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From rural villages to towns

Personal narratives of female domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania

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1   INTRODUCTION

This thesis will present the ethnographic research I carried out in Ethiopia and Tanzania in 2018 and 2019 as part of my PhD program, in collaboration with Comunità Volontari per il Mondo (CVM), an Italian non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to support female domestic workers in both countries. The research was largely conducted in two cities where the Italian NGO has its premises: Debre Markos (Ethiopia) and Morogoro (Tanzania).

The research design entailed a comparative analysis of the situation of female domestic workers in both countries. In my study, I take domestic workers to be the young women who move from rural and semi-urban areas to major towns and cities to work within households outside their own families of origin. They usually come from families that are economically dependent on agriculture, and move to middle-class or upper-middle-class households in urban areas. Their main work activities encompass cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, running errands and taking care of children and sick people. They are primarily live-in domestic workers, so they reside in the households where they work.

Through an analysis of their narratives, I have sought to shed light on the gendered relations in which women's lives are embedded, and on the complex interweaving of personal strategies and social constraints regulating such relations. In particular, I have explored the reasons behind their movements, life trajectories, future plans, their ambitions and expectations, and the strategies they employ to carve out spaces of action, overcome challenges and achieve goals.

By privileging a relational framework (Strathern 2014), I have explored the various (kin and non-kin) relations that women mobilize within and outside the workplace in different phases of their lives: from when they leave their villages of origin to life and work in their cities of current residence (where I met them). Domestic workers live in asymmetric power relationships, some of which seem to recall master-slave relations. These multiple (asymmetric) relations in women's lives turn out to be both constraining and enabling. Interestingly, they include idioms and practices of power and domination, as well as of protection and care. Through the analysis of domestic workers' narratives, I have explored the everyday making of these asymmetric relations which occur at multiple levels in their lives. One of the key aspects of this work is precisely the attempt to illustrate this intricate and ambiguous relational knot, where relations of power, domination and exploitation, and relations of love, care and protection, are hard to disentangle.

Various streams of research, from different disciplines, intersect within this study. These include studies on migration and care work, on personal narratives and memory, family and kinship studies, studies on personal networks and life trajectories, as well as methodological studies that question the ethnographic relationship. Women and their narratives are always at the core of the work.

To develop the design of this research, first of all I aimed at answering a number of questions. We tend to think of young women and girls who have to leave their homes as victims of an economic situation which does not allow them to live as happy a life as others. Of course it cannot be denied that structural violence (Farmer 2004) exists, which imposes poverty and forms of gendered violence within poverty. But our external perspective, and tendency to define women as victims, may not reflect their own viewpoints. Thus, a number of questions arise: how do these women see their lives and the reasons that led them to become domestic workers? What are their projects, aspirations, hopes and expectations? Their fears, anxieties and trepidations? What were their options before leaving their rural homes? Has any of them managed to change their lives significantly by leaving their place of birth? What could have been their lives in their village of origin had things been otherwise? Through a comparison between Tanzania and Ethiopia, I have investigated if the two countries show significant differences in women's options.

Another set of questions take a comparative approach to investigate the living and working conditions of domestic workers in the cities of destination. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working as a domestic worker in an urban area? What risks and opportunities do women encounter in the city, within and outside the workplace? What other job opportunities does the urban context offer? What forms of gender oppression are women exposed to? Compared to life in their original place of birth, in what way have the social obligations and gender norms to which women are subjected changed? Furthermore, I ask how domestic workers explore the city and become familiar with the opportunities and risks that the urban environment presents, and what networks they put in place to carve out spaces of action, navigate their lives and, more specifically, their new jobs.

The issue of personal networks is central. The relational life of women is an evolving and open process, where they engage in different relationships within and beyond family ties, within and outside the workplace. These multiple relations, both enabling and constraining, are partly intertwined and confused, partly separated and in isolation: the sphere of familial, kinship, work, friendship, community and neighborhood relations, among others. By mobilizing various forms of relatedness (Carsten 2000), domestic workers might try to

emancipate themselves from traditional roles and obligations in some situations, and to renew or even reinforce them, in others. This leads us to ask further what the concept of freedom means from the point of view of female domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania, and, more broadly, what locally accepted forms of emancipation are possible for these women.

Relations, whether individual or collective, also play a crucial role in the imagination and planning of the future, even so more when the future becomes, or is perceived to be, uncertain and precarious. How do different forms of relationality enable women to imagine the future as better than the lived present? In which ways are unmet aspirations remembered, resumed and transformed? What aspirations, hopes and projects, as well as anxieties and fears, do relations activate and respond to? More broadly, how do domestic workers change their hopes, expectations and plans throughout their lives? And what forms of relatedness do they mobilize to build alternative futures?

In my study, the aspects characterizing domestic workers' lives gradually emerge through women's narratives: the women remember their childhood and recount their lives before leaving their villages of origin, they report the motivations that pushed them to migrate, their aspirations and expectations, risks and opportunities in town, the goals achieved and the unmet aspirations, their future projects and plans. Relations are the threads running through their life trajectories. Through their narratives, domestic workers represent themselves, they build and forge their own identities. Most of their narratives are about change and reconfiguration in their lives and actions. Their lives take place in constantly changing contexts which are influenced by global forces, the impacts of technological innovation, the change in market logic, and other aspects that disrupt and reorganize communities and workplaces. Even as they speak, the women reformulate their plans for the future and create alternatives, while feeling the uncertainty and the unpredictability of their futures. But women's narratives take place within an ethnographic encounter that must be questioned. Again, the relational dimension is central.

During my fieldwork, I was aware of my privileged position as a foreign researcher and a member of the NGO. I have repeatedly reflected on my own positionality, and tried to reposition myself several times in the attempt to minimize, as far as possible, the complex set of power hierarchies that inevitably persist during the ethnographic encounter. I wondered in which way and to what extent my presence in the field influenced domestic workers' narratives, what they told me and their way of recounting. I thought about the influence that their narratives had on me, the limits in how I interpreted them and reported

them in this thesis. But I also tried to grasp some aspects that link my life to those of the women interviewed, so that they would give me at least the impression that it was, at least momentarily, possible to bridge the distance between researcher and research participants. Lastly, I wondered what it meant for me to study the issue of 'care' through the life stories of domestic workers, and what political character my research might assume. I realized that the gender perspective, which I have broadly embraced within my work, could help me answer these questions.

1.1 Gender as a methodology

I place my work within gender studies and consider the gender approach a fundamental tool, above all, as a "methodology" (Pinelli 2019, p. 20). It is precisely within the political space that gender must be articulated as an analytic category and adopted as a way of signifying relationships of power (Scott 1988, p.42). As black feminists wrote in the 1980s, "politics", in its widest sense, means "any situation/relationship of differential power between groups or individuals" (Hull and Smith 1982, p. xvii, in Pinelli 2019, pp. 19-20). As an analytical, exploratory category, gender offers interpretative and theoretical frameworks and, simultaneously, makes room for their critical analysis. It allows us to investigate the forms of power and the relationships between groups and individuals in a critical, contextualized way, by taking into account the historical, cultural, social, economic and political conditions within which relationships take shape. It has to do with looking at the hierarchical and political dimension of social processes, and linking macro-processes with micro-processes and individual experiences.

In exploring the narratives of female domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania, I have taken these dimensions into account, trying to avoid as far as possible an uncritical, non-contextual analysis. The gender dimension emerges dramatically in women's accounts, continuously permeating the different phases of their lives, and leading my research. Thus, in my study, gender is also the space in which the women perceive and represent themselves, give meaning to their existence, engage with power and seek to manage its excesses. Seeing women as victims of unlucky migrations for domestic work, as compared to other who stay in families where their work is exploited, would assume that they should be stuck in a gender dynamic that sees them as reproducers.

 Among the scholars whose work guided me in writing this thesis are those feminists and women activists who have contributed, since the 1970s, to the elaboration of gender as an

analytic-critical concept, initially within the discourse on the "sex/gender system"[1] (Rubin 1975, p. 159). An important aspect in the elaboration of the concept of gender lies in questioning the conceptualization of the differences between men and women, and acknowledging the arbitrary and socially constructed elements in the differences between the sexes. Having been defined by the feminist critique as a structuring principle in all human societies (Moore 1988, p.vii), gender is not static, but rather a changing, historically constructed category, a set of attributes, psycho-attitudinal characteristics and behaviors that are considered appropriate for a boy or a girl, for man or a woman, as "social beings" (Busoni 2000, p. 22). If gender structures emerge from particular histories and social contexts, we must focus our attention to the ongoing ways in which gender is made and remade by institutions and in everyday interactions. In this sense, then, "gender" is actually about "gendering" – it is a process (Oyewùmí 2011, p. 2).

In this introduction I will not further explore the debate on gender, but would like to briefly stress the importance that several women scholars and activists have had in building critical knowledge, and their ability to integrate theoretical debate with political commitment. These prompted me to take these women as a reference point, all the more so since in many Italian universities these female authors are not sufficiently valued within academic programs. Above all, these women have been united in the attempt to uncover and challenge the invisibility of women in various fields, including ethnographic studies. I position my work as following in their paths. These scholars and activists acknowledged that women were invisible in the official history, in broader scientific debates, as well as in the ethnographies, both as objects of study and as researchers. This invisibility – which inevitably led to a general distortion of knowledge – had to be acknowledged and named through a new scientific production (Ribeiro Corrossacz and Gribaldo 2010, p. 17).

In the first half of the twentieth century, scholars such as Margaret Mead (1928, 1935, 1949) and Ruth Benedict (1934) had already acknowledged, through comparative ethnographic studies, the sociocultural construction of sex roles and temperament. For instance in *Sex and Temperament* (1935) Margaret Mead concluded that "many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to

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[1] As a preliminary definition that she aimed to develop further, Gayle Rubin defined the sex/gender system as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin 1975, p. 159).

either sex" (1963, p. 280). The influence such women had on the development of subsequent theories, particularly on the study of gender relations, was enormous (Sanday and Goodenough 1990, p. 3). In the 1970s, feminists scholars shifted ethnographic attention from the construction of social roles to a direct commitment to unveiling the patriarchal domination and subordination of women in different human societies. The question became "why (…) the relation of the sexes continued to be asymmetrical, and how is that social groups, which change radically through time, continue to produce and reproduce a social order dominated by men" (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, p. 7). Sherry Ortner (1972) defined the universality of female subordination as "something very profound, very stubborn, something that cannot be remedied merely by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, nor even by rearranging the whole economic structure" (1972, p. 6). She stressed the importance of considering local and specific social structures and cultural conceptions, ideologies and symbolizations of woman which are "incredibly diverse and even mutually contradictory" (*ibidem*, p. 5). This debate looked directly at the dynamics of power that place women in positions of social subordination. It was not just a purely academic debate, but rather a political project whose goal was to bring about change (Declich 2017, p. 99), as Sherry Ortner puts it:

> It goes without saying that my interest in the problem is more than academic: I wish to see genuine change come about, the emergence of a social and cultural order in which as much of the range of human potential is open to women as to men (Ortner 1972 p. 5, in *ibidem*)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, one of the main challenges posed by feminist scholarship – which is greatly evident in feminist anthropology – was to highlight the changing nature of gender relations in space and time, exploring how women and men experience changing economic and social pressures in different ways (see Moore, 1988; S. B. Stichter, 1985; S. B. Stichter & Parpart, 1988). One of the distinctive contributions of feminist anthropology is precisely "the way in which it demonstrates that gender relations are central to any sustained analysis of class and historical relations" (Moore 1988, p. 192). Drawing on Jane Collier and Michelle Rosaldo (1981), Henrietta Moore (1988) argues that gender relationships "are the social arena in which individuals are enabled to make political claims and initiate personal strategies. It is through the competing claims that women and men make on one another, in the context of particular sets of social and economic relations, that the cultural conceptions of gender are constructed" (1988, p. 37). In the attempt to advance their interests, individuals further develop and mobilize "gender stereotypes". The latter, strategically used in day-to-day interactions, have great power, "for they have a perfect

material reality, which helps to reinforce the social and economic conditions within which they are developed and employed" (*ibidem*, p. 38).

These assumptions shed further light on multiple female and male identities, challenging the idea of a universal category of woman. This follows the recognition of differences between women – differences based on class, race, age and other cross-cutting factors – and also similarities which cannot be assumed, but rather have to be specified (see, for example, Pat Caplan & Bujra, 1978; Smith B.E. 1999). Women's experiences must therefore be analyzed in their local, specific, historical analysis, without losing sight of larger material aspects such as political and economic structures (see Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997; Kuhn & Wolpe, 1978). Lastly, the gender-oriented approach can be integrated into the development discourse/planning in a transformative way: recognizing differences between women, but also calling for the possibility of solidarity and collective action to challenge gender hierarchies and ideologies (Kabeer, 1999; Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Moser, 1993; Rowlands, 1995).

These approaches are relevant to my study to the extent that they invite me to analyze the experiences of female domestic workers (as a non-homogeneous group) in a problematized and contextual way, as different from those of male domestic workers, and they invite me to identify a political element underlying my study. But also because they prove to be a necessary tool for the deconstruction of some concepts relevant to my work. Indeed, when discussing domestic work, there is a range of related terms – 'foster child', 'employer', 'employee', and others – whose use and meaning varies over time and by cultural and geographical context, and should therefore be referred to carefully. Some concepts overlap and interact in complex ways. Also, dichotomies such as 'paid' and 'unpaid' work, 'formal' and 'informal', 'free' and 'unfree' work should be deconstructed and problematized when applied to a specific context (see Bellucci & Eckert, 2019). Thus, some theoretical consideration of the terminology is needed.

1.2   Defining domestic work

The term 'domestic worker' is a broad term, with no common definition across countries for what constitutes domestic work. Opinions about the use of this term diverge even between the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and in recent discussions about this occupational group at the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Hoerder et al., 2015, p.

4). The use of the term 'domestic worker' is particularly significant for the ILO, which is the United Nations agency responsible for improving the conditions of all workers. The shift to 'worker' has been used as a way to replace terms that clearly imply subservience, such as 'servant' and 'maid' (Blackett 2011, p. 44).[2] The ILO definition is based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), which gives a comprehensive list of workers including maids, babysitters, cooks, waiters, chauffeurs, gatekeepers, gardeners, caretakers and more. The Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (ILO Convention No. 189) defines domestic work as work performed for or in a household within an employment relationship. The household is therefore recognized as a place of work, and domestic workers (live-in or live-out; full-time or part-time) are those who provide care and support to its functioning. The ILO defines 'employment relationship' as a relationship between an employer and an employee in which the latter performs work in return for remuneration under certain conditions, on the basis of reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties involved. Yet the international definition proposed by ILO Convention 189 "is still insufficient for capturing the plurality of forms of domesticity and for grasping the true magnitude of the phenomenon in Africa" (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. X).

Studies from East Africa highlight that, in order to understand the meaning and implications of the employment relationship in the domestic work sector, it is important to explore recruitment processes. For instance, girls may be recruited "through kinship networks, commonly referred to as *Undugu* in Swahili" (Kiaga & Kanyoka, 2011, p. 13), literally meaning "brotherhood/sisterhood". Since the practice of *Undugu* reflects cultural values of working together for the sake of, and being part of, the larger family, domestic workers identify themselves as family members more than employees (Mpango 2020, p. 17). Thus the employer-employee relationship may become blurred and sometimes be confused with kinship or distant kinship. Scholars also point out that the ILO definition of 'children in

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[2] We should consider that the problem of defining who is a domestic worker/servant is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities made even more challenging by linguistic and cultural variations over time. Whereas 'domestic worker' is a recent term, 'servant' and 'service' are ancient (Higman 2015, p. 26). For instance Raffaella Sarti (2014) prefers to use ''servants'' when dealing with a (rather) distant past, and the term ''domestic workers'' when speaking about more recent decades (Sarti 2014, p. 279). In my study I adopt the term 'domestic work', but follow their terminology when quoting other scholars. For instance, I may use the term 'domestic labor' when I quote Deborah Bryceson (2019), who uses the term 'domestic work' in the chapter's title, but broadly adopts the term 'domestic labor' in the same chapter. Similarly, I use the term 'domestic service' when referring to Janet Bujra's (2000) study.

employment' and 'child domestic work' risks excluding work undertaken in the child's own household, turning unpaid care and domestic work invisible (Evans & Becker 2019, p. 233). For this reason, Abbi M. Kedir and Peter Rodgers (2018) adopt a broader definition of domestic work in Ethiopia, including "those who are engaged in providing services to private households in an employment relationship (i.e. waged employment)" and "those who live in the private household and provide services without an employment relationship (e.g. services provided by relatives and children without payment)" (Kedir & Rodgers 2018, p. 6).

Historically and today, in many parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world, children have been transferred from rural to urban areas to serve as domestic laborers in kin and non-kin households. The term 'child placement' commonly refers to the intra-kin relocation of children which forms part of child socialization and rearing in much of Africa (Howard 2011, p. 3). In the academic literature this practice is often termed 'fosterage' or 'child fostering', and defined as "the relocation or transfer of children from biological or natal homes to other homes where they are raised and cared for by foster parents" (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985, p. 53). This practice – usually (but not only) between poorer rural and better-off urban households – may provide complementary opportunities, both for hosting households and those who are fostered and carry out labor. It often meets wider socio-cultural needs within a community, being a means to promote social bonds, a long-standing community strategy of labor redistribution, and a strategy for coping with adversity based on familial networks of support (Kassa and Abebe 2016, p. 48).

Yet, recent studies further highlight that the traditional institution of kin support "has transmogrified in some places towards forced labour or indeed slavery" (Bryceson 2019, p. 326). For example Ina Gankam Tambo (2014) points out that in Nigeria, in precolonial times, child fostering consisted of community-based practices of child relocation regulated by customary law, accommodated in specific normative and moral frameworks (Gankam Tambo 2014, p. 17). Yet, as she puts it, in contemporary Nigeria children are likely to be "exploited fostered children" (*ibidem*, p. 209), and the difference between employment and fostering can be blurred (see also Bourdillon 2007, p. 27; Sommerfelt 2001, p. 25). These studies acknowledge the emergence of commercial recruiting agents who obtain financial gain from transferring the girls from their rural natal homes to well-off urban households (Bryceson 2019, p. 325), and argue that the changing nature of social relations under capitalism have contributed to this reality. However, contextual historical studies of the process of child fosterage also demonstrate that "the practice has *always* had economically productive underpinnings" (Howard 2011, p. 7). If we go beyond the dichotomization

between the 'good' foster family which displays 'real' parental love, and the 'bad' one exploiting children, foster care strategies might be also understood as sociopolitical relationships between adults (see Bledsoe 1990, p.72), aimed at building a complex network of patronage relationships between biological parents and foster ones, without necessarily deriving from these relationships any immediate and direct utility for the children themselves (Bailkin 2015, pp. 86-87). That is, fosterage reveals its political function: it is closely linked to political patronage and clientage,[3] and more generally to power relations between adults. Situations of this kind often emerge in my study, where female domestic workers in both countries usually start working as adolescent girls for people who promise to send them to school and give them protection, in exchange for domestic work. But promises about school are broken, domestic workers end up working in very exploitative circumstances, and the relations between the people who organized the placement are unclear.

Moreover, in my study, different forms of engagement in domestic work overlap and cannot be clearly distinguished. Since their childhood, and during their life course, domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania have worked in various kin and non-kin households, moving from house to house in search of better working conditions, and performing different types of domestic work (formal and informal, paid and unpaid, full-time or part-time, live-in and live-out). And so, I adopt a broad and inclusive definition of domestic work which manifests itself in multiple forms:

> Work in the *households of others* includes all tasks concerning *household* work such as cooking, washing, cleaning as well as *care* work such as taking care of children, elderly and sick persons. Defined in this way, domestic work can be paid or unpaid, forced or free, formal or informal employment (Hoerder et al., 2015, p. 2).

Similarly, I use the term 'household' – conventionally understood as a group of people who live "under the same roof" (see Barbagli, 1984) or eat "from the same pot" (Declich 2015,

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[3] By the way of defining patron-client relations I draw upon Caroline Bledsoe's (1990) study on foster children in Sierra Leone. The notion of "being for" someone else or other people is closely tied to the notion of clientage. That is, "you have made yourself subject to the person". You work for him/her, you take care of him/her, and he/she should be in turn responsible for you in several ways. As Caroline Bledsoe puts it: "Any individual, whether an adult or a child, needs protection and mediation with superiors; in return, the subordinate must accede to demands from those who perform these services (see also Handwerker 1987) (…) People do not seek a dangerous state of independence (Kopytoff & Miers 1977). In fact, the more desperately individuals need something (…) the more they need patrons with contacts and resources, and the more they grow vulnerable to demands of recompense" (Bledsoe 1990, p. 75).

p. 628) – or, in a broader sense, the people related to the owner and for whom the laborer works, as well as the place where this group resides. The household is also a place of maintenance and recreation of people's wellbeing. Indeed, domestic work is extended to *care work*, or more precisely, it is a form of care work. The component "care" further emphasizes the fact that domestic work also includes emotional aspects.

> Caring *for*' comprises concrete 'corporal' activities which in general serve to have a 'good life', while 'caring *about*' refers to rather emotional aspects of sharing compassion. In this, 'care' in general is not only 'given' to human beings; care is also provided to the surrounding environment (e.g. also to animals) and includes activities like listening to each other, going on errands and taking the children to medical consultation (Gankam Tambo 2014, p. 23).

Thus, domestic workers, who provide both direct and indirect care in households, are also care workers and "are also part of the care workforce" (ILO 2018, p. xxvii).[4]

I shall conclude this section with an account of the words used in Amharic (in Ethiopia) and Swahili (in Tanzania) to define a domestic worker.

1.2.1   Amharic and Swahili terms

In Ethiopia, the Amharic term *yebet serategna* (የቤት ሠራተኛ) literally means 'domestic worker'. During my fieldwork, the women I interviewed, CVM staff, trade unions and other workers' organizations in Ethiopia used this Amharic term and the English 'domestic worker' when speaking in English. Yet many Ethiopian domestic workers also mentioned the term *gered* (ገረድ, female servant/slave) as an example of an insulting or derogatory word which employers and other people used towards them. In the Ethiopian literature, we find references to female and male servants in manuscripts and documents going back to the Old Testament, and in the *Fetha Negast* ,[5] a medieval Christian code of law (Andualem 2014, p. 7; Balcha 2018, p. 11; Belete 2014, pp. 192-193). Scholars point out that after the Ethiopian socialist revolution, in 1974 the Derg regime put terms used for domestic servants in the list of oppressive and banned terms. These included *ashker* (አሽከር, for male servants) and *gered*, which was gradually replaced by *yebet serategna* (see, among others, Belete 2014, p. 193;

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[4] According to the ILO's definition, care work – which may be paid or unpaid – "consists of two overlapping activities: *direct, personal and relational care activities*, such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner; and *indirect care activities*, such as cooking and cleaning" (ILO 2018, p. xxvii).

[5] See the article "Slavery and Emancipation in Traditional Ethiopia: the Role of the *Fetha Nagast*, or Laws of the Kings" (2011), by Richard Pankhurst.

Gebremedhin 2016, p. 41; Hailu 2018, p.10). Yet the term *gered* (which was rejected by trade unions and other workers' organizations) is still widely used as a pejorative in everyday language. This aspect is relevant and shows how certain terms, which are removed from the official categories, also should be studied and can be linked to the memory of slavery in its multiple forms of dependency. It suggests "a more or less strong relation of subordination, a more or less committed enrollment in the wage and salaried workforce, and a more or less assertive recognition of a status" (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. XII).

The authors of a recent article on the treatment of domestic workers under Ethiopian and South African laws point out that, in fact, the abrogation of derogatory terms was not accompanied by the attempt to free women from a condition of extreme exploitation. As they put it:

> Inspired by the Marxist ideology, the *Dergue* took power by ousting the feudal monarchy in 1974 barred the use of the term '*gered*' in favour of '*ye bête serategna*' which means 'domestic worker" in English. This ban is a manifestation of the government intention to eliminate social classes. But, the abrogation of the term 'gered' notionally did not bring any substantive change to eradicates plague of the live-in domestic workers as the regime never strived to take legislative measures to correct ills of the past (Dabala & Sefara, 2020, p. 95).

Also in Tanzania it is possible to identify several terms used to define a domestic worker. Unlike Ethiopia, however, in my study domestic workers didn't report being called 'servants' in a derogatory way by their employers. Rather, some of them said that their employers repeatedly insulted them and verbally abused them by using terms related to the animal world. For example: "You dog, come here!"

In Tanzania, the women interviewed, CVM staff, trade unions and other workers' organizations tended to use the Swahili expression *mfanyakazi wa nyumbani* or *mfanyakazi wa ndani* (indoor worker) and the English term 'domestic worker'. Domestic workers are also referred to as *msichana wa kazi* (working girl) and *dada wa kazi* which literally translates to 'work-sister', reflecting the idea of the domestic worker as a family member (Mpango 2020, p. 17). Lastly, employers, domestic workers and many community members use the colonial term 'housegirl/houseboy'. Similarly, Janet Burja (2000) in her study acknowledges:

> the usual Swahili word for servant (*mtumishi*) was not employed here. Instead servants referred to themselves as 'house workers', 'inside workers' or 'househelpers' (*wafanyi kazi ya nyumbani* or *wafanyi kazi ya ndani* or *wasaidizi wa nyumbani*). Employers often (and

servants occasionally) used the colonial terms 'houseboy'/'housegirl', no matter whether they were speaking English or Swahili (Bujra, 2000, p. 182).

This leads us to ask how colonial legacies shape how domestic work is defined, performed and conceived. In particular, it can be asked how far contemporary patterns of domestic service incorporate continuities from colonization that derive from deeply rooted hierarchies of wealth and inequality, and how far these patterns depend on recent social and economic change unrelated to the processes of formal colonization that dominated earlier periods (Higman B.W. 2015, p. 19).

