

MARGINALIZATION IN THE DOMESTIC LABOR MARKET: AN ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURAL LINKAGES BETWEEN CAPITALISM AND PATRIARCHY

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ABSTRACT

This literature study employs a feminist political economy approach to analyze the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy in creating and sustaining a marginalized domestic labor market. Through a qualitative synthesis of scholarly work, the research examines the symbiotic interaction between these two systems. It finds that capitalism depends on cheap social reproductive labor, while patriarchy provides the mechanism to allocate this labor to women, unpaid or underpaid. The commodification of this labor produces a domestic work market characterized by informality, legal exclusion, and personalized power relations, which facilitate the extraction of value from a predominantly female workforce. Furthermore, the study identifies a reinforcing set of economic, legal, and ideological mechanisms that maintain this marginalization, including exclusion from labor laws, restrictive immigration policies, naturalizing care work as women's innate role, and social stigma. The analysis concludes that the marginalized position of domestic workers is not a market anomaly but a structural outcome of the capitalist-patriarchal nexus. Effective transformation requires an integrated strategy that simultaneously addresses legal recognition, regulatory enforcement, the provision of public care services, and challenges to the gendered devaluation of reproductive labor.

Keywords: Feminist Political Economy, Domestic Labor, Social Reproduction, Capitalism, Patriarchy, Informal Work, Care Work.

INTRODUCTION

The conventional understanding of economics often separates the domain of public production, which is measured monetarily, from the realm of social reproduction and domestic work, which is considered outside the scope of formal economic analysis. This artificial separation has long obscured the actual workings of the economic system, particularly in terms of how it depends on and exploits unpaid work, which has historically and culturally been assigned to women. Domestic work, which includes activities such as caring for children and elderly family members, cooking, cleaning the house, and managing daily household needs, is the foundation that enables the

sustainability of the workforce in the public sector (Harcourt, 2023). Without this reproductive work, the workforce cannot be reproduced from day to day or from generation to generation, and profit-generating economic activities would come to a halt. In contemporary studies, transformations in work patterns such as remote working and hybrid work systems have revealed how the boundaries between productive work and domestic work are becoming increasingly blurred, while the burden of social reproduction continues to be disproportionately borne by women (Irfan et al., 2023). However, in capitalist accounting logic, this vital work is not recognized as "real" work because it does not directly produce commodities for the market. It is naturalized as an expression of love, moral obligation, or female nature, so that its economic and social value can continue to be ignored and unpaid (Craig, 2017).

The feminist political economy approach emerged as a critical response to this theoretical omission. This school of thought argues that capitalism and patriarchy are not two separate systems, but are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in a symbiotic relationship (Schmitt et al., 2018). Capitalism, as an economic system oriented towards capital accumulation and profit, requires a stable and cheap supply of labor. Patriarchy, as a social system that places men in a position of dominance over women, provides the mechanisms to secure this supply (Harcourt, 2023). Through a highly hierarchical division of labor based on gender, patriarchy designates women as primarily responsible for reproductive work in the domestic sphere (Schmitt et al., 2018). This designation is institutionalized through cultural norms, public policy, and labor law frameworks that are often exclusive and unprotective of workers (Negara et al., 2024). This designation, supported by cultural norms, religious values, and legal structures, ensures that work that is essential to the survival of capitalism is performed for free or for very low wages, thereby reducing the overall cost of labor reproduction for capital.

The interaction between these two systems creates what is known as the "domestic labor market". This market encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from unpaid domestic work performed by women within their own families to paid domestic work performed by domestic workers, nannies and carers. Although referred to as a "market", this space is characterized by features that are very different from those of the formal labor market. These characteristics are consistent with findings from studies on employment relationships, which show how labor laws often fail to protect workers in fragmented and personalized employment relationships (Arrosyid et al., 2024). It is often unregulated, fragmented, outside the protection of labor laws, and characterized by highly personalized and paternalistic employment relationships. The position of workers in this market, the majority of whom are women, especially from working-class, racial or ethnic minority groups, becomes highly marginalized. This marginalization is not an accident or a market imperfection, but a structural result of the way capitalism and patriarchy together define and devalue work related to care and reproduction.

