Domestic Drama:

Exploring domestic workers' lives in Amman-Jordan

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Dedications

To:

Ramzi, who is my solid rock and precious precious stone

My younger sister, who is my biggest role model

My parents and brother whose love, patience, and positive energy have sustained me everyday of my life

Hana, for being a sure source of support on very many levels

Zaina, for lending me a second pair of eyes and putting herself in my shoes

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List of Acronyms

FMDWs - Female Migrant Domestic Workers

ILO – International Labour Organization

MoL - Ministry of Labour

SWC - Special Working Contract

UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women

QIZ - Qualified Industrialized Zones

Abstract

This research paper adds an important dimension to the literature on female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs): while applying rigorous conceptual framework to underpin its analysis of the complex relationship between FMDWs and their employers, it uses data collected from interviews and observations to bring out the voice and experience of FMDWs without the stereotypical portrayals of employer and worker that pervade the literature.

The study focuses on relations between FMDWs and employers in Amman, Jordan, to answer the question: How can FMDWs ensure their rights and benefits through their complex intra- and extra-household relationships?

It uses an eclectic but cohesive conceptual framework consisting of gender, intersectionality, agency and social capital to analyze the data from in-depth interviews with workers and employers. The analysis shows that while FMDWs are relatively aware of the formal protection measures relating to them, they often achieve their goals independently and/or collectively by diverse means. These include, for example, active instigation of and participation in informal networking with their fellow FMDWs inside and outside the household. In many instances, they employ innovative strategies to negotiate with their employers.

The paper further argues that the perceptions underlying formal protection measures have fallen short of capturing the intricate and often contradictory relations between employers and workers. It argues that FMDWs are not a homogeneous group and that their relations with their employers are not inherently antagonistic.

Chapter 1
Introduction

The debate on the violations of the rights of female migrant domestic workers (henceforth FMDWs) has involved many actors. Embassies, relevant ministries and NGOs have conducted numerous meetings and spent millions of dollars on regional and local programs to protect domestic workers from abuse by employers. However, what has been strikingly absent is the voice and experience of these workers. This research attempts to fill this gap.

Studies concerning FMDWs have a propensity to use stereotypical portrayals of employers as villains and workers as victims. They favor quantitative methodologies, which tend to reify stereotypes while veiling the intricate ambiguities that shape the realities of the lives of employers and workers.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to provide a theoretically informed study of the dynamic relationships between FMDWs and their employers in Amman, Jordan. To that end, it asks the following question: How can complex internal and external household relationships generate better outcomes for FMDWs? This question assumes that, since there is a disconnect between the efforts made by policy-makers and the real lives of the women, FMDWs have their own protective measures that they are forced to employ. The paper was written on the basis of two months of fieldwork in Amman, which was helped considerably by my years of experience and familiarity with the relevant social structure and codes of behavior.

Building on conceptualizations of gender, intersectionality, agency and social capital, the study concludes that FMDWs resort to the wide matrix of relationships that surround them when they need support, and decline them when they are seen as restrictions rather than sources of assistance. FMDWs take part in 'horizontal' (with their peers) as well as 'vertical' (with their employers) forms of solidarity in order to achieve better living conditions. However, this possibility of relying on other people for support is not always appealing to the workers and conflict and competition between them often compels them to act individually.

The paper comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the research and spells out the research methodology and methods of data collection. It also outlines the dilemmas that I faced as a researcher and a writer.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical frameworks of the research and links it to the analytical frameworks. It draws on conceptualizations of agency as instances and relations that are used to achieve better ends. FMDWs lie at the bottom of social hierarchy due to the type of work they are engaged in, their gender and the fact that they are migrants. However, despite their identification with each other in these general aspects, they are not one single coherent group. The concept of intersectionality is employed to avoid the trap of homogenising the workers and to discern the effects that differences among workers have on their daily lives. Finally, the concept of social capital is explored to understand household and communal networks that FMDWs employ. The chapter also delves into the workers' choice of relying on individual strengths and strategies.

On the basis of interviews with FMDWs and employers, Chapter 3 explains some of the limitations of formal measures of protection. It argues that the working conditions of FMDWs do not always need to match what is assumed, that the implementation of the formal measures is dependent on the employers' perceptions, and finally that differences among workers make some groups more prone to violation of rights than others.

The agency of FMDWs as individuals in the complex and varied matrix of relationships is explored in Chapter 4. Their agency is executed in various ways: understanding the gender dynamics of the household, resorting to their employers' compassion and reasoning, basing their negotiation on valid and socially acceptable reasons, shaming the employer, utilizing the children's attachment, anticipating the needs of the employer, gaining the employer's trust, bending the truth, and, as a last resort, running away. They are all means to one end, that of improving living conditions.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary of the main conclusions as well as some recommendations for future research.

Contextual Background

In 2007, according to the Ministry of Labour (MoL), a number of 12985 registered female Filipina domestic workers were in the country of Jordan, as well as 7567 registered female Sri Lankan domestic workers. These are an addition to around 19000 who are from 28 other Nationalities.

Generally speaking, it is said that Jordan is a "country of both immigration and emigration" following a "relatively liberal and open policy on international migration" (Olwan, 2008:1). Although the labour law gives priority to Jordanian labourers, some occupations have been shunned by Jordanians themselves and are hence being taken up by migrant workers. These jobs include: agriculture, construction, catering, factory work, and domestic work.

Paid domestic work pre-existed this in-migration that is taking place in Jordan as some of the employers, who were interviewed, explained to me reminiscing about the days when their parents would hire Jordanian workers (who were usually siblings of each other). However, they believed that at one point the workers became too proud to be called "servants" and difficult to deal with. Another point was that Jordanian workers were too culturally close to them and spoke the same language, which became a source of anxiety for the employing families. Moreover, the migration from other countries grew in parallel to the oil boom which provided many Jordanians with higher incomes at the gulf countries, resulting with the emergence of a new upper/middle class. Families then started hiring migrant workers who provided cheaper labour.

Despite the advantages that this international transfer of work yields for sending and receiving countries, it is not simply business. By looking at paid domestic work we can analyse the "power relations that are associated (and sometimes reinforced) in the provision of domestic care" (Kurian, 2006:150), where different people at different ends of the deal occupy different power positions and privileges which ultimately affect the negotiation positions and outcomes of the groups. As global inequalities surface throughout these international relations FMDWs are usually left in a vulnerable position. We often hear horrifying stories about the inhumane situations in which the workers are forced to live with such as withholding of passports by employers, detention at home, lack of proper accommodations, work overload, insufficient rest hours, insufficient food supply, verbal and psychological

abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and extortion and financial exploitation as reported by UNIFEM*.

In the past few years efforts have been made to regulate FMDWs entry and work in Jordan. However, "despite the elaborate recruitment system Filipinos complain of abuse" (Martin, 1993:639). Moreover, it is said that Sri Lankans suffer even more violations, "a worker might work here 3 or 4 years and have to go back without being paid [and] this is applicable only for Sri Lankans" (Counsellor, Employment and Welfare Embassy of Sri Lanka in Amman) as quoted by Manseau (2005). Mainly the Special Working Contract (SWC) was designed to guard FMDWs. In addition, there are programs which act as temporary and contingency plans of protection for FMDWs.

Statement of the research problem

While ample studies tend to focus on the abuse of FMDWs by their employers, this research is concerned with the ability of the workers to protect themselves and ensure better life conditions. Indeed this study is inclined to view the workers as agents, but it does not stop at the portrayal of these women's autonomy, it also sees them as people in dynamic relationships.

Social capital and 'horizontal' forms of solidarity are important avenues for improved lives. However, they can be a constraint rather than a resource. Moreover, an intimate picture of worker/employer relationships is needed to portray more subtle, everyday actions taking place for better life conditions, making the envisioned line between workers and their employers a blurred idea. The relationships between worker and employer do not only constitute forms of conflict, but also forms of solidarity which are 'vertical'. Moreover, while the hierarchy between the worker and employee has been discussed, there is ground to explore the hierarchies constructed among the workers themselves which often lead to conflict and competition. Finally, while previous studies were based on the assumption of a preferred Nationality for domestic work, this research produces an analysis of a non-static preference which

* www.unifem.org.jo

changes according to employers' current needs, and eventually affects the lives of the FMDWs.

Briefly put, the private sphere has not been theorized extensively, especially in Jordan. Moreover, when it has been explored, it has usually been concerned with specific arguments mainly of violations, forsaking others. These gaps are clarified in the 'literature review' section.

Research objective

The objective of this research is to provide a theoretically informed study of the dynamic relationships between FMDWs and their employers in the context of Amman-Jordan.

Main question

How can FMDWs ensure rights and benefits through their complex internal and external household relationships?

Sub-questions

1. How do FMDWs protect themselves from employers' violations and ensure better life conditions?
2. What forms of solidarity do FMDWs take part in and on what basis do they engage in these networks (similarity in nationality, class, age, working household, or neighbourhood)?
3. How are the protective measures provided by law for FMDWs in Jordan limited?
4. How do the different perceptions of Filipina and Sri Lankan workers that employers hold affect household relations and the lives of the workers?

Relevance and Justification

The debate on the violations of the rights of FMDWs has involved many actors. Embassies, relevant ministries and NGOs have conducted numerous meetings and spent millions of dollars on regional and local programs to protect domestic workers from abuse by employers. However, what has been strikingly absent is the voice and experience of these workers.

In academia it is argued that "data on the female international migrants has been a largely neglected subject" as Kurian (2006) quotes the United Nations Secretariat. According to Moors[*]: "paid domestic work has not been a prestige zone in the world of academia" because the private sphere is not considered to be important (2003:387). Moreover, she suggests that having a theoretically informed study of migrant domestic work in the context of Amman-Jordan, would add value to the former studies which are concerned only with violations.