However, in both countries the English term 'domestic worker', as it is adopted in the ILO's projects, was widely used and defined – by domestic workers themselves and by other research participants – as the most inclusive term, no matter whether they were speaking in English, Swahili or Amharic. In the common understanding 'domestic worker' (in Swahili, *wafanyakazi wa majumbani*; in Amharic, የቤት ሠራተኛ *yebet serategna*) is associated with a 'proper', mainly 'formal' type of employment that should guarantee domestic workers' rights. But I take into consideration that many research participants knew the NGO and its projects, the terminology adopted by the ILO and its projects in relation to domestic workers' rights, even though many of the domestic workers I interviewed had been in contact with the NGO for less than a year. These aspects, as well as my own presence in the field, certainly influenced the terms research participants adopted and their choice to use an English term rather than an Amharic or Swahili one.

Furthermore, the English term 'domestic worker' was sometimes misleading. I came across this problem mainly in Ethiopia. For example, I did some interviews at Debre Markos Private Employment Agencies (PEAs), along with some NGO staff, to understand if these agencies had inventories that recorded the number of domestic workers in the city. In 2018, during the first year of fieldwork research, the owners of the offices showed me some notebooks with the list of people who went to the office to find a job. They would then add, placing their finger on the notebook: "here, this is a 'domestic worker'!" Sometimes they spoke in English, at other times in Amharic, but before me, they used the English term. Whenever I specified *yebet serategna* they stopped and exclaimed: "ah, you mean *yebet serategna*! No I'm sorry, they are not registered here." In fact, by domestic workers, they referred in a broad sense to cleaners employed in hotels, bars, restaurants and other categories of care workers formally recognized under Ethiopian labor law. At the same time, whenever I asked them how to translate *yebet serategna* into English they would reply: "domestic worker!" We should consider that the intermediaries of these agencies could not 'legally' find women a

job as domestic workers, precisely because the Ethiopian labor legislation excludes domestic workers from its remit.[6] This was repeatedly acknowledged by the PEA intermediaries, who tended to stress that they performed their job "legally". Thus, domestic workers who worked in private households escaped from legal records. During my research I was able to see that these intermediaries move on the blurred borders between legality and illegality, formality and informality. That is, it is possible that some domestic workers were also registered in those PEA registers, but I was not told directly, because in this case the practice would have been considered illegal. Just as it is also likely that the intermediaries working in the PEAs used to find work for women and girls both inside the offices (legal and formal practice), and outside the offices (illegal and informal practice).[7] However, as far as I know, was told and shown, both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, domestic workers are not registered in the records of employment agencies.

Unlike in Ethiopia, in Tanzania I rarely encountered problems of interpretation in the use of the English term 'domestic worker', although – as I have already mentioned – domestic workers were often referred to by a different English term, the colonial term 'housegirl/houseboy'. But this is probably due to the fact that in Tanzania there was more familiarity with some expressions in English (which is an official language along with Swahili). And thus the term 'domestic worker', along with other English words, had become part of the common vocabulary. I refer here to its use by people who had at least a basic knowledge of English, because in the other cases only Swahili terms were used, with the exception of 'housegirl/houseboy' which was generally recognized and adopted.

In Ethiopia, my first interpreter (a woman) explained to me that the English term 'domestic worker' was not adopted in the studies on domestic work at the Debra Markos University. At the end of my first year of fieldwork research, in 2018, a male undergraduate student in the department of social science at Debre Markos University had written a research proposal

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[6] See the section "Ethiopia: domestic workers in labor law" in this thesis (Introduction).

[7] This aspect is very well elaborated in the Master's thesis of Elia Paolo Murgia (2021), who was a graduate student when I met him at the end of 2019, during the last month of my fieldwork research. As we carried out several interviews in the Debre Markos Private Employment Agencies, I could see how some problems of interpretation that I had encountered the previous year in relation to the use of the term "domestic worker", had later been contained. This makes us reflect on the impact that the NGO as an organization, its members as individuals, and me as a foreign researcher, have on the local reality, and should never be underestimated. Elia Paolo Murgia (2021) then developed a thesis on the ambiguous role of the Ethiopian male intermediaries (*dalala* in Amharic) in the recruitment process of female domestic workers.

on female domestic work that he wanted to propose to his tutor, aiming at developing his final Master's thesis. The professor encouraged the student to use the English term 'housemaid', as 'domestic work' was considered "too broad and misleading".[8] In 2013, CVM had commissioned a research project at the University of Bahir Dar entitled "Housemaids - A Most at Risk Population!". But three years later CVM, in its projects, recommended using 'domestic worker' in alignment with the ILO. Thus, all CVM reports and research from then on refer to domestic workers. In 2019, during my second period of fieldwork, the professor at the University of Debre Markos had changed his mind and encouraged his students to use the official ILO term, 'domestic worker'. However, by now his student had changed his research project, graduated and moved to another city. At the University of Debre Markos, there were no studies on domestic work or related subjects for me to consult. I expected to find many studies in Addis Ababa, but during my fieldwork I was not able to access other university libraries. The time available was very limited, as I spent most of it far from the cities where the main universities and libraries were located. The same problem occurred in Tanzania. This makes me think that there are probably many studies that I do not know about and have not been able to consult. In the next section I will present a brief overview on studies of domestic work in both countries, referring also to other African contexts.

1.3 Studies on domestic work: Ethiopia, Tanzania and other African contexts

As can be deduced from the above discussion, it would be inappropriate to argue that there are few studies of domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania, though I managed to identify and consult a relatively small number. Furthermore, one of the most important periods I dedicated to the study of bibliographic material coincided with the lockdown which followed the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy. This means that for a long time I was unable to enter Italian libraries as I wrote my thesis in Rome. Or, if I did, the time available was very limited and the environment uncomfortable. Although I was able to consult many articles online, I faced challenges in browsing through books and offline materials. Furthermore, we must consider that searches through online academic channels, while full of potential, also have many limitations (Biolcati-Rinaldi et al. 2017, p. 9). The results of the searches on source databases such as Google Scholar emerge from a complicated relational intertwining

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[8] In both Ethiopia and Tanzania, university lectures are delivered in English and students are required to write their papers and dissertations in this language.

between what the database is able to detect (and which depends on a number of indicators), the information that our access profile disseminates, search strategies that we adopt by choosing to enter, for example, specific keywords (sometimes in "quotation marks") in the search engine, as well as power dynamics that determine the degree of authority of the articles and their degree of (in)visibility, among the other factors. Much of the information on the source database methods of selecting materials, inclusion criteria, update times and indexing methods, are covered by secrecy (*ibidem*). Clearly, even doing research in public libraries has its limitations that we shouldn't underestimate. Thus, the selection of bibliographic material (whether it through online search or in public libraries) is always and inevitably influenced by a number of factors, relationships and power dynamics. There may be many studies that I have not been able to identify, even more so when the authors are women and are not part of the academic community recognized and considered "renowned" by source databases. Tracing these studies will be my task as soon as conditions allow.

Thus, rather than saying "there is a lack of studies on…", I would prefer to say that the specific studies of domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania that *I have been able to identify* are few and fragmented. I have found it important to integrate them within the broader field of studies on domestic work in different geographical areas in Africa, and in different historical periods. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, domestic work is usually addressed in the context of child protection projects related to child migration, child labor and trafficking. Rarely is the issue addressed as part of the migration process from rural and semi-urban areas to major towns and cities (The Austrian Red Cross 2016, p. 3). Most of the studies I went through adopt a human-rights approach to indicate domestic workers' experiences of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization with regard to pay, working conditions and legal rights, as well as verbal, physical and sexual abuse (Andualem 2014; Ayenalem, 2015; Biadegilegn, 2011; Erulkar & Ab Mekbib, 2007; Getachew 2006; Hailu 2018; Matheka et a. 2020; K. G. Mulugeta, 2012; Tesfaye, 2007; and others). These approaches are clearly relevant, but they should be integrated with studies that address the issue from more nuanced angles, as the scholarship on domestic work has done in other geographical contexts worldwide, by providing contextual analysis which allows to observe the multifaceted portrait of women's lived experiences as migrant workers, and how they are able to carve out spaces for action (see, among others, Fernandez & de Regt 2014; Grabska et al. 2019; Hondagneu-sotelo 2000; Marchetti 2014; Parreñas Salazar, 2001; Ribeiro Corossacz, 2018). In my study, I have sought to explore how domestic workers continue to take everyday strategic decisions despite structural constraints (Briones 2009a, p. 25), and to elaborate on

what (un)freedom means to women raised in particular communities and in certain social and historical contexts (Abu-Lughod 2013; Mahmood 2005). Among the studies that focus their attention on the agency of Ethiopian and Tanzanian migrants, particular highlights are Natascha Klocker (2007)'s work on child domestic work in Tanzania and some studies of Ethiopian migrant domestic workers in the Middle East (see de Regt 2007; Fernandez 2014).[9]

A pathbreaking work in Tanzania is a study by Janet Bujra (2000) who provides a detailed historical and contextual analysis of domestic service in the country, and grasps the complexities of male and female domestic servants' lives "to understand the terms and conditions of their employment, but also to hear how they survive in a world of hardship" (2000, p. ix). Her contribution is vital also because interrogates the role of the colonial past in shaping domestic workers' experiences, and the actual forms of domestic labor within migratory settings. Indeed, domestic work is not constant in space and time. Its nature and content can diverge from one society to another, and take new forms as social and economic change occurs (see Bryceson 2019). Janet Bujra (2000) argues that domestic service as wage-labor is a product of the colonial period with its racialized social order (Bujra 2000, p. 4). But she does not analyze characteristics of domestic labor within local society because she does not speak of domestic labor as a legacy of slavery within Zanzibari aristocratic families. In Tanzania during colonial rule, the majority of domestic servants who worked in the colonial homes were male (Pariser 2015, p. 111).[10] Men were induced to work as migrant laborers, while their wives, mothers, and other women were left behind to remain in their home regions, with double the workload on their shoulders. However, each context had its

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[9] I have found many more studies of Ethiopian domestic workers in the Middle East than those addressing the problem from an internal migration perspective (that is, Ethiopian women working in Ethiopia as domestic workers).

[10] If we move away from the African context, studies in other geographical and historical contexts illustrate that domestic work has not always been exclusively a female occupation. For instance, "until the middle of the 19th century the work was predominantly done by men in many European countries" (Lutz 2002, p. 94). Then, if we consider specifically the colonial rule, we find several studies that illustrate the complex intermingling of race, gender and colonial rule not only in Africa but also is Asia and Latin America. In particular, studies on Asia and Africa have mainly focused on local male servants employed by white people, as in these contexts (unlike in Europe, the United States and Latin America) in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries male domestics were numerous. Thus, we find studies on male servants in countries such as Zambia, India, and Malaysia, but also Australia (Sarti , p. 296).

different realities and specificities. For example, in colonial Eritrea domestic work in the service of Italian colonists was predominantly a female occupation (Barrera 2011, p. 108). Studies on domestic work in Africa point out that in many countries throughout the post-colonial period there was a gradual feminization of domestic service as a form of employment in towns and cities. Yet situations differ: in the mid-1980s Janet Bujra expected to uncover the inside story of the 'feminisation' of domestic service in Tanzania, but found that men in Tanzania were still predominant in the domestic workforce. Thus, rather than assuming the feminization of domestic service as an obvious shift, "the challenge to scholarship is not to take assumptions for granted but to examine the changing interaction of structural, historical, and cultural factors involved in producing particular gender conventions in employment" (Hansen 1990, p. 122).

Studies on Ethiopia tend to point out that domestic work in Ethiopia has always been a women's occupation. Historical perspectives illustrate the link between the current conditions of female domestic workers and slavery, especially in reference to the eighteenth and nineteenth century social history of Ethiopia (Belete 2014, p. 193). These studies generally use the terms 'servant' and 'slave' interchangeably, showing that in Ethiopia domestic work has evolved from servitude/slavery to domestic work, but in practice little has changed except for payment of services (Lowe 2018, p. 33). The history of slavery in Ethiopia was partly reconstructed by Richard Pankhurst, son of Sylvia Pankhurst (Manchester, 1882 to Addis Ababa, 1960), the feminist and revolutionary socialist whose active opposition to fascism dated back at least to 1919. Following the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, she espoused the cause of Ethiopia (where she eventually moved together with her son Richard in 1956), at that time one of only two independent states (with Liberia) on the African continent (Davis 1999, pp. ix-x).[11] According to Richard Pankhurst, in the early nineteenth century most well-to-do families would have had both female and male slaves in their service. Overall, "during the long extended time of slavery in Ethiopia, from which domestic working evolved and which was abolished only in the first half of 20th century, the women slaves usually served in the home while the men slaves worked in the agricultural fields (Pankhrust 1968)" (Mulugeta 2012, p. 11).

I have not found studies that investigate domestic work in Ethiopia from a historical perspective, other than general references to past and current forms of slavery. Yet, we should consider that the Ethiopian experience certainly differs from those of other African

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[11] Sylvia Pankhurst's anti-racism, as well as her opposition to colonialism, is well documented in the book *Sylvia Pankhurst. A Life in Radical Politics* (1999), by Mary Davis.

countries, as Ethiopia has not been subject to prolonged colonization. Studies on domestic work in other African countries start with the colonial experience to illustrate how domestic work can change over time. I have mentioned Tanzania, but the case of Zambia is also relevant, where domestic service remained almost exclusively a male occupation for the entire colonial period and beyond. To the extent that in the 1980s Karen Tranberg Hansen pointed out that the great majority of servants continued to be men, although women had entered the occupation in growing numbers since independence in 1964 (Hansen T.K. 1986, p. 18). Several studies on domestic work explore the ways in which race, class and gender shape the character of domestic service. The reality that emerges is varied and sometimes contrasting even within the same country. For instance in Cape Town (South Africa), in the early twentieth century, domestic workers in service at settler homes were predominantly women, while in Natal, particularly in Durban and along the gold mining Witwatersrand, African women began to outnumber men only round the time of the Second World War (Gaitskell et al. 1983, pp. 95-96). There were also racial variations of course, as Deborah Gaitskell et al. (1983) illustrate: "in Cape Town, coloured women servants have long been in the majority, while around Grahamstown in the 19th century, it was African women who gradually replaced white women as cooks, nursemaids and general house servants" (1983: p. 95). Thus, domestic service has had a 'kaleidoscopic' story, of people of different races and sexes passing through domestic service, perhaps side by side, at various times (Hansen K.T. 1990, p. 121). Today domestic work in South Africa is considered a female job, as in current Zambia and Zimbabwe, where there was a longstanding tradition of hiring males in the domestic sector (Pape 1993, p. 401).

Studies on domestic work during the post-independence period shed light on changing class and race relations which, in many African contexts, determined an increase in the number of black employers, and the consequent oppression of black domestic workers by black employers. In particular, studies illustrate class relations and power hierarchies between upper-middle-class women – increasingly engaged in 'formal' paid jobs in cities – and rural girls who serve urban households in conditions of exploitation. Urban women need someone filling the gap left in their households. As Janet Bujra (2000) puts it, referring to Tanzania, "rather than confronting husbands to share the work (which might lead to divorce or domestic violence) they off-load the dirtier, heavier and more tedious aspects of it onto servants" (2000, p. 180). Gendered division of labor in urban households is therefore reinforced, together with class inequalities across women. Annamarie K. Kiaga (2007) argues that in Tanzania "urban middle-class women draw on *Undugu* as a cultural means to

make claims on the surplus labor of housegirls" (2007, p. 11). *Undugu*, as already discussed in this introduction, is used in the context of domestic work, but also "represents an ideology of kinship, where that term is extended to include not only blood relations, but also those that share bonds of friendship, ethnicity and 'tribal regions'" (*ibidem*, p. 9). *Undugu* finds its roots in the African concept of *Ubuntu*, an African philosophy particularly associated with Bantu-speaking people, based on values of intense caring, humanness, respect and compassion: values that should assure a happy community life for the sake of the family (Broodry 2002, and Ramose 2002 p. 643, in Kiaga A.K. 2007, *ibidem*). As it is based on such values but at the same time regulates work practices where exploitation dominates, a sort of paradox or "conundrum" arises (see Kiaka 2012). This ambiguous nexus between, on the one hand, love, care and protection, and on the other hand, power, hierarchy and submission, is one of the key points of this thesis.

As a form of recruitment, *Undugu* disguises the employer-employee relationship "leading it to be perceived as something other than a wage relation" (*ibidem*, p. 2). Indeed, for now I have talked about wage-work, as most of the studies I have consulted generally refer specifically to this type of paid domestic work. But domestic work manifests itself in multiple forms: "Whether informal or formal, salaried or freelance, paid in money and/or in kind, full-time or part-time, residential or non-residential, all-round or specialized, or even professionally qualified, domestic service forms a complex intertwining of situations, a wide range of statuses and social relations" (Jacquemin & Tisseau 2019, p. III). This aspect recurs in my study, where domestic workers in both countries perform different typologies of domestic work during their life course. A woman might have worked with no remuneration for someone (kin or non-kin) who offered accommodation and education in return, or for someone who needed domestic help due to difficult family circumstances. She might have performed domestic chores within the house, taking care of children and sick people, but also helped relatives or other people working in the informal sector in running a business or other cash-generating activities. The same woman might have then moved to another household (kin or non-kin) to work with remuneration. Overall, it is not easy to identify and disentangle the various forms of hosting by pseudo-parents, friends, acquaintances and peers, as well as the diverse forms of work performed by women.

I have also found relevant studies that show how, in specific contexts, the efforts to recognize domestic work as a form of employment, and so the formalization of hired care work, might produce recalcitrant realities and contradictory consequences, and even reinforce structures of classed, raced and gendered inequality. This is the case of post-apartheid South Africa

(see Ally 2010). The context of South Africa is clearly very different from the Ethiopian and Tanzanian, particularly when we consider the specificity of white racism during apartheid. However, even in the latter contexts, the proposals for the formalization of domestic work – as they are advanced by formal labor movements and international organizations – sometimes clash with local realities and are not necessarily adequate in specific circumstances. So I tried to identify in what circumstances, within each country, specific tools for the formalization of domestic work could prove to be effective, under which circumstances they would not be, and what alternatives could be elaborated to improve the situation of female domestic workers.

Several streams of research have guided my work. I have found pertinent and relevant studies on child fostering in Africa (see, among others, Bledsoe 1990; Goody, 1983; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Nelson 1987), as in my study the distinction between domestic work, fosterage, and other practices of relocation within extended family networks is, in many cases, nuanced or blurred (see also Bourdillon 2007; Gankam Tambo, 2014; Sommerfelt 2001). I have taken theoretical tools from studies that address the changing nature of domestic labor in Africa in space and time (see Bryceson 2019; Jacquemin & Tisseau 2019); studies which question how values and images inherited from colonial times still shape how domestic work is performed and constructed in specific ways (Marchetti 2015; Haskins and Lowrie 2015); and – more broadly – studies that explore the labor history of Africa (see Bellucci, 2019; S. B. Stichter & Parpart, 1988). Lastly, I have used studies on pre-colonial forms of slavery in Africa and on the slave trade (Bellagamba et al. 2013; Miers and Kopytoff 1979; Lovejoy 2019), and specific studies on women and slavery (Declich 2018; Robertson and Klein 1983; Wright 1993), aiming at exploring how the legacies of slavery might haunt contemporary life and shape the everyday experiences of domestic workers (Gardini 2020). These studies allow us to explore continuities and discontinuities with previous forms of slavery, to reflect on concepts such as 'slave' and 'servant', and on the different forms of dependency, but also to elaborate on the meanings of the concepts of emancipation and (un)freedom in different contexts (see Declich 2017, 2020a). In particular, in my study I have tried to explore this latter aspect through the analysis of domestic workers' narratives.

I will explore these theoretical tools within the two theoretical chapters of this thesis: one on the nexus of migration and agency, and one providing an overview of studies on domestic work in Africa in space and time. In the next sections I shall discuss the data on domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania and the legal instruments that are relevant in both countries.

1.4   Facts and figures

The ILO acknowledges a steadily increase in the number of domestic workers worldwide since 1995: estimated at almost 20 million in 1995, 52.6 million in 2010 (ILO 2013, p. 19), and 67 million in 2013 (ILO 2016b, p. 3). Today, it is likely to be as high as 100 million or even more if we consider the many limitations of these estimates and the difficulty of collecting data, as the same ILO report acknowledges. According to the most recent ILO report, around the world there are at least 75.6 million domestic workers aged 15 years and over, of which over three-quarters are women (ILO 2021, p. xvii). Africa is the third-largest employer of domestic workers, after Asia and Latin America. In 2013, the ILO estimated that approximately 5.2 million domestic workers were employed throughout the region, of whom 3.8 million were women and 1.4 million men (ILO 2013, p. 33). These data – which exclude unpaid domestic work and workers who have not yet reached working age – are mainly retrieved from official publications, and complemented with the of records LABORSTA.[12] This database on labor statistics, operated by the ILO's Department of Statistics, builds on data from national statistical offices, mostly from labor force surveys. Other ILO reports show that the number of domestic workers in Africa has been increasing over the years. According to a recent report, there are currently around 9.6 million domestic workers in Africa, representing 2.1 per cent of employment overall. Female domestic workers would represent 6.8 per cent of female non-agricultural employment (ILO 2021, p. 41). Determining the number of domestic workers is a challenge everywhere, but especially in contexts where the majority of female and male domestic workers are members of the extended family, as the ILO (2021) puts it:

> Kinship ties, the low recognition of domestic work as real work and the low level of awareness among domestic workers that they are workers and among employers that they are employers, significantly reduces the chances that households may report being employers of domestic workers in national household surveys of any kind (Mehran 2014). As such, perhaps more so than in other regions, the estimates of the number of domestic workers in Africa is assumed to be far below the reality (ILO 2021, p. 41).

According to this report "most domestic workers in the region (8.7 million) are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, due in large part to the presence of the two largest employers of domestic workers, South Africa (1,335,343) and Ethiopia (1,168,730), both of which are

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[12] LABORSTA's data are compiled from censuses, labor force and other household surveys. The database can be accessed for free at http://laborsta.ilo.org

among the top ten employers globally" (*ibidem*). The ILO also acknowledges that other countries in southern Africa (such as Botswana and Namibia) might employ a smaller number of domestic workers, but these account for higher proportions of employment. Thus, if we consider domestic workers as a percentage of employment, Ethiopia and Tanzania do not place among the top ten African countries. In contrast, if we consider the number of domestic workers, Ethiopia (1,169,000) represents the second largest African country after South Africa (1,335,000), and is followed by Egypt (457,000), Nigeria (313,000) and the United Republic of Tanzania (310,000) (*ibidem*, p. 42). However, these estimates are based on the few official surveys[13] available in the various countries, the most updated of which may date to different years. For example, the 2021 ILO report mentioned earlier refers to estimates from 2019 for South Africa, 2013 for Ethiopia, 2014 for Tanzania, 2012 for Botswana and 2010 for Liberia. In particular, while the ILO has always considered Ethiopia a significant country for the study of domestic work, all previous reports tended to cite outdated estimates.

I will also quote older estimates, as the few reports available allow us to understand this as a phenomenon in continuous growth. This also makes clear that national surveys on domestic work over the years tend to be scant and out of date. For instance, the 2013 ILO report *Domestic Workers Across the World* uses national estimates from 2005 and 2006 for Ethiopia and Tanzania respectively. Although subsequent reports refer to more recent national surveys, it would be very important to conduct quantitative studies for these data to be updated. The place reserved for domestic workers in censuses should be valued as both a site and a tool of political renegotiation. Yet the instruments for estimating the number of domestic workers, with their diverse situations, are currently inadequate, and there is a need for the development of new surveys with alternative, refined, methodologies (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. X).

If we consider the case of Ethiopia, according to an older estimation retrieved from the LABORSTA database, in 2005 at least 248,600 people were employed as domestic workers in private households: 23,100 men and 225,500 women. These statistics refer only to domestic workers in cities (Schwenken & Heimeshoff 2011, p. 19). In 2013, the ILO report on global and regional statistics of domestic workers across the world still refers to this figure in its description of the domestic work sector in Ethiopia. The 2013 report further states:

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[13] The ILO's global estimates in the 2021 report are based on an approach that identifies domestic workers in the national labor force and household survey microdata sets, which might be complemented by data from secondary official sources.

with a female share of 91 per cent, the sector is highly feminized, and domestic work accounts for 1.5 per cent of female employment. Domestic work in Ethiopia is mainly an urban phenomenon, with 81 per cent of domestic workers employed in urban areas. Here, domestic work is the fourth-largest employer of women: 11.3 per cent of all urban women workers are employed as domestic workers. The number of domestic workers had slightly increased prior to 2005, up from 200,000 in 1999 (ILO 2013, p. 34).

We must consider that the global and regional estimates generated by the 2013 ILO report consider domestic workers – in line with the international legal definition provided by the ILO Convention 189 – as persons who perform domestic work (in or for a household or households) "within an employment relationship", and therefore exclude people who perform domestic work "only occasionally or sporadically"[14] (ILO 2013, p. 107), and more broadly, those who perform domestic work outside an employment relationship. Thus, the international definition of domestic workers proposed by the ILO "is still insufficient for capturing the plurality of forms of domesticity and for grasping the true magnitude of the phenomenon in Africa" (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. X).

I will now illustrate other surveys that could be considered to understand the phenomenon of domestic work in Ethiopia. An urban household survey was conducted in Ethiopia between 1994 and 2004 in seven urban centers (Addis Ababa, Awassa, Dessie, Bahar Dar, Mekele, Dire Dawa and Jimma). The sample covers 1,500 households and 12,000 individuals. This survey, albeit remote in time, is interesting because it includes both paid and unpaid domestic workers by adopting a more comprehensive/broader understanding of domestic work in the informal labor market (Kedir & Rodgers 2018, pp. 8-9). The survey estimates an increase in the number of domestic workers across time,[15] and concludes that they (and particularly paid domestic workers) were growing groups in the labor force in Ethiopia: in 1994 the total number of domestic workers was 547 (272 paid domestic workers; 187 unpaid family workers; 88 children helping with household chores); while in 2004 the total number was 858 (637 paid domestic workers; 189 unpaid family workers; 32 children helping with household chores). The household survey indicates that 74 percent of domestic workers in 1994, and 77.5 percent in 2004, were female. Moreover, the survey finds a decrease in younger children (aged 10–15 years) in both paid and unpaid domestic work,

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[14] However, day laborers, part-time workers or those who work in casual work arrangements are not excluded if they perform domestic work on an occupational basis (ILO 2021, p. 5).

