: 61). Understanding ethics, on this view, carries with it a heavy empirical burden, insofar as it must rely often on documentary, historical, psychological, ethnographic and sociological

research in order to know what is actually going on (Walker 1998: 11). That said, it makes no claims to pure knowledge or absolute truths. On the contrary, it questions claims to the purity and necessity in moral judgment. As a feminist ethics, moreover, this account seeks to 'make visible the gendered arrangements which underlie existing moral understandings, and the gendered structures of authority that produce and circulate these understandings' (Walker 1998: 73).

Feminists have argued that care ethics provides a substantive basis for applying an ethics of responsibility (Tronto 2011: 169). From this perspective, our responsibilities to particular others are the basic substance of morality, and the practices of attentiveness and responsiveness to other sustain and reproduce all aspects and spheres of human life. This is not to say that the ideas and practices of 'rights' and 'justice' are unimportant; rather, it suggests that, rather than being 'foundational' to morality, they are, instead, the individualist 'tip of the iceberg'. To focus on this tip alone is to ignore the submerged mass of collective and individual relationships and responsibilities which allow for the very possibility of individuals and their rights (Baier 1994: 241).

At the level of international political theory, feminist care ethics sheds light on the transnational relations that support the apparent autonomy of both individuals and states. On this view, 'decolonizing' political theory means foregrounding the relations not only between state actors and non-state actors – such as NGOs, transnational corporations and terrorist organizations – but also relations between international tourists and chambermaids in Caribbean hotels, sex tourists and sex workers, and migrant domestic workers and their employers.<sup>5</sup> These relations are neither simple nor unmediated; rather, they are subject to structural and policy determinants, and constructed by gender discourses and cultural representations. As such, they are thick with intersecting forms of power based on gender, race, class, and geo-politics.

### *Power as relational*

The 'theoretical-juridical' model of ethics described above is closely tied to a juridical model of power. Where the former presumes a set of law-like principles that rational moral agents will follow, the latter assumes that power itself exists in the rules and laws, invested in a sovereign power, which act on individuals. This is the power to 'say no', to thwart and repress, and to support that repression with the appropriate coercive apparatus. Both the theoretical-juridical model of ethics and the juridical model of power understand the individual as existing apart from or outside of 'politics' – as a sort of 'elementary nucleus' that is defined largely by its essential core of humanness (Foucault 2003: 29). This individual, on both of these views, is as 'thin as a needle', rather than

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<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Enloe revealed the importance of chambermaids to international political economy in her classic work of feminist international relations, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

being produced by multiple and intersecting relations of power and responsibility (Murdoch 1997: 343). Foucault's well-known understanding of power as a relation contests this simplistic juridical model. For Foucault, power is not primarily repressive; rather, it is a fundamentally productive relationship. Indeed, power is a productive network which runs through the whole social body. (Foucault 2000). In this sense, human subjects – including 'moral subjects' – can never escape or finally resist power; indeed, they are constituted or produced as subjects by relations of power.

Like the theoretical-juridical approach to ethics, the juridical model of power is usually theorized in a 'top-down' fashion. Kant's ethics, for example, rests on unconditional or categorical imperatives, which must be held to be universally applicable to all men. Such universal imperatives conform to the law of nature. Our morality is our duty; this duty lies in obeying the rational law that we ourselves create. Although these universal laws are generated by our own rationality, they come first, and our actions are guided by them. Similarly, the juridical model of power starts from the power itself – the singular, coercive, repressive power of the sovereign – and then considers the effects of that power on individuals. On Foucault's view, by contrast, power must be studied via a bottom-up, ascending analysis that starts with a fine-grained investigation of local and specific power relations (Allen 2010: 57). *Power and ethics are thus inextricably intertwined, rather than existing in opposition.* A non-idealized care sees practices of care as the basic substance of morality; however, this substance is always mediated through productive relations of power.

Understanding both ethics and power as fully relational is necessary if our goal is to 'decolonize' international political theory. This approach moves away from an understanding of power as residing in and being exercised by 'powerful' states (especially so-called 'imperial' ones) and institutions; rather, it sees power operating at the level of everyday practices, discourses and representations – of gender, race, and class. As Jenny Edkins writes, 'relations of power and their intricate movements are what matter ... not the power-ful and the power-less' (Edkins 2010: 143). The practices and discourses that constitute 'emotional imperialism' are not vested in 'ostentatious' power of sovereignty – not the traditional, ritual, costly, violent form of power (Foucault 1984: 209-210). Rather, this is the power of the 'everyday' -- the 'minute disciplines' that work with accumulation of capital to maximize the 'use' of bodies at the least possible cost (Foucault 1984: 210, 212). Migrant careworkers are not simply the victims or objects of 'imperial power'; rather, they reconfigure power relations *and* social relations – intimate, local, and transnational -- through the practices of transnational caregiving.

## **Conclusion**

International political theory is dominated by liberal approaches, which rest on universal principles of justice, community, or moral progress. While



there are significant differences among cosmopolitan liberalism, discourse ethics and constructivism, all of these approaches encompass an emancipatory urge to rescue the weak and less fortunate, and to welcome them into the universal community of humankind. The discipline of international relations is built upon the geographical separation of land, people and knowledge (Agathangelou and Turcotte 2010: 45). International political theory – the normative political philosophy of global politics – asserts ‘our’ moral obligations to emancipate the Others. In so doing, it reifies and naturalizes these segregations, and obscures the complex and cross-cutting relations of power – material, emotional, discursive – that constitute contemporary global politics.

As many scholars have argued, there is a pressing need to ‘decolonize’ international political theory; doing so requires that we foreground the ‘relational processes’ that connect the world (Barkawi and Laffey 2006). In this paper I have used the example of ‘emotional imperialism’ to demonstrate the changing nature of neo-colonial relations in contemporary world politics. Making sense of emotional imperialism requires a shift in focus away from traditional state and non-state actors, and away from traditional materialist or juridical understandings of power. The relations, structures and processes involved in sustaining emotional imperialism highlight the limitations of ‘theoretical-juridical’ understandings of ethics, especially those based on liberal rights or cosmopolitan understandings of global justice. Individuals and groups whose subjectivities are produced by transnational caring are not autonomous actors, individualized units of labour, or atomized rights-holders. Rather, they are intimately bound up in relations. These relations are material, contractual and emotional, and are governed by discursive and normative structures – of neo-liberalism, gender and race -- which discipline and normalize roles and identities. The relations of global care migration ‘trouble’ the ‘perceived geographical immobility’ of international relations (Agathangelou and Turcotte 2010: 45).

A feminist international political theory of care does not idealize or essentialize relations of care; instead, it re-politicizes them. While recognizing their life-sustaining value, it interrogates critically the gendered, racialized structures and processes that constitute them. States, international financial institutions, private organizations and families across the globe are intertwined in an intricate dance of power, governed in part by paradoxical conceptions of the value of care. With great efficiency, and without force or fanfare, emotional imperialism maintains and renews the exploitative logics of colonialism.

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