The concept of "marginalization" here needs to be understood beyond simply low

income. Marginalization in the domestic labor market is multidimensional. It includes economic vulnerability due to low wages, lack of benefits, and job insecurity. It also includes legal vulnerability due to a lack of formal recognition and protection. Furthermore, this marginalization has a strong social and symbolic dimension, in which domestic work is viewed as unskilled work, "natural" women's work, and therefore has a low status. This view obscures the skills, knowledge and emotional resilience that are actually required in care work. The capitalist logic that views it as "non-productive work" and the patriarchal logic that views it as "women's work" combine to create conditions in which exploitation in this space can take place without serious questioning. This pattern of marginalization is in line with contemporary economic dynamics characterized by labor flexibilization and narrowing opportunities for social mobility for vulnerable worker groups (Sulaksono et al., 2025).

Therefore, this literature review aims to critically examine how feminist political economy approaches dissect the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy in creating and maintaining marginalized domestic labor markets. This study will attempt to uncover the mechanisms through which these two systems work together to extract value from reproductive labor, while simultaneously placing workers in vulnerable and powerless positions. This research departs from the premise that understanding the domestic labor market and the position of women within it is impossible without a simultaneous analysis of class and gender dynamics. This analysis will attempt to answer how domestic work is reproduced as cheap female labor, how the market for this work is constructed and regulated, and what consequences this has on the lives of workers, especially women from lower social classes.

The main problem faced is that domestic work, whether paid or unpaid, is structurally excluded from the protection and recognition afforded to work in the formal sector. This lack of recognition is systematic. In the labor law systems of many countries, domestic workers are often excluded from minimum wage guarantees, regulated working hours, paid leave, social security, and the right to organize. This occurs because domestic employment relationships are viewed as personal relationships in the private sphere, rather than professional contractual relationships in the public sphere. This view is protected by a family ideology that separates the household as an autonomous domain. This situation reflects an imbalance in the dynamics of labor regulation, where the protection of workers' rights lags behind changes in the labor market structure and the complexity of modern working relationships (Negara et al., 2024). As a result, paid domestic workers operate in a legal "grey area", where exploitation is easy and difficult to prosecute. They face the risk of abuse, violence, and forced labor with few effective complaint or remedy mechanisms. This vulnerability is exacerbated for migrant domestic workers, whose immigration status is often tied to a specific employer, creating an extreme relationship of dependency.

The second problem lies in the way domestic work continues to be reproduced as a

female responsibility, which then justifies poor working conditions and low wages. Cultural narratives that associate caregiving and housework with female "motherhood", "devotion" and "nature" serve as powerful tools to devalue this work economically. When a type of work is seen as an extension of women's natural roles, it is not viewed as an acquired skill or expertise worthy of high pay, but rather as a naturally available and almost unlimited resource. This logic is consistent with managerial practices in various informal work sectors, where efficiency is achieved through work intensification and disregard for worker welfare (Amri et al., 2021). This logic applies both to unpaid work in the home and to paid work. Employers who hire domestic workers often pay low wages with the justification that they are "just helping" or "like family members", a rhetoric that obscures the exploitative economic relationship. Thus, patriarchy not only assigns this work to women, but also creates an ideology that makes the exploitation of this work seem normal, even invisible, thereby hindering collective efforts to demand change and justice.