[15] More precisely, according to the survey there was "an upward trend in the number of domestic workers until 1997 with a slight decline in 2000 following by an increase in 2004"(*ibidem*, p. 10).

and an increase in individuals aged 30 and above, but the majority of domestic workers were between 16 and 29 years of age, with quite stable figures across time (*ibidem*: pp. 10-11).

Between 2015 and 2016, the Population Council undertook a study of migrant out-of-school girls in six Ethiopian regions. Overall, 4,540 out-of-school female migrants were interviewed. Urban respondents were an average of 19 years of age among domestic workers, and 20–21 years among other categories of workers. While 1,094 were in domestic work at the time of the survey, 67 percent among migrant girls entered domestic work as their first working experience, yet often shifted to other kinds of jobs after a short time. Domestic workers had the lowest mean years of education (3.7 years), and 26 percent of them had never been to school at all (see Erulkar et al., 2017). This is one of the most recent studies from which some estimates of domestic work in Ethiopia can be retrieved.

Reports on domestic work in Tanzania also show that the phenomenon is constantly growing, with the most up-to-date national estimates to be found in a 2016 ILO report. First, let's consider previous reports. According to the 2013 ILO report, in 2006 131,500 persons were engaged in the domestic work sector in mainland Tanzania, of whom 104,800 were women and 26,700 were men. These made up 0.8 percent of the total workforce and 1.2 percent of the female workforce. The same report counts 1,900 domestic workers in Zanzibar (1,700 women and 300 men). These data are mainly retrieved from the National Bureau of Statistics of Tanzania, 2006 Integrated Labour Force Survey (micro-data set) (ILO 2013, p. 128). The 2013 ILO report does not make reference to more recent data, but only mentions the number of domestic workers in 2006. The volume *Domestic Workers Count: Global Data on an Often Invisible Sector* (2011) gives different figures: "in 2006 Tanzania had 701,500 domestic workers working in private households, of whom 138,200 were men and 563,300 were women. These made up 3.9 percent of the total workforce, 6.1 percent of the female workforce (LABORSTA)" (Schwenken & Heimeshoff 2011, p. 19). I have not found these figures quoted elsewhere. These data are, however, close to those reported by the most up-to-date ILO (2016) study on domestic work in Tanzania. Indeed, a situation analysis of domestic workers conducted by the ILO in 2016 suggests that at least 883,779 domestic workers in mainland Tanzania, and 203,622 in Zanzibar, were party to an employment relationship by declaring themselves as domestic workers. However, the report states that if we consider people performing domestic tasks, who are involved in very informal arrangements without necessarily being recognized as workers, this number increases to at least 1,728,228 (75 percent women) (ILO 2016, p. 98). Further surveys suggest that about

53 per cent (5,009,076) of all households in Tanzania employed a domestic worker (weighted results using 2012 Census) (*ibidem*, p. 109).

We might also consider other studies that can help us understand domestic work in Tanzania. In 2020 the Population Council, in collaboration with the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) Dar es Salaam, carried out a study (both qualitative and quantitative) on domestic workers and sex workers (aged 15–24 years) in the cities of Dar es Salaam and Mwanza. "In total, 75 respondents were interviewed in-depth in the qualitative phase of the study: 52 domestic workers and 23 commercial sex workers. In the quantitative study, 1,415 girls and young women were interviewed, including 813 domestic workers and 602 commercial sex workers" (Matheka et al. 2020, p. 2). "Nineteen percent of domestic workers started domestic work before they were 15 years old, while 89 percent reported that they started domestic work before they were 18 years old" (*ibidem*, p. 7). Among sex workers, "Twenty-seven percent of respondents started sex work as minors, below the age of 18; 7 percent started below the age of 15" (*ibidem*, pp. 7-8). The study finds that both groups had low levels of education (less than 6 years of schooling) and one-quarter have never been to school. Among the sample, "74 percent reported their first paid work was domestic work. However, many ultimately drift into commercial sex work or commercial sexual exploitation (…) Fifty-eight percent of sex workers in the sample are former domestic workers" (*ibidem*, p. 9).

Given the difficulty of collecting data on domestic work and the invisibility of domestic workers in employment statistics – not only in Ethiopia, Tanzania and other African countries, but at different levels worldwide – organizations like the ILO are working to make known the number of people involved in this sector, and make visible their social and economic contributions. Indeed, the recent ILO report, *Making Decent Work a Reality for Domestic Workers* (2021), constitutes "a new attempt to capture more accurately and comprehensively the situation of all domestic workers, (…) The estimates thus capture live-in and live-out domestic workers employed directly by a household or households; domestic workers employed through or by a service provider; and domestic workers providing direct and indirect care services. They do not include domestic workers under the age of 15 years" (2021, p. xvii). This report also recognizes domestic workers as care workers and its estimates "include all domestic workers who provide indirect and direct care services" (*ibidem*, p. 6).

Overall, recent decades have seen increasing concern over domestic workers' labor rights globally. One of the most important landmarks in this area was ILO Convention No. 189

Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189), accompanied by Recommendation No. 201, which was promulgated in Geneva in 2011 and came into force in 2013. The Convention requires that ratifying countries ensure equal treatment between domestic workers and workers from other sectors, for example, in relation to working time, overtime compensation, minimum wages, daily rest, weekly rest, paid leave, social security protection, occupational health and safety, and beyond. Since 2012, the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), the only global trade union led by women, has been active as an umbrella organization promoting domestic workers' groups in all countries and the ratification of the ILO C189 (see Boris & Fish 2014). Neither Tanzania nor Ethiopia – nor the majority of other countries worldwide – have ratified the 2011 ILO convention.[16]

In Ethiopia, domestic workers are excluded from the application of Labour Proclamation No.1156/2019 and they do not have a specific trade union upholding their rights. In the proclamation, domestic work is simply defined as "employment of private service", "employment of a nonprofit careening, cleaning guardianship, gardening, driving and other related services for the employer and his family consumption." Yet these kinds of services are excluded from the Labour Proclamation [Articles 2 (16) cum 3 (2) (c)]. The Proclamation also indicates that the Council of Ministers can issue the regulation. However, no specific regulations have yet been issued.

Under Tanzanian laws, domestic workers are considered along with other employees, and although their rights are provided for under the Employment and Labour Relations Act, 2004 and Regulation of Wages and Terms of Employment Order, 2010, no specific provision strictly applies to domestic workers alone. The Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU) represents, amongst others, domestic workers.[17]

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[16] At the time of writing in 2021, ILO C189 has been ratified by 35 countries around the world, of which six are African countries: Guinea, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia (not in force), Sierra Leone (not in force) and South Africa. The status of ratification is available at: Ratifications of ILO conventions: Ratifications by Convention.

[17] CHODAWU came into being in 1995 and aimed at defending and fighting for rights of domestic workers and other sectors (namely conservation, hotels, social welfare and counselling institutions). CHODAWU is an affiliate of the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA) and focuses on workers' challenges such as low remuneration, long working hours, lack of rights, exploitation and subordination (IDWF report 2014, p. 8).

My study has also meant confronting different sets of labor legislation that, as I have mentioned above, in the case of Ethiopia excludes domestic workers from its remit, while in Tanzania it includes them in umbrella legislation for all workers but falls short of accounting for many of their needs. In the next two sections I shall elaborate on domestic work in the Ethiopian and Tanzanian labor law.

1.5   Tanzania: domestic work in labor law

Domestic workers in Tanzania are included in umbrella legislation for all workers under the Employment and Labour Relations Act of 2004. General labor law applies to domestic work, including the recognition of the right to collective bargaining and freedom of association, the elimination of discrimination in respect of occupation and the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of forms of compulsory or forced labor. Furthermore, under the existing legislation domestic workers enjoy the right to strike (URT 2004). Like other sectors, domestic work in Tanzania is regulated in terms of overtime compensation, working hours, weekly and daily rest, and maternity, sick and annual leave with remuneration (see ILO 2016). Tanzanian law states that, depending on their employers' income, domestic workers are guaranteed a minimum wage,[18] and also benefit from social security schemes.

"Importantly, Tanzanian law places the burden of proof on employers" (Steiler, 2020, p. 86). Employers are required to provide a written contract indicating remuneration, working hours, job description, workplace, *inter alia*, to the employee, and are also obliged to report all details relevant to the conduct of employment, and to produce the contract with all details

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[18] These are the categories of employers and respective minimum wages for domestic workers: "Employers are categorized into three groups: Diplomats and Potential Businessmen, Entitled Officers, and all other households, the latter including high to low income households. Minimum wages for domestic workers were previously set at 90,000 TZS, 80,000 TZS and 65,000 TZS (approx. 45, 40 and 33 UDS), respectively. Live-in domestic workers could have up to 68 per cent of their salaries deducted for accommodation and food (ILO 2016a: 79f.). Since 2013, minimum wages for domestic work have been set in four categories: 150,000 TZS (75 USD) for domestic servants employed by Diplomats and Potential Businessmen; 130,000 TZS (65 USD) for domestic workers employed by Entitled Government Officers; above 80,000 TZS (40 USD) for live-out domestic workers not employed by those in the first two categories; and above 40,000 TZS (20 USD) for live-in domestic workers not employed by the first two categories. The reduction of 68 per cent for live-in domestic workers is no longer applicable (ibid.: 7); however, if employed in a household other than in the first two categories, a live-in domestic worker still only receives half the wage of a live-out domestic worker" (Ilona Steiler, 2020, p. 86).

in case of labor disputes. Covered by these provisions, "domestic workers can seek redress through mediation and arbitration mechanisms and the Labour Court, according to the Labour Institutions Act of 2004, even and especially if their contract is oral or has not been specified to them (interview with CHODAWU 02.02.2015)" (*ibidem*, p. 87).

However, the representatives of CHODAWU, the Tanzanian Women Lawyer Association (TAWLA), Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA), and Community Justice Facilitators (CFJs) that I interviewed in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro stated that only in recent years have domestic workers have begun to turn to them. Many female workers are unfamiliar with CHODAWU and do not expect mediation offices to support them. From my study it emerged, even in the narratives of domestic workers, that mediation strategies take place mainly through other channels, through the involvement of friends, relatives, acquaintances and domestic workers in the neighborhood and intermediaries of different types, but outside of the associative and formal reality for the protection of domestic workers.

As in Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), the Employment and Labour Relations Act of Tanzania also recognizes verbal contracts. However, even in case of these contracts the law obliges the employer, in furtherance of protecting the domestic worker, to keep in writing most of the conditions and terms of employment:

> Employee's personal details including name, age, permanent address and sex of the employee and also other details such as place of recruitment, job description, date of commencement, form and duration of the contract and the place of work (…), the hours of work per day, per week and also rest periods (…), details about remuneration, how it will be calculated and other payments to be made to the employee including payments in kind. (…) Notably, a copy of all these details written by the employer must be given to the respective employee if the contract of employment is oral; for a written contract, an employee must have a copy of the contract of employment. In the event that the written particulars have changed, the employer is obliged to inform the employee about such changes (ILO 2016, p. 67).

However, the great majority of domestic workers I interviewed in my study do not have an employment contract that complies with these legal requirements. Only two have a written contract. In these cases, the workers and their employers signed the contract a year previously, after coming into contact with CVM, which promotes written contracts. In the case of all other women, being hired as a domestic worker is the result of multiple verbal agreements, usually between influential adults, with no clear agreements about the

responsibilities of the worker. This also applies to Ethiopia where, however, domestic workers cannot have a 'legal' contract, as they are not considered 'workers' under the labor laws.

Despite the apparent high level of legal protection, the Tanzanian labor law falls short of accounting for many domestic workers' needs. Four deficiencies can be identified: "First, private households are indirectly exempted from the regulations under the Tanzanian Occupational Health and Safety Act of 2003 due to legal procedures which would require official registration of the household as a designated workplace" (Steiler, 2020, p. 87). Yet the law respects the employers' right to privacy, private homes are not recognized as employment sites open to safety and labor inspection. "Second, if abuse, harassment or violent treatment of workers occur on grounds other than discrimination, they are not subject to labour but to criminal law" (*ibidem*). According to criminal law, the prosecution has to present proof of the crime, which is very difficult for victims who work behind closed doors. Third, "the law neither fully addresses the distinct nature of domestic work nor takes into consideration groups among domestic workers who are more vulnerable than others" (*ibidem*, p. 88), such as child, live-in domestic workers who face specific challenges and forms of exploitation and discrimination based on age, gender, lack of social support networks, and other cross-cutting factors. Fourth, since any legal framework requires clear job descriptions and stable employment relations, the law cannot account for domestic workers who are hired as daily laborers or casually, or when living arrangements and job descriptions do not fall into certain categories.

Thus, although in Tanzania domestic workers are covered by the labor law, it does not account for the specific nature of this work and does not treat it as work like any other. The deficiencies mentioned above affect, more broadly, the effectiveness of all regulations concerning collective unionization and organization, working conditions, fundamental rights at work, and the protection of domestic workers from different forms of exploitation and abuse. Thus, "the seclusion of the household creates an extra-legal and invisible space and thwarts following up the domestic workers' rights which are enshrined in the Labour and Employment Relations Act and other relevant pieces of legislation" (*ibidem*, 2020, p.89). In practice, only a minimal part of domestic work relations are compliant with the law or subjected to public scrutiny. Thus, the inclusion of domestic work in labor law "is simply an indicator of the extent to which the law is beginning to provide domestic workers with rights and protection; it is not an indicator of the level of coverage enjoyed. Domestic workers may

be included in the general labour laws but excluded from specific provisions or afforded levels of protection that are insufficient to ensure decent work" (ILO 2021, p. 58).

However, this thesis also aims at illustrating the strategies employed by domestic workers, outside the formal channels, to improve their condition. My study shows that the working conditions of domestic workers in Tanzania are no better than those of Ethiopian domestic workers, even though the latter are excluded from the labor law.

1.6   Ethiopia: domestic work in labor law

As in the former Ethiopian Labour Proclamation No. 377/2003, and in the recent and current Labour Proclamation No.1156/2019, domestic workers are excluded from the scope of application, and domestic work is simply defined as "employment of private service" [art. 2 (16)]. The current Proclamation, like its predecessor, authorizes the Council of Ministers to "issue regulation governing conditions of work applicable to personal services" [see art. 3, 3(c)]. However, no specific regulations have yet been issued.

The new Labour Proclamation entered into force at the end of my fieldwork in 2019. I was in Ethiopia at the time. In the months preceding its promulgation, at several meetings in Addis Ababa attended by CVM, trade unions and international organizations, some people put forward the hypothesis that domestic workers would soon be included in the Proclamation. Even at the meetings of the Domestic Workers Associations established by CVM, the domestic workers and some CVM staff members said that, although it was naive to expect that ILO Convention 189 would be ratified by the government, at least domestic workers would soon be recognized as workers in the new labor law. But this never happened.

In her study on female live-in domestic workers in Addis Abeba, Elsa Biadegilen (2011) reports that "at the time of data gathering for the research it was found that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was drafting regulations applicable to govern conditions of work that arise from contracts for personal services" (Biadegilen, 2011, p. 3). The author critically analyzed the content of the draft, arguing that "efforts for the provision of specific regulation, while valued, have not necessarily taken into consideration the specific realities as experienced by domestic workers" (p. 13). However, as I have shown, the new Proclamation is almost identical to the previous one.

In a recent article, Diriba Dabala and Abdata Sefata (2020) argue:

When the Ethiopian legislature repealed the Labour Proclamation No.377/2003 and replaced it with the new Labour Proclamation No.1156/201969 no change was made. Article 3 of the new proclamation hinted that this new proclamation does not apply to: support, treatment, care and rehabilitation contracts (Article 3, paragraph 2 (a), and personal service contracts (Article 3, paragraph 2) (d). This Proclamation, like its predecessor, provides that the Council of Ministers shall issue regulation governing conditions of work applicable to personal services' (Art-3(3) (c). Despite the adoption of a new Labour Proclamation, yet the new regulation does not include those regulations stipulated in the provisions of its predecessor (Dabala & Sefara, 2020, pp. 97).

According to some activists I interviewed, the only possible solution out of this impasse would be to address the Council of Ministers directly and with more determination.

Several scholars point out that "The only legal document issued by Ethiopian state that addresses domestic workers explicitly is the Ethiopian Civil Code which has been endorsed in 1960s" (Mulugeta 2012, p. 13). At the same time, they point out that the 1960 Civil Code adopts the term 'servant' (*ashker* for male and *gered* for female servant) instead of 'domestic worker'. Mussie Gebremedhin (2016) argues that the choice to use a specific designation has implications on the way domestic servants are treated. These implications may relate to exploitative conditions that evoke master-slave relations. In his words:

> However, the Code does not clearly define what domestic work is and who domestic servants are. The domestic and international socio-political realities of the 1960s might have influenced the Code to use the term domestic servant. This 'designation' has its own implications, if not everything about domestic workers. It could imply and dictate the manner and kinds of treatment a domestic worker could receive. The implication may relate to unfavourable conditions and treatments a servant traditionally faced in the context of a master-servant relationship which involved inferior levels of treatment and protection than provided to other groups of workers (Gebremedhin, 2016, p. 41).

Similarly, Diriba Dabala and Abdata Sefata (2020) provide a brief examination of the 1960 Ethiopian Civil Code, "the first legislation that recognized domestic workers" (p. 94). In the Civil Code, we find reference to 'domestic servants' in Book V (Special Contracts) under Title XVI (Contracts for the performance of services), Chapter 2 (Contracts of particular kinds of work), in particular Section 3 (Contract of domestic servants living in), Art. 2601-2604. According to the Civil Code, it is at the discretion of the employer to provide accommodation, food, times of work, and other reasonable measures to safeguard the health and well-being of the employee. "The expression 'reasonable' utilized under art-2601 of the

Code is nebulous and untenable. It gives the employer the full right to decide what his/her domestic worker can get" (2020, p. 94). The remuneration of such employees must be paid every three months unless otherwise agreed, but in general, the Code provides less protection and benefits for domestic workers than to other groups of workers. In particular, although the employer is required (for a limited period of time) to protect the health of the worker, he/she can cover the domestic worker's medical treatments by reducing the salary. Moreover, the employer can avoid complying with these obligations if it is proven that the disease was "intentionally" contracted by the worker:

> According to art-2602 (1) of the Code, the employer is obliged to provide medication test if its employee contracted of sickness either through medical attendant at home or takes him/her to the hospital. However this duty is limited to one month in case the illness occurs after at least one year from the beginning of the employment contract, and to two weeks, where it occurs after at least three months from the beginning of the contract. The Code stipulates that a meager salary of the employee will be used to compensate for the expenses incurred in treating domestic workers during the period of illness. Article 2603/3 of the Code expounds that the employer can be exempted from liability, if an employee deliberately contracts an illness. (…). So, holding domestic workers responsible for any disease is lamentable, as causes of illness may be related to workplace for which the employer is responsible (*ibidem*, pp. 94-95).

Thus, although the Civil Code regulates the employment conditions of live-in domestic servants, in fact it leaves ample space for employers in defining the conditions of domestic workers, and leaves domestic workers in a vulnerable condition. It is interesting to note that, as I have already mentioned, the Civil Code still adopts the expression 'servant', which was banned in 1974.

> The expression in the Code has utilized an abusive word to describe live-in domestic workers which is *'gered'* in Amharic loosely translated 'servant' in English. (…) Therefore, the Code retained the legal effect under the *Dergue* and the problems of live-in domestic workers continued an abated. They denied of their humanity and their basic human rights, and thus are regarded as a commodity rather than a human being. Normally, the treatment conferred to them under the Code is uncalled for (Dabala & Sefara, 2020, pp. 94-95).

Although the term 'servant' is not present in the Ethiopian Labour Proclamation, domestic workers are here even more invisible than in the Civil Code. They are not named, except loosely within the category of 'private service', and are not covered by the Proclamation. Paradoxically – and unlike the Labour Proclamation – the Civil Code, with its pejorative

terms, guarantees domestic workers some extra protection, albeit minimal and ambiguous. It would seem that domestic workers can be 'protected' only to the extent that certain hierarchical and servile relations are guaranteed and, more or less explicitly, recognized. In fact, studying domestic work today also means highlighting some aspects of past servile and slave relations that persist over time, but take different forms and are subject to continuous transformations.

Outside the Civil Code, domestic workers might find some legal protection, as Ethiopian citizens, under the 2004 Criminal Code of Ethiopia.

> The Criminal Code, for example, has provided various criminal sanctions against criminal acts, including but not limited to crimes against life; morals, persons and health, honour, and bodily security. In particular, the Code provides protection to domestic workers from any possible sexual, physical and psychological abuses. Apart from the Criminal Code, domestic workers have the right to claim compensation for damage sustained while working for the employers under the law of extra-contractual liability (Gebremedhin 2016, p. 62).

However, the effective protection provided to domestic workers is very limited and the women themselves, as my study also demonstrates, mobilize different strategies outside formal channels to find protection against the abuses suffered.

Diriba Dabala and Abdata Sefata (2020) emphasize that Ethiopia, by failing to protect domestic workers' right in its labor law, has actually violated the country's constitution. Indeed, the human rights framework established by the constitution reflects the labor rights of domestic workers. As they put it:

> Article 18 (2, 3 & 4) implicitly regulates the labour of domestic workers; although this is not an orthodox description ordained only for them rather it is a comprehensive provision for all the citizens. Its Art-18 affirms that inhumane, degrading treatment, forced servitude, and forced labour are prohibited. Forced labour is simply 'any work or service that is exacted from any person by coercion or menace of penalty and for which the person does not avail himself willingly. The idiom of the Constitution above on forced labour should be broadly construed to include minors who is incapable under the law to enter into contracts, as it is explicitly declared in the Convention No.189 (Dabala & Sefara, 2020, p. 95).

From this point of view Ethiopia – which has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – has violated "the Constitution; the ILO Convention No. 189 and Recommendation No. 201, adopted in 2011 and other human rights instruments" (Dabala & Sefara, 2020, p. 97).

Some members of government bodies, such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), openly express some doubts about the prospective enactment of a domestic worker regulation. MoLSA is the responsible organ to elaborate and propose a draft regulation on domestic work. According to some members, such a regulation would act against the domestic workers themselves, as it would "disrupt the traditional family-like relationship that exists between an employer and a domestic worker" (Gebremedhin 2016, p. 64). No member of the institutions and organizations I interviewed has ever explicitly admitted to being against the regulation of domestic workers. But several have pointed out that domestic workers can get more benefit when they are also treated as family members, rather than only as workers (and vice versa). In this regard, the prospective regulation might also have negative effects. At the same time, research participants (members of organizations and institutions, CVM staff, but also the domestic workers themselves) highlighted the potential negative effects of this family-like relationship, which often leads to further exploitation.

Again, as in the case of Tanzania where I have talked about the "*Undugu* Conundrum" (Kiaga 2012), the knot that binds practices, idioms and imaginaries of protection, care and family love, with practices, idioms and imaginaries of exploitation, hierarchy, and asymmetric relations, is rather difficult to unravel. Domestic workers seem to gain some minimal protection under the Civil Code, even as they are referred to with an Amharic term that recalls master-slave relations. They lose any form of protection in the labor law, in which they are not named at all. They are supposed to find protection within traditional family-like relations characterizing domestic work, but these relations also lead them into exploitation. This tangled knot occurs at different levels within this thesis and reveals that the transformations of domestic work over time are not linear, and cannot be reduced to a simple shift from the slave, servile relations, or the traditional family-like relations of the past, to today's forms of paid-based contractual work relations.

1.7   Women's profile

This thesis is based mainly on the analysis of 30 life-stories gathered in Debre Markos (Ethiopia) and 25 in Morogoro (Tanzania), the cities where I conducted most of my fieldwork. Of these, I mainly focus on the narratives of 9 women in Ethiopia and 10 in Tanzania. Their life stories have been transcribed from Amharic (Ethiopia) and Swahili (Tanzania) into English by local interpreters. Thus, I specifically quote the (17) transcriptions and translations that I have analyzed. I have selected these women because

they are the ones with whom I was able to establish a stronger relationship during my fieldwork, and whom I was able to interview several times.[19]

The great majority of women interviewed come from families that depend economically on rural agricultural activities. They generally move to middle-class and upper-middle-class households in urban areas and, more precisely, to households where at least one member works in the public sector or has a permanent job. The great majority of women I interviewed in Ethiopia come from villages in the Amhara region and especially in the Gojjam area. The women in Tanzania come from different regions of the country: Dodoma, Mbeya, Kigoma, Iringa, Dar Es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Manyara, Mara, Singida, Mwanza, Tanga. Specifically, the ten Tanzanian domestic workers that I mention in this thesis are from Kigoma (1), Dodoma (2), Morogoro (3), Iringa (1), Singida (2) and Mwanza (1).
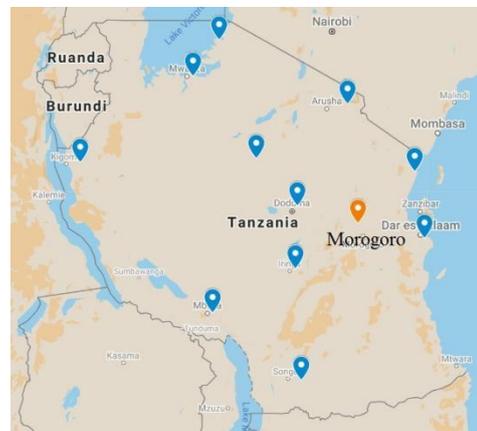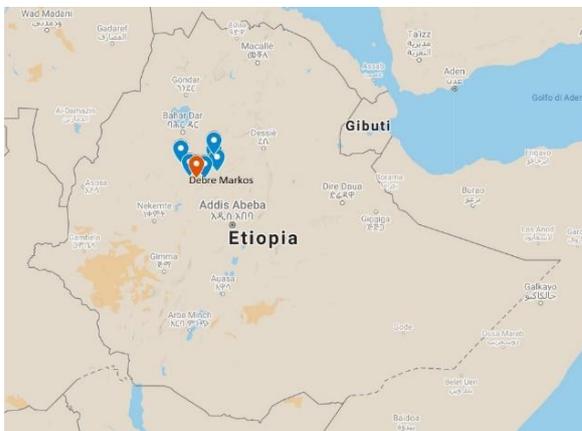
The great majority of Ethiopian women are Orthodox and only few are Muslim (all the nine Ethiopian domestic workers discussed in this thesis are Orthodox). Tanzanian women are split between Christians (Catholics, Protestants and some members of the Seventh-Day

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Adventist Church) and Muslims. Of the ten Tanzanian domestic workers in this thesis, one is Muslim.

