



**The irony in “House Wife” Emancipation: Reflection of Female Relationships in Domestic Service Employment, in Nairobi-Kenya**

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Table 1.2 Socio- demographic characteristics of FDE respondents

## List of Acronyms

<b>ILO</b> -	International Labor Organization
<b>FDEs</b> -	Female Domestic Employers
<b>FDW/s</b> -	Female Domestic Worker/s
<b>DW-</b>	Domestic Work
<b>DWB</b> -	Domestic Workers Bureau
<b>KUDHEIA</b> -	Kenya Union of Domestic Workers, Hotels, Educational institution, Hospitals and Allied workers
<b>UM</b> -	Unmatched
<b>M</b> -	Matched
<b>Ksh/s</b> -	Kenya Shilling/s

## **Dedication**

*This piece of work is dedicated to my two year- old daughter, Dorcas. My aim is to help her understand, when she grows up, that women's positioning in society is not only shaped by patriarchal sentiments, but also by the power relations among women.*

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## **Abstract**

This study has explored interactions among female domestic employers (FDEs) and female domestic workers (FDWs). Understanding and interpreting their interactions was guided by the following three questions: What are the diversities of interactions between FDEs and FDWs? What are the drivers to these interactions? What are the negotiation strategies used by FDW to have agency from their employers. To answer these questions, the study used data collected through in-depth interviews and observation, to bring out the voices and experiences of both FDEs and FDWs. This acts as a fair ground to add knowledge to the existing debate by Morgan, Harding and Mohanty on the role of patriarchy in women oppression and differences that exist among them on women oppression from Kenyan context. To analyse empirical data, I used concepts of power and class relations that are in line with Foucauldian theory of power and subjectification. The analysis shows that, FDEs and FDWs have diverse oppressive relations that include: Control of time, kindness and compassion and labour relations. The diversity in their interaction is influenced by their differences in power and class positions that remain distinct in their close interactions. These differences were displayed in different forms like: Language and name use and familial ideologies. In many cases, employees use different strategies to negotiate for agency from their employers, which included: Cheating and faking truth, gratifying employer's expectations and trust acquisition. The paper argues that, oppression among women exist (from the context of domestic sphere) and that women are not a homogenous group, but differ from context to another, thus placing certain category of women in a higher power positioning, which they uphold by maintaining the power of another category low.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This study has contributed to scholarly debate that portrays women as homogenised group, categorised by reproductive roles, and equal in oppression by patriarchy. It contributes by exploring oppression among women in the context of domestic work from Kenya. The aim is not to disregard the role played by patriarchy in women oppression: But expose women oppression from another dimension.

## **Keywords**

Women, Oppression, FDWs, FDEs, DW, Power differences, Class relations, Agency, Kenya

## |Chapter 1: Introduction

*For the last three years I have been a mother, wife and a professional, and expected to satisfy all the roles of the “ideal” woman, I have managed to juggle between the above duties through the help of a domestic worker. The fact that I had to leave my two- year old daughter under the care of my employee, for the period of my study abroad, coupled with experience of my neighbors, who rely most on their FDWs help, necessitated the choice of my topic e.g. to explore the dynamics that exist in feminized domestic service and the diverse and complex relationships between them and their employers. The study’s main aim was not to portray employers as villains and workers as victims, but to try to explore their relationship, in relation to the hidden meanings attached and the conditions of their work.*

Relations in domestic service have been an ambiguous area to pursue, yet very unique and interesting since, its operations are founded in a home setting, unlike other forms of labor, where workers leave their home environments and go to work in an office setting. Interestingly, home for an employer implies private space, while for an employee symbolizes a public space. These parallel dynamics (home for one and office for the other), make the relationship between the two parties very unique (Muttarak 2004:503).

This study has mainly explored the relationship between FDEs and FDWs in Kenya and in particular the women domestic workers because majority of domestic workers are women. As documented by KUDHEIHA (2013), Kenya has 1.8million domestic workers, in the city of Nairobi with FDWs making 83% of the population.

In Kenya, just like any other part of the world, DW is highly feminized. In many countries, women comprise of 80% of people working in domestic sector” (Schwenken 2011: 10). Human Rights Watch agrees with KUDHEIHA that high female participation in DW can be explained from pull and push factors that include: Economic crises, rural poverty and devastation of agricultural sector (Joint International Law Program 2006). Kurian (2006: 153) supports the above idea that, much of household work has been left in the hands of women, who tend to be unpaid/poorly paid or less recognized in the society.

Domestic worker and oppression are common terms, with specific meanings in this study. “**Domestic worker**”, represents a person involved in housekeeping, child care, cleaning, cooking, and ironing clothes and other related household chores in exchange for wages, either on part-time or full time basis. In other circumstances, one can be employed by a single employer or multiple employers (Mantouvalou and Albin 2012: 2). While “**Oppression**” is an exercise of authority and power by one group of people against the other, that results to favorable condition of the former at the expense of the latter.

The theoretical focus of this study is in the context of contribution to a debate of western feminism standpoint and post-modern feminists (Harding 2002: 219),

(Mohanty 2003), (Bulbeck 1988: 12), (Morgan 1984: 4). According to the above debate, women are portrayed as homogenous group in solidarity to the experience of oppression by patriarchy and differences that exist among women from context to another, and assuming the oppressions that exists within women in these categories. This study has contributed to the above by providing rich empirical material from the context of worker- employer relations in DW in Kenya. Methodology and findings have taken deeper on the qualitative and feminist approach. In that, the analysis chapter has employed in-depth interpretations, with women as the point of entry. I found this area interesting to study, since in Kenya; micro-level interactions in domestic service are very ambiguous to interpret and analyze and yet have received less scholarly attention.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Women oppression in DW as founded on patriarchal systems cannot be underestimated. Many discussions have portrayed undisputed debate between standpoint feminist and post-modern theorists over the women oppression and its systems. Morgan as quoted by Bulbeck (1988: 12) claims that, patriarchy has reduced all women to a narrowed role that share fundamentally similar position. Harding (2002: 225) adds that, politics around women oppression has been discussed from the perspective of their identity. An idea, she claims, categorizes women as marginalized and that any knowledge on this topic should be developed from their perspective. Mohanty et al. (1991:66) questions the above ideology by claiming that women are not universal but differ from one context to another.

In solidarity with Mohanty on the above debate, these ideas are too weak since, women oppression is always argued from the perspective of patriarchy. So women, either from the “western” or “third world” context, in domestic employment, oppression of one form or the other exists. This directs the attention of women oppression from its base on patriarchy, to other factors like class and power differences among the women involved. Thus, the objective of this study is to contribute to the existing feminist debate on the women’s oppression, not to uphold the role played by patriarchy as majority have done, but to expose a different level of oppression: A group of women oppressing another through female domestic interactions in Kenya.

The study had relied heavily on Mohanty’s focus on the differences that exist among women, and tried to show exploitation of women by women, within their categorization and also to explore the unique form of women exploitation in a unique labor market. It is unique because women exploitation in labor market has largely been talked of from perspectives of women trafficking and men-women relations, but with less attention to woman-woman relations. Rollins (1987:6) says “In no other labor arrangement is it usual to find both employer and employee are female, and both are members of the subordinate gender of all societies”. Fundamentally, how power and class divide and how their differences inform the female-female labor relationship, and the meaning attached to this relationship by both women and society at large, are the central issues being addressed by this study.

## **1.2 Contextualizing DW and Women Labour Participation in Kenya.**

This section has discussed status of DW in Kenya, by bringing out the status of women participation in labor market and employment of FDW to support in domestic chores. The two employment scenarios bring into context two different women, who struggle to relate in a work-related environment.

### **1.2.1 Women in Labour Market and the need for FDWs in Kenya**

In looking at how FDEs and FDWs in Kenya associate in the household work, it is very vital to focus on women empowerment and their participation in labor market: And how this translates to increased enrollment of women in DW. Kenyan women have joined labor force in very high number for the last two decades; which can be related to the increased level of women education and enlightenment. Though concentration is still high in the so called “female occupations” and informal sectors, statistics show that women participation in labor force increased from 30% to 56% in 1995 (Suda 2002:310). With One World Nations Online (2010) claiming that, between 2005-2008, labor force participation for adult women moved from 73.9 to 74.1 %, though a slight change within a span of five years, but positive.

This shift in labor force brought the challenge on women having to balance between employment and domestic chores. This called for a need of FDWs, so that FDEs could dedicate more time to office and full time employment. “The housemaid is a very recent phenomenon and one of the stubborn and curious traces of colonialism. Since, it is the quintessence of the irony of female liberation. Housemaids arose as a result of housewife emancipation. When the housewife gained economic empowerment and moved to the office, the housemaid took her place at home” (Suda 2002:311).

### **1.2.2 Conditions of DW in Kenya**

Domestic work in Kenya, just like anywhere in the world, has been the oldest and the most important occupation for many women. Nearly every middle class person has a house help, with Nairobi having around 2 million households with domestic workers (Count 2011: 18). Relationship between FDEs and FDWs, is not only determined by the vulnerability of these employees, but also education gap, unemployment ratio, educational achievement, familial arrangement and labor legislation(King 2007:69).

