Global Householding and Social Reproduction: Migration Research, Dynamics and Public Policy in East and Southeast Asia

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THE HOUSEHOLD AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

Households make up one of the key institutions of the capitalist world economy...It is the household – torn from its once indissoluble link to territory, to kinship, and to co-residentiality – that does the most to strip bare the real conditions of life. (Wallerstein 1984:17,22).

By the middle of this century the world’s population is projected to begin a process of chronic decline. This extraordinary “second demographic transition” raises a host of questions of great importance to society (Buzar et al. 2005). How will a younger generation care for a numerically larger superannuated population? How will people be able to engage in everyday associational life as communities and cities begin to shrink? How can capitalism find alternatives to its dependence on the household to absorb its crises to continue as a global system? Specifically, how can its contemporary reliance on household consumption as the principal driver of national economies continue? These questions point the discussion to the household and its role in social reproduction, understood as a reflexive relationship between the household’s capacity to daily and generationally sustain life and the social, political and economic context in which it is imbedded (Katz 2004, Bezanson 2006, Bezanson and Luxton 2006, LeBaron 2010).¹ As summarized by Duggan (2009:2):

Social reproduction includes how food, clothing and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and the elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work—mental, manual, emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically defined care necessary to maintain life and to reproduce the next generation.

Katz (2004:xii) emphasizes the cultural and identity dimensions of social reproduction by stating that it “embodies the whole jumble of cultural forms and practices that institute and create everyday life and the meanings by which people understand themselves in the world.”

Throughout the world the household has been society’s basic institution for parenting, inculcating values and cultural norms, creating citizens, and buffering individuals against the vagaries of the world at large. It is also the site of the most intimate contestations and inequities of gender and generation. With these understandings, the household as a “mini-political economy” of social reproduction has been the subject of theory and debate from a wide array of perspectives and interests, ranging from grand philosophical treatises about the good society and the foundation of civilization, expositions on the moral economy, feminist critiques of patriarchy, neoclassical economic treatment of the household in maximizing self-interest, and world systems views of capitalist development, to name a few. More recently, interest has focused on the impacts of globalization and neoliberal policy regimes on the household.

¹ Duggan (2009) traces the renewed interest in the concept of social reproduction to feminist writing in the 1970s that used the term as a post-structuralist counterpoint to Marxist political economy focusing on class analysis that excludes race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.
The breadth of theories and concerns about the household in society makes all the more compelling the need to bring them to bear on international migration research, which has focused most of its attention on labor, diaspora and gender with the household occasionally as a backdrop within a time frame typically of less than a generation. The intention of the discussion here is to focus on the globalization of householding, namely, the ways in which the processes of forming and maintaining households through time are globalizing in all key dimensions of the life of households: marriage/partnership, bearing, raising and educating children, managing daily life, earning income and caring for elders and non-working members. In responding in part to increasing disjunctures in householding prospects within territorially bounded societies, global householding is also explored in terms of hopes that are placed on its possibilities of revitalizing the household, which in the higher-income societies of the world seems to be on the brink of disappearing.

The household is defined here as a social institution that reproduces itself not only through the physical bearing of children through the generations, but also through daily practices of mutual support, including income-pooling and labor-sharing. It is used here instead of the family to allow for many possible configurations that go beyond kinship or marriage (Folbre 1986, Wallerstein and Smith 1992). It can take many forms, including those that have fictive kin, domestic workers who become “part of the family”, same-sex and unmarried couples, friends who develop long-term householding arrangements, and even small-scale urban enterprises where paid employees are expected to contribute unpaid work to householding (Jellinek 1991).

As noted, the household is not a black box of always harmonious relationships or a single preferences for all, but is instead a site of gendered, intergenerational contestations, negotiations, compromises and cooperation revolving around individual differences and status. It is at the same time an institution characterized by caring that separates it from the outside world and removes it from simply being a small-scale market economy. Altruism – “an unselfish concern for the welfare of others” – also exists in the household and is one of its defining attributes (Folbre 1986:251).

As summarized by Meyer and Lobao (2010:161-62) in their study of gender dynamics of household responses to economic downturns, the internal decisionmaking of households is understood as being nested in other scales of social organization and political economic structures:

We stress that individuals are embedded in households that shape personal social positions, identities, grievances, and political decisionmaking. Households also generate their own contested issues and may respond to others from external social forces. In turn, households are embedded in the local community, which is a site of state intervention, social interaction, and economic opportunities for household survival.

From this perspective, the understanding of the household in social reproduction requires an analysis of how the household reflexively adjusts to and is transformed by changes in larger systems, which in the contemporary world involves the state and corporate capital as principal agents and drivers. Several key disruptions to the household have transpired over the course of the past century that have radically changed its role in social reproduction, beginning with the substantial removal of production (self-provisioning) from the household by the early 20th century, followed in mid-century by the rise of welfare states and commercial services that supplanted key elements of household reproduction in the “golden age” fordism, and then a withdrawal of this support with the decline of the welfare state under neoliberal policy regimes emerging from the 1980s to the present (Crotty and Lee 2002). In the high-income economies of the world, including those in Asia, by the 21st century entire national economies have become dependent on household consumption while at the
same time requiring households to resume unpaid work in daily householding and generational care, most of which falls on women.

Along with the second demographic transition, the increasing economic pressures on household to devote more labor and income to its reproduction while continuing to consume to keep the world economy going has presented a deepening crisis in forming and sustaining the household and its roles in social reproduction. Global migration and the advent of the global household can be seen in this light, namely, as a response to both the difficulties in forming households and re-internalizing household reproduction while increasing indebtedness for the sake of global consumption. Finding spouses, having, caring for and educating children, education, daily household maintenance, finding higher-paying wage work and sending money home, and care of seniors have all began to globalize in East and Southeast Asia, as they have throughout the rest of the world.

TRANSFORMING THE HOUSEHOLD – FROM PEASANT TO WORLD SYSTEM

The Pre-Capitalist Household

A useful point of departure for considering how the household in the contemporary capitalist world system has come to the point it is at, namely, contraction and possible demise, is to begin with theories about the household in a pre-capitalist economy. A prominent thesis on such a household is contained in the work of Alexander Chayanov on the Russian peasantry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawing from detailed household interviews, he concluded that the household was organized in such a way that it maximized self-sufficiency in producing enough for household consumption needs. Work is drudgery in the view of the peasant household. This observation introduced what economists would later call the “backward bending supply curve”, namely, the withdrawal of labor from production after self-sufficiency is achieved. While this did not preclude production for the market, the peasant household was found to be interested first and foremost in producing basic levels of livelihood by and for itself, not in profit-making for its own sake.2

This thesis was accompanied by the understanding that the self-provisioning peasantry was typically subordinated to other systems of production, such as feudalism or capitalism. In this regard, and as argued by Kautsky in his debates with Chayanov in the 1920s, the reluctance of the peasant household to work for the sake of more income meant that this form of household had to disappear altogether if, in the case of the Soviet Union, socialism was to advance (Banaji 1976). In the 1960s and 1970s, this problematic gained new interest in a postcolonial world in which governments of newly formed nation-states, ahistorically categorized as “less developed” or “developing” economies, sought to turn peasant households into capitalist farmers. Resistance of households to selling their labor for a wage was viewed as irrational and perpetuated by superstitions that needed to be rooted out by the state (Taussig 1977). Writing about Africa, for example, Hyden (1980,1983) famously asserted that for a capitalist pathway of development to occur, the peasant had to be “captured” by the market, which meant ending their practices of self-provisioning.