In both countries, the domestic workers interviewed were between 17 and 30 years of age at the time of my fieldwork, and the majority were between 20 and 25 years of age. They started employment as domestic workers in urban areas when they were between 12 and 17 years of age. The biological ages mentioned here are likely to be imprecise, since most women interviewed don't have birth registration. At the time of my fieldwork the women interviewed were all working as live-in domestic workers. However, their narratives also refer to previous experiences as both live-in and live-out domestic workers in households other than the current one, as well as in other towns or cities (such as Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia; Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo in Tanzania), and in different sectors. Indeed, many women have passed through different work experiences during their life courses. For instance, many Ethiopian women previously worked as daily laborers on construction sites for brief periods (several streets in Debre Markos were under construction at the time of my fieldwork). In Tanzania, domestic workers might have previously worked as street vendors, selling vegetables and fruits. In both countries, domestic workers might have previously worked in bars, or alternated between domestic work and other forms of unskilled labor in shops and groceries, usually when their employers in households were engaged in such activities. However, when I met them they were working as live-in domestic workers. When I met them, none of the women interviewed were married and most of them had no children. Specifically, only 7 out of 30 women interviewed in Debre Markos had one or two children; In Tanzania, 5 out of 25 women had one or two children.

In this thesis I will show that the women interviewed have changed households and forms of engagement in domestic work during their life courses. When they are paid, the monthly salaries of live-in domestic workers range between 300 Birr (6 Euros) and 800 Birr (15 Euros) in Ethiopia; and between 30,000 TZS (11 Euros) and 70,000 TZS (26 Euros) in Tanzania. In very few cases Tanzanian women are paid more than 70,000 TZS, up to a maximum of 100,000 TZS (37 Euros). At the time of data collection the majority of Ethiopian domestic workers working in Debre Markos were paid 400 Birr (7 Euros) per month, while the average monthly salary of Tanzanian women in Morogoro was 50,000 TZS (18 Euros). The great majority of the domestic workers interviewed received a salary when I interviewed them, but in most cases at least their first working experience was unpaid.

Most of the domestic workers I discuss in this thesis have been members of the CVM Domestic Workers' Associations for two months up to a year. Only three women in Ethiopia

and two in Tanzania have known the NGO for three, five or seven years. They are the so-called leaders, or representatives, of the Domestic Workers Associations: Ketema, Emebet and Yamrot in Ethiopia; Vestina and Beatrice in Tanzania. Overall, in this thesis I analyze women's narratives in the present and past tense to explore different situations before and after they came come into contact with the NGO.

A characteristic shared by the vast majority of the domestic workers I interviewed in both countries is that they are "lonely" women, as Giulia Barrera (2011) would say. That is, they lack a strong support network in their villages of origin. In this thesis I also call them 'orphan' women, a term I do not associate with the loss of biological parents. They are instead women who have never had, or have lost for various reasons, the support of (kin and non-kin) people who might protect them and take care of them. Instead, these women constantly perform care work in the service of both urban and rural households. Thus, once they move to the city they also look for a support network that they have lost or never had, and that might help them improve their lives.

1.8   General structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. After this (1) Introduction there is a (2) chapter, "Methodology and women's narratives", in which I describe the methodology I adopted to analyze women's narratives. I mention several social actors who have been fundamental for me to be able to develop a methodological approach and write this thesis. I shed light on the limits of this work and also reflect on ethical dilemmas that accompanied me before, during and after the fieldwork. Moreover, I think of possible strategies that might help minimize the inevitable power hierarchies between researcher and research participants.

Then, there are two theoretical chapters. The first, (3) "Conceptualizing Migration and Agency", illustrates my theoretical approach in relation to the analysis of women's migratory experiences and the concept of agency. In particular, I will outline the theoretical tools on which I built the analytical framework of my research, such as the concept of migration as a practice, the concept of social reproduction, and the intersection between gender, migration and transitions in individual life phases of female domestic workers. I will analyze the concept of agency in the migration/agency nexus, in relation to other notions such as the concept of resistance, and to the risks to which domestic workers are exposed during their life.

The second theoretical chapter, (4) "Domestic Work in Africa. An Analysis in Space and Time", gives an historical overview of the changing nature of domestic labor in Africa from the pre-colonial period to the present, based on studies from several disciplines in social science. In particular, I will explore how the expansion of labor commodification in African economies through time has affected the household division of labor and domestic labor performance.

The remainder of this thesis concerns the analysis of interviewees' narratives. In chapter (5) "Reasons for Migration", I will present women's narratives in relation to their life before migration and to reasons behind migration. This chapter starts with a reflection on the concept of poverty in relation to the issue of structural violence and gender-based violence, and on how the same concept can be expressed in domestic workers' narratives. In exploring the reasons that led women to leave their villages of origin, as well as the social actors and structural elements that might influence migration processes, the chapter also reflects on the concept of 'freedom'. I ask what it means, from the point of view of the women interviewed, to escape certain gender norms, restrictions on mobility and social obligations in their villages of origin; what form of (un)freedom women aspire to; and more generally what are the ambitions, expectations, future plans of these women.

In chapter (6) "Life in Town", I describe how women's lives turn out after migration, their work experiences in towns and cities other than Debre Markos and Morogoro (where I met them), and then when they reached the two cities of destination. I explore different forms of domestic work in which women have been engaged during their life course, and reflect on how we can define "domestic work" in the contexts under study. Through the women's narratives, I explore their first encounters with urban areas and their living and working conditions as domestic workers and when they have been engaged in other types of labor. I investigate how women explore the urban space and carve out personal spaces of action. I shed light on opportunities, constraints and risks in urban areas in relation to women's ambitions and future plans, as well as the obligations and responsibilities which regulate their lives. I explore how the gender norms and social obligations that domestic workers might have tried to escape in their villages of origin recur in different forms in urban areas. I also explore women's need to seek protection in the city and certain asymmetric, hierarchical relationships that characterize their lives, and where relations of power, subordination, protection and care inevitably coexist.

In chapter (7) "Personal Networks in Women's Lives", I discuss how domestic workers continuously establish and mobilize various types of personal networks to achieve their goals

and overcome challenges that hinder their precarious lives. Women's relations also appear in the previous chapter, especially in relation to domestic workers' relationships with their employers, but this chapter focuses on the ties that Ethiopian and Tanzanian domestic workers develop with other female domestic workers, and specifically ties of mutual support. I show how female workers, in the absence of formal channels of protection and support, mobilize alternatives forms of practical, emotional and material support to improve their lives. Women exchange information, take on the role of intermediaries and facilitators to help other women and achieve their goals. I explore their personal networks by following their experiences in different phases of their lives: before they moved to Debre Markos and Morogoro, and once they reached the cities of destination. In doing so, I analyze the nature of these personal networks, which might appear weak and can be easily interrupted, but which can be reactivated in later circumstances and strategically used in times of need.

In chapter (8) "A Fight for Rights and Recognition", I link the lived experiences of female domestic workers to the NGO projects involving them, and to the international policy plans for the improvement of domestic workers' rights (such as the international campaigns for the ratification of ILO Convention 189). Drawing on my interviews with members and representatives of Domestic Workers' Associations, trade unions and other organizations and institutions in Ethiopia and Tanzania, I examine the perspectives of activists advocating for the recognition of domestic workers' rights in both countries. In doing so, I briefly explore the ambiguities that might emerge when projects aimed at the formalization of hired care work do not meet the particular needs of domestic workers in specific contexts. I reflect on how domestic workers' individual and collective strategies of resistance at different levels of (formal and informal) solidarity – as well as ethnographic research through the analysis of women's narratives – might help identify alternative solutions for the improvement of domestic workers' situation. Lastly, I offer my (9) Conclusions.

2   METHODOLOGY AND WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

The research was mainly conducted in two towns where CVM has premises: Debre Markos (Ethiopia) and Morogoro (Tanzania). I carried out a total of seven months of fieldwork in Ethiopia, and five months in Tanzania, split in two phases: between June and December 2018, and between August and December 2019. Each phase was, in turn, divided into two research periods: one in Ethiopia and one in Tanzania. Thus, every year I left Italy and went to Ethiopia, then I moved from Ethiopia to Tanzania before going back to Italy.

My entry into the field was gradual, a slow but constant accumulation of small events which allowed me to become familiar, step by step, with the contexts under study. At the beginning I started an exploratory phase of the urban context, I tried to observe, take notes, and build relationships. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania CVM staff guided me in exploring the city. All staff members were local people, except for a few Italian social service volunteers.[20] In particular, during the first two weeks of my stay in Debre Markos and Morogoro, two local CVM male coordinators helped me build trust in the community. I was curious to participate in the activities of the NGO, even when they were not specifically related to domestic work. Thanks to my collaboration with the NGO, I was able to travel, move from the cities under study to other cities, towns and villages. In general, I tried to seize every experiential opportunity, as what really matters in ethnographic research is make sure that you do not overlook any element along the way, but rather experience and savour the flux of events by following every possible direction (Pavanello 2010, p. 123). Fieldwork is not limited to the observation of specific moments, nor does it end in dialogue with specific subjects. These aspects, while certainly important, assume their full meaning only within a continuous flow of constant attention – at times distracted or fluctuating – to what surrounds us and happens around us, and which allows us to truly penetrate the experience (Schirripa 2019, pp. 9-10). Sometimes it happened that part of the NGO staff suddenly changed their plans and left Debre Markos or Morogoro to carry out, for example, a monitoring activity in the surrounding villages for a few days. I could decide whether to go with them or remain with the rest of the CVM staff in the city. Should I leave or continue the work in Debre Markos/Morogoro? Here, at a certain point, I had the feeling of not being able to give up any experience. What if I could never come back? If it was proposed to me, I needed to go. It was like a game where whatever you give up means not being able to grasp an important

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[20] During my fieldwork I met two Italian volunteers in Ethiopia and four in Tanzania.

opportunity for your fieldwork, and above all, your life. However, the activities in the surrounding rural areas were very important to me, also because some domestic workers interviewed in the city came from these areas. In this way I could observe the contexts from which they came. And so, along with this gradual "understanding through attendance"[21] (Piasere 2002, p. 56), I started planning my first interviews in Debre Markos and Morogoro.

The main data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and life stories, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), daily conversations, participation and observation. Adopting a life-story approach, my work is mainly based on the analysis of 30 life-stories gathered in Ethiopia and 25 in Tanzania which were subsequently transcribed from Amharic (Ethiopia) or Swahili (Tanzania) into English, thanks to the work of local interpreters. Whenever in this thesis I quote domestic workers' words, I specifically draw on tape-recorded life stories which were transcribed by these local translators. As I have already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis (see the section "women's profile"), in quoting women's narratives I have selected the transcriptions of 9 domestic workers in Ethiopia and 10 in Tanzania. I have changed names of the women in order not to disclose their identities.

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, my first meetings with domestic workers took place through the intermediation of the NGO. I initially met them at the CVM premises, in an open space dedicated to the meetings of the Domestic Workers' Associations established by the NGO. During the meetings, the members share their life and work experiences, and jointly develop strategies for engaging new members with the Associations. On these occasions, spontaneous FGDs emerged, and I made my first appointments for individual interviews. I should make it clear from the outset that most of the women I interviewed had known CVM just for a year or even less. Only five women in Ethiopia and three in Tanzania had come into contact with the NGO for three, five or seven years, and they were the so-called 'leaders', the main representatives of the Domestic Workers' Associations.[22] Here I refer specifically to the domestic workers I met in Debre Markos and Morogoro, the ones I could interview several times and with whom I was able to establish relationships. Obviously, during the social dialogue tables organized by CVM in other cities (usually Addis Ababa in

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[21] Leonardo Piasere coins the Italian term *perduzione* (see Piasere 2002, pp. 55-57, and chapter VI, pp. 142-166).

[22] CVM established the first Domestic Workers' Associations in Ethiopia in 2010 and other associations in Ethiopia and Tanzania between 2010 and 2013. However, at that time the NGO was not working on specific projects for domestic workers, but rather on supporting people vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. I will give more details on CVM projects and Domestic Workers' Associations in the final chapter.

Ethiopia and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania) other representatives of the Associations gathered. For example, during a meeting with the Ethiopian trade union that I attended in Addis Ababa there were 14 representatives of the Ethiopian Domestic Workers' Associations, six of whom represented Associations of returnee migrant domestic workers (women who used to work in the Middle East and then repatriated). These representatives had known CVM since 2010 or 2013 (the first Domestic Workers' Association in Ethiopia was established in 2010). But when, in this thesis, I describe the experiences of domestic workers I mainly refer, as already mentioned, to narratives I collected during my stay in Debre Markos and Morogoro. Domestic workers, as I have understood also from their narratives, often move, change cities, return to their villages of origin and then leave again. Some women who had returned to their home villages in rural or semi-urban areas, had, however, created associative networks there too. I could see these when I moved with the NGO, collaborating on other social or environmental projects in the surrounding areas. Again, however, the women I was able to interview were new members of the associations. Those who had previously come into contact with CVM were always elsewhere. Mobility is a central element in domestic workers' lives, an aspect that will also emerge in this thesis through the analysis of their personal narratives.

The expression 'personal narratives', that I also use in the subtitle of this thesis, may give the idea of individual narratives which reflect only parts of a woman's life, in the past and in the present (Willemse 2014, p. 39). Personal narratives can take many forms, including biography and life history (Personal Narratives Group 1986, p. 4), illuminate the course of a life over time, and shed light on the individual, personal character of women's experiences. Through personal narratives, the gender dimension comes to the fore, as do alternative spaces of self-representation. Clearly, personal narratives are given from a specific point in place and time creating a distance from past experiences. In this sense, they are about "how the passage of personal time is remembered and recounted" (Brettell, 2002, p. S45), but they are also a space in which women imagine and plan their futures. In addition to illuminating the course of a life over time, personal narratives "allow for its interpretation in its historical and cultural context" (Personal Narratives Group 1986, p. 4). Thus, they are about the process of construction of the self and, simultaneously, "provide a vital entry point in the interaction between the individual and society" (*ibidem*, p. 6). At this point of interaction, everyday relations emerge with all their contradictions.

During my fieldwork, I would have liked to "follow" (Epstein 1969a, p. 112) the domestic workers through several situations in the city, along urban paths, precisely to grasp parts of

their personal relationships, through observation and active participation in community life. In this way, I hoped to reconstruct some aspects of their personal networks, to trace the nature of the social contacts they made over a limited period of time (Epstein 1969b, p. 117), following to some extent the methodological guidelines suggested by the Manchester School[23] (Decimo 2009, p. 14). I would have liked to integrate this approach with the analysis of women's narratives, but this has, unfortunately, rarely been possible. Domestic workers are not easy to reach; they hardly have time off, and a relationship of confidence is not easy to build. They usually start work very early in the morning and end late in the evening, after the last meal. Overall, their freedom of movement is restricted, as it often depends on the will of other household members who determine the extent to which they can leave the house when they are not working outdoors (such as when they shop at the marketplace). Thus, I followed the migratory trajectories of female workers, and their personal networks, mainly through their narratives.

Certainly, I also explored the urban context. I met other domestic workers in the city, and had encounters that helped me to better understand the context. But the specific interactions with the domestic workers involved in this thesis was, most of the time, limited to a precise moment: the limited space where each woman recounted her story. I rarely had the opportunity to spend time with her outside of that space. However, the narratives I quote in this thesis are mainly those of women whom, unlike the others I spoke to, I was able to see frequently and interview several times.

2.1   The fundamental role of interpreters and others

During the fieldwork a female interpreter was always by my side. Without her I would not have been able to conduct this research. During the two phases of fieldwork research, in 2018 and 2019, four female interpreters accompanied me, two in Ethiopia and two in Tanzania. When I met them, they were volunteers at CVM and I paid them to interpret. In Ethiopia I also worked with a male interpreter for a month when collaborating on CVM projects in Addis Ababa. On several occasions, however, NGO staff members assumed the role of interpreters. This was especially the case during the meetings of the Domestic Workers' Associations. These were important occasions for me to carry out, together with the NGO staff, short semi-structured interviews and FGDs. The field turned out to be a

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[23] See, in particular, Mitchell, J.C. (ed.) (1969), *Social networks in urban situations: analyses of personal relationships in Central African towns*, Manchester University Press.

"laboratory" (Cresswell 1981, p. 30), a space where I repeatedly developed, together with other people, research methods and interpretation of the collected data. These 'other people' were the NGO staff, interpreters, female domestic workers, and others I came to know along the way, including neighbors, students and researchers. They were the social actors that – directly or indirectly – gave me hints on how to undertake the research. In Ethiopia, I had the invaluable opportunity to attend, together with my first interpreter, a course in qualitative research methods at the University of Debre Markos (two lessons per week for a month and a half). She was enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences and invited me to attend classes with her. It was a very important opportunity to better elaborate a research method together, and to reflect on the work in progress. At the same time, I thought even more intensely about my privileges as a white researcher. A letter written by the NGO, signed by the university professor, was enough for me to be allowed to attend the course for free, in a context where attending the university, and even finishing secondary school, was a privilege for the few. The presence of the NGO and the interpreter as intermediators and facilitators was crucial in these circumstances.

Some moments of collective discussion were organized by CVM staff who convened meetings with the 'leaders' or representatives of the Domestic Workers' Associations. These were, as previously noted, those female domestic workers who had known CVM for the longest time. These meetings, where different viewpoints were acknowledged, shared and discussed, aimed to identify ways of improving the condition of domestic workers in the two countries. The domestic workers played a central role in leading the meeting. This was in line with the feminist participatory action research approach that guided also other research carried out by CVM in collaboration with international actors such as IDWF (the International Domestic Workers Federation) and GAATW (the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women) (IDWF-GAATW 2019, p. 3). Consequently, this was also an opportunity to talk about research, analyze some research results and identify critical issues within a process of co-creation of knowledge.

Outside of these moments of collective work I used to explore the urban space. During these explorations, the female interpreter helped me build trust in the community and make new acquaintances. We gathered the points of view of different social actors on the condition of domestic workers. In doing so, I tended to avoid direct interviews so that were, as much as possible, spontaneous and flexible. Organizing individual encounters with female domestic workers was more challenging because, as I have already mentioned, they were barely reachable and had little time available. The greatest challenge was to build up relationships

of trust and confidence with them. It was also essential to find secluded places where they felt comfortable talking.

2.2   Organizing interviews and everyday conversations

Together with the interpreter, I looked for secluded places to gather life stories and conduct individual in-depth interviews. The latter almost always developed in the form of life stories. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, these secluded places were quiet courtyards near the CVM office, or uncrowded coffeehouses. At other times, I conducted interviews in a room that was usually dedicated to the meetings of the Domestic Workers' Associations, and which the domestic workers themselves considered to be a suitable place, as long as there were only the three of us in the room (me, the interpreter and the domestic worker). In-depth interviews and life-stories lasted between one and two hours, on average an hour and a half. If the woman agreed, they were tape-recorded.

An important occasion for organizing additional interviews was when I visited domestic workers in their workplaces (the households). In fact, at the time of my fieldwork, CVM was organizing – in both countries – visits to sensitize employers to issues affecting domestic workers, and to raise awareness about the NGO's projects. Whenever I followed CVM in these visits, I had the opportunity to get an idea of the women's workplaces, and to meet employers. I also took the opportunity to make appointments with the domestic workers. In some circumstances, I was able to interview them at the end of the visit, if the employers agreed. In that case, we found a quiet place outside the home for the interview.

Organizing these home visits was challenging. The NGO was not always well received, and I often had the sense that my presence might be inappropriate. This tension mainly emerged when the NGO tried to make an appointment for the visit, either by phone or when we casually passed by the house. But once the appointment was made, people welcomed us with hospitality. I found differences between visits in Ethiopia and those in Tanzania. In Ethiopia it was quite easy to get into houses. In fact, the employers, regardless of whether they appreciated our visit or not, invited us to come into the house, they offered us coffee and injera, a fermented flatbread. This was in line with the usual ethics of hospitality and care, and the coffee ceremony (the so-called *buna* ceremony) with which people usually receive guests in many parts of Ethiopia (see Rita Pankhurst 1997).

In the serving of coffee there is a pronounced gender hierarchy. Women are supposed to make the coffee, they usually offer the first round to men in order of age, followed by women

and children (Howard 2018, p. 89). The hierarchy is even more pronounced where there is a domestic worker in the house. And so domestic workers served us *buna* and injera. For me it was very important to observe the interaction between domestic workers and family members, but always taking into account my positioning, the impact of my presence, and of the NGO's presence, in that context. In contrast, in Tanzania this invitation to enter the house was very rare. The employers usually invited us to take a seat in the balconies outside their houses, or in the courtyards that run along them. They employed several forms of companionship and assistance to make us feel welcomed onto the scene, sometimes they offered us fruit or a cold drink. It was a different form of hospitality (see Fourshey 2012). Here, it was more difficult for me to observe a specific part of the workplace, the one relating to the indoor space of the house.

However, in both Ethiopia and Tanzania, we were able to visit the workplace (the household) – whether by entering the house or staying outside – of a limited number of domestic workers. Specifically, seven domestic workers in Ethiopia (entering the house); and fourteen in Tanzania (where I entered the house only in three occasions). The number of houses in Tanzania is larger because, at the time of my fieldwork, the NGO was particularly committed to raising awareness among employers, and spent a lot of time seeking to arrange appointments with them. This was because, in Morogoro, CVM was organizing trainings on 'domestic service' for domestic workers at the Mikumi TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) center, and needed employers to permit their workers to participate. During the fieldwork I also did some interviews at TVET centers in both Ethiopia and Tanzania, where domestic workers were attending trainings. On these occasions I interviewed the staff of the TVET centers, carried out FGDs with domestic workers, and conducted semi-structured interviews while working in the NGO staff teams. Overall, while semi-structured interviews and FGDs were very useful to provide contextual information on the lives of young women, in-depth interviews and life stories make it possible to more precisely decode the general categories that appeared. I always took handwritten notes, which I checked and sorted out after the interviews.

The viewpoints of employers, recruiters, relatives and friends of domestic workers, and other social actors, were also collected. It was particularly difficult to meet domestic workers' relatives. Only on very few occasions was I able to interview some relatives, specifically, three mothers in Ethiopia, two aunts (one in Ethiopia and one in Tanzania) and five sisters

(three in Ethiopia and two in Tanzania).[24] I was never able to meet male members of domestic workers' families. However, in domestic workers' accounts, their relatives (both male and female) were not in Debre Markos and Morogoro (with a few exceptions), but rather in their birth areas or in other cities across the country.

Further information was gleaned from representatives of various organizations, institutions and local and international NGOs working on internal migration-related issues and workers' rights in both countries. In particular, in Ethiopia interviews were conducted with representatives of the Bureaus of Labour and Social Affairs (BOLSA); Private Employment Agencies (PEAs); Women, Children and Youth Affairs office; community-based associations (CBO) (such as *Iddir*, a CBO established to provide mutual aid in burial matters, but also to address other community concerns); Debre Markos Univesity; Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU); the ILO in Addis Ababa; Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) and brokers' offices in Addis Ababa.

In Tanzania, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Conservation Hotels Domestic Workers Union (CHODAWU); Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE); Tanzania Women Lawyer Association (TAWLA); Commission for Mediation and Arbitration (CMA); Community Justice Facilitators (CJFs); Tanzania Employment Services Agency (TaESA); International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and WoteSawa (Young Domestic Workers Organization in Tanzania) in Mwanza city (north-western Tanzania).

I emphasize that observation and participation in the daily life of the community, markets, community gatherings and ceremonies were opportunities of great value. All everyday encounters, whether planned or not, allowed me to better understand the context in which I was doing research and to build connections with people. Visits to the homes of people I encountered allowed me to meet some domestic workers who didn't know about CVM activities. However, it was difficult to make appointments with them and see them outside, beyond the specific occasion in which I had met them. In particular, it was difficult to organize private, individual interviews without the presence of the people for whom they worked. The same goes for the domestic workers I met in the markets, during social and religious ceremonies, and other occasions of community gatherings. After those occasions, it was easy to lose track of them. However, as I have already mentioned, most of the domestic workers I interviewed, who were members of the CVM Domestic Workers' Associations,

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[24] Two of them were not biological sisters, but rather female friends who were considered 'sisters'.

had been in contact with the NGO for a year or less. In their narratives, they largely talk about past work experiences, when they were children and adolescent girls. In my study I analyse their narratives in the present and past tense (see Klocker 2012) to explore different situations before and after they come into contact with the NGO.

2.3 Ethical concerns

Clearly, it is difficult to speak for women and in their names. How are individual narratives and life stories reconstituted by those who gather them and transmit them to the audience? As Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet highlight in the book *Child Migration in Africa* (2016), when using individual testimonies we should always take precautions, we should use citations with reflexivity, taking into consideration the plurality of voices and the diverse contexts in which the subjects' lives are embedded (2016, p. 6). Above all, we should always consider the risks of an unthinking use of the attempt to 'give space' to subjects' voices, as well as other issues which have to do with ethical problems in representing personal narratives. The idea that giving space for personal narratives is necessarily beneficial and liberating for the individual who speaks stems from an ethnocentric approach, a universalistic vision of personhood which draws on psychoanalytic and psychological insights (see Lancy 2012). These ideas are often adopted within the development discourse as tools to empower women. Again, a political reflexivity is needed, especially when we deal with so-called North-South relations.