Most of FDWs as conveyed in this study are ignorant of their rights and in case of hostile working relationship; they live it to fate and “resign themselves” to the demands of their employers. FDWs use different forms to abuse their FDWs, like, yelling at them or beating. They are rated to mistreat employees more as compared to male employers, this is supported by the stereotype that: If a FDE does not control the girl house help, she is likely to take advantage

and steal from them their property or start having sex with the husband (Hughes 2008: 1). Due to scarcity of employment opportunities in other sectors, domestic workers are forced to endure very harsh working conditions, to afford a meal and provide for their dependents' (Hughes 2008: 3).

Kenyan domestic workers are poorly paid 158.10 kshs per day for the unskilled employees, to 824.20 kshs in other working sectors (Tijdens and Wambugu 2012: 10). Most payments are made by FDEs. It is ironical that some of these less paid employees are employed by financially stable employers, and yet their employees go for months without full pay. Contrary to the lay man expectations that better pay for employers raises pay for employees. This study shows that, domestic workers have no leave-off, even maternity leave; so they tend to lose their jobs once they get pregnant, and are replaced immediately, since they have no protective rules for their jobs.

### **1.2.3 Sites of Protection and Agency for Domestic Workers in Kenya**

Kenya policies concerning DW have been debated for a couple of years now, and yet less has been done to improve and protect this arena. Kenyan law pertaining to DW came into force way back in 2008. Though it has existed in written form, less has been done in implementation. According to Munyes of Kenyan Ministry of Labor, the legal notice number 14, the minimum wage for domestics was set as follows: Ksh. 8580 for those working in the city, Ksh. 7586 for those working in municipalities, and a mandatory 48 hours break every week. As per this legal provision, those who failed to adhere to these were to be punished by paying their employees, an additional of Ksh. 3000 per month or else serve a jail term of three months or a fine of Ksh. 50,000 (Daily Nation 2011).

All these regulations were an effort by the government to regulate, control and better the working conditions of the domestic workers. Though, the terms appear strict as pronounced, they were less adhered to, some of the reasons being that, many of the middle class employers in Kenya have less capacity to pay their employees, as per the set minimum wage and the social security controls as stipulated by the provisions. These employers claimed that their own wages were equally set and paid by the government and which were quite low, so they could not afford to pay a domestic worker that amount (Njeru 2008).

The above contributed in domestic workers identifying themselves as close family members or relatives. ILO conventions claimed that the rights for domestic workers like in Kenya have not been relocated to the localities. This is because the government ratified the convention without putting into consideration its applicability (ILO, 2011). Juma (2011: 2), positions that KUDHEIHA has been working closely with the Ministry of Labor to implement these laws but are yet to realize the dream. Since responsibilities in improving terms and conditions of service through collective bargaining, negotiating with employers on pay and other conditions of work, educating and training of domestic workers to boost their labor power and providing assistance for its member is one way of increasing bargaining power of domestics (KUDHEIHA 2013).

Though the above claim exposes concern over condition of domestic work, the study positions that, FDWs knew less of their rights, and in case of severe mistreatments by their employers, they were not informed of where to report. Those employed through private networks escaped from their job in case of mistreatment, while those employed through bureaus reported to the bureau before escaping from the employment.

### **1. 2.3 Research Questions**

- 1) What are the dimensions of interactions and associations among FDEs and FDWs in domestic service employment?
- 2) What are the determinants to the FDEs and FDWs domestic interactions?
- 3) What are the negotiation and power resistance strategies used by FDWs to have agency in their domestic interactions?

## **|Chapter 2: Analytical Framework**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The Foucauldian theory of power and subjectification acts as the lens through which interactions in DW are analyzed. First, the study looks at levels of interactions and analytical classification of drivers to these interactions, by emphasizing on power relations and its interlink with class, and agency in shaping domestic relations.

### **2.1 Dimensions and Drivers to Domestic Interactions in Domestic Service Employment**

According to Sawicki (1991: 21), the Foucault's perspective of power considers three models of power discursing: power as exercised rather than possessed; power as not primarily repressive, but productive and power as coming from bottom-up. This study has majored more on discussing and using the two models of power, that is: power as exercised rather than possessed and power as coming from bottom-up and its applicability in the daily interaction in domestic sphere.

#### **2.1.1 Power Relations**

Foucault claims that power is to be understood as a range of force relations (Radtke and Stam 1994: 37). These force relations may result in one party having ability to get what they want, at the expense of the other (Boulding 1989: 15). This understanding of power is consistent with "women – centered" approach to power, in that, the interest is primarily on social practices and interactions among the gendered individuals. An idea that is paramount in this study since females involved forcefully relate<sup>1</sup>. Foucault claims that, one is never outside power and that power is always "already there" (Radtke and Stam 1994: 37). This does not mean that we are always operating in divides of power, either as dominating or as dominated, but as Foucault (1980: 92) puts it "power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere".

Foucault (1980 p.95) has put emphasis on the "relational character" of power, in that; its survival depends on different ways of struggle. Thus, relations between FDE and FDW manifest themselves in the daily struggles and resistances that, these two parties have in their interactions. Thus, Foucault is very clear on his rejection of the notion of power as top- down, and totalizing. Though, FDEs and FDWs relations are very oppressive and unequal as discussed in analyses chapter, every party has power which can be understood by focusing

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<sup>1</sup>The FDW is forced by her need for money to work and FDE is forced by her need for DW assistance, thus the two are forced to interact closely bringing power into play

on the situations when this power is applied and the methods used to apply it. And the circumstance when there is fight to disassociate these relations (Radtke and Stam 1994: 45).

Foucault has emphasized on how individuals experience and exercise power, by arguing that “individuals circulate among the threads of power and are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and experiencing power” (Hartsock 1990: 167). This relates to how individual FDE and FDW exercise power, in their micro-level interactions and the positioning of power relations at individual capacity. Foucault also claimed power not to be top-down, but gradually develops from the local (Fraser 1981). This idea makes it hard to trace domination in gender relations and also relations in domestic sphere. Since, FDWs employ different agentic and power resistance strategies, which neutralize their employer’s domination, hence bringing the two categories at the same level of power play. Foucault also analyses power from the micro-level interactions. He argues that, it’s hard to understand power relations by focusing on macro level analyses of “class position” or “gender oppression” (Alan 1994: 139). This argument is useful in this study in that, to understand practices and interrelations in DW environment, we have to analyze them from the local level and understand their forms and stability.

The Foucauldian perspective of power as summarized by Allan posits that, power is exercised rather than possessed and it roots itself from the micro-levels (Alan 1994: 139). This is witnessed from daily social life in different dimensions and shapes the general relationship between the FDEs and FDWs. Foucault’s ideas as discussed by Dews (1984: 87) shows a relationship between power, “subjectification” and “subjection”. He brings out the concept of power that, it is applicable to everyday life which categorizes an individual, marks him/her by his/her own individuality and identity. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. In Kenya, employers are deemed to be the subjects, while employees the objects. Thus, FDEs position themselves as subjects of honor, who should be allocated easy duties, in relation to FDWs, who are seen as objects responsible for hard duties, at the exchange of wages.

Subject as per Foucault can have two meanings, subject to someone else by control and dependence and being tied to your own identity by conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault 1982:212). In domestic service, these two forms of subject can be applied to both FDEs and FDWs. The two act as subjects of power, whereby, the employer is seen as the subject to control and the employee, is the subject conscious of the control by the employer. In the other form, subjectification is exercised when FDEs position themselves as the “subjects” worthy of power and certain class prestige, thus reducing their FDWs to less power and class positioning. This power is exercised in household, on daily bases, either consciously or unconsciously.

The Foucauldian analytics of power is useful in domestic relationship perspective, since the intimacy in this sector acts as a base to power play on daily basis. Domestic workers are closely monitored by FDEs, and this may oppress the



employee as she works to please the observer. Though Foucault recommends collective action to overcome this micro –power inequality, I find it limiting since in domestic sphere, employees are closed indoors most of the time, hence limiting their interaction with other people. This makes it hard to implement Foucault’s strategy of social action for agency or power resistance, thus recommending a more individualized strategy (King 2007:34).

## 2.2.4 Negotiation Strategies for Agency in DW

Mahmoud (2001:222-236) draws her arguments of agency from Foucauldian argument of power and subjectification. By claiming that, the same way a subject plays a key role in creating her power, is the same way that subject should create his/her agency in a social relationship. This social relationship between the employer and employee is created from the face to face daily interactions that are repeated on daily basis. Mostly, physical services offered by the employee are paid for, but for the emotional ones are mostly not accounted for. This becomes very difficult for the worker to avoid emotional services if the person cared for is a child. A Barcelona domestic worker said “*for my family I give lots of love for free and because this is a job I feel like telling her to pay me for the love I offer*”. Employers are likely to consider more of emotional services than physical services, and yet they only compensate for physical services<sup>2</sup>.