In reference to the SWC, Manseau (2006) suggests that it "could help towards improving workers' bargaining power" and argues that with this initiative Jordan has made major strands (2005). In Constable's book about Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, some of the women do "threaten" their employers using their contract as a basis. This research has investigated this in order to produce empirical data whether (and how) this takes place in Amman, since the workers are usually faced with complex relationship with the employers that might make the usage of this document a difficult task.

Therefore this, contribution sheds light on a dimension of the lives of FMDWs which has been rarely explored, and which reveals domestic workers' agency as previous studies only focus on victimising the workers (Moors, 2003). It delves into the complex intra-household relationships and their dynamics, explores bargaining chips, in addition to other support mechanisms which FMDWs sometimes choose to rely on.

[*] Prof. Annelies Moors (Ph.D. University of Amsterdam 1992) taught anthropology at Leiden University and Islam at the University of Amsterdam. She held a visiting position at the Women's Studies Centre of the University of Sana'a, Yemen. She is the Chair of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) at the University of Amsterdam. She has been working on issues related to migration and domestic work, and one of her publications is ‘Migrant domestic labour: transnationalism, identity politics and family relations’, Comparative Studies in Society and History (2003). She is also the program Director of a research program with the title 'Muslim Cultural Politics: Family Dynamics and Gender' which addresses the politics of culture in Muslim societies, including such sensitive topics as women migrant domestic workers, family law reform, and the body politics of representation.

Literature Review

"If the 1970's modernization theorists predicted the demise of paid domestic work, developments during the last two decades have proven them wrong" (Moors, 2003:386). In fact it was at that time precisely when migration from Sri Lanka to the Middle East started, as a result of increased demand for labour which was generated mainly by the growth in petroleum production (Ismail, 1999).

With a focus on transnationalism Ismail (1990) writes about Muslim Sri Lankans who travel to the Middle East, concluding that they are pushed by economic factors and end up making sacrifices that can not be remunerated. According to her, "Sri Lanka was one of the last Asian countries to enter this labour market but currently has more workers there than any other South or South-Asian country"(1999:229). She also indicates that three to six percent of the total population in Sri Lanka are working in the Middle East (Ibid). Brochmann's (1993) study looks at the conditions of Sri Lankan workers in the Gulf sates on the one hand, and on the other, it examines the consequences of female migration on the families and communities in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, the Philippines is the world's second largest labour–exporting country, where most of the migrants are women who have an advantage of becoming domestic workers because of their English proficiency among other characteristics, and their prime destination is the Middle East (Lan, 2003). This has led some scholars such as Rodriguez (2008) to examine the Philippine state as a "labor broker" and its role in the globalization of Filipina migrants. Others taking an economic approach zero in on the policies of exporting countries; Martin discusses the failure of the Philippines to achieve "stay at home" development. He looks at the country's per capita income and the importance of remittances for the country's economy. It is argued that sending states "have strong interests in maintaining relations with migrants as they are a major source of foreign currency" (Moors, 2003:388). Similarly, the Sri Lankan government encourages the migration of women through the Bureau of Foreign Employment Act[*].

As for receiving countries and how this migration serves and is facilitated by their states, Mundlak (2005) writes about the admission of care workers in Israel,

[*] www.hrw.org/reports/2007/srilanka1107/3.htm

arguing that it has suited the process of welfare state retrenchment. An additional contention to this matter was made by Moors who sates that receiving sates' policies "are indicative of the relations between the state and the emerging new middle-classes" (2003:388).

Basing their arguments on the global care chain, many have asked the question of why this transfer of work is taking place. It is argued that, the current increase of women's participation of formal jobs is causing a deficit in care. Pei-Chia Lan (2000) explores how Taiwanese employers hire migrant domestic workers in order to empower themselves. For those who can afford it, this gap is filled by hiring other women to do the work, as Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, xii) suggests, much care work has “left the hands of wives and mothers and has entered the global marketplace” (Misra and Merz, 2004:7), similar arguments are made by Folbre (2006) and Lutz (2002). That is what Kurian (2006) refers to as the "pull factor" in the global care chain, where middle class women can benefit from cheap labour, and where the countries can benefit from these women's release from domestic work. Therefore, care work is proving to have more international dimensions where workers from poor countries travel to rich countries and "provide a source of free human capital" (Folbre, 2006: 190).

This resonates with the situation taking place in Jordan, given the increasing number of women who are entering the work force. However, women's entrance into the work force could not be the only possible reasoning for shifting care work. As statistics have shown, increases in education rates have not been accompanied with the same increases in entering the labour force. It is a wide phenomenon that women who are not participating in the formal labour hire domestic workers to help them. In fact, some mothers who are relatively well-off are blamed for their negligence in the household (Moors, 2003). She argues that employing FMDWs is a means for the employers to acquire a higher life style. Examining these claims in Amman, and discussing the region's 'different' reasons for requiring external paid care work is worthy of exploration. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper and I can only stress this gap for future work.

In the paid domestic work debate, the unequal power relations between employers and workers have been looked at as not simply emerging during the working period in that location at that specific time, and the global changes that

determine the way relationships evolve and reinforce inequalities of gender, class, and Nationality have been rightfully acknowledged. Chang and Ling discuss FMDWs' migration as part of a large globalization process. They differentiate between two processes of global restructuring: the first is what they call the "Technomuscular" Capitalism (TMC). Which refers to the "glitzy, Internet-surfing, structurally integrated world of global finance, production, trade and telecommunications", which is "populated primarily by men at its top rungs of decision making" (2000:27). The second process of global restructuring according to them is "more explicitly sexualized, racialized, and class-based than TMC and concentrated in low-wage, low to semi-skilled jobs as created by TMC" (Ibid). Therefore, the subjects of studies who are "corporeal men and women whose choices and movements reflect their gendered, racialized, and class-based identities in the worlds they inhibit" (Ibid) are necessarily linked to a broader world order.

Although not divorced from this broader view, studies focusing on the private sphere have been conducted. This has been less for the Middle East Region, which is a major destination for many female migrants. Helma Lutz (2002) discusses the emergence of the informal labour market in the private sector mainly in Europe. She refers in brief to agency: "some studies indicate that domestic workers devise individual strategies to compensate for their disadvantage in the dependence relationship, for example by appealing to the sense of guilt of their female employers to gain a material and psychological advantage. Alternatively, they may use moral negotiation to alter interpersonal balances of power" (2002:97).

Spelling out the injustices associated with this type of work, many have explored and written about violations of rights of FMDWs and sought answers in formal protection measures. Halabi (2007) wrote about "contract enslavement" of FMDWs in Saudi Arabia, describing ways of abuse, and finally stating that international pressure is needed to solve the problem. Manseau (2005) responds to the issue of abuse of FMDWs in the Middle East, arguing that the SWC is one step forward in increasing the workers bargaining power and allows them to reach judicial authority. According to Moors' review concerning migrant domestic workers (2003), "horror stories" have been explored in the Middle East by Gamburd, but draws attention to the mainstream display especially through the media of abuse. Glenn (2007) takes up a historical narration of care work beginning with the times of slavery in the United States of

America, when "care work" was unpaid and obligatory. As care work evolved into paid labour, it was still coerced labour and highly racialized. It is argued that debt bondage is a form of slavery and it has been banned by the ILO's Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour. (Manseau, 2006:31). Moreover she points out that the exclusion of women's unpaid labour in the family from the realm of citizenship and rights also extended to the paid caring economy.

One of the studies' turning our attention to workers' agency is that of Lutz and Schwalgin (2005). They focus on domestic work in the German migration regime in three German cities. They mainly ask if this type of work can be professionalized and become an "ordinary job" given the highly complex and hierarchal relationship between employer and employee in which the boundaries of private and public, personal and professional, insider and outsider, gender, class and ethnicity are constantly negotiated. To this question, their answer is negative. However, they refuse to view this relationship as merely an exploitative one but rather one where both the employer and worker make an effort to "professionalize" the relationship or where more intimate or private "family like" relationships are developed. Lutz and Schwalgin's who also focus on agency, discuss FMDWs who think of themselves as self-employed and argue that "emphasis on autonomy and self-determination is a possibility to symbolically upgrading their status instead of presenting themselves as victims, as cue-ball of the circumstances" (2005:14). They tap on agency and say that the workers "often speak about their tricks and strategies to ease the work through the adaptation of working rhythms, time management and appropriate working tools" (Ibid). In her article about domestic workers in Hong Kong, Constable explores sexuality and argues that "Filipina domestic workers are not unlike the Bedouin women described by Lila Abu-Lughod, following Foulcault, as "both resisting and embracing the existing system of power" (1997:553). In "Maid to Order in Hong Kong" (1997) Constable provides stories of resistance and protest by Filipina workers in the household in the context of Hong Kong. Some scholars looked into the social realities of domestic workers, such as Brenda Yeoh and Shirlena Huang, who have explored migrant domestic workers in Singapore, and examined "the ways in which their social maps are structured and negotiated in relation to public space" (1997:583). Morever, Michele Gamburd (2000) provides scholarly work about labour migration

from Sri Lanka to the Middle East and discusses some success stories which portray domestic workers as capable decision makers.

My Contribution

Having laid out a summary of previous literature, it has become more apparent that addressing domestic work with an engagement in the private sphere in Jordan has not been given sufficient attention.