I can't know if the women I interviewed were actually happy to share their narratives. I often had the impression that they were, but who can assure me of this? I also felt their tiredness when an hour of interviewing passed. In such cases, the only thing I could do was to not force my hand, and maybe even softly interrupt the conversation. And I believe that in some circumstances we must also be able to give up our claims to collect as much data as possible. But whatever impression I had, it could also be the other way around, or a combination of the two. Furthermore, my position as a white woman, a member of an NGO, sparked false hopes in women who, at times, considered me capable of helping them financially – whether in the short or in the long term – or even changing their lives. I do not want to generalize: there were also women who were perfectly aware that this was not possible, but the former situation also occurred. And so, I had to be able to handle these situations without creating false expectations. Moreover, I was a white, middle-class woman who could easily be seen as "a potential employer" (Ribeiro Corossacz 2018, p. 390). Some women asked me if I needed a domestic worker, in the hope I would take them with me to Italy. They asked me

if there was any sick member in my family to take care of, and they promised me that if so, they would dedicate their lives to caring for that person. I had become part of their personal network. In their imagery, I was one of those contacts through whom they could, perhaps, change their lives. At the same time, I was building my own personal network (of which they were a part) for this research. This almost paradoxical situation made me uncomfortable. But the only thing I could do was become aware of the inevitable structural disparity and try to communicate with them as sincerely as possible. And further, how do research participants react when the friendly researcher leaves with the data and is no longer able to keep in touch? Who is going to benefit in the long run? As Razy and Rodet put it (referring specifically to studies on child migrants in Africa):

> Ultimately – and this is a crucial point – once the researcher has obtained the child's testimony, he or she leaves the field and returns home. So what will result from this testimony and what will happen to this child who, in speaking, has gained access to a process of subjectivation – which may cause further difficulties that he/she will often have to face alone? (E. Razy & Rodet, 2016, pp. 8-9)

Once back to Italy, it was very difficult for me to keep in touch with the domestic workers I interviewed. I kept in touch with a few via social media (Facebook, IMO or WhatsApp). But one can count these on the fingers of one hand, as most (especially in Ethiopia) do not use social media, and use their mobile phones only for calls within the country. Some of them (albeit a few) didn't have a mobile phone when I met them. Moreover, It emerged from their narratives that often the people they work for do not allow them to use the mobile phones freely, and rather impose several limits. However, I regularly maintain contact with some NGO staff members in both Ethiopia and Tanzania. Sometimes we make video calls. Sometimes they call me (or I call them) during the meetings of the Domestic Workers' Associations. These are delightful opportunities to see and greet some women via a screen, albeit for a very short time.

Once I have completed this thesis, I intend to write a simplified document, or summary, of its findings to be shared with CVM staff in Ethiopia and Tanzania. CVM staff will describe the content to the domestic workers during Association meetings and a discussion should ensue. Indeed, research results were shared and discussed during the continuous process of reproducing findings that does not end in a static final stage. The dilemmas which emerge when research results are shared and discussed, constitute another ethical problem.

There are so many ethical problems – often impossible to resolve – in which researchers may find themselves. Yet the construction of ethical practice should never be assumed, rather it

is gradual. According to Élodie Razy (2018), a focus on the anthropology of children would allow us to question ethics in anthropology more widely (2018, p. 20). These considerations are relevant for my study as I have interviewed women of different ages, including many adolescent girls, and I have analyzed their narratives in the present and past tense, narratives which refer to different phases of their life course. And so, a number of ethical issues should be considered: the determinants of the ethnographic relationship (together with questions about reflexivity, subjectivity, involvement and engagement, and the practice of participant observation); the framework of temporality at its various levels (considering the different temporalities of the actors involved, the ethical dilemmas emerging in real time, as well as before the researcher's arrival in the field, and after her/his departure).

Although there is no general methodology for the resolution of ethical problems, some spaces to debate ethical dilemmas exists, for instance the book edited by Pat Caplan (2003) *The Ethics of Anthropology: Debates and Dilemmas*. It is essential to consider the political character upon which the anthropological research is based in all its stages, and which concerns all the actors involved. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) promotes a militant anthropology which never interrupts ethical questions, and further suggests that "responsibility, accountability, answerability to 'the other' – the ethical as I would define it – is precultural to the extent that our human existence as social beings presupposes the presence of the other" (1995, p. 419). Thus, a reflexive and critical approach towards ethical dilemmas in anthropology is needed to minimize the reproduction of relationships of domination.

If we specifically consider the ethnographic relationship, it is influenced not only by the researcher's personal involvement, but also by other determining aspects such as the researcher's integration with the community, a set of variables (age, sex, origins and so forth), the relationship of a specific community with otherness, and others (see Fogel & Rivoal, 2009). The framework in which the exchange occurs is the product of interactions between the parties involved in the study and cannot be decided in advance from the outside. The relationships built in the field are characterized by a changing and progressive character:

> Adults and children alike are aware of the researcher's attributes and the reasons for his or her presence, and then forget them; they then remember them and put them aside again, by turns (Razy, 2018, p. 13).

The role of the researcher is negotiated over the course of the fieldwork. Subjectivity, together with transformations of the self, are key elements within the process of reflexivity,

to the extent that we should also reflect on personal aspects within the fieldwork that influence and have a role in the production of knowledge (Razy 2018, p. 4). As I said in the introduction of this thesis, feminist thought has the value of inducing us to reflect on the political character that lies behind our research. A personal reflection on the aspects of political commitment accompanied me during the writing. After all, "there is always a political element in the research activities that we carry out, but this political element of the research may be more or less present in researchers' awareness" (Declich 2017, p. 98).

My interest is in making a contribution, however small, to the debate on care work which aims at identifying solutions for improving the situation of domestic workers, and other typologies of care workers globally. Thus, I am in line with those who strive to revitalize the social struggle for recognition of care (Uhde 2016, p.703) in its multiple forms, and its value, without losing sight of the varied registers of care work around the globe, with their multiples, complex, changing specificities in space and time. Contributing to this debate also means recognizing the subordinate position to which women are relegated in various contexts, finding themselves stuck in gender dynamics that see them only as reproducers. I try to contribute to this debate through two specific case studies. Domestic work in the Ethiopian and Tanzanian contexts is certainly different from domestic work in other contexts which are familiar to us, and probably requires different solutions. But the value of a gender-oriented approach, when integrated into development discourse and planning, is precisely the ability to recognize differences in space and time, and simultaneously, to recognize the possibility of solidarity and collective action to challenge gender hierarchies and ideologies (Marchand & Parpart, 1995, pp. 15-20).

A political project of this kind also implies the recognition of complex and contradictory power relations that keep us linked (women, men or other gender identities) in an interconnected world. Feminist ethnography can help shed light on these relationships, as Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) argues:

> It can also make clear our relationships, since it is a pretense to think that we do not live in one interconnected world, a world that brings us together in fieldwork but also a world in which my privilege of being able to have written this lecture on a computer and to answer the Bedouin girls' question about the computer they heard about on a radio soap opera depends on underpaid women in southeast Asia spending long hours in multinational electronics plants assembling these computers (Abu-Lughod 1990, p. 27).

Carrying out an ethical research precisely means carving out a space for reflection, where you can devote attention to your own and others positionality, and recognize the power

relations that come into play before, during and after the fieldwork. This process should happen at many levels as ethnography, in its broad sense, refers to the activity of doing anthropological research, to the written results of this research, and the texts or ethnographies as a specific form of writing (Abu-Lughod 1990, pp. 8-9). Now, when we devote attention to issues of reflexivity, power relations and power differentials between researcher and research participants are likely to emerge in a disruptive way precisely when we do our fieldwork. But recognizing these power relations, and specifically thinking obsessively about the researcher's privileges, may sometimes limit our ability to do research. I mean that sometimes a kind of sense of guilt does not help us to proceed, to place ourselves in a proper way before the other, because whatever we do seems wrong to us. We are not worthy of being there with those privileges. This way of thinking can also limit our ability to grasp relational nuances that are not always and exclusively about 'power' and 'domination' in its negative sense.

I think it is also important to practice grasping – especially during fieldwork – some aspects of closeness with 'the other'. I was a woman who met other women in the field, and these women recognized me as a woman. My field was certainly influenced by gender dynamics, even if these dynamics were completely different from those affecting domestic workers' lives in Ethiopia and Tanzania. But these elements of closeness are not just about gender dynamics, or other dynamics that influence our lives and from which we would like to free ourselves. Here I mostly refer to those life experiences that sometimes make us feel close to a person. I happened to establish strong relationships with some people only because, during a chat, we realized we had similar family problems. Clearly, as much as that problem was 'similar', it was also different, given the differences in our lives, the diverse contexts in which we grew up and live, the enormous difference in the tools we have at our disposal to try to solve certain problems, and so on. I cannot know if that other person perceived this as a shared experience as I did. But the moment I got that perception, illusion or impression, I felt like I was establishing, even for a moment, a stronger bond.

I would like to overturn the expression 'power relations' for a moment, and imagine that it could assume a completely different meaning, a positive meaning: the power of moments of closeness in relations, although they often boil down to temporary impressions. Awareness of the relativity of these sensations somehow constitutes a so-called empathy (a term that, in my view, is often overused). As Francesca Melandri writes in her novel *Sangue Giusto* (Right Blood):

> Empathic people (…) are not so much, as it is thought, the most capable of understanding the Universes of others, but only the most aware of how inaccessible these Universes are. That is, those people who accept the idea of knowing nothing, or very little (Francesca Melandri 2017, p. 225).

Thus, being aware of this, we should take these moments of closeness as tools to establish positive relations, but above all to learn to work in serenity, and without too many pretensions and expectations. Sometimes closeness distances us, scares us, separates us. It is not at all obvious or certain that grasping the moment of closeness, the 'shared experience', helps us to create, in practice, a strong relationship. But on an imaginative and momentary level, the bond has been created. When I talk about shared experience, or of feeling similar to or close to a person, I know very well that these are often fleeting impressions. And there is no way we can know if the person in front of us has experienced similar sensations. Moreover, the experience that seems similar to us is probably incredibly different from the other person's experience. As soon as we stop and think (once again) about our privileges as researchers, and about our respective positionalities (as researchers and research participants), we realize this. Clearly, everything I write now is probably the result of personal experiences, it is the result of the sensations I feel now, at the exact moment in which I am writing, and which do not meet everyone's sensitivity. I have mentioned the 'obsession' with researcher's privileges and sense of guilt. We are not all the same. Not all of us feel a sense of guilt, not all of us are obsessed with the problem of power relations during the fieldwork. What I mean, however, is that practicing grasping, during the fieldwork, the moments of closeness as we perceive them in an instinctive way, can perhaps help us to better face the other, and in general, to work well. A passage from the essay *Respect and Reciprocity: Care of Elderly People in Rural Ghana* by anthropologist Sjaak Van Der Geest, comes to my mind. The author quotes the anthropologist Robert Desjarlais (1991: 394) who asked an old man in Nepal what happens if one's heart is filled with grief. The man smiled and gave the best possible answer: "You ask yourself" (van der Geest 2002, p. 4).

> If we do not recognize anything from ourselves in them, our data will remain stale and meaningless. It will be like reading a novel on people and events which do not touch us in any way. If there is nothing we share with the characters of the story, not even their desires or anxieties, we take no interest in them and do not understand them. We will never finish the book anyway (van der Geest 2002, p. 4).

These reflections can also illuminate one aspect of the analysis of women's narratives. As I noted in the introduction, during my fieldwork I wondered in which way and to what extent my presence in the field influenced domestic workers' narratives, what they told me and their way of recounting. And the influence that their narratives had on me, the limits related to the way I interpreted them and reported them in this thesis. But again, once we are aware of the limits of interpretation, how do we move forward? Where to start writing? To answer this question, I would like to quote Pat Caplan (1997) who writes, in her book *African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village*:

> Does the use of a personal narrative allow us more fully to represent "the native's point of view" (see Geertz 1977)? Does it reduce the difference in power between the author and the subject (which is frequently also one of a privileged northerner and an underprivileged southerner)? We cannot assume a positive response to either of these questions. Yet, on the other hand, writing a personal narrative is perhaps worth a try because the prize is very great: that of some degree of transcendence of difference, of reaffirmation of common humanity (Caplan Pat 1997, p. 17).

Even if these considerations might, at a simplistic level seem mere rhetoric, it is precisely that feeling of "common humanity" that leads us to do research, interpret research results and share them with the reader of the text. The goal of our work, in analyzing and interpreting personal narratives, becomes "to explore the universal human condition, and in so doing, cross, or bridge the gap between oneself as ethnographer and the subject of the life history" (*ibidem*, p. 233). In my study, I find myself in the dual position of researcher and a member of the NGO. Awareness is the only way to contain or minimize the inherent complications of the structural disparity between the researcher, NGO and research participants. However, while recognizing these hierarchical relationships that inevitably persist, as well as the researchers' limits in interpreting research results, it is also important to celebrate the relationships that the researchers themselves are able to build during their fieldwork. The relationships that arise from the ethnographic encounter might create an important space for dialogue and, in this case, in the battles for domestic workers' rights. Perhaps reflecting on those situations at individual and structural levels that make us all, in different ways, potentially vulnerable, can help us bridge the gap between ourselves, in our privileged position, and domestic workers as subjects of their narratives. The feeling of common potential vulnerability which bind us might lead broad reflections on the recognition of care and its value, without losing sight of the various registers of care around the globe, with their complex, multiple specificities, varying in space and time.

3 CONCEPTUALIZING MIGRATION AND AGENCY

In this theoretical chapter, I would like to explore the migration/agency nexus. First of all, I shall show in which way I conceptualize the migratory experiences of female domestic workers and illustrate some theoretical tools that helped me build this research, such as the notions of migrations as a 'practice' (Karen O'Reilly 2012) and the concept of 'social reproduction'. In doing so - and before moving to the notion of 'agency' - I go through some studies on the issues of gender, migration, and the notion of the personhood. In particular, I shed light on the intersection between migration and moments of transition in women's lives.

In my study, when I talk about domestic workers I call them "women" as in this way they defined themselves when I met them. But as I have mentioned elsewhere, their narratives largely refer to their life and work experiences at different phases of their life, since when they were little girls. The studies on female migration that I consider in this chapter, and in particular the specific studies on domestic work, are of different types: some speak of women, others of adolescent girls, others of children. In particular, several studies on domestic work in Africa focus on child labor. For this reason in this theoretical chapter, in quoting and reviewing several studies, I sometimes talk about children, other times about adolescent girls, other times about women. But throughout this thesis I tend to define the female workers of my study as "women". In this chapter, the transition from one category to another can sometimes be confusing or misleading, but it sheds light - through a partial literature review - on different phases of domestic workers' lives. These phases will then emerge in the following chapters of this thesis, through the analysis of women's narratives.

3.1 Migratory experiences

Studies on female migration in Africa are show several challenges in analyzing, defining, categorizing and interpreting the movements of women. What does it mean to be a woman who, since she was an adolescent girl or even a child, has left her home village to work as a domestic worker in a town or city? What roles do her migration play in a specific community, and what kind of migration are we talking about?

Migration traditionally refers to large-scale and long-term movements of people, objects, capital and information from points of departures and points of arrival, while the concept of mobility encompasses also local movements within everyday life (Hannam, Sheller and Urry

2006, p. 1). Indeed, the mobility literature explores different forms of mobility, ranging from daily movements around the home and the neighborhood, to long-distance movement and also virtual mobility. Some scholars prefer to strategically distinguish between the two terms: on the one hand the term 'migration', adopted to capture long-term, large-scale movements; on the other hand the term 'mobility', adopted to describe short-term, small-case and dynamic movements shaping the everyday life of people (Veale & Donà 2014, pp. 5-6). Another term is that of 'circulation' (Chapman 1979, p. 111) which usually refers to a specific type of migration made of subsequent displacements and trips back, therefore excluding the unique experience of permanent migration.

In my study I adopt a comprehensive definition of the term 'migration' which includes 'mobility', as well as the possibility of periods of pause or immobility within the migratory trajectories and pathways of domestic workers. A broad and inclusive definition of 'migration' allows us to shed light on multiple forms of migration with often fluid boundaries. As Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet (2016) put it:

> In an African context, we therefore take migration to mean any change of residence (at a local, regional, national/international or intra/intercontinental level) that takes place outside of the space of a given community (such as a village or town), whether it is temporary or permanent. Seasonal migrations are therefore included, as well as more long-term migrations (E. Razy & Rodet, 2016, p. 2).

Through the analysis of women's narratives, in my study I explore domestic workers' migratory experiences and trace the various movements that women undertake during their life course, and which take shape within wider migration fluxes. The migratory experiences of female domestic workers are characterized by exploitation and abuses of various kinds. These experiences lead them to continually reformulate their action plans to build safer life alternatives. The trajectories that define their movements, since their childhood, are the result of collective and personal choices. Often, influential adults trace women's path, defining where they will go working especially when they are little girls. The working conditions are harsh, women's aspirations (for example related to the possibility of studying) are often broken. Over time, women identify alternative paths and disengage themselves, at least partially, from those assigned to them, and follow other paths in an attempt to improve their situation. In this context, most studies of domestic work in Africa focus on the complex links between contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking. This is particularly true for studies on child domestic work, within the broader literature on migrant minors in Africa. These

studies mainly use the lens of national and international legal instruments to address a clear concern for children, girls and women's rights and welfare. Meanwhile, scholars from several disciplines ranging from anthropology, sociology, history, and others, have shifted the focus onto domestic workers' agency in their migratory and life trajectories. Didier Fassin (2012) shows how ambiguous and fragile is the status of victims depicted by many humanitarian organizations, for example in the representation of children suffering from AIDS in South Africa, children victims of rape and orphaned children. In his words:

> Telling the story of raped children makes society aware of sexual abuse. Publicizing the plight of orphans stimulates national and international aid. But this emotional mobilization is fragile and ambiguous. The sick child becomes a burden on society, the abused is revealed as a future perpetrator of sexual violence, the orphan is transformed into a potential criminal. Above all, the affective emphasis reifies children as victims in a way that removes them far from the social reality in which they live (Fassin 2012, p. 180).

In my study I have sought to go beyond the exclusive trope of the victim, at the same time shedding light to the precariousness and vulnerability of domestic workers' lives. Not only women's experiences largely differ from each other, but every single experience reveals multiple nuances and changes over the life course of each individual. If we consider, for example, the reasons behind migration from rural to urban areas, it is clear that the decision-making process is multifaceted and complex (see Huijsmans, 2012; Kwankye, Anarfi, & Tagoe, 2009). A woman may move together whit someone as well as alone, the decision may be taken by some influential members of her community, as I have already mentioned, with or without her will, or may be taken by her with the authorization of someone in the family, but she may also move without informing anyone.

In order to grasp these multiple facets I consider migration as a process where various contrasting factors occur and intersect. Child and girls' migration in Africa often depends on complex social and kinship networks which have deep historical roots, and is situated within cultural and social relations scattered across diverse geographical spaces. Children and adolescent migrants contribute to the perpetuation and transformation of various social and kinship links, being at the core of issues of multilocality and translocality (Razy & Rodet 2016, p. 5). The latter can be conceptualized "as an embodied practice of living far away from one's original place of birth, either continuously or at regular/irregular intervals or as a state of mind involving an imaginary of spatial and social mobility" (Declich 2018, p. 8).

Women who move from rural to urban areas, since their childhood, make significant contributions to both urban and rural households and help to preserve economic and social

links across spatial boundaries. Their movements build on historical practices of rural-urban labour migration and are shaped by the demands of the urban labour market, as well as by several rural household dynamics. In most international and national discourses these migrants are represented as subject to the choices of other people. It is often assumed that the migration of children necessarily implies the breaking up of the family. In some cases, it is assumed that when a child leaves home his/her parents can no longer take care of him/her and consequently child-parent relationships fall apart. In other cases, it is assumed that children migrate precisely because their parents are not caring properly for them (and so child migration is seen as an effect in relation to family dysfunctions). Yet in certain contexts, migration may be considered a normal aspect of life for both children and adults (Whitehead et al. 2007, p. 9). Children may live away from their home areas for a variety of reasons. For example Ann Whitehead, Iman Hashim and Vegard Iversen (2007) illustrate that in many West African countries children may be seen as benefiting from the widespread practice of fostering, whose causes depend on various factors, such as education, socialization, illness, parents' separation, death, the strengthening of family ties, and others. In these circumstances children's migration does not correspond to family ruptures. Rather, both adults and children involved may perceive it as an opportunity. For this reason, even when we recount the experiences of those orphaned children who left their village of origin because their relatives were neglecting them, it is necessary to interpret these data with caution to better understand what it means "being maltreated" (2007, p. 12). More broadly, we must always consider that multiple motivations determine and influence a single migratory experience, and so a rigid categorization of experiences as "positive" or "negative" is quite limiting. This does not mean that experiences of family breakdown do not occur, but reality is more complex than it appears. The same expressions of "running away", "escaping" or "dodging", may be recognized pattern of behavior underlining both children's will to escape challenging situations, and children's will to meet family expectations and obligations by finding a job in town (*ibidem*, pp. 13-14).

For example in my study, domestic workers use the expression "run away" in a contradictory way. Many women left their villages when they were adolescent girls precisely to escape certain social obligations and gender regimes in their villages of origin. In some cases they seek to avoid or postpone arranged marriages, or to escape forms of abuse and mistreatment back home, an aspect that often emerges in studies on adolescents girls' migration in the Global South (Grabska, del Franco, de Regt 2019). But once they arrive in the city of destination, domestic workers do not lose ties with their family of origin. On the contrary,

they often start working within households closely linked to the villages. Contributing to the well-being of their families is always part of the women's aspirations and goals. Thus, "running away" means finding alternative spaces that perhaps offer more opportunities, and some forms of protection, but it does not mean completely 'freeing' oneself from family obligations. As Sacha Hepburn (2016) illustrates in her case study on female child domestic workers in post-colonial Zambia, migration strategies are often shaped by rural household dynamics, but domestic workers also use migration as part of a strategy to pursue their own ambitions which vary from the desire to continue their education, to aspirations for employment and independence (2016, p. 70). In my study, once women start working in the cities of destination they find themselves in situations of severe exploitation. They collide with new forms of gender oppression, and the hierarchical relationships with the people they work for often recall slave/master relationships. At the same time, women often find forms of protection - even if within hierarchical and exploitative relations - that they did not have back home, or they perceive the urban environment as potentially conducive to achieving their goals in the future.

The migration of women appears to be driven by multiple structural and individual factors. On the one hand it seems that women have no escape from migration and domestic work, which presents itself as a rooted life path that they cannot escape, also to demonstrate a sense of responsibility towards their families, both in the rural and urban area. On the other hand, women themselves use migration and domestic work as a springboard for a prospective better life. In this context, a number of questions arise spontaneously: how domestic workers continue to practice agency and take everyday strategic decisions despite structural constraints? How to elaborate the notion of agency? And how to define the concept of freedom? what does it mean to 'free yourself', for example, from family obligations and gender oppression? And what alternatives do women have, what forms of emancipation can they actually aspire to?

In order to explore these aspects, I take as a theoretical framework the practice theory that Karen O'Reilly (2012) has developed in reference to international migration processes, and in particular some concepts that she considers as useful to inform and frame empirical research. Clearly, I can't extensively apply these concepts - and the broad framework of the theory - to my empirical work and analysis of domestic workers' narratives, but I have tried, as far as possible, to take into consideration the interactions of "external structures", "internal structures", "practices" and "outcomes", as Karen O'Reilly suggests (2012, p. 32).

3.1.1 Migration as a practice

> Practice theory views practice as the ongoing processes involved in the constitution of social life; it favours neither subjectivism nor objectivism, but instead works to understand the interrelationship at the meso level of structures and actions (Karen O'Reilly 2012, p. 37).

The practice theory stems from a range of different theorists, especially Anthony Giddens (1976), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), and Rob Stones (2005). As Karen O'Reilly explains, practice theories seek to explore the interconnection between structure and agency by rejecting a rigid ontological dualism. Structuration is a social theory (see Anthony Giddens 1976) which aims at investigating the historical processes of society without resorting to either subjectivism or objectivism. Structures are conceived as both the limits and outcomes of agency. In this view, agents and structures are always interrelated and interdependent. Specifically, they are linked through the way individuals perceive their world, shared understanding, and daily lived experiences and actions. Social structures (the outcomes of agency) are perceived and practiced by agents in different ways. Since structure is part of the agent, and the agent is part of the structure, social structure exists as an intertwining of both structure and agent. Thus, social processes occur through a constant interaction between external structures, internalised structures in agents, practices (actions), and outcomes (with both unintended and intended consequences) (*ibidem*, p. 17). Agents have always a certain degree of control on social facts, but human action cannot be reduced to the mere motivations of agents. Overall, according to Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, empirical work should explore "the ways in which people work things through in practice". Practice theory "draws attention to the ways in which the social world emerges out of an ongoing interrelationship between structures and the way they are interpreted and enacted" (*ibidem*, p. 19).

Drawing on practice theory, Karen O'Reilly delineates some key concepts for a theory of practice:

> These include *external structures* (including those that are distant and more proximate, hard and more malleable), *internal structures* (including habitus, conjuncturally-specific internal structures), desire and projection (as the third dimension of agency), *communities of practice* (and external conjuncturally-specific structures), and *outcomes* (which can take form in any or all of the above) (2012, p. 23).

External structures are opportunities and constraints that confront a given agent. Conceptually, external structures are the context that exists before a given agent - in the

context of our research - acts. For instance, "global inequalities are a good example of external structures framing migration, as are colonial histories and their legacies" (*ibidem*). External structures have influence on actions, but at the same time, social structures work on the basis of acting agents, and are influenced by power resources, values and norms, interpretative schemas, etc. (Stones 2005 p. 52, in *ibidem*). We should consider that both actors and the researcher can be or not be aware of these structures which can lead to unexpected consequences. External structures can also include social transformations and global forces, such as technological advances, general cultural changes, policy agendas, so on. Then there are proximate structural layers that include, for examples, rules, local policies, as well as physical/material things built by people, and the natural environment, but also specific-context small-scale constraints and opportunities. It many cases agents are influenced by external structures to a degree that individuals do not even realize they might need or want anything different. However, social life is always constituted through actions. Thus, the external structures "are sustained by the daily ongoing practices of agents within them - networks of people drawing on their own rules and resources, (power, opportunities, constraints, norms, habitus) (…) they have been made by and will be transformed or reproduced by other agents" (*ibidem*, p. 25).