Mahmood supports Foucault’s ideas by claiming that, agency should not be thought of as opposition to domination, but the ability to take action and free oneself from subordination and oppression. This shows that, for FDWs to have agency in their domestic relationship, they have to experience the process of subordination and oppression. Thus, agency can be seen by challenging those situations that led to subordination in the first place. Mahmood’s analytics of power and agency has been useful in my interrelating how FDEs are conceptualized to possess power over FDWs. This may result to FDW’s subordination and oppression at the micro-levels, and the strategies they employ for their agency and autonomy. Thus, they end up challenging structures in which this power/control is embedded. Kandalaft (2008: 37) explains agency by claiming that, there exists different ways in which domestic workers are forced to challenge authority in order to have their way out. One way could be that, workers take their own action at individual level towards a specific condition they face, in the interactions with FDEs. This argument Contrast the Foucauldian idea that, power can be challenged through Solidarity action (Abu-Lughod 1990: 45). Since, it’s applicable in domestic space to challenge power individually rather than collectively, due to the nature of the job.

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<sup>2</sup>This can happen as a result of naturalizing care services in women

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has analytically explored domestic relations by the use of Foucauldian theory of power and subjectification. Foucault's argument on power relations focuses on micro-level interactions, an aspect that has been relevant in analyzing domestic interactions at micro levels. Since, the interaction between FDEs and FDWs are individualized and private, I found Foucault's claim on power as individualized very applicable, as compared to focusing on power relations from the social context. Foucault in solidarity with this study emphasize on individual experience and exercise of power, putting individuals at the central point of power play.

The power relations as discussed in this chapter allows agency. There is no totalism in power possession, since every individual has power at their own capacity and power should be perceived from down –top. Agency is also discussed as a key component of domestic interactions with Foucault positioning that, power should allow exercise of agency and is likely to bring about power resistance. And this is well discussed in the analyses chapter. The above theoretical and conceptual engagement helped me, to critically engage with the empirical concepts in findings chapter.

## **|Chapter 3: Methodology and Data**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter has discussed the approach and methods used to generate data, and justifications for the choice of these methods. The study has employed qualitative and feminist approaches to conceptualize and interpret power, class and agency relations in domestic sphere. Feminist approach was dictated by my focus on women and the interpretation of their experiences. Beside the approach and the methods of data collection, study area, sampling and data analysis methods and ethical consideration are discussed. I have mentioned my position with respondents, with emphasis not to have a generalized representation of all Nairobi FDEs as oppressors, evil and exploitative, but have contextual analyses.

### **3.1 Study Area**

East-land of Nairobi was preferred as the main area of importance in this study, because of two major reasons. First, it's an area with the highest household population in Nairobi, comprising of mostly middle class people, with ability to employ domestic workers (Omwenga 2008). Second, I am well acquainted with this area, since I have been a resident there for almost ten years, making it easy to access respondents.

### **3.2 Methods of Data Gathering**

The study has employed in-depth interviews to collect primary data, because interactions amid FDEs and FDWs are very sensitive, thus require openness and clarity that is likely to be achieved through qualitative discussions. Secondary data was obtained from online journals and articles, text books and newspaper.

The major objective was to generate information that would reflect on the oppressive relationship between FDE and FDW and contribute to western feminist standpoint and postmodern discourse that concerns women oppression and experiences. I decided to emphasize intensively on relatively few respondents, in order to analyze the degrees of their interactions one by one. The objective was to encourage women to elaborate on aspects of their relationship that was more important to them. Thus, my questions were more of a guide than a direction. With permission from the respondents, I audio recorded all the interviews except of two employers whom I was naturally scared to request to tape them, since from their facial expression, I had already got the message, they had no time for what I was up to.

The respondents composed of 10 FDWs and 8 FDEs. Among this, 6 employers vs. employees were matched and the remaining 4 FDEs and 2 FDWs were not matched. The reason for using this method was that, I noticed the mis-

matched respondents were more open and free to give deeper details, and were willing to spend their time with me, as compared to the matched ones. For the matched respondents, I interviewed FDEs first, then they later ushered their FDWs. However, the moment the FDWs realized that, I had interviewed their employers; they became shy and somehow withheld information from me.

The openness from the respondent was also influenced by the venue of interview. For matched respondents, interviews took place at home as suggested by FDEs. However, matched FDWs did not decide interview venue, thus depicting power inequalities and control of space by FDEs. I interviewed FDWs from their bedrooms to ensure confidentiality, while interviews for some FDEs took place in their working areas, due to time constraints. For the ones I was lucky to interview from their houses, they insisted that, the discussions be held in the living area and sent their employees away for confidentiality purposes.

Discussions with mismatched FDWs were done in DWB. An exercise that was organized and respondents sampled by the person in charge of the bureaus. Unmatched employers were free with me; probably because they were detached from their work environment and felt secure disclosing their conditions of work. Or maybe, my distanced interactions with their employers assured them confidentiality. Unlike the matched FDWs, the unmatched employers appeared restricted to sharing information. Perhaps they were reluctant to discuss about their employee, who was a stranger to me. They dismissed some aspects of information as mere gossip.

Both audial recordings and hand written notes supplementary were used to track the interview discussions. In the month of July 2013, I interviewed a total of six FDE and seven FDWs, and the remaining three FDWs and two FDEs I interviewed in the month of August and September 2013. As mentioned earlier, all respondents were from the Eastland of Nairobi.

I experienced challenges convincing FDEs to match them with their employees, a requirement that led to an employer turn down my interview request, claiming I was a government spy and so by interviewing her FDW would be inciting her to quit her job. The following is an example of some responses I got when requesting for an interview, “*I do not want you to interview my worker because I colonize her*”. This word colonization caught me by surprise and I became keen to understand their interpretation of it (Discussed in analyses chapter).

The interviews were done in an in-depth and individual manner, apart from two FDWs I interviewed in same room, since the latter (Jess) requested to speak in presence of the former. These two FDWs seemed to be free and happy narrating their stories. Their expressions were more of complain that was sarcastically introduced, Ann always said “*mmmmmm, wamama mna shida kweli* (women you have problems for sure)” (Ann, 16, UM, 25).

One FDW I interviewed in the presence of the DWB officer, who insisted on hearing the discussions. One thing I picked from this interview was that, the respondent was too easy to say “fine” to my questions. This made me question their employment relationship. To which she responded “*I have worked for a single FDE for the last five years, she is easy to work for, I am a single mother, my daughter is in high school, and my employer supports in educating her. Single FDEs are very understanding and kind to other women*” (Mwika, UM, 37). Was “fine” easily said because of the bureau officer’s presence?

In-depth interviews allowed probing to get more information and opinions from the respondents through expanding their answers. This method also allowed new ideas that were not originally considered, this helped in achieving my objectives (Gray 2009: 217). For example: In the interview questions, the use of names in this relationship was not originally factored, but the issue came up. One employer said “*I like naming my employee by her first name rather than use of untié*” (Jem, M, 28). Reasons are analyzed in later; this turned up to be very helpful and was used in subsequent interviews. The in depth interviews also allowed open expression of thoughts, feelings, experience and information to all respondents and to me as a researcher (Patton 1990: 353).

I used both English and Swahili in order to address the diverse groups. Although I found it was challenging to maintain Swahili all through due to spending a lot of time in the Netherlands where we used English only. A field session therefore ended up taking 45-50 minutes; it was quite tiring although, some kind employers offered something to drink or eat, an offer that gave me an opportunity to observe their interactions.

### 3.3 Sampling Methods

I used chain sampling to identify matched respondents. This method was useful since the sensitivity of the study problem could make it challenging to access respondents through other methods (O’Leary 2009: 170). As the interviews continued, I was referred from one respondent to another, making the chain bigger and bigger, thus giving an opportunity to gather more details in this area (Patton 1990: 176). For the unmatched respondents, I purposively sampled via DWBs in order to get information from rich respondents, who could illuminate the study from different angles (Patton 1990: 169).

In the last DWB I visited in the month of July, the lady in charge was very open and detailed; she was an employer and had a lot of experience through working with DWB. This made her very instrumental to the research, and more so, because the DWB officer and I belonged to one ethnicity (kamba), an issue that made the interview easy. I quote her “*I knew you are a Kamba, just like me, that’s why I trusted and disclosed my details to you*” (Emp, UM, 43). This shows how ethnicity influenced the study. The sampled FDEs and FDWs took into account ethnicity, religion, age, class, education level, marriage status and income level, in order to afford the study balanced and varied experiences.

