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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Living a Bare Life: Assembling the Everyday of Migrant Domestic Work in Cairo

A Thesis Submitted to

Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts/Science

by Sabrina Lilleby

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

August 2015

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP)

Living a Bare Life: Assembling the Everyday of Migrant Domestic Work in Cairo

A Thesis Submitted by

Sabrina Lilleby

Submitted to the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies
06.09.2015

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts
in Migration and Refugee Studies

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Abstract

This ethnographic study of work in Cairo argues that the laboring lives of migrant domestic workers in this locality are both similar and different to that of other spatial locations. Contrary to the re-hashed representation in media, this text shows that migrant domestic workers in the Arabic speaking world are not what is often referred to as modern day slaves. Instead, I show how these workers shape and are shaped in accordance with a neoliberal governmentality, through their techniques of managing their affects, bodies and actions. However, regardless of the increasing focus on training subjects before entering the workplace, the market for domestic work in Cairo is not organized according to skill or merit, but rather according to nationality and gender. The pricing in this market is a reflection of a local and global hierarchy where certain nationalities are marketed as skilled, docile and modern, while others are seen as human waste. Despite the constrictions this market creates and although they work without papers, workers' rapid change of employment shows how these workers are not simply victims, but rather active subjects who practice unconventional forms of labor politics in navigating the micro politics of the everyday.

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Chapter One:

Patchwork

Introduction

“The wife of the employer beat me, she did not work. Everyday she beat me. She beat my head, so I would cover it with my hands. She hit my foot with her sharp high heels. Everyday she did this until my foot was injured. When I told the husband about his wife's behavior, he also beat me. After she beat my hands and they became swollen, [they made me] wash my hands with ... one whole cup of bleach. I felt very hurt and had a lot of pain. I never got enough food. After one year, they still had not paid my salary” (HRW, 2008, 23).

These are the words of Nour, an Indonesian maid working in Saudi Arabia. My familiarity with migrant domestic work in the Arabic speaking world had previously been established through abhorrent accounts such as the one above, but as I pondered on the possibility of undertaking this research project, one of the individuals I contacted was Nirmal. Nirmal had, like many others, advertised the availability of Nepalese maids for work in Cairo on an online forum. My assumption was that Nirmal represented a placement company in the city itself, but I was very surprised to receive his response:

hello ms sabrina!
how are you!
thank you so much for your email. i can provide you nepalese maid
from my side too. are you directly looking for you in your house or
you are a recruiter agency? plz do let me know and your all tarms (sic)
and condotion (sic).
thank you!
waiting your reply!
have a wonderful day!
[personal email communication April 25, 2014]

Nirmal was not actually located in Cairo, but in Nepal. How was it that this man, who had never set his foot on Egyptian soil, was advertising on an online forum for expatriates living there? My communication with Nirmal quickly evaporated, but our encounter sparked further interest in the logistics, dynamics, and practices involved in becoming a domestic worker in Cairo.

This thesis is about laboring lives and practices. It is an attempt at delineating the ever-changing processes that shape workers' subjectivities. In addition, as much as it is about

workers, it also is about their employers, about a city in the midst of change; and about the unease concerning illiberal topics such as inequality and servitude, amidst our reliance on them in the current economic system. The laboring lives of the numerous migrant domestic workers in the Arabic speaking world are regularly depicted as exceptionally harsh and burdensome. Previous studies have dealt with the exceptional nature of migrant domestic work. Without discrediting the oftentimes terrible truth to these reports, I propose an alternative conceptual framework that enables us to conceive of these laboring subjects as workers, not simply victims. When we speak of these subjects as workers, it is easier to contextualize their lives within the global movement of labor and its local articulation. This thesis is not about women or migrant rights. In fact, the research this thesis is based on is not only important because little has been previously written about migrant domestic workers in Cairo, but also because it allows us to investigate a life common to millions who cross borders on a daily basis in the context of work. This thesis is centered on two main questions: How does the everyday, laboring life of migrant domestic workers in Cairo inform us about the nature of our present neoliberal moment? How do migrant domestic workers in Cairo navigate, transform and circumvent the world they live in?

This project has two goals. First, I wish to bring the topic of migrant domestic work in the Arabic speaking region into conversations with a larger body of academic work, some of the theory produced of neoliberalism, and subjectivities. By doing this, I automatically achieve the second goal, which is to demonstrate how a of study migrant domestic work in Cairo can reveal and lay bare enlightening features of late capitalism such as workers' increasing need to self management of affects as well as their workday. Thus, it is an attempt to deliberately gaze beyond the rehearsed discourse on human rights that often saturates the debate around migrant domestic work in the Arabic speaking region. When studying questions related to gender, labor and migration it is particularly compelling to write about the apparent rights held by subjects produced within these categories. Such a project assumes a set of static rights belonging to the woman, the worker or the migrant. Transversely, the researcher's main task is to then examine why these specific rights have not yet been implemented. As a result, the investigator is caught between the binary of rights or no rights, and the possibilities for social transformation thus remain predetermined and fixed. Instead, my argument emphasizes the importance of studying our social world through contemporaneous processes outside the binary referenced above

'Rights' are often divorced of their spatial and temporal context and somehow assumed to be granted and operate in a dimension exterior to the social (Menon, 2004). Indeed,

once a right has been legalized it often becomes naturalized and fixed. By its very nature, law cannot change as fast as the world in which we operate. Furthermore, emancipatory discourses premised upon rights often assume citizenship, be it national or global, though migrant workers oftentimes dwell outside these categories of ‘belonging’. We could then ask, what rights signify in the life of the migrant domestic worker? Yet, in this project, I deliberately chose to not answer this question. Instead, I hope to recount worlds outside the assumed binary of rights/rights-less.

Literature Review

When I refer to migrant domestic workers throughout this thesis, I allude to people who perform care work (e.g cleaning, cooking and child care) in a non-family member’s home, outside the state in which they hold citizenship. Large metropolises such as New York, Dubai, Hong Kong and Cairo are all locations that attract numerous migrant domestic workers. These places are inhabited by a significant number of prosperous families that prefer to outsource housework.

[These] families do not want to perform domestic chores but prefer, and can afford, to employ others. Sometimes having someone do the domestic work and care for children enables female employers to enter the workforce at higher salaries; for others it allows them greater freedom to spend time with their children, helping them with their homework; for some it is also a part of social status maintenance. (Jureidini, 2009, 76)

Individuals, families and societies need to reproduce actual workers who one day becomes producers, but this is more than merely a biological process of reproducing children. It requires the daily tasks of cooking and cleaning by or for producers as well as producing a sense of affectivity. In the households described above, domestic work— or, reproductive and affective work— is contracted out rather than shared by family members, and a woman from outside the family performs this job in the home. Resultantly, despite decades of activism calling for equal distribution of housework, this form of labor remains a remarkably gendered category of production (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010).

Workers employed in these households are rarely paid the equivalent of their employers. In a world of increasingly polarized incomes, it is difficult to maintain relatively high standards of living without assistance in the home, and differences based on gender, class and race become crucial in legitimizing lower salaries received by those providing this assistance (Nagar, 2002). Related to this line of thought, Wright (2006), in her work among young fe-

male Chinese and Mexican factory workers, describes how factory owners and managers deploy a myth of disposable women. According to Wright, we as consumers of cheap manufacturing goods — and more importantly the young and female factory workers themselves — are led to believe that an infinite supply of young women stand in line for menial work and may take the place of workers who decide to resign. The myth asserts that they are more concerned with marriage, make-up and gossip than with long-term labor struggles. In addition, it maintains that these women do not need a salary on par with their male counterparts because they do not head households but instead rely on male family members to support them.

However, capital in the form of remittances is now a crucial part of the global economy, and women play an essential part in sending money home to their families (Kunz, 2008). Commonly, families and even entire communities rely on the payments sent back by domestic workers abroad. Processes of migration and remittances interlock in such a way that they produce an international division of labor premised on a neoliberal logic. In this division of labor, work is divided between women from the global north, migrating women from the global south, and lastly, women from the global south who are too poor to migrate (Parreñas, 2001).

Although media and human rights campaigns often bring to the forefront abusive relationships between employer and worker, it is clear that more complex processes than simply the relationship between employers and employees are at work. Multiple actors are implicated in transnational flows of labor migration and the hiring of foreign domestic workers. Behind and alongside these seemingly singular relationships such as that described in the introduction between Nour and her employers, we find both ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ states. On the one hand, states that depend on remittances to boost their economy create a beneficial environment for migration through laws that urge citizens to travel abroad for work. On the other hand, states that rely on cheap labor from outside their borders implicitly and explicitly produce legal and social backdrops that encourage immigration (Silvey, 2004). This flow of immigration is usually premised on differential inclusion that allows different labor conditions for migrant labor, as opposed to that performed by citizens.

The prototypical example of a sender state is the Philippines, who has named their young women working abroad their “new national heroes” (Pande, 2013). The Philippines is perhaps the state that has to the greatest extent ‘perfected’ the recruiting and marketing process on the global market of care work. It is implicated in the recruiting and training process of young women and has been known to advertise for the quality of Filipino work in other states. This could be the direct reason much of the literature produced on migrant domestic

labor has been written about Filipina workers, but the excessive focus in research on Filipinas oftentimes masks the stark differences based on nationality and race that are present in the global care market. In fact, these workers are usually paid the highest salaries in a hierarchy of pays based not on skill or education, but rather on nationality (De Regt, 2010). On the global market for affective and reproductive work, particular bodies are considered valuable laboring bodies, while others become ‘human waste’, and salaries usually reflect this division.

Migrant domestic labor is not only a gendered category, but one that is also affected by differences based on nationality, race and class. Migrant domestic workers operate in a complex world where they perform care work in other states than where they hold formal citizenship, but usually without the same legal rights afforded by citizens in the given country. A relatively large percent is subjected to sexual harassment and violence, while many complain about long work-hours and limited spatial freedom coupled with scant salaries. This is part of what leads Aiwah Ong (2006), who researches modes of labor organization in Asia, to use the term neo-slavery to describe the precarious conditions many migrant domestic workers live under. Apart from worker’s experiences abroad, and though these women are crucial to the economies of the states they come from, they are often found in the bottom part of the social hierarchy in their countries of citizenship (ibid).

The plight of the domestic worker has often been banished to the sidelines of labor rights (Guiterrez-Rodrigues, 2010). But, in 2011 International Labor Organization (ILO) finally created the much applauded Domestic Workers Convention that sought “to protect the rights of domestic workers, promote equality of opportunity and treatment, and improve working and living conditions.” (ILO, 2011, para 25) However, it remains unclear what effects this convention has on national laws and neoliberal economics, and one of the critical questions underlying this thesis asks how much hope we should invest in the project.

Migrant domestic work in the Arabic-speaking world has received much attention through the work of international human rights NGOs, as well as media. One of the most common complaints among migrant domestics throughout the Middle East is that employers often withhold their passports. The legal culprit behind this practice is often referred to as the *kafala*, or sponsorship system. It creates particularly precarious conditions for foreign workers because of the way the sponsored person is legally tied to the sponsor (Jarallah, 2009). In this system, the worker needs a sponsor to acquire a visa to the country and while the migrant resides in the country, the employer is responsible for this person. This legal practice is instituted by law in both the Levant as well as in most of the Gulf countries (Moors, forthcoming).

ing). Most of the *kafala* workers come to the country through agencies that bring in employees from their own countries. The employer pays the worker's visa fees, airfare, as well as a fee to the agency. Yet, the only way the worker can remain legally in the country is by staying with that particular employer. For instance, in 2009 in Jordan, it was estimated that the country was hosting around 300,000 migrant workers. However, these workers became victims of a policy whereby they were pushed towards working without legal permits. If they chose to leave their employers, they could only go home, or stay and work illegally as a freelance worker (Abimourched, 2009). Still, it should be added that the *kafala* system is not unique to the Middle East, but in fact typical of many of the world's guest worker programs which permits migrants in unskilled jobs, or, what are aptly termed the "three D" jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult), to come into the country but only as temporary workers" (Pande, 2013, 470).

As mentioned above, paid domestic work often takes on gendered and racialized nuances and this is also true in the Arabic speaking world. Jarallah (2009) portrays a 'feminization' and 'Asianization' of paid domestic labor in the Gulf countries, where domestic work has come to be perceived as a 'foreigner's job'. The same might be said for Lebanon where the word maid is now used interchangeably with the word 'Sri Lanki', signifying the largest nationality of migrant workers. The existence of the *kafala* system creates particularly precarious and harsh conditions for foreign workers in the Gulf due to the legal bond of the employee to their sponsor.

Aside from statewide issues, the maid is that 'other' who works in the home; therefore, she is simultaneously close and far. Jureidini (2006) highlights how there has not been enough focus in the academy on the role of the maid in the Middle Eastern family. In some cases, the conditions for the worker becomes so difficult that she chooses to escape her employer. Some workers then seek out their respective embassies and ask them for help to return to their country. Others end up working without a contract and not living with their employers. In Lebanon and Jordan, these workers are often in a better position than their live-in colleagues. These are women who live on their own or in shared housing, somewhere other than with their employers. Despite what are often long commutes and precarious living conditions, these women cite the ability to choose their own working hours, keep their own papers and have privacy as reasons for why they prefer to freelance their skills. Research underscores this trend as incidents of abuse and violence seem higher among live-in maids than with freelancers (Jureidini, 2009).

De Regt (2010) argues that although agency among female migrant domestic workers has received due attention in the international realm, literature from the Middle East region has been very much grounded in a victim-based framework. Furthermore, there has also been an excessive focus on trafficking in the region (Jureidini, 2010). Yet, “[a]lthough it cannot be denied that women who migrate as domestic workers to the Middle East are sometimes deceived and trafficked, the dominant discourse about trafficking leaves very little space for difference” (De Regt, 2010, 241). As in other places, trafficking discourse conceals states’ roles in the exploitation of workers as well as individual aspirations and actions.

Some scholars do, however, choose to look at stories of domestic migrants outside frameworks of victimization and trafficking. Pande (2012) carried out an intriguing study that circumvents the excessive focus on trafficking in the region. She initially faced difficulties in meeting migrant domestic workers in Lebanon for her fieldwork since they were not usually allowed outside their employers’ houses. In her paper, she explains how employers often restrain their domestic workers’ access to space in the house and, therefore, the domestics are frequently limited to the balcony or the kitchen. However, through a tip from a local NGO, Pande discovered how workers actually use balconies as a place where they form networks to retrieve information that can later be used to negotiate with their employers. On Lebanese balconies, workers tip each other off about everything, from how to negotiate days off outside the house to possible escape routes in case of excessive abuse (ibid).

In addition to this ‘balcony talk’, Pande describes how migrant communities form so-called ‘weekend enclaves’. These communities, generally based in poorer areas of Beirut, act in similar fashion as organized unions. In fact, she mentions how these informal communities answer to the plight of workers considerably faster than some of the formal human rights based organizations. In other words, agency occurs mostly through networks maintained outside the development industry and the unions (ibid).

De Regt (2010) focuses on migrant domestic workers in Yemen. In her work, she also focuses on subjects living lives more complicated than the discourse focusing on abuse and trafficking allows. Instead, she complicates the picture and highlights both the ways in which Ethiopian domestic workers in Yemen inhabit subjectivities invariably found in the tension between being victims, but also agents. She does this by analyzing the number of ways these women arrive and stay in the country, and interestingly describes a reality where many of these women, despite known cases of abuse, desire to work in Yemen (ibid). Such narratives of desire severely complicate the usual discourse because it makes the worker the producer of her own experiences (ibid).

I want that place my work within the same vein as Pande (2012) and De Regt (2010) whom I applaud for attempting to think through the work performed by migrant domestics subjectivity outside the category of victims.

Migrant Domestic Work in Cairo

One could assume the global demand for labor outside of Cairo as the driving force behind the subjectivities that I discuss within the Cairo market; however, I do not make a distinction between the local and the global. Instead, I argue that the global is local and the local is global; in effect they are part of the same sphere. Assuming this then means that individuals I met in my fieldwork in Cairo are not simply objects being acted upon by the global market, but instead they are also creators of new and changing subjectivities. My field is located in specific locations in the city of Cairo, but at the same time I acknowledge this as a node in a transnational circuit where labor, capital and thoughts are transferred from one location to the next at an increasing speed. Cairo, as a city, might at times be represented as a place of tradition and not being, as of yet, a “globalized city”. When discussing neoliberalism, globalization and capital, what might come to mind are the glitzy new cities of the gulf such as Dubai, but I argue that Cairo is part of a concatenated world like the rest of the African continent (Ferguson, 2006; Katz, 2001). The Cairo in which I do research is a city of increasing and solidifying horizontal structuring. The neoliberal state in 2015 Egypt is an assemblage of individuals, groups and institutions that urges further privatization and securitization.

The *kafala* system mentioned above makes it easy to both import and recruit new employees, but also places severe restrictions on workers despite their formal legality. As opposed to some countries in the Gulf and the Levant, Egyptian law includes no particular legislation to attract migrant workers such as the *kafala* system. Egypt is usually studied as a sending country, not a receiving one in the world of labor migration. In fact, Egyptian law places limiting restrictions on the process of hiring migrant labor. A number of laws and decrees, together with actual practice, make legal work permits from the Egyptian government inaccessible for workers lacking the experience, skill or education deemed necessary by the authorities. In a survey conducted in 2007 of 633 domestic workers in Cairo, the researchers found that eighty-five percent of the domestic workers who participated in the study worked without a legal permit (Jureidini, 2009). Working without a state issued working permit does not render these workers more precarious than their colleagues in the Gulf and the Levant who work with legal permits.

Places in the Arabic speaking world without the *kafala* system are interesting venues for new research in the region. Jureidini writes that,

while most work very long hours which restricts their freedom of movement, there were not the kind of strict regulations by employers that domestic workers were not allowed outside the house or apartment, as found in other Arab countries – ostensibly to safeguard against absconding and losing the upfront costs of procuring a migrant worker from their home country (ibid, 2009, 88).

Much of the literature on this topic is created about Lebanon or the Gulf, yet Egypt differs from these areas with regards to domestic work. From the onset it needs to be made clear that the large majority of domestic workers in Egypt are Egyptians (Mohamed, 2009). The second largest group is women who come from sub Saharan Africa, while those coming from South Asia, at times through agencies, constitute only a small portion of migrant domestic workers (Thomas, 2010). Some had come to Cairo through agents, while other has come on their own. In her dissertation, Amira Mohamed (2009) highlights the important conclusion that in the context of Cairo, workers from Egypt are in fact the lowest paid and largely worst treated with regards to working hours.

Domestic workers in Cairo find work through a number of channels, but the most preferred way, both for workers and employers, is when the worker has been referred through another employer or vice versa, preferably a close friend or relative. Many migrant workers in Cairo have extensive networks that are often established through religious institutions, such as churches or community centers. Those unable to find someone through their social network then rely on other channels. Recently, a number of Facebook groups and internet forums have popped up catering to the domestic work market. Social clubs and colonial establishments, who only permit members holding passports from other countries than Egypt, offer bulletin boards where madams refer previous maids. Some agents run agencies with a relatively public status and advertise for this online and in the newspapers while other operate just on a word of mouth basis. Last, as I will elaborate further below in the fieldwork section of chapter, a few NGOs help match workers with potential employers.

The words used to refer to domestic workers in Cairene Arabic are either *sheghela* or *khadema*. The root of word *sheghela*, — *sheghel*— refers to the word for *a worker* and the added a sound makes the word feminine. The word *khadema* means servant and is related to the word *khedma* which means service. A number of upper class Cairenes switch effortlessly and frequently between English and Arabic, and this meant that many of the people I talked to simply referred to the workers as maids, or simply, workers. The employer is usually re-

ferred to as Madam (with a slight French twist). As in many other locations, the men of the household are not particularly thought about as employers, although they are often the ones who pay the salaries. This means that it is usually the madam who is left in charge of managing the domestic and has the everyday responsibility to communicate with and manage the worker.

Conceptual Framework

A recent report from the World Bank reported that one in seven people are migrant workers (World Bank, 2014). Many of these people, perhaps the majority, live between, on the fringes, or outside the realm of the nation state. Yet, the concept of the modern nation state has affected the very way we do and think about social science. Commonly, we assume states as self-containing compartments where citizens live and belong. Within this social imaginary, subjects are workers and citizens, but migrants— particularly irregular migrants— become anomalies whose existence is often rendered unintelligible. In this landscape based on “sedentary metaphysics, refugees fall into the narrow cracks between borders, between societies and between cultures. They effectively disappear into the liminal world of the aberrant where they are depicted as impure, immoral, terroristic and criminal in a ‘pathologization of uprootedness’” (Shami, 1996, 7). Not possessing citizenship, or being in country without a legal permit, usually means not having rights since rights are given by and governed through the vehicle of the state. Despite their liminal position within a world of nation states, migrants do not constitute an insignificant group that can be pushed towards the margins of social science. In fact, they constitute an immense number of subjects whose very existence highlights and underlines the oftentimes-invisible contradictions at the heart of a neoliberal system compartmentalized into nation states (Malkki, 1995).