Then there are the *internal structures*, which can be separated into "conjuncturally-specific internal structures" and "habitus". *Habitus* (singular and plural) - conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu - includes "the multitude ways of being and thinking, of seeing and doing, that we each, in groups and as individuals, acquire through socialisation, through generations of past practices, and through our own repeated practices" (O'Reilly 2012, p. 26). Individual's actions might also distance themselves from the usual activities of their social group, for instance when individuals face unfamiliar field before, during and after migration. Yet objective constraints still mould what individuals consider achievable. It is important to consider the interaction between the habitus of the individuals and the groups where they are located. Indeed, *conjuncturally-specific internal structures* are how a given agent (in my case a female domestic worker) perceives the specific context of action, and she/he perceives the external circumstances. Agents are always embedded within networks of social relations characterized by norms, power, and interpretations, and they continuously (re)create and (re)shape structures, (re)mould their goals and habirts in given circumstances.

The *practice* of everday life involves active agency, conjuncturally-specific external structures, and communities of practice where the agent confronts the habitus and conjuncturally-specific internal structures of the other individuals within a specific context.

A theory of practice acknowledges that each member of a given community has her/his own internal structures, structural opportunities and constraints, power, reflexivity and knowledge. In this context, Karen O'Reilly defines 'agency' in the following way:

> Agency, in a theory of practice, thus takes the shape of individual, reflexive reactions to specific circumstances, albeit that these reactions are always to some extent circumscribed by previous events and experiences. An important element is the ability to imagine a different way of being and doing, thinking and feeling (O'Reilly 2012, p. 29).

Active agency therefore implies that actors define problems on the basis of what they know, (re)shape habits deliberately in changing contexts, take decisions (more or less consciously), and perform them. Individuals are able to envisage, plan and pursue goals, and respond to challenges in specific ways, mobilizing strategies to face them. They also think of prospective alternatives to current situations, test their ideas and strategies, and constantly modify them. However, individuals act within communities of practice that imply maintaining relations of mutual engagement. Communities of practice are not homogeneous, as individuals have different identities, histories, backgrounds, forms of power. And so individuals, in the various social circumstances of everyday life, need to negotiate their life paths, personal goals and expectations, in line with practices and experiences of others.

> In other words practice is about knowing (and working out) how to go on in given circumstances suspended within networks of other people and groups each with their own internal and external structures (*ibidem*, p. 30).

Finally, we should consider the fourth concept illustrated by O'Reilly. "The *outcome* of practice is the reproduction and transformation of social life into newly (re)shaped external and internal structures, dreams and desires" (*ibidem*, p. 37). The ways in which individuals interact and what they actually do influence expectations, perceptions, habitus and conjuncutally-specific internal structures, but also communities of practice and conjuncturally-specific external structures. In this ongoing process, wider structures are partially transformed or reproduced. The outcomes can be unintended or intended, they can lead to consolidation or innovation.

Overall, the practice theory allows us to draw the bridge between macro and micro perspectives, through the analysis of the interaction of the wider structures and individuals (and their perceptions) who act in specific social and historical context.

> A theory of practice examines the daily lives of agents as they are lived (the practice of daily life) in the context of wider social structures and historical forces; (…) It enables us to explore daily practice at the intersection of wider forces (2012, p. 33).

This interaction takes place precisely in lived experiences, or the micro level of the everyday life. In this space, it is possible to investigate, to some extent, how specific daily circumstances meet the forces of habitus and external structures, and vice versa, and how the external structures are perceived and acted on by individuals.

This theoretical framework is relevant to my study, in particular in the analysis of the migration-agency nexus. Female domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania seems to trace deeply rooted migratory practices which can be hardly avoided. The act of migrating goes beyond the individual choice, or the evaluation of advantages and disadvantages that migration might entail. But on the other hand women themselves use migration and navigate their jobs in different ways to achieve certain ambitions and goals, while taking certain risks. Therefore it is interesting to explore what are the possible moments of rupture with these inevitable practices, and how the subjectivity of domestic workers come to the fore. I explore these aspects through the analysis of women's narratives. Yet I also consider the elements of structural violence[25] (see Farmer 2003, 2004) that characterize women's lives, and in particular gender-based violence as a form of structural violence (Declich 2020c, p. 40). This violence further exposes women to conditions of poverty and vulnerability. An 'anthropology of structural violence' – which is "structured and *structuring*" (Farmer 2004, p. 315) - integrated with 'the practice theory', could help us frame and inform the empirical research and, in this case, the migration/agency nexus. Amartya Sen reminds us of the need to look at the various ways in which agency — what he terms the "capabilities of each person"—is constrained (Sen 1998, in Farmer 2003, p. 43).

In this chapter I will integrate the notion of 'agency', as it has been conceptualized in the 'theory of practice' mentioned in this section, with other definitions of agency, and other intersecting notions that interest my study. Yet before doing that, we should consider that migration is not just an event or an act in an individual's life, but rather a process which links

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[25] In its broad sense, structural violence can be defined as "a host of offensives against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality, and the more spectacular forms of violence that are uncontestedly human rights abuses, some of them punishment for efforts to escape structural violence" (Farmer 2003, p. 8).

to other transitions during the life course of domestic workers. I will explore this aspect in the following sections.

3.1.2 Transitions, personhood, (in)dependence

Transition to different life phases is not linear, but rather a fluid, controversial process. In my analysis of women's narratives I refer to "life phases" rather than "life stages" precisely because during transitions key changes occur in the life of individuals involved (Grabska et al. 2019, p. 13). Indeed, many narratives of the women I interviewed in Ethiopia and Tanzania are about change. Practical changes in living conditions, in the different contexts in which women work. Changes related to unexpected events, whether positive or negative. But also emotional changes, linked to desires, aspirations, life plans. Sometimes change means 'postpone'. That is, sometimes desires remain there, suspended, but women move the goal (its hypothetical achievement) to a later moment, since the immediate achievement of that goal is hindered by a series of events. Other times desires totally change form and content, and the original shape is forgotten.

The anthropology of life course is grounded in indeterminacy and innovation, it is based on a social analysis of aspirations rather than life events, which usually are not coherent, clear in direction or fixed in outcome (Johnson-Hanks, 2002, p. 865). Indeed, the "vital" of demographic events can be integrated with the conjuncture of action and structure conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). This is "the vital conjucture" (Johnson-Hanks 2002, p.866), meaning that in many circumstances – as illustrated by Jennifer Johnson-Hanks in the case of Beti people in southern Cameroon - the life of individuals is not organized in linear phases: the "growing up is not a unitary process" (*ibidem*, p.869). Thus, individual transitions are variable and multiple, often hidden pathways within which each person forges her or his own path differently, and that do not necessarily imply a specific content and direction.

In my study I look at how the process of migration intersect with other processes of transitions in women's lives: transitions which shape the kind of social person that they want to be, their ability to make certain choices, their sense of selfhood. In doing so, I consider many aspects including: the age, and the intersection of gender and generational aspects; the social status of the woman within her community of origin and in the place of destination; the duration of the migration; the overall women's migratory story, eventual links of kinship and affinity, as well as economic relations between the parties involved; eventual contacts

with people left behind; and other elements affecting the migratory path. Women face transitions related to work, education, having children, and many others, within a complex realm of choices, opportunities and constraints which affect their future life trajectories. Within this realm of limitations and fleeting opportunities, women try to seize certain opportunities and make choices. Over time, they somehow develop their ability to identify available opportunities, and to use them in different ways. Indeed, a 'capability approach' (see Briones 2009b) is useful for shedding light to a combination of personal and collective skills, and environmental opportunities, that women use in everyday life. The construction of the domestic workers' personhood, along the moments of transition that affect their lives, takes place within a process made up of different bonds of interdependence with other people.

The concept of personhood - as well as correlated conceptions such as that of 'individual', 'woman' and 'man' - have to be defined as cross-culturally variable (Moore 1988). Marilyn Strathern in *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) points out that Western notions about personhood tend to evoke ideas about evolution. That is, "to be a full person one must be culturally creative" (1988, p. 89) and achieve, for instance, a sort of autonomy in the public sphere, at the workplace, away from the infantile domestic circle. Yet the Hagen view of person in Papua New Guinea is completely different, and women's identity as persons is not based on evidence that they are able to break free from domestic confines. The Hagen denigration of domesticity does occur, but it is located within completely different domains of specific evaluation and does not touch the sphere of women's condition as social persons. In other words, "there is no equation between adulthood and independence" (ivi, p.92). The child grows within a set of social relationships which are based on asymmetrical relations between children and parents and mutual feelings between them. These ideas of personhood do not turn on what we usually call dominance. A person cannot be her or him only distancing the self from obligations and responsibilities imposed by others, an idea which obviously obscures many Western constructs.

In different contexts "social becoming" might be much more a collective experience than an individual process (Grabska et al. 2019, p. 10). Jennifer Cole and Christian Groes (2016) talk about "affective circuits" to emphasize that personhood emerges at the intersection between personal desires and obligations to a broader social network. Affective circuits take shape from the circular movement of multiple exchanges of people, ideas and goods through which people navigate their social relationships (specifically, Cole and Groes refer to experiences of African migrants in Europe). It is precisely when people move from the

margins to the centre of these circuits that they become providers and controllers of resources, and they achieve valued forms of personhood as women, men, adults, and so forth. The affective practices of care characterizing intimate and kin relationships entail both material and relational elements, goods and money as well as feelings of obligation, love and respect. Information and relational ties are continuously maneuvered and regenerated, and so new networks of various kind arise across space and time within an ongoing process of social regeneration. These flows are of discontinuous nature, they can be blocked, slowed and reutilized, so much so that their trend could be compared to that of "an electrical current" (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016, in Bakuri and Spronk 2020, p. 4).

In my study, domestic workers seem to move within an incessant process transition, where they continually move in and out of relative independence/autonomy and dependence, depending on where they live and work and in relation to different people. We cannot speak of a linear process from dependence to independence. One could speak of "negotiated interdependence" (Punch 2002, p. 123). Women at times gain relative autonomy with respect to the control of certain people in their villages of origin, but they begin to work under the dependence of other people. Then they change families, also thanks to their contacts in the urban context, but again their freedom of movement often depends on the will of their employers. And if they were married, probably on the will of their husbands. Even the decision to leave the rural area is often the result of a negotiated interdependence. The intrahousehold relations may be "simultaneously relations of dependence, interdependence and autonomy on different terrains (see also Jackson 1998)" (Whitehead et al. 2007, p. 18). The ways in which men and women, parents and children, juggle these contradictory and mutually configured aspects of household relations can be explored through qualitative accounts of everyday practice.

That is, women live within rural-urban households structures that depend on their work to maintain their well-being. Therefore, their migratory paths and their work as domestic workers seem to be part of deep-rooted and persistent practices, which go beyond the notion of 'individual choice'. But at the same time, in talking about the moments before the departure, the women mention their curiosity to explore the urban context. They refer to the desire to study in high-quality schools in the city, and they define domestic work as a 'moment of transition' to access other types of work, start a family on their own, and gain a certain degree of independence. Yet this independence is still closely linked to a series of duties towards their families and communities of origin. Overall, independence is never completely disentangled from dependence, as women also seek protection from the people

they work for. These people, in turn, need care work performed by women. In some way, giving care, receiving care, being independent, depending on someone, being exploited and submissive, receiving protection, are all elements that coexist.

Often, in their narratives, domestic workers describe the moment they leave their village of origin as the moment they begin a journey towards adulthood. And the moment they leave a certain household in the city to find a new one, with better working conditions, is the moment when they are 'adults', and they are ready to conquer a certain degree of autonomy and independence. But it is difficult for them to free themselves from the dynamics of exploitation that follow them, in different forms, in the different households where they work. In this context, how to frame the social age of domestic workers in the different phases of their lives, and in the different moments of transition they go through?

3.1.3   Generational profiles

In the literature – and especially within the discourse of humanitarian and development projects - the distinction between childhood, youth and adulthood tends to be automatically adopted following the criteria of the so-called Global North, without taking into consideration that in many societies of the so-called Global South the contours of these life phases may be different and hardly correspond to our criteria. Clearly, Western psychological studies have highly influenced our ideas of which should be 'children's needs', as well as our perception of personhood, with the adoption of notions of adult 'maturity' and childhood 'immaturity' and the consequent reinforcement of the separation between 'adulthood' and 'childhood' (see Woodhead 1997).

But in the first half of the twentieth century, the anthropologist Margaret Mead (1928) had already urged us to question properly these categories. She was committed to understanding the differences between children in the US/Europe societies and those of their peers in Polynesia. Being aware that these categories largely change in place and time and are ascribable to the cultural setting in which each individual grows up, Mead was interested in learning from and about children themselves, in capturing the diversity and complexity of their lives and childhood experiences. In particular, she was motivated by the consideration that the European and North American ideas about the 'stress' as a mood characteristic of adolescence were culturally specific. In this regard, anthropology can play a pivotal role in challenging the two-fold media representation of children: on the one hand, the isolated

minors and the trafficked children; on the other hand, the empowered children saved by humanitarian organizations. As Jason Hart (2006) puts it:

> The vision that lies at the heart of the project of saving children is of 'a safe, happy and protected childhood' (Boyden 1997: 192). Such a vision implies that children can and should be shielded from the effects of societal processes. However, it is demonstrably the case that the lives of children are often subject to the same forces as the rest of their societies. Rather than reinforce romantic ideas about the space of children's lives, anthropologists would do well to challenge the seeming naturalness of a conceptual boundary between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' by illustrating that such separation depends on material, social and cultural conditions that are absent in many settings (Hart, 2006, p.7)

Indeed in my study, the work of domestic workers seems to be used - since when they are adolescent girls - by influential adults to maintain and reinforce social relationships between adults, between rural and urban households, and contributes to the functioning of these households. But the adults, including family members of the domestic workers in their villages of origin, do not seem to put the 'well-being' of the girls – as we conceive it - as their primary goal. Certainly, for female domestic workers, working in the city - albeit in conditions of exploitation - can be a way to avoid certain types of risks back home, such as experiences of abuse, or the so-called 'abduction' that some Ethiopian women mentioned in the interviews. The city might also offer considerable educational opportunities, with schools of better quality than those in the rural areas. But once in town, female domestic workers usually are not sent to school, although they were often promised otherwise. And therefore the well-being of the adolescent domestic worker in the city does not correspond to our idea of a happy child who goes to school every day and plays with her peers. Furthermore, I have already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis that often the placement of female workers in certain households in the city reveals the political function of these processes of placement (or fosterage) (Bledsoe 1990, p. 75). Female domestic work seems to be a means of facilitating relations of clientelism between adults. Only if we try to put aside for a moment our idea of safe and protected childhood, as well as of good parental love, we can understand - at least in part - how these processes work.

Anthropology can have a fundamental effect in those political processes that are inevitably related to humanitarian projects. The latter continuously provide evidence which support the claims of politicians by means of their accounts on 'vulnerable' people's needs (notably children and women), and rarely make reference to wider political causes and events. For example, rather than focusing only on the vulnerability of domestic workers as victims of

individual traffickers who exploit them, we could ask ourselves first of all: what are the reasons that lead states to impose certain family/households models where women's work continues to be exploited and made invisible? (Moore 1988, p. 128) Accurate ethnographic accounts must therefore place young people within the complexities of ongoing economic and political processes at regional, local and global level (Hart 2006, p. 6). Anthropology can help to challenge a type of ethnocentrism usually justified by reference to instances of 'deviant' childhood in the Global South - such as in the case of 'child soldiers' illustrated by Jason Hart (2006) - and to discredit a depiction of children often adopted to justify state interventions of any kind, including military ones. Clearly, even this discrediting operation must be done with caution and measuring the risks of specific statements, because " '[t]here is a fine line between suggesting that Western models of childhood are not applicable cross-culturally and the careless assumption that somehow people in other cultures are immune to the sorrows and travails of losing children in warfare or seeing their children become fearful embodiments of violent rage' (Das and Reynolds 2003: 9)" (*ibidem* , p. 8).

Thus, we should be able to question the sharp separation between childhood and adulthood, since only a more relational vision of the interaction between adults and children may help us to grasp the complexity of the reality experienced by many young people in the global South. In the literature, when it comes to non-adult individuals scholars tend to use the term "youth" as a catch-all term that groups together both children and young people and these two categories are rarely questioned (Razy and Rodet 2016, p. 9). In particular, very rarely the definitions adopted are based on local criteria and representations with a mention to the responsibilities and roles with which they are associated, or a mention to possible age sets to which they correspond. These complex specificities are not really taken into consideration (*ibidem*). Pierre Bourdieu (1993) argues that *'youth' is just a word* and the divisions between ages are arbitrary. Thus, the divisions into generations or into age-groups are entirely varying and subject to manipulation, age and youth are socially constructed in the struggle between the old and the young. As he puts it:

> To understand how the generations are divided, you have to know the specific laws of functioning of the field, the specific prizes that are fought for and the divisions that emerge in the struggle […] All that is fairly banal, but it demonstrates that age is a biological datum, socially manipulated and manipulable; and that merely talking about 'the young' as a social unit, a constituted group, with common interests, relating these interests to a biologically defined age, is in itself an obvious manipulation (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 95).

And so the 'social age' does not necessarily correspond to the chronological one. In my study, I define domestic workers as "women". This is how they defined themselves when I met them. In general, I try to give relevance to the way in which female domestic workers define themselves with reference to specific phases of their life. Most of the respondents were between 20 and 25 years of age. However, their narrative largely refer to past work experiences, since when they were adolescent girls. In both countries, most of them started working between the ages of 12 and 17. So in describing their life experiences, I might use the term "child" (mainly in reference to the moments before the first migration) and "girl" or "adolescent girl" (in reference to the first migratory experience). In the latter case, I tend to use the term "adolescent girl" to emphasize a specific gendered period in the life course, that intersects with gender and migration, and that might become a defining period of transition in that particular phase of life for girls (Grabska et al. 2019, p. 7). We should also consider that the biological ages mentioned in this work are likely to be unprecise, since most of the times women's interviewed are unregistered legally in their early years. Overall, I always consider the categories of "woman" and "girl" as fluid and changing categories. The latter vary according to different circumstances, such as the study-context, the life phase of the individual interviewed, the ways in which different individuals describe and perceive themselves at the moment of our encounter and in other periods during their life course.

There is one last aspect that I would like to outline before moving on to the second part of this chapter, where I will focus on the concept of "agency". We should consider that women, both when they remain in their villages of origin, and when they leave to work in the city, remain stuck in gender dynamics that relegate them to care and reproductive roles. The concept of 'social reproduction' may be used as a tool to analyze the transformations produced by migrant women's agency at the individual and social level (Fernandez 2020, p. 14). The concept was elaborated in the 1970s within a debate between feminism and Marxism that has been very influential in feminist theorizing. Thus, it would be important to highlight some aspects of this debate and briefly explore the concept of social reproduction.

3.1.4 Migration and social reproduction

The notion of social reproduction has been used by feminist scholars from the 1970's onwards to emphasize the importance of women's labour in many social spheres: through the biological reproduction of the future generations of labourers; the constant reproduction and maintenance of labourers through unpaid care work within the households; and the

reproduction of labour as a social class. While conventional Marxism had considered male domination as something inextricably linked to capitalism and the ruling class (Engels 1972), the feminist challenge to Marxism arose arguing that the subordination of women also occurs in pre-capitalist societies, and the abolition of capitalism will not necessarily lead to the end of patriarchy. Male domination over women required an explanation and it was not enough to simply argue that it was functional to capital. Feminists raised three main issues: patriarchy, reproduction, and the problem of unpaid "domestic labor" performed by women.

A radical feminism focused on male/female inequality in biological reproduction to understand the oppression of women (Firestone 1971; Millett 1971). Patriarchy would therefore consist in the control of women's sexuality and fertility by men (Maureen Mackintosh 1977). But this approach risked falling into biological determinism (Barrett 1980, p. 13), and Gayle Rubin (1975) proposed the term "sex/gender system" in an attempt to distinguish sex as a biological category from gender as a social category. Several feminists noted the limitations of the universalistic character of the concept of 'patriarchy', and tried to tie this notion to a material base (Kuhn and Wolpe 1978). Yet many traditional Marxist views tended to see reproductive relations as secondary (Sacks 1979), and did not attempt to resolve the question of the relationship between reproductive and productive labor (see Parpart and Stichter 1988, p. 9).

In an attempt to merge Marxism and feminism, many scholars used the term "socialist feminism" (Jaggar 1983, in *ibidem*). There was a tendency to distinguish between two systems (the so-called "dual system"): the patriarchal one, based on the family, in which women are controlled by men; and the economic one, where the workers are controlled by the capitalists. The sphere of production and the sphere of human reproduction tended to remain substantially separate in this dual system. Some scholars objected that this approach allowed traditional Marxism to keep its theory of production relations in a substantially unchanged form (Young 1981 p. 49, in *ibidem*). Yet the theoretical status of biological reproduction was increasingly getting attention within the feminist debate. Interestingly, Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (1984) call for the need to identify the material basis of women's alienation and identify this material basis with the existence of children. Women's role as childbearers would be at the core of women's alienation. In their words:

> It is the social act of childbearing which provides the material basis for the origin of women's alienation and its perpetuation in specific forms under different modes of production (Bryceson & Vuorela 1984, p. 145).

We must note that this assumption does not fall into biological determinism. Due to objective circumstances children are the material basis of women's alienation. Women do not have a natural monopoly over children except for the specific acts of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. There is no biological necessity for women to perform the majority of childcare activities. Yet sexual division of labour has always existed in its changing forms, relegating women to specific labour tasks considered as related to pregnancy and breastfeeding. The degree of division of labour can change depending on the incidence of childbearing activities, but it can never disappear entirely. In conclusion, the authors argue that an analysis of the effect of childbearing on the sexual division of labour is essential for the understanding of women's alienation. In their view the social patterns of human reproduction have to be understood "in articulation with modes of production" (*ibidem*, p. 137) and not as an autonomous sphere, taking into consideration that they embody different development dynamics, they may undergo changes over time and their interaction is subject to historical contingency.

Claude Meillassoux (1981) was one of the first modern Marxists to give an autonomous importance to human reproduction. He argued that in the precapitalist domestic society, the domestic community where reproduction takes place is the very unity of production. In his view, in domestic societies, and to some extent in all subsequent modes of production, the social position of women derives from the male control of their special reproductive powers. Yet feminists noted that in this approach women appeared to be completely passive (see Mackintosh 1977). Furthermore, no distinction was made between the reproduction of human beings and the reproduction of the labor force (Edholm, Harris, and Young 1977). Overall, the tendency to combine these two types of reproduction, with the broader process of reproduction of the social relations of production, was common in most early Marxist-feminist writings (Stichter and Parpart 1988, p. 12).

Felicity Edholm, Olivia Harris and Kate Young (1978) argued that in any mode of production the labor force, or those who are available to work, is socially constituted. Moreover, they clearly distinguished between three different levels at which the term 'reproduction' is used: human reproduction; reproduction of the labour force; and social reproduction (1978, p. 104). These scholars explained the concept of social reproduction drawing attention to the reproduction of the conditions of social reproduction in their totality, as well as to the specific structures that have to be reproduced in order that social reproduction as a whole takes place. Thus, the aim would be to understand the extent to

which male-female relations or women's position are basic to the reproduction of the social totality.

More recent feminists have explored a broad range of variables within the framework of social reproductive labor, taking into consideration the role of the market forces in contributing to social reproduction, geographical differences in households, and other variables. Lise Vogel (2000) points out that the concept of "reproductive labor" is often adopted to cover a broad range of activities contributing to the reproduction and regeneration of people, varying from manual, intellectual and emotional labor, both waged and unwaged work (2000, p. 167). And so, she quotes Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) who defines the concept of social reproduction in the following way:

> The term *social reproduction* is used by feminist scholars to refer to the array of act and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally. Reproductive labor includes activities such as purchasing household goods, preparing and serving food, laundering and repairing clothing, maintaining furnishings and appliances, social children, providing care and emotional support for adults, and maintaining kin and community ties […] Thus, it involves mental, emotional, and manual labor (Brenner and Laslett 1986, 117). This labor can be organized in myriad ways – in and out of the household, as paid or unpaid work, creating exchange value or only use value – and these ways are not mutually exclusive. An example is the preparation of food, which ca be done by a family member as unwaged work in the household, by a servant as waged work in the household, or by a short-order cook in a fast-food restaurant as waged work that generates profit for the employer. These forms exist contemporaneously (Glenn 1992, pp. 1-4).

To sum up, the concept of reproductive labor originated in Karl Marx's assumptions that every system of production involves both the reproduction of labour power necessary for production, and the production of the necessities of life in capitalist societies. Following elaborations have emphasized the two-fold character of the concept, the production of human being and the production of subsistence. The term social reproduction – although often equated with domestic labor, or merely defined in reference to the renewal of labor power – has gradually come to be more widely understood in relation to the recreation of people as physical, cultural and social beings.

The concept of social reproduction originated in, and has been applied to, very different contexts from those of my study. But the recent broad elaboration of the concept is relevant insofar as it sheds light on the reproductive roles to which women are relegated at different levels, and which differ from context to context, beyond the rigid separation between the

public sphere and the private one, the society and the family. Indeed, recent feminist scholars have explored a wide range of variables within the domain of social reproductive labour, "from geographical variations in households to the role of state and market forces in contributing to social reproduction" (Fernandez 2020, p. 15). The term thus refers to reproductive labour performed in various institutional sites, including the household, the socialisation and care of children, care for the sick, elderly and people with disability, and the maintenance of certain familial and communal ties. Moreover, social reproduction and reproductive labour should be investigated in an intersectional way that integrates race, nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and other cross-cutting factors.[26] And consequently, also feminist political engagement should take place at multiple levels, thus bringing to light the ways in which the state exercises control over reproductive roles and relegates them to the female sphere. For instance, states tend to promote specific forms of 'family'/household structures "which also allows the reproduction of the labour force by exploiting women's unpaid and invisible contribution as domestic care workers" (Declich 2020b, p. 94). In which particular household structures do the domestic workers in my study move? In this thesis I cannot fully answer this question, as it would require a different study and, in all cases, a single researcher (as well as a single disciplinary field) would not be enough to reveal complex family/household dynamics. But women's experiences highlight some aspects of these structures, where they are 'stuck' in reproductive roles. In this context, what strategies do they mobilize to carve out alternative spaces for action? At this point it is necessary to reflect on the concept of agency.