N.B: The live-ins had familial associations as compared to live-outs. Their employers trusted them and feared that, live outs were likely to steal from them (money, food staff) and carry with them to their home.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic characteristics of FDWs**

Numbers	Code Names/ Matching letter	Ethnicity	Age(years)	Educational level	Years of service with cur- rent em- ployee	Marital Sta- tus/parenthood	Live- in vs. live- out	Salary(KES / USD)per month
1	Jamba(m1)	Kamba	23	Class Eight	1	Single	Live- in	3000/ 37.5
2	Jaka (m2)	Kamba	26	Class Eight	2	Single parent	Live- in	3000/ 37.5
3	Kete(3)	Luo	19	Secondary- drop out	1	Single	Live- in	3000/ 37.5
4	Ann(4)	Kamba	25	Form four	2	Single	Live- in	4500/ 56.25
5	Jess (5)	Meru	23	Class eight	1	Single	Live- out	3500/ 43.75
6	Mwika(6)	Kamba	37	Class Eight	4	Divorced	Live- in	6500/ 81.25
7	Dish(m4)	Luyha	33	Class eight	4	Single parent	Live- out	6000/ 75

**Table 2: Socio- Demographic characteristics of FDEs**

Num- bers	Pseudo Names/ Match let- ter	Age( years )	Educational level	Occupa- tion	Marital Status	Ethnicity
1	Jem (m1)	28	Form four	Business	Married	Kamba
2	Leko(um 1)	33	College	Nurse	Married	Kamba
3	Lemu(m2)	34	Form Four	Business	Married	Kikuyu
4	Kavu(m3)	36	Tailoring school	Business	Married	Kikuyu
5	Eun(m4)	38	Degree	Lawyer	Married	Luo
6	Emp(um2)	43	Form	Business	Married	Kikuyu
7	Lua ( m5)	33	Degree	Banker	Married	Kamba
8	Tere(m6)	35	Graduate	Teacher	Married	Kikuyu
9	Agen(um 3)	52	Primary	Business	Single	Meru

### 3.4 Data Analyses Methods

I listened to recorded audial, over and over. The two methods supplemented each other and helped in capturing repetitions, similarities, differences, and voice tone changes, thus contributing to thematic analyses. I then categorized the information into three themes that would inform the data analysis. The themes below were specifically generated from the data collected, which contributed to inductive analysis.

- 1) Interactions of FDWs and FDEs, in terms of: *Control of time , kindness and compassion, labor relations*
- 2) Drivers to household interactions (FDEs): *Power differential, class divide, poverty and income inequalities,*
- 3) Agency and power resistance Strategies (FDWs): Trust acquisition, gratifying of employer's requirements and expectation, cheating and faking the truth

### 3.5 Power Relations between Researcher and Researched

The assumption that the researcher will benefit from more power positioning was proved wrong by some of FDWs, since majority saw me as a trusted friend whom they could disclose their issues to. For example, when I met with Kete, we had a warm discussion with her but after interview, it turned to be my turn to answer her many questions about my positioning in DW.

Different power level differed with employers depending on the socio-economic class, for lower middle class employers, placed themselves in a less powerful position with the middle class ones putting me in a less powerful position where by, they appeared very confident and in control of the discussion. I guess this was acerbated by my "student" identity, which made them feel their identity as "working middle class" gave them more power over a student.

I used Bureaus to access FDWs, and with my identity as a student in The Hague, (most people in Kenya identify Hague with ICC ongoing case for our president and vice president on post-election violence), this positioned me in a high power level, in that, the agency officers felt threatened by my association with international human rights city, so I had to explain my missions clearly in order to be accepted for interviews.

Lastly, though I may sound non-academic, I found my smiley face helpful in establishing rapport with both respondents. I remember my last incident with a FDE, who had hesitations over the interview, though to some extend I guessed she reflected the husband, since he reminded us to keep time while on the interview process. An action I smiled back to. This loosened her and she gave a lot of details.

### **3.6 Ethical Consideration**

The comfort of the respondents was a major consideration; so they had to be interviewed at the places they felt comfortable. Employers in business preferred being interviewed at their business premises.

Confidentiality was a key priority to this study, so to ensure this; I used pseudo names and sought their consent before tape recording them. All the transcribing was done by me.

### **3.7 Limitations of the Study**

Mostly, the limitations faced in this research were based on the nature and the context of the research topic. Relationships of female in domestic sphere is a very sensitive topic and most of respondents felt narrating stories in relation to the other party reflected gossips, which they were reluctant to participate in. Thus, I had to invest more efforts in convincing them to understand my objectives clearly.

Domestic sphere is too private to access, it was challenging to enter people's home, so I had to use a gate keeper, though still with her, some respondents could not allow me in their homes.

I was challenged by the limited resources: Limited time to complete the research made it hard to fit in travel periods, and also limited the number of respondents I could bring about.

The use of chain sampling did not spare me either, to some extent, respondents I had through the gate keeper provided me with similar knowledge, so I had to change my strategy to use DWBs in sampling respondents, in order to diversify my data.



## **|Chapter 4: Domestic Interactions and attached meanings**

### **4.1. Introduction.**

This chapter presents and analyses the data, with the aim of exploring domestic interactions among women in Nairobi. I have used Foucault's conceptualization of power and subjectification to understand and unpack power relations and also worked on Marxist ideas, on class relations to understand class divide and its impact on domestic interactions. The case studies represented here were not a representative sample, rather, were deliberately chosen to contribute rich data to the theoretical argument from the feminist discourse.

### **4.2. Case Studies: Case 1-4.**

The case studies below give a brief background of the respondents. They were sampled from both matched and mismatched categories systematically.

#### **Case Study 1: Jem- FDE and Jamba-FDW**

The home composed of a kitchen, bathroom, sitting room and two bedrooms. The furniture was of good quality and house was neat. Jem was 28 years old, married with a 3 year old son. She was a curtain tailor in a nearby market. She said her current domestic worker, Jamba, was her third employee, whom she had lived with for one year. Jem said that though her husband worked, she insisted on working to earn some money to supplement her husband's income and besides, the responsibility to pay employee was left entirely to her. She did not want to be friendly with Jamba, because she believed that ensured efficiency in their responsibilities.

Jamba was a live-in, single, and had financial responsibility of helping her mother back in the village. She claimed to love her employer Jem, because she gave her freedom to manage her time and duties. She liked Jem's son and spent most of her time attending to him and helped him with home-assignment. On whether she was okay with her wages, she respondent that did not request for more pay, but waited for the idea to come from her employer. She worked for Jem, Monday through Monday and had only a break for Sunday service which ran for about 2-3 hours. Her day started 6am to 9.30pm; she could find her time to relax especially when the employer was out for work. Jamba was paid 3000 kshs. per month, and said this was supplemented by her access to free food, soap, accommodation, an idea she felt favored her work conditions.

#### **Case Study 2: Lemu- FDE and Jaka-FDW**

This house consisted of sitting area, 2bedrooms, small kitchen and a toilet. Lemu claimed that always opted for two bedroomed houses in order to afford comfort for her live-in FDW. She was 34 years old, and sold second hand

clothes in a street around her home. She was married with two children, aged 4 and 2 years. The husband worked abroad, so she spent most of her time with her children and the FDW. Lemu disclosed that, herself had worked as a domestic worker, for a couple of years before she got married and was careful how she treated her FDW, since she did not appreciate how her former employers treated her.

She valued her employee Jaka, because she helped her manage her young children, so she could get time to do business; she described her as active and trust-worthy. She employed Jaka through a friend and this made her feel responsible for her wellbeing. She had employed several FDWs within a span of 4 years, some resigning their jobs after only 2 days, an idea she defended that, she does not tolerate untidy FDWs. Her comments portrayed stiff on class binaries, an issue that is highlighted in analyses part of this chapter.

Jaka came from the village and was shy and scared to talk to me, thus I devised a strategy of having her talk by joking with her employer's children to loosen her a bit. She was 26 years and a single mother of one child, whom she left behind with her mother in the village. Her pay was Ksh.3000 per month. Asked whether she was comfortable with that amount, she said her problem was not the little wage, but the delay in getting it. She said *'for the last 3 months I have not been paid'*, every time I say I need money, am told to wait. She worked Monday to Monday with only 2 hours to attend church. During which, she was expected to check on children while in church: Since she attended the same church with her employer. Thus, she felt going to church did not make sense, since it was an extension of her duties at home. She said that, her off days are strictly controlled by employer's working, so she had to inform her employer 3 months prior to the time she needed a holiday. Their relationship was friendly though, she complained of employer's outbursts in case of a mistake.

### **Case Study 3: Tere- FDE and Agne-FDW**

Tere was a graduate and a primary school teacher, and married to a chef. Her 3 bedroomed self-contained house was big, with its own compound and was well furnished. She had only one 6 year old daughter. She tried to avoid live-in FDWs, because her daughter was once burned with hot water by a FDW, so she said was more comfortable with Agne being a live-out and working twice a week. She did not like having an employee, but wanted Agne, since she traced her children collecting food from the dustbin and thought employing her would support them (analyzed later in this chapter).

Agne had stayed in the city slam for a couple of years; she was a widower and had 4 children. Her husband had died when she had three children, so she had to move to Nairobi to hustle and get fend for her children. She gave birth to her fourth child as a result of prostitution, but then changed to work as FDW in fear of getting more children. She was paid 400ksh per day, though she said the money was not enough to meet her family's needs, she acknowledged it was helpful. She lived in a slam, far from her employer's home, so she had to walk for one hour to her work place. She liked her employer and wanted to give her good services.

## 4.2.2 Unmatched Respondents: Case Study 1: Anna

Anna was single and a form 4 graduate, she opted for DW because she had no money to further her studies, although she felt that, she should have been working for a formal sector, but that was all that was available to her at the time. Thus, she suffered low self-esteem. She slept for 2 hours daily (2-5am); her employer was a housewife and did not allow her time to relax, thus was forced to move from one assignment to another. She was paid Kshs 4500 per month which she felt was little compared with the amount of work she did. She was a live-in and came from poor background and her income was used to support her family back in the village. Employer's household had six members whom she looked after, she had no off days and had never visited her parents for the one year she had worked for this employer.