Therefore, this research entails an academic contribution through the exploration of the strategies of FMDWs in the working households to ensure better life conditions, filling the "gap" pointed out by Moors (2003) as an important avenue for future research in the context of Amman-Jordan. It addresses issues that have not been adequately dealt with; FMDWs agency in the context of Jordan as a receiving country in the Middle East. In addition to the interplay between the workers and employers, their perceptions, as well as the various forms of solidarity and conflict which take place inside and outside the household. Furthermore, while the hierarchies between workers and employers have been explored, hierarchies among workers themselves have not been exhausted, demanding more research.

Methodology

This study utilizes conceptualizations of gender, intersectionality, agency, and social capital to analyze data gathered from in-depth interviews with FMDWs and employers in Amman-Jordan.

Before moving on to the methods of data collection, I would like to reflect on my personal stand in the process and address my relationship with the workers. The approach to this research was affected by my belief that there was more to the issue than percentages and objective recommendations, and that there is a need to move beyond the stereotypical portrayals of FMDWs and employers.

True, I was agonized by the stories of abuse of FMDWs, but I was also appalled at the generalized representation of Jordanian employers as evil and exploitative, and/or sexual predators. After much thought, I decided to explore FMDWs' agency in the milieu of their relationships with their employers, to understand the interplays between the two parties away from the common labels usually given to them.

A viable query would be in regards to my position vis-à-vis the workers during the actual fieldwork. I was faced with some anxiety before going into the field as well as dilemmas when the time came to write down my findings. My reflections regarding this are follows:

In Jordanian society, marriage is an important right of passage, and a female who has not passed it is usually considered less than a woman, let alone how much less of a man. A young and unmarried girl (which is what I was during the fieldwork), is not usually seen as a serious threat. As this study argues, even though the workers might come from a different background, this does not deem them incapable of grasping the codes in the new context they are in. Therefore, I feel that some of the workers spoke to me simply as a student who needed some help with school work!

Others, I believe spoke to me of their experiences because they were fed up and knew that they were not compromising anything since they speak of previous employers as opposed to current ones. They spoke of their strategies of self help, only because they felt they have been violated. Moreover, they were excited about the idea of displaying a more positive and agentic image, as the comment made by Lin manifested; *"It is not always bad! You* (referring to other FMDWs) *just need to be smart enough to make it good!"*

Finally, three or four of the workers, who knew I was getting married and about to have a house of my own, offered to work with me once I return. These women saw me as a potential employer, and were far from shy to promote themselves to me. It is possible that they saw a better opportunity since I don't have five children and a three story house, or maybe because they reasoned that I care about them because I am writing this paper. Regardless of their motive to want to be employed by me, they did not seem hesitant to tell me about their past experiences; good and bad.

In any case, the process of the research enabled me to re-think my own assumptions. Also, it has made me experience, first hand, how relationships that are supposedly class separated and influenced by power relations can transcend these social constructions that we take for granted. During those instances, I believe a relationship was built between me, the researcher/prospective employer, and the "FMDWs".

Having clarified my position, I will move to the next section which describes the process of data collection.

Methods of Collecting Data

- **Primary Data**

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with a total of 22 female workers of which 14 were from the Philippines and eight from Sri Lanka. Their ages varied from 20 to 40 years since most workers are in that age range. What is also common between the interviewees, other than their line of work, is the fact that they are in an urban setting, in Amman. Their period of experience varied from several months to over 10 years. The length of the interviews varied from two to four hours and those who were comfortable to speak offered to meet me again for more "talk" and that was arranged.

The interviews with workers and employers were scheduled ahead of time by a friend of mine in Amman. After a number of interviews at households, I decided to meet the workers who at one point used to work inside homes and have now moved out. Those workers were much more confident and seemed to be happy to spend time talking to me. This is an indication of the importance of the place were the interview was held. At home some workers could have felt that there is more pressure and more to compromise if they spoke about their conditions, strategies, and employers.

I offered the workers taxi money and some would resist because they "want to help me with my paper" but after I insist that it is only for the transportation they would agree. I found myself spending a considerable amount of time with one Sri Lankan worker named Lata who had worked in Amman for more than nine years and had recently decided to move out on her own and become a "free lancer". Another worker who I met more than once was Oudinika. She was always mentioning the names of the families she worked with and seemed to speak with no or very little reservation. Fortunately, another worker seemed to always be pleased to see and talk to me; Linda. She is from the Philippines and she too has moved out to work on her own. I ended up seeing Linda more than once and we talked in length about her 11 years of experience in Amman. The other workers who are quoted in this paper are: Tia and Rose who are Filipinas and are Linda's friends, Kinda and Moreen; two Filipinas who are relatives and working at the same household, Lin who is a Filipina who came to Jordan as a domestic worker but is now a manicurist, Jane who is a Filipina who has only been working as a domestic worker for a few months, Silla,

Suscilla, and Shandra who are Lata's friends and are Sri Lankans, and Kumari who is also a Sri Lankan and has worked for a number of years at a friend's house.

Some of the interviews were one on one, and others included more people because I tried to set a more casual atmosphere and the ladies would just chat, share stories, and compare notes.

In addition to that, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 20 male and female employers to explore perceptions and treatment of the workers, constituting the structure which dictates their mode of agentic action. Interviewing male employers was challenging since most of them refused and advised me to talk to their wives since "they are the ones involved". Usama spoke about the issue for 45 minutes but then started telling me about his business for two hours. I managed to sit down with four male employers. As for female employers, I met with 16 women who shared their views and stories. In addition to Usama, in this paper I quote: Dana who is a 26 year old working mother of one baby, Basma who is a working mother in her late forties, Taleen who is a mother of two and who teaches at an elementary school, Hanan who is also a teacher in her thirties, Hind a working mother of two, Nada who was going back to the job market after spending 10 years looking after her three children. In addition to Hala, Farah and Reem who are "stay at home moms".

The choice of the number of interviewees was made in order to spend more time and establish rapport with the workers enabling me to understand their lives more. Second, as this is an individual research it also aims to help my learning process and a manageable sample was needed. More importantly, the aim of this research is not to produce representative conclusions, or generalised statements, or universal acts of agency by Sri Lankans or Filipinas. On the contrary, it is to look at specific cases that will make possible the drawing of some specific and theoretically informed conclusions.

Finally, participatory observation was an important resource for this study, where I was able to observe the complex relationships in their natural environment during my stay in Amman.

- **Secondary Data.**

  - Previous research and/or surveys conducted especially by MoL and UNIFEM.

- Literature including books and articles
- Newspaper clippings
- Websites

Opportunities and Limitations

Having conducted this research in my home country provided me with many opportunities and sources for support. Scheduling the interviews before arriving by a friend saved me time, knowing the areas and not having trouble moving around, as well as understanding "traditions" and codes of conduct facilitated the process of the research.

One of the first anticipated limitations to the research was the Language barrier. However, communication was good with the workers who all spoke English in a sufficient manner. Meeting outside of the house, or speaking of previous employers proved helpful, in the sense that the workers seemed more comfortable when talking. Simillarly, the interviews with part timers, who live on their own, were also quite relaxed.

Ethical Issues

All the interviewees were asked for permission before recording, for those who felt uncomfortable, only notes were taken down. They are all informed of the study and I have their permission to quote, however I have used pseudo names in order to protect the interviewees' privacy.

Chapter 2

Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

This research uses an eclectic but cohesive conceptual framework consisting of gender, intersectionality, agency and social capital which will be presented in this chapter.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Housework is not only a necessity of life, but is central to social and cultural reproduction (Anderson, 2002). With the employment of house help, the household becomes quite a particular space because "paid domestic work brings together people from very different backgrounds in intimate and highly personalized interactions in the domestic sphere. As a result, paid domestic work transforms at least two sets of identities: that of the employer and that of the domestic worker" (Moors, 2003:389).

While victimising domestic workers and right based approaches have lead the way in this topic, I have explored agency as the means of protection through the strategies used by the workers who undergo negotiations and settlements in order to circumvent violations. This includes, resorting to internal and external support systems, depending on ones' own strengths for self help, and utilizing specific social norms for ensuring better life outcomes.

The definition of agency has been contested by social scientists as well as feminists who have engaged in the meanings and significance of this concept. Sociologists who take up a 'structuralist' view believe that structures and institutions such as families, social classes, and states determine the behaviour of the members of a society. Others who take a more 'agentic' stand believe that social structure is altered and maintained by human agency (Giddens: 1997). A less dichotomous interpretation comes out of Marx's famous quote, "Human Beings make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing" (1963:15 quoted by Kilduff, Tsai, Hanke, 2006).

Answering the resonant question of what is agency? Embirbayer and Mische account for the emergence of a new concept "that affirmed the capacity of human

beings to shape the circumstances in which they live" (1998:965). Complementing that, Karp argues that "through their strategies the actors are able to achieve their aims even though they act under conditions of unequal power" (1986:133).

"The practical activity of the agent transcends the immediacy of the present through the 'mobilization of the past and practical anticipation of the future inscribed in the present in a state of objective potentiality'" (McNay 2008:144 quoting Bourdieu). Emirbayer and Mische "re-conceptualise agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented towards the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities), and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (1998:963). I agree that agentic action must be situated in the flow of time. For FMDWs, the time spent in the household affects their decisions, in addition to other experiences they have gained over time which inform their present actions.

According to Emirbayer and Mische "the conception of agency centres around the engagement (and disengagement) by actors of the different contextual environments that constitute their own structured yet flexible social universes" (1998:973). The idea of flexibility is important here, since the workers and employers' lives are not statically separated but are constantly changing and influencing each other.