The importance of examining this topic is increasingly evident in the current global care crisis. Population ageing, budget cuts to public services such as childcare and elderly care, and the increasing participation of women in the formal workforce have created an explosive demand for paid care work. Various market-based solutions, such as childcare services and family care businesses, are increasingly being promoted as practical answers to the needs of working families, especially amid limited state support for care work (Sinambela & Mardikaningsih, 2022). However, the response to this demand has not been to improve the status, wages, and working conditions in this sector, but rather to deepen dependence on female migrant workers from poor countries, creating a new and highly unequal global care chain. A feminist political economy approach is particularly relevant for revealing how global capitalism reorganizes, rather than eliminates, international divisions of labor based on gender and race. It helps explain why market 'solutions' to the care crisis actually reinforce old patterns of exploitation, shifting the burden from states and families in developed countries onto the shoulders of poor women from developing countries, while keeping the costs of care low and invisible.

Furthermore, in the discourse on development and economic policy, there is increasing pressure to "include" women in the formal economy, often measured by their participation in the paid labor force. However, this narrow focus on this metric fails to address the double burden experienced by many women, who must bear paid work during the day and unpaid domestic work at night. Without a critical analysis of how marginalized domestic labor markets function to subsidize both the capitalist economy and men's comfort in the household, efforts to achieve gender equality in employment will remain superficial. This study is important because it offers an analytical framework that allows us to question the overall economic structure, not just the position of individual women within it. It demands a radical reconsideration of what is valued as "work", how that work is organized, and who benefits from these arrangements.

The objective of this literature review is to analyses and synthesize thinking in the feminist political economy approach regarding the formation and maintenance of the marginalized domestic labor market. Specifically, this study aims to describe and explain the symbiotic relationship between the capitalist system and the patriarchal system in producing the domestic labor market as a space dominated by female labor with precarious working conditions, low wages, and minimal legal protection. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify and map various interrelated mechanisms, including economic mechanisms (such as flexibilization and informality), legal mechanisms (such as exclusion from labor laws), and ideological mechanisms (such as the naturalization of care work as a female trait) that work together to maintain these conditions of marginalization. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its attempt to present an integrative framework that dialectically links gender and class analysis, transcending fragmented explanations. In practical terms, this synthesis is expected to provide a strong conceptual foundation for policy advocacy oriented towards the recognition, protection, and enhancement of the value of domestic work, as well as the elimination of various forms of gender- and class-based exploitation within it.

METHODS

This research was conducted as a systematic literature review with a qualitative approach aimed at compiling a critical synthesis of various ideas in feminist political economy. A qualitative approach was chosen because it is suited to the exploratory and interpretative nature of the research, which seeks to understand the complexity of the conceptual relationship between capitalism, patriarchy, and the domestic labor market. This method allows researchers to delve into theoretical arguments, analyses conceptual constructs, and identify patterns and contradictions in the existing body of literature, without being limited by quantitative measurements. This literature study serves as the main vehicle for conducting an in-depth review of theoretical developments, consolidating various perspectives, and developing a coherent analytical framework to answer the research questions. The focus is on building a comprehensive understanding through narrative and critical analysis of the academic works that form the foundation of feminist political economy.

The procedure for conducting this literature study refers to the systematic review methodology developed for the social sciences and humanities. This process follows the phases outlined by Jesson et al. (2011) in their guide on how to conduct a literature review. The first stage involves careful planning, including the formulation of clear research questions and the development of a comprehensive search protocol. The literature search was conducted extensively through multidisciplinary academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, as well as specialized databases such as Gender Watch and Sociological Abstracts. The combination of keywords used included "feminist political economy", "social reproduction theory", "domestic labor", "care work", "patriarchy and capitalism", "paid domestic work", and "marginalized labor markets". The

publication time frame was focused on capturing key developments in feminist political economy theory. The identified articles, books, and book chapters were then selected through a gradual screening process based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, with primary consideration given to substantive contributions to the understanding of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy and the construction of the domestic labor market. The analysis stage was conducted through an interpretive thematic approach. Conceptual and theoretical data from the selected texts were extracted, coded, and grouped into emerging main themes. These themes were then analyzed in depth, compared, and synthesized to construct a structured argument and systematically answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship Between Capitalism and Patriarchy in the Production of Marginal Domestic Labor Markets

