

21. The Triumph of the Domestic Workers

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In the rich countries, we are having a *boom of domestic labour*. More and more children, elderly persons and people with disabilities are being cared by domestic workers who often work under precarious conditions. A new type of female migration has emerged from these conditions in the last years. Female migrant workers not only contribute to the economic growth of their home countries by sending money home, they also contribute to and maintain economic standards in the countries they are working in. By leaving the care of their families in hands of other women, the migration of women leads to the creation of global care chains. As a disputed political field, care work gives birth to new gender subjectivities, hierarchies, desires and resistances.

I met Rafaela from *Territorio Domestico* at a conference about care work in 2008. Herself a domestic worker, she told us how the women of her group presented themselves as lawyers in order to recover the wage of an undocumented colleague who was kicked out of her work without getting paid. They succeeded. The women, most of them

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from Latin American, founded the association *SEDOAC* (Active Domestic Work) in 2006. Territorio Doméstico is located in the self-organized feminist center Eskalera Karakola in Madrid, where women, collectives and activists of various nationalities and with different experiences, who work as domestic workers or are otherwise connected to this issue, meet once a month. Together and along with other domestic workers' associations and collectives, SEDOAC and Territorio Doméstico are *fighting for equal rights* of domestic labour, against precarization, and for the rights of domestic workers no matter what their residence permit status is.

I began to work with Territorio Doméstico in 2009, having meetings with the group and various discussions with different persons. These discussions formed the main basis for the performative work we realized together in February and March 2010. During this time, I worked with six domestic workers on four short documentary based scenes that thematize *the conditions of a domestic worker's daily life*: migration, precarious work conditions, exploitation and irregular residence. The performance was part of the 'International Action Day of the Domestic Workers' that took place in the center of Madrid on the 28th March and at which hundreds of women took part.

The scenes had to be short and easy to understand – even without hearing the words. The most adequate form for this we found was *Agit Prop*. The short scenes about repression and resistance in the daily life of the domestic workers were written and performed by the workers in an assertive and forceful presentation. At the time, *the performance fitted in* with the other parts of the demonstration. For example, after our last scene, the manifesto

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of the demonstration was read in front of the wagon and the carpet in the middle of Plaza del Sol.

The wagon, which was constructed with a painting on bicycle wheels and moving gearwheels, was a very important part of the performance. It accompanied the demonstration and formed the scenery for the scenes. Territorio Doméstico, Stephan Dillemath and I painted it together on a Sunday with grilled chicken and Coca Cola. The commonly developed painting shows various *revolutionary women*/icons of the women's and workers' movement, state institutions and the many-headed hydra. *The hydra attacks* the judges of the Spanish Higher Court.

The painting is called "Triumph of the domestic workers" and it refers to a colonial painting that it reinterprets and turns upside down: "The triumph of the name of Jesus". Being invited to "The Potosí Principle,"¹ an exhibition about actual and historical forms of colonialism and the involvement of picture production in this process, we were asked by the curators to refer in our work – as were all of the participants – to a colonial painting.

The "Triumph of the name of Jesus" *shows a chariot* with several floors and the prophets, church fathers, apostles and saints of the Catholic Church on it. The four evangelists seem to pull the chariot – their sashes seem

¹The exhibition „The Potosí Principle“ is curated by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann and Max Jorge Hinderer. It opened in May 2010 in Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, and moved to Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, in October. In 2011, it will be shown in Museo Nacional de Arte, La Paz, Bolivia. The installation „The triumph of the domestic workers“ by Territorio Domestico, Stephan Dillemath and Konstanze Schmitt consists of the wagon, a video of the performance, fotos, texts and various stage props.

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to disappear into the mouth of the serpent which squirms around the chariot. Above the chariot, we see Ignatius from Loyola, founder of the Jesuitic Orden (really important for the missionary work in Latin America), and behind him, John Baptist. On the flag are the allegories of church, faith and justice. Behind the chariot, there is the family tree of Jesus. But under the wheels of the wagon, there are four women who represent the four continents. A much-discussed question when looking at the picture was: Who actually *sets the wagon in motion*? Is it the four evangelists in front of the wagon, the siren twining around it, or the four women under the wagon moving its wheels with their hands?

One of the slogans of Territorio Domestico is: *Without us, the world doesn't revolve*. Care and domestic work is in its different forms the *base for social and capitalistic production*. Reproduction work as the central element of the society dovetails with all other areas of production, be it companies, universities, hospitals or careers in general. All work depends in the end of the work of these women who mainly come from Spain's former colonies.

In order to visualise this principle and domestic work in the society, Territorio Domestico has developed its own symbol: a system of gearwheels set in motion by a female domestic worker. Indebted to the wealth of images of the classical labour movement, domestic work now takes on the central position in regard to factory labour. These gearwheels who are very present in the painting, are the *link between* the colonial painting/situation and the actual system of colonialism, and it focuses on the power of the persons under the wheels – answering the question of “Who moves the wagon/world?”