Much debate took place among feminists as to whether or not agency necessarily entails change. Butler has viewed agency in terms of resisting norms and structures, which did not sit at ease with Mahmoud's (2001) views on agency. This paper draws from her argument that we can "think of agency not only as the capacity for progressive change" (2001:217) but as instances and relations that persons can use to achieve better ends. Scott notes in his "weapons of the weak" regarding class struggles that they are "well short of collective outright defiance" and that they "often represent a form of self-help" (1985:29).

This research is inspired by these conceptualisations, albeit it does not discount the women as being part of a larger system, and their autonomy is neither seen as absolute nor static. It is not viable to look at the workers and their agency without examining the structure they are in and in which they act, where as "the constituent components [of structure and agency] cannot be examined separately" (Archer 1988,

quoted by Emirbayer and Mische 1998:1003). Then again, to ignore the significance of the FMDWs as human agents, in these complex relations, is to "have a theory swallow its own tale [!]" (Scott, 1985:42) Therefore, employers and workers' thoughts, perceptions, and actions are constitutive of each other.

Counterbalancing the theory of human capital and its focus on the agency of individuals, we have the theory of social capital. Scholars such as Coleman have theorised social capital and networking, with a focus on their benefits for individuals. Social capital can be defined "as any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates the actions of the individuals within social structure and is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate instrumental action" Coleman (1990) as quoted by Seibert and Kraimer (2001:5). Furthermore, "a 'network' can be defined as the pattern of ties linking a defined set of persons or social actors" (Ibid).

Taking different approaches, social network researchers explored relationships among people. Seibert and Kraimer (2001:5) built their paper "A social capital theory of career success" on the three approaches; weak tie theory by Granovettor, structural hole theory by Burt, and social resource theory by Lin. The most important point to stress here is that "[t]he notion that social resources embedded in networks will provide benefits to the actor is central to all three network approaches to social capital" (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001:10).

There is now a great and growing amount of literature regarding migrants' lives and how they are nourished by connections and social networks with people back home or anywhere else (Vertovec, 2006). Social capital is closely related to social networks in terms of their "substance and impact" (Ibid). A number of scholars have argued that networks "migrate" (Vertovec, 2006; Salaff and Greve, 2004) and that migrants benefit from kinship relations, friends, and other social set ups especially those from their own origins.

By and large, there is an inclination to associate social networks with certain advantages that members are predicted to yield. Seibert and Kraimer suggest that usually "these benefits include greater and timelier access to information, greater access to financial or material resources, and greater visibility, legitimacy, or sponsorship within the social system" (Ibid). In reference to migration, frameworks have focused on the importance of family and community networks for facilitating the lives of migrant workers (Datta, Mcllwaine, Evans, Herbert, May and Wills, 2006:3).

The central premise of the theory of social capital is that capital can be acquired through social relations, which induce constraints and opportunities as well as actions and choices by actors (Lin, 2001). While the opportunities are explored in this paper, constraints are also given ample attention since social capital has a "dark side" that should not be downplayed (Daly and Silver, 2008).

In this paper, agency involves a wide range of alternatives that FMDWs resort to. As discussed by Datta, Mcllwaine, Evans, Herbert, May and Wills: there are individual, household, and community strategies that migrant workers establish in order to survive (2006:2). In an argument similar to that of this research, they view migrant workers' strategies as involving both the operation of structural conditions and their agency (Ibid). Reciprocal networks can generate social capital that can take the shape of maximising income, exchanging information, or emotional support, to articulate a few (Salaff and Greve, 2004; Datta, Mcllwaine, Evans, Herbert, May and Wills, 2006). This is maintained by visits, talking on the phone, and participating in events (Vertovec, 2006). Data from fieldwork confirmed the argument that "disadvantaged groups use informal networks" (Silver, 2008:549) possibly because of hampered accessibility to the formal ones. It is important to specify that in this paper, informal relations and networks are the indicators of social capital, since the concept has various theorisations. Moreover, data from fieldwork showed that workers resort to usage of social norms, and sometimes strategise as individuals.

Gender can be defined as a social category imposed on a sexed body. Feminists have used "gender" to refer to "the socialization of the relationship between the sexes" (Scott, 1999:28). Scott introduces two definitions for gender, the first constituting four interdependent elements for this definition of gender: Culturally available symbols, normative concepts that give meanings to these symbols, politics as well as social institutions and organizations which play a role in the process of gender constitution, and finally subjective identities that are "substantively constructed, and relate their findings to a range of activities, social organization, and historically specific and cultural representations" (1999:44). Her second definition relates to "gender as a primary way of signifying relations of power" (Ibid). There are "gender biases implicit within the rules and practices of different social institutions" (Kabeer, 2001:226), where male power tends to dominate women. Moreover, "patterns of local gender relations [are] reproduced by the practises of household labour" (Nagy,

1994:92). While FMDWs identities in the household are reiterated by the constraints at all four levels, they do not always accept their seemingly "destined subordinate identities" vis-à-vis their employers. Where there is power, there is resistance, and there are also avenues for changes in relationships with superiors.

Scott points out that although concepts of power are greatly related to gender, there are more factors to consider. Differences between workers proved to be essential and since they played an eminent role in the lives of the workers, they must not be taken for granted. Through interviewing employers and workers I was able to unfold the term "maid" in order to avoid the trap of homogenizing FMDWs and portraying their positions as unified and universal since different axis of their identities "interact in the social and material realities of [their] lives to produce and transform relations of power" (Davis, 2008:8, quoting Anthias, Yuval Davis, and Collins). Therefore, I have looked at agency through the lenses of Intersectionality to explore the different hierarchal positions held by FMDWs as a result of differences among the FMDWs in Nationality, skills, language, and the perceptions of the employers.

Intersectionality, which is a relatively recent concept when compared to gender, was defined by Davis as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination" (2008:1). She goes on further with her definition to say that "Intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the out comes of these interactions in terms of power" (2008:2). When considering the unequal and sometimes abusive relationships between FMDWs and employers "several axis of differentiation are compounded in the relations between [them]. These include: gender, age, ethnicity, race, class, and migration status" (Sanjek and Colen, quoted by Nagy, 1994:86).

2.2 Analytical Frame Work

The term agency has been associated with many terms; self-hood, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:962). In this research it is quite helpful to relate it to some of those terms, in addition to others precisely because the term is itself "elusive" (Ibid).

"[G]endered understandings that define women as most suitable for performing care work continue to exist across the globe" (Rodriguez, 2008:794). Families in

Jordan mostly hire female workers as domestic work is primarily seen as a female's job. Moreover, female workers are also preferred in families that have girls since it is preferred for male workers not to be in close relational or spatial contact with young women. In one of the interviews, a couple explained to me that a male worker "might kill them in the middle of the night and steal everything they have". For this couple, the choice of a female worker was made specifically because according to them females present less of a threat.

As has been previously argued, FMDWs "carry a triply low status as ethnic aliens, unskilled workers and women, rendering their position that of virtual non-persons (Brochmann (1993: 106 quoting Longva 1990). It is true that as foreigners FMDWs employ an uncomfortable disposition especially when compared to their employers. However, discriminatory perceptions take a more complex shape than that. As Nagy (1994) shows in her article 'This time I Think I'll Try a Filipina', a preference for a certain Nationality for the job is often articulated. In one of her interviews a woman said, "Sri Lankans themselves are sloppy and can not be expected to keep someone else's home clean". This perception is widely spread, and I have myself heard similar comments numerous times in Jordan. A Filipina is usually preferred for her perceived neatness and proficiency in English. Moreover, there is a hierarchy between a Filipina and a Sri Lankan worker in terms of salaries, where the former usually gets a higher pay. I went to the field with the assumption of a preferred nationality that is bound to affect the employers' decisions regarding the workers conditions and often discriminating between them. The general idea of discrimination proved to be true, but the assumed hierarchy was neither static nor generalizable.

In any case, the differences among workers and the stereotypes constructed about them have a number of implications on FMDWs' lives; the first one is concerned with the formal protection of FMDWs, which tend to homogenize the group and make assumptions regarding their needs. This is followed by the importance of the employers' perceptions which affect their role in ensuring these rights. Other implications are concerned with the working environments in the household such as conflicts, in addition to differential treatment based on difference in Nationalities. This will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

When looking at the big picture of the employing household, we see on the one hand, a family who has made an investment that includes travel costs, salaries, food,

and accommodation, of which they require maximum output (Brochmann, 1993:105). On the other, we have workers trying to avoid humiliation and assert some rights in a relatively unequal and isolated environment. Therefore, agency is used to view FMDWs' strategies to protect themselves, and secure rights and benefits throughout their day-to-day activities. I suggest that some manage to overcome the difficulties of resorting to the formal system, by using the "empowerment tools" in an indirect manner, and others are forced to turn to their own alternative strategies, to reach these goals. I have heard stories of how workers use their own reasoning to pursue their employers to giving them a raise (since their salaries are already below the required minimum wage) or giving them a day-off, without resorting to their formal "rights", they achieve these goals without defying their employers and waving the special unified contract in their face.

Moreover, the FMDWs' relationships with female/male head of the household were looked at with a conscious gender lens in order to see whether the workers have developed an awareness of the gendered hierarchies in the house and how they are able to make use of them. Indeed, many actions of workers portrayed understanding of gender differences in the household, which were employed to achieve certain ends.

FMDWs' are not individuals cut of from people surrounding them. Sometimes they make use of 'horizontal' networks with their peers inside and outside the household. Other times, they team up with their employers 'vertically'. Contradicting that, as explained to me by some of the workers, they make a conscious and purposeful decision to drop out of a communal network and act as individuals. This elaborates the first part of Lin's definition (2001), that I had mentioned earlier, concerning social relations as constraints, which is often left aside. Therefore, these strategies are explored critically in chapter 4.