The feminist political economy approach departs from the premise that capitalism and patriarchy are not two separate, independent systems, but rather two social structures that are historically interrelated and mutually reinforcing. This relationship is symbiotic; each system benefits from and is supported by the way the other operates. Capitalism, with its intrinsic drive for capital accumulation and market expansion, requires certain conditions to reproduce labor from day to day and from generation to generation. This process of social reproduction, which includes feeding, caring for, socializing, and maintaining the health of workers, requires a large investment of time and resources (Tuncsiper, 2024). This is where patriarchy comes in as a system that regulates the division of labor based on gender, stipulating that the main responsibility for this reproductive work lies with women. This designation is enforced through various mechanisms, including cultural norms, religious values, family structures, and laws. Thus, patriarchy provides capitalism with a mechanism for obtaining essential reproductive labor at a very low cost, as this work is often performed unpaid within the household or for low wages when commodified.

The concept of social reproductive labor is central to this analysis. This work encompasses all activities necessary to produce and maintain the labor force, both literally through food and care, and socially through education and emotional support. In capitalist societies, the majority of this reproductive labor has been privatized within the family unit, particularly under the responsibility of women (Tuncsiper, 2024). This privatization has profound economic consequences. First, this work becomes invisible in macroeconomic calculations such as Gross Domestic Product, so that its vital contribution to the economy as a whole is not recognized. Second, because it is performed without pay, this work does not provide direct economic bargaining power to the women who perform it, thereby increasing their economic dependence on male or state income. Third, this

privatization shifts the costs of labor reproduction from capital and the state to individuals and families, particularly women. In this way, capitalism is effectively subsidized by women's unpaid labor, enabling higher rates of capital accumulation.

When working-class women enter the paid labor force, the double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic work becomes unbearable (Ramnarain, 2024). This tension creates a demand to commodify some of this reproductive labor, giving rise to a market for paid domestic and care work. However, this market does not emerge in a vacuum. It is shaped by the same logic of capitalism and patriarchy that has devalued reproductive work from the outset. Because this work is seen as natural and unskilled "women's work", it can be offered at low wages. Furthermore, because it takes place in the private sphere of the household, it is easily excluded from labor regulations that protect workers in the formal sector. Thus, the paid domestic labor market is reproduced as an extension of the traditional gender division of labor, but now with wage relations that place women from certain social classes as workers and women from other social classes, or men, as employers.

This market also serves as a safety valve for the tensions generated by the participation of middle-class women in the workforce. When middle-class professional women enter demanding careers, their need to delegate household work and childcare increases (Agnihotri, 2025). Rather than challenging the fundamental gender division of labor within their own households or demanding universal childcare services from the state, the easier market solution is to hire other women, often from working-class, racially or ethnically different backgrounds, to perform this work. Thus, the patriarchy-capitalism relationship not only exploits women's unpaid labor within the family, but also facilitates the transfer of the burden of reproductive work from middle-class women to working-class women, while maintaining the existing gender structure. This relationship preserves men's freedom from reproductive responsibilities and allows middle-class women to pursue careers without significantly disrupting the gender order in their own homes.

The marginal characteristics of the domestic labor market, such as informality, the absence of written contracts, and personal dependence on employers, are features that are functionally necessary for this symbiotic operation. Informality allows for the flexibility and low costs desired by employers. The absence of formal contracts and legal protections keeps workers in a vulnerable position, reducing their ability to demand better wages or conditions, and ensuring a supply of compliant and cheap labor (Young, 2001). The highly personalized working relationship, often framed in "family" rhetoric, functions as an ideological control mechanism. This rhetoric obscures the exploitative economic relationship, exploits female norms of sacrifice and care to justify exploitation, and creates a sense of indebtedness that makes workers reluctant to demand their rights. Thus, marginalization is not a failure of the market to achieve efficiency, but rather a condition that allows this market to function in accordance with capital's need for cheap reproductive labor and patriarchy's need to maintain the gender hierarchy.