Echoing the Enclosures of the early industrial revolution in England, the need to dispossess households of the means of production to compel them to sell their labor power was not new. In land surplus territories of Southeast Asia, the peasantry was not interested in migrating to the city as cheap wage labor, and low-wage urban labor for colonial plantations and cities was brought from

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2 Chayanov’s work did not enter into Western discourse on the peasant household until it was translated into English the 1960s, long after Stalin sentenced him to death for his contrary views about mass cooperativization for socialist development.
India, China and Java in situations in which rural households were losing their capacities for self-provisioning due to land scarcities, calamities, indenturing and slavery, rebellions and landlord exploitation (Kaur 2009). By the early 20th century kinship-based migrant support systems emerged from these sources along with robust systems of professional recruiters, brokers and middlemen. In this regard, transborder migration in colonial Asia can be seen as a household response to the loss of its capacity to produce for its own needs, and, from a larger perspective, to reproduce rural society as it then existed. The first round of the global household was being born, and its supporting kinship institutions can still be found today in Southeast Asia’s cities.

This is not to say that positive attractions could not begin to pull people into the (colonial) market economy (Barber 1960, Cliffe 1987). For example, people seasonally migrating from Northeast Thailand to Bangkok in the mid-twentieth century reported that they did so not just for more income per se, but for money — cash — needed to buy consumer products that were appearing in their home region. However, they kept one leg in the peasant household economy while putting another leg in the wage labor economy as a way of having security with increased consumption. Recent reporting on the impacts of the world recession beginning in 2008 on migration in China found that the capacity of rural households to re-absorb the masses of newly unemployed coastal region urban workers was directly related to the household production capacities that still exists in rural China (Kong et al. 2010:1):

The rural agricultural sector provided the employment buffer for return migration during the global financial crisis. Because of this buffer effect, no open unemployment was observed...In the long run, small-scale farming will inevitably give way to large landholding and higher agricultural productivity. This will naturally lead to the consolidation of farmland, and many small landholders will need to sell their land. For these workers, then, future employment shocks will have to be cushioned by other means.

The loss of the production function of the household did not occur in all households but was instead implicated in a process of rural social stratification that differentiated households by their access to land and related means of production such as water. Self-provisioning then became a prospect only for the “middle peasant”, who, as the “small farmer” became the target of rural development policies in Asia from the 1970s. Households that were marginalized through various mechanisms of land concentration and land loss became candidates for migration. In response, as the twentieth century came to an end, very large shares of this migration had become globalized. In Asia in the 1970s the key destinations were initially toward the OPEC countries of the Middle East, but by the 1990s international migration had turned equally to the high-income economies of East Asia that were experiencing rising labor costs and net decline in the size of their own labor force due to precipitously falling population growth rates that were the outcomes of diminishing capacities of households in social reproduction in those countries. Migration across national borders also began to more clearly reveal householding dimensions in terms of extraordinary levels of migrant remittances, the very large share of women migrating as domestic workers in households abroad, and a new form of migration in Asia, namely, migration for marriage.

Although the prospects for households to produce for their own needs have largely passed into history, it is not totally gone. Throughout the world households, particularly rural households that still have some land, continue to rely on some form of self-provisioning. Even in slums in cities, self-provisioning of food and housing outside of the market comprises significant portions of the
household economy. However, in the latter half of the 20th century the household was overtly repositioned by both government and (global) capital as an institution charged with the reproduction of labor for the labor market and as a unit of consumption for goods and services purchased in the market.

The latter view has been reified by national accounting invented with the idea of the GNP in World War II, which treats the household solely as a unit of consumption and, in so doing, has made invisible the household’s contribution to the economy. Along with this changing concept of the position of the household in social reproduction, the husband-headed household with wife at home was idealized, with “women’s work” devalued, made invisible, and subject to further exploitation. In this context, migration research also lost sight of the household as it took a decidedly economistic direction by neglecting or crudely reducing to material motives such householding dimensions of migration as marriage. This began to change, however, as feminist research refocused attention on the household.

Inside the Black Box: The Gendered Household and its Transformations

Pointing to the gender dimension of householding leads discussion to a consideration of social relations within the household, which was seriously neglected in debates about the household up to the 1970s. Gender studies have made substantial contributions to this issue, and many have also linked the household to the question of social reproduction (Bezanson and Luxton 2006, Appadurai 1996, Wilson and Donnan1998, Katz 1997, Braun et al. 2008, McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

Gender related inquiries about the household in international migration studies have recently coalesced under the rubric of the “transnational family” to provide new insights into intra-household power relations by chronicling and assessing how international migration, in particular the feminization of migration, results in new power relations, contestations and gendered role switches between men and women (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, Levitt, et al. 2003, Parreñas 2005, Bacas 2006, UNFPA 2006, Silvey 2006, Sørensen 2005, Toyota 2006). While confirming many issues about inequities, these studies also reveal much more malleable relationships than had been previously been expected in straightforward assumptions about patriarchy and the post-World War II model of the husband-as-breadwinner. Although the concept of what constitutes a transnational family varies greatly among these studies, and the family (or household) is treated mostly as a backdrop for the dynamics of migration and gender relations, these studies implicitly reveal that the household can have continuity through time even when its size and internal relations radically change.

Transnational family and related gender studies also present a response to mainstream neoclassical economic theories of the household that are based on the contradictory notion that in an assumed intrinsically self-interested and competitive economy, households have a single utility function that is somehow derived from presumed harmonious, uncontested and equitable household choices (Folbre 1986). But as Meyer and Lobao (2003:162) explain, “Women’s distinct social position in the

3 In the 1980s in cities in Southeast Asia estimates showed that poorer households depended on their own labor and mutual assistance outside of the market for as much as one-quarter of their material income (Evers 1984).

4 Ho and Bedford (2008) define transnational family as an entire family living in two or more countries. In contrast, UNFPA (2006:33) defines transnational families as “those whose members belong to two households, two cultures and two economies simultaneously”. Some (Silvey 2006) simply mean that that at least one family member is working abroad. Still others use the term to indicate a ‘mixed marriage’. Almost all deal only with families headed by heterosexual couples (Bacas 2006, Constable 2005, 2009, sGuarnizo 2003, Yeoh and Willis 2004, Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).
household suggests that their political interest, behavior, and experiences of economic restructuring should differ from their spouses. Gender also impacts political behavior, including movement success and life-course histories.” Wolf (1990) adds to the critique by drawing upon cases from Taiwan and Java to illustrate how the concept of a “household strategy” disguises unequal internal power relationships as well as differences in cultural norms among societies.

Others writing in the transnational family framework make the important contribution of going beyond the diaspora orientation of migration studies that imply a migrant’s yearning for the homeland while never quite being at home in the new land. Many of the transnational family studies instead show how migrants operate well and often between two or more countries, and, equally important, that non-migrants in these families are also part of the transnationalization of the family (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:132):

Transnational migration is taking place within fluid social spaces that are constantly reworked through migrants’ simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society. Both migrants and nonmigrants occupy them because the flow of people, money, and ‘social remittances’ (ideas, norms, practices, and identities) within these spaces is so dense, thick, and widespread that nonmigrants’ lives are also transformed, even though they do not move.

Even though the actual number of people who are not in the country of birth in a given family might not be large, their influence on a wide range of social reproduction activities such as religious practices, elections, disaster responses and economic turmoil are substantial, and over time, “their combined efforts add up and can alter the economies, values, and practices of entire regions” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:132).