In this context, regular and irregular migrants are often legally denied their very humanity (Agamben, 1998). Agamben (1998, 2005) argues that one of the essential foundations of the modern state, as well as several other forms of territorial sovereignty, rests on its ability to exclude a number of individuals. The sovereign state has the ability to expel people to the ‘state of exception’, where they remain as ‘bare life,’ or in his terminology, *homo sacer*. They seemingly live outside the political life of law. The sovereign of the state is theorized to be both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the law because he has the ability to make exceptions to it. As ‘bare life’ persons are reduced to simple biological beings and are placed outside the sphere of politics with little, or no, influence (ibid).

My project is inspired by Veena Das's critique of how some of Giorgio Agamben's concepts have come to be understood as if some communities and individuals do not inhabit political subjectivities. When studying a poor community in Delhi, Das (2011) writes 'against' Agamben's theory on bare life. As important as Agamben's theories are in theorizing and highlighting a fundamental contradiction with regards to contemporary sovereignty, they are often read to mean that migrants, in Agambenian language *homo sacer*, remain de-politicized due to their precarious lives vis-a-vis national and international law. But, Agamben's thesis has been misunderstood. He does not claim that those rendered as bare life are non-political, merely that the sovereign considers them so. However, he urges us to look just there, at bare life, to find the core of the political as contemporaneous migrancy uncovers the flawed paradoxes of our current ways of organizing society (Abourahme, 2015)

Although capital claims to organize itself according to a so-called "free market", states' borders are in fact imperative to the creation of capital in our neoliberal present. Most importantly, borders and walls have a productive function for capital, by way of "lines" that create various regimes of inclusion and exclusion that generate capital (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Brown, whose focus is on the global construction of walls, claims that these do not really "work", in that they rarely resolve conflicts, but rather function theatrically (Brown, 2010, 25) and performatively, and hence maintain what Heidegger called a 'reassuring world picture' (ibid). This world picture has two effects— it makes those inside the walls maintain a certain feeling of safety, while simultaneously justifying a continuous supply of inexpensive labor.

Current immigration regimes makes it possible to hire labor from outside of the state but pay workers less due to their status as being non-citizens. Furthermore, as will become clear in this thesis, differences based on nationality tends to reach beyond the realm of law and become part of our social imaginary. Neoliberalism perpetually produces excess— both excess population and excess non-human waste (Yates, 2011). It is particularly this excess, or waste, population — the refugees, irregular migrants and slum dwellers — that labor under the hardest of conditions in a legal and socially understood hierarchy of labor.

The majority of the workers portrayed in this thesis labor and live outside the auspices of Egyptian and international law because they work and stay in the country without legal permits. But, can my interlocutors not navigate, transform and circumvent the world they live in simply because they are found in the bottom section of this hierarchy and in the crevices between state borders? Indeed, the migrant domestic worker may easily be rendered as waste since the laws in neither the 'host', nor 'supplying state' usually 'protect' her. These circum-

stances often arise because it is in the economic interest of elites in both countries. The ‘host state’ benefits from cheap labor, while the ‘supplying state’ benefits from the inflow of foreign capital through remittances sent home by workers abroad (Ong, 2006& Silvey, 2004).

But although migrants might often be denied a legal status that grants them legally defined humanity, it does not mean they do not inhabit political subjectivities. Papadopoulos (2008) writes:

To speak of the ‘autonomy of migration’ is to understand migration as a social and political movement in the literal sense of the words, not as a mere response to economic and social malaise (Jessop and Sum, 2006). When migrants become illegal they are commonly conceived as people forced to respond to social or economic necessities, not as active constructors of the realities they find themselves in or of the realities they create when they move (202).

While the migrants in this thesis might easily be conceived as if simply forced by their circumstances to move to Cairo and work as domestic workers, none of the workers I spoke to actually saw their world through such a monochromatic lens and the danger is that they easily become interpreted in a neoliberal present as a singular body, that of bare life.

Literature on migrant domestic labor, particularly in the Arabic speaking region, often lacks focus on working practices and the politicization of these. This thesis is a challenge to the depoliticization of work. Instead, I wish to highlight the ways in which the labor of my interlocutors is ascribed particular value in a system where nationality and gender is the determinant factor, but also the ways in which they as workers navigate this in their everyday life. It is through this navigation, that unconventional forms of labor politics are made visible and thus workers subjectivities become political.

Although migrants are often deemed to be without rights, their power lies in their *labor force*; living labor in the form of migrants are of great importance to production inside borders of all countries (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). Guitierrez-Rodrigues (2010) asserts that migrant domestics have more power than the paradigm of bare life allows. She contends that the women in her own study “demonstrate their capacity to evolve and act beyond the technologies of control and governance imposed on their bodies and through their capacity to be affective” (7). Thus she describes the labor of the domestic worker as affective labor and is this way able to see the domestic worker’s labor force as unbound affect, not only as bare life.

It is through the category of work, I also pry open that which is shut close in a reading of migrants as simply as waste or bare life. This thesis is built around Marx’s idea that in or-

der to understand the exploitive nature of current laboring practices, we have to shift the angle from where we pose questions. In other words, I do not ask questions about migrant domestic work from the perspective of the market, the state or law, but instead from where value is produced, through laboring practices (Weeks, 2011). As an outcome, this thesis can be read as an attempt to deconstruct the idea of a self-regulating, objective market.

It will be clear from the very beginning of this thesis that a number of my interlocutors are legally characterized as refugees. Yet, certain parts of their “refugee-ness” falls outside the scope of this thesis, as I rarely focus on the reasons for migration, but instead remain interested in the everyday present life of these subjects. Modernity has always been about the future; about the quest for arrival at that perceivably perfect place. Although we never seem to reach that place, it has shaped much of the current thinking about the social. Too often, legal rights are our objects of desire and labor politics in the present gets concealed. How do we break with this continued study of what may be or should be? In order to move beyond this hegemonic paradigm we should perhaps not look towards that past or the future — but rather at the present (Lury, C, & Wakeford, N, 2012). I discovered in my field that this present is easiest detected in everyday life because it can be found outside the event that easily gets rendered as a singular experience. And I use the idea of assemblage because it is “a resource with which to address in analysis and writing the modernist problem of the heterogeneous within the ephemeral” (Marcus, 2006).

Neoliberalism and late capitalism remain two key words that resonate throughout this thesis. Under the regime of neoliberalism, capital and its ideologies have become all encompassing, but not homogenous (Hardt & Negri, 2000). The ideologies and logic of capital configures space, time and the subjects who operate within these in numerous ways, but always vis-à-vis capital. Katz (2005) describes the process of subjectification in neoliberalism: "As professionalization proceeds, a growing number of community-based "partners", many of whom came to this role as grassroots activists, are formally trained, enter degree programs, or otherwise acquire specialized knowledge and skills in more structured and credentialized settings" (2005, 624). In these atmospheric conditions, Constable (2009) argues “intimate and personal relations— especially those that are linked to households and domestic units, the primary units associated with reproductive labor— are increasingly and evermore explicitly commodities” (50). Workers are urged to manage their affects and their intimate experiences in increasingly standardized ways, and to a growing extent, housework and sex work is managed according to the logic of capital.

Yet, “political theorists tend to be more interested in our lives as citizens and non-citizens, legal subjects and bearers of rights, consumers and spectators, religious devotees and family members, than in our daily lives as workers” (Weeks, 2011, 2). Weeks, drawing on Engels (2010), considers this an outcome of "privatization" of work, which has been contingent on the development of private property. She argues that, "we seem to have a hard time grasping the power relations of both work and family systematically; we often experience and imagine the employment relation like the marriage relation not as a social institution but as a unique relationship” (Weeks, 2011, 2). In the same way, exemplified in the human rights and media discourse, difficulties and injustices related to migrant domestic labor, is not connected to an overall system of waged work in a world of states and private property, but simply on the injustices internal to it.

Currently, and throughout various points in time, capital relies, and has relied, on various constructed categories to produce itself, such as *the native*, *the woman* and *the black*. In other words, capital needs a constant supply of de- and under-valued labor in order to extract surplus value from worker’s labor. While these categories are at times contested, the category of the nation-state (together with its subject- the citizen), seems to be particularly tenacious.

For an employer, it is not just a matter of hiring masculine and feminine workers and putting them to work, but of actively managing workers' gendered identities and relationships. Exploitable subjects are not just found; they are [...] made at the point of production. (Weeks, 2011, 20-21)

In other words, the labor process is a process of subjectification. We do not simply enter the workplace pre-fabricated as women or people of color, but these distinctions are given meaning through the practice of work.

Although labor is often construed as 'apolitical', the workplace is a highly political space because work is that practice where our political subjectivities are not only made visible, but actually produced. It is a place where gender, race and ethnicity are created, as well as performed. In this thesis I endlessly speak of social categories, however, the most important lesson I have taken away from the study of gender is how difficult it is to talk of injustice, while at the same time being careful not to re-inscribe hegemonic discourses about fixed essences of social categories. On the one hand I want to highlight how those portrayed as belonging to certain categories experience exploitation. On the other hand, I understand that I can easily freeze this methodically catalogued universe in place by writing about it. I therefore deliberately do not construe social categories as static containers of subjects; in-

stead, this thesis can be read as a snapshot of the processes in which subjects become classes, gendered and racialized. Essentially, this text is an attempt to orientate writing towards processes instead of categories. The ever changing, perpetual motion and mutation of subjects pose particular challenges to the methodology practiced throughout my analysis.

Both the political left and right can be criticized for their obsession with what Das (2007) calls *the event*. She writes, “Given that there is a certain air of obviousness with which notions of the everyday and of voice are often spoken of in anthropological writing, I have been amazed at how difficult I found it to speak of these matters” (6). I insist that the workers I met in my field are both typical, yet particular. How can I speak, and worse, try to argue, for this somewhat contradictory statement? In order to find the emergent and elusive construction and reconstruction of migrant workers subjectivities, I contend that we cannot contemplate only the politics of the state apparatus, celebrated or mourned events, but rather look into the fissures between these— in the expansive everyday. In other words, it is through the study of the everyday that it becomes clear how ‘lines of flight’ emerges out of the mundane and habitual and these lines stretch, entangle and interweave as assemblages. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

Methods and Fieldwork

This project has taken a year to complete. I began interviewing workers in the summer of 2014. A majority of the interviews this thesis is based on were facilitated through what I refer to as the placement office throughout this text. Its management helped me find interviewees as well as letting me observe their placement process. I refer to this location as a placement office because it is clearly different from many of the other agencies operating in the city. While a number of agencies are business ventures designed to profit on bringing workers to Egypt and placing them in homes, the placement office is part of a larger NGO that caters to Cairo’s considerable refugee population. It acts as a meeting place between refugees looking for domestic work, and families who look for skilled, but relatively inexpensive domestic workers. It should perhaps be mentioned that the office is located in a church – yet, to the best of my knowledge; this plays no part in the employee selection- process. However, it does happen that employers request particular religious backgrounds of their workers.

The office is located in the basement of an adjoining building to the church. While the church is spacious and bright, the office is gloomy and small. It consists of a small waiting room and a waiting room. The waiting room is filled with colorful outdoor plastic chairs for waiting workers, and cubicles divide the office where the staff spends their time. The of-

office also distributes food to newly arrived refugees until they settle in to the city and find work. The distribution days are the busiest days, and people lining up to receive their bi-weekly ration of food. In the fall of 2014 I spend a number of days at the placement office. I began by getting to know the staff and would simply linger around the office and talk to people trying to make myself seem an ordinary part of the environment. My two main interlocutors at the office were Sara and Joyce. Sara is an Egyptian woman in her thirties who is in charge of registering employers that are looking for workers and setting up interviews with them. Joyce is a middle-aged woman from South Sudan who is in charge of registering new workers in the office's database. They have both worked together for a number of years and seem to function well together despite rumors that Sara tends to side with employers and Joyce with employees during disputes.

I also conducted interviews with workers I met other places and through different channels than at the placement office; I met people through friends and family, but tried to the best of my ability to not include anyone in my immediate social circle. All in all, I carried out twenty-five semi-structured interviews. Ten of these interviews were with workers, nine with employers, and six interviews were with others in the field. Four of those interviewed were with people working with the placement of domestic workers, while two were scholars working specifically in the field of labor and migration. The internet was also a source of information for me. I searched both web pages for various placement agencies as well as Facebook groups. One Facebook group was of particular help for as members, mostly employers, used it as an open forum to discuss their discontents about pricing and the expectations they had of the workers. Quite interestingly, several employers would utter comments on this page that were more "extreme" than those I heard during interviews.

I chose these subjects as my main interlocutors because these persons, mostly from other African countries are always talked about only as refugees and have consequently been largely overlooked as workers despite of the fact that thousands perform care work in Cairo's many homes. Seeing that much of the literature worldwide is focused on the Filipina migrant worker I wanted to study another group. Hence, my initial plan was to only focus on workers from other African countries working in Cairo, but I was very soon met by the fact that the work market is organized according to nationalities. Therefore, I decided to expand my research slightly to include workers from other countries as well and I started interviewing them. Soon however, I realized that I could not speak of the domestic care market in Cairo without also interviewing employers since they have the upper hand power-wise in this market.

In an ideal world, I would have conducted fieldwork in a home/workplace for an extended amount of time. However, this would put a number of my interlocutors in a compromised situation since there is such a difference in the power relationships between workers and the employers. Touching upon the same topic and the ethical issues surrounding his work, De Genova (2002) writes, “In the case of undocumented migrants, the ethnographic documentation and exhibition of such practices can have quite practical consequences and entail certain ethical quandaries and strategic risks at the levels of both research practice and representation” (422). This particular problematics posed certain issues as I navigated throughout the field. Although I was offered it, I did for example avoid talking to agents mostly because of safety reasons, both my own as well as the workers. Furthermore, studying domestic work means prying into people’s intimate spaces.

Doing fieldwork seems to be a perpetual balancing act as you perhaps have particular questions about a particular issue, while at the same time you want to allow for novel thoughts, ideas and proposition to emerge and get to be articulated. During the the in-depth interviews, I focused both on my interlocutors’ life and work in the employer’s home, but also what happen ‘outside’ work. That made it easier for to get a sense — almost at an energetic level — of the life- world and subject formation of those I met.

This project was not structured along the conventional ethnographic framework of a period of fieldwork, and then a disengagement with the field for the “write up”. Although the interviews gave me access to particular insights and more cohesive stories, I soon came to accept that I was saturated my field to the point theses constructed lines became diffuse and at times vanished completely. I would have engaging conversations about domestic work, gender and nationality in taxis or at the supermarket. Insights would often occur to me at the strangest of times, like when I was cooking or sleeping (the idea for this paragraph came when I was driving) and I would hurry to note down the idea. I would go home and write and add it to the body of work I already had. The result of this process was I never really “exited” the field.

I initially have spent much time cultivating guilt over the very particular way in which I worked with this project. That was perhaps why it felt so liberating when I discovered these sentences by two authors who came to influence much of my thinking. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describes their process of writing, “We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs. Each morning we would wake up, and each of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there” (24). This methodology runs counter to much of conventional wisdom within the social sci-

ences where we are often taught to decide on a whole, one singular argument, before we start writing and. Instead I slowly watched a larger argument arise out of smaller components as they were assembled.

Chapter Outlines

In the succeeding chapters I show the many ways in which the laboring lives of workers I met are both particular and exceptional, but also typical of our neoliberal present. In the second chapter, I delineate how capital and the state often rely on a rhetoric of migrant domestics as modern day slaves in order to explain the very precarious nature of their laboring everyday lives. Admittedly, it is indeed unreasonable to simply compare a migrant domestic worker in Cairo with a white collar worker in another location, yet I contend that that the workers I encountered in Cairo share certain characteristics with other waged workers in the way they attempt to discipline the self through particular governmental technologies typical of our neoliberal present. Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, I argue that the subjectivities of these workers, albeit different, can still be located within our neoliberal present— not in a distant past marked by slavery.

In the third chapter, I look at the way in which the various subjectivities of workers are formed and shaped by a neoliberal market. Why is it that certain laboring bodies are more valuable than others? Here, I could easily surrender to simply rely on the too-often iterated discourse of supply and demand. But, rather than arguing that this neoliberal market is objective, unavoidable and external to my subjects, I deconstruct the idea of the market. I show how this market that my interlocutors speak of is created through encounters in the everyday, not in some distant and aloft place. In fact, the domestic care market in Cairo is assembled around a number of constructed social categories, such as gender and nationality. In accordance with Marx's view that the value of labor is a 'social hieroglyph', I convey how the value of my interlocutors' work is measured and created according to these categories through everyday encounters and conversations, not through a self regulating and intelligent market.

In the fourth chapter I trace the lines of flight that take place in the laboring lives of many migrant domestic workers in Cairo. Labor protests and organized labor unions, can at best remain a mere day-dream among migrant domestic workers in Cairo since most of these workers are irregular migrants who perform precarious labor in the privacy of their employers' homes. Yet, instead of perpetually wandering towards the future mirage that is organized labor, I instead suggest to look at the practices that workers presently deploy in order to navigate their everyday life. In particular, I describe how workers perpetually change jobs and

thus dissolve the assemblage that is their employers home. Migrant workers are workers “within while yet against capital” (De Genova, 2009, 461). In the final chapter, I tie up the strings of what I previously argued by urging us to gaze beyond common objects of emancipatory desire such as legal rights and the state.

Chapter Two:

“They are here to work:” becoming a neoliberal worker

Introduction

This thesis is a snapshot of a Cairo in the midst of *becoming*; it is not about fixed categories and locations, but about processes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By investigating processes of *becoming* instead of subjects that *are*, I strive to relate and depict subjectivities that are not permanent, stable, or shaped by static relationships; instead, I hope to relay the fluidity of the present as well as past historical moments. Bearing this in mind, this section should not be read as a nostalgic longing for a distant and romantic past. Neither should it be read as a plea to bring migrant domestic workers into the warm embrace of modern law. Instead, I hope, through narrating the spatial and temporal changes in the organization of labor relations in Cairo, we are better positioned to interrogate the laboring lives of the present.

Our current historical moment— a neoliberal present— holds within itself a number of contradictions, but this chapter will primarily delineate and discuss the contradictions between a rhetoric that refers to migrant domestic workers in the region as *modern day slaves*, and the everyday lived experience of these workers. The unfair treatment of migrant workers is commonly framed in a language of individual abuse and presumed conditions of slavery. This rhetoric makes injustices appear as if exploitation and injustices faced by workers belong to a bygone era of a different governmentality, and that these laboring relationships are simply lagging behind, but that when they eventually “catch up” the exploitation and injustice will evaporate. Although often narrated as slaves in the media and by human rights NGOs, I will argue that a number of laboring subjectivities I encountered throughout Cairo are dissimilar to slaves. Hence, although seemingly equivalent to previous times, relationships of domestic labor in Cairo are incorporated in a neoliberal present. This present is decidedly different from the past, and the governmentality of migrant domestics labor gets to be articulated in particular ways, some of which are described in this chapter. Consequently, this particular location in the Arabic speaking region is not an exception in the context of global labor processes, but actually the norm.

Modern slaves

Migrant domestic work as a topic, does not suffer from being underreported in the Arabic speaking region. The mistreatment and abuse of domestic workers in this area usually

referred to in the media and policy oriented publications as the Middle East, makes headlines both locally and globally. Titles such as “ Maids Made Into Slaves in the Middle East” (En-sor, 2010), “Gulf Maids in Slavery to a Reign of Terror in Gulf Homes” and “Shameful and Striking: Slavery is Alive and Beating in the Middle East”(Al-Bawaba, 2013) are not un-common. Countries, ethnicities and religions are often conflated in these media reports. In these reports, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon becomes ‘The Middle East’ while state sanctioned Hanbali jurisprudence turns into Islamic law. In a region that already struggles with negative publicity, the effect is a simplification of a complex regional and global division of labor that renders the Arabic speaking region as an exception to a historical moment in which it is actually quite typical. An example of this exception-making can be seen in how the sponsorship laws — *kafala* laws— that are part of the legal order in states such as Lebanon, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, are read as global anomalies despite their similarity with so-called Au Pair laws in Europe.

A number of hard working activists have been struggling against the often deplorable conditions of labor domestic workers are subjected to. In mid-2011 *The International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 and Recommendation No. 201 Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers* was adopted. As an addendum to the long awaited convention, director general Juan Somavia writes that, “The Convention and Recommendation are founded on the fundamental premise that domestic workers are neither “servants”, nor “members of the family” nor second-class workers” (Somavia, preface, 2011). Somavia’s aim seems noble as he seeks to detach domestic work from a historical context shaped by bondage and servitude. Human Rights researcher Nisha Varia celebrates this new convention as a victory against what she sees as modern day slavery:

Governments may never be able to count the number of women and girls who escape getting trapped into domestic servitude due to better labor standards. But by closing gaps in legal protections and enforcement, they will no longer be providing employers the tacit permission and leeway that has allowed exploitation of domestic workers to flourish. (Varia, 2012)

In the ‘slave rhetoric’ utilized by the media and seemingly supported by Vaira and Somavia it sounds as if the difficulties, the abuse and the unfairness met in the everyday of numerous migrant domestic workers belong to a bygone era; that all that is needed is to bring these workers into the enlightened and just sphere of international law in the contemporary.