Global capitalism further intensifies and reorganizes these relations through the

formation of global care chains. The demand for care work in developed countries, driven by the care crisis and welfare state budget cuts, is met by recruiting women from developing countries who have fewer economic options (Rosewarne, 2015). This migration creates a highly unequal circulation of value and labor. Migrant women fill care gaps in destination countries, enabling the participation of the local female workforce and maintaining levels of capital accumulation, while sending remittances that often form the backbone of the economy of their families and countries of origin. However, this process also creates a care vacuum in the countries of origin, where the children and elderly left behind require care from other women in the family or community, often without compensation. Thus, global capitalism extracts value from women's reproductive labor at various points in this chain, while patriarchal structures at both ends of the chain ensure that it is women who bear the social costs of this arrangement.

Patriarchy also plays a role in shaping the subjectivity and choices of the workers themselves. The internalization of gender norms that define caregiving as women's primary responsibility and identity can influence how women view paid domestic work. For many women, especially those with limited education and few economic options, this work may be seen as a natural extension of their role in the home. This view can lead them to accept poor working conditions and low wages as inevitable, or even to feel proud of their resilience and sacrifice. Capitalism exploits this subjectivity shaped by patriarchy, as it reduces the possibility of collective resistance and facilitates a disposition to work hard in difficult conditions. Thus, patriarchy not only allocates this work to women externally, but also shapes the way women experience and understand it, thereby securing a relatively compliant labor supply.

This interaction between capitalism and patriarchy is also evident in the role of the state. The state often takes an ambivalent approach to the domestic labor market. On the one hand, the state may ignore it, leaving it unregulated because it is considered a private matter. On the other hand, the state can actively shape it through migration policies that bind migrant domestic workers to specific employers, or through labor laws that deliberately exclude domestic workers from basic protections. These policies reflect a compromise between various interests: capital's need for cheap reproductive labor, pressure from middle-class households for access to affordable domestic workers, and the desire to maintain the patriarchal family order by delegating work without disrupting the gender division. Thus, the state acts as an arena where the alliance between capital and patriarchy is consolidated and institutionalized into laws and regulations.

The division of labor based on gender and class in this market is often reinforced by divisions based on race and nationality. More "light" domestic work or work involving interaction with children may be more likely to be given to women from certain racial or ethnic groups who are considered more "suitable" or "caring", while heavier and dirtier work may be allocated to other groups considered inferior. These practices reflect how patriarchy and capitalism intersect with racism and xenophobia to create a

more complex hierarchy within the labor market itself. This hierarchy divides the workforce, hinders solidarity, and allows employers to exploit differences to negotiate lower wages and conditions. Thus, the logic of capitalist exploitation is reinforced by patriarchal and racial prejudices, creating deeply marginalized conditions for those at the bottom of this hierarchy.

The consequences of these relations for the lives of domestic workers are profound and multidimensional. Economically, they are often trapped in poverty with little upward mobility due to a lack of formal training, recognition of skills, and accumulation of savings. Legally, they face vulnerability to abuse and violence without effective protection. Socially, they may experience isolation, stigmatization, and psychological pressure from intense emotional labor and unequal relationships with employers. This indicates that women's limited access to inclusive human resource management practices reinforces gender inequality in the world of work (Infante & Darmawan, 2022), while also limiting women's emancipation and participation in broader social development (Issalillah et al., 2022). Physically, exhausting work and exposure to cleaning chemicals can cause long-term health problems. This stressful work experience also reflects the low level of work engagement commonly experienced by women in jobs with unequal power relations and limited career opportunities (Putra et al., 2022). These impacts are not unintended side effects, but direct results of how this market is constructed by and to serve the interests of capital accumulation and the maintenance of the patriarchal order.