Chapter 3

The Formal Protection Measures: Purpose and Limitations

On the basis of interviews with FMDWs and employers, this chapter explains some of the limitations of the formal measures of protection. It argues that the working conditions of FMDWs do not always match what is assumed, that the implementation of the formal measures is dependent on the employers' perceptions, and finally that differences among workers make some groups more prone to violation than others.

Generally speaking, the state bases its legislation on the principles of "suitable work" and is said to be in harmony with the ILO standards, but it excludes domestic worker and the agricultural sector among other categories from its scope of application (Olwan, 2008).

However, the MoL together with UNIFEM launched campaign to confront the abuse of FMDWs as part of a regional program on Empowering Women Migrant Workers by UNIFEM Asia-Pacific. This initiative commenced by shutting down a number of agencies and by setting up a licensing procedure. In 2003, the government introduced the Special Working Contract (SWC), a legally binding contract which aims to secure the workers minimum rights. In 2006, the contract became an obligatory prerequisite for getting a permit in Jordan. When compared to the labour law, the rights stipulated in the contract fall short in many areas; Workers excluded from the provisions of the labour law are not entitled to some of the internationally recognized labour rights such as the minimum wage, working hour regulations and social security entitlement. Moreover, Jordanian law prohibits Jordanian unions from affiliating foreign members and prohibits migrant workers from organizing.

In the summer of 2008, it was decided that the labour law was to be amended to include the categories that had been formerly excluded such as domestic workers. This was considered to be a groundbreaking decision and many advocates anticipated implementation. I spoke to one official who believed that all the initiatives taken were a "result of pressure from and in order to please the international community". She pointed out that the migrant labourers working in the Qualified Industrial Zones

(QIZ's) who also undergo many experiences of exploitation and abuse were ignored since it would be very hard to include them in the labour law. She believes that the government chose the group of labourers (FMDWs) and not others (such as the workers in the QIZs) as a token, knowing that monitoring will not be effective and implementation will be the least applicable, because boundaries of private households usually prevent formal intervention.

Other initiatives took the shape of asylums as contingency plans to support abused FMDWs and runaways, in addition to hotlines, text messages, and the dissemination of booklets stating rights as well as responsibilities of FMDWs.

Despite the plans to prevent violations, a study regarding runaways found considerable anecdotal evidence suggesting that abuse of FMDWs continues to be wide spread in the Kingdom. Officials from Sri Lankan and Philippines' Embassies interviewed for the study stated that the problems most frequently cited by runaways are non-payment of salary, being overworked, and physically abused.

In what follows, I will critically assess some structural constraints of these measures and especially the SWC, relying on primary data from the field.

Different Needs: The voices of the workers

During the interviews I found that some of the stipulated rights do not fit with the workers' needs at all times. One of the issues highlighted by the workers was the right to a day-off; some said that refused to go out at all even if they are allowed by their employer simply because they do not feel safe outside the household, or because they calculate their losses in financial terms. For these women, the house is a safe haven even if it meant that they had to stay in and work hard during the traditional Friday family lunches.

About her safety, Kinda elaborates that she has heard scary stories of things that happen "outside". She said *"there are strange men and Filipinas having sex"*. This "immoral" behaviour seemed to scare Kinda and she consciously chose to stay inside the house and not mix with or encounter the situations she has heard of. Fay believes that if the family is good to her she does not need a day-off where she will end up spending money on taxi, meals and shopping. She clearly calculates her well being in terms of minimising consumption and cost before making a decision.

We often come across examples of sentences such as "employers rarely allow" the workers to leave the house, not only in the media but also in scholarly work. It is important to show the other version of the story, because advocates emphasise the right to the weekly day-off and generalize it as a major violation when the worker spends all her time in the household. All the while, some workers have other ideas of their needs such as staying in or preferring more flexible time, proving to us that we tend to rush with our own assumptions in the quest to defend those who need protection.

Employers and Implementation

Implementing the formal protection measures is related to the general perceptions of domestic work and workers. Paid domestic work is given a low status which is designated by the character of this line of work, where not only do the wages of this work remain low but also its social status (Lutz and Schwalgin 2005:8). Moreover, the nature of domestic work, of cleaning houses and scrubbing toilets despite its vitality it is not only viewed as an awful task but is distinctive "in being regarded as something other than employment" (Hondagnue-Sotelo 2001,2007:9). "As the sociologist Mary Romero has noted, this occupation is often not recognized as employment because it takes place in a private home" (Ibid). Therefore, the process of professionalizing paid domestic work does not merely depend on official decisions and drafting new laws, but also the values that employers hold.

When FMDWs are isolated in the household and external protection is virtually nil as pointed out by Brochmann (1993) the domestic worker finds herself at the mercy of the employer. Therefore, the beliefs and understandings of the employers play an important role in making these measures effective ones.

For many employers, the contract is merely a procedure. The workers also understand that it is "just a paper" and therefore developed their own mechanisms to protect themselves in this highly unequal relationship they have with their employers. The fact that neither parties viewed this as a real "working relationship" and that regulations regarding it are not viewed as unbreakable laws, places a question mark on the measures and put on view the ideas that employers hold regarding the system and the workers.

Different Origin Differentiated Treatment

The generalization of all workers as being one homogeneous group is inaccurate, where some FMDWs often do not start at the same playing level of others. This hierarchy and the differences among FMDWs were unfolded through both the eyes of the employers and the workers themselves.

During the interviews, the employers' reactions were mixed; some preferred Filipinas for their "culture" or "religion", others preferred Sri Lankans for their "subordination" or because they are "easier to control". The gender of the worker often intersected with her nationality when employers' views were being explained; in many accounts, the Nationality would be used to describe a workers' promiscuity; For example Hala believed that Filipinas "like to have sex". In other cases the Nationality of a Sri Lankan would be used to explain that Sri Lankan women are very afraid of men, and that makes it better in the household because they tend to respect the male head more. These perceptions regarding the workers' Nationality, lead to discrimination between the workers, where some were given more privileges than others.

Nada articulated this saying:

"We hired Sri Lankans for seven years then finally decided to get a Filipina. At that time I took up working again, and I needed someone who did not need training and constant attention. Before the Filipina came we painted her room and installed new curtains.

When I asked her if the old curtains were ruined, she said no but this one *"will definitely be more sophisticated and we wanted to make her feel comfortable".*

Her friend, Reem said:

"To be honest we had a Sri Lankan a few years ago and we did not allow her to leave on the weekend. But Fanny (the Filipina) goes to church every Sunday with her friends, and then they spend the rest of the day outside. I trust her".

The exploration of employers' perceptions especially in regards to differences among workers showed that some have discriminatory attitudes. These perceived differences, served the employers in rationalizing differential treatment for workers. This preference, however, was not constant as the next section will show.

"Going Back" to the Sri Lankan

The original design was based on the assumptions that there is a preferred Nationality and namely Filipina based on Nagy's article (1994) "this time I think I'll try a Filipina". Brochmann (1993) also points out that "Filipino housemaids are assumed to be cleaner than others". Other studies also included this generalization, "[w]hile set in very different countries, these studies of domestic workers, generally examine the labour markets of labour-receiving states as well as employers' constructions of domestic labour in order to explain preferences for Filipinas" (Rodriguez 2008:795).

Rodriguez explains further that "the Philippines has a long history of nurses' out-migration and hence has long-established training and education programs that prime women to work as nurses and other kinds of care workers" (2008:795) this could be a reason for the "preference" that is being discussed and sometimes even promoted. "Labour brokering as a developmental strategy engaged in by the Philippine state, relies on particular representations of women's labour. Filipinas construction as caring, docile, meticulous migrant care workers abroad is congruent with their construction as caring, docile, meticulous factory workers or workers in the tourism industry in the Philippines" (2008:799).

In my fieldwork I found that this construction is diminishing and being replaced with another that speaks of Filipinas as strong and demanding women, which are characteristics that some employers are trying to avoid. I discuss this because it has implications on other groups of women who are, hence, becoming more vulnerable to abuse. Despite the fact that many of the informants repeated the same things regarding Sri Lankans and how they are perceived to be "sloppy", many preferred a Sri Lankan because in comparison to their Filipino counterparts, "they are easier to control". Ultimately, a number of employers said that they are going back to hiring Sri Lankans after hiring Filipinas. One example of this pattern in the interviews was Usama's comment:

> *"We do not hire Filipinas any more, because they are too demanding. They are strong, because they know that they are better than the others. We went back to Sri Lankans"*

Similarly, Farah conclude that *"the Sri Lankan workers are more obedient since they know less"*

While most employers gave this comparison between Sri Lankans and Filipinas, Hanan explained that she is now hiring Indonesian workers because:

> *"They are even more humble and more obedient than Filipinas and Sri Lankans. They will schedule their lives as you want and will do anything you want as long as they are making you happy as an employer, in order to keep on working for you".*

It seems that it is all relative; when employers compare Filipina to Sri Lankan workers they conclude that the latter are more obedient. When they compare Sri Lankans to Indonesians, they conclude that the Indonesian is even more obedient and flexible to meet the employers' needs. Employers are trying to find someone who is more compliant and who will not cause them much "trouble".

The idea that Filipinos are more aware of their rights and hence more demanding, while possibly solving the problem for this group of women, is only making employers switch to other groups; Sri Lankans and sometimes Indonesians. This is alarming and further confirms the role that the employers' perceptions as well as the role of differences among FMDWs in shaping their circumstances.