The Political Economy of Householding

Gender and other interrogations of the lives of members of households often go beyond the family or household to contribute to political economy models of the household, which includes previously discussed views of the peasantry, post-structuralist and world systems perspectives. The Marxian view of the household has its foundations in class struggle as it unfolds under capitalism. As previously discussed, the capitalist system depends on moving production out of the household, turning it into a site for the reproduction of labor and consumption of marketed commodities and services. Petty commodity production can still exist as family-based enterprises, but these activities depend on an external market rather than being primarily engaged primarily in self-provisioning. Marxist feminist research underscores the gendered family roles that serve to exploit women, who have had the well-known dual role of housewife and mother (of future labor). Monogamous marriage with parentage of children established with it ensured class divisions through time (along male lines) by allowing the bourgeoisie to pass on wealth to offspring.

Male-female relations, with men being the breadwinner in the family, are thus said to promote class divisions. Females and males in the lower classes are compelled to work outside of the household to make ends meet even though labor used to sustain the household and raise children is not compensated, making the household a convenient institution for the super-exploitation of labor. It also allows the state, which uses police power and propaganda means to bring the household into its ideology, to produce compliant members of society and to allow government to remain free from responsibilities to assist the household. For Marx, the household is a principal institution for acculturating society to class distinctions and gaining the discipline needed for performing as wage labor. Gender disparities are ideologically perpetuated as well (LeBaron 2010). Women, who are taught to view themselves primarily as housewives, move in and out of the paid labor force
depending on household needs and outside opportunities. They are thus part of the reserve army of labor that dampens wages for labor all around by keeping costs of the reproduction of labor below the level that it would be paid if it were a for-profit activity.

There is nothing new about the household having an ideological function in society. Every civilization and major religion sees the household as a crucial institution for inculcating good moral thinking and behavior in people in their realm. “Good wife, good mother” was part of state-promoted ideology in pre-capitalist East Asia as well. Political economists, however, see this function under capitalism as one that perpetuates inequality, exploitation and oppression. The recasting of the household as a private sphere serves to enforce conservative political leanings that support the unquestioned acceptance of class divisions as being the outcome of individual effort rather than the logic of the system. Further turning the household into a unit of consumption allows for unrelenting bombardment from corporate media to link personal identities with products and thereby result in households devoting more and more financial resources to reach a level of conspicuous consumption that has become essential to post-industrial economic expansion. In the higher income economies of the world, including East and Southeast Asia, household consumption now accounts for at least half and as much as three-quarters of the GDP.

Neoliberalism and the Household

To return the discussion to the historical transformations of the household, from the post-World War II years to the 1970s a particular model of the household appeared. Called by some scholars the “Keynesian” or “Fordist” household model, its main social reproduction dynamics consisted of government welfare systems coming to the aid of households by providing programs essential for its daily and generational reproduction that had been undertaken previously within the household. Food subsidies, unemployment support, day-care, lunches at school, social security, social housing and national health systems all emerged in varying degrees to shore up the material needs of the household in the higher income countries of the world. Unionization simultaneously increased household incomes ahead of inflation. The market economy also devoted more attention to household services and products to give more free time to those who were taking care of its daily maintenance. The result was that households could devote more time and resources to consumption, which they did.

A reversal of this system of the support was about to take place, however, as neoliberalism successfully captured the public sphere around the world.

The post-Fordist’ flexibilization of employment patterns, alongside the simultaneous ‘deinstitutionalization’ of the family, has led to a fundamental shift in the relationships between gender, economy and work. The household is being affirmed as an important site of nonmarket production (Buzar, et al. 2005:429).

Over the past three decades, the global sweep and reach of neoliberalism has become a major focus of political economy theorization and research on the household. Commonly associated with the advent around 1980 of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the UK and US, respectively, and the writing of such economists as Milton Friedman, its major ideological foundations arise from a simplified understanding of capitalism based on the belief that markets are self-regulating and any imperfections in markets caused by government regulations, subsidies, or impositions such as taxes on capital will only work against economic efficiency and the economic growth presumed to accompany it (Harvey 2008). As a policy regime it seeks to downsize government, eliminate welfare programs, privatize the public sphere, reduce taxes on the wealthy, and eliminate subsidies except those for “job-creating” corporations. In addition to national and local governments, key global
institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF have been among the principal enforcers of this ideology and its policies among the so-called developing countries. Although associated with the “Washington Consensus”, its major exemplars include Pinochet’s regime in Chile and, paradoxically, the “transitional economies” such as China and Vietnam that maintain the authority of socialism but are dismantling public support for household reproduction while dispossessing rural and lower income households land and other assets.

LeBaron (2010:900), in writing about neoliberalism in Canada, details the more general costs of the outcomes of neoliberal policies in reducing real wages and eliminating public support for household reproduction. Together these reductions have substantially reconstituted the household by compelling it to absorb increased risk and insecurity through greater reliance on the commodification of food production, leisure time, care work, and childhood. Added to this is increasing indebtedness to financial institutions for all manner of household consumption needs.

Most of the added time and work resulting from this reversal of the role of the household in social reproduction falls on women. In terms of global migration, the “neoliberal household”, in further compelling every member of the household to work outside of the home for wages to cover new expenditures and rising debts, has intensified the middle class dependence on domestic workers from lower-income countries as solution to middle and higher-income women’s entry into the labour market (LeBaron 2010). LeBaron concludes that neoliberalism no only places greater burdens on women but also exaggerates class as well as racial inequities.

Studies in other parts of the world reach similar conclusions (Bezanson 2006). Phillips (2009:231), in writing on the neoliberal experience in Latin America and the Caribbean, finds that the supply of cheap migrant labor, including domestic workers, for the North has been greatly augmented by the same neoliberal policies that result in a “severe contraction of ‘development space’” and “accumulation by dispossession” of workers and their households in their home countries. Entire communities and regions have become dependent on migrant remittances to cope with the income and revenue losses from neoliberal policies of dismantling welfare systems and dispossessing households of assets and benefits from wage employment.

Global migration for social reproduction has produced state managed remittance economies in many countries, including several in Asia. As inadequate as the institutionalization of migration for remittances might be to countering the impacts the seek to remedy, it is indicative of the way in which “migration is being pulled centrally into the articulation of national development strategies to contribute ‘passively’ to the maintenance of macroeconomic and social stability” (Phillips 2009:231). Countries in Asia have also witnessed a marked shift from the “developmental state” and its households supported by a variety of protectionist measures and, in some cases such as Hong Kong and Singapore, substantial public support of the household in social reproduction in housing, health, and social services. The emerging neo-developmental state, though still strongly interventionist, has shifted to a corporate economy support role. Public housing has been privatized, as have many institutions, including internationally renowned public universities.