This relationship also highlights the limitations of reformist strategies that focus solely on incorporating domestic workers into the existing labor law framework, without challenging the broader structure. While legal recognition and protection are certainly necessary and important, they may not be sufficient to address the root of the problem. This is because the market itself is designed to be informal and exploitative; formal regulation may push it further into the shadows or cause resistance from employers who depend on cheap labor. Therefore, the feminist political economy approach emphasizes that true transformation requires a radical rethinking of the division of reproductive labor as a whole, demanding the assumption of responsibility by the state and society through universal public services, as well as the fair redistribution of care work between men and women within the household.

The marginalized domestic labor market is a product of the structural symbiosis between capitalism and patriarchy. Capitalism requires cheap social reproductive labor to maintain its accumulation, while patriarchy provides the mechanisms to allocate this labor to women, either unpaid or low-paid. When this labor is commodified, the resulting market inherits and reinforces the logic of devaluation and exploitation of both systems. The characteristics of informality, vulnerability, and personal relationships that define this market are not flaws, but rather functional conditions that enable the extraction of value from women's labor. This process is increasingly deepened and regulated globally, creating chains of care that cross national borders and reinforce gender, class, and racial

hierarchies. Understanding the production of this market as the result of mutually constitutive relations between capitalism and patriarchy is essential for developing strategies of resistance and transformation that not only improve conditions within the market, but also challenge the economic-political foundations that created it.

Mechanisms for Maintaining Marginalization in the Domestic Labor Market

Marginalization in the domestic labor market does not occur by chance; it is maintained and reproduced by a series of mechanisms that work synergistically at the economic, legal and ideological levels. The first and most fundamental mechanism is the legal construction that deliberately excludes domestic work from the scope of standard labor laws. In many jurisdictions, domestic workers are explicitly excluded from provisions regarding minimum wages, maximum working hours, paid sick leave, annual holidays, or compensation for termination of employment. The legal basis for these exclusions often rests on an outdated public versus private dichotomy, in which the household is considered a realm of personal relationships outside state regulation. These exclusions create a legal vacuum in which work takes place, giving employers almost unlimited authority and leaving workers without a framework of protections to which they can appeal. Even when specific laws for domestic workers are introduced, their coverage is often partial, enforcement is weak, and workers' access to complaint mechanisms is hampered by fear of dismissal or deportation. Thus, the legal framework actively constructs vulnerability as an inherent condition of employment.

The primary economic mechanism that perpetuates marginalization is rampant informality. The domestic labor market is characterized by the absence of written contracts, cash payments outside the tax system, and a lack of official employment records. This informality benefits employers by reducing direct costs such as taxes and social security contributions, and providing flexibility to arrange working hours and tasks according to their needs without legal obligations (Agnihotri, 2025). For workers, informality means constant uncertainty, an inability to prove an employment relationship in disputes, and blocked access to social benefits such as pensions or bank credit. This system creates a trap: low wages force workers to accept informal conditions to get any job, while informality itself prevents them from accumulating the capital or credentials necessary to escape such work. This mechanism ensures a continuous supply of labor trapped in low-wage jobs with no clear path to mobility.

Restrictive and work-bound immigration systems function as a powerful retention mechanism for domestic migrant workers. Many destination countries impose visas that bind workers to specific employers. If workers leave their employer due to abuse or intolerable working conditions, they automatically lose their legal status and risk deportation (Jokela, 2017). This legal binding creates a highly unequal power relationship, in which employers have control not only over the work but also over the worker's right to reside in the country. This unequal power relationship reflects gender-based structural barriers that systematically limit women's agency and bargaining power

in various work and leadership contexts (Rojak & Fajar, 2025). This extreme dependence makes workers highly vulnerable to exploitation, forced labor, and other rights violations, as the fear of losing their residence and livelihood outweighs the fear of poor working conditions. Thus, migration policies act as an effective disciplinary tool, enforcing compliance and silencing dissent, thereby perpetuating a cycle of deep marginalization.