Chapter 4

Agency

This chapter explores the agency of FMDWs as individuals in complex and varied matrices of relationships. It argues that agency is executed in various ways, which are all means to one end, that of improving their life conditions.

This research leads us to think of FMDWs as "social agents rather than subjects" (McNay 2008:143 quoting Bourdieu), as I have come to know about many incidents in which the workers were forced to interfere and take action in their own inventive ways to ensure a certain preferred outcome. This conceptualization was manifested especially in the stories where FMDWs had to arbitrate and find ways to collect or raise their meagre salaries.

FMDWs' are forced to be resourceful, when placed in a relatively uncomfortable situation, where power relations are not equal and the odds are against them. In many of the stories, they found versatile ways to affect their employers and their decisions, which in turn, impinged on their own livelihoods. Mostly, the workers do not defy their employers nor do they seek radical changes, they in fact are "both resisting and embracing the existing system of power" as Constable (1997:553) quotes Abu-Lughod (1990:47, 1986).

Before going any further, I would like to draw on Kimberly Chang and L.H.M. Ling, who highlighted the importance of avoiding the tendency to "romanticize agency" quoting Abu Lughud (1990). Indeed it is vital to note that by looking at agency, this research does not intend to focus on individual (or collective) freedom while neglecting the importance of state protection. I am not sitting behind the presumption that present day global inequalities must be accepted and dealt with on a personal and micro level only. The study does not excuse the injustices that take place while showing how these women have their own ways to better their lives. On the contrary, it is actually pinpointing them as proof that current protection is not solving the problem. Another important reason for exploring agency, as pointed by Abu Lughod, is that it provides us with insights about dynamics of power and power relations (1990).

Furthermore, I do not presume that agency can be measured, following Kabeer who noted that it is futile to apply statistical methods to measure women's agency. However, women "[enact] a different modality of agency" (Mahmoud, 2001:221), and a qualitative variation became more crystallized through a comparison among workers from different countries and who are in different positions.

As a starting point for the analysis of this section, I will discuss the interviewees' remarks on the formal protection measures and especially the SWC. Some views on the formal protection proved that although it is not directly used, it has inspired some workers to indirectly gain their rights. For example, Beth, as told to me by her employer Basma, had the booklet from the MoL which states her rights. She reads the book all the time and she makes sure that her employer sees her when she is reading it *"as if she is subtly threatening me"*.

Two employers told me stories where the workers gained their right to a day-off. Shelby read an article in one of her employer's magazines about the rights of FMDWs. After she read the article she went to her employer, Hind, and told her: *"Madam please read this!"* Although her method upset Hind who said that she would have preferred it if Shelby was honest and just asked for what she wanted, she ended up getting her day-off.

The other interesting story is Nada's who spoke about the domestic worker at her house:

"she never asked for a day-off, but now that she has a mobile she has been receiving those group texts that inform them of their for a day-off (among many other messages). This inspired her to come up to me and ask me if I have been receiving those messages on my mobile as well".

This worker did not ask for the day-off bluntly, but implied it when she questioned her employer about receiving the same message. Whether this was rationalized and foreseen by the worker is something I do not wish to presume and can not discern. However, the employer was eventually embarrassed enough to allow the worker to start going out once every two weeks.

While in the beginning, the formal protection measures did not seem to be used efficiently, they have proved to provide some workers with space and strength for negotiation. Others, however, spoke about the SWC saying: *"it is just a paper!"* and explained alternative ways through which they manoeuvred, bargained for, and

asserted their rights and benefits. This is what the coming section of this chapter addresses.

4.1 Harmony and Cacophony

The workers actions and decisions are often supported by their peers outside the household, as well as those with whom they work with inside. Furthermore, their support mechanisms are more complex; sometimes forms of solidarity take place inside the household with the employers, and sometimes outside the household with other (meaning not FMDWs) groups. What I have assumed to be the structure (employers) was found to merge with the agents (FMDWs) in some cases for various purposes. It is therefore not a clear cut polarized differentiation among the two groups. In what follows I discuss forms of horizontal and vertical solidarity and group action with in the household.

Horizontal solidarity with in the household

Some workers resorted to group solidarity and action such as a group of six workers who work together at one household. This group was a diversified one; they were not all of the same nationality or the same sex. However, together they developed strategies to avoid extra work that is tiring and humiliating to all of them. Oudinika said to me, *"she* (the employer) *makes us work this hard not because the house needs this much work, only because of the money!"* I asked her to explain what she meant and she said "she has more money and she has to prove to us that we will do what ever she wants". Then she told stories of 'little white lies' that she believes have saved her and her colleagues in many instances.

Their employer, Manal, is an affluent woman living alone in a mansion. She used to ask them to clean the cupboards of the kitchen every day which the workers, including Oudinika, felt was unnecessary and hectic. The "Madam's" friends would come in the afternoon to play cards and smoke hubbly bubbly *"sheeshah"*, so they decided to use that time to "clean" the cupboards. They would be in the kitchen making sounds as if they were cleaning when in fact they were just banging the plates on the table. When Manal's friends are visiting and she wants something, she rings a bell and one of the workers would go to her and she would not come herself. This is why it seemed to be the perfect timing for them to pretend to do as she requested.

Similarly, Manal forbid them to use the scraper *"ashatah"* to clean the floors; she would tell them to remove all the furniture, throw a bucket of water, and remove the water with their hands using mops. Since this way was too hard, they wanted to avoid it; one of them would stand on the door pretending to clean it while the other five use the *"ashatah"* to clean. When she would come to check, the worker at the door would warn them that she is coming and they would hide the *"ashatah"* away and pretend to be cleaning on their hands and knees.

For this group of workers, despite their diversity they thought of themselves as one group and planned accordingly in order to facilitate their lives. It seems that they agreed about the harshness of their employer as "hurt feelings can become the motivational grounds for collective resistance only if individuals can articulate them within shared interpretive frameworks that are typical for a given group" (McNay, 2008:274). This group resisted this humiliation, and believed that they should not be over worked in that manner; however, they did so without publicly defying their "Madam".

Sometimes when two women of the same Nationality are working together, they explained ways of supporting each other. For example, in the case of Moreen and Kinda, they explained to me how they both take care of each other and how Kinda who is Moreen's aunt, gives Moreen advice. One of the issues they stressed was the fact that Kinda was allowed to have a mobile which they both used. Moreen, on the other hand was not allowed to have a phone and since Kinda was leaving soon, she was worried. Although a mobile phone might not be considered a 'basic right' the workers tend to assign symbolic meanings to owning one. Other than being an important avenue for communication with family members back home, the significance was also that if a FMDW is allowed to have one, then she is trusted by her employer. The idea of trust was central to most of the workers' stories, and it will be dealt with separately in the section discussing the employment of social norms.

Another example was Tia's explanation:

> *"Whenever something is missing in the house I help Lisa to look for it, because we are both Filipinos and I don't want Madam to be angry at her for losing it" (Tia and Lisa work in the same household)*

Here, the basis for solidarity can be discerned as common Nationality. However, as Oudinika's stories have shown, similarity in Nationality is not the only reason. This

section displayed solidarity of similar as well as diversified groups of domestic workers. The next section explores more 'vertical' forms of solidarity.

Vertical solidarity with-in the household

Interestingly, unity is not always and only among workers and 'vertical' solidarity with employers is also utilized when there is a need for it in the household. Solidarity is significant especially in hierarchal social lives, but it is not exclusive to one group. It is, also, not reserved for individual benefits only but overall positive outcomes. Employers and workers team up together in many instances to ensure a better outcome for themselves and the household as a whole;

Tia explained how she and her Madam hide things from the father when a child misbehaves.

"When the boy does something wrong or smokes a cigarette or drinks the black label, Madam asks me to talk to him because he doesn't listen to her. More importantly, we hide it from Sir because he will start smacking everything in the house if he finds out, and he can not control his temper".

In this story, Tia provides support to the child and the mother in order to avoid the father's wrath.

Linda told me that when the family eats outside, the husband is the one who brings back something for her.

"He trusts me and talks to me about his girl, Muna, because she tells me everything and shares her problems with me". The father knew that she is close to Linda and asked about Muna to know what she has been doing.

Normally, employers ensure that there is a line between them and the workers that must not be crossed. However, when it is convenient, they violate this artefact which has been mainly created by them, in order to satisfy a purpose. Hence, the maintenance of clear cut personal and cultural boundaries between employer and worker are challenged (Gamburd, 2000: 104) especially when children are involved. These moments, of transcending relationships, give the workers a sense of achievement and ultimately boils down to one of the factors considered most important for their wellbeing in the working household; gaining the trust of their employer.

Extra-household solidarity

In this section, I discuss the cases where FMDWs draw upon friends and family who live outside the working household for support.

Rose was working with a family who were not paying her. Her Filipina friend had a friend who is a police man and with her help, the police man came to the house and the family started paying. *"I would not have called the police office myself"*. When she decided not to be passive about this violation, and decided to take the risk of antagonizing her employers, she called on a friend who provided the necessary support.

Lata told me that her male employer would watch her constantly during her work, which made her feel uncomfortable. As she always does; she went to church with her problem and talked to the priest, who advised her to leave the job if it made her feel uneasy. However, she decided to keep working, as the man has never actually tried something physical with her. The next time she found herself in that situation she called the priest from her mobile phone and made sure that her employer could hear her. She told the priest that everything is ok and she is not bothered ensuring that her employer knew that someone was informed of the situation. The next day her employer explained that he respects her and that he had no intentions to hurt her. This made Lata feel much more relaxed and in control. She explained that the priest played an important role in her life and well being, as she told other stories of how he supported her and advised her.