She complained of being segregated against, since was not expected to eat fresh food but the remains in fridge. Drank plain tea, without bread and blue band. She was not supposed to take part in any celebration that family members participated in. She did not watch TV, or sit in certain sofa sets. She was uncomfortable with her entire work, but when asked why she was still working there, she said that, she needed the money and that other employers paid less. When I asked about her worst experience in this employment, she said that was expected to flash toilet for all the six members after use. An issue she expressed bitterly.

## 4.3 Dimensions of FDEs and FDWs Interactions

Questioning of normalized female interactions in the domestic service by use of feminist analyses, has helped in unpacking how “women oppression” has been grounded on patriarchal system, by most of western feminists with less attention to femininity and its levels of associations. Discussed below are dimensions of female interactions in DW and their oppressive tendencies. These dimensions have been categorized from the empirical data collected.

From my field experience, I noticed that **control of private time** featured prominently in domestic interactions. “**Private**” is a debated concept especially in the context of DW that has raised concerns like: The level of privacy in the “private”, and private in whose eyes? Time is an asset that is valuable to every party in employment relations; however in domestic employment, interactions are very intimate as discussed by (Muttarak 2004: 515). Thus, it becomes very hard for the involved parties to draw a line between the “private and public” time. This may result in the employer having control over the employee's time, thus privatizing it and publicizing from the employee's perspective.

In agreement with Himmelweit (2000: 31), workers sell their labor power as a commodity for a certain period of time in exchange for money. Where else for the rest of her/his time is his own and there is rigid separation between the time in his work and time for his/hers leisure. These time distinctions rarely apply to DW. Like in Kenya for example, they are expected to carry out their

duties Monday through Monday, with less consideration to their “private” time by their employers. In most cases, workers ask for their off days, in the name of either visiting their families, relatives or going out for church functions.

Jaka for example mentioned that, she had no weekend off and lunch hour “*I only rest when am eating, unless when my employer is at work, then I can relax a bit when am through with my duties*”. Her employer Lemu commented on same “*I allow Jaka a break only when going for church services or visiting her family in the village, and it’s not guaranteed that even in these cases I have to. She has to do her duties well, when she hurts me then, I refuse her offs*” (M, 34). These duties as quoted by Jaka above could be related with the 2 young children and the size of the house under her responsibility (as shown in the above case studies).

Jamba appeared bothered by her employer’s control over her time, she said, “*I have no opportunity to go home, when I tell my employer, she does not seem to mind, this makes me feel constrained since I miss my people so much, so I mostly make requests in advance, like in four months’ time and keep reminding her*”. Employers took advantage of FDWs from the village, because they did not know the city well, so their movements were likely to be controlled. This forced FDWs to work Monday to Monday, for they could not afford fare to frequently visit their far villages.

In reference to chapter three, control of time was perceived as a form of “*colonization*”. A form that was very clear during interview. “*New colonization*” is a term associated with DW, and it’s rooted from British colonization, but in Kenyan case as Mary claimed, it’s not British colonizing Kenyan employees, it is an African woman colonizing their African sister (Hughes 2008: 3).

**Kindness and compassion** is another diversity, which I found very interesting to analyze. Both FDEs and FDWs were quick to say that, they were compassionate and kind to each other. A claim I perceived to be more of control and use of power than freedom. In that, showing compassion places one party in a higher power positioning over the other. FDEs kindness to her FDW is likely to win FDW’s cooperation and efficiency in her duties. While FDW’s compassion, may act as a tool to win favor/token from her employer and have freedom to determine her operations.

The FDWs who claimed to be yelled at, or quarreled by their employer rated poor performance in relation to those who experienced compassion and kindness from their FDEs. Though yelling and quarrel was also a form of exercise of power and control, it appeared less efficient as compared to use of kindness and control. This is seen from Jaka’s words “*Sometimes my employer quarrels a lot, she can be angry over something at night and keep quiet over it, and then she will quarrel the following morning. This makes me lose confidence over my work; I like to be corrected calmly*”. The above discussion likely relates to Foucault conceptualization of power as having “relational character” and that, its survival is dependent on different ways of struggling (Foucault 1980:95): Kindness being a key tool in shaping domestic relations, it acts as a channel through which power survives and struggles within domestic interactions. This can be based on Tere’s comments in the case study 3, of being kind to her employee (Agne) and yet Agne on the

same claimed to have little wages in relation to duties she performed, thus kindness can result to material control to the employee.

The third diversity of FDEs and FDWs interactions has been drawn from the **labor relations** perspective. Hard manual jobs, like cleaning the house are left to FDWs, with employers doing easy duties that concern caring for the children. This can be interpreted from Foucault's perspective on subjectification in that, FDEs identity takes the form of "subjects" with that of employee taking that of "object" (Foucault 1982:212). Labor relationship between FDEs and FDWs has resulted in exploitation whereby, the FDEs as the capitalists own household assets like: Vacuum cleaner, washing machine, soaps, and basins: while FDWs are the proletarians who use these items for labor. Thus, the capitalists exploit the workers to earn more profit. This brings the essence that; welfare of the exploiter is at the expense of the exploited (Wright 2000: 9).

Employers claimed that, they liked to see their employee work all through. Ann explained why she stopped working for a certain family after 2 months "*I was expected to go to bed at 3am and wake up at 5am. As long as the madam is in the house, there is no time to rest unless when taking the meals. She liked seeing you work; the harder you worked, the good she felt. I have never seen a house like that!!! Six people taking supper at different times and you have to wait for all, in order to clean those dishes; I had to sleep as late as 3am*" (Ann, UM, 25)". FDEs described their discomfort with their FDWs inactivity, even when they find all duties well performed, they would still have discomforts finding the FDW sited and watching TV. They wanted to see employees working. Employees said that, work can be hard physically and with less pay, and that had no hour limit; their waking up and sleeping time was determined by working time of family members.

Mostly, employers expected employees to know their work prior to employment. To have learned their duties elsewhere, before are offered employment, although, employers would still train them to match their expectations and standards. This exposes the feminization of domestic chores, in that, females are expected to naturally learn domestic chores. This also acted as an excuse for poor pay to the employees<sup>3</sup>.

## 4.4 Drivers of FDEs on domestic interactions

### 4.4.1 Power Differentials

Power differential among women are very strong in domestic service, as Cock claims, FDWs are relegated to powerless and dependent positions which results to superiority and power to employers leading to "paternalistic practices"(Cock 1989: 81). This section is in solidarity with Foucauldian conceptual-

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<sup>3</sup>Women should learn how to cook, wash, clean, iron naturally. Since, it is their entitlement.

ization of power as exercised consciously or unconsciously and as takes place at the micro-level interaction (Foucault 1982: 212). In the dimension I reflected on how kindness in DW is used as a form of control; in that some FDEs employ kindness either consciously or unconsciously as a way of power exercise.

Kete gave an example of how her employer is kind and how this has shaped their interaction, she seemed very positive though, it can be used more as a form of power exercise than being good hearted. *'My employer is very friendly to me, I do a lot of mistakes but she corrects me with calmness, has never shouted to me, we share soaps, body oils, Colgate and other items, she has not differentiated me from the other family members. I formally worked for an employer who was not kind to me, I once overslept up to 7am whereas, I was expected to wake up at 6am, and she shouted at me that, am not worthy working in the city, I should go to the village'* (KETE, UM, 19). This power control strategy can earn employers' agency or domination in their interactions.

Familial ideologies and the essence of "natural extended family" is another factor that contributes to power divides among FDEs and FDWs in that, FDWs assume or are assumed to be a member of the "natural extended family" (King 2007: 12). Sisterhood relationships can be oppressive in cases where, the two parties involved work to maintain intimate relationship. Thus, the employer upholds her power and authority, which can be reflected by FDW's efforts to perform to the employer's expectations in order to maintain this sisterhood relationship which may result in subordination by employee.

This relationship is very unequal, FDE has power which gives her ability to increase or decrease the employee's salary with the expectations that, the employee will settle for that since, is likely to see the employer as a sister who has power over her and should not disregard her wishes in order to maintain the friendship. This channels the blame and complains in domestic sector from individuals to labor market system. This is reflected in Jaka's words *'I cannot argue with my employer, for the fact that she is my boss, even if I feel the decision is not the best for me, I agree with her, just to fit in her plans'* (Jaka, M, 26). Her employer Lemu also did mention that, Jaka agrees with everything, an issue she articulated as a compliment<sup>4</sup>. As debated by Miles, in cooperating DW as part of family, usually carries more disadvantage than advantage; some are paid less with a notion that, they should understand their financial condition thus depressing their wages (Anderson 2001).

Jaka's scenario relates to that of Jess, whose statement was interesting, though; there was no opportunity to interview her employer on the same for comparison. She had stayed with her employer for two years, *'My employer does not take any response from me; she says is not worthy to exchange words with a house girl. Last week the child under my care lost his shoes as he played outside with other kids. I sought for them and could not see them, when her mother came; she asked 'where are the shoes'? Then I said*

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<sup>4</sup>Agreeing with everything is not a form of obedience but lack of agency by DW to take part in decision making.

*'we should ask the child since is the one who lost them', the woman became so furious and said, 'I do not want to exchange words with a house girl, you will go out of my house now'* (Jess, UM, 23).

