



European Research Council

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Call for papers

Servants' Pasts: 2nd International Conference, Berlin 11-13 April 2018

We invite papers for the second international conference organized under our ERC funded project 'Domestic Servants in Colonial South Asia'. https://www.zmo.de/forschung/projekte_2014_2019/domestic_servants_d.html

This conference will explore the various regional histories of domestic work and service within South Asia, as reflected in different language-based sources. It will also explore comparative similarities and specificities in domestic work across diverse imperial, colonial and postcolonial settings. The temporal range will include the early modern and modern periods (sixteenth century to the contemporary). We nevertheless remain interested in soliciting conceptual and thematic contributions extending further in time that would promise to explore the long history of domestic servitude in South Asia.

We invite contributions that explore the ideologies and practices which were deployed to organize domestic work. From the point of recruitment to that of maintaining the boundaries of intimacy and loyalty, among others, law, language, caste, religion, gender, and age played a crucial role in the making and constant reworking of master/mistress-servant relationship. We invite applications exploring the legal and juridical bases of regulation and the everyday maintenance, reproduction and breach of that relationship. This everydayness can include among others gesture, appropriate behaviour, touch, purity, and defilement. Papers based on vernacular sources and visuals exploring these themes are welcome.

Moving beyond the ideological macro-structures and practices of organizing domestic work, we wish to enter into the world of material objects, everyday technology, food, and not least, dress. Liveries enhanced masters' prestige. The arrival of new commodities, gadgets, and utilities in the household – refrigerators, electric fans and bulbs, motor cars, sewing machines, piped water, tinned food, television to name a few – reorganized domestic work. How did servants react to them? Did these changes instrumentally affect the terms of employability, wage and work time? Did these new changes affect their own

households? We encourage contributions on 'ethnographies of domestic work' that bring out the textured nature of these changes up to the present.

The changing forms of organisation of work, home and domesticity are crucial to understanding of servants' pasts. The architecture of the home, the technological changes taking place therein, the move from joint families to nuclear, and the change from bungalows to apartments may tell us more about how servants negotiated these changes. A new kind of domesticity, publicness and politics emerged in the nineteenth century. What is the relationship between cities and servants? Was it different from the earlier period? We invite applications on both specific changes in a particular time period as well as on long term trends and changes.

The master/mistress-servant relationship has been significantly constituted through the use of violence and the languages of affect and intimacy. We intend to explore the forms of servant resistance – individual and collective – that mark this relationship. From everyday forms to that of overt collective action spread across households and cities, how do we read servants' protests in our sources and how do we account for their transformative potential in the service relationship?

Finally, we invite papers that look at domestic servants in non-South Asian contexts such as the Ottoman empire and other imperial and postcolonial regions, to evaluate and compare histories that may be marked by similar ideologies and practices of race, class and gender. We would especially like to receive contributions on African case studies.

Some possible thematic clusters that we wish to address are the following:

1. Early modern South Asia
2. Caste, religion, gender, age & domestic work
3. Everyday technologies, material objects & architecture
4. Sensory histories
5. City & servant
6. Resistance
7. Children & domestic work
8. Ethnographies of domestic work & forms of servitude
9. Comparative imperial case-studies

We invite 400 words abstract by 15 September 2017. Please send your abstracts to erc.servants@googlemail.com Travel and accommodation will be covered.

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