3.2 Conceptualizing women's agency

The concept of agency is very complex to define and there is no consensus between scholars around its use and definition. Agency has been associated to a variety of other terms, such

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[26] If we look at global dynamics for a moment, the post-industrial economies of North America and Europe in the 1990s brought about various transformations in the structures of social reproduction globally, with an increasing number of low-wage migrants demanding to undertake social reproductive labour. The 'dirty work' (Duffy 2007, in Fernandez 2020, p. 15) of socially reproductive labour is persistently assigned to ethnically and racially marginalized groups. Several research examine the phenomenon of increasing flow of migrant domestic workers in the current global economy (Briones, 2009; Constable, 2007; Parreñas, 2001), and more in general illustrate women workers' contributions to social reproduction across borders, where different types of reproductive labour are transferred from one ethnic group, class, nation to another (Asis et al., 2004; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015).

as aspiration, choice, resistance, independence, capacity, action, voice, free will, and many others. This term has been often used in an unproblematic way, so much so that Jean and John Comaroff characterize agency as an abstraction often misused, underspecified and largely fetishized by social scientists (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, p. 37). Agency deserves deeper analysis precisely because the specific ways in which scholars conceive agency have further implications for the understanding of intention, personhood, and a variety of other aspects.

Agency is most often understood in general terms, as a rational individual's capacity to act independently and autonomously, in order to achieve her/his personal ambitions and according to her/his own free will. Yet agency cannot be simply reduced to 'free will', we should rather consider agency as a sociocultural product, "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Laura Ahearn 2001, p. 112, in Fernandez & de Regt 2014, p. 56). The challenge is to be able to convey also the ways in which individuals are shaped and constrained by social structures, without losing sight to the ways in which they act to achieve their goals and create social change. To be an agent embedded in a set of social structures and social relations in turn implies the capability to exert some degree of control over them, as well as the possibility to transform them in a creative way.

Now, I would like to integrate the notion of 'agency' that I have illustrated in the section 'migration as a practice' with other notions and aspects of agency that I consider in my work, and that have been addressed by feminist analyses. In particular: 1) Sherry Ortner's (2006) conceptualization of agency (the notions of 'agency as power' and 'agency as cultural project'); 2) and the consequent attention not to fall into the risk of equating agency merely with resistance to subordination; 3) Lastly, women's agency must also be examined in relation to those 'risks' that hinder domestic workers' lives.

3.2.1 *Sherry Ortner*: beyond rigid oppositions

Sherry Ortner conceptualizes the idea of agency in the following way:

> the idea of agency, and the wider theoretical matrix of so-called practice theories in which it must always be embedded, is precisely concerned with the mediation between conscious intention and embodied habituses, between conscious motives and unexpected outcomes, between historically marked individuals and events on the one hand, and the cumulative reproductions and transformations that are the results of everyday practices on the other (Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 1989, 1996; Sahlins 1981; Sewell 1997)" (Ortner 2001, p. 77).

The significant element of this definition, which I take as a theoretical tool in my study, lies in the fact that it goes beyond the rigid opposition between structure and agency, and also beyond the dominant idea of an agency always in tension with resistance. Sherry Ortner highlights the existence of structural contradictions which have a potential destabilizing effect, at the same time allowing possible social transformation. At first instance, agency may appear a property belonging to individuals, and so we tend to distinguish between people who have more agency and those who have less. Yet individuals work within webs of relations of various kind (webs of solidarity, power, affection, etc.) which intersect in complex ways, and so individuals cannot achieve their goals in a social vacuum, as much as they cannot fully control those relations in which their lives are embedded. This aspect emerges in a disruptive way in the life of domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Women's goals, and their ambitions, can only be understood if placed within the broader framework of the relationships they are part of, at different levels: family relations, with all the links - often not very explicit - between urban and rural households; but also, on a more individual level, women's relations with the people they work for in the city, where dynamics of power emerge, but also elements of mutual need between the parties involved in these relations. And then there are all those unexpected relations that emerge in everyday life, within and outside the workplace, and that influence the way women act.

From the cultural analyst's perspective individual desires are defined by the enactment of projects, rather than the latter issuing from personal desires. If social subjects "play the games of their cultures", the anthropology of agency brings to light the ideological underpinnings of those cultural games, and how "the play of the game reproduces or transforms those underpinnings" (Ortner 2006, p. 152). Sherry Ortner emphasizes complex relations between agency and power. Drawing on Comaroff's study on Tswana women and men, she calls "agency of power" a kind of agency mainly defined in terms of the dominant counterpart within the domination-resistance dialectic (such as the agency played within the missionary colonial relationship in the Comaroff's study). Differently, an "agency of (cultural) projects" occurs "on the margins" of that relationship and refers - if we consider Comaroff's case – to the ways in which Tswana women and men play their games defined by their own ideals and values despite of the colonial context. And so there are two forms of agency and who must be explored shedding light on the articulation between the two: "agency as a form of power" (the domination of others, the empowerment of the subject, acts of resistance, and so on); and "agency as a form of intention and desire" (the pursuit of personal ambitions and goals, the actualization of projects). In the context of "serious games"

the pursuit of projects for some implies, inevitably, the subordination of others. Yet the latter are not completely deprived of agency, as they always have their of ambitions, desires, both powers and projects of their own, and resistance (in its variety of forms) remains a constant possibility.

> Both domination and resistance then are, it seems to me, always in the service of projects, of being allowed or empowered to pursue culturally meaningful goals and ends, whether for good or for ill (Ortner, 2006, p. 153).

In my study I adopt this double conceptualization of the notion of 'agency'. Thus, I explore the different circumstances in which the domination-resistance dialectic emerges in the life of female domestic workers, for instance within the hierarchical relationships between domestic workers and their employers. But I also consider that agency "takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity—of (culturally constituted) emotions, thoughts and meanings" (*ibidem*, p. 110). And so I explore the personal ambitions of domestic workers, their goals, how they try to achieve them, and how they see the prospective actualization of their future plans. I wonder how certain personal ambitions and goals are linked to a series of obligations towards other people, members of the community of origin and other people met during the life course. I also take into considerations the possible interests and needs of the people for whom domestic workers work, although the point of view from which I carry out the analysis is inevitably that of domestic workers, as I explore their narratives. I refer to various hierarchical forms of relationships, not only within the workplace, but also outside (within and beyond the women's family network). Lastly, I take into consideration that the same people who exercise a form of domination over female workers need their care work in turn. So, in some way, the same workers can exercise a form of power over other people, and threaten, for example, to leave the household where they work. Clearly, certain power hierarchies cannot be completely reversed. Domestic workers remains in a condition of subordination towards the people for whom they work. But it is interesting to note that, beyond the relationships of domination and power, both sides involved in the relation need to receive care from the other, and give a certain degree of care in turn. Female workers need protection in the urban context, and often do not see many other alternatives to living in the households where they work. In turn, employers need the care work performed by domestic workers. This intertwining is important because it is here that agency takes shape. I said that certain power dynamics cannot be overturned, indeed they are often even reinforced: the top-down employer-employee relations, but also other power dynamics taking place in asymmetric and

hierarchical relations of different kind, within and outside the workplace. An so, within this persistent domination-subordination dialectic, what does women's 'resistance' mean?

3.2.2 Agency and resistance

The agency has been also described as a form of resistance which can manifest itself in a variety of forms. For instance Judith Rollins (1996) theorizes as a form of resistance to physical domination what she calls "ressentiment," a deep-rooted negative feeling that black domestic workers feel towards their white employers in the United States. James Scott (1985) in *Weapons of the Weak* theorizes the hidden transcripts of resistance as ways through which the dispossessed express a subtle critique of their domination. Yet these kinds of resistance usually do not transform structures of domination. As Shireen Ally (2010) puts it:

> Indeed, with domestic workers, cynical forms of deference, mocking modes of silence, or various types of 'foot dragging' – wasting water while washing dishes or electricity while pressing laundry – simply confirm employers' racist, classist, or nativist attitudes. Workers' 'agency' in these cases re-instantiates and reinforces, rather than disrupts, the logics of their domination (Ally 2010, p. XXX).

Similarly, Rhacel Parreñas (2001) argues that the acts of resistance employed by Filipina domestic workers do not question the relations of inequality established by employers, but rather maintain them. In her study on domestic work in South Africa, Jacklyn Cock (1980) points out that due to a variety of reasons which range from the lack of educational opportunities and employment alternatives, to different mechanisms of control legislation that restrict the movement of black workers, black women in the Easter Cape are 'trapped' in domestic service. While acknowledging the framework of constraints in which women's lives are embedded, as well as the narrow parameters of choice that they have, Clock also individuates strategies of survival, and in some case individual actions of rebellion and resistance. In her words:

> The domestic servants' silence, and mockery of employers, might thus be viewed as muted rituals of rebellion. They are a crucial mode of adaptation, a line of resistance that enables the servant to maintain her personality and integrity intact. Petty pilfering, too, might be seen as an expression of situational rebellion (Cock 1980, p. 103).

Yet she further specifies that, in her study, most of the time this is more a strategy of survival rather than a private revolt, due to the powerlessness of domestic workers' situation which obstructs any overt expression of discontent (*ibidem*).

The conception of agency and resistance which is not socially transformative has been also described through the notion of 'tactic'. The latter has been formulated by Michel de Certeau (1984), meaning everyday practices which cannot reverse inner dynamics of inequalities and power hierarchies. Yet through these 'tactics' the subject is able to carve out some space for resistance (Marchetti 2014, p. 33).

Other scholars highlight that migrant domestic workers also mobilize forms of agency that directly challenge the power of their employers, for instance when women run away and change their position, as well as when they organize informal collectives to provide support resources and improve their situation (see for example Fernandez & de Regt, 2014, p. 15). In her case study on migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, Amrita Pande (2012) describes forms of surveillance and the spatial exclusion that domestic workers experience, for instance when they are not allowed to enter places such as restaurants or coffee shops. Nevertheless, domestic workers constantly use the exact spaces they are excluded from to mobilize strategies of resistance: when they gather and form small collectives outside churches; when they talk with each other outside of their balconies, and other circumstances.

Then, there are authors which do not see the category of resistance as very useful, while arguing that we should concentrate on a variety of transformative processes through which things are transformed, regardless of the intentions of the actors (Stoler 1986; Cooper 1992). As I have mentioned in the previous section, Sherry Ortner (2006) suggests to escape the dualism resistance/domination thorough an anthropology of resistance which focuses on "practice". She highlights the ambivalences, the ambiguities and the social complexity of resistance, as well as the internal politics, the cultural richness of dominated groups and the subjectivity of their actors (their desires, intentions, projects and fears). While arguing that resistance studies have been too often thin in capturing these complexities, she also argues that resistance "even at its most ambiguous, is a reasonably useful category, if only because it highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity" (S. B. Ortner, 2006, p. 44). Similarly, Abu-Lughod (1990b) criticizes feminist scholars (herself included) for being obsessed with resistance, as well as for the tendency to romanticize it, "to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated" (1990b, p. 41). Yet she proposes to "use resistance as a diagnostic of power" (*ibidem*, p. 42).

In line with Sherry Ortner and Abu-Lughod, I consider 'resistance' as a useful category to grasp certain power dynamics that emerge in the hierarchical relationships in which female domestic workers live. But in my work I always explore the categories of power and

resistance in relation to the category 'care', as power and submission are never defined as entities separate from care, the need of caring and being cared for in turn. In my study, this aspect also emerges from the way domestic workers talk about the various forms of resistance and daily strategies of survival that they employ. In both countries, many women tend to describe their employers as people who exert strong control over their lives, often mistreat and insult them. Domestic workers, however, do not hesitate to say that, in case they wanted, they could leave the households where they work and leave their employers uncovered, unprotected, in difficulty, because these employers strongly need a domestic worker who performs housework and takes care of their children. At the same time, female workers describe the protective attitudes of the people they work for. In particular, female employers are described as 'protective mothers' who take the place of other mothers in their villages of origin. Interestingly, the authoritarian attitudes of female employers - or influential mothers - are often described as fair, appropriate, even useful, but only on one condition: that the domestic worker is recognized as a daughter in turn, her work is valorized and she feels to be respected. Yet being treated like a daughter does not rule out the top-down power dynamics that continue to characterize the relationship employer-employee / mother-daughter (as well as relations between women and influential adults in their villages of origin).   In their continuous search for protection, domestic workers try to avoid risks (for example those risks linked to the life in their villages of origin), but simultaneously run new risks in urban context. The relationships that domestic workers establish with the people they work for, as well as with people outside the workplace, seem to protect them from certain risks, but also expose women to other risks. The concept of agency and resistance of women must therefore be understood in relation to the concept of 'risk'.

3.2.3   Agency and risks

Domestic workers are moved by a plurality of factors, such as moral obligations towards the families, the prospect of upward social mobility, personal aspirations for emancipation and well-being, which can also coexist with a sense of compulsion. Migration produces changes in the subjectivity of migrants, in their way of imagining themselves in relation to their social and family context of reference. The complexity of push factors highlights the importance of reflecting on risk management, which is a fundamental issue when it comes to safe migration. The link between risk and migration is a very intimate link when, for certain individuals, moving means running into danger. Female domestic workers run very high risks. I believe that reducing these risks to the fact of 'not knowing' them is highly limiting, in the sense that it reduces the perception of risk - which is always a socially shaped

perception - to the ignorance of the social actors, to a lack of information that would be easy to fill. As anthropological reflection has shown (Mary Douglas 1992), the selection, identification and management of risk do not respond to universal mechanisms. In fact, risk is not something objectively observable and definable, but a style of thinking that classifies the world on the basis of the social, moral and political horizons that locally filter the perception of reality for the subjects.

Consequently, the tolerability of dangerous, risky or painful experiences, the level of danger that one is willing to run, varies according to the contexts, the people involved and so on. Several studies have shown that risk control mechanisms exist among migrants and those who aspire to migrate (see Kindler 2016). Travels are less frightening because they are a collective experience and not an individual one, in the sense that they have been faced by friends, acquaintances, relatives. The risks are therefore in some way known and 'domesticated'. There is a tendency to place emphasis on success stories, through a mechanism that is very similar to that of those who gamble: regardless of the odds, happy ending stories attract interest, they become the horizon through which to imagine a better future. By future I am not referring to a probable near scenario, but an imaginative horizon that - regardless of its realization - guides the action of workers in the present and endows them with meaning.

And the future is crucial here, because for the "lonely" (Barrera 2011), "orphan" domestic workers of my study the dangers of staying in their villages might be perceives as worse than those of working under exploitative conditions within a household in the city. In this regard, it is useful to take up the concept of "social death" (Vigh 2006), widespread in the social sciences to indicate an extreme form of exclusion that coincides with the impossibility of having a life deemed socially worthy. Well, very often the risks of "social death" are considered more frightening than those related to the migratory experience, which must therefore be understood by taking into consideration the agency of women, their ability to act and decide, also in relation to the support networks that these women could rely on before moving to the cities of destination.

3.3 Conclusions

What I have argued so far brings us to the conclusive point on which I would like to dwell, namely the importance of understanding migration as a set of knowledge which spreads, circulates, builds the desire to migrate and constitutes a sort of capital to draw upon during one's experience. In this sense, the example of a former migrant woman who reinvents

herself as an intermediary (to help other women find a job) is in my opinion central. This element will emerge within this thesis, where I will show individual and collective strategies employed by domestic workers to improve their conditions. Even if the migratory experience of domestic workers increases the "skills" of young women little or nothing, there is a field in which the growth of knowledge takes place, and this is precisely that of migration. 'Knowing how to migrate' becomes a pool of skills that becomes a potential resource for promoting informed emigration. Women dispense information on wages, living conditions, advices (such as the importance of negotiating the salaries with their employers), in this way pursuing a "risk reduction" approach. In the social sciences, all this makes up what is called "culture of migration" (see Hahn & Klute 2007) which here helps us to keep together the migratory trajectories that domestic workers make within Ethiopia and Tanzania. Elsewhere - not having enough space to do so in this thesis - these considerations would also allow us to keep together internal migrations with those that female workers carry out abroad (for example in the Middle East).

4   DOMESTIC WORK IN AFRICA. AN ANALYSIS IN SPACE AND TIME

In this chapter I will provide an historical overview of the changing nature of domestic labour in Africa in space and time - from the pre-colonial period to the present – drawing on studies from several disciplines in social science. Domestic labour, often termed 'housework', is commonly associated with women's unpaid working activities – encouraged by feelings of love, responsibility and care - varying from cooking, childcare, cleaning the house, washing clothes, running errands and household maintenance in general. This work – which largely contributes to both the social and economic reproduction of societies - is usually accounted from a devaluating perspective, it is not recognized as real, productive work (see Anderson 2000). Given its common association with a set of naturally home-based tasks pertinent to the feminine gender, it is not surprising that domestic work is often addressed with little historical analysis and documentation, as something constant in space and time (Bryceson 2019, p. 301). Yet the content of domestic labour, as well as the relationship between domestic and non-domestic labour, is not constant and rather varies across space and time, as several feminist scholars in the 1970s have remarked. Maureen Mackintosh (1979) pointed out that the lack of cross-cultural and historical analysis within the domestic labour debate of her time created an impasse in which the concept 'domestic' was repeatedly adopted unproblematically (Mackintosh 1979, p. 173). The rigid separation between productive labour in the workplace and domestic labour in the home can be considered as peculiar of specific kinds of economy under capitalism, yet it is not characteristic to all types of economy. For instance, in certain African rural contexts household and non-household production are closely linked, and it is difficult to draw a line between the two. Domestic work may encompass activities such as picking vegetables and gathering wood, as much as agricultural labor may encompass household production (for instance when agricultural goods are processed for the household's own consumption) (see Beneria & Sen 1981, p. 292). In African rural areas the burden of subsistence falls upon domestic and agricultural work, and the separation between productive and reproductive activities is blurred.   In contrasts, an apparent rigid separation seems to occur in industrialized urban societies, where unpaid housework becomes increasingly isolated, while wage covers most of subsistence needs.

In *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) Esther Boserup adopted a comparative approach to show that in several African farming systems men are not the primary providers of food, they clear the land while women cultivate the crops. She shows that women's work

greatly varies from society to society, and in doing so she provides examples of women's situation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Boserup's work gave a great contribution to the understanding of African rural labour systems, though she has been criticized for having overrated the role of women in the sphere of subsistence agriculture (see Beneria & Sen, 1981). In some societies we may find that men perform specific roles at home which are commonly assumed as of feminine domain. And so the sexual division of labour both within and outside the home can greatly diverge from one society to another, and takes new forms as social and economic change occur. The same concept of 'domesticity' cannot be universally defined (see K. T. Hansen 1992). Indeed, "defining gender roles as necessarily tied to the category of domesticity generates obstacles to understanding gender relations in cultures presenting unfamiliar domestic relations" (Declich 2015, p.628).

The mutability of domestic labour content can be observed, for example, when one investigates the consequences of increasing involvement in the capitalist economy, such as specific technological changes, the degree of access to certain devices, the necessity of earning cash by increasing some kind of production in the home (beer production, weaving, and so on). In her study on middle class women in Kenya, Sharon Stichter (1988) points out that the actual content of domestic labour is affected by the availability of domestic technology, and it can be defined as the relationship of the domestic unit to the broader economic context. In her words: "Domestic work is a category defined by the degree of commodification of labor and goods; as capitalism develops domestic work constitutes an ever-declining residual of those tasks and products which have not yet been subsumed under capital" (Stichter, 1988, p.180). She argues that - unlike what is commonly thought - for many middle-class women in urban Kenya the amount of domestic work is not decreased, when compared to rural areas, but it has changed in several ways due to advances in domestic technology. And so easy comparisons between urban and rural areas cannot be made. Middle-class women may hire a substitute - commonly called housegirl – to mitigate the workload. In this case, wives tend to be responsible for the wages of the housegirl whose presence is therefore strictly correlated with the employment of the woman. It is only on account of such substitute that women in cities are able to combine their responsibilities as wives and mothers with their work in the wage economy.

The value of a certain feminist critique has been precisely to remark that women's domestic labour cannot be understood as a cluster of given tasks common to all women, in all societies at all times. When one takes into consideration class, race, age differences and other cross-

cutting factors, it is clear that not all women perform the same domestic tasks (see Caplan & Bujra, 1978). And so defining what is 'domestic', what can be deemed as 'women's work', as well as which groups of women and to which degree some women perform domestic activities is not as easy as it may appear.

Given these considerations, in the following sections I shall trace a brief historical overview of the changing nature of domestic labour in Africa in space and time, by following the periodization illustrated by Deborah Bryceson (2019) in her recent chapter *Domestic Work*: the colonial period (1900-49); the nationalist period and the early postcolonial period (1950-79); economic crisis, de-agrarianization and income diversification (1980–99); the neoliberal economic boom and urbanization in African national economies (from 2000 to the present). However, I shall draw a few considerations on the precolonial period before moving to the colonial one and beyond.

4.1   Pre-colonial institutions

As Janet Bujra (2000) points out in her study on domestic service in Tanzania, in the precolonial period some Africans, Arabs and Indians had household skivvies and domestic slaves. Domestic slavery was a pre-colonial institution amongst several African groups, and both African and Arab slave traders expected women slaves to provide domestic services. During the last two decades a growing scholarship has focused its attention on legacies of African slavery, with several studies that explore oral traditions and oral data, memories of life in slavery from the African continent (Bellagamba et al., 2013; Declich, 1995; Klein, 1989). Recent ethnographic studies on domestic workers' life and working conditions in Africa further suggests that "the long shadow cast into the present by past forms of slavery has touched not only slave descendants but also those who are subjected to contemporary forms of labor exploitation and abuses" (Gardini, 2020, p. 272). These studies probe what it means to be exposed to contemporary forms of labor exploitations in contexts where the stigma related to past slavery is marked, and still results in economic and social marginalization.

In exploring the context within which domestic labour evolved in Tanzania, a situational analysis of domestic workers conducted by the ILO (2016) argues that in pre-colonial societies, during communal ownership of property, domestic work was performed as an obligation to traditional leaders. The latters assigned boys and girls various tasks, such as

cleaning, running errands, cooking, gardening and cattle keeping. According to this study, domestic workers were protected by several traditions and customs, although they might be obliged to be loyal to their royal leaders to death. With the advent of private property there was a proliferation of domestic work. More endowed people were served by have-not people who subjected themselves and their families to their masters, in exchange for accommodation and food. This trend continued during the colonial governments, where large numbers of former slaves continued to work for their colonial masters in servile conditions. But this time, they didn't enjoy any kind of legal protection: they were neither protected by customs and traditions, as they were detached from their families, neither by statutory law. The latter was meant only for the colonial masters and certain Africans working in the industries and farms of the colonizers. However, Janet Bujra (2000) also argues that in colonial times domestic servants continued to work also for non-Europeans but colonial officials did not count them in their estimates. As she puts it:

> When colonial officials made estimates of the numbers employed in domestic service they generally counted only those employed by fellow Europeans and Asians, and sometimes only the former (…) This exclusive focus on European and Asian practice and the invisibility of African employers requires its own explanation. It spoke both of self interest (since any policy changes would impact on Europeans as employers) and instrumentality (since the distinctive inclusion of 'Asiatic' employers offered the opportunity to contrast their practice unfavourably with that of Europeans). It would also seem that the racialised distinctiveness of employer and employee defined domestic service for colonial officals. (…) What is evident is that to bring Africans into focus as fellow employers would have been at odds with their stereotypical colonial representation merely as workers/subjects. Given these distorting perceptions (…) the 'statistics' must be viewed with skepticism (Bujra 2000, pp. 6-7).

Interestingly, some scholars invoke a sociolinguistic approach to examine the use of specific terms such as "slavery" and "service" in Swahili communities, shedding light to shifts in meaning over space and time. For instance Carol Eastman (1994) analyzed the Swahili term *utumwa* ('slavery, service') as a concept of social change in East Africa. In line with Jonathon Glassman (1991), the author argues that some terms are so broad to include many categories of subordinate, and also personal dependents who do not necessarily fulfill most common definitions of 'slavery.' These considerations further led Jonathan Glassman and other scholars to suggest that "the institution of slavery in East Africa arose as a variant of local concepts of clientship" (Pouwels, 1991, p. 376). As Carol Eastman points out:

In such a complex setting, notions of servitude are encoded with multiple layers of cultural meaning. The history of the Swahili people is one of incorporating former slaves, clients, dependents and high status immigrants into freeborn society accompanied by periods of social change during which formerly lower class clans came to achieve high status (Pouwels 1987) (Eastman 1994, p. 90).

In the Ethiopian literature, we may find reference to female and male servants (in Amharic *gered* [27] for female servants and *ashker* for male servants) in different manuscripts and documents going back to the Old Testament and in the medieval Christian code *Fetha Negast*[28] (or 'Laws of the Kings') (Balcha 2018, p. 11). Richard Pankhurst (1985) quotes a 15th manuscript of Psalms which refers, in the narrative on King Solomon, to female servants in the Palace of Queen of Sheba. The author argues that the relevance of slaves in Christian Ethiopia is evident in the *Fetha Negast* which includes detailed rules of possession, acquisition and treatment of slaves. As he puts it:

> Slavery was so important in traditional Ethiopia that the *Fetha Nagast* devoted considerable attention to the institution's history and moral justification, as well as to such questions as relations between slaves and free men (and women), the manumission, or freeing of slaves, the slave's status in relation to inheritance, the slave trade, and the pricing of slaves (Pankhurst R. 2011, p. 34).