More specifically with regard to the household, Moghadam (2005) concludes that neoliberalism has resulted in the feminization of deepening poverty and social inequality, and the consequences of diminished household capacities for reproduction and consumption are readily apparent. Similarly, Crotty and Lee (2002) find that neoliberal reforms, which effect a transfer of household savings to corporate financial institutions, have widened income disparities and deepened poverty, resulting in a majority of households experiencing deeper economic insecurity.
These political economic takes on the household present a formidable challenge to research, including research on migration. In taking seriously these frameworks for theorizing about the household, we need to also step back and critically assess them. Even though they offer important insights and point toward key areas for concern, each perspectives risks falling into a certain amount of reductionism. For instance, the household cannot be reduced to being simply a site for capitalist exploitation. Identities within households and society at large are not just about class or in the service of capital (Castells 1996). While the Protestant Ethic or other religious and secular ideologies might be consistent with capitalism, this does not mean that they are always trumped by capitalist motives. Households can be sites of radical resistance. If households provide for relationships that help people cope with injustices, the logic does not necessarily follow that this is a form of false consciousness. Likewise, when households help compensate for the insecurities and calamities visiting its members, this does not necessarily mean that such actions are ideologically in support of capitalism.

It should be pointed out, too, that liberal and radical feminists do not necessarily reject capitalism, and many point to patriarchy that arises in any political economic system as the major source of intra-household inequities. Further, individuals are not totally conditioned by the household. The sources of identity and purpose extend far beyond its confines. The claim can also be made that as the household has weakened as a site for moral and social instruction, indoctrination within the household as the major underpinning of capital becomes less and less formidable.

To put the critique another way, households and the people in them have agency that is exercised in ways that do not always conform to or support the system producing inequities of gender, class, race, religion or any other division. At the same time, capitalism as a system is also constantly changing and adjusting to the crises and opportunities it generates. And localized histories and political, social and cultural institutions also filter the logic and dynamics of generalized global dynamics.

In sum, in realizing its role in social reproduction, the household is simultaneously the site of contestations and cooperation. It is also a reflexive institution that responds to systemic turbulence and transformation. The general pattern of these transformations has been, first, the removal of self-sufficiency in production from the household, moving labor from the household and into the market economy, thereby accentuating its internal daily and generational reproduction role and, by the end of the 20th century, its role in sustaining national economies through consumption. Second, the halcyon days of fordism and its Asian version of the developmental state-led economic miracles included the appearance of public institutions related to social housing and welfare that relieved households of reproduction tasks. This also included the commodification and marketing of fast foods, day care, pre-school, nursing homes and a host of services that facilitated the shift of many elements of reproduction out of the household. Neoliberalism, however, has substantially weakened public support elements, confronting households with a new age in its role in social reproduction marked by widening social inequalities among households, greater burdens on women, and a crisis in social reproduction that follows from these rifts.

A central paradox in tracing the theory-reality trail of householding over time is that just at the moment, today, when the world economy is said to be most dependent on the household to sustain it (Smith et al. 1984, Safri and Graham 2010), the household appears to be less capable of carrying out its roles in social reproduction and, in some parts of the world, seems to be even disappearing. The awareness of this possibility has reached such international institutions as the UN:
‘The point may be reached,’ warns a recent United Nations study, ‘where households are no longer able to reproduce themselves’ because the current situation ‘is unfavourable for the operation of traditional household mechanisms...’ (de la Rocha 2001: 89).

Yet in the face of apparently increased difficulties, the social desire and pressure to form and sustain households and their social reproduction duties also remains surprisingly strong. Where territorial formations are organized in such a way that householding has become increasingly difficult within the nation-state, it has begun to go global to overcome them, finding both traditional and non-traditional ways to go forward.

**GLOBAL HOUSING IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA**

The global household coordinates and participates in international migration and contributes the most stable capital flow to developing countries. It orchestrates and carries out international production of childcare, health care, elder care, and affective labor (Safri and Graham 2010:112-113).

In recent years the higher-income economies of East and Southeast Asia have begun to exhibit the same demographic turn that much of Europe earlier began experiencing. Absolute population decline has just begun in Japan, and Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore -- the original ‘tiger’ economies of Asia -- are not far behind (UNFPA 2006). In demographic terms this trend in Asia is also the outcome of the same underlying trends of late or no marriage, full time employment outside the household for all adults, increased rates of divorce, choices of long-term careers over parenting, stress, and even infertility linked to environmental pollution. These are themselves manifestations of systemic changes in society, such as higher educational attainment and more choices for women to have professional careers, institutionalization of family planning, and the desire for higher levels of consumption of marketed goods and services. But for much of the middle and lower income classes, they are also responses to the crises explained in the previous section above, namely, the insecurity of income, high unemployment and growing shares of people with only temporary employment, and the withdrawal of public support for householding.

These trends are bringing an impending crisis in the respective national economies as the labor force has already begun to dramatically shrink, dependency ratios are rising, and welfare systems are becoming more difficult to publicly finance in their rapidly aging societies (Douglass 2010). On a more personalized level, stories in Asia’s cities now appear about people living alone without any support from their families, with some being discovered months or even a year after dying alone in their apartments. The share of single person residences are now reaching from 20 to 50 percent of all housing in major cities in higher income countries of Asia. Marriage and lasting marriages, raising children while working, taking care of the elderly have all become more difficult to accomplish.

One emerging way of attempting to overcome these local disjunctures in householding and its contributions to social reproduction is to go beyond national borders to form and nurture the household. Summarized here as “global householding,” the major elements of this process are: marriage; child-bearing and adoption; education of children; hiring foreign domestic helpers and caregivers; and moving not only from low to high-income economies but, as retirement ages approach, also moving from higher to lower income societies as a way of stretching fixed incomes. None of these elements exist in isolation of the others, but are instead part of cycles of reproducing the household through time.
The idea of global householding is put forth to inquire into linkages between the household and larger structural issues such as demographic transitions and shifts in the global economy and their impacts on whole economies and daily lives (Douglass 2006, 2007, 2010). The question at both levels reverses the one raised above about the social consequences of impeded householding: does global householding overcome these impediments and thereby enhance its daily and generational contributions to social reproduction? Answering this question requires a longitudinal view of the household as a social institution. One way of doing this is to look at household life cycles. To do so requires an open mode of inquiry that goes beyond the economistic reduction of migration as simply a labor process or, more generally, as a process solely explainable as a pursuit of material gain. It instead allows for more multi-faceted understandings of the motives for migration and accepts such possible drivers as affection and genuine desires to form households, to be in love, express sexuality, have progeny, and to altruistically care for children, elders and other members of the household.

More than 215 million people live outside of their country of birth (World Bank 2010). Multiplying this number by 4 or 5 to account for non-migrating members of a migrant’s household increases the number of people engaged in global householding to a range of 850 million to more than 1 billion people. One-quarter of global migrants originate in Asia, suggesting that more than 200 million people in Asia are participating in global householding, signaling that global migration is a major dimension of local life in every country, whether sending or receiving migrants. Comprising the fastest economically advancing region of the world over the past a several decades, countries in East and Southeast Asia have begun to display the entire gamut of global householding processes:

- Marriage/partnering
- Bearing children
- Raising and educating children (and adults)
- Maintaining the household on a daily basis
- Dividing labour and pooling income from livelihood activities
- Caring for elder and other non-working household members

The sources of this global householding turn are many. Most can be seen as being a response to difficulties in forming and sustaining households within nationally constituted social relations.

Marriage and Partnering

It is changing much faster than I ever thought. Now the marriage of Japanese men, even elite businessmen, to women from the Philippines has become so common that it has come to be accepted without any great reluctance by Japanese society (Hisada 1992:308).

