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Margot Beal, *Des champs aux cuisines: Histoires de la domesticité en Rhône et Loire (1848-1940)*. Lyon: ENS Editions, 2019. 235 pp. Notes and bibliography. €28.00. (pb). ISBN 9791036201363. €0.00. (eb). ISBN 9791036201387.

Review by Denise Z. Davidson, Georgia State University.

Images of domestic servants abound in French literature, from the older, loyal woman in the background of bourgeois family life to the young woman at risk from the sexual advances of men in the family. Of course, we know that these images do not tell the whole story of domestic service, as it was not just wealthy families who paid for people to work in their homes. Peasants hired agricultural workers to live with them and help with all the labor of the farm, and artisans and shopowners also employed domestic servants to contribute to the work required in operating their household businesses. In addition, restaurant and café owners hired live-in domestic servants. Because they lived within the households of their employers and could be asked to contribute their labor to virtually any of the tasks required to keep those households running, domestic servants occupied a nebulous position as both part of the household and the family, and yet separate from it.

Margot Beal's recent book on domestic service in the Rhône and Loire departments takes us beyond the images and anecdotes and deep into archival records that allow access to the realities, experiences, and reactions of domestic servants in both urban and rural environments. Based on a dissertation completed under the supervision of Laura Lee Downs at the European University in Florence, the book includes a brief introduction and eleven substantive chapters organized both thematically and chronologically. It concludes with an epilogue that explores trends in domestic service during the interwar period, which included the continued precarity and feminization of the sector, and a shift away from servants residing with their employers. The book's organization allows Beal to trace change over time while drawing attention to specific aspects of domestic service in the various chapters. She interrogates her sources intelligently, seeking evidence for how gender and racial categories impacted the world of domestic service, for example, as well as methods of resistance to employers' efforts to control their servants' lives.

The book relies upon deep engagement with archival sources, making innovative use of materials that are notoriously difficult to work with, particularly judicial records. Putting census records to good use, the book includes extensive amounts of quantitative data and analysis to clarify how many domestic servants worked in the Rhône and Loire departments, and to trace change over time regarding their numbers, their ages, and their sexes. Beal also relies upon a broad range of qualitative data coming out of diverse source materials, including memoirs, court cases, and the archives of various institutions related to domestic service. While recognizing the difficulties of

using judicial records as evidence for everyday experiences and behavior because court records necessarily reflect exceptional situations, Beal recounts the fascinating stories that emerged from these cases and analyzes them in ways that allow her to reflect on widely held assumptions and behaviors. While incorporating the perspectives of both employers and employees, it is clear that Beal's main interest lies in gaining access to domestic servants themselves and their approaches to work and life, particularly how they created spaces in which to exercise agency within a system designed to dominate them and leaving them few openings to resist that domination.

The book makes several points clear. First, domestic servants were not naïve rustics who allowed their employers to manipulate them with ease. Rather, they took advantage of opportunities to improve their situations and to resist forms of control, whether by slowing down their work, managing to get extra time off, or changing employers. To uncover the tools that servants had at their disposal, Beal built her methods on the work of Alf Lüdtke and its attentiveness to workers' sense of autonomy and individuality as forms of resistance. Beal finds similar processes taking place among domestic servants as they struggled to "assurer un meilleur quotidien" (p. 132). Second, throughout the book, Beal emphasizes gender distinctions, including female domestic servants' vulnerability to sexual assault and the diminishing appeal of domestic service for men as new ideals about masculinity emerged, particularly after World War One. Third, race emerges as an important analytical category in the book. Beal underlines how assumptions about whiteness shaped the world in which domestic servants and their employers operated and analyzes the experiences of non-white servants from France's colonies, as well as perceptions and assumptions regarding European immigrants, such as Polish or Italian workers.

Starting in the 1880s, *bureaux de placement* began to help employers find servants to hire. These new institutions represented a shift as "professionals" began to replace personal connections and word of mouth as methods for recruiting servants. However, scandals involving prostitution and the white slave trade suggested that these placement bureaus could be less than reliable (p. 116). Beal found cases of young women signing up to serve as domestic servants in Algerian businesses only to find that they had been sent to work in brothels. Another case involved an Egyptian judge who tried to hire a domestic servant through a Lyonnais placement agency to accompany him to Cairo. When the owner of the placement service made an inquiry to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was told not to send a French woman to work in Cairo. This decision, Beal suggests, reflected fears of allowing "filles blanches, même issues des classes populaires, 'déchoir' dans le travail sexuel auprès d'étrangers ou—pire—d'indigènes" (p. 118). In recounting and analyzing these stories, Beal argues that they provide evidence of a moral panic that reflected tensions regarding the proximity of sexuality and the workplace in the case of domestic service, and the desire to see women safely ensconced in heterosexual marriage.

The book's final chapter, "Monde ouvrier, monde domestique," explores the consequences of growing working-class political movements and unions, which excluded domestic servants who typically lacked access to working-class forms of sociability and interaction because they tended to spend most of their lives isolated in the homes of their employers. Tracing a long period, from 1848 to 1936, the chapter does an excellent job of pulling together many of the themes covered earlier in the book, including race and sexuality, as it analyses working-class identity and its relationship to domestic service. Beal contests common assumptions that servants tended to identify more with their employers than with the working classes. Among other places, Beal found evidence for this point in letters dating from the first decades of the twentieth century that servants sent to the Ministry of Labor arguing for their right to time off from work, even though

the 1906 law obliging employers to give workers one day off per week explicitly excluded domestic servants. Servants' sense of belonging to the working class also appears in café employees' successful efforts to create a union in 1936, the same year that the Popular Front government legislated paid holidays, a law that, this time, explicitly included domestic service. These changes reflect a growing sense both among domestic servants themselves and more broadly that they should be considered part of the working class.

*Des champs aux cuisines* is an impressive piece of work. It reflects deep archival work in the tradition of social and labor history to find tidbits of information about people whose lives are extremely difficult to access and to allow their voices and choices to come across. It also discusses the changing legal situation, analyzing the ways domestic service was treated in the context of French labor law. The breadth of the time period covered allows Beal to trace change over time both quantitatively and qualitatively regarding the numbers of domestic servants employed in different sectors, their pay, and expectations regarding their work lives. At the same time, it interrogates those hard-won tidbits of information through the lens of gender, race, and sexuality, offering convincing and thought-provoking reflections on the meaning of domestic service and what it says about broader social and cultural transformations during France's transition from a predominantly agricultural economy to an urban, industrial society.

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