In the current social imaginary, slavery is understood as previous or past form of class relations. Instead of rendering these workers as slaves belonging to the past, I instead argue in

this chapter that these workers are an integral part of the neoliberal project and I show this through worker's application of everyday 'technologies of the self' and through the ways in which the workers get to be interpolated in the domestic work market in Cairo. Aiwha Ong (2006) argues that, "populations that are governed by neoliberal technologies are dependent on others who are excluded from neoliberal considerations" (ibid, 4). I instead want to argue that they are not excluded from neoliberal considerations, but they are in fact part and parcel of a neoliberal present that subsumes certain forms of technologies of governing workers, while leaving others behind.

The Cairo In-Between

There is scant historically oriented literature produced on slavery and other forms of servitude in the Egyptian environment. Luckily Jurieidini (2009) carried out an oral-history project in Lebanon on the topic, and his paper gives us a rare glimpse into the laboring relationships of pre-civil war Lebanon which can also help us with insights into Egypt's past. Jurieidini describes a social arrangement where young girls were 'brought in' to upper class households. They were typically not paid in cash, but rather considered "fictive kin" (ibid, 75). He also describes how his informants would emphasize "the sometimes long and stringent process of training to ensure that the girl maid perform[ed] all her tasks with precision and according to the nuances of her employer's requirements" (ibid, 75). Hence, these young girls, some only seven years old, came into the home without much previous experience of how to manage a household. Interestingly, Jurieidini detects a shift during the civil war from employing young Lebanese girls, to employing women from Asian and African countries.

Although the two locations are not identical, a similar modality of labor occurred in Cairo where it was recently common practice, and still prevails to certain degree, among relatively wealthy urban households to bring a young girl from outside of the city to work in someone's house (Ahmed & Jureidini, 2009). The male head of the urban household would travel to the countryside, often his ancestral village, to ask around if any of the families nearby included a young girl that could work in their city-home. These girls would come to work and live in the urban household as early an age of seven or eight years. They personally did not receive a salary except food and shelter, but the labor performed by the young girls was paid and the payment was made out to the girls' fathers on a monthly or annual basis. The family that took in the girl would usually take on the

responsibility to find a suitable husband for the young woman and would help set up the couple in a new house. Hagar, a woman in her seventies recounted:

When I was growing up and my own children were young we just brought young girls from the village to Cairo to work in our house. They usually came when they were around eight to ten years old and stayed to the time when their father would tell us that he had found a husband for her. When he did, we started buying things for her house to prepare her for the marriage [it is common practice in Egypt that a girl's dowry consists of items for the house such as appliances and furniture]. They were always treated as if they were part of the family (Personal communication June, 2015).

That the young workers were treated as part of the family was mentioned repeatedly during conversations. In fact, they were often not even considered as workers during the initial duration of their stay with the family, but rather someone to play with the household's children or babies.

When she was young and growing up in the Cairo neighborhood Mounira, Manar, a woman now in her early nineties, loved her handmaiden Aziza, who she remembers to this day. She describes how they used to play together and gossip. Yet, despite apparent nostalgia on Manar's part, it becomes clear that Aziza was in fact a worker and not simply a friend because she began early to observe the household's older maids in order to learn how to clean, cook and babysit. Manar's family, like a multitude of other urban dwelling families, appreciated employing young and inexperienced workers because they came as blank slates and were therefore easier to train according to the needs and wants of the family. It would take years to train and produce a worker, but the result was often a skilled and docile worker tailor made for a particular context.

Me: But, what happened when someone did not do what you wanted them to, were slow or difficult? Did you fire them?

Manar: No, no we could not do that. If we did not like a girl, she would stay with us for a while longer until her father would come and get her to visit her family. Then we would just never ask after her again (Personal communication, June 2015).

Hence, an employer did not frequently hire and fire these young maids. Instead, the relationships and governmentality of labor were seeped in implicitly understood, yet particular modes of labor organization. The worker would then stay with that family for years and habitually keep contact and perform smaller jobs for them throughout life. For instance, Rania, a young mother of thirty living in the Cairene suburb of Sheikh Zayed told

me that her cook, who travels all the way from Fayyoun (an oasis outside of Cairo) once per week to cook for her and her family began as a chamber maid in employment for her mother when she was ten, and has worked for her in various ways for over fifty years.

Now, bordering on senile, Manar initiates daily discussions with family members because she refuses to treat her maid according to what her daughter, in her early sixties, considers decently. Her daughter tries to tell her mother that times have changed, but have they? When I asked Hagar why she did not employ young girls from the countryside anymore she answered that:

the phenomena just disappeared [pause] you know it happened with Nasser. He built schools and made schools free. Nobody wanted to send their daughter to work anymore, and it became shameful to send your daughter away to work [...] Nasser told us we should stop calling them servants and instead call them workers (Personal communication June, 2015).

As previously mentioned, Jureidini describes how a shift occurred in labor relations in Lebanon around the Lebanese civil war, and although a war did not ravage Cairo in the same time period, a similar change is presently occurring within the city. The practice of bringing rural girls to work as domestics in the urban is slowly disappearing in the midst of a reconfiguration where certain practices are embraced in a neoliberal present, while other practices are left behind. The reconfiguration is engendered by a perceived emancipation of poor women and greater wish for effectiveness in wealthy urban households in Cairo.

If we contrast the forms of laboring lives, alluded to above, with that of the present migrant domestic, the contrast is sometimes blurred and other times quite stark. Heba, an employer in her thirties and a mother of two small children personally works in a large corporation. When I met with her, Heba had fired three workers during the last two months because she believed they did not do a good enough job. When I enquired about the phrase ‘a good job’ Heba explained that she works at the Cairo branch of an international corporation. Surrounded by what she considers professional employees, she expects the same professionalism when she returns home. She informed me she works in the daytime, and has little interest in hiring someone who needs extensive training. I met Heba right after she had called the agent who had placed the worker in her house and asked him to come because she wanted to ‘return’ the worker he had brought her. She fired her because she had tried to hit Heba’s daughter, “I found her trying to hit my daughter. Of course I asked her what she was doing. She said that she was hitting her because my daughter hit her first” (Personal communication, May 2015). Heba explains that she is astounded that someone in ‘this day and age’ uses cor-

poral punishment in child rearing, and explains that it is demanding to find a worker that already knows how to perform tasks the way she wants, and is what she considers 'gentle'.

That we find ourselves in the midst of a shift in the processes related to paid domestic work becomes visible in the very language deployed by employers. When I ask employers aged around 50 years or above to talk about their domestic worker, they usually refer to them as servants. However, among the younger generation, you are likely to hear designations such as, 'the woman that helps my mom', or simply, 'worker'. Subjectivities such as servants or slaves do not belong in the social imaginary of the modern liberal, and through my research it became apparent that the residents of a household who considered themselves 'liberal' and 'modern' were likely to feel incredibly uncomfortable with the idea of having servants. My argument is that in Cairo we are somewhere in-between two particular modes of labor. However, in their representative forms, here referred to as servants and workers, these are purely theoretical distinctions not actual configurations of labor; they are illusory beginning and end points. These are articulated in order to explain the multiple processes that occur in Cairo at present where certain long-standing practices are maintained at present while others are left behind.

Two advertisements from an online forum for expatriates in Cairo went as follows:

10-14 Young girl for a 4 persons family at Zayed City, Egypt, preferably from Aswan, Luxor, Nuba, Fayoum. Skills. Smart, clever, dynamic...
Khadijah in Aswan.

Please call Joseph today to hire maids both stay in or out from Africa and Asia. Recruitment fee / Commission: only half the first month salary of the stay in maid. Commuting African maid: \$ 200.00. You will be glad that you did. Thanks

These two advertisements posted on an online forum (10th November 2014) first appear as examples of two very distinct forms of organizing labor. In the first ad a family living in a newly constructed area of a rich Cairo suburb is searching for a young and mendable girl from rural Egypt. The second one omits an aroma of the elusive, but often referred to by my interlocutors, 'modern' with its predetermined salary and the commuting maid. The simple question to pose in this context is, which relationships around labor are we moving away from, and what we are moving towards? Such a project would seek to stabilize and render comprehensible these two adverts as two distinct ways of laboring in the world. Although

certainly more tangled and obscure I want to narrate the in-between, or the ever-moving becoming, of workers.

Coming to Cairo Today

Jessica's cousin had already lived in Cairo for several years before she suggested that Jessica should join her. Jessica, a seamstress and mother of a little girl, was born and grew up in Accra, the capital of Ghana. Jessica's cousin told her that she could earn a very high salary in the Egyptian capital and that she knew people that would help her arrange for a tourist visa. Jessica double-checked with her cousin that she would find a job sewing and her cousin told her that of course she would easily be employed in a factory manufacturing clothes. One day, Jessica found herself on a plane to Cairo and when she arrived, her cousin picked her up. Instead of taking her to a factory, she told her that, unfortunately the job as a seamstress had fallen through. However, she did have another job waiting for her so that she could pay back the three thousand dollars she now owed her, and the other middlemen who helped her get there. Soon after, her cousin took her to a house in Alexandria where she would care for an older couple whose children were living abroad. Is Jessica's story a story of family betrayal? Yes, it might be. However, I suggest that we should look behind the immediate tragedy at the individual level.

This story not only completely collides with the common trope of the human trafficker as dark men belonging to a mafia who subsist on smuggling humans. In this story the so-called 'human trafficker' who brought Jessica to Egypt was her own cousin, who she remains friends with to this day. Furthermore, Jessica tells me that most of the Ghanaian women she has gotten to know have been through the office of James. According to human rights literature, one might refer to James as a human smuggler as his job is to illegally bring women into Egypt. Jessica tells me that he oftentimes promises them other jobs than being maids, but when they arrive, it turns out they have to again work as maids. However, all of Jessica's friends frequent James's office because he also sells cheap international phone cards and can send money home for a small fee.

Much of the trafficking and security discourse conceals the feminization of labor under the cloak of security, and thus fails to highlight how neoliberal capital relies on gendered subjectivities and ideas as ways to earn money. I would argue instead that Jessica's subjectivity as a worker forms her according to neoliberal principles and she forms herself according

to this logic. In this system, workers and employers operate on what is deemed and presented as a free market, where capital is traded for labor, and also across borders. However, after decades of neoliberal reform, the Egyptian state, like many others, is now reduced to a shell. This shell is a security state seeped in an excessive rhetoric about the need for security. This apparent need for security is executed both in the everyday of Cairene inhabitants as well as at Egypt's borders. Hence, there is a screaming contradiction between increasingly strict border control and the state's wish to enter a free market economy.

The outcome is that labor does not flow freely between African states. In order for someone to issue a visa for Jessica, her cousin has to use part of the 3000 US dollars to pay off her interlocutors that she knows from her embassy. These interlocutors then pay their own interlocutors employed in the Egyptian state. When Jessica arrives, she has to register at the UNHCR in order to legally remain in the country for an extended period of time, but she is still in the city to work. Jessica's move to the city is both different, but also similar to Manar's maid, Aziza's, earlier trip to Cairo.

Becoming a domestic worker in Cairo: Shaping the neoliberal subject

The question of power can be viewed through a lens that highlights the ways in which we become subjects (Foucault, 1983). Weeks (2011) argues that, "Work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects. In other words, the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens, and responsible family members." (8). Work and home are places where we become subjects and this applies to both the employers and the workers I have talked to as a part of this study. The question that arises is what kind of subjects we become in different temporal and spatial contexts. What is involved in the "neoliberal subject making" of doing domestic work in Cairo? How do subjects come to be interpellated in a neoliberal governmentality?

The global story of migrant domestics in our neoliberal present is often a story that casts the Filipina or Indonesian young worker as the main character. The governments of these countries are heavily implicated in the process of sending the young women. For instance, in 2006 former president Gloria Arroyo the co-called "supermaid program" which would train young women to become skilled, efficient and service orientated through state run training courses (Brygo, 2011). Maids are trained at Philippine locations, such as the state run Housemaids Academy in Manila, in caring for an 'ultramodern house' with all the appliances, cleaning products and tasks this requires. Although the Filipina worker is the described as

the quintessential migrant domestic, it does not mean she is the only one. Numerous migrants cross borders to work as domestic workers, and although their journey might look different, they are interpellated in a neoliberal present.

Sumaya was born in what is now South Sudan. She first arrived in Cairo in 2000 and worked as a domestic for an employer that helped her pay for a law degree at Cairo University. When she finished her degree, and the employer needed to leave the country, Sumaya went back to Sudan to look for work. She was happy to be reunited with her loved ones in Juba. She worked, got married and gave birth to a baby boy. A recent motorcycle accident left her husband unable to work. This, together with the discovery that her baby needed medical treatment for a severe allergy, made Sumaya decide to return to Cairo and look for domestic work. Sumaya is now the main provider of her family and regularly sends money home to Juba.

Indeed, the relationships around labor changed, and in the context of Cairo we are thus urged to ask, how is Sumaya's reality somehow similar, yet drastically different to that of the young domestics Hagar and Manar spoke of? Sumaya is both a refugee and a worker; a typical subject of a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two. She is registered with the UNHCR in the city and works in order to support herself, her child, as well as family members in South Sudan. Those who apply for refugee status arrive in the city for a number of reasons and contact the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Once involved with the UNHCR they are usually given a 'yellow card', which means that they are in the process of applying for resettlement. All too often, individuals might hold a yellow card for years without moving onward in the system, the result being that Cairo becomes a 'final destination' for many who receive little or no assistance from the state or the non-profit NGO industry. Employment of refugees in Egypt is governed according to Law 137/1981 (Grabska and Al-Sharmani, 2009). This means that refugees have to go through the same process as other foreigners who seek work in the country. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to obtain a work permit since an employer has to prove that he or she cannot find an Egyptian national who can perform the same job. This, simultaneous with the fact that there are no refugee camps in the country, means that a majority of refugees go to urban centers where they find work in larger cities where they, like most Egyptians, work without legal permits (ibid, 2009; Wahba, 2011).

The placement office where I met Sumaya operates within what has been called the 'informal economy'. I will complicate the concept of an 'informal economy' further in the fourth chapter of this thesis, but for now it should suffice to say that the word informal in this

context is problematic, as workers go through either a so-called cleaning exam or a cleaning course to show that they can perform care and domestic work in modern Cairene households. After they pass through either of these two paths, their personal data is then added to the office's database. When the office finds a suitable match between employer and employee, they then contact both parties for an interview. If the one who is looking for a domestic likes the worker, both parties sign a standardized contract issued by the office. Thus, although the office helps workers that are not legally allowed to work according to Egyptian law, it still attempts to emulate the legal model typical of many of the maid agencies that now operate in the Levant and the Gulf countries.

The first time I meet Sumaya was on a warm September Saturday in 2014. This Saturday, like every other Saturday, the office organized a cleaning test to screen future workers. Sumaya, the examinee, and I were placed on chairs sitting in front of a shelf filled with cleaning products. The examiner, George, proceeded to ask about the purposes of the various products as well as pointing to different surfaces while asking Sumaya how she would clean them. He would for instance point to the wood floor of the church and Sumaya pointed to the bottle on the shelf that read Pledge (a soap suitable for wood surfaces). Luckily Sumaya already knew how to clean houses so she passed the test and did not need to attend the cleaning course. After Sumaya left the room I sat in on more exams. The test was always oral and the questions sometimes changes form between the different examinees, but it was relatively standardized. It thus becomes clear that this is the knowledge that you need to acquire in order to clean a modern-day house in Cairo. Furthermore, the test is one of the ways in which 'self-governing' and 'skilled domestic labor' is emphasized.

For those who contact the agency, but have no previous experience cleaning houses or fail the test that is held every Saturday, the placement office organizes a cleaning course that runs over a period of two weeks. The course is taught by George, the man who also conducts the test. The first few days consists of an introduction to cleaning. Students learn how to use various soaps for various surfaces, how to use appliances such as microwave ovens and washing machines and are given cues in how to behave in the houses they will work. After these introductory days, students are sent out to various apartments in the city where they work under supervision. Lastly, after two weeks they receive a diploma that states that they have completed the course and are then added to the database. During the ceremony the administration gives a short lecture that advises students on how to best behave in the households they will work. They are advised not to speak excessively on the phone during working hours, not to talk unnecessarily or loudly, not to argue with their employers and if, for any

reason, they encounter any issues or enters into a disagreement with their employer to contact the office before they leave their job. They are also informed of their rights as workers: an eight hour workday, the freedom to move around and leave after the resignation period, and the fact that they only have specific tasks such as either babysitting, cleaning or cooking, but do not have to perform all three tasks.

Foucault (2012) taught us that the prison is not an exception to the present with regards to the link between power in society and its institutions. He theorized the vital link between prisons, schools and clinics, and showed how these are places where subjects internalize and also disseminate politics and power. Yet, the links between subjects and institutions are not always clear and explicit lines that can be easily recognized. Particularly, as power moves away from being disciplinary, it becomes diffuse, all encompassing and internalized (ibid). Ferguson and Gupta (2002) expand Foucault's concepts as they theorize transnational governmentality. Their theory describes a new modality of government that, like Foucault's, creates subjects that work "all by themselves" to bring about results through the transference of risk onto the "enterprising" the individual [...] and the "responsibilization" of subjects who are increasingly "empowered" to discipline themselves (ibid, 989). In their project this modality is not as clearly tied up with the state as it is for Foucault. Instead, the governmentality in which they describe is tied up to transnational institutions such as NGOs. I argue that a similar process occurs among migrant domestic workers in Cairo where workers shape subjectivities in accordance with demands of neoliberal capital., Through the work these workers perform; they shape and are being shaped into neoliberal self-governing skilled subjects. These are subjects who are "empowered" through skill and "responsibilization" yet disciplined (ibid, 989). Rodriguez (2010) argues that the migrant domestic in Europe is located in the intersection between modernity and coloniality. Thus, "Their working conditions in the private households recall feudal and colonial times, while they embody the exemplary worker of the "new economy" through their self-governing abilities as autonomous workers" (43).

In the imagination surrounding migrant domestics, the Filipina worker is already marked as the quintessential self-governing employee. The relationship one establishes with her is promoted as different from the one described by Hagar and Mana previously in this chapter. The relationship with the Filipina worker is advertised, as well as described by employers in Cairo, as not being based on personal knowledge or trust, but instead on her training and adoption of appropriate skills to govern herself in the household before she is even hired. Her employer does not discipline the ideal neoliberal maid; the maid disciplines herself. One of the reoccurring answers when asking why employers would rather employ Fili-

pina workers instead of Sudanese or Egyptians, was that, "you don't have to tell her what to do". Some then elaborated further by anecdotes of how Filipina workers would labor tirelessly and flawlessly without the need to be managed or disciplined. For instance, I was twice told that Filipina women even dust the dust of the leaves of plants without being asked.

Filipina employees themselves also take pride in their knowledge of how to manage a modern household. Anna, a Filipina woman in her forties, confirms this when she tells me that, "we know what to do" (personal communication, June 2014). I would argue that the knowledge she here refers to is part of what the placement office is trying to teach the refugees they refer. This argument becomes even more valid when we consider the fact that Filipino workers are the highest paid in the hierarchy of domestic work in Cairo. Thus, they are Sumaya's competition. Migrant domestic workers are shaped as neoliberal laboring subjects in a number of ways, but the structure of the market as with the Filipina as highest paid usually means that workers strive towards this. Some arrive pre-trained such as Anne, while others, such as Sumaya, try emulating the quintessential Filipina workers in the face of the market.

Thus, Sumaya's reality is drastically different from that of the young girls who arrived in Cairo earlier. Firstly, Sumaya has a salary, but she also has to rent an apartment and pay for medical help for her child. The previous madam she worked for would only pay her 1000le, which Sumaya confirms is not enough to cover rent, food and transportation. This is why Sumaya does not have furniture and sleeps on the floor with her baby boy. Secondly, Sumaya is being employed on a contract. This means that she may leave her job if she feels uncomfortable like in the case with her previous employer. However, it also means that she can get fired. Thus, put in 'neoliberal language' Sumaya can more easily 'explore and move around the labor market' and switch from one employer to another. The flip side of this coin is that she can more easily get fired as in the current context of domestic labor in Cairo it is easier to hire, but also fire.

Feminization of labor in neoliberalism

Indeed it does sound like a cliché line from a movie, yet you would be surprised by how many times you might hear the phrase, "It's so hard to find good help" when talking to residents of upscale Cairo neighborhoods. But, what does "good help" in this context mean? Interestingly, when I asked employers what was the most important quality they were looking for in a maid, they said *trust*; that they could trust a worker with their belongings and family

members without supervision. Almost all employers I encountered would express how they would rather employ a less efficient maid, but one who they could trust not to steal. However, as I argue in this section, the most common ‘solution’ is to hire feminized labor due to its assumed docility.

In fact, there is usually little preparation before a new maid arrives in a household. When she enters, a new person will be sharing intimate spaces with the family and the children might have a new caretaker. Throughout discussions, it continued to baffle me how employers again and again would to trust a new maid with their house and children. The obvious question became: how is trust established in the household between employers and employees? Workers are able to establish trust with their employers through particular forms of “marketing”. This marketing is what sets the value of the work and is closely tied up with socially understood values ascribed to particular genders and nationalities. In this section I delineate how the feminization of labor in our neoliberal present is important for establishment of trust in the household.

Interestingly, there was always an abundance of men seemingly loitering in the placement office who were looking for, but unable to find, employment. Sara, who worked with placing workers with employers, briefly explained this to me:

You know in Egypt, because of religion, it is a problem to have men work in the house. And when they [the employers] let men work there, it is only to clean because they know men cannot cook or babysit (personal communication, October 2014).