When I enquired what happened if she responds politely, she said the issue was not about words but employer's power exercise, making her highly positioned to have a dialogue with FDW, whom she considered less in terms of power. Jess's employer threatened to chase her employee out of the house in order to uphold her power and authority over her. By subjecting the employee to ideology that employer has power to host her, so she should subordinate or else result to power conflicts between the two. Power differentials are manifested as a key reason as to why FDEs oppress or mistreat one of their own or their colleagues, which is a major gap in western feminist epistemology (Harding, Morgan and Mohanty): That, all women are under oppression of men. Empirically FDWs, who claimed to be oppressed by their FDEs, gave different and thought triggering debates. Ann said, *"Female bosses mistreat us house girls, with an intention of showing their husbands we are useless, or we are less women, so that they may keep their attention from us"* (Ann (UN), 16, 25).

Though the comment appeared sensible and somehow giving a perspective on why women oppress their sisters, I wanted a different perspective from FDWs employed by single FDEs. The idea was that, the two parties had good relationship, which depicted less difference and conflicts. Mwika said *"Some FDEs think oppressing their employee is winning her respect, which is not always the case, As long as a woman has hosted you in her house, they feel they have power to mistreat you or handle you the way they prefer(Mwika UM, 37)"*. Mwika's comment was very interesting, and brought new perspective. Kenyan society is dominated by hetero-sexual marriages that call for a woman to be hosted by a man. This makes the man (host) to possess more power thus lessening that of the woman. When this is interpreted from domestic employment scenario, a woman has an opportunity to host another woman, which results to power hierarchies, that builds the essence of dominancy and subordination between FDE and FDW.

#### **4.4.2 Class Divide in Domestic Interactions**

Class as discussed in this section has taken after Marxist perspective of both labor vs. capital and social status. It refers to "groups of people one of which can appropriate the labor of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy" (Giddens and Held 1982: 57). Class interacts with power in influencing domestic relations, an idea that Marx debates from exploitative perspective. In that, those with ability to control means of production form the dominant/ruling class, thus divides the interests between the ruling and the subordinate which end up being conflictual and giving rise to class struggle (Giddens and Held 1982: 4).

This idea applies in DW in that, FDEs own means of work (soaps, utensils, vacuum cleaners). This makes them capitalists and dominant, while subordinating FDWs who only own labor power<sup>5</sup>. DW facilitates close interaction of two

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<sup>5</sup>Class can be a source of power in influencing Domestic interactions.

women in established different classes. In solidarity with Cottrell, “occupational status” is not the only factor an individual should consider when placing themselves in a certain “social class”. Other factors considered include: Income, wealth, housing tenure, education and style of consumption, social origins, family and local connection (Cottrell 1984: 211).

However, class positioning in Kenya can also be experienced from sharing of household assets and items in domestic employment. Anna articulated “*Mama says am supposed to only eat fridge food not fresh food, other things like blue band, bread, eggs, ice cream, am not supposed to eat, and I should only take black tea*” (Ann UM, 25) this is reflected in case study 4. It is a contradiction for Anna to be denied access to the products she prepares and handles. She cooks fresh food that she has no access to, an idea that can be explained from Marxist articulation that, “wage labor has no control of labor process and labor products since it’s organized by the employer” (Giddens and Held 1982: 5). Thus duties are controlled by employer and impose them to the worker, so the worker lacks control over the whole process.<sup>6</sup>

Anna also explained that, she was restricted from watching TV, sit on sofa, or use perfumes. In Kenya the above items denied to Anna are associated with middle class lifestyle. They are more luxurious and expensive, thus Anna’s use of them was a sign of ‘class cross’ with her employer’s. Since the little pay, exposure and conditions of work are assumed not to afford such lifestyle. On the other side, FDWs thought their exposure to these assets allowed them to experience a higher class positioning; with an opportunity to seat on more comfortable seats, to watch TV and eat better food. A lifestyle they had not probably experienced before. So, they used these items during the day, when their FDEs went to work, an issue that displeased the employers in case they went back to their homes during the day without notifying their FDWs and found them accessing in the very items they had been warned not.

Disclosing of secrets is a sign of class positioning; Lemu said she could not disclose her secrets to her FDW despite how friendly they were. “*I do not share with her my secrets, although I try to fit to her level, I share my secrets with people of my class*’ (Lemu M, 34). I enquired to understand the meaning she attached to “*my class*” and “*her class*”, Which she respondent “*I do not expect my employee to have expensive items from the salary I pay her, sometimes when I see her with expensive things like: phone, or clothes, I tend to think, she is stealing from me or is getting support from somewhere and this disturbs me a lot*’. The employer feels insecure when the employee possesses expensive items. This might be explained from the perspective of “class-crossing” which may result in conflict among FDEs and FDWs,

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<sup>6</sup>The case of Anna, does not determine what to cook and how to cook it and yet the food she cooks has no access to it. This is a form of exploitation that is in solidarity with Marx’s claim that “capital is able to exploit wage labor (ibid).



in that employer's class identity becomes threatened, an issue that can be facilitated by change of societies over time (Muttarak 2004: 511).

Jaka, Lemu's FDW commented on the same *"No I only tell my secrets to my friends when we meet, am not free with mama to disclose my secrets, she has never told me anything private too"* (Jaka, 25). On her position on if she would prefer having expensive staff and its implications to her relation with Lemu, she dismissed the idea that, she is not consecutively paid, so how would she then have expensive items? If Jaka had enough money, could she possess more expensive items openly than her employer? I found this discussion totally interesting on how the two parties had positioned themselves in different classes and tried their best to maintain the boundaries.

Anna said her employer expected her to work without breaks. An issue she claimed betrayed her class. She perceived her class positioning different from her employer's perception, *'myself am learned, I have schooled to form 4 and then she goes on taking me like class one child, like am not learned, somebody with no rights, a fool, I feel bad about it. Sometimes I regret for knowing my employer'* (Ann, UM, 25). She added that, smiling was not expected from a "poor girl" (employer's perception), or even attending family celebration since it was a lifestyle of the middle class. I quote her words *"when there is celebration, you are nobody to take part, you are expected not to smile-it's a crime, it's an insult, everybody looks at you funny"*. This statement justifies that, Anna's class identity is totally different from the one her employer classified her, thus she had conflicting class identities. Though, the above argument sounds interesting, her employer could not be reached for comparison purposes.

With the employment of domestic workers in Kenya, women have become more mobile, responsibilities assigned to them by the societal gender socialization have now been channeled to another woman. Thus, allowing them more free time to participate in productive work to earn money that they can use to position themselves in a certain class and a certain lifestyle, which intensifies their class disparities. The presence of FDWs does not only allow women an opportunity to avoid some household duties, as a way of differentiating class, but also privileges them with free time to invest in productive work, earn some income, that places them in position to afford some "ego-enhancement" and enter in a certain social world and lifestyle.

Employer- employee relationship is exploitative, since the worker might be working for more hours and supplying more muscles yet earning less than an eighth of their employer's wage. This contradicts Marx's argument that, the amount for capitalist to pay a wage labor should be determined by amount of labor time, brain and muscle supplied by the worker (Giddens and Held 1982: 5). An issue that is parallel to FDWs experiences, for they invest more time, brain and muscles in production and yet are poorly paid as described in chapter 3. The class difference gives FDEs more power to control "private" time of FDWs.

## Language a tool of Power Divides and Class Positioning

Dwyer expressed language to be one of the most sensitive issues of our contemporary society, through which ideas like power and class positioning as key factors in social relations are diffused (Dwyer and Drakakis-Smith 1996: 47). In relation to this, Foucault presented power, not just as hierarchical and oppressive, but as horizontally produced in complex and invisible ways like language and practice (Harcourt 2009: 20). A statement that can be substantiated since, language is a key tool of power and class positioning in domestic employment.

Articulation and accent of words, is an element that is influential in class identity. Being an educated woman, with European accent influence, and interviewing women of mixed education levels, I found it very interesting how this changed the perception of my respondents. From my interview introduction, I could see how FDWs struggled to pronounce words perfectly to fit to my language level and this could influence the details they gave. Thus, I kept emphasizing on them to be relaxed and open, which I think helped. This made me question the “communicative power” of our national language Swahili, which has been reduced by the colonial language (English) to a lesser power and class positioning. The strength of any language (in Kenya where majority speak Swahili), has less to do with numbers but inherent power and the class positioning (Dwyer and Drakakis-Smith 1996: 63).

Employers with “high” education level preferred English to Swahili in our discussions. I write “high” in quotes, since the essence of “high or low” is relative and differed in meaning from one individual to another. Some respondents with primary education equated themselves to those with university degree. Tere, a university graduate told me, “*Use English!!!! Of course am learned, and I am a teacher so English would do*” (Tere M, 35)<sup>7</sup>. I was puzzled, by her astonished face; I thought maybe, she expected I should have known she fitted in the “English speaking class”, which implied high class positioning. The above reflects class identity and its base on language use. The employers of “low” academic level identified with both Swahili and English, but there are those who I shared vernacular, so they requested that it be used.