Marriage with non-citizen spouse is the most prominently reported dimension of global householding in Asia (Douglass 2010). Beginning mostly as a response to the failure of rural men to find prospective brides in their own country, transborder marriages have now spread to cities. In South Korea it has advanced to such a level that the government has officially declared the nation to be multicultural, a position that would have been thought to be impossible just a few decades ago. In 2005 nearly 40 percent of all new rural marriages and 14 percent of all marriages for the country as a whole had a foreign spouse (The Chosun Ilbo, 2006; Asia Pacific Post 2006). In Taiwan by 2003

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5. Until the late 1980s migration to Japan from other Pacific Asia countries almost wholly consisted of women in the sex industry (Douglass and Roberts 2003). Since that time, new layers of workers in construction, low-wage assembly, and services have been added.
nearly 30 percent of newly wedded couples were cross border (Huang 2007). In Japan about 6 percent of marriages included a foreign partner in 2006. Although a small share of marriages, it is four times the share of foreign residents in the total population of Japan.

The reluctance of women in these countries to marry is often attributed to the educational advances they have achieved with careers that follow, which allows more freedom of choice that is, in effect, rejecting the patriarchy of the family and the confinement to unpaid household reproduction as the husband “marries the company” and spends little time at home. However, other reasons appear as well. A major one is the end of lifetime employment systems that had previously guaranteed household income from male employment. As previously noted, from one-third to one-half of the labor force in both Japan and Korea is now only hired as temporary workers, with no pensions or other welfare benefits. Marriage and forming a household has become a high-cost, high-risk venture.

In this context, it can be argued that women from less economically well-off situations in, for example, rural Vietnam, who choose to migrate for marriage to men in Japan, Korea, Taiwan or Singapore see such great differences in income that the risks in householding in the new husband’s country are thought to be worth taking. However, in finding that these women came from cities as well as the countryside, with some from the middle class and above, Nakamatsu (2005:406) shows the image of a “mail order bride” being poorly educated and coming from poor villages is overly stereotyped. According to her research, the reason for this stereotype is to make their marriages to men in Japan more palatable to Japanese society:

These ‘Asian’ wives of Japanese men entered the imagination of the Japanese in a very specific way. The prevailing images of immigrant wives and their marriages made their aspiration for an affluent life in purely economic terms, and prevented alternative readings that acknowledge such aspiration is possibly intertwined with desires for love and affection within the context of marriage and the family.

Adding to reporting on intentional imaging of women as being poor, uneducated and dutiful is research showing that the willingness of women to migrate cannot be reduced to ideas of backwardness or poverty generated by isolation of subsistence villages from the world economy. In a revealing study of *doi moi*, Vietnam’s transition from a socialist to a market economy, Jacobs (2008:17) explains that the willingness of women to migrate abroad for work and marriage is directly related to the interaction between decollectivization and the country’s rapidly emerging market economy:

Decollectivisation and liberalisation often mean widespread female unemployment; the feminisation of subsistence farming, the diversification of livelihood strategies, and the strengthening of traditional gender norms and patterns. In general, women are being pushed back into unremunerated, informal work with increased responsibility for family welfare. This is usually accompanied by the reinstatement of the husband/father as manager of the farm and of wives’ labour.

These insights about women exercising their own agency that cover a wide variety of situations and motives are not widely perceived or accepted, however, and popular reportage and academic research on these marriages are exceptionally partial in presenting negative images while ignoring the many marriages that are successful, as complicated as the word “successful” might be. For example, in an interview of a long-time researcher of foreign wives in Japan, Megumi Hisada finds that Filipina wives of Japanese men have become active members of the local communities and are seen as bringing a refreshing creativity to them (Yamashita 2008:8).
Women in higher income economies in Asia that are using their agency to choose global householding remains largely without documentation in the countries of origin and, unlike farmers who receive subsidies to find a bride, women are not state sponsored in their search for a spouse. As an example of women emigrating from higher income countries, in a reversal of previous gender ratios, women now account for 80 percent of Japanese people moving abroad for education, with such moves often being a preliminary step in permanently settling abroad, including possibilities of marriages (Yamashita 2008). Since 1999 the emigration of women from Japan overall has been higher than the emigration of men. From interviews with Japanese women who were formerly OLs (Office Ladies) in Japan and who had come to the U.S. as students in San Francisco, Yamashita (2008:5) found that “most of these women were frustrated by gender discrimination at work places in Japan”. Yamashita also found that 200 Japanese women had married Balinese men in Bali for similar reasons, which is difficult to reconcile with the thesis that income and material welfare are the only incentive for marriage migration.

**Having Children**

Experts say that [marriage with foreigners in Korea] will result in around 2 million mixed-race births by 2020 (Asia Pacific Post 2006).

Singapore’s fertility rate fell to less than 1.2 in 2010, prompting Lee Kuan Yew to assert that Singapore needs “young immigrants” to avoid slow-growth aging as in Japan. (Migration News, April 2011).

Birth rates in higher-income countries in Asia are racing to the bottom and are now so far below replacement that experts in this branch of demography voice the view that reversals are improbable. In 2005 South Korea and Taiwan tied for the lowest birthrates in the world at 1.1 per woman, with Japan close behind (Demick 2006). Governments have made token efforts to encourage families to have children, but they are too meager in comparison to actual costs in time and opportunity of having them. As discussed, increased economic insecurity and the need to dedicate time to wage work also dampen plans to have children.

Despite the many inhibiting factors, people still want to have children. Japan and Korea are among the top ten countries in the world in terms of infertility treatment clinics per capita (Collins 2002:266). In 2006 the Korean government reported that 157,000 women and men had sought infertility treatment that year. The increase in the number of couples over previous years made it the fastest growing form of health treatment in the country. In addition to late marriage and pressure to earn income, air and other forms of pollution were identified as causes of infertility (Bae 2007). Many women said that not having children was a source of severe depression. WHO states that about 15 percent of couples in Singapore seek medical assistance for infertility (Straits Times 2007).

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6 In Japan, for example, beginning in 2010 families can receive $150 a month for each child, and public high school fees have been abolished. One-third of Japanese women aged 30 to 34 were not married in 2005.

7 In Korea in 2010 the police arrested a woman and a man who were trading human eggs online. The donor was reportedly selected because she was not only a graduate student but also had a good command of English, which is a skill greatly sought for their children (Korean Times 2011). Over the past decade, the sale of human eggs for parenthood has become a billion dollar global industry (Carney 2010).
Because social censure of unmarried women having children is prevalent in Asia, global householding solutions are oriented toward married couples, and evidence to date supports the conclusion that global householding is associated with higher fertility rates. In Taiwan, for example, in 2004 one out of every 7.5 newborn babies was delivered by an immigrant mother. In the same year some 41,000 children of these mothers were in primary school in Taiwan (Huang 2006:455). Similar evidence comes from Korea and Japan. Childless couples can also try more extreme global solutions. In 2005 the Korea government banned surrogate motherhood in response to publicity about a Korean couple that engaged an American woman to bear their child (Lee, 2005).

When having their own children becomes impossible, couples can turn to international adoption. Sending Asian babies to the West for adoption has long been practiced, and it continues today. The preference for male children prevalent in many Asian countries not only results in highly imbalanced sex ratios favouring males but, paradoxically, also a very large numbers of female children made available for adoption abroad. China, which now has 120 boys for every 100 girls under age four, is experiencing significant levels of abandonment or the putting up for adoption of female children and is now a principal source of (female) babies for adoption in the West. Korea and Vietnam are also sources of children for adoption.