Thus, according to Sara, it is an explicit fact that these men might learn how to clean, but that they are unfit to make food or take care of children.

Several times I met an older man at the placement office who I assumed was in his sixties. He carried his age with a dignified grace, always looked immaculately and smartly dressed and spoke flawless English. Indeed, his looks also startled Sara. When she met him she asked, "May I help you with something? Are you looking for a worker?" but he answered, "I am here looking for work" (Personal communication, October 2014). A little taken aback, she requested him to sit down and asked him the office’s procedural intake-questions. When she asked what kind of work he was looking for, he replied that he could do any type of work. A few days went by and I saw him several times at the office. One day I asked him if they had found a job and he said "they don’t want me because of my age" (Personal communication, October 2014). I would argue that his age was not his only obstacle, since I had

several times earlier seen women his age— although not preferred by employers— find work in this industry that thrives on young female labor.

In a market thriving on young and feminized labor, it is quite difficult for the older man to compete. The construct of young women as a submissive social category is not a thing of the past left behind by neoliberalism, but remains flourishing and operational in the contemporary as neoliberalism has found ways of generating capital based on gendered subjectivities. In other words, “Capitalism has aimed, in general terms, to appropriate for itself polyvalence, multi-activity and the quality of female labour, exploiting thereby the experience brought by women which stems from their historic function in the realm of reproduction and domestic work” (Morini, 2007, 42). And, “In a broader sense, the feminization of the work process we are dealing with here is therefore indicative, on the one hand, of an exponential implementation of low-paid labour on global market” (Morini, 2007, 41).

During my interviews it became increasingly clear that the lives of my interlocutors were structured within a global order where a gendered division of labor means housework is understood as woman’s work. This was the experience among the younger interviewees as well as older subjects; women and men; employers and workers. But, it was somewhat concealed in upper class households by their ability to outsource care work and thus have women from outside of the household perform much of the care work at home. This outsourcing of domestic work to someone outside of the family or household relies upon a perpetual de- or under- valuation of housework work. Hence, the question that slowly crystalized was: how is value determined for the work performed by the workers in which I speak of in this thesis?

Feminists and the women’s movement in the 1970s made visible the important part reproductive work plays under all forms of economic arrangements. Reproductive work, previously confined to near invisibility in the shadows of the capitalist economy due to not producing commodities, was then emphasized as that mode of production which does not only reproduce new human beings, but also reproduces new workers (Della Costa & James, 1971). In other words, the extraction of the labor from these workers, although deemed as reproductive work, aids in the production of commodities that are sold for capital because reproductive work reproduces the very humans or workers that daily create commodities. The objective of wages for housework movement in the 1970s was to create a feminist initiative that was inspired by this new insight; it was to highlight the internal flaws in the capitalist system by showing how it depends on the exploitation of the labor-power of women working silently in millions of homes without taking this labor into account. Reproductive labor is still largely in many contexts, considered as something outside of capitalism. Nonetheless, reproductive

labor is in actuality that which lies beneath the entire capitalist system because it produces the actual worker (Federici, 1975).

When Federici famously spoke of wages for housework in 1975, she made an important contribution when she asserted that the value of work is affected by precisely what she speaks of, the devaluation of this specific form of work based on specific socially constructed and understood value of work performed by women. What Federici was challenging was how work performed in the home was excluded in the equation calculating the production of capital. Similarly today, the value produced through reproductive labor, would explode any current measurement of GDP as well as global flows of capital and make visible another contradiction in the economic system; how capital relies on the gendering and racialization of certain bodies to accumulate (Nagar et.al, 2002). Although the workers I met in Cairo were paid for the work they performed, this work remains de- and under-valued and this is legitimized through the gendering and racialization (often through nationalities) of subjects.

One could argue that those operating in the domestic work market inhabit gendered and racialized bodies such as black and woman, and that often these subjectivities intersect. Yet, as important as this contribution would be to the exposure of the unequal division of labor in the capitalist market, its limitation would lay in the assumption that race and gender are stable social categories. Bringing to the forefront exploitation premised on the intersectionality of these is a crucial task, but it becomes even more productive when we study how these social categories are produced and reproduced in the workplace and the market itself.

In this thesis I perceive of social categories as unstable (Butler, 1991), and instead choose to consider the everyday practices of negotiating value of domestic work as a way to circumvent the dilemma faced by using stable and fixed social categories to analyze the social. In this way, I avoid using rigid groupings that are frozen in a specific time and place. That makes it easier to capture the story of how labor gets to be articulated in the present, and more specific to this thesis, capture a snapshot of a moment in which reproductive labor is being subsumed into a system of neoliberal capital in Cairo. Our understanding of a certain body is not only determined before that person enters the workplace, but is constantly created.

The value of the work my interlocutors perform is not based on the actual work they carry out, but on the contrary, the commodification of the bodies that labor and the socially negotiated value given to housework and care work in general. How does this commodifica-

tion occur, and how does the value form — social hieroglyph— come about? Concerning value Rodriquez (2010) asserts that:

Value, at the end of the day, has very little to do with its value form or its equivalent value form, money. As Marx suggests, it is “social hieroglyph,” a phenomenon socially produced and culturally predicated, with material implications and effects that configure and ontological predispositions.” (89)

In other words, the value attributed to domestic work, as to other forms of work, is perpetually created and recreated through encounters in a social field infused with power relations. In other words, the crafting of subjects and their presumed value is a perpetual process. The workplace and the home are two locations where subjectification as such occurs and processes transpire that make us identify as woman, black, docile or skilled.

Rodriquez (2010) writes about *becoming a woman* and its relationship to the feminization of labor. Indeed, the workplace is a place where we become women. Thus, instead of looking at the workplace as a place where gender is simply deployed, Rodriquez argues that it is a place where it is constructed. The context of the household (for the employers) and the workplace (for the workers) is one of the places that gendered subjectivities are created. She argues that as a result of the pull back of the welfare state worldwide, increasingly reproductive and affective labor is being managed privately. However in the European context, much as a result of second wave feminism, housework is generally devalued and most of the employers she interviews would rather have another job than to clean and be a housewife. Yet, it is still the mothers and wives in Rodriquez’s studies that are seen as responsible for the management of the household; and, instead of distributing additional housework to their husbands, they more often employ an outsider. This person enters the private sphere to do care work, women’s work. The question is often who can best manage themselves and thusly be presented as skilled labor through their behavior at the workplace. But, this behavior is not simply related to the way in which they perform tasks such as cleaning, but also about how workers manage their affects in order to comply with the female ‘face’ of domestic work.

The worker does not only sell an assumed skill-set used to produce a particular material product— a clean house— but also carefully performed affective relations (Hochschild, 1983). A worker should know which soap to use to clean particular surfaces, or how to change diapers and season the salad; but, a worker also need to manage his or her affective self in the workplace. She should look down when spoken to, keep secrets and smile when

she plays with the children. The management of affects and affective relations are deeply tied to a neoliberal governmentality.

Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects.... One can recognize affective labor, for example, in the work of legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile). One indication of the rising importance of affective labor, at least in the dominant countries, is the tendency for employers to highlight education, attitude, character, and "prosocial" behavior as the primary skills employees need. A worker with a good attitude and social skills is another way of saying a worker is adept at affective labor. (Hardt & Negri, 2004, 108)

The workers I met throughout Cairo were all skilled at managing their affects. For instance, Grace — a young woman from South Sudan— had to leave her three-year-old son home alone all day behind a locked door, but was still expected to show up at work with a positive attitude and provide care and a loving surrounding for her employer's children.

This can be contrasted with the Fordist assembly line. Workers in a factory configuration may perform their minute task, and through this menial process be alienated from the product in which they produce are not expected to manage their affects in such comprehensive ways as workers in a post- Fordist configuration. Although the separateness between the worker and the product she produces in the factory is alienating, it is a different sort of alienation. The workers I interviewed are not only alienated from the product of their labor, but they were asked to manage their own affects in minute ways; they were expected to show care and fondness for the family they worked for through their words and their body language; they were not only selling a set of skills, but also their feelings and their love— or, as often admitted by the workers— the appearance of tender and loving feelings. As in Grace's case, they were expected to show love and care for the children of their employers all day despite perhaps having a child at home themselves.

Although many women during the second wave of feminism fought for women's right to work, the way women has been included in paid work was perhaps unintended. With the advent of a neoliberal restructuring of the economy, certain skills and attitudes associated with the subjectivity woman have become increasingly popular and subjects are expected to manage their affects in certain ways to emulate the trope of the caring and loving young female. This young woman is presumably not interested in labor politics and poses not threat to the harmony of the home (Wright, 2006).

As previously mentioned in the introductory chapter, Wright refers to the myth of “disposable women”. This myth is in various ways an articulation of the idea that there are hoards of young women willing to work for low wages in manufacturing factories. Hence, if you leave your job, someone else will be there to replace you quickly. Furthermore, this myth also claims that these women’s salaries only go towards personal goods (ibid). This narration needs to be so because it perpetuates a system where poor women perform manufacturing work. Thus their labor-force is exploited and this becomes the surplus pocketed by factory owners. We encounter a similar myth in the laboring lives of migrant domestics in Cairo in the argument that, “they are here to work”. Indeed, the workers that are assumed to be “here to work,” such as Filipina and Ethiopian women, do in fact receive a higher salary. However, in exchange for this salary, employers expect submissiveness. Young women are model workers for neoliberal labor because they have a presumably submissive and do not allegedly participate in labor protests, while they are also taught to be self-managing, not only in their daily tasks of cleaning and caring around the house, but also in the management of their affects.

In the placement office and in the domestic work market in Cairo, the feminization of labor has interesting outcomes. Indeed, you have number of women who seemingly display the characteristics females supposedly embody: they are young, docile and display adequate affection towards household members. Yet, interestingly, you also have a large group of men, mostly refugees, whose only avenue of work is domestic work because it occurs behind closed doors and can more easily be accessed without a work permit. They are to a lesser or larger degree successful in finding work depending on how they present themselves as non-threatening and young. Workers need to “market” themselves as the docile and compliant feminine worker and presumably pre-trained like the typical Filipina worker. The better a worker can manage this, the better he or she is paid. In the following chapter, I outline how the workers of various nationalities negotiate the value of their work through marketing themselves as this laboring body.

Denial of covalence

One way the domestic labor market in contemporary Cairo is changing is the fact that employees seem to change workplaces at very high rate. We are moving away from a regime where it was assumed that a worker would stay with the same family for decades. She or he would come to the house at an early age and go through a lengthy training process. The workers I met are increasingly self-governing and pre-trained, skilled subjects. The place-

ment office described in this chapter— the place the workers frequent in order to find work— attempts to professionalize, standardize and homogenize, yet hierarchize work and workers according to the logic of neoliberal capital. They do this through creating contracts, conducting standardized cleaning exams and cleaning courses. An increasing number of employers prefer a pre-trained and ostensibly “professional” worker to that of the familial more intimate relationships of the past. Yet, they desire a worker who displays a set of characteristics representative of the young, docile and loving female worker; a worker they feel they can trust.

The narrative presented of the domestic worker in the Arabic speaking world today, often depicted by activists and NGOs is that domestic workers are like “modern day slaves”. This representation of the migrant domestic often relies on the re-iteration of pain and abuse faced by many of these workers. However, in my field I was presented with a different actuality. Several of the workers I met did indeed face what they considered abuse at work, but they were still not slaves.

In economic theory, it is assumed that we move through certain economic stages such as: primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, and capitalism. Thus, when describing these workers as slaves- we assume that they belong to an era of economic organization that has already passed. Thus, if the effects are the particular conditions of domestic workers— here described as slavery— the cause is then assumed to lie outside of capitalism. Instead I argue that at in our current organization of labor capital operates with categories of labor that create slave like conditions. But, importantly, these conditions are not slavery.

This ‘slavery argument’ is a denial of the very covalent-ness of the past and the present and a denial of how a so-called free market produces exploitation. This paradox is one of the main contradictions of the neoliberal present; there is a reliance on rhetoric of the free market, however, through the nation-state, hierarchies based on nationality and gender become imperative in the production of capital (I will elaborate further on this in the following chapter).

Exploited labor might not always take the form of *corvée*- , serf- or slave labor but Marx still maintains that capital exploits the laborer. Interestingly, while slavery and serfdom shows the master-slave relationship clearly, capital completely conceals this by its insistence on focusing on the market, not on the actual labor. Yet, throughout his writing you can hear a clear call to the worker where he says: Don’t be fooled, you think you are selling your labor, but you are selling your labor-force, so you are selling yourself. You are not a slave, being a waged worker is another form of bonded labor (Marx, 1990).

Chapter Three:

“It’s the market”:

Talk of value and domestic work in Cairo

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that my interlocutors are not slaves, but in the process of becoming neoliberal workers. This thesis is thus capturing a moment in-between where labor in the household is increasingly becoming monetized and organized according to a neoliberal rationality in Cairo. In this chapter, I ‘zoom in’ and study the more intimate everyday relationships where the negotiation of the value of work occurs.

In my field, I was constantly met by the assumption that “the market” is what sets the price or salary. Oftentimes, the ways in which employers and employees speak of the market makes it appear as if this market is external to them, when the crux of the matter is that they are the actual subjects which constitutes the aforementioned market. This chapter is an attempt to deconstruct, or rethink, this market and show how my interlocutors — with the myriad of complex and ever-changing power relations, presuppositions and global forces this entails — speak of and thusly engender the specific values of domestic work for particular workers. Valorization of work is produced in that space between employers and workers; in that space, value is negotiated in the intersection between difference and trust. In the last chapter, I argued that the particular feminization of labor under a neoliberal governmentality fabricate a market where the young docile, but also self-disciplining and self-managing, female body is highly sought after. In this chapter I articulate my understanding of the ethnically asymmetric market of domestic work in Cairo and how the perceived ideas about the various nationalities that participate in this market connects with the feminization of labor.

A common trope in neoliberalism is that society is divided into two spheres: the political and the economic sphere. According to this reasoning, the political is that which is formally recognized as state institutions, while what pertains to capital is regarded as the economy. This conception of our social and material world is what underlines the idea of a so-called free market where states ought to “keep out” of the economic sphere in order for market forces to organize production in the most efficient and beneficial way. Neoliberal capital claims that workers operate in a partially free market and that we should aim for a world where this market can operate without intervention from politics. Instead, I argue in this chapter that in the domestic work market in Cairo, the political and the economic are not only dialectical spheres, but is in fact the very same thing. Although workers, employers and others

frequently speak of labor conditions in the reproductive and affective work market in Cairo as if the market is outside their control and is set by market forces, they are in fact the subjects who daily construct, shape and maintain this so-called market; they are part of these market forces. However, maids and madams in Cairo do not independently create this microcosm, but are informed by a global totality where states draw borders and promote certain laboring bodies as more valuable while certain bodies get to be understood as a human waste or expendable bodies.

Processes initiated by states inform my interlocutors, but they also inform these processes. I hypothesize that value or price is not created in a self-regulating market based comparative advantage, but instead in the very intimate and everyday lives of my interlocutors acting within a neoliberal totality that produces heterogeneous spatial locations as well as valued and devalued bodies. The ideal in my particular field was that of the nimble and docile female worker who could manage herself according to ostensible neoliberal practices. The better a worker is understood as to fit to these categories, the more she or he is paid. As a continuation of an attempt to understand value as what Marx referred to as a social hieroglyph, I suggest that workers often “market” themselves in particular ways, as distinct nationalities, in order to increase what in liberalism would be called human capital. On the other hand, employers speak of the workers in particular ways to manage and reduce the price of labor.

Delineating Difference: Employers and Workers

Looking at hierarchical power structures between women is somehow a non-topic in feminist circles, yet the search for an emancipatory politics is better served by bringing to the forefront the field of power relations that constitute the very way in which we reproduce ideas about work (Frederici, 2006). Women in the Arabic speaking world are often presented through the media as docile subjects but this narrative disregards the oftentimes imperial and orientalist representation of this region. The contestation of power within and between women that happen to come from, or reside in, the region is thusly concealed (De Regt, 2010).

In the households in Cairo where domestic workers are employed, it is usually implicitly understood that the female head of the household is also the manager of the worker, yet the search for an emancipatory politics is better served by bringing to the forefront the *woman*, the everyday experiences of these two subjects are decidedly contrasting. As mentioned earlier, the assumption found in other spatial contexts about the perpetuation of the feminization of housework also holds true in the households my interlocutors work and inhabit (Ro-

driquez, 2010). The employers I interacted with, to a lesser and greater degree also labored in the home with cooking, cleaning or taking care of family members. But how is that the work performed by them is perceived as more valuable than that their maids? And even more interestingly, how is the work performed by workers of certain nationalities understood as more valuable than others?

If phrased in an industrial language, the madam is the manager of the worker. However, the relationship between the two parties is different than the typical relationship of the factory. The madam brings the worker into her home and insists that she can trust the worker in an intimate and perceivably familial space. On the affective level, the worker is not only expected to perform various domestic tasks, but also manage her affects in ways to display affection and compassion for the members of the household. But, the stark material as well as societal differences in everyday life between the employers and workers needs to be legitimized. In this dual process of legitimizing difference and establishing trust in the most intimate of spaces, madams employ a number of strategies often expressed through everyday conversations and encounters.

A general idea of difference between maids and madams emerges, and consumption patterns at times become both cause and effect of this differentiation. Marie, a woman from continental Europe running her own business in Maadi, may shed some light upon this point of view:

Marie: I have to say, after the revolution it's out of control; people's salaries have increased so much.

Me: but the cost of living has increased a lot right?

Marie: but the cost of living has increased for me too-- but then I cut in expenses. You always need to save.

Me: But what if you cannot save or do not have enough money to make cuts?

Marie: You can always cut or save. Look for example at my driver—he has a tablet [referring to an iPad-like device]. He doesn't need that. He doesn't even know how to read. (personal communication, November, 2014)

Because her driver cannot read, which in her context denotes that he belongs to a different class, Marie assumes that he does not have the same consumption patterns as herself. In this framework, the poor need a justification for owning commodities, participating in cer-

tain activities and frequenting a number of places. Reasoning as such is utilized to speak of both Egyptian as well as migrant domestic workers, and the comment that reoccurred in interviews, as well as my everyday encounters with employers was, “that is a lot of money for them.” Marie observes and safeguards the boundaries separating herself and her driver. In her opinion, it is not his class or income level— correlated to the salary she pays for his labor— that separates the two of them; instead, it is his level, or rather lack, of education. This is not the first time the poor have been blamed for their own poverty in the disguise of lacking education (Mitchell, 2002). Poverty in Egypt has previously and is currently, by different institutions, blamed not on income inequality, a faulty economic system or corrupt governments, but rather on overpopulation spurred by uneducated masses failing to understand the advantages of family planning and the value of saving capital. According to this narrative, the Egyptian population is blamed for its own poverty because it is uneducated and does not comprehend the benefits of establishing a twenty-first-century nuclear family and savings account (ibid). This way, the narrative is always about the lack of education and futility of the masses, and never about labor politics.

However, this is not a phenomena spatially or temporally constricted to contemporary Cairo. Describing the unease expressed by upper-class inhabitants of Sao Paulo about the incorporation of the working class in consumer culture, Caldeira (2000) explains that that “consumption by the poor is reprehensible if it appears to transgress the imagined boundaries separating social groups and keeping them in their “proper” place” (72). Hala, is a woman in her twenties who was born in Pakistan but grew up in the USA, and is studying in Egypt. When I explained to her that some people believe maids are underpaid, she answered that “you cannot compare your life to theirs” (Personal communication, May 2015). She maintained that workers such as drivers and maids eat cheaper, non-imported food, live in inexpensive areas of the city and travel by public transportation instead of private cars. This logic is enables employers to verbalize comments such as the “it's a lot of money for them” mentioned above. If the presumed affordability of belonging to another class makes it possible to legitimize different income levels and consumption patterns, this often becomes even easier with migrant domestics and I encountered throughout several interviews the comment that, “it is a lot of money in their country.”

While much of the literature on domestic work in other locations depict how families import labor from other locations because it's cost effective, it is interesting to note that in Egypt, the domestic workforce performs labor cheaper than foreign nationals. Still, many of

the employers I met preferred to hire workers from other countries. Employers referred to the idiom *adet khawaga* (foreigner complex) in order to explain their negative view towards Egyptian workers. If you want to purchase an electric appliance in Cairo, the retailer will be quick to underscore how the given commodity is assembled in another country. Similarly, private educational institutions catering to upper-class children in Cairo prefer foreign, preferably white, teachers over highly skilled local labor. Hence, according to the rationality of the *adet khawaga*, Egyptian commodities are seen as inherently defective while the Egyptian workers are perceived as lazy and troublesome. The toiling masses of Cairo are understood as inhibiting a bygone mentality and unable to habituate themselves to an era of rationalization, professionalization and privatization. Salah, a man in his thirties working for a large multinational corporation, attempted at an historical explanation when talking about his Egyptian maid

Our maid has like ten kids. I talk to her you know, about politics and stuff. It's all Nasser's fault you know. These people depend on the government for everything. Can you imagine? Ten kids! This mentality has to change. (Personal communication, May 2015)

Egyptian workers are perceived as dirty, slow and unskilled who rely on the government and lack the entrepreneurial skills Asian workers seemingly exhibit. By blaming Nasser, Salah appropriates the neoliberal language of the city's new business elites, but fails to acknowledge that for a majority of the population it remains logical for a family's economic wellbeing to give birth to many children. When the costs are measured against benefits it makes sense to have many children because each individual is paid a very low salary and the family needs to pool all its income.