After interview with Eish, her employer Lua wanted to find out the language we used, which I said “*Kamba*”<sup>8</sup> since I did not see it as an issue of confidentiality. She was surprised because Eish had always pretended not to understand Kamba. I conceptualized this to be an issue of class identity, in that: FDWs especially those from the village like Eish, preferred the use of Swahili or English as a way of associating with the city and identify with FDEs children’s class, who used Swahili and or English. This also identified them with the class

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<sup>7</sup>This was a response to my question on which language she would prefer we use in our interviews.

<sup>8</sup>One of the native languages in Kenya

of employer's family. I asked Lua why she would think Eish preferred Swahili to Kamba, an issue she was reluctant to talk about, so long as communication between the FDW and children was effective. Could FDEs and FDWs use of Swahili result in "class clash"? In cases where the FDW has low education and is from poor background like the case of Eish? Especially if the employer identify to "official or national language class" which is associated to royal or middle class lifestyle in Kenya?<sup>9</sup>

## **Power of a Name in Class Identity**

Naming is another key factor to class binaries as depicted in this study. Employers preferred identifying their employees with the first name, since it was "colonial/ English" and was easy to pronounce and it cut across ethnic boundaries. On the other side, FDWs preferred "auntie" to the child; this gave them a sense of "familial ideology", which distanced them from worker's identity to more of a family member. Apart from familial ideology, the use of unteie worn employees a sense of respect from children, since it signified seniority. This is likely to have positive impact on employee's class identity and also translates to some form of exploitation and material consequences in that: Familial ideology could be used by the employer to justify low pay with minimized complains from the employee.

Some of FDEs thought naming FDWs as auntie was faking their identity and this confused their children, since it was hard to distinguish the "real auntie" from the "fake auntie". This argument was sensible and an issue of concern, but it assumed impacts of surrounding environment on the same. Despite FDEs avoiding use of unteie, their children always referred to FDWs by that name, which was influenced by surrounding community.

Employers opinioned that, being named mummy by both FDWs and their children gave them more respect as compared to using their real names, though to others, this did not matter at all. One employer mentioned that, it would sound disrespectful, if employee names her by real names. Being named mum caused her feel "mum of the house" which positioned her in "high" power level and also reproduced familial hierarchy. Since FDWs felt more of a child to the family and this led to control and impacted negatively on the material benefits as discussed above.

## **4.5 Gender Concern in Domestic Service**

Discussions from FDEs and FDWs show that, DW is predominantly performed by female. The female partner takes the role of employer, while that of

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<sup>9</sup>Kind or commanding words are also power positioning strategy. Some employers use commands to control their interactions. Kind or commanding words is an issue that can result to material control to DW thus positioning them in a "low" class status, since they have hardships to afford certain lifestyle.

employee is also taken by a female. It's the female partners who manage and plan for most of domestic chores; they supervise and pay employees. Although this did not always mean the female partner is the source of money; the money can be channeled by the husband through her. This can be seen from Leko's words "*I am the one who mostly does the payments in the household, even my employee, I do not encourage exchange of money between my husband and my employee, she should know am the one to address her needs, unless only when am not available, then, I can give room for my husband to pay or my house girl to ask for money from him*" (Leko, M, 33).

The above statement reflects that, gender divisions in domestic service, cannot only be explained from perspective of patriarchy overburdening women, but also women take it upon themselves; with the perception that, domestic duties are women's role and that men should be less involved. This increases gender segregation in DW. The above argument can also be explained from the perspective of power differences in that, for FDEs to uphold her power status, she proves her ability to pay, supervise and monitor her employee, making the FDW to subordinate.

Gender socialization in Kenya makes employers prefer women for DW to men. Although male employees do exist, preference was more on female. I refer to Kav'u's words "*I prefer women for they are easily controlled, African men are used to being served by women thus, they cannot cooperate in serving a woman*" (Kav'u, M, 36). Female workers were said to be: docile, easy to follow directions and corrections, others claimed men are to perform manual hard jobs and since domestic duties are easy, they would prefer a woman. Women can multitask, tolerate and are gentle as compared to men who are hard to control and aggressive. Other employers were afraid that a male worker might be a threat to their daughters. I suppose female workers are preferred as a form of economic control in that, women can earn less as compared to men, and thus employing women is a strategy to control their wages<sup>10</sup>. FDEs preferred single FDWs, an issue that is clearly seen from the sampled respondents. The singleness placed women in a lower status, especially if they had children and expected to feed them single handedly and this exposed them to accept any available job available, despite how low or high the pay is.

Women, who give their house helps time off, find themselves with a burden of both productive and reproductive responsibilities, with their male partners showing less support in domestic duties. Majority of women interviewed said, their husbands do not help with domestic duties. Thus to balance these duties Jem said "*when I give my house girl an opportunity to visit her parents in the village, I find it hard to perform my work and domestic duties, so what I do, I avoid some duties like: cleaning clothes, washing the house, thus despite how long she takes while at holiday, she will find all the dirty clothes waiting for her to clean*" (Jem, M, 28). Jamba her employee, confirmed these words and seemed unhappy about, though she could not chal-

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<sup>10</sup>Employers preferred women in order to pay them less wages, since men were likely to go for higher wages.

lenge her employer's actions for she needed money. I enquired more from Jem what would happen in case the employee fails to show up, as expected and with cleaning expected for her. Which she claimed had to employ somebody else to help.

The above idea position DW to be gendered in Kenya, with distanced male participation leading to double responsibility for women. Jem's idea reflects on my own experience, I naturally have less interest to washing clothes, so when my employee goes on holiday, I pile the dirty clothes for her to wash when she resumes work. An issue that sounds oppressive on one side (since the employee is not relieved of her duties, even when is on holiday), and also "economic burdening" on the other side. In that, may be seen as double pay, in case of hiring another person on casual bases to clean clothes, as well as paying the employee on holiday. This may be economically straining to a middle class woman.<sup>11</sup>

From employees perspective, engendering domestic relationship was attached a different meaning. On average majority of respondents claimed of their male bosses to be understanding and gentle. Jess said that, all a man wants is to see good work; they will eat and go to work calmly, they quarrel less. It was also expressed that, men pay well as compared to women, this they related to their former experiences of DW. On the other hand, FDWs preferred single FDEs to married ones. Mwika worked for her single employer for six years, she said "*I like working for a single lady, since she treats me with respect, a married lady oppresses someone. I do not know why, may be they see you as a competitor in the house, or maybe afraid you will take away their husbands, so they hate and mishandle you for that*" (Mwika, UM, 37).

The above quote can also be interpreted from (Schippers 2007: 87) ideas on hegemonic gender identity: in that, femininity hegemony can be experienced not only through subordination of femininity to hegemonic masculinity but also through the subordination and marginalization of other femininities. Thus, employers subordinating their employees can be seen as a form of hegemonizing femininity.

## 4.6 Role of Poverty in Power Play

Domestic service is a place of income and material inequalities, a situation that has contributed to "endurability, versatility and adaptability of domestic service" (King 2007: 67). In Kenya FDEs are characterized by high levels of income and material possession, while FDWs are characterized by low incomes and less material possession. This economic disparity can be justified from Agne's words "*DW is not that good; we tire out of heavy duties and embarrassment, to work for another woman's household. Imagine! Washing clothes and dishes in another woman's kitchen just like your own! But we have to do it, since we need money, it's about persis-*

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<sup>11</sup>Experiences of oppression to FDWs positions them at the bottom of gender hierarchy among women workers

*tence, it is not enjoyable at all. There is a problem” (Agne, UM, 32).* This shows how poverty and need of money pushed Agne to work, irrespective of work conditions.

Agne was generally dirty with unpleasant smell through her mouth and her body, an issue that was worrying a lot since; she had maintained her employer’s home decent. Wondering why she would be dirty despite maintaining her employer’s home clean and being positioned in a middle class status and lifestyle where cleanliness is highly emphasized.

I thought this could be explained from the economic disparities, in that Agne earned too little to afford items like soap, tooth paste or body oil, but her employer had mentioned that she had access to these items freely. So, why would Agne be dirt? May be this can be explained from the aspect of time poverty. Agne was a live-out and worked twice a week, and throughout the week, she did mention that she sourced to clean clothes for money. So may be, she had no time for herself since she dedicated most of her time to working for wage and support her four children(case study 4). Or, the conditions of work were not regulated, so there was no specific working hours, thus the harder Agne worked, the more she earned. Thus, denying her an opportunity to have enough time for her personal hygiene.

Income inequality in Kenya is an issue that has endured for long through different political and social contexts, a situation that is linked to historical background and shows no indication to improve. Latvala (2009: 16) claims Kenya to be a country that income inequality is represented in both extremes, whereby the gap between the rich and the poor is so big and keeps widening with each passing day. It is a country where you can find two different categories of people in the same space. This can be equated to experiences of domestic sphere where women from different economic levels are brought to interact. Domestic service employment is a reflection of income inequalities that justifies the exploitation of the marginalized group in the society: in that the socially and economic privileged FDEs are parasitic on their employees and takes advantage of their FDWs marginalization and poverty, to uphold their privileged status. But on the other side, can be an opportunity for the less educated, poor and jobless to earn income, thus minimizing inequality between the parties involved.