From 1951 to 2001 children from abroad adopted in the United States totalled 265,677. Of that number 156,491 came from Asia. The annual number more than doubled between 1991 and 2000. Korean press and government consider the sending of Korean children abroad for adoption to be a national shame, but, as in most Asian countries, adoption outside of the extended family in Korea is not condoned. Because of this international adoptions in Asian societies are largely unreported.8

As with the cases of foreign surrogate mothers, having children is a multi-faceted pursuit. For Korea and Taiwan there are well organized “tours” for women in the late stages of pregnancy to have their babies in the U.S. so that these children can automatically attain US citizenship when they become 18 years old. Future education, avoidance of military service for male children, and globally hedging bets about the future are all bundled into these tours, which include airfare, lodgings, hospitalization to give birth and early postnatal care.

**Child Rearing and Education**

In some countries, notably Korea and Taiwan, sending children with their mothers to live abroad for schooling is a well-established, highly organized practice (Huang 2006; Lee and Koo 2006). As reported by Lee and Koo (2006) about Korea, husbands and wives together are involved in and are supportive of this process, which results in very modest life styles for husbands and long years of separation that can last more than a decade. Yet “despite long periods of physical separation, families reveal strong family solidarity” (Lee and Koo 2006:551-552).9

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8 In 2005, applications for adoption processed by the Singapore Government totalled 556; foreign children accounted for 56 per cent of this number. In addition, smuggling of babies from Indonesia is estimated to be a significant form of unreported adoptions in Singapore (Arshad, 2006).

9 China reportedly has the largest number of people in the world who study abroad. In 2002 a reported 460,000 Chinese were studying in 103 countries and region (People’s Daily, 2002).
Educating foreign nationals has recently become a preoccupation in East Asia as well.\footnote{The government of Japan now allows foreigners who obtain degrees from Japanese universities and receive job offers to remain and work in Japan. About 130,000 foreign students were studying for university degrees in Japan at the end of 2010. This compares to 67,000 Japanese students who were studying abroad in 2008. The government hopes to increase this number to 300,000 by 2020 (Migration News 2011, Lin and Kao 2010).} Faced with precipitously declining numbers of school age children, Japan, Korea and Taiwan are now pushing forward with international education programs as a means to ameliorate the pervasive trend of permanently closing public and private schools and universities suffering from inadequate levels of enrollments. This represents yet another radical transformation of inward-looking educational systems of the past. It also turns these countries from senders of youth to receiving sites for global householding for education.

\textbf{Daily Household Maintenance and Generational Care}

Taiwan’s Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) supported a bill to extend the maximum length of stay of guest workers from the current nine to a proposed 12 years in response to appeals from Taiwanese who said that their disabled children or elderly parents had become attached to foreign caregivers, and would suffer if they had to leave (Migration News, Jan. 2011).

Global householding in several countries in Asia is readily observable in the form of millions of women from lower income countries who circulate among richer countries as domestic helpers and caretakers for children and the elderly. In 2003 three quarters of a million women were engaged in domestic work as foreign workers in Hong Kong (240,000), Taiwan (120,000), Singapore (150,000), and Malaysia (240,000). In Singapore one in seven households now has a domestic worker from abroad. The majority of women in these households report that they cannot take care of domestic chores, including taking care of children and the elderly, without a (foreign) domestic helper (Lam, et al., 2006).

Because they are limited to a few years in any one country by host governments who fear long-term settlement, and with the dense networks they have created among themselves at home and abroad, foreign domestic workers use Asia as just one source of employment as they further deploy themselves around the globe (Porio 2007). At the same time, the availability of seemingly unlimited supplies of cheap foreign domestic workers means that for the first time in history, middle class families, not just elites, can have full time caretakers to carry out daily householding tasks and care for non-working household members (Wee and Sim, 2003).

This sector of employment is also among the most exploitative of all foreign worker jobs. In Taiwan, for example, while foreign workers in factories are required to have at least one day off per week, employers of domestic workers have no such requirement. Women working in households in Taiwan are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is common in practice in other countries as well.\footnote{In 2011 the government of Malaysia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Indonesia to grant Indonesian domestic helpers in Malaysia a day off a week and the right to keep their passports. Malaysia, which has no minimum wage, refused Indonesia’s demand for a minimum wage for domestic helpers, most of whom earn less than $250 a month (Migration News Jan. 2011).} Like Taiwan, for Singapore Huang et al. (2003:93) explain that the government does not view foreign domestic workers as being essential to a key sector of the national economy but rather as a service to the Singaporean household for its personal needs.
With Asia’s aging societies and working spouses, foreign workers are increasingly dedicated to care of the elderly. Households hire more than half of all foreign workers in Taiwan, with a majority assigned to watch over disabled and senile family elders. Likewise, an estimated 30 percent of the 150,000 foreign domestic workers in Singapore are hired specifically to care for the elderly (The Straits Times, 2006). Japan, where governments are actively trying to limit dependence on foreign workers, is an exception in East Asia. It has almost no foreign domestic workers, and other foreign workers in household generational care services such as nurses are kept to a minimum by strict selection and migration controls.

Whether these workers are considered to be members of the families that employ them varies from family to family (Lam et al., 2006). Nonetheless, they are clearly indispensable to the reproduction of hundreds of thousands of households in many countries in East and Southeast Asia.

**Labor Migrationa and Household Remittances**

One of the most obvious signals that global migration is a household rather than individual project is found in the growing levels of remittances sent by migrants to their families in their home countries. Recent estimates reveal migrant remittances to be greater than the total of all government foreign assistance worldwide (World Bank 2010). A global remittance banking industry has emerged to profit from them as well (Huang and Douglass 2007). Remittances have become so large and routine in global householding that for at least 36 countries they have become a primary source of currency, and without them their entire economies would collapse (World Bank 2006). Even larger numbers of regions within countries have become remittance dependent, and families in these regions now devote a great deal of their resources and energies to cover costs of skill training for their would-be migrant members, paying migrant fees and taking care of the children of migrants while they globally sojourn for work.

The World Bank (2010) finds that remittances are important sources of reducing the incidence of child labor and helping to be better able to cope with economic and other shocks such as natural disasters. In areas such as Northeast Thailand they are important in paying for hired labor to assist elderly parents in keeping farm production going. However, other takes on this phenomenon decry the dependency, exaggerated inequalities and conspicuous consumption that remittances create (Grabel 2010). From either perspective, this element of global householding is having a profound impact on receiving countries and regions. Some estimates show that for lower-income countries, remittances now account for about 6 percent of the GDP. At $16 billion for the Philippines in 2009 it accounted for 11 percent of the GDP (Economist 2010). This does not include unreported remittances.

With the exception of Japan, which was already heavily recruiting hundreds of thousands of foreign female sex workers from the 1970s, recruitment of foreign workers within Asia began on a large scale only from the late 1980s when changes in currency exchange rates suddenly accentuated rising labor costs and shortages of low-cost labor in Japan and the “tiger economies” of Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. In the 1990s recruitment of men and women into construction work, low-level assembly and manufacturing and domestic work took off, quickly reaching historically unprecedented levels of millions of workers circulating through the region. By 2010 Japan had some 680,000 Chinese, 267,000 Brazilians of Japanese descent and 212,000 Filipinos in addition to Korean residents who comprise a special category of residents. Korea had almost a million foreigners legally in the country, up more than five-fold from 170,000 in 2000. In Singapore non-citizens account for 36 percent of people residing there, the highest share in East and Southeast Asia (Migration Review July 2011).
The global circulation of workers is most visible in the Philippine experience. More than one million people leave the Philippines annually for work abroad, and approximately 20 percent of the entire Philippine labor force is now working outside the country. Porio (2007:16) vividly describes householding as a mutual support system covering the world by telling the story of Luz, a Filipina nurse successfully working in Germany, who financed the migration of Rosa and Ben. She also partially assisted Vic when he left for Papua New Guinea and Vic’s daughters when they moved to the U.S. in 2001. In addition she supported Sarah when she first arrived in London, and partially supported a brother in the Philippines who is a widower with six children.