In fact, some employers see the act of employing a domestic worker as a form of charity. Those who hold this worldview often acknowledge the structural implications of underpaid domestic work and poverty, but claim that they would rather aid someone by offering employment than to do "nothing at all." However, at the same time, employers usually offer workers salaries according to the market price. Not once during my fieldwork did I encounter anyone who had set the monthly, weekly or daily salary above the market rate. Instead, employers mention how they help workers 'when they need it.' For my interlocutors, it had been the norm for as long as they could remember to give presents usually in the form of money on holidays and special occasions, and the majority of employers considered themselves obligated to gift a certain amount of money during the two yearly Muslim feasts or the large Christian holidays such as Easter.

In essence, employers are faced with a paradoxical problem; they need to extract a surplus from workers' living labor at the same time as they invite workers into intimate spheres of their lives and homes. Similarly to the factory sphere of production so vividly described by Marx in his time, exchange-value is highlighted and the use-value of work is obscured, through an excessive focus on the marketplace in the valorization process. But differently than in the factory, these families and individuals rely on workers in deep and intimate ways distinctive from mass commodity-production.

Thus, employers must create and maintain trust, but also legitimize of difference. Different bodies are assumed to be more or less trustworthy. These assumptions are rooted in experiences and talk that circulate in the care market in Cairo. Many rely on having a domestic worker to ease their everyday life who is underpaid and much poorer than their employer. While male head of households remain conveniently absent from these complicated laboring relationships, madams are usually cognizant of the fact that their employees are much poorer, but attribute it to various forms of difference. What remains unuttered is the relationship is the relationship between workers' lack of capital and the salary they offer them. Instead, employers incriminate the market and the lack of education amongst workers, or the fact that they perform unskilled work.

With workers who do not live with their employers, the threat of theft always seems immanent to madams. The stress of having someone poor inside more affluent households plays itself out in a number of ways. For instance, Sherine, a young woman who lives in the upscale suburb Maadi, hired a domestic worker recommended by a friend. He was a smart young man from South Sudan who studied business at Cairo University. Hiding money from plain sight, Sherine had left two hundred pounds inside the pages of a book. A couple of weeks later they went missing, but instead of accusing the young man, she simply told him to look for it and said she must have misplaced it. Luckily, he found the money the next time he came to the house. This story seems representative of a larger picture, since it is indeed for employers to "test" workers trustworthiness. They hide valuables in places where it appears as if they might have been forgotten. Then they proceed to check if the worker takes it. Yet, workers and placement personnel are not unaware of this practice and during the graduation ceremony at the cleaning office, Joyce repeated several times to the recent graduates how important it was to demonstrate that they would not steal, "if you find a stack of money somewhere strange, put it on the table and tell the madam that you found it. If you find jewelry where it should not be, put it on the table. Remember, they start off not trusting you and you

have to prove yourself to them— not the other way around!” (personal communication, November, 2014).

Amongst the madams I interviewed, the possibility of theft did not seem to be so much of an issue when employing so-called live-in maids. The literature on domestic work in the Gulf as well as in Lebanon extensively maps out how employers place spatial restrictions on the workers they fear might disappear. As an example, during a conversation, Lama, a woman in her thirties, told me that after some time, her mother decided to let her Ethiopian maid keep her own passport when she lastly felt she could trust her. During the same conversation, Lama highlighted that this is not particular to her family. She described how it was common for employers to do anything possible in order to keep workers since many employers had experienced workers who merely vanished in the middle of the night or right after the official payday. In fact, Lama said some employers preferred that workers did not go out at all since a rumor was circulating amongst employers that some workers have been, as she put it, “stolen” when they were going to the supermarket.

When I visited Rania on a Sunday morning to talk about her relationship with her maid and see how they interacted, a number of contradictions became clear. Jessica, had previously mentioned to me that her first employers did not let her cook her own food. This seemed to be consistent with the several other stories as employees mentioned how their employers were unhappy when they prepared their native food because its apparent strong and strange odor. However, Rania said she cherished the days Tharushi prepared Sri Lankan food. Rania loved the smells since it reminded her of the smells from her own childhood in Bahrain when she was raised by her nanny from Kerala in South India.

Rania, her husband and their nine-month-old daughter live in a gated community in one of Cairo's newly constructed wealthy suburbs. Since they were blessed with a daughter, they have employed a maid from Sri Lanka, Tharushi, who helps them around the house. It was Rania's mother in law who helped Rania find Tharushi and she explained that, “she [the mother in law] is obsessed with finding good help because it so hard” (personal communication, February 2015). Rania conveyed how Tharushi is “such a blessing. I could not have done it without her” (personal communication, February 2015). The little family lives in a 400 square meter villa; the house has three floors and a garden with a pool. The bottom floor has a large reception area, kitchen, guest bathroom and what should have been the maid's room, but it is now used as a pantry and washing room instead. In this villa, completed around two years ago, the maid's room is around 6 square meters, with a small bathroom and a small window far up on the wall. However, Tharushi does not stay in this space. Instead,

Rania and her husband have prepared another room for Tharushi with her own entrance, TV and fan.

Thaurishi's job is to maintain the house while Rania looks after her little baby girl. Rania explained how she did not like to ask Tharushi for help with her girl, because she knew the house was large and a lot of work. She also told me "we are actually more like friends" (personal communication, February 2015). Rania and Tharushi spend much time together in the day when they, and Rania's daughter, are home alone. Rania told me that she and Tharushi liked to chat with each other and Tharushi shared stories about her own daughter who is only a few years older than Rania's, but stayed in Sri Lanka with her grandmother while Tharushi and her husband were in Egypt to earn money. Tharushi missed her daughter dearly and Rania felt terrible that she could not go back to visit her, but since Tharushi had at that point overstayed her tourist visa by three years, she was now illegally in Egypt and could not re-enter the country if she were to return home for a short visit. Rania told me that Tharushi and her husband were waiting to save for 'something' at home, but she was not quite certain what this 'something' was.

When Rania speaks of Tharushi as her friend she conceals Tharushi's role as a worker and makes it seem as if Tharushi does the job for love. She actually relies on the earlier language of the 'labor of love' to rationalize and uphold the relationship she has with her maid. At the same time Rania also carefully manages Tharushi's workday and delineates specific tasks for her. Bhatt, Murthy and Ramamurthy (2010) write about the new Indian middle-class and the advent of neoliberal ways of managing worker. They highlight the worlding of certain middle-class sensibilities and gender roles. This idealized way of being in the world, has been formed by neoliberalism and its insistence on placing laboring relationships within a managerial language. This is what Rania does when she delineates specific tasks for Tharushi.

As mention earlier, a generational gap seem to emerge in how employers see their relationships with their domestic workers. This generational gap is not so much about age of various employers, but rather about different historical moments with regards to labor politics. Yet, oftentimes this generational gap seems to be one of self-identification and language, not one of praxis. Domestic work is underpaid because it would be an enormous expense if it was actually priced according to its use-value. Further, a definite sense of guilt seem to grip new "middle class" women for employing domestic workers to engage in a form of work they consider dirty and unworthy. Nevertheless, they need to extract the surplus value and use divergent strategies to construct their relationship with their workers. On the one hand,

they seek the managerialization of their relationship, which seemingly makes the worker a modern neoliberal and “equal” worker. However, in the same instance they rely on an earlier language of a “labor of love” to create trust and comfort between themselves and the workers.

Tharushi and Rania spend most of the day together. Rania describes how that Tharushi’s job is not to help with the baby, but all “her tasks” are only related to cleaning the house. Yet, almost simultaneously as she mentioned this, she asked Tharushi to heat the pumpkin she would feed the baby (it was important for Rania that Soraya is fed healthy, preferably organic, food). After Tharushi heated the food, Rania asked her to go upstairs and clean Soraya’s room quickly before she would put the baby down for her afternoon nap and Tharushi replied with a dutiful “yes madam”. Hence, it becomes clear that Tharushi does indeed help Rania with her baby by preparing her food and cleaning her room.

Rania explains that their relationship is more like a friendship than an employer-employee relationship and that they are really close. But, what the employer perceives as a friendship is marked by a clearly asymmetric power relationship. This becomes even clearer by the fact that Tharushi addresses Rania through her formal title as *madam*. Rania also tells me that Tharushi used to share stories with her about her aspects of her private life. Tharushi and her husband used to share an apartment with another couple from Sri Lanka, but after a while the two couples started to quarrel and several members of the Sri Lankan her private life. Eventually, Rania got tired of the stories and felt she had to tell her to stop sharing the Sri Lankan her private life at home and between the women in the Sri Lankan community. Rania and Tharushi’s relationship is marked by closeness, but also a difference between the two.

Maids as status symbols

An early Saturday in November (2015) a young woman paced into the placement office. She passed everyone who was waiting and headed straight for Sara who is responsible for connecting workers and employers. The blonde woman sported a ‘new age’ style as she carried her colorful bag and wore wide legged pants. She opened her mouth and voiced in a British accent, “I cannot believe I am here again looking for a new worker. The one you sent did not want to work full time. I need a new one.” Sara offered her a seat at her side with a hand gesture, and there she waited while Sara brought in possible workers for interviews. The

first person they saw did not want to work full time and the young woman shook her head frustratingly at Sara. From her look, it was apparent she felt the office was unorganized.

Finally Sara brought another man, a young man from South Sudan. The roles adopted during the conversation were clear and explicit. The young woman exhibited an air of confidence and made it clear that she was his superior in all regards as she asked questions and he answered them. She spoke in a louder voice than him, he bowed his head while she looked straight at him and she asked him quite personal questions such as “do you drink?” My initial impression of this woman as a ‘new age clad’ liberal person left me puzzled. Apart from my own naiveté about the link between the link between certain forms of dress and forms of values, the interesting question that remains is still how young ‘liberal women’ construct a world completely dependent on expendable domestic workers.

The popular TV show “Sign Al Nissa” swept away an Egyptian public during Ramadan 2014 with its presumably realistic portrayal of conditions in an Egyptian women’s prison. In an episode we see two characters talking together after one of the character’s maid has stolen something from her house. One of the women says to the other, “ You should have listened to me and hired a foreign maid”. This comment is symptomatic of a prevailing view among a number of employers in Cairo; the idea that foreign maids are somehow better than their Egyptian colleagues because they are better trained to clean and also more trustworthy. In the same way many wealthy Egyptians will speak of products manufactured domestically as naturally faulty, Egyptian maids are often talked about as if they are prone to laziness and theft. In addition, they have that unfortunate trait of sharing the same mother tongue as their employers, and can therefore disclose household’s secrets to noisy neighbors. Hence, many Cairene employers, even those who currently employ Egyptian workers, would prefer to employ workers from outside of Egypt whenever possible.

But, when examining the social implications of having a foreign maid as opposed to one from Egypt, we detect that there is more at work than the typical narrative served us about lazy and dirty locals. Throughout my research I was constantly faced and troubled by a returning conundrum: women are increasingly required, and chose to, take up employment outside of the household, and it is often in this debate about the perpetuation of the feminization of reproductive labor is mentioned. However, the conundrum I met in my field was the fact that a number of women who employed domestic workers did not themselves work outside of the household.

Academic literature often focuses on locations in the global north. There, in households where women work outside of the home, residents chose to hire a woman from another country instead of having family members sharing chores in the home. Ordinarily this woman is paid less than locally sourced labor. Thus, domestic work and care work —the reproduction of the reproductive forces the Global North. There, in households where women work outside of the home, residents chose to hire a wave of feminism (Rodriguez, 2010). Yet, in many of the households I visited, there would be no apparent need to outsource affective and reproductive work since labor force is readily available in the home in the form of the ‘housewife’ and cheap labor is available locally.

Already a hundred years ago, in his theory of conspicuous consumption, Veblen (2005) emphasized the ways in which society’s higher echelons distinguished themselves from the rest of community through its consumption patterns. That having a maid of Asian origins in upper-class circles in Cairo is a status symbol was mentioned by several of my interlocutors. Interestingly enough, they would mention how fellow madams chose to employ foreign domestics for such ‘superficial reasons,’ while they personally did not choose their employees based on this reasoning. Not everyone, actually quite few, can afford the several hundreds of dollars price tag on the employment of a foreign domestic. Having an Egyptian maid is recognized as something “everyone” can afford, while by employing a non-Egyptian maid, preferably from Asia, you distinguish yourself from those who cannot afford this luxury, and this accentuates a distinctly different consumption pattern from the average Cairene family.

This conspicuous form of employment becomes visual throughout cafes on early afternoons in exclusive newly built areas of Cairo, such as New Cairo or Sheikh Zayed. In these cafes, young Cairene women meet over salads and cups of coffee and often bring their maids to take care of their little ones. Some cafes boast colorful play-areas for children, but the adult supervision of the children is often provided by maids, not mothers who are busy socializing with their friends. The interesting part of this image is that you usually see Asian and African women chaperoning the children; you never or rarely, see lower class Egyptian women in these spaces.

It is quite normal that more affluent households employ several workers of different nationalities to live and help in the home at the same time. Thus, it is known that lower class Egyptian women work in homes and take care of children next to the Asian and African workers, but they are not the maids brought to these cafes. Poorer Egyptian maids, often re-

ferred to as *balady*, *shaaby* or *bi'a*, dress differently and display a different public performance than their 'liberal' madams and their Asian colleagues. This performance is not understood by madams as non-modern or traditional, but rather as belonging to the popular classes (Singerman, 1995). Individuals from these classes do not belong in the newly established spaces for Cairo's affluent and liberal youth, and their behavior and attire does not conform to neoliberal spaces such as Starbucks despite its semi-public status. Young Filipina maids, made ubiquitous through international films and media, do however fit in in this context. Nevertheless, this does not mean they are afforded the same spatial freedom as their madams. For instance, maids are located at the play-area with the children, not at tables by themselves. Similarly, at the Arabella Country Club in New Cairo the daily usage fee for adults is 100LE, while the fee for nannies is 50LE, but they are only allowed in the children's area.

Manufacturing a market

A certain discourse about the personalities as well as abilities of domestic workers from different countries circulates among employers, but also among workers themselves as well as others involved with the domestic work market (such as agents and NGO staff). The exchange value of labor— in other words, the salary paid to a particular worker— is premised upon his or her nationality. When I asked Sara who works at the placement office, about the reasoning behind this differentiation based on passports her answer was that "it is the market". Further confirming this was that fact that during dialogues and observations I was persistently met by comments by employers such as, "well, this is the market-price" or "why would I pay more when this is the market price?"

By and large, workers, employers as well as others I met with, all relate to this "thing" that is the labor market; but, they see it as external to themselves. Hence, my interlocutors postulated the labor market and its prices as outside and beyond their own subjectivities and power. Few imagine themselves as constitutive and integral parts of this market. When I asked employers how they settled on the salary for a particular worker, several madams told me that they would "ask around" for the "going rate" at the moment. Employers would then precede to ask friends and family members how much they had heard they should pay for a particular nationality. Furthermore, private agencies, as well as the placement office where I spent many hours, operate with a publicly available list of monthly salaries for domestic workers in Cairo. Such lists are prevalent in the domestic work market and can be found at placement agency walls and on Internet pages that advertise for foreign domestics. The list is

implicitly and informally understood both among employers, employees and agencies and is discussed among employers as well as employees in conversations about the 'reputation' of the different nationalities. Jessica's salary is not determined by her skill as a seamstress or by the experience she has with care work. Instead, the strictly enforced border and Jessica's Ghanaian passport is what determines her salary. In fact, if Jessica showed up at a placement agency, she would be confronted with a list that looks like this:

**Domestic Placement Office
Price List**

Type of Work	Hours	Price
Cleaning OR caretaking	Part-time/8 hrs	120LE/day
Sudanese/Somalian woman - cleaning OR caretaking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	1400 LE/month
Sudanese/Somalian woman - cleaning AND caretaking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	1600 LE/month
Sudanese woman - cleaning OR caretaking	Live-in/1 day off per week	2500 LE/month
Eritrean/Ethiopian woman - cleaning OR caretaking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	\$400/month
Eritrean/Ethiopian woman - cleaning OR caretaking	Live-in/1 day off per week	\$450/month
Nigerian woman - cleaning OR caretaking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	\$350/month
Nigerian woman - cleaning OR caretaking	Live-in/1 day off per week	\$400/month
Ugandan woman - cleaning OR caretaking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	\$400/month
Ugandan woman - cleaning OR caretaking	Live-in/1 day off per week	\$450/month
Male - cleaning	8 hrs/1 day off per week	1250LE/month
Male - cleaning OR caretaking	Live-in/1 day off per week	1700LE/month

Type of Work	Hours	Price
Driving	Part-time/8 hrs	120LE/day
Driving	8 hrs/1 day off per week	1400 LE/month
Driving	Live-in/1 day off per week	2000 LE/month

Type of Work	Hours	Price
Cooking	Part-time/8 hrs	120LE/day
Cooking	8 hrs/1 day off per week	1400 LE/month
Cooking	Live-in/1 day off per week	2000 LE/month

Overtime (any position) - 15LE/hour

Employer contract fee
 - 150LE (part time staff)
 - 250LE (full time staff)

The list is not organized according to skill or experience, but according to nationality. From the first moment in which the worker enters the market for care work she meets a labor market that is organized not according to skill, education or seniority. Instead, the market is organized according to the nationality of its workers and according to their gender.

Not listed above, is the Egyptian worker, who is paid the lowest salary in Cairo. Similarly with Egypt, Yemeni workers are also the lowest paid in Yemen. De Regt (2009) argues that employers feel a certain discomfort with the closeness to workers of the same nationality. She writes, "Yemeni domestics, even though there are class differences, nowadays they are socially too close to their employers" (571). In Yemen, the language middle and upper class employers use to differentiate themselves from lower class domestics are one of cleanliness. Similarly, in Cairo, employers rely on a language of cleanliness. Employers would tell me that Egyptians are not clean, or opposite, express that other nationalities, such as Ethiopians are a clean people. Yet, when employers refer to Egyptians as a group it quickly becomes that they do not see themselves as part of these Egyptians, and they clearly speak of the larger population of Egyptians who belong to the 'popular classes' (Singerman, 1995). For example, Mona Shaheen, head of training and consultation at the German Goethe Institute in Cairo, explains in an interview why she needs a worker, "While driving, my baby should sit on my legs, and this is illegal and could harm us both. That's why I needed a helper to sit beside me and carry the baby". (Sarah El-Sheikh, 2015). Yet, she had a hard time selecting the most convenient helper.

I changed more than 10 workers, after facing problems with their work, attitude and behavior," she said. Shaheen further explains: "I always put rules for the helper not to touch or kiss my baby for my baby's safety. But one day when they were with me at work, the helper kept kissing the baby in front of everyone on her mouth, despite my warning to her against doing this. (Sarah El-Sheikh, 2015)

The Filipina is seen as the opposite of the Egyptian worker. While the Egyptian worker is dirty and unruly, the Filipina is clean and compliant. Marie, who we met earlier in this chapter, lives in the upscale Cairo suburb Kattameya explains why employers want a Filipina worker and thusly states,

When I go to the swimming pool with my son for swimming lessons at the club in Kattameya all the upper class Egyptians... they all have Filipina nannies. None of them are Egyptian! They don't want to deal with it. Egyptians all have their way, they always argue about this

and that. The Filipinos they don't argue, they say yes mam, yes mam, yes mam. (personal communication, November, 2014)

The circumstances in Cairo, where the Filipina worker is always assumed to be the most skilled and hence also receives the highest salary, is opposed to much of the current literature on domestic work conducted in other countries. In locations in the global North, it is generally assumed that migrant labor is a cheaper workforce than domestic workers and hence the choice falls on foreign maids over indigenous ones. Although this might not be the assumption in the Arabian Gulf, there the argument remains that local women do not want or cannot work because of religious and cultural constraints. However, Egypt, the most populous of the Arab states is a country with a long tradition of supplying cheap (male) labor to the Arabian Gulf. This excess of cheap labor is also available at home—and thus, hiring an Egyptian maid can be cheap. But, why is it then that families choose to employ workers from abroad when there is even cheaper labor available at home? In an online Facebook group the employer Vicky writes,

This rates come from the quality of work of each nationalities. You have so see Filipinos working and Egyptian working. Then you can understand why the rates are big difference [sic]. If you want high quality, pay high price. Of course some time unlucky also you can get fake quality... Cheap price of course low quality. I have used Indonesian and Philippines... High price but my house cleaned well organized. I have. Egyptian cleaning in my office. They are slow, lazy and not cleaning well. They can drink 1 cup of tea for more than 1 hour, often to hiding somewhere. And sleep during working time (May, 2015).

Another popular nationality to employ by urban affluent Egyptian families is of Indonesian origins. Indonesian workers are perceived as knowing less English, but still sought after because of a certain assumed Asian submissiveness. Furthermore, Indonesian women who work in Cairo are often Muslim and may therefore exert “a better influence” on Muslim children. This means that newly religious families often prefer them.