Ideological mechanisms play an important role in naturalizing and justifying these marginal conditions. Strong cultural narratives link domestic work and caregiving to feminine traits that are considered natural, such as patience, gentleness and self-sacrifice. This association serves to devalue such work as not a real skill, but rather an expression of gender identity. When a job is seen as a natural calling rather than a learned profession, it becomes difficult to fight for decent wages, humane working conditions, and professional recognition. Furthermore, rhetoric that frames domestic workers as loyal "family members" or "helpers" is used to obscure economic relationships. This rhetoric exploits norms of female devotion and loyalty, creating the expectation that workers will show unlimited flexibility and dedication without additional compensation, because that is what "family" does.

The social stigma attached to domestic work acts as a disincentive to collective organization (Jaehrling et al., 2024). This work is often looked down upon, associated with inferior social status and lack of education. This stigma can lead to shame and attempts to conceal one's employment, which hinders the formation of collective identity and solidarity among workers. When workers view their position as a personal failure or a temporary, shameful circumstance, rather than as a form of systematically exploited labor, the possibility of building a collective movement to demand change is diminished. Furthermore, the isolated nature of work in private homes physically separates workers from one another, hindering the communication and organization that are fundamental to collective action in other workplaces.

The lack of formal skills recognition and training schemes for domestic work is another structural mechanism that perpetuates marginalization. Unlike other professions, there are no widely recognized certification or standardized training pathways that could enhance the status and economic value of this work. This absence reinforces the perception that the work does not require specialized skills, thereby justifying low wages. Employers are often reluctant to invest in training or pay more for skills, as they assume the work can be done by anyone. Without a framework for identifying, measuring, and rewarding the complex skills actually involved in household management, childcare, or emotional support, workers have no basis for negotiating better compensation or demonstrating their professional value.

Mechanisms of marginalization also operate through the structure of demand itself. The market is dominated by individual households purchasing services separately, rather than by large institutions. This fragmentation of demand means that workers face many employers who have relatively little bargaining power individually, but collectively

determine market conditions (Mehta & Awasthi, 2019). The lack of large buyers or buyer unions makes it difficult to establish industry standards or prevailing wages. Furthermore, this work is often viewed as a discretionary expense that can be cut during difficult economic times, placing workers in a position of extreme vulnerability to economic fluctuations. This instability in demand contributes to income insecurity and reinforces the position of workers as a flexible labor reserve that can be hired and fired easily, without compensation or notice.

The state often adopts policies that indirectly reinforce these mechanisms of marginalization through omission or commission. Regulatory neglect is a form of passive policy that allows the market to operate informally. On the other hand, active policies such as budget cuts for government-subsidized childcare and elderly care services increase households' dependence on private market solutions, which often means hiring low-wage domestic workers. By withdrawing from its role as a provider of reproductive services, the state encourages the commodification of this work while refusing responsibility for ensuring decent working conditions for those who perform it. In doing so, the state facilitates the expansion of the market while neglecting the welfare of its workers.

Gender dynamics within employer households are also a mechanism of reproduction. When women from employer households are involved in the management of domestic workers, these relationships are often reproduced along complex lines of gender hierarchy. Although both parties are women, differences in class, race, or nationality define the power relationship. Female employers may use their authority to delegate tasks they themselves wish to avoid, thereby transferring the burden of reproductive work without challenging the gender division of labor in their own households. This situation reflects how women's participation in the domestic sphere does not automatically result in equitable relationships if it is not accompanied by a legal, cultural, and gender equality framework that supports the formation of gender-responsive family systems (Inamah et al., 2024). This inequality also shows that structural factors such as gender, social position, and access to economic opportunities from the outset shape individuals' work trajectories differently, thereby reinforcing hierarchies and inequalities in various segments of the labor market, including domestic work (Khayru et al., 2022). In some cases, men in households may completely disregard these arrangements, thereby maintaining their traditional exemption from reproductive work. These conditions underscore the importance of public policies that are sensitive to social and gender inequalities, because without structural interventions oriented towards justice and sustainability, these unequal working relationships will continue to be reproduced across private and public spaces (Musyafak & Darmawan, 2025). Thus, the domestic labor market allows for certain adjustments in the organization of reproductive work without disrupting patriarchal foundations, thereby maintaining the conditions that create demand for such work intact.