Linda was working at a house were she was being harassed by the employer. While she temporarily managed to keep her employer from "forcing her" by acting relaxed, her niece helped her get in touch with the agency. She explained the situation but the manager ignored her complaints. Finally, she said to him *"if you do not take me now I will jump from the window"* she also told him that she had informed her family where she was and that her family will file a case against them if something happened to her. After four days the agency picked her up and placed her with a new family. In this story, Linda tried to threaten the agency but since she was ignored, she had to rely first on her self and on her family. She used the efficiency of threats to take her own life, and then she deliberately told them that her family knew where she was because she recounted that, only then, they would care about the loss of her life. She told me that she knew that her life did not mean much to them, unless it was followed by a

lawsuit that could ruin their reputation and risk losing the business. Here, Linda threatened the agency and not the members of the household. However, she indirectly drew the strength of her threat on the basis of her family and their knowledge of where she was. Even though her family's, who are back in the Philippine's, support was not tangible, it was still an important tool for her to get out of that abusive household.

Dana told me about Sandy, the Filipina at her house: *"she uses her pay check to give the doorman money to go buy her several cell phones. Then she sells them to the neighbouring workers and makes a profit out of it and also gives the doorman commission"*. This is an example of drawing on external networks for economic benefits.

Many employers believed that when the workers meet each other they tend to become stronger because they seem to advise each other and become more demanding. Some also, explained to me that they try as much as possible to forbid this type of networking to take place. An example was Ibtisam who now wants to get a Sri Lankan worker because all of the neighbours' workers are Filipinos. She obviously is trying to avoid what Chin expressed as the "hidden transcript of domestic service" which takes place in the "informal assemblages" in Malaysia where the workers exchange experiences, advice, information about contractual rights. (1998:149). However, some cases have shown workers who felt that being with someone else is a burden and workers prefer to act as individuals.

Some interviews revealed that the workers sometimes believed in solidarity only if it does not go against their well being. This means that workers do not always see social networks as important and even harmful in some instances, which is what I shall present next.

Rising individuality

Contradicting the initial assumption of solidarity among workers, some cases were fraught with conflicts and rising individuality. An example is Suscilla, who prefers to be alone and not depend on any of her friends. She told me that if she had a job (she is a part-time worker) and her friends call her on her mobile she lies and says she is at an internet café because she is afraid they might envy her if they found out she had work which will cause her to lose her job. Suscilla explained to me that it is better to be on your own because then the girls will be too involved in your life and start wanting and

expecting things from you. In this case, the worker understands the bleak side of networking, which can be "stifling" and tie her to relationships which "do not always give rise to trustworthiness [but] may detract from productivity" (Silver, 2008:555).

Another case is Suscilla, who at the beginning was afraid to live on her own so she worked for families and stayed with them. After some time she decided to rent a house with two other Sri Lankans, then she decided to live on her own. She said that it is troublesome to have roommates because there were three of them and they shared the same bathroom. Also, she had to clean her room, the dishes she used and clean the bathroom, if it was her turn, when she came back from work and sometimes she was too tired to do that but she had to do it anyway because of her roommates. On the other hand, when she is living alone she can leave all of these things to the next day and rest when she is tired. Unlike the argument of minimizing consumption that is achieved when workers live in groups (Datta, Mcllwaine, Evans, Herbert, May, and Wills, 2006), financial coping strategies were not Suscilla's main concern.

An elaborate story was that of the "lost check", told by Linda:

“When Sir lost a check one day, he asked me if I had seen something in his pocket. Since "the Sri Lankan" [as Linda referred to her in the beginning], was the one who ironed the pants, they had to ask her about the lost check but she was very angry and thought they were accusing her and started yelling" Linda explained in contestation *"if you did not take the check and do not know where it is, then you have to relax and not show that you are nervous and don't keep on crying and defending yourself".*

Linda adopts this attitude of being "relaxed" especially when things are missing because it is the only way to earn trust. She stressed to me that she protected herself from accusations by displaying self-confidence and relaxation. This strategy worked for Linda, while Swarna (the Sri Lankan) usually ended up in trouble. It is important to note that Linda did not accuse Swarna of stealing the check, she believed it was lost. Her point was that the attitude plays an important role in determining your position in the eyes of your employer. Here, Linda did not help Swarna to look for the check. She ignored Swarna's distress because she wanted her employers to trust her. These disputes escalated and resulted in the expulsion of Swarna. This was much better for Linda even if it meant having to do more work to do on her own. She said that she already had too much to deal with and that she did not want one more problem to deal with every day.

As shown, some workers leaning towards "rising individualism" (Silver, 2008:560 building on Putnam) and prefer to work, plan, live, or earn the employers' trust alone.

4.2 Using Social Norms

Households with paid domestic workers are entities with intricate affiliations. Domestic workers are not blood related to their employers, but are often perceived as quasi-family members. Moreover, FMDWs are not considered to occupy the same status vis-à-vis other household members. These women might have less material resources to call upon during their negotiations, but "based on their tacit understandings of the rules and relations of the household, they still have a 'voice'" (Kabeer, 2000:345).

Utilizing the gender dynamics of the household

Some workers are compelled to find ways to increase their bargaining power and have developed methods to get their salaries or day-off by using the knowledge they have acquired in relation to the dynamics of the household they are in.

> *"Here in Jordan, I notice that the man is easier to talk to even though we are supposed to talk to the madam because we are girls and to avoid any problems you have to be direct with your madam. For example, four months I was without my salary. I told my madam first I need money to pay for my daughter's school. Two weeks passed and nothing happened. Then one day when the family was all leaving the house, I caught sir at the door when madam was already in the car. I told him I need my money please. That is when I got the salary immediately! After that, if I needed an advance on my salary, I always asked him!"*

After Tia tried the more acceptable route, which was to ask the "Madam" who failed her more than once, she decided to take things into her own hands and obtain her money. She waited till she could speak to the husband alone, and asked him. The agentic action here is manifested in Tia's (as many others) ability to recognize and put into practice the social organization of the household as well as her own experience. In addition to that, the action essentially confirms the aptitude to "watch out for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'" (De Certeau quoted by Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:1001).

Kinda, who did not know what the contract stipulates, explained to me that she asks for her salary in advance from "Sir"; she told me that he is very nice to her and that they are "best friends". Then she explained how she negotiated for a raise; The first two years she worked for 150 $ a month. On the day she was travelling home for her break she told her employer, "I will only come back if you raise me to 200 $". Kinda bargained with him as she was leaving giving him the impression that she truly might not come back. Eventually he agreed and made her promise to be back after her break, which she did for the higher salary she receives now.

Another story that clearly shows how a worker managed to use the power of a person who is in a higher position for her benefit was told by Linda:

"The boy was not tidy, and always left his dirty clothes on the floor of his room. One time I took a dirty sock and put it in the corridor in the way of Sir when he is walking out of his room. So he saw the sock! He was angry, and he said "what's this?" I told him it's Fadi's dirty sock! So he shouted at the boy "pick it up yourself and put it in the laundry bin, if I see it again you will see!" After that day, the child did not leave anything on the floor. He is scared of his father, but not of his mother".

There are different "motivations and ways in which individuals and groups struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources" (McNay, 2003: 140). Here Linda, relied on the power of the male head of the household as her own personal weapon. She deliberately placed the sock it the wrong place because she knew it would upset the "master" (another word she used for her employer), she used this anger to achieve her objective instead of being the "servant" who had to constantly clean after the boy.

The employers' compassion and reasoning

"Some studies indicate that domestic workers devise individual strategies to compensate for their disadvantage in the dependence relationship, for example by appealing to the sense of guilt of their female employers to gain a material and psychological advantage" (Helma Lutz, 2002:97).

When Shelby first arrived to Amman she agreed to work for $ 150. After a few days at her new household she spoke to her husband who refused the idea of the $ 150. This made Shelby go to her employer, Hind, and bargain with her on the basis that this made her husband angry and that she was afraid of him. This reasoning left

her employer with no choice but to pay $ 200. Hind explained that she sympathised with the worker and decided to help her.

Jessica who worked at Taleen's household came to her employer crying and explaining that her daughter could not go to school because they had no money. This compelled Taleen to immediately send money (in addition to her salary) to her family in the Philippines.

"Alternatively, they may use moral negotiation to alter interpersonal balances of power" (Ibid). Norms are not always as constricting as one might presume. They can allow for a range of explanations which can inspire different actions (Kabeer, 2000). One example Linda, who was expected to clean the car, since employers often feel they are at liberty to ask the worker to take up the task. To that, Linda contested: *"I'm a girl! It's not nice for me to wash in the street!"* This responsibility made her feel uncomfortable, and explaining to her employer that she should not be doing that type of work because she is a female and the men in the street will keep looking at her, was a good enough reason to make the employer change her mind.

Religion, family, and marriage

When the workers talk about their day-off they often say they are going to visit their aunt or they are going to the church in *"Luweibdeh"*. The persistence of these two excuses was very hard to miss. Many, who started their work with no day-off, approached their employers with either reasoning. Some employers explained to me that they did not believe that this was true, and that it was just an excuse that the workers thought the employer could relate to. My goal was not to cross check their answers and question their credibility, so I did not pursue the employers' uncertainties.

Moreover, having spent more than one year before asking for anything seemed to have a lot of weight any negotiation. In many stories the worker did not directly ask but tried to get more money (since the salaries were usually very low) by providing a valid reason. Jane kept on asking her employer for a raise because the tuition of her son's school has increased. This strategy became a pattern after a number of the interviews.