Compared to Beirut are perceived as knowing less English, but still sought after Cairo receives a relatively small amount of Sri Lankan migrants, but the city hosts a wealth workers from several locations throughout the African continent. Interestingly, most of the employers interviewed in this study seemed to not consider Egypt as part of Africa and workers from sub-Saharan Africa are simply referred to as Africans. This naming does indeed reveal the racial character of the domestic care market in the city. In fact, wealthier Cairo households have a long history of employing darker skinned workers and this racially divided relationship has been articulated and re-articulated numerous times, particularly in times when what

is today considered Sudan was seen as a subsidiary of Egypt. The largest number of domestic workers with regards to nationality in Cairo are the Sudanese, but the territories we today talk about as Sudan and Egypt have a shared history that goes back to the very earliest periods of recorded history. Most of the Sudanese workers that participated in this study live, in Egypt with their family, yet many are still willing to work as so-called live in maids.

Employers assume that Asian workers usually leave their children and husbands at home when they go abroad for work. They are thus divorced from such everyday nuisances as those created by Sudanese extended family that may fall sick or need help at any point. As previously mentioned, when employers spoke of the Asian workers, the sentence “they are here to work” was oftentimes repeated and an assumption about Asian workers is that they are disconnected from a community that interferes with their work.

However, when closely questioned about the workers from African countries, employers are more meticulous and refer to the particular nationalities. But, perhaps most importantly, the workers themselves often differentiate between the various nationalities. Until a very particular interview, the reputation of the Ethiopian workers was somewhat cryptic for me. I asked a worker why some employers wanted to pay 400 USD to hire her instead of 1600 LE to a Sudanese woman that actually spoke Arabic. Her answer was, “they want Ethiopians because they know us” (personal communication, November 2014). I asked, “What do you mean by that sentence?” and she answered, “I mean, we are Ethiopians you know”. I felt frustrated, “ what do Ethiopians do that other workers do not?” “We do what the madam tells us without disagreement. We don't spend a lot of time on the phone and there is no problems with our families.” Interestingly, further on in the interview, she explained to me that Ethiopians workers are often in Cairo on their own and hence do not carry the burden of having children and family in the city.

The concern about trust ran like a red line through my interviews. Speaking about Somalians in Yemen De Regt writes (2009), “The fact that employers have less control over their time is one reason why these women are seen as less attractive domestic workers and why they are stereotyped as unreliable” (574). This is because, “Women who come to Yemen as labor migrants, such as most Ethiopian and Asian women, intentionally come to work as domestics and seem to have fewer difficulties with expressing subservience, which makes them attractive as domestics” (572) Somalis in Yemen currently have a relatively low social status, mostly because they are refugees, but also because they are culturally similar to Yem-

enis and often have extensive family in the country. Similarly, the Sudanese in Cairo are seen as culturally similar to Arab Cairenes, yet also distinct.

West Africans, such as those from Ghana and Nigeria are usually discussed as less troublesome and more skilled than their Sudanese and Somali colleagues, yet, they carry a certain stigmatization because of stories of frivolous women and the media coverage of the HIV and Ebola epidemics. A perception prevails that Asian women can talk with the children in English, but several employers have confidentially pointed out to me how it is more prestigious to have a babysitter from Asia. Quite interestingly, employers usually assume that Filipina women speak better English than West Africans despite of the fact that English is a national language in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. Perhaps their answer lies in employers' impression of their supposedly homogenous and also "primitive" child-rearing techniques? An employer in her mid-thirties, Heba, confidentially explained, "I hate Africans. They have a different culture that they bring. They are very tough. The maid I just fire she tried to hit my daughter. All the Africans are horrible, but I was desperate so I had to because there are so few Asians and the Filipinas are so expensive" (Personal communication, May 2015). The common practice I observed in a number of houses I visited was to employ an Egyptian woman as the cook, while women from other countries would be charged with cleaning and taking care of the children. Typically, and most prestigiously, the babysitter should be from Asia, while the cleaner would be from somewhere on the African continent and the cook would come from Egypt.

The question that arises amidst these practices and conversations is whether we here should consider Egypt and Arab states as exceptions. Similar studies to this conducted in both South Africa (Griffin, 2011) and Yemen (De Regt, 2009) shows how South African and Yemeni employers also prefer foreign domestic workers. This should point towards how this is actually a larger phenomena than one pertaining just to Cairo.

The question I kept on returning to in my research was: why do you think there is such a list, and how do you think it comes about? Although a number of people were very critical of this form of classification, they still saw some truth to it and would highlight how some workers, such as the Filipina, would never have to be asked to do something while the Sudanese women would always spend all day on the phone; how some nationalities were more caring than others or how women from certain places were particularly rebellious or talkative.

Nobody mentioned how the global discourse created by states plays into the production of local prices for labor except one person. Jessica gave the best answer to this question. When I asked her why she is paid almost half of her Filipina colleague, her answer was, "it is something their [the Filipino] government did for them" (personal communication, November 2014). In a way, Jessica is right about this. The Filipino government has relatively successfully marketed Filipino domestic labor as skilled and compliant, and has used everything from billboard posters and magazine advertisements to carry this message across to potential employers abroad. Other states however, like Sudan or Somalia have not followed the suit. Certain populations are seen as excess population, or human waste, and receive salary in accordance with this. Contrary to global and local government's rhetoric, the domestic labor market in Cairo is organized according to gendered and ethnic markers. Thus, borders become lines that create regimes of differential inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). They become a tool used to organize labor to increase profit. States, capital and the actors that control the two constantly chose to include and exclude migrants to various degrees in order to benefit from their labor" (Abrantes, 2014, 431).

The Not-so-docile Filipina

An early morning in October 2014 a man and his child walked into the placement office and the man asked one of the office's representatives "but, you don't have anyone from Asia?" and adds, "they are so much better because they can speak with my children in English." As has been repeated several times up until now, the Filipina is marketed, but also often understood, as the best trained, most caring and docile worker in Cairo and can therefore usually expect the highest salary (at the time of research, she could expect a paycheck of 700 dollars per month). I argue that employers prefer her for two reasons. Firstly, as described before, the Philippine government has successfully marketed her as the most skilled worker on the care-work market. However, I also argue that many prefer her because of the status it gives you to have a Filipina worker and the fact that she seems less likely as an individuated subject to practice laboring protests. In accordance with the feminization of labor Heba said, "they have such kind hearts," and I asked, "what do you mean by kind heart?" Heba answered, "It's their culture; they do their work and don't create any problems. They are more modern [than other citizens of other African states] you know". The Filipina is thusly often narrated

as docile, kind, caring and maternal, yet modern. But does this trope clearly depict the actual encounters in the everyday? As much as the talk about the various nationalities attempts to classify various nationalities, everyday life explodes the categorization of the typical Filipina, Egyptian and Sudanese.

Although often narrated as such, the Filipina was during this research under attack in Cairo. In late May 2015, on a Facebook group dedicated to domestic work in Egypt, a heated debate about Filipina workers took place. The debate seemed to have been instigated by a Maha who initially wrote, "Looking for Asian help.. Stay in.. All house chores and cooking.. Little toddler sitting.. Inbox me if interested" (May, 30, 2015). However, it soon became apparent that Maha struggled with getting an Asian maid, because the next thing she wrote was, "Ok from what I've seen last two days since I put the post for hiring stay in help is that I WILL NOT hire any lady from Phillipine!! They text me asking about salary and where I live! I tell them 5th settlement and ask about their experience they don't reply!!" (May, 2015). Then, a couple of days later, she is appalled at the salaries the Filipinos are requesting and writes, "Phillipinos now ask for \$800 baby sitting OR cleaning". She also writes, "And house help need to STOP telling us it's either cleaning or baby sitting!! I never used hear that before!! It's a job that is paid for as long as these is no abusing!!" (May, 2015).

Lorna, who seemed to be from the Philippines, took the Filipinas in defense, and wrote, " if you can't afford to pay pilipino, choose another nationality maam, choose a maid that u can afford to pay, please stop being rude with Filipinos. We WORK for CAUSE not for APPLAUSE. LIVE LIFE to EXPRESS not to IMPRESS!!!!thats a pilipino people. Have a gud day and peace..." . However, Lorna is soon expelled from the group by one of the moderators. Mary Tess (who hails from Manila) claimed that, "we are different" (June, 2015). Instantaneously Maha answers, "We r not being rude!!! The being rude and ungrateful r the ladies who ask for that much money and demand less work and more vacation!! The ladies that assume that just by being a phillipinos it gives them the right to be arrogant!!! And dear take it from me we all work to IMPRESS!! We work our butts off for a living and we expect our help to do the same" (June, 2015).

Faith, herself from Kenya, few days later told me that, "Filipinas like to talk too much. They pretend to be angels, but you cannot trust them. A Filipina will go and get something from madam, put it in your bag and tell her that she saw you steal that thing... I think they

want them just to hire Filipinas or something” (June, 2015). But, the answers Maha received to some of her comments revealed that many of the employers feel threatened by the Filipina workers while at the same time preferring them. Hence, the Filipina is marketed as compliant and docile neoliberal labor internationally, but these comments reveal that despite this perceived docility everyday encounters are much more complex than the simple categorization of workers according to nationality allows

Conclusion: The myth of freedom

When asking employers why they are willing to pay more for a worker from the Philippines, Asia or a particular country their answer is oftentimes that “they are here to work.” I would argue that employing a foreign domestic as opposed to an indigenous one is related to an assumed docility. Generally, foreign domestic workers in Cairo are considered more skilled and docile than the domestic ones. However, there are major differences between the perceptions about the different personalities of the different nationalities. The more the nationality of a particular worker is understood as if adhering a certain neoliberal logical self-managed docility, the better that worker is likely to be paid.

The labor of the workers in this study are export products and some governments successfully participate in the creation of reputation of certain forms of labor as more skilled, while other forms of labor is seen as disposable. In Cairo the Egyptian and the Sudanese workers are seen as disposable labor, or human waste, while unsurprisingly, the Filipina is understood as a skilled worker worthy of a higher salary. But, the exchange value of the labor performed by particular workers is not simply created by governments, it is re-iterated, recreated, changed and performed in the everyday. Hence, prices are set in a social context where governments and subjects interact and set the certain exchange-value for labor based on social categories. Yet, the actual encounters in everyday life— here, the example of the not-so-docile Filipina— are often much more labyrinthine and shows complicated relationships of power that operate among subjects in the particular social field that is Cairo.

Chapter Four:

“But, they need us:” Navigating domestic work in the everyday

Introduction

I have previously highlighted how migrant domestic workers in Cairo are not simply inactive objects operating in a different temporal realm outside of neoliberalism. Instead, my interlocutors — in a world where power is at times contested, shared and diffused — are not only shaped by the structure of the present global and local market, but also constitute this very imaginary of a market. Currently, migrant labor, and particularly “irregular migrant labor”, acts almost like a wild card in the global system of capital and labor. De Genova (2009) insists that irregular migrants in the United States are not only objects in which the state and capital act upon, but are in fact self-constituting subjects. He writes:

The subjectivity of migrant labor is quite material and practical, indeed corporeal. It remains an unsettling presence that persistently disrupts the larger stakes of securing the regime of capital accumulation. This subversive potential is characteristic of the social force of all labor, ever indeterminate in its centrality – as a subject – within while yet against capital” (ibid, 461).

My interlocutors are both migrants and workers. What does this mean? They are laborers inside, yet against capital; and they are migrants inside, yet against the state. In the previous chapters I showed how capital is part and parcel of the political and how the various categories of nationality are in fact not based in a free and non-political market, but also intensely political.

Migrant domestic workers in Cairo do not participate in modernist forms of labor politics such as unionizing and if this is the only forms of the political that we search for, these workers may be rendered simply as bare life. But, although it appears as if migrant domestics are apolitical due to their precarity, they do in fact produce multiple forms of labor politics. This labor politics, however, takes a different shape than the usual suspects when organization happens around rights and unions. This chapter is an attempt at understanding the numerous ways in which migrant domestics, operating in a legal zone of magic, navigate in the everyday in Cairo.

To accomplish this task, I convey how the labor power of migrant domestic workers in Cairo becomes visible when they join or leave the assemblage referred to as the home. I refer to this as navigating. I utilize the analogy of navigation to explain this perpetual move-

ment since sailors are always on the expansive ocean, also navigating through it. In their words, I use the concept navigating in order to circumvent the lengthy and troubled debate of agency versus structure to show how “ persons are not fully sovereign, [but] are nonetheless caught up in navigating and reconstructing the world that cannot fully saturate them” (Berlant, 2011, 15).

Labor politics in the households I visited took on a particular shape. While my interlocutors often appeal to the socially constructed identity categories, workers politically also mobilize against these. This renders visible the very materialistic and crucial position of the worker *within* and *against*. Consequently, this chapter, and thesis as a whole, is an attempt to make visible to ways in which politics take form outside of such modernist concepts as unions, minimum wage, and the state. Indeed, the laboring lives I have described are precarious, but do not be mistaken, as they remain political.

Where magic happens: Becoming *worker* between legality and illegality

In theory it should be possible to divide domestic workers in Cairo into two categories. Those who would belong in first category would have come to the country on a previously organized agreement, and it is already decided that they will work in the country as domestic workers. The second grouping should contain those who come to Egypt in other ways, but for a number of reasons end up working as domestics. The workers, who are recruited for domestic work abroad, usually come through an agent and hand over their passport to their agent or employer upon their arrival. In the second category you might find persons who initially came through an agent, but who have overstayed their visa or find other ways of staying.

Already here, at the starting point, these categories become blurred and overlap in Cairo. As an example, Mary, came to Cairo from the Philippines over ten years ago. At work she met her current husband who she now lives with in Nasr City. Mary is now an Egyptian citizen, but receives “a Filipina salary” in accordance with the scheme described in the third chapter. On the other hand, Jessica, whom I mentioned in the second chapter, was recruited by an agent and paid a large fee to come to the country, but did not receive a visa and had to instead register as a refugee. The “messiness” of the social categories that Jessica and Mary oscillate between is illustrative of the everyday life of domestic workers in Cairo (Law, 2004). For instance, all the workers I interacted with at the placement agency were legal residents on refugee permits while a number of the ‘non-refugee’ workers did not have legal residency permits.

The refugee permit allows refugees to stay legally in the country, but not to be officially employed. Those who stay in the city on tourist visas are not allowed to work, and those who have other residency permits, for example through marriage, are still not allowed to work legally in the country. Thus, none of the workers I encountered in this study were legally allowed to work and are said to operate in what is often called the “informal economy”. According to such a distinction, the assumption is that an informal economy runs alongside a formal economy. This sphere supposedly operates without being sanctioned by the state; it purportedly exists outside of law and the contractual obligations which are tied up to it. It also assumes that there is another “formal economy” that runs parallel, but separately from it. Yet, to clearly demarcate two distinct economic spheres in Cairo in this a way is not only difficult, but also highly problematic.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) writes about the Egyptian context that, “The whole regulatory and institutional set-up does not create an enabling environment for small enterprises. Therefore, it is wiser and more rational to sidestep them and operate informally” (El Mahdi, 2002, 4). However, the problem, according to the ILO is that “informality – which especially means the absolute or relative absence of institutions to support, monitor and inspect enterprises and employment – results in a deficient application of provisions of the international labour conventions and the labour law in the sector” (ibid, 2). Seen from this perspective, it is assumed that the Egyptian state would prefer to formalize the economy but cannot. In general, a common assumption that circulates about the global south is that states are not able to bring these workers under the auspices of the laws that govern economic transactions. Given Egypt’s strained economy and fraught political milieu, it may seem quite logical to assume that the state is unable to provide economic aid to the hundreds of thousands of refugees currently in the country.

On the one hand, the state could benefit from the revenue generated through taxing workers in the informal economy. On the other hand, the state needs to reproduce the reproductive forces and it can make more sense to simply silently sanction informal underpaid work. In fact, this binary— informal/formal economy — is quite novel. It was first deployed by ILO officials in a study conducted in Kenya in 1972 and has since been presupposed as a natural division of economic transactions. It is easy to get caught up in this language, and for a while I was also obsessed with understanding workers as informal. But, an interview with a former high rank ILO office ‘put me in my place’. I asked the foolish question, “but how is it possible for so many people to work illegally”? Both answering and not answering my ques-

tion, he responded while laughing, “everyone in Cairo works illegally, so why not these people?” (personal communication, November 2014).

Hence, we may actually question the entire understanding of the concept of an informal economy.. Instead, I want to situate Egypt in a world where labor, even in those places that were previously concerned with citizens as workers, now grows increasingly precarious. Actually, in the light of the increasing precarity of labor in the Global North, it becomes in Cairo unclear whether the Egyptian state *cannot* perform the law or *will not*.

Referring to an economy as informal is flawed because, contrary to common held beliefs, "often such endeavors require and establish highly organized modalities for financing and labor recruitment" (Roitman, 2005, 19). Speaking of an informal economy may surmise a realm dismissed to the margins of capital accumulation, when multiple locations can in actuality be recognized by intense economic and political activity outside of the seemingly state-sanctioned range. Similarly to multiple locations in the global south, a great number of Egyptian citizens work without contracts, without being registered at state-institutions or without paying taxes. Furthermore, state law does not protect Egyptian domestic workers because they rarely have a written contract or set work hours, and oftentimes Egyptian law does not cover this form of labor. Thus, Egyptian workers' circumstances are not very unlike the migrant domestic workers when it pertains to law— but their difference is that Egyptians (and to a certain degree Sudanese nationals) have extensive personal networks (Elyachar, 2010).

My interlocutors operate in a legal grey zone. On the one hand, the Egyptian state silently sanctions a number of NGOs activities that could have been performed by the state, while the placement office referred to in this thesis, as well as various agents, mimic the same tactics as the state by relying on a language of law deployed through the use of (not legally bound) contracts. The placement office has been operating for a number of years despite the fact that none of the workers there have legal work-permits. However, the Egyptian government does not close it down. Several workers who showed up at the placement office looking for jobs had first visited the UNHCR to ask for assistance, and were then told to get a job despite the fact that it is illegal for refugees to work in Egypt.

Thus, the NGO that runs the office is well aware that their activities are in fact illegal and thus not officially sanctioned by the state, yet, it does not intervene with their work. Strange situations appear as an outcome of this unofficial state-sanctioned experience. As an example, the office asks both employer and employees to sign a contract. However, how do you sign a contract with someone works without a work permit? Outside the legal boundaries of the Egyptian state, it still maintains a certain performance of legality.

Das (2004) theorizes that the modern state oscillates between being a rational and magical entity. The rational part of the state is the bureaucratic apparatus with its rules and regulations. When speaking of the magical part of the state, she speaks of how the state's practices are appropriated, mimicked and modified in people's everyday lives (ibid). The magic performance of a certain legality has very real effects in workers lives. The contract signed between the parties involved, clearly stipulates the tasks of the worker such as work-hours and the responsibilities of both parties. This contract is one of the ways in which we can see " how the documentary practices of the state, on the one hand and the utterances that embody it, on the other, acquire a life in the practices of the community" (ibid, 233).

One afternoon at the placement office, an employer walked into the room. He asked Sara, how she could help him find a worker. Looking at his child who was accompanying the man, she inquired whether he wanted someone to clean or to babysit whereupon he asked, "What is the difference? Why can't she do both?" Those working at the placement office mentions to potential employers several times daily that they operate with different categories of work and that this will be stipulated in a contract and the office management clearly stipulates that workers will be hired as either cleaners, baby sitters, elderly caretakers, cooks or drivers. They rarely agree that one worker should perform more than one task such as both cooking and baby-sitting.

One of the most common complaints among workers during interviews was that the employer did not respect their list of tasks and that they were often asked to do other tasks than what the contract and oral agreement stipulated. These categories are heavily contested and thus emphasized and guarded by the domestic workers themselves. The parameters set on this magical, yet legal contract, further become grounding points the workers and employers can discuss around.

During an interview between a domestic worker and her likely employer I witnessed such a discussion surrounding the work-hours and the categories of work. Sara called in a middle-aged woman and a young worker for an interview and the two began conversing. The madam said that she needed someone to work between nine and five o'clock most days, but she would need help when she was having guests over (and added that she would pay her extra for this service).

Worker: Ok, but you have to tell me some days before...

Madam: (interrupts) Yes, of course.

Worker: ... and I will tell you if I can come that night.

Madam: But, I need you there when I have guests— I cannot manage that alone. Worker: But sometimes I don't have a babysitter at night so I can't work.

Madam: Can you not ask someone you know? I need someone there when I have guests.

[A little bit later the conversation moves on, and the topic of her tasks comes up. The worker asked what she will be doing at the house and the madam]

Madam: Well, you will do mostly cleaning, and maybe help me when I cook.

Worker: But, my job is to clean...

Madam: Your job is to help in any way possible.

This conversation shows how workers attempt to protect the classifications of work and their own working hours. During the interview it initially seemed clear to me that employer had the upper hand in the power relationship between the two since she was the who asked questions in a much louder voice. Furthermore, I assumed that the worker was desperate for the job since she had a young child at home. Yet, within a few days as I met the same worker at the office, it became clear that I had been wrong. The madam had offered her a job, but she had turned it down because she did not trust that the employer would hold the agreement.