Most of FDWs have poor backgrounds, are school drop-outs, this has minimized their chances of formal employment opportunities, convicting them to poor working conditions with low wages. This creates chain of poverty, thus maintaining economic differences among people. Poverty can steer power control in employment relations as seen from Tere, who said that: she identified Agne through her children feeding from dustbin. She gave them bread and sent them to bring their mother, whom she employed (case study 4). This is an issue that can bring about power control, in that the employer can take advantage of employee’s poverty and exercise control over her. Since with the humiliation of sending children to collect food from the dustbins, the FDW can settle for fewer wages and may end up being mistreated.

## 4.7 Agency and Power Resistance Strategies for FDWs

Foucault argues that, where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault 1978: 95-96). This section has discussed how different resistant and copying mechanisms are employed by FDWs to resist power or acquire themselves agency in their power relations and daily domestic interactions with their FDEs. As quoted by Abu- Lughod, this foucauldian perspective of power and resistance helps in questioning how repressive power can be. This study argues that, power inequality in domestic duties is not always repressive but faces resistance as discussed below. The different resistance mechanism acts as a way out within their oppressive interactions, in relation to Foucault's perspective of power as something that is not just negative, repressive, denying, restricting, prohibiting but also positive to produce new knowledge and discourses (Abu-Lughod 2009: 42).

Although the aspect of power resistance and Agency negotiation was not my key priority in this study, I found it interesting to explore, in-order to understand how oppressive interactions between FDEs and FDWs were tolerated. Through women stories, I discovered different forms of resistance, some of which I perceived to be non-confront way of resisting power. I have identified three main forms of power negotiation for domestic worker's agency that I found out to be common in domestic interactions among the women involved in Kenya. Then, I have also discussed their transformative impacts on the entire relationships.

The first arena is of **Gratifying of employer's requirements and expectations**. This is an issue every employee wished to achieve for their advantage. Based on my observations in field work; meeting employer's demands, is not only a will that every employee would want to achieve, but also a strategy of self-positioning and regulation of household interaction. Mostly, the employees worked very hard not because they were motivated to, but to win their employers trust. Employer Kav'u's words reflect her expectations on her employee's performance and how this replicates to their relationship. *"I love her as my daughter and also I allow her freedom, since she performs her duties as her own, I do not interfere with what she does or have quarrel with her, simply because I know she performs it whole heartedly"* (Kav'u, M, 36).

From FDEs perspective, employees could regulate their interaction levels as long as they performed their duties well to their employer's satisfaction. Though majority of employees had embraced this strategy it can be a form of oppression in that, FDWs could be exposed to oppressive working conditions, at the expense of freedom. And this exposed them as subjects under the control of their employers, who always depended on employer's mercy for their freedom (Foucault 1982:212)

The second agentic strategy I observed in my field work is **Trust acquisition**. The strategy of employer gaining trust over their employee is that, it is demonstrated in her freedom. In most cases, employees are given freedom to control

and determine their working outcomes, only if employers develop trust with them. Apart from freedom, they had access to other benefits in in-kind form, and were also tolerated in case a mistake is done that was worthy dismissal. According to Kandalaft (2008: 50), trust within domestic service gives employees to be seen and treated more of family member than an employee. Mwika said *“My employer has trusted me so much with my responsibilities, this makes her trust that I can manage time well and do all expected duties, I choose when to perform my duties, as long as at the end of the day I perform well”* (Mwika, UM, 37). From the Mwika’s words it’s very clear that, the more an employer develops trust in her employee, the more freedom is granted.

Trust is a virtue that takes time to develop within the employment relationship. Long interaction span depicted trust- worthy relationship as compared to short interaction span. Employers spend more time in their careers and even had night outs, entrusting their children and domestic responsibilities to their FDWs. The notion of trust can also be portrayed in a case of Lua, who was very concerned about the attitude of her employee, since after one year of interaction, she was yet to be convinced to trust her. This forced her to request me to ask her employee during interview, what can hurt her most and how she can revenge, though this was a challenge to my code of ethics.

The third copying mechanism is **cheating and faking the truth**. Employees devised strategies like cheating to compensate for their freedom in their dependence relationship. Cheating was used to excuse themselves from tight programs and have off days. Some cheated to have sick family members in order to get permission and have off days to attend to their private matters. I occasionally found that, cheating was also used to resist power, especially in cases where the employee was exposed to unfavorable working conditions. Some cheated to be responsible of educating their young brothers in order to bargain for better wages. Others complained of fake pain, especially backache in order to resist many hard assignments from their employers. Although, they acknowledged that employers know sometimes dishonest take place, they said the success of their lie depended on how it was expressed. They had to fake the lie to resemble truth.

I remember a case of Eish, who disliked washing his employer’s car, since she felt it was a lot of work, for she was responsible for her employer’s two young children. She accepted to wash the first day, but had to plan on how to avoid doing it again. So when her employer asked her to wash the second time, she said it was against her culture for women to wash cars, for it may result to car accidents on her. She even claimed to have had bad dreams of being involved in car accident the previous time she had done it. Her employer believed her lie and started washing her car from car wash zones for pay. This is a form of power resistance in that, despite Eish being under control of her employer, she had to device a way to avoid duties imposed to her against her will.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study was born from curiosity to understand the ambiguity of women interactions, levels to these interactions and what drivers them, within domestic employment. The objective of the study is to provide empirically informed understanding of dynamics in domestic interactions between FDEs and FDWs in the context of Nairobi, Kenya. My aim was not to make generalised conclusion, but discover through in-depth interviews and observations, the ambiguity of domestic interactions and the agentic negotiations strategies that FDWs employ.

The study found that domestic interactions among FDEs and FDWs are oppressive and this oppression is expressed in diverse ways. The first level of their interaction involved control of “private” time of employee, thus some FDWs worked Monday to Monday, without or with less off time. This not only happened by employees failing to realise the need for day offs and private time, but by power and class disparities that existed among the two parties and in fear of the consequences of the employee’s actions if they acted boldly.

Exercise of kindness and compassion is another level of their interaction. Though from their expression, kindness appeared a positive form of interaction, I interpreted it to be power exercise and control by both parties. This was in line with Foucauldian articulation of power that, every individual has power that is exercised either consciously or unconsciously (Foucault 1980:95). Thus, no individual has total power over another. Employers use compassion to control their employees in that, FDWs are likely to adhere to employers demands in response to the compassion expressed to them and channel their complains to the system.

The above discussion is in line with familial ideology, where by employees feel part of the employers family, thus are likely to be exploited. For example, are likely to be given less wages, with hope that will understand economic status of the family. This ideology is likely to have negative material consequences to the employee, and at same time it can be perceived as a way to class positioning, in that employees may associate with employer’s class identity. This worn them respect from employer’s children, since they saw her more of a mature relative than a worker who deserved respect. Expression of kindness by employee to employer was expressed by being loyal to their demands, which worn them power to control their employers and gain agency. Thus exercise of kindness by the two parties was a sign of power play that subjected them to a form of subjectification as discussed in analytical chapter by Foucault, in that their survival depended on the other party by being a subject of control.

The third level of interaction was expressed in their relations as pertained to labour. Hard manual jobs were done by the employee, thus taking the form of object, in relation to the employer, who took the form of subject by allocating herself easy tasks that concerned caring. Just like any other labour force, exploitation of employees by employers in domestic work exists, employers act as

the capitalist, since they own items like: Vacuum cleaner, soaps while FDWs supplying their labour power. Most employees claimed that, their employers always wanted to see them work; they worked Monday to Monday with minimised time to relax due to allocation of more responsibilities by their employers.

Power and class interactions discussed in this study are the key factors to oppression among FDEs and FDWs. Though before coming to that conclusion, I had to scrutinise how this power and class manifest themselves and interact, and the specific influence they have on domestic relations. As well as the strategies employed by both parties to resist and acquire agency. Employers told stories of their positionality in terms of power and class and how they worked to maintain these positions.

Naming is a factor among other factors that positioned both employees and employers in a certain power and class levels. Employers claimed of preference in the name of mummy since, it positioned her in a higher position in terms of familial hierarchy: Thus winning respect from children and the employee. Employees thought having a familial name like “auntie” positioned them to have respect from employer’s children, thus upholding their power and class as discussed in the paragraph above.

Language use was also a form of class and power positioning. Emphasis on education in Kenya has positioned many people to speaking Swahili which is the national language, and the educated ones are conversant with English. Employers felt using English in relation to Swahili positioned them in a higher class as compared to employees who preferred Kiswahili due to low education level.

Class divide could be explained from employer’s expectations, towards employee’s item acquisition. Employer Lemu claimed that, she would not be comfortable with her employee possession of expensive items like, phones, perfume. Since was aware, the little pay offered to her could not afford such. This could be seen as a form of material control to the employee. In that, less pay to her employee positioned her in certain class, thus owning expensive items was a sign of “class cross”.

Employees used different strategies to access agency, some claimed to work to please their employers, an aspect that reflect control and power exercise by the employer. Employee’s efforts to please their employers subjected them to difficult working conditions at expense of agency. Thus, their agency depended on their performance in relation to employers expectations, thus reducing them to a subject vs. an object as discussed by Foucault in the analytical chapter.

In conclusion, I will suggest that, studies on DW should not present FDEs and FDWs as homogenous bodies, since there are variations that exist among these categories and any effort to understand and improve their working environment should focus on their relations at contextual levels.



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