In an age of acute economic uncertainty at the household level, the number of people moving for work abroad is escalating. Host countries in Asia are also experiencing high levels of unemployment and governments, and have responded by limiting the number of foreign workers allowed in the country, even though the types of jobs that foreign workers obtain are not taken by unemployed labor in the receiving country. As a result, underground or undocumented foreign workers are also reported to be increasing. The Malaysian government, for example, has repeated crackdowns to expel the estimated one million illegal foreign workers, mostly from Indonesia, in that country (Economic Times 2011).

When considering in-kind support from families at home, remittances are not just one-way from migrants to households in their country of origin. In a great number of instances, these households take care of the children of the migrants and serve as a sanctuary between migration episodes. They also give meaning to the sacrifices that especially low-wage migrant workers endure in harsh, highly exploitative employment overseas. Household support is typically cited as the main reason for migrating and is the principal source of emotional well-being for people working abroad, even over very great distances.

Migration of Retirees and Non-Working Household Members

I did not want to send my mother into a nursing home in Japan because I heard lots of bad things about it. I thought I could enjoy caring for my mother at home in Kota Kinabalu because I can hire a maid as a care-giver to take care of her here. (Conversation reported by Ono (2008) with a 48-year-old woman from Sendai, Japan, who took her 81-year-old mother with Parkinson’s disease to live in an eco-tourism area of Malaysia. Her husband stayed in Japan).

The most recent dimensions of global householding to appear in Asia is the movement of people to live in retirement abroad in other Asian countries where costs of living are much lower and living conditions better than in the home country. These patterns already existed to some extent in bringing non-working parents to the U.S. or Europe where children had already migrated for education and work. The motives for these moves are not only to save money. As reported by Toyota (2006:525), one retiree said that he moved from Japan to Thailand as a way to avoid being a burden on the lives of their children and to retain their pride as a “respected father in-law”. In Thailand and other retirement destinations, retirees can also afford to add a live-in domestic helper as part of the new branch of the household. Retirement migration is appearing from other parts of East Asia as well. Old soldiers of the KMT who came to Taiwan in the late 1940s are returning to China; others are also moving from Taiwan to China to not only take advantage of lower costs, but to also participate in China’s booming economy (Huang 2006).

Receiving countries have already established programs to attract seniors from Japan and elsewhere. In 1988 the Malaysian government established a “Silver Hair” program, which in 2002 was upgraded to “Malaysia, My Second Home.” Under this program foreigners over age 50 are allowed to live in
Malaysia after depositing 150,000 Malaysian ringgit in special accounts and with the proviso that they do not work in Malaysia. In 2006 about 10,000 people from 75 countries had applied for the program.\textsuperscript{12}

On the Japan side of the equation, the 1986 “Silver Columbus Plan” put forth by the government to create urban “villages” abroad for Japanese seniors to live out their retirement years was quickly shifted to the private sector after public outcry against the wholesale state-driven export of seniors. The new entity, called the “Long Stay Foundation” appeared in 1992 with government guidance. It publishes magazines, long-term “tour” package information and other promotional material encouraging Japanese elders to move abroad to experience other cultures and lifestyles (Ono 2008). A principal motive is to reduce government costs of supporting non-working populations.

The neoliberal age is bringing a new twist to inter-generational support in Asia. In Japan and Korea, as in the US and Europe, adult children who now find no prospects for permanent employment and have no significant savings are moving back into their parents homes, depending on parent’s wages and pensions to take care of their daily needs. The term “parasite singles” has been coined to unflatteringly speak to the serious issue of a new generation of people who do not relate to and cannot obtain the lifetime employment with house and secure income of their parents (Genda 2003). Japan and other countries are now experiencing a reversal of inequality between generations as older household members still might retain career jobs and benefits while younger ones cannot establish them.

In 2010 a reported 40 percent of Japanese working people between the ages of 15 to 24 were employed part-time or sub-part time from day-to-day (Migration News Apr 2011). As the neoliberal economic deepens, the older term, “arbeit”, or part timer, has yielded to “freeter” (temporary) and now to an even less hopeful one, “precariat” (precarious proletariat, borrowed from the Italian, precariato, of the same meaning) to capture the degree to which labor has been demoted to jobs paying marginal wages on a day-to-day basis with no benefits or long-term prospects (Ueno 2007, Bernier 2011).\textsuperscript{13} Some (Kosugi 2006) use the term, NEETs – not in education, employment, or training – borrowed from the UK to suggest that the failure is not only the labor market, but equally that of the household, which, in presenting to children the “Japanese style labor system” of workaholic fathers and doting education mamas has alienated children from wanting to have the same life. Whether such a view is accepted or not, the onus has been placed on the household to deal with the problem of marginally working and non-working generations. Some of these precariat freeters and NEETs are already in their 40s and continue to live with their parents and/or from their parent’s financial support.

Instead of joining the labor force, many younger people have simply dropped out. In Japan half of working people under age 35 are not paying into the pension system, which means they will have no pension whenever they reach retirement age. In 2011 less than 60 percent of university seniors received job offers in a country in which a few decades ago competition for their labor was so keen that governments had to intervene to try to stop corporations from hiring university students before they graduated. In Japan graduating from university without a job offer had become a serious social stigma, but now it has become common. As the older generation draws down its savings and the

\textsuperscript{12} The top countries of applicants were: China (2,021), Bangladesh (1,429), the United Kingdom (1,049), Taiwan (621), Singapore (604) and Japan (512).

\textsuperscript{13} At a macroeconomic level, Japan’s government debt was 60 percent of GDP in 1992. Today it is almost 200 percent of GDP, which is putting enormous pressure to eliminate social welfare programs (Migration News July 2010).
new generation has none, deflation is expected to accompany falling housing prices and declining population numbers. Shrinking towns, declining public services and the absence of children have become common characteristics of non-metropolitan Japan.

In view of such grim trends, global householding has also potentially taken a new twist. According to Toyota (2006), seniors are not the only ones migrating south for cheaper living. In some cases it is the “parasite” child that is being sent to Thailand and other locales where it is cheaper for parents to support them. Yet Japan has resisted most other elements of global householding except perhaps marriage. Elsewhere in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and other countries such as Malaysia, the response has been different. Children are being sent abroad for education instead of dropping out from school, domestic workers are appearing from abroad to relieve parents of householding tasks, and global connections among households are in general much more evident.

Global householding covers an immense diversity of experiences and outcomes, making impossible a summary claim about it being either as a wholly positive or negative process. Furthermore, their outcomes cannot be placed only on the household. Many of the difficulties encountered result from external factors such as government policies, networks of parasitic brokers, societies that resist multicultural relationships, and the machinations of powerful international institutions.