As previously mentioned, the narrative displayed about domestic workers in the Middle East today, often presented to us by activists and NGOs is that domestic workers are like “modern day slaves”. This activist representation of the migrant domestic often relies on the re-iteration of pain and abuse. Instead, in my field I was presented with a different actuality. Many of the workers I met did indeed face what they considered abuse or unfair treatment at work, but instead of simply enduring and remaining in the job, many workers would simply pick up and leave. Several days at the placement agency, I would observe frustrated and angry employers who came to complain that the worker they had recently employed suddenly did not show up at work. One day, somewhat frustrated, I wrote in my notebook, “People seem to leave jobs right and left. Why do they do that? And, how do they have the agency to do so?” After seeing this rapid change in employment, I subsequently tried to resolve this mystery of the workers who would often merely that very same day.

As an example of this phenomenon, Hala, a woman in her forties with two children, told me that she had employed four different maids from South Sudan over a period of only three years. She did not meet them through the placement office, but rather through recommendations from friends and relatives as she insisted that this is the best way to get a new maid. None of the maids lived in her house, but would come several times per week to clean her house. Hala was not exactly sure where they lived, but she believed they all lived in one

of the poorer neighborhoods surrounding Heliopolis, and indeed, this does seem logical as Cairo is constructed in such a way that every middle class/upper middle class neighborhood are surrounded by poorer neighborhoods that service the richer ones.

The first domestic worker Hala had employed was her favorite, and during our talk she highlighted twice how Salwa, the worker, was in her words “very obedient and laborious” (personal communication, June 2014). As highlighted in chapter two, Hala, like many other employers, seem to value these two virtues the highest when searching for help. Unfortunately, Hala relayed how Salwa had to quit after only two years because she gave birth to a fourth child and got anemia. However, Salwa did not completely stop working. Instead, Hala heard that she started serving coffee and tea at a Sudanese social club in Heliopolis instead. The three consecutive maids stayed with Hala for much shorter periods of time and she could not remember their names. She highlighted how she never fired any of them, but instead just left and never came back. Shortly after she had employed the second maid, her kids came home with lice and Hala preceded to ask the worker if she had lice. After this conversation, she did not come back to work. Her third maid was according to Hala, “so melancholic” (personal communication, June 2014). After she sat her down to talk about how her moody demeanor affected the household, she followed suit and did not return to the house. Hala further describes how beers started missing after she employed the fourth worker and how she subsequently quit after Hala confronted her with it. Hala argued that these workers were all easily insulted and that is why they quit their jobs. This might be so, but Hala’s story is also indicative of a larger pattern in the domestic work market in Cairo.

One way the domestic labor market in contemporary Cairo is different from its past is in the way that employees seem to change employers at very high rates. As mentioned in the second chapter, in the past it was assumed that a worker would stay with the same family for decades and become something akin to a second-rate family member. She would come to the house at an early age and know nothing or little about how to manage a household. There, the madam or the other staff would train her. Now, employers change workplaces at a high frequency. Employers speak about the instability of today’s workers and a common comment is that it is very difficult to find someone you can trust. They highlight how they assume that many employees steal, but perhaps even more importantly, how many leave without any prior notice. Interestingly, this becomes possible in the “magical” in-between described above. The workers and employers do sign a contract as a sign of mutual agreement, but this contract is not legally binding and can therefore not be used as any particular leverage.

Faith is from Mombasa, Kenya, and had lived in Cairo for around three years when we met at her apartment in the neighborhood Maadi. She has a son who is seven year old and now lives with her mom in Mombasa. Before Faith left Kenya, she was working as a customer service agent for the telecommunications company, Airtel, and was earning around 200USD per month. But, with escalating prices it became increasingly difficult to support both her elderly mother and her child on that salary. This was perhaps why she was so positive when a Nigerian man living in Cairo one day contacted her through Facebook and offered her a hotel-job in the Egyptian capital. Despite a surging hope that she had finally found a great job, Faith was initially somewhat skeptical and requested a phone conversation with the man. However, on the phone he seemed like a decent man and they agreed that she would meet four other women, who would be traveling with her, at the Egyptian embassy in Nairobi so they could apply for visas together.

When they later arrived at the airport in Cairo they were picked up by the man's Croatian wife who took the five women to their large villa in the upscale neighborhood, Kattameya, in suburban Cairo. There, her Nigerian husband was waiting. Faith explains that the women were allowed to exit the house if they wanted to, but due to the couple's incessant fear-mongering about how people in Egypt are kidnapped even in daytime and killed because of organ trafficking, meant that the couple was always accompanying the five women when they wanted to exit the house. The antsy women waited in the villa for two weeks to start their new hotel-job. When the man finally told them to get in the car, they were very excited. They drove together to the center of the city. But when they arrived in the upscale neighborhood Zamalek, they were shocked. When Faith read the sign outside the office, she recognized this form of operation from back in Kenya; it was not a hotel like they were promised, but a domestic service agency. When she understood what was really going on, she began arguing with the agent, but his response— according to her, a lie— was that the girls were delayed so the job at the hotel had fallen through and this was the only job available at the moment.

When the workers entered the agency, two women were waiting there to bring them home to work as maids. They all argued with the agent, but in the end only one of them refused to go with the women. Faith explained how she was very disappointed, but was still anxious to earn back the 3000 dollars she now owed the agent who had sponsored her trip. Thus, she went with one of the two women while Rachel, who was initially supposed to go and work with her, went back with the agent and his wife to Kattameya.

She did not have to travel far to the lady's house as she lived in Zamalek, the same area of town as the agency where they met. As it turned out, the woman, who was in her thirties had three small children she was receiving little help to care for. The youngest child was only four months and still breastfeeding, which meant that the employer was getting little sleep. Faith described her as being on the edge of madness, always screaming and crying. Faith helped her with everything she could around the house and with the children. This usually meant that she would go to sleep around two in the morning on the kitchen floor she was assigned as her bed. There, on the tile floor, she would try to both sleep on and cover herself with the only cover she had been given and wait for the next morning when she would be awoken around six o'clock. After two weeks, Faith was both mentally and physically exhausted and the day came when she resigned. The incident occurred when the employer threw a used baby burp cloth at Faith and only missed because Faith ducked. Faith simply sat down, stopped working and called the agent and his wife. They came, but when they came, the employer locked Faith up in the room while she tried to negotiate with the agent and his wife. After much back and forth, Faith was released from the room and began exiting the door. Then the employer started threatening them and screaming that she would call the police and inform them of the Nigerian man's illegal business. Terrified, he decided to stay behind to calm her down.

Why was this lady so desperate to keep Faith working for her? Faith describes how employers, "have no idea how to clean or take care of the house and are often desperate for help. Actually, the worst is when you start working somewhere and they try to tell you how to clean when they don't know how. They really need us you know" (personal communication, June 2015). Jessica seemed to agree with this sentiment, when she described how the family members of one employer would not flush the toilet and wait for her to go in to the bathroom after them.

An older employer told me that her previous maid has stolen money from their safe. This meant that she now had to take time off from work to follow the new maid around while she cleaned. Indeed, for anyone who spends more than a week in a Cairo apartment without cleaning it, he or she cannot fail to encounter the grey dust that soon blankets all furniture and trinkets. A general complaint from employers is the dust so ubiquitous to Cairo. Keeping a house clean in Cairo is usually assumed to be much more difficult than cleaning in other places. However, it does not become an option for them, or even less for their other family members, to clean the house. That is perhaps why the employer Heba told me that she knows that all the agents are crooks — it is her belief that they ask the workers to leave in order to

scam decent families for the obligatory fee they pay the broker— but, that she has no other choice than finding workers through them.

As previously mentioned, through perceived differences, the home becomes a place where invisible borders are constructed. In the same way that modern neoliberal states erect borders at will, and in a variety of places, imaginary walls are constructed in the everyday lives of my interlocutors. Similarly, in my field, invisible borders and walls are constructed in the homes and workers are seen as a constitutive, yet silent, part in the household. If you are not used to it, you might be taken aback by how workers seem to sit and move around room without their employers taking notice. Yet, good workers is always at an arms length and thus, when the madam or the mister of the house needs something, she or he may reach out and ask for an item or a service. This behavior is further mimicked by the household's children and this makes it possible for a young girl or boy to stretch out her hand and signal to the maid or say, "get my backpack," or "I want some food." These workers are part of the building pieces assembled to create homes. At times, the border becomes porous and those on the outside of the wall are included in the laboring masses of the state. At other times, the wall remains rigid and the laboring masses are excluded (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). But, this is not particular to Cairo, and Rodriquez narrates a story from her fieldwork in Europe where an employer was crying at the kitchen table and the employee crossed the imaginary wall between them to provide comfort. These workers are part of the building pieces assembled to create homes.

Homes as Assemblages

One early morning when the placement office was quiet, Joyce signaled me to come over and told me in a confidential tone of voice, "I should tell you what happened here yesterday" (Personal communication, December 2014). A bit taken aback by her very serious tone, I leaned in confidingly and asked, "what happened?" She recounted a story about a young woman that had ended up at the office morning before. A newly arrived worker had been kicked out of the house by an employer in the neighborhood Nasr City in the middle of the night and was left to her own devices roaming the streets. Some young men had stopped her and tried to assault her, but thankfully a taxi driver had picked her up and brought her to the church where hysteric crying awaked the stewards. Another employee at the office, George had earlier told me that, " People have gotten killed. Maybe not at our office, but I know that people have gotten killed by their employers" (personal communication, October).

This is the story is often presented to us in activist reports, but, domestic work in Cairo is a heterogenous field, hence this is not always the case.

Another day a skinny, raisin-skinned, fuming older lady, seemingly in her 60s or 70s, entered the office and yelled that she needed a job. Mariam asked and smiled, “but what happened to the one I just got for you?” She answered, “I could not stand that witch or her snotty kids any more so I left.” Mariam laughed at the somewhat wacky old lady and rolled her eyes to me, but then asked her more seriously, “did you give any warning that you were leaving?” The lady answered, “yeah, yeah.” But when Mariam said that she will call the madam to ask if she actually did, it soon turned out she had picked up her personal belongings and left without informing her employer that very same day.

Rania also told me that her mother in law has been very “unlucky” with many of the maids she had previously hired. She narrated how they had left leave her alone in the middle of difficult times such as when her husband had returned home after surgery. Rania placed the mystery of the disappearing maids in a neoliberal language of supply and demand and explained that, “there is such a high demand for Filipinas that they quit all the time. They don't even bother to tell their employers” (Personal communication, February 2015). Nevertheless, these women rarely get a higher salary when they leave for another household. The question then becomes, why do they leave? Was it perhaps the other way around from what Rania explains, that the workers were unlucky with the madam?

I asked, “if the madams are so impossible and desperate, why don't workers ask for a higher salaries?” Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, some workers do this, but more often, the worker simply leaves the house without previous notice. The answer I got from the workers was that there is no point, these ladies will not change because, according to Faith, “they do not see us as human beings”. An example of this can be read in this posting by Sahar wrote on a Facebook group:

Looking for a helper to start immediately. Preferably Egyptian. Either stay in- or stay out from 9am till 9pm. Friday off. I live in an apartment in nasr city for now, and i have twin babies 1 year old. Duties will be:
-light cleaning daily and once per week deep cleaning
-helping me with the babies
-helping in kitchen
No ironing needed.
Salary will be 2500EGP paid in EGP non negotiable. That's what i can offer if u don't like move to the next post.
This system of "either babysitter or cleaner" doesn't work with me and i don't know who exactly started it here just in Egypt!!!
Opinions and advise are not welcome on my post. If u don't like anything i said scroll down and continue your life while not interfering with mine.

Discussions and lectures about minimum wage and/or human rights are not welcome on my post.
If interested please inbox me, and if any of you know anyone that u can recommend please also inbox me. (June 2015)

This constant change of employees show how it is rather unimportant for employers who they currently employ, but simply that someone is there to perform the function of care. Many of the employers that came to the placement office are returnees who seem upset with the loss of a worker. Nevertheless, they do not seem particularly upset that a specific worker quit because they had developed a personal relationship with that person. Rather these employers rarely knew their workers' family names or where they lived. In other words, they always know which country the worker originally comes from, but they hardly ever know where the worker lives in Cairo. Indeed, these workers come from far away and may at times have unfamiliar names, yet, employers do not take note of their employee's place of residence or their last name because it does not interfere with the price they pay for their labor. As I deliberated in chapter three, the salary of the domestic worker is based on her or his nationality and a presumed set of qualities that comes with that nationality. Consequently, their salary is not calculated based on their skill-set or their seniority so this does not become important.

Workers are this way denied part of their humanity; they become something akin to a machine that performs specific tasks in these households and may consequently be replaced if faulty. The high turnover of domestic workers in households such as Hala's shows how it becomes possible to replace workers as long as they can all perform the same tasks. The 'neoliberalization' of domestic workers into self-governing and skilled subjects/workers therefore further enhances the 'mechanization' of labor and the laboring relationships because it releases the employer of some of that intense, personal and power-infused affective interaction that occur in the everyday. Since employees are assumed to enter the home already pre-trained and ready to manage themselves, the employers do not personally need to train or manage the worker.

Hence, when workers quit their jobs without much previous warning, the employers do not lament the loss of a person, but rather feel frustrated over the fact that their homes cease to function. In other words, the departure of a worker causes a disruption in the everyday operation of the home. The perfect neoliberal maid (an ideal that does not exist) might be discerned as a subject akin to a machine, but she or he is still part of the assemblage that makes a home. And, it is in this very important the part she plays in the assemblage of the

home, that her power lies. It is here that her “subversive potential [that] is characteristic of the social force of all labor, ever indeterminate in its centrality – as a subject – within while yet against capital” becomes visible (De Genova, 2009, 461).

Viewing the world as collections of assemblages is helpful for thinking through the position and labor-power of migrant domestics in Cairo. This is more valuable than thinking of the home as an organism because when we speak of an organism, one assumes a perfect whole where one individual part cease to function if the organism as a whole ceases to function. Contrary to this way of understanding the meeting of actors in the social, I propose that we theorize the world as collections of assemblages. A home is constituted by a set of entities, humans, animals and things, which may relate to each other through uneven relationships and power dynamics. Yet, despite these uneven relationships of power, all agents (Latour, 2007) participate in the creation of that thing we call the home. This way we may instead assume that things are created by a number of parts and that these parts may be taken out of a given assemblage and can be added to new assemblages (De Landa, 2006). Every time a domestic worker leaves her job, she detaches from an assemblage and every time she gets hired and welcomed into a new home, she joins in the creation of a new assemblage—a new home.

However, when she joins a new assemblage and thus participates in the creation of a home, the process is not arbitrary. She gravitates towards other actors because of a desire to work—and the other actors gravitate towards her because of her skills. Thus, the homes that my interlocutors are employed in are not simply collections of things and individuals. When domestic workers exit, or are pulled or pushed out of the assemblage, — home— the assemblage weakens and often cease to function, but the worker may be inserted into another assemblage. In an assemblage, the parts need to interact in such a way that the combination of the parts creates a thing that had properties none of the parts had before (ibid). That thing we may call the home is, an entity that cannot be reduced to its parts while remaining that whole (ibid). Assemblages are therefore productive. They produce effects and the effect is affect and the successful reproduction of the reproductive forces. Thus it becomes clear that it is, “in domestic work, homes [that] are *made* and people *reproduced*” (Näre, 2009, 7).

The domestic workers I have met in the context of this study all brought specific skills to the house of their employers that made this house into a home. Often, young mothers my interlocutors worked with, would know little about child care and the task of taking care of children became a shared task between the child’s grandmother and the domestic worker. This might seem redundant to mention, but I believe it productive to highlight how important

the worker is in order for the 'day to go around' in the home. It is in the way the mundane — the way the 'day to goes around' — that reproductive forces are reproduced in the home. The best way to highlight this is perhaps through narrating part of the day of what at the placement office is called a babysitter or nanny. The typical day of a nanny in Cairo begins even before the children wake up. If the children are of school age, it is not unusual that the school bus picks them up around seven in the morning because many children attend schools far away from home. She will then be up around 5.30AM so she can prepare their uniforms and wake them up. Then she will make breakfast and take them to the bus. When they return home, she plays with them, help them with homework, but also shows them love and affection.

The disruption caused in the home when a domestic leaves is due to the fact that she performs these important tasks. In one household I visited the mother was divorced and living with the children's grandmother. None of the two women would know the weekly school or homework schedule of the two children because this was the nanny's job. One day the maid said she was leaving on vacation back to Uganda, but she never returned. When the maid left and failed to return, the eight-year-old daughter would have showed up at school without having completed her homework had it not been for her private tutor who checked the homework by chance. Interestingly, although it might seem as if it is more attractive to work as a nanny than a cleaner because this job involves less physical work, this was not the case among the workers that the placement office helped. In fact, Sara told me that the office exert much effort to find workers willing to take care of young children. Several of the workers I talked with would rather take employment as cleaners, because in their experience the children they had met in previous jobs were very demanding. Many expected the maids to do everything for them such as fetching them water or their backpacks. Furthermore, they were often rude when the maid tried control and guide their behavior.

When middle and upper class women in Cairo say they are going to clean the house, it often implied that it is the maid who will do the actual cleaning. Regularly, as these women are trained to *becoming woman*, they do not learn how to clean (Rodriquez, 2010); instead, they learn how to manage their staff. Thus, when it comes to cleaning the house, it is the domestic worker that employs the actual skills needed to maintain the very materiality of the house. Cleaning the house, although perhaps not as intimate as elderly care or babysitting, is part and parcel of care work in the Cairene household as in any other household. Making sure the house is clean is important for the general function of the home. Indeed, the fact that in the Arabic language, speakers use the same word for the physical structure of the house and

what in English would be called home is perhaps indicative of the diffuse line between the material and immaterial in this context.

A home is not only constituted by human subjects; the very non-biological material substances of the home participates in its creation and have agency (Latour, 2007). The very space in the home becomes an active ingredient in the renegotiation of power, motion and affect in the home. Cho had moved to Cairo after she got a job through a friend. She would work in a building with several apartments that all belonged to members of the same family. Thus, everyday she would rotate where she would be cleaning. Cho told me that cleaning in South Sudan is a major challenge due to its infamous fine red dust. In South Sudan she would take a big cloth, saturate it with water, bend down and wipe the floor. Her garden, she would sweep with a broom made from palm-fronds and it would always be neat. Yet, in Cairo she met a new challenge. There she found a number of new soaps—each meant for a different part of the house. One soap would be for the wood chairs, while another one for the wood on the floor.

The way we see and use space is a social construct and how we construct that thing we finally call home follows the same logic (Bourdieu, 1970). Moving from a location such as South Sudan to Cairo is a big transition in its own regard. Furthermore, many workers move from their own homes into homes owned by others. This requires an incredible ability to adjust and readapt. Often workers go through courses where they learn the basics about cleaning in a “modern house”, but this provides only a rudimentary understanding of how the home is constructed in various locations, cultures and classes. Once the worker enters the home, she observes and adapts to the various ways in which various employers prefer the set-up of their home. Yet, this does not mean workers simply surrender to the all-encompassing power of the employer. In fact, there is a perpetual contestation of the space in the home. For example, the kitchen is often the domain of the domestic workers. For instance, once when visiting a friend who lived with her in-laws, I was perplexed by the fact that she could not go into the kitchen to fetch me a snack because the cook was preparing food and she did not dare disturb her.

Indeed, the workers I met in my study perpetually de-territorialized and re-territorialized Cairo households (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). On the contract of the house it might be written the name of the employer; this is the owner according to the state and its laws, but when looking at the everyday life occurring in numerous homes around the city, the picture becomes significantly more intricate than that stipulated by law as workers re-territorialize specific rooms and areas of a house or apartment. Hence, it is often the cook

who really knows where the utensils are in the kitchen or what food is in the fridge, and the babysitter who has control over the children's rooms.

It is common practice in many Egyptian families to organize large meals with many family members on a daily or weekly basis. During these meals, a number of dishes are served such as *mahshi*, *molokhia*, *lahma* and *baba ghanoug*. Preparing such elaborate meals in large quantities might require several days worth of work. Dishes are magically carried out from the kitchen by the madam, but if you enter this kitchen you are most likely to find a domestic worker. Cooking traditional Egyptian food is a time consuming affair. It is not only the preparation that takes time, but also gathering the food may take much time because it is expected that you have to use fresh vegetables and meat. When I lived for a while in the upscale Cairo suburb, 6th of October, I was frustrated of how family members and friends would criticize me for buying vegetables at the supermarket. Indeed, when I had lived in downtown neighborhoods such as Wust El Balad and Dokki, it had been easy for me to drop by the local market to purchase my fresh greens, but when I asked people where I could find fresh vegetables in 6th of October, it turned out they did not actually know. Instead, they mentioned that they would send their maid to the souk, the local markets. Rania's cook would bring her chicken for two hours on a small minibus from the oasis Fayyom outside of Cairo, and it is common practice to send the Egyptian maid to buy vegetables in her local souk because she gets better prices than the employers.

Hence, behind many a 'proper Egyptian woman', you will find a maid. This argument can be read as a shade of the argument about the feminization of labor and by following this reasoning, it becomes clear that maids are much of the reason why many middle and upper class Egyptian households are able to sustain the imagination of tradition and "Egyptian-ness". Producing a home— particularly one permeated by "Egyptian traditions" such that exemplified through home cooked food from fresh vegetables and loving childcare— is premised on employing domestic worker.