The globalization of communication and media can serve as an additional mechanism by

promoting lifestyles and standards of neatness that increase pressure on households to employ domestic help (Guarnizo & Rodriguez, 2017). Images of perfect homes, orderly families, and long working hours for professionals create aspirations that often depend on the hidden labor of domestic workers. At the same time, the media rarely highlights the working conditions behind these lifestyles. By celebrating the end result while obscuring the production process, contemporary consumer culture normalizes dependence on marginalized domestic labor and does not ask critical questions about how this is possible.

Marginalization in the domestic labor market is maintained by a complex machine consisting of various interlocking mechanisms. Exclusionary legal frameworks, informal economic practices, restrictive migration policies, and ideological narratives that devalue work work together to create and reinforce conditions of vulnerability. These mechanisms do not operate independently; informality is reinforced by the absence of legal protections, and both are justified by ideologies that naturalize such work as not real work. State policies often consolidate these arrangements, either through direct action or omission. As a result, workers, particularly migrant women, find themselves trapped in a cycle of exploitation with few ways out. Understanding the interconnections between these economic, legal, and ideological mechanisms is essential for devising effective intervention strategies. Attempts to improve conditions by addressing only one mechanism, such as introducing legislation without combating informality or changing cultural narratives, are likely to fail because other mechanisms will adapt to maintain the status quo. Only an integrated approach that challenges the entire ecosystem of marginalization can pave the way for meaningful transformation of the domestic labor market.

CONCLUSION

This literature review has examined how feminist political economy approaches dissect the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy in creating a marginalized domestic labor market. The main findings show that this relationship is symbiotic and mutually reinforcing. Capitalism relies on cheap social reproductive labor to maintain capital accumulation, while patriarchy provides mechanisms to allocate this labor to women unpaid or for low wages. When this labor is commodified into a paid domestic labor market, the market inherits and reproduces the logic of devaluation from both systems. This market is characterized by informality, legal vulnerability, and highly personal but unequal working relationships, all of which serve to extract maximum value from women's labor while keeping costs low. Furthermore, various economic, legal, and ideological mechanisms work together to perpetuate this marginalization, including exclusion from labor laws, restrictive migration policies, narratives that naturalize care work as women's nature, and social stigma that hinders collective organization.

The findings of this study have important implications for economic theory and practice, social policy, and workers' rights advocacy. Theoretically, this research reinforces the

superiority of a feminist political economy framework that integrates class and gender analysis, by showing that analyses that separate the two systems are unable to explain the production and sustainability of marginalized domestic labor markets. For public policy and advocacy, the main implication is that fragmented or partial interventions, such as merely introducing protective legislation without addressing the root causes of informality or challenging the underlying gender ideology, are likely to fail. A transformative approach is needed, one that simultaneously targets the various mechanisms that perpetuate marginalization. This includes comprehensive legal reforms to include domestic workers in all labor protections, migration policy changes to abolish binding visa systems, state investment in universal public care services to reduce dependence on exploited private markets, and public campaigns to change social perceptions of the value of care and domestic work.

Based on these conclusions and implications, several recommendations can be made. For further academic research, it is recommended to conduct an in-depth comparative study of policies in various countries that have successfully improved domestic work conditions, focusing on the interaction between legal reform, regulatory enforcement, the role of domestic workers' organizations, and cultural narrative change. Participatory research led by domestic workers' organizations themselves is also essential to ensure that the research agenda and policy solutions are rooted in their experiences and priorities. For governments, trade unions, and civil society organizations, the practical recommendation is to form a broad coalition to advocate for the ratification and full implementation of ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. In addition, nationally recognized training and certification programmed for domestic work and care skills need to be developed to enhance the professional status and economic value of this work. Public awareness campaigns should be launched to challenge stigma, value care work, and promote the fair redistribution of care responsibilities between men and women within households as a long-term social goal

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