One couple told me about their worker who had been trying to negotiate a day and night off. One day she came to them with a marriage certificate, and asked them

to be with her husband. This made the male employer accept her request because it only seemed reasonable for a wife to want to spend time with her husband, and he gave her permission to go. His wife, on the other hand was suspicious, and investigated to find out that the certificate was false and that the worker was still legally married to her husband in Sri Lanka. The worker used a marriage certificate to legitimise her request and give a boost to her negotiation, which worked for a short while before she was caught by her employer.

The employers' shame

During my fieldwork I found that some workers could influence the decisions of their employers in the most creative ways. I can not be sure if it is premeditated or merely coincidence but one of the stories that stood out was told to me by Shandra who is from Sri Lanka. After a while of talking, she brought up her former employer and said:

"When I came, she only paid me 100 dollars but her sister in-law pays Soma 150 dollars. So I tell madam, why you don't pay me like your sister-in-law? You don't have money like her? Then I tell Soma in front of madam that I do not get what she does so madam was jealous and started paying me!"

Probably aware of the competition that takes place between families, when Shandra compared her employer to a relative, she shamed her into displaying her wealth, and started receiving a better salary.

The children

Kumari has been working with her family for more than six years. I have known this family for a long time and one day while I was visiting, Kumari wanted to go out on a Friday and the Madam did not allow it, so in the kitchen where Kumari she started crying to the children and telling them that their mother made her upset. The youngest child, who seemed to be very attached to her, went to the mother and told her that he does not like it when Kumari is sad, and started crying too. The mother decided to cut the story short and let Kumari take a leave. I visited them more than once, but when the family had been travelling I went to see Kumari. I asked her about the children. She started by explaining how much she misses them. Then talked about all the work she does for them. I asked her about that day she managed to go out and she explained to me: *"The children do anything I say. They do not do anything with out me. I don't think*

Madam like me, but children like me and listen to me, so she is nice to me". She is obviously aware of the children's attachment to her, and more importantly the benefits that can be yielded of it.

Linda finds harmless ways to guide the children as well as the parents, in order to relieve herself from extra household chores. Regarding their constant demands, she told the children that they had to learn how to do there own food and tidy up because they will leave to university soon. The boys started to help and serve themselves instead of ordering her all the time. According to Linda, she does not have to do all that work alone and she believes she has done a good thing for the boys and has "trained" them to take care of themselves too. She did not "use" the children, but negotiated with them using their future as to make her point, and eventually not work on her own.

Threatening

Some workers took less subtle strategies in more drastic situations. Threatening the employer to harm oneself came up more than once and the workers would get their way because employers want to avoid negative situations especially concerning death. Tia locked herself up in her room because she wanted to go back home as her employer urged her to get out of the room. When Tia came out she had a knife in her hand and began screaming that she wanted to kill herself. Her employers tried to calm her down and promised her that she would return home the very next day. Her employer explained to me that she sent her home immediately after that despite the costs that they had to bear because it was too scary to have Tia hurt herself, especially in their home.

Farah explained about a worker who was "very normal". Nevertheless, after 10 months of working, one night she woke her up at 3:00 am saying: "I am going to die tonight, call my uncle when I die". Farah immediately arranged for her to travel as soon as possible in order to avoid her actions which seemed dangerous.

Threatening the employer and especially of death, seemed to ensure the workers an exit strategy of which they did not have to pay the cost of.

Anticipating needs

Some workers try to anticipate the needs of their employers and try to meet them. While this anticipation could very well be out of genuine concern, the workers were not shy to explain how it reciprocally ensured good treatment by their employers.

Kinda told me that she advises Moreen to sacrifice for the family, in order to get good treatment, and Moreen agreed that a worker must give the employing family what they need to the best possible extent.

Lata explained how her attentive behaviour towards the families she has worked with, was reciprocated with good treatment. When she became sick and could not afford the medical expenses, *"everybody gave me money (for medicine, bills, x-rays, MRI, and flight ticket to Sri Lanka) because they know that I care about them. I call every one of them on their birthday and also call on Christmas and Easter"*. She also explained that she always prays for the well being of families she works with, and she feels that they sense her genuine love for them, which makes them prefer her and not other workers.

Gaining trust, bending the truth

Others build on the idea that employers need to trust their domestic worker. The importance of gaining trust was linked it to their own wellbeing, and well being was usually explained in terms of having some material privileges such as a mobile phone. Sometimes trust is what causes differentiation among workers in the house, where one is allowed to go out and the other is not as Reem's story explained (p. 34). In cases of conflict between workers, it even determines who gets to stay and who gets fired as explained in Linda's competition with Swarna (p. 44).

Second, it gives them a sense of achievement to be seen as more than just domestic workers. Examples of how the workers perceived trustworthiness as an important factor of their lives were manifested in Kinda's (p. 40) and Linda's (p.44) stories.

On the other hand, I occasionally found that bending the truth was crucial to avoid humiliation and some workers resort to these forms of resistance as told by Oudinika (p.39). As for the employers, a number of them believe that some dishonesty takes place. One example was what was told to me by Usama: *"one Sri Lankan never spoke a word of Arabic to us, and it was always very hard for her to*

understand whenever we asked her to do things around the house. One day, I caught the Egyptian guard coming to visit her with a bag of lingerie. I took them to the police station where all of a sudden she started speaking Arabic as if it were her mother tongue!" He said that for almost a year she had pretended not to understand them, and they had been very lenient with her because they thought she did not understand when she was just avoiding to work.

4.3 Exit Option

Finally, some workers opt for the exit option and escape the house they are assigned to. Unofficial statistics mentioned in a study conducted by UNIFEM and provided by the Sri Lanakan embassy reported an average 100 women run away each month. Similarly, the Philippines embassy suggests that around 90 women run away every month.

Linda told me about a time when she had to run away even though she faced no abuse at one of the houses. For eight months she stayed with a family who was good to her. She was working with two other girls, who did not want to stay and were planning to run away. *"I did not want to leave, but if they ran away and I stayed alone, it's hard for me! So I will die! That's why "khalas"(i.e that's it!) I go with them".* Although Linda was content with the family she was working with, she had to join the other girls in order to avoid staying behind alone which she felt was too hard for her to do. As this example has shown, many workers resort to running away when they find that it is a better option.

Chapter 5
Conclusions

This research extended from a concern regarding FMDWs and how they manage to protect themselves as well as gain good treatment from their employers. Are they protected by the government? Or are the left at the mercy of their employers? More importantly, are FMDWs mere receivers or do they have a role in enhancing their own lives?

The objective of this research is to provide a theoretically informed study of the dynamic relationships between FMDWs and their employers in the context of Amman, Jordan. Its aim, however, is not to make generalised conclusions, but to explore through interviews and direct observations the drama that goes on inside the private sphere and the ways through which FMDWs negotiate their rights and benefits or protect themselves.

While the formal protection measures appeared to be limited in terms of their scope and are jeopardized by inequalities locked away inside private sphere which was discussed in Chapter 3, they have inspired some workers to stress their rights in indirect and often in a veiled manner as presented in Chapter 4. With one exception, the tacit nature of requesting salaries and days-off was not because of the workers' ignorance of their rights, but due to their recognition of the sheer power relation with their employers and their awareness of what is at stake if they act boldly. Therefore, the support that came in more informal ways, such as the text messages that were sent in bulk by government and NGO initiatives, inspired the workers and provided avenues for protection methods that FMDWs subtly employed. Therefore, informal methods of protection should be strengthened in parallel to the new developments in the formal measures such as the SWC or the recent inclusion of FMDWs in the labour law.

With alternative protection methods in mind, this research paper leads us to think of domestic workers as agents, but before reaching that conclusion one must first scrutinize the influence that the employers might have on the workers' lives, as well as the nuances of the workers' relationships inside and outside the working households. In Chapter 4, the workers told stories of how they resort to solidarity with their

colleagues in the household. Workers from different or similar origins, gender, and age, planned together in 'horizontal' solidarity in order to facilitate their lives. While workers' are sometimes forced to bend the truth and even trick their employers, the two parties are not always on two opposite edges of a power line. In some occasions, employers and workers need to support each other, resulting in other forms of solidarity that are 'vertical'. Moreover, differences among employers also played a role in forming this solidarity. In one example, the female employer struck a deal with the worker, when her and her child's interests were at stake in relation to her husband. Moreover, although FMDWs are often isolated in households to different extents, they often manage to depend on external networks. These external networks can offer concrete results such as ensuring the salary. Other times they provide intangible support and can be used to increase one's bargaining power.

Therefore, solidarity takes many shapes inside as well as outside the household, and they are employed not only for the benefit of the worker but also for the benefit of an employer, a child, or the household as a whole.

However, this picture of workers supporting each other is counter balanced by cases of conflict in among the workers who compete for the employers' trust. For some workers' it was more effective for them to view themselves as individuals and break a network that can stifle them. On another register, despite the discriminatory attitudes on the part of the employers, FMDWs adapt to the environment they are in, make use of social norms and manage to have some control over their daily lives, for example the non homogeneity of the employing couple usually provided an avenue for FMDWs benefits when requesting salaries.

This research points to some areas for further exploration: it is often claimed that paid domestic work is required due to the engagement of women in the formal work force (Lan 2001, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, Folbre 2006, Kurian 2006). The Jordanian case might prove different motivations for employing FMDWs; Not so much the case that Jordanian women avoid the double burden of out and in-house work, but in fact the aspiration to attain higher life style and the urge to demonstrate advanced social status by employing FMDWs (Moors, 2003). Research on domestic workers, I finally suggest, should not keep presenting them as homogenous entity; huge variations exist and these are of ample importance in strategising for improving their work environment as well enhancing formal protection measures.

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