“Everybody Lies”: The Sexual Politics of Money and Maids

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In 2011, the head of the International Monetary Fund and French socialist politician, Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK), was taken from a plane and placed under arrest, accused of sexually assaulting a hotel worker. While he was subsequently released, the high drama of the DSK scandal, and the later accusations of prior sexual assaults, sex parties, and even procurement, seem less significant now than they did then, but revisiting the drama, and unwinding its various skeins, tells us something about immigration and sexual politics, international banking and European politics, and the culture of “exposure” that is contemporary mass media politics. Perhaps it also is a way of addressing our resilient—if naïve—belief in the possibility of finding and understanding “exactly what happened” in a culture that values the appearance of truth at the same time it demeans its revelation. Most of all, it reveals to us our own deep distrust of those who are “Other” in our world, both those who live on its margins, as did Nafissatou Diallo from Guinea, and Dominique Strauss-Kahn himself, born in the French elite and a socialist intellectual and politician.

Elizabeth Faue is professor and director of graduate studies in the History department. She is the author of Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945 (Gender and American Culture), on gender in the labor movement of the 1930s, and a biography of labor journalist, Eva Valesh. She is currently working on a study of workplace safety and risk and the transformation of work, labor politics, and the meaning of class.