The domestic workers I have interacted with are important in order to maintain the idea of the ideal traditional Egyptian home. The construction of tradition always takes place in the present. In this context, the construction of tradition is premised on extracting the labor power of another woman. The Egyptian family is often studied as a "traditional" entity— however, I wish to show how employers are increasingly looking for neoliberal labor in order to avoid explicit personal relationships characterized by unequal power that one feels so uncomfortable with. However, domestic workers maintain the idea of a traditional family in

middle class and upper class households. Thus, the madam is able to be both “traditional” and “modern” at the same time because of the domestic worker.

What makes a home different than a house containing a group of people? I would argue that in a home there is a larger intimacy in the meeting between bodies. The more functional a home is, the more there will be general circulation of affects of caring. Affect is the possibility of movement and action at any given time. Affect as a concept seems slippery as an eel, when it slithers in one direction as emotion, in the other it’s an action; seems to be many things at once. One way of understanding it, relates to the way the word is used when it is placed in a sentence as a verb; the other way of understanding it seems to be related to how it acts as a noun. When we talk about affect as a verb we highlight its potential for change, its possibility to affect or be affected, but when relating to its use as a noun, it portrays that which has yet to be rationally articulated. Thus, it is a word filled with tension and motion. I consider affect as both those things, and something in between. In the homes my interlocutors worked in the caring affects that I speak of, were fleeting and effervescent and thus demanding to properly theorize. Centuries ago Spinoza wrote, “By emotion [affectus] I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections “ (Spinoza, 2002, 278).

We can glimpse the circulation of caring affects in the joy circulating around the dinner table between family members or in child’s play. Caring affects are generated through the school lunch or being picked up by a welcoming face at the bus stop. Caring affects are premised on having a clean house without actually cleaning it. In the homes in Cairo I visited, the maid is imperative to the perpetual circulation of caring affects in the assemblage home. She is the one who takes the kids to the bus in the morning and picks them up in the afternoon. She cooks the warm afternoon meal and makes lunches for kids. She fluffs the pillows and changes the bed sheets. There are instances where the family members are not necessarily more connected when there is a maid present. However, often her presence produces affects of caring in the home as she allows more time between the family members and she produce surplus time for them to spend together. In Rania’s house for example, it becomes possible for her to spend time with her young daughter because Tharushi takes care of the house.

Conclusion: Micro politics in the home

De Regt (2012) shows, through her work with workers in Yemen, that being legally in a country is not always better than being there illegally. In Yemen, this illegality often gives

certain freedom to workers. This chapter shows how migrant domestic workers who work in Cairo in fact operate in a legal grey zone where state sanctioned items such as contracts take on a magical role. The Kenyan worker Faith one day told me that, “The Kenyans have discovered this place now. It has a lots of money” and only a few days later, Heba struck a similar cord with an interesting comment, “ you know, we are the most expensive country for this in the Middle East. In Lebanon and the Gulf people come there legally so they check them medically before they come and they are allowed to stay by law. It is much better” (Personal communication, May 2015). Indeed, at the time of this research the prices for foreign maids in Cairo were higher than in Beirut, Dubai and Riyadh.

Even though all my interlocutors seem to in a world separated by invisible walls, but a common joke among the employers were how some workers think they are the employer and that they, the madams, had to serve them. Workers highlight how you have to wait until you get your salary before you leave or else they will not pay your salary. Employers with recently hired employees described how they were dreading payday, uncertain if the workers would stay for another month. The employers I met complained repeatedly over the quality of domestic work services, but at the end of the day the maids are constitutive parts of their households whose presence they cannot avoid. This ever-present tension between various subjects forming and leaving assemblages and negotiation of space and trust leads to a form of micropolitics that is often invisible to the state and law oriented mind.

In a certain way of reading Foucault, we are always constructed as subjects by power - this assumes that power is outside of us. But, in fact, it is the subject themselves who create power. Bigness amply summarizes Foucault’s view on power from the later years of his life:

Foucault thinks of society as a network of power or force relations. In his view, power traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1980a: 119) As a relation between bodies, power refers to a subject’s capacity to act upon another’s actions (Foucault 1983b: 221). In this sense, power operates at a local, ‘micropolitical’ level, but through its circulation it becomes concentrated in general ‘macropolitical’ institutions such as prisons, schools and State apparatus, and structuring discourses such as delinquency, health and morality. This distinction between the micropolitical and macropolitical levels of the operation of power is generally perceived as a spatial distinction, leading us to conceive of micropolitical relations as small scale relations of force carried out between individuals or small groups, and macropolitics as large scale political relations involving the structures of class, discourse and institutions. (2010, 135)

The migrant domestic in Cairo is part of the state and capital sanctioned macro political total. However, this totality has its limitations. It is in the micropolitics in the home possibilities of navigation and changes occurs in the larger structures of power. Because social institutions created by the accumulation of power will always have excess— it is in the everyday, in the meeting between the bodies in the household or the home, that infinite possibilities for breaking out of the totality created by capital takes place. The rupture occurring in the everyday— in the home when the worker leaves— is a testimony to the infinite possibility to break free from the finite power created by institutions. Quotidian and mundane experiences are often forgotten in the study of the social; perhaps because once confronted with the messiness of everyday life, we as scholars and researchers, tend to get overwhelmed and confused because of the very contradictory way in which subjects think and act.

Lauren, a girl from the USA and an intern at the NGO that runs the placement office, expressed concern over the fact that they cannot go into homes to see how the employers actually treat their employees. Yet, the workers have their own strategies when navigating the everyday life of labor struggles.

As the configuration of waged work moves out of the industrial factory, the vehicle of labor politics change. Although, the factory worker of the mid-twentieth century would obviously go to the union to change her or his working conditions, this option remains closed for the migrant domestic in Cairo. Not only does the work take place hidden inside homes where workers are unlikely to meet many other workers, but it is also difficult to unionize in a country where you are not a citizen. Yet, despite of this seemingly bleak picture, migrant domestics do not remain powerless in their everyday. We don't have labor protests, but what do we have? This chapter has been an attempt to verbalize a small part of that complicated social actuality that arises instead.

At the end of the day, Faith took matters into her own hands and left the horrible situation she was in. Her life remains precarious as she lives in Egypt without a visa or a legal permit to work. After having told me about the traumatic events that occurred upon her arrival in Cairo, I ask her the obvious question, “but why are you still here?” She answered, “well, the lady that my embassy put me up with told me that I should stay a little while longer and work for a bit. I saw that the situation for many girls from Kenya was not so bad. And the money is good you know. I can earn three times what I can earn in Kenya” (personal communication, June 2015).

Chapter Five:

Domestic work in a larger picture

Introduction

On the 20th of May 2015, as I was in the final stages of my research, a friend forwarded an article to me that presented one of the few media accounts of migrant domestic workers in Cairo I have ever seen. Under the headline "Domestic hell: The plight of African workers in Egypt," Egypt Daily News journalist Sarah El-Sheik outlines some of the difficulties faced by the many African domestic workers in Cairo. In a laudable attempt at bringing into light the precarious situation faced by a number of workers, she cites the Ugandan woman Sadaah who says, "The house owner treats the dog a hundred times better than me, the dog has a house to sleep in, while I sleep on the balcony's ground" (Sheikh, 2015, paragraph 6). Yet, Sheikh solution to all ills lies within the realm of law and rights as she later in the article cites Malek Adly, Director of the Lawyers' Network at the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, who claims, "The point is in Egypt we are not totally committed to the 1951 refugee convention policies" (Sheikh, 2015, paragraph 24). Hence, the root cause of the misfortunes these workers face in their workplace is attributed to the lack of certain rights as refugees.

But, if the Egyptian state fully committed to convention, could we then assume that the conditions of labor for migrant domestic workers in Cairo would change? In this final chapter I argue that reforms rooted in international law and the imaginary of the nation-state may have little impact on the laboring lives of domestic workers in the region because it fails to address the very underlying causes: a 'neoliberally structured economy' that systematizes laboring bodies along lines of gender and nationality in order to generate and regulate capital. Similarly, as social hieroglyphs, nationality and gender work as organizing factors in the domestic work market in Cairo.

Marx theorized that people and things would relate differently to each other in the each mode of production. My aim has been to take one mode of production — neoliberalism — a particular part of capital production, and to theorize the laboring lives it partially produces. It could be assumed, as is proposed through the 'slavery argument' that injustice is simply a ruminant from previous times of 'less liberal economies,' yet this is not the case. Instead, in the neoliberal mode of production we see an increasing internalization of technol-

ogies of the self and standardization of work dissimilar from other forms of labor configurations.

The assumption in a capital oriented market economy is that with proper laws that maintain ‘negative freedom’, the market will logically make all actors better off; so-called comparative advantage. The belief is that in a liberal economy "domestic service workers shall enjoy new and improved opportunities if recognition and progression under a system of meritocracy and assessment mediated by commercial institutions and regulated" (Abrantes, 2014, 431). But, instead of a system based on merit and skill, we see a market organized according to ethnical and gendered differences.

This thesis argues along with Žižek (2009) “if we broaden our horizon to encompass global reality, we see that political decisions are weaved into the very texture of international economic relations” (15). The idea of a free market that benefits everyone involved is at best a shaky one. This has been an attempt to put migrant domestic work in Cairo, as well as the Arabic speaking world, in a larger global context in order to stress this argument. This part of the world is often spoken about as an exception as crises and lacking in human rights, when it is in fact not so much of an exception after all. This entire thesis has been an attempt at bringing the ethnographic production of material on migrant domestic labor conversation with some of the critical theories that have developed lately in anthropology, sociology, gender studies and social theory. Often, the study of migrant domestic labor in this region has remained separate from other topics in our study the social, most particularly critical political economy.

My goal as student of labor in Cairo has been to dislodge patterns of thought from the treelike re-tracings of the state and instead explore all the categories that are being constructed, reconstructed, imploded, constantly created and deployed, from the position of the nomad, in this case the migrant worker. I hope that through this study it has become clear that I wished to show how migrant domestic workers often operate outside of law and in a state of exception. However, this state of exception, with the precarious conditions it creates, is not that different in fact from the way will all live in the neoliberal moment. Although the lives of the workers I describe is theirs and theirs alone, I think many— if not all of us— can recognize ourselves in a world where certain privileges— here in the form of nationality— is often more important than our skills. One does not have to look further than across the Red Sea, to the countries in the Arabian Gulf, to see how various nationalities are given differential inclusion and exclusion.

Here in the final chapter I want to suggest a rethinking of how rights and law always acts as our targets and instead suggest that we think about emancipation without rights as our singular object of desire. Currently, there is great focus on law and human rights and the media displays the migrant domestic, as an object that is *acted upon*, not as a subject that acts. However, presenting and studying these workers as ‘ultimate victims,’ seems unproductive because it assumes the presence of ‘external support,’ which is not always present. It could be argued that the precarious lives experienced by these women can be improved by formally organizing as workers in unions or further human rights activism. However, it is questionable how effective such forms of organization may be in improving labor conditions. This is because unions work *vis a vis* the nation state, and the state in many countries is not invested in the idea of human rights. Instead, I would rather argue that it might be more productive to consider other ways migrant domestic workers negotiate power *vis a vis* their employers as well as the state.

Our Objects of Desire: Law and State

The modern nation-state is currently the hegemonic form of organizing human beings. The idea of the modern state (and democracy) operates as a sort of totalitarian ideology removed from all temporal and spatial contexts and therefore are we presently obliged to discuss politics within ‘the container’ of the modern state. If you suggest the possibility of considering a politics outside of it, you are suddenly balancing on the very margins of what is seen as politically correct and worthy of serious attention the academy. The idea of an imperative need for a state is rooted in a philosophy where humans are seen as naturally predisposed to be at war with each other. We thus need to live under a sovereign that may manage their warlike behavior. However, the figure of *homo scare*, or bare life, shows that the sovereign can be more brutal than even humans, ourselves, we are supposed to be protecting. But, it is not only the most Hobbesian of scholars that look to the state and not only liberals who remain attached to the nation state and the perceived possibilities of social transformation it allows. Bookchin argues that “the [political] left has repeatedly mistaken statecraft for politics by its persistent failure to understand that the two exist in radical tension- in fact, opposition- to each other” (2002, para 24).

The state is not an institution separate from society (as is often assumed by political scientists), but in fact part and parcel of its people. They are perpetually produced by state power, and in turn also shape what would perhaps more conventionally be referred to as the state. Given that the state is in effect an expression of public culture, Navaro-Yashin argues

that state is not a rational, but rather a mystical entity; this fantastical creature conceals the contestation of power in society. She quotes Philip Abrams and writes, “Power, or [...] ‘politically organized subjection’ is the careful maintenance of the illusion of state [...] the state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is” (155). This thesis has been an attempt at uncovering some of that which is concealed in our present system based on the nation-state.

I suggest that the first task of thinking, is unlearning. Our incessant focus on rights—granted by the modern state or by international organizations governed by states—impede us from seeing the larger picture. It creates a form of myopia where rights become “all we can hope for” (Brown, 2004). As applaudable as it is, activists’ focus is perpetual attempt to institute law in order to better the conditions for domestic workers. The rhetoric of victims of abuse and of slavery deployed in the debate about migrant domestic workers in the Middle East is an attempt at compartmentalizing their laboring lives and explain it as if they live in a reality different from ours; as if they exist in feudal or slave society, while other workers are part of the neoliberal present. This thesis has been an attempt at delineating the larger lines that cut across state borders. The neoliberal system always tries to chop up our social reality into pieces and compartmentalize these pieces as if they are separate. Yet the neoliberal system, now encapsulating the entire globe becomes part of everyone’s lives although it does at times appear in different garbs (Katz, 2001; Ferguson, 2006).

Much of the global North’s initial industrial, and thus economic, development was premised on the colonization of large portions of peoples and territory and this allowed for the development of supposedly democratic welfare states. In other words, slavery and colonization were equally important parts of the project often referred to as modernity (Mitchell). The official colonization of territory has mostly passed, but that does not mean that neoliberalism has not subsumed and incorporated earlier forms of inequality that allow for further production of capital premised on the extraction of workers’ labor force. Hence, the coloniality of labor persists, but is often referred that as something else—such as modern day slavery.

The nation-state as we know it today is a product of colonization and allows of the perpetual coloniality of labor. We seek emancipation as workers, migrants and gendered subjects. That is why we turn to rights. Yet, rights are somehow colonial. First, because they can only be exercised through the vehicle modern state project in a world where the number of excess humans, so called bare life, is increasing. Strictly speaking, from an empirical standpoint, rights are at best problematic in the Arab region as human rights are often entrenched

in state laws with little effect in everyday lives of subjects of the state. Yet they remain the rationale on which foreign powers intervene both militarily and through humanitarian projects within neo-imperialist world order. Within the current social imaginary there are two ways to deal with the issues migrant workers face in their laboring lives. As workers we can deal with them through unions, but unions seem to suffer even for workers within their own nation-states. As migrants we can deal with them, through rights, but why are rights not working?

However, these "minor" flaws could perhaps be accepted had it not been for rights largest analytical flaw. The fact is that rights allow us only to seek certain objectives within social categories such as worker, migrant or woman. At best, they improve our conditions within a certain regime by mending the symptoms; they cannot, by their very nature be the tool in which we subvert and transform the regime itself. The effect is often that rights calcify hierarchies of power instead of overturning them.

Our perpetual appeal to law and rights is form of cruel optimism. Lauren Berlant writes that:

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. ... These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially (?)

In other words, in our context, rights is an object that offers itself up for attachment and thus operates as an impediment for a truly transformative politics. Law is stagnant. Hence, the problem is not instituting law, but rather the fact that we are looking towards law instead of looking at the causes behind the effects oftentimes visible in the present.

The cause for the difficulties met by domestic workers in the navigation their laboring lives are not caused by the lack of protection by law, but rather a neoliberal system. If that is clearer, how can then an emancipatory politics based in law emanate from this? Berlant interestingly theorizes that what we wish for the most might in fact be what impedes us from moving forward; our failure to look at the present and only gazing towards an optimistic future bogs us down. Our wishful thinking creates attachments that make us attached to mirages that always seem to evaporate when we approach them. Particularly, in a neoliberal present we are attached to the ideals concerning rights as well as economic growth and the dream of women, workers and migrants rights. But, it is actually this firm faith in the naturalness of

objects nation- state, citizenship and modern law is what obfuscates the very real and common alienation caused by capital.

It is usually assumed that being outside of the state is something negative. Being recognized as a subject of the state is always the object of our desire. However, in the case of the subjects I met in my field, being outside of the law was not necessarily worse than actually being recognized. It makes it possible to move around freely and change jobs occasionally. The employers I met during this year would look at the cases of abuse happening in the Gulf and the extreme cases in Egypt with horror, yet fail to link their hiring and management practices— or their economic position— with this. Workers, often have crosses hundreds of kilometers, were usually more aware of the political implications of their laboring lives in Cairo.

Conclusion: Unlearning to think

In neoliberalism, there is persistent focus on *doing* and one is always urged to produce. In the academy we are moving towards a regime in which everything is counted. Classes should be about doing and we should learn gender policy or international development so we can count workers and execute workshops and various strategies. We should acquire skills and training, and then go out and train others. In the end, we are told that we should go out and change the world. But in fact, we are active all the time to make sure nothing is changing.

The so-called Arab spring was part of numerous social movements that have spread around the world since the imposition of a privatized neoliberal economy. Such movements have sprung up extremely different places like Chiapas, Mexico; Seattle, USA and Athens, Greece. Although the political outlook at present might look bleak, these movements all express dissatisfaction with the status quo and raise a critique towards what is done to mend the increasing economic and social differences clearly present in our everyday lives. An increasing number of people agree that there is “something” wrong. Something that can be felt on the energetic level, however, this “something” remains unspoken and is still in a state of emerging articulation. The serendipitous circumstances often surrounding and propelling forward change remains hidden because politics is not something that is purely linear, sequential and rational, but political change is often created in the everyday in that magical space between sanity and madness, legality and illegality, and rationality and irrationality.

In a world subsumed by neoliberal capital, a prismatic array of processes occur simultaneously and as the current neoliberal system has subsumed all spatial locations, labor lives

in the south and the north are increasingly similar, but the multitude spins on and we do not know where it will go (Hardt & Negri, 2000). Yet, we remain attached to the object, the myth that is the nation state as a protector, when this in fact is what creates difference and capital accumulation in the hands of few (Anderson, 1991). We wait for a blueprint of what we should do, but the blueprint never seems to come. Instead, changes occur continually in the encounters of the everyday.

Thus, is this all we can hope for? In his preface to the book *The Order Things* Foucault recounts how he “roared with laughter” after reading Borges who cites an old Chinese encyclopedia that categorized animals according to:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’. (Foucault, 2012, xvi)

Utterly nonsensical way to his European trained eye, he writes,

the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography - breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (Foucault, 2012, xvi)

What can we understand from Foucault’s laugh? Even though capital has subsumed the entire globe, does it mean we cannot think the impossible? Can we think of space as not divided into states, and a sense of freedom beyond rights?

Instead of thinking about space as the space within and between states, Butler offers a radical rethinking of space and writes,

The “true” space then lies “between the people” which means that as much as any action takes place somewhere located, it also establishes a space which belongs properly to alliance itself. For Arendt, this alliance is not tied to its location. In fact, alliance brings about its own location, highly transposable. She writes: action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anywhere and anytime. Although Agamben borrows from Foucault to articulate a conception of the biopolitical, the thesis of “bare life” remains untouched by that conception. As a result, we cannot within that vocabulary describe the modes of agency and action undertaken by the stateless, the occupied, and the disenfranchised, since even the life stripped of rights is still within the sphere of the political, and is thus not reduced to mere being, but is, more often than

not, angered, indignant, rising up and resisting. (Butler, 2011, paragraph 2).

Although capitalism tries to reduce it to the most minimal, part of the labor-power remains inalienable. This inalienable “something,” as a power remains trans-individual and lies “between people.”

The reiterated solution to increasing precarity of labor is always the nation state and our protection through its laws. This project has been about trying to imagine laboring lives on the margins, or even outside, the state. It has not been my goal to hide or gloss over the exploitation or abuse numerous domestic workers meet in the everyday. However, I wished to show the normalcy that people actually conduct their lives. The story that is told is always about the migrant domestic worker as a victim and the injustice faced in the everyday is usually an outcome of lacking rights as a human, migrant or woman. This reading of the world isolates the worker from her social experience, when workers in fact practice politics in their everyday.

I have wanted to write against the way Agamben’s thesis has been understood, but not against what he actually wanted to convey. In the same way that Agamben uses *homo sacer* to bring to the front the contradictory nature of contemporary sovereignty, I wanted to take the precarious laboring lives of these workers to highlight what are actually some fairly typical relationships of labor. This is not only an academic or intellectual project for me, but also a political one because I wish to show how we often see our own lives as normal and that of ‘the other’ as abnormal, as an exception. Migrant’s subjectivities are examples of cracks in our system of capital and nation states. Capital and the state seek to narrate those who live in these cracks as exceptions, or ‘others’ different from us. Thus, capital continuously relies on categories of race, gender, class, and nationality. Yet, in our quest to battle the extraction of our labor, we often appropriate and deploy the same categories. We may feel disgust at the Filipina president that is marketing the Filipina maid to rich employers in Saudi Arabia or the Ethiopian embassy who fail to help their citizens, but it is not until the we explode the category of ‘the other’ that a truly transformative politics can occur.

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