In a more positive vein, some governments, such as that of South Korea, are openly acknowledging their multicultural future. In the democratized countries of Asia, non-government organizations are emerging from civil society to support foreign workers as well as foreign spouses and children. International NGOs and foreign assistance from some international aid agencies are also supporting similar causes. With this growing support and the demonstrated tenacity of global householders, many dimensions of global householding are now established on a broad enough scale and have become sufficiently beneficial that they are likely to continue to expand. As many researchers on topics related to global household have concluded, what was thought to be impossible yesterday, such as transnational marriages, has become a matter of course today. Rather than resisting these processes, a more proactive course of action would be to direct public policy toward curtailing their worst elements, such as the super-exploitation of domestic workers, and removing barriers, such as citizenship requirements, that prevent the fruition of its beneficial contributions to people’s lives and social reproduction.

CONCLUSIONS: GLOBAL HOUSEHOLDING, CITIZENSHIP AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

What if we were to universally recognize the global household as an international actor on a par with the multinational firm? What kinds of political and policy issues might arise, and how might they be dealt with? (Safri and Graham 2010:118).

The quote above seems far-fetched and, as Safri and Graham readily confirm, is probably not workable in the sense of trying to find a way to represent the great diversity in households around the world. It nevertheless serves to raise basic questions about the political economy of the world order and how households are not just embedded in it but are also institutions that are fundamental to its social and economic resilience. Among these questions is the principal one raised in this paper: as it seems to be faltering when sequestered within the nation-state, can the household be reconstituted globally in a way that sustains its role in social reproduction?

One lens through which to view this problematic is the globalization of migration, which necessarily encounters a world organized into the sovereign nation-state. In carrying out its roles in social reproduction, the household is a locus of decisionmaking about who should migrate for what
purpose and whose benefit. The world system based on the independent, cultural defined nation-state is no longer capable of meeting either the needs or capturing the dynamics of the household, which is globalizing in all of its in daily and generational dimensions that reach beyond borders and are not driven simply by differences in, for example, employment opportunities that arise from competitive advantage among nations. They are also a response to the local configurations of demographic transitions combined with the diminished capacities of territorially bound systems of governance to ameliorate the increased stress on householding.

Care must be taken, however, to avoid reducing the household to a set of economic imperatives. The desire to form and sustain a household involves all aspects of human aspirations for love, affection, nurturing, validation, moral support, and conviviality, to name a few. This observation is not intended to romanticize the household. We know that it has inequities, discord, and abuses. But these aspirations must also be given recognition as motives for what is summarized here as global householding. To ignore these non-material dimensions or to treat migrants simply as labor is, to put it simply, to ignore our humanity.

Householding is viewed here as a reflexive process in which adjustments made in the household to changes in external dynamics have outcomes that also impact upon and change these dynamics. If, for example, finding a spouse becomes impossible for farmers in one country, a response has been to seek marriage across national boundaries. As the evidence shows, no matter how the process is assessed, the outcomes of this search are profoundly reshaping the core idea of the nation-state in terms of the bundling of cultural identity with citizenship. Over time what was exotic or unacceptable has become accepted as a householding practice. The same can be said of including a foreigner into the intimacy of the household as a domestic worker, relocating in a foreign land for the sake of a child’s education, or moving abroad to retire and ending life’s final years in a foreign cultural setting.

In all of these everyday forms of householding we now see an unraveling and a reconstitution of the world order that raises the issue of the national border, citizenship, what Lefebvre (1971) has coined as the right to the city and participatory governance. Concerning the border, in the contemporary era, its principal use has become one of controlling the flow of people. When this flow is viewed and treated as labor, border controls appear to be a very powerful in containing these flows by, for example, linking the right to be in a country with employment in a specific firm. When marriage to a foreigner is at hand, attempts are also made to use border mechanisms, such as requiring a decade or more before a foreign spouse can become a citizen, to separate labor from the household and thereby minimize householding as a threat to state and corporate control over foreign labor. Through the household people of other cultures become part of families, have children, live in the neighborhood, join community organizations and gain political rights to voice their concerns in the public sphere. In Asia foreign workers have almost no rights to do engage in any of these activities.

Border controls are in need of thorough reform. Labor migration is part of householding; workers are members of households and their motives for migration are intimately part of householding. To pose the issue as simply a one of work conditions and workers’ rights, as important as they are, is an exceptionally narrow view of what is at stake. As populations decline begins in migrant receiving countries in Asia, governments are having to rethink these forms of filling their shrinking citizen labor pool. Most have resorted to a policy of welcoming elite and highly skilled workers to eventually become residents and even citizens while keeping lower skilled workers as labor to be routinely disposed before issues of residency can arise. As in the Middle East, the end result of such policies will be very high ratios of non-citizen to citizen populations that are likely to be politically volatile. More importantly, in treating foreign workers in socially confining ways that citizen workers would never be asked to endure, such systems lack a meaningful sense of social justice when cast as simply
the benefit of wages that are higher than those in the migrants’ home countries. Consideration
needs to be given to treating workers as whole people with lives beyond the workplace.

Such a consideration confronts the question of citizenship. As summarized by Phillips (2009:254):

We see a fundamental clash between ... global migration and the manner in which
the world remains organized around highly nationalized forms of governance
centering on ideas of sovereignty and national citizenship that permit the
reinforcement of lines of exclusion based on the citizen/non-citizen distinction. It is
this clash which acts profoundly to limit the possibilities for the realization of the
developmental potential of migration, both at the aggregate ‘macro’ level of global
development and at the level of the individual migrant.

Inserting the word “household” into Philipp’s exhortation to rethink citizenship would further
broaden it to include locally born non-migrant members who are also caught in the nexus of
citizenship issues. Governments are already rethinking the question of dual citizenship, and where it
is not yet recognized, many seem to turn a blind eye to its widespread practice among more affluent
classes of people.\textsuperscript{14}

Global householding is placing multifaceted pressure on all dimensions of citizenship. In addition to
the right to join in political processes through, e.g., voting in elections, citizenship also relates to
collective consumption, which includes access to social services, public housing, and public amenities.
Due to the focus on migrants as labor, these issues are not well represented at the national level,
but many local governments have had to consider them. For example, the city of Kanagawa, Japan,
has led the way in opening lower level prefectural public service employment to permanent
residents (mostly of Korean descent) (Tegtmeyer-Pak 2003).

Efforts to enhance migrant access to collective consumption are mostly in response to global
households rather than to migrant workers. In Korea, for example, local governments are setting up
special programs for foreign spouses to learn Korean language and culture. In Japan similar
programs are set up by local governments to help foreign workers of Japanese descent from Latin
America, who are the only group of foreign workers allowed to bring families with them, to integrate
into Japanese society. In contrast, low-wage foreign workers are not seen or supported as future
members of host societies.

Taking a further step, collective consumption can be seen as comprising one element of the right to
the city, which Lefebvre (1968) defined as access to “urban life” in its fullest sense. This includes the
right to change the city, which means equal rights to own property, join cooperative associations,
engage in political discourse, and participate in public decisionmaking. This is more than individual
rights. It implies a collective right of people joining with people, households with households, in
governance. In this sense, enhancing inclusive participatory governance at the local city or
prefecture level to include the voices of people engaged in global householding is a crucial way
forward in going beyond foreigners as simple labor. Herein will lay the answer to the question of
whether household and state can reflexively adjust in ways that will also contribute to both the
household and its roles in social reproduction.

\textsuperscript{14} As a means to attract its diaspora back to the homeland, the government of South Korea is in the process
of adopting dual citizenship protocols. In a contrary move, recent elections and appointments in Taiwan
discovered high officials with US resident green cards, which were ceremoniously destroyed before taking
office as acts of loyalty to Taiwan.
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