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[27] This term was often mentioned by Ethiopian domestic workers in my study. Studies on domestic work in Ethiopia point out that after the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 the communist regime put domestic servants in the list of the oppressed, and banned the term *gered* which was gradually replaced by the term *yebet serategna* (which literally means 'domestic worker') (Gebremedhin, 2016). Yet the term *gered* is still widely used, and many Ethiopian domestic workers mentioned this term as an example of insult or derogatory term that their employers adopted referring to them.

[28] The *Fetha Nagast*, or Laws of the Kings, "was based on a 13th century Arabic text written by an Egyptian Coptic scholar, Abu-l Fada-il Ibn al-'Assal (more commonly called Ibn al-'Assal). The *Fetha Nagast* was based essentially on exegesis – the selected use of the Bible. The code, which was one of considerable sophistication, but at times difficult to interpret, was largely based on the Old and New Testaments, on the teachings of the Fathers of the Christian Church, and on Roman and Byzantine Law. Ibn al-'Assal's text was translated, reportedly during the reign of the Ethiopian Emperor Zar'a Ya'qob (1434-1468) by an Egyptian scholar called Petros Abda Sayd, into Ethiopia's classical language Ge'ez (Pankhurst R. 2011, p. 33).

This document states that all men have been created free by God, but it also asserts that the law of war sanctioned the capture of slave, especially among unbelievers (R. Pankhurst, 1976).

> The state of liberty is in accord with the law of reasons for all men share liberty on the basis of natural law. But war and the strength of horses bring some of the service of others, because the law of war and victory makes the vanquished, slaves of victor. Those whom you take from the people who dwell around you and the aliens, who dwell among you, let them, men and women be your slaves. You shall buy slaves from among them and from among their off-springs born in your land and they shall be for you and your children after you as an inheritance (*The Fetha Nagast*, in Tesfaye, 2007, p.37).

According to the traditional customary laws, as well as the *Fetha Negast*, slaves were considered property of their owners. Since they could be sold and rented, a slave could be owned by more than one master. Slave owners could not separate women slaves from their children, neither a male slave from his wife and child (SEID A., 2015).

Written documents dealing with slaves/servants in Ethiopia increased in the 18th and 19th century social history of the country. In particular, we might find testimonies of explorers and travelers. In his autobiographical writings, the British traveler Nathaniel Pearce, who accompanied Henry Salt's 1805 mission to Abyssinia and served the ruler of Tigré until 1816, reported that servants were usually paid with salt. He provided the following description of the "servants" in the country:

> I have observed, that if through their faithfulness and attention the master may think fit to make them an addition to their pay, or any present, they become immediately ungovernable and insolent, the least indulgence spoiling them for good servants. When not so indulged they are very submissive, and never received any thing from their master's hand without bowing and kissing the article. The day they receive their new cloth, or wages, after sewing it into a proper form for a dress, they go to their master and mistress, and bow with their foreheads to their knees, saying, 'Bless my new dress, that it may be a lucky one !' Servants of both sexes, after washing either the master's or mistress's feet, always bow and kiss them; they are in general clean in their persons, and wash themselves often as well as their dress (Pearce, 1831, p. 342)

According to Richard Pankhurst "though the number of slaves in Ethiopia in former times has never been adequately calculated it is estimated that no fewer than 1,250,000 were exported from the region between 1800 and 1850, and it may be assumed that many more

slaves were retained there for local use" (Pankhurst, 1976, p. 99). The author argues that in Ethiopia in the early 19th both male and female slaves were engaged in various forms of domestic work in and around their master's households. Men slaves usually worked in the agricultural fields, while the women slaves served in the home. In *The Economic History of Ethiopia* (1968) Richard Pankhurst described the condition of slavery in the country during 1800-1935. He mentioned specific duties performed by servants depending on their ability and sex: "every domestic servant has his own duties and in no circumstances will consent to do other jobs, for instance, one man looks after the *tej* and nothing else, another concerns himself only with the gun, another is merely a treasurer, and another has charge of animals" (Richard Pankhurst quoted by Tesfaye, 2007, p. 35). Female tasks were grinding cereals, serving in the home, fetching water and gathering woods, while male servants followed their masters during their journeys. Arnauld d' Abbadie (1980) (quoted in Belete, 2014) described rich mistresses spending their time lying on the bed, while directing to work their slaves or servants. These descriptions often identify slaves by the kind of tasks they were 'specialized', for example distinguishing between 'water girls' who carried water and 'grinding-women.' Other types of slaves where those engaged in cooking and preparing drinks, and the 'camp-followers' who prepared food for the troops at battlefield (Harris 1843, quoted by Belete 2014).

In her chapter on domestic work in Africa, Deborah Bryceson (2019) points out that in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa slave trading in the pre-colonial nineteenth century led to changes in labour patterns and domestic life. When men were seized as slaves, women were left behind supporting their families. In some cases, the impact of slave raiding led women to withdraw from farming. By the mid-nineteenth century, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was ending, while slavery was escalating in Central and East Africa. Women were traded as slaves and used as pawns to traders and chiefs along the slave trade routes. Those who reached cities on the coast and Zanzibar usually became concubines or domestic labourers for their masters. The persistence of slave trading for centuries in West and East Africa contributed to the formation of creolized populations, with the scattering of slaves in different geographical areas and sexual relations between slaves and masters, as well as the emergence of new ethnic identities (see Bryceson, 2010). Slavery did not disappear after the official banning of the slave trade and the imposition of the colonial order. Many former slaves continued to work in servile conditions and many female slaves married their masters.

4.2   The colonial period

In her study on domestic service in Tanzania, Janet Bujra (2000) argues that the so-called domestic service as wage labour is a product of the colonial period with its racialized social order. In Tanzania during the colonial rule the majority of domestic servants who worked in the colonial homes were male. According to Robyn Pariser (2015) "some African women worked in European and Asian homes, mostly as *ayahs* (nannies or childcare providers), but until the late 1950s domestic service was considered men's work" (Pariser 2015, p. 111). Men were induced to work as migrant labourers, while their wives and mothers were obliged to remain in their home areas with double workload on their shoulders.

It is well-documented the fact that in many parts of the world gender relations have been transformed under the impact of colonization, 'Westernization' and international capitalism. Colonialism and capitalism had a huge impact on the sexual division of labour and the types of political and social options available to women and men (Moore 1988). European colonial policies in different African countries employed the idea of women as 'hearth-holders' as a colonial stabilization strategy. African male were pushed into the cash economy, employed in mines and plantation, and drawn away from their 'hearth-hold 'women who remained in *situ*, in their marital home areas. The objective of dissuading women from migrating to towns and cities were shared by indigenous and colonial authorities. In some parts of colonial Africa, specific restrictions on women's movement prevented them from moving to cities or joining their husband in the mines or plantations. And so women, entrusted to tribal leaders, entered an era of residential immobility under the indirect government policies of colonial governments. Rural women were therefore assigned the role of 'Mother Africa' (see Bryceson 2019), female heads of households capable of independently support and care for their offspring through domestic labour and food production.

However, colonial policies were contradictory and shifting. Studies also demonstrate that in some circumstances colonial policies encouraged women to move to urban areas in order to provide sexual services for the male workers, as well as to stabilize the workforce. For instance, Jane Parpart (1988) argues that in colonial Zambia many mining companies sought to encourage stabilized married male labourers, therefore promoting women's migration to towns and marriages in the urban areas. While women struggled to free themselves from marital constraints, they engaged in personal liaisons with men to gain economic survival, since wage-earning opportunities in towns were very limited. Although patriarchal strategies and gender hierarchies succeeded in the attempt to stabilize African marriages in towns, and

further limited women's independence, women continued to mobilize and employ creative strategies to meet their needs. The struggle between the genders continued to challenge the dominant patriarchal system.

Notwithstanding the great contribution provided by female hard work to male labour migration, colonial governments emphasized the role of male breadwinner, therefore undervaluing women's labour and their capacity of economic self-reliance. Esther Boserup (1970) pointed out that in some cases colonial administrator dispossessed women of their rights to land through the introduction of land reforms. Governmental incentives in favour of male farmers (and their cash crops productions) led to further discrimination.

Debora Bryceson remarks that tribal gender divisions of labour varied in terms of tasks and allocation, but the workload was almost constant throughout the continent. Monica Wilson maintained that in the mid-1930s in the lands of Tanganyika a wife had to brew beer and cook, clean the house, mud the walls, fetch wood and water, work in the fields (Wilson 1977, quoted by Deborah Bryceson). Other studies in southern Africa and in West Africa demonstrate that housewives were responsible for much of the food farming and for more than half of the agricultural work of the year. "Yet the ideology of male patriarchy was used to co-opt wives' labour in their husbands' commercial cash cropping" (Bryceson, 2019, p. 309).

Christian missions contributed to promote a Wester model of monogamous nuclear family. Christian teachings imparted values based on male household headship and marital conjugality, equating good housekeeping and motherhood with being a good Christian woman, and labelling as bad girls urban unmarried women (J. L. Parpart, 2001). A small group of salaried African men (converted to Christianity) started moving to urban areas together with their wives, mainly to keep them away from brewing and trading activities. These families started forming part of an embryonic urban African elite based on monogamous Christian marriages. An interesting case study on educated African elite is that of Kristin Mann (1985) in colonial Nigeria (Logos). She described the changes in family and household structures as a result of the spread of Christian and Western education. She illustrated both men and women responses to Christian marriage, and the different economic and social circumstances to which women and men were exposed. European missionaries introduced middle-class Victorian values and the 1884 Marriage Ordinance which prohibited polygyny among Christians. Traditional domestic arrangements and inheritance practices were radically altered, and Christian marriage contributed to the isolation of the emerging educated elite from the rest of the population. While polygynous marriage for men

in rural area was advantageous, since men gained prestige and wealth through the labour of their wives, for men in towns Christian marriage had both advantages and disadvantages. In the urban area, wealth depended on trade, colonial service and employment in various professions, and so limiting the number of children and wives was a favourable economic strategy. On the other hand, the Christian laws of succession made Christian wives heirs to men's properties, and many men found it difficult to support their wives who had no financial autonomy to contribute to household expenses. This ambiguous situation led many men to choose a 'dual marriage' (both Christian and Yoruba one) juggling advantaged and disadvantages of the two. What is more, they found creative way not to contravene the Marriage Ordinance, by leaving the status of their customary marriages ill defined. Kristin Mann argued that elite women responses to Christian marriages were less ambiguous than elite men, and women tended to support Christian marriages. Indeed, women had less social and economic opportunities to survive, their status depended on their husbands, and those women who failed to conform to Christian values of ideal mothers were considered a threat for the status of the entire elite.[29]

However, in the analysis of people's varying responses to specific ideological structures during the colonial rule and beyond, we should consider also the critical role of class and other cross-cutting factors. As Henrietta Moore remarked in her comments of Kristin Mann's study:

> The early colonial period provided new opportunities for women and men to redefine and renegotiate aspects of their domestic lives, but this was not true for all sections of the community. Christian marriage was part of a socio-economic and political strategy for the elite middle class, but those outside this class pursued very different strategies. There were also differences within the elite itself. Some individuals held strongly to Yoruba marriage throughout the period, and found it morally binding and socially compelling, while others continued to adhere to Christian values and Victorian ideology even under changing political and economic circumstances (Moore, 1988, pp. 122-123)

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[29] Things began to change from around 1900, when both women and men realized that Christian marriage had not met their needs. Yoruba marriage was reassessed and redefined in different ways, and many influential people began to propose professional trainings for elite women to let them gain greater economic independence.

4.2.1 Only 'houseboys'?

Deborah Bryceson (2019) points out that during the colonial period, many urban inhabitants were European administrators, Asian and European people working as health professionals, Lebanese and Asian traders. Many non-African women, who were rarely involved in formal sector work, began to employ domestic servants. I have already mentioned that in many African countries, the latter were mainly men, the so-called 'houseboys' (see Bujra 2000). Ironically, the colonial labour system resulted in a sharp duality: African women in the rural area were left with double workload on their shoulders, performing housework, childcare and basic need provisioning; urban non-African women were almost free from household chores, with domestic servants at their disposal.

However, each context had its different realities and specificities. For example, in colonial Eritrea domestic work at the service of Italian colonizers was predominantly a women's occupation. As Abbebe Kifleyesus (2012) remarks:

> Although migration and trade between the Red Sea littoral, the Nile Valley, the Mediterranean world, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian peninsula existed as early as the third millennium B.C., the use of women as a steady pool of entrants to wage work was first introduced to Eritrea by the Italians (1890-1941) in the early years of the twentieth century. The Italian plantation economy, the textile industry, and the food manufacturing industry required the recruitment of labor, in which women played a large part. This kind of labor migration continued during the short-lived British Military Administration (1941-52) and the subsequent years of Ethiopian federation and formal annexation (1952-91) (Kifleyesus 2012, p. 102).

Giulia Barrera (2011) argues that during colonialism the majority of Eritrean women who migrated from rural to urban areas were probably "lonely"[30] women: single women who were no longer considered suitable for marriage; orphans who could not afford a dowry; divorced women; women socially condemned for having lost their virginity before marriage; among others. Once in cities, many women began to work as domestic servants for Italian men and ended up being their concubines. Many Italians confused concubinage with a local, and perfectly legal, institution of temporary marriage called *demoz* or *quzar*. This was a kind of conjugal union where a woman established a relationship with a men, for an agreed limited time, in exchange for remuneration. Usually, women who entered into this "marriage by

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[30] The author prefers to use the expression "lonely" (sole) women rather than "single" women, because it better reflects the perception that the society in which they lived had of them.

reward" were precisely those "lonely" women without better life prospects (Barrera 2011, p. 100). Unlike the non-temporary marriage (*qal-kidan*), in the case of *quzar* the woman couldn't inherit from the man in the event of his death. But *quzar* provided that men took permanent responsibility of the offspring of the couple, even after the relationship had terminated. The Italians ignored this aspect, and so the children born within this relationship were often abandoned together with their mothers. That is, *demoz* was strategically used to provide sexual partners for colonial officers and soldiers through a form of concubinage which was called *madamato*.[31] After the promulgation of the Fascist racial laws (1938) - that prohibited intimate and sexual relationships between Italians and colonized populations - the Eritrean concubines and their mix-raced children were even more likely to be abandoned by the Italian partners (Marchetti 2014, p. 47).

Giulia Barrera argues that many "lonely" women sought new job opportunities in the city. For instance, many orphans left their villages of origin, even more so that they couldn't afford a dowry. The author argues that during colonialism each Italian household recruited at least one domestic servant, and even well-off Eritrean households[32] used to employ one or more. The number of women working in this sector grew over time, together with the growth of the Italian community. "At the end of the thirties, when the Italians in Asmara were more than 50,000, the domestic workers in the capital city must have been tens of thousands" (Barrera 2011, p. 108).

Domestic service was one of the few available opportunities to them, and for many Eritrean women it turned out to be a lifelong occupation. It is likely that these "lonely" women had no chance of a better life in the countryside. Thus, some of them improved their economic and social position, exploitation and abuse notwithstanding. With their meagre earnings they contributed to the sustenance of family members left behind. For women without family ties, life in the city meant being able to enter the market economy as autonomous subjects, even though they were exposed to exploitative conditions and recurrent risks of sexual abuse. These issues have been little investigated by scholars. Giulia Barrera invites us to explore

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[31] For what concerns the sexual and racial policies of the Italian colonialism in Eritrea see Barbara Sòrgoni (1998).

[32] It is very difficult to find information on domestic workers recruited within African households during the colonial period. For example, in the case of Tanzania Janet Bujra points out: "when colonial officials made estimates of the numbers employed in domestic service they generally counted only those employed by fellow Europeans and Asians, and sometimes only the former" (Bujra 2000, p. 6).

the experiences of single or – in her words - "lonely" women who moved to cities during colonialism, as well as consequences on wider gender and generational relations.

4.3   The nationalist period

Deborah Bryceson (2019) remarks that after the Second World War, with the gradual politicization of the African population who strived for better working and living conditions, colonial governments began to take radical measures to address issues such as inequities in wage policies and the access to education. Most regions of the continent saw a rapid urban growth, an increase in total fertility rate and an improvement of health facilities. New primary school were implemented, especially in the urban areas; the meagre bachelor wages were replaced by a family wage in many countries; and women began joining their husbands in urban area or independently moved to cities assisting urban households with childcare and domestic labour.

The expansion of peasant crop production and the mineral extraction became the main economic development strategies employed by post-independent national governments. In the 1960s, many African nation states witnessed a global agricultural commodity price boom. Peasants were exhorted to replace traditional systems of subsistence agriculture with new systems of modern agriculture, and many male migrants went back to the farmsteads (see Tischler, 2019). The production of export crops was entrusted entirely to men, who were considered the households' breadwinners, while women were supposed to produce food crop for direct home consumption playing their role of good housewives. However, men often coopted unpaid crop production of their wives to convert it into forms of cash-crop production. Women often assisted their husbands in the cultivation of export crops and their workload became more and more intensified. On the other hand, several foreign donors began to sponsor projects on income-generating activities for women, usually overlooking or taking for granted women's domestic labour burden (Bryceson 2019).

4.3.1   Towards the so-called 'feminisation' of domestic work

Studies on domestic work in Africa demonstrate that in many countries throughout the post-colonial period there has been a gradual feminization of domestic service as a form of employment in towns and cities. Yet situations differ, and "the challenge to scholarship is

not to take these assumptions for granted but to examine the changing interaction of structural, historical, and cultural factors involved in producing particular gender conventions in employment" (Hansen 1990, p. 122). For instance in the previous section I have mentioned the studies of Giulia Barrera (2011) in Eritrea, where domestic workers at the service of Italian colonizers were mainly women. Different is the case of Tanzania. Janet Bujra (2000) reports that in Tanzania there has been a gradual feminisation of domestic service, "but one delayed by the failure of industrial growth and the determination of men to hold on to jobs which they considered worth having." (p.4) The author also remarks that during the colonial period, female servants were intentionally boycotted in colonial newspapers on account of their presumed threatening and rampant sexuality. This impacted the composition of domestic labour since colonial female employers - fearing of their husbands' infidelity -preferred to hire male servants. In the early 1970's, a middle-class African employer began to emerge who could afford to employ a domestic servant. In the mid-1980s men in Tanzania were still predominant in the domestic workforce. As she put it:

> I assumed that by the mid-1980s women would have ousted men from the lowly occupation of domestic worker and my study would uncover the inside story of the 'feminisation' of domestic service. In the event, my own data from Tanga indicated that the majority of these jobs were still monopolised by men, though women held 28% of them (Bujra, 2000, p. 8)

The author pointed out that the feminization of the occupation was an outcome of economic and social transformation of the rural areas, with dislocations of gendered modes of rural livelihood, and related transformations in the composition of the labour supply during the colonial period and beyond. Labour migration tracked the beginning of a process of proletarianisation where families survival demands that some people must stay whilst other leave, while relations to the land as a means to a livelihood were eroded.

Bujra illustrated a vibrant struggle between the genders. For men, wage labour in cities was part of a familial and patriarchal strategy for survival. They left wives to cultivate their land in rural areas. Women migrants in the urban area (in Bujra's study nearly half of them were married) had moved to town avoiding patriarchal strategies. For women in Tanzania, as well as in other African countries (e.g. South Africa: Bozzoli, 1983; Senegal: Mackintosh, 1979), domestic service offered a first form of entrance in urban economy.

Scholars have further argued that, before the 1980s, in Tanzania paid domestic service in cities was not equated to 'women's work' as it is today, because it allowed men to fulfil their social roles as breadwinners. Men were earning money to feed their families in the rural area. Yet in the post-colonial independence period material conditions of labour had changed. The

increase of female migrants began to challenge men's masculine identity, as men in cities were performing tasks which they refused to do in their own home.

> In other words, increased female rural to urban migration is implicated in the pace of change from male to female domestic workers in that it reduced, for houseboys, the distance between place of work (urban household) and home (originally rural) (Kiaga, 2007). That is, the propensity for participating in otherwise 'women's work', hence emasculating, increases with increased distance from 'home (ILO 2016, p. 21)

Studies in South Africa show that African female servants began to equalize with male servants at the end of the Second World War. Under apartheid residential zoning, women were working as domestic servants for white employers, while men were mainly employed as gardeners, guards or cleaners. Jacklyn Cock (1988) explored to which extent apartheid depended on the exploitation of black domestic servants, while shedding light to the complex interplay between gender, class and race. In her study, the power relation between white women and black women is examined through the institution of domestic service, which represents the incorporation of the wage relationship into the household. Domestic servants provide services which are fundamental for the reproduction of labour power, whether on a daily or on a generational basis, and greatly contribute to the prosperity of the economy in South Africa. Many African women find themselves as "trapped" workers with no other employment alternatives, experiencing a variety of denials, daily frustrations and forms of oppression. The wife of the household is responsible for the supervision of the domestic servant and for the administration of her work. Yet Jacklyn Cock demonstrates that in reality both the wife and the female servant are subordinate to the male head of the household, and in fact the employment of domestic servants strengthens the exclusion of the husband from domestic tasks. Black servants, whether directly or indirectly, build up the current work force and increase the value of labour power of individuals who constitute the future work force. Through their role of childcare they expand the value of white children's labour power, since the dual household income allows extra activities of socialization and trainings for children. However, the level of contribution that domestic work can provide to the value of labor power is strictly correlated with the household's degree of access to specific means of production, as well as to the level of development of capitalism itself. Different degrees of household incomes determine the possibility to cover the cost of a domestic servant, to afford extra educational trainings for children and restaurant meals, and so when levels of wages are very high the fuller capitalization of domestic work may occur. The work provided by domestic servants in a way subsidizes white workers, for it decreases the cost of their

maintenance when compared to a situation of fuller capitalization of domestic work. This means that the relationship between capital and domestic labour is complex and fluctuating, it varies in accordance with the status of subsistence labour, of capital, as well as of the working class struggles to define what is essential for their standard of living.

One must consider that a substantial part of the studies on domestic work in Africa focuses on South Africa, "and given the white racism of apartheid policies we must be careful in interpreting the significance of the data for the rest of Africa" (Bryceson, 2019, p. 314). In the rest of the continent, when colonial expatriates departed, many urban households relied on various forms of domestic help based on extended family networks. The usual practice was to recruit a girl from the home area who moved to the urban area to perform care and domestic work in exchange for accommodation, food, and in some cases educational opportunities. In her study on domestic service in post-colonial Zambia, Sacha Hepburn (2019) shows that female children migrated between rural and urban areas to perform domestic labour for kin and also strangers. Not only they made significant contributions to both urban and rural households through their labour and migration practices, but they also helped to maintain economic and social connections across spatial boundaries. Many women and girls saw the possibility to engage in different forms of domestic service as a first foothold in the city life. In several circumstances - as illustrated by Karen Hansen (1990) - matron's constant demands for the girl's engagement in domestic tasks were countered by girl's ambitions to explore the city and find profitable job opportunities in the urban economy. Matrons tended to supervise and pose restrictions on girls' movement, often afraid they might have sexual relations with their husbands. Various fears and forms of antagonisms between matrons and their female servants emerged over time, to the point that girls rarely remained in their job positions for more than one or two years. Just like the former European employers, African matrons constituted higher social positions in the urban hierarchy. Ironically, certain types of urban middle-class women could participate in the paid labor force outside the home only through the subordination of rural woman performing domestic labor (Kiaga & Kanyoka, 2011).

Overall, Deborah Bryceson (2019) points out that in many African countries labour relations moved forward in complex ways, with men employed in wage labour within different professional sectors, and women usually engaged in various family duties in rural and urban areas, or forms of kin labour exchange – that was unpaid - in cities. However, "rural women with heavy familial duties were facing the harshest circumstances, and it is no wonder that

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their daughters were eager to migrate to the city and engage in extended family relational exchange" (p. 315).

4.4   The economic recession

In the mid- and late 1970s, with the oil crises, the vast majority of African countries were forced to ask the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for loan. They plunged into debt and faced dramatic economic restructuring and government cutbacks. Only exceptions were the few oil-rich countries: Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria and Libya. Urban households faced severe financial shortcomings and many smallholder farmers reverted to subsistence farming throughout the 1980s. Both men and women, together with their offspring, began to seek alternative sources of income to survive. Many of them engaged in different types of non-agricultural cash-generating activities giving rise to a gradual deagrarianization process (see Bryceson, 1996).

During the 1980s and 1990s, many women increasingly engaged in a range of cash-generating activities outside the home, such as beer brewing, sales of snacks, soap making, tailoring, among others. Simultaneously, with the spread of AIDS pandemic throughout the continent many people were occupied with the care of migrant labourers who returned home sick. Female carers themselves got the disease, and many orphan children moved to town seeking home and support within kin and non-kin households (see Baylies & Bujra, 2000). A decline in the total fertility rates combined with an increase in mortality rates in southern, East and West Africa. Pro-natalist attitudes were questioned, and women themselves – fearing contracting HIV/AIDS – began rethinking their sex lives. Some single women tended to avoid marriage, while some wives divorced their husbands (Bryceson 2019).

Informal labour in town and cities was the only opportunity of employment for many people. Many women sought to engage in petty trade and services, making the feminization of the labour force increasingly evident. Even though husbands badly needed women's paid labour that bolstered household earnings, new tensions between the genders emerged. Many husbands felt humiliated as they were denied the role of solely breadwinner, and complained that their wives did not have time to cook properly, do housework and take care of their children. Many countries witnessed a radical restructureng of the sexual division of labour for household welfare, which resulted in the extension of women's responsibilities within and outside the home. Yet women's labour was still downplayed: while men were referred

to as breadwinners ensuring household economic welfare, women continued to be portrayed as housewives and mothers.

Interestingly, Janet MacGaffey (1988) addressed the issue of women's resistance to male oppression and women's struggles for independence in the second economy of Zaire, between the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that during this period men lost part of their control on women since the institutions of the state did not operate in the second economy. Women took advantage from a range of income-generating opportunities in the informal sector, and began to invest in plantations, real estate and transport. These trends led to changes in family and kinship structure. On the one hand, the increasing economic role of women in towns gave them more independence, on the other hand it raised new conflicts within the household. New norms and family codes were developed in order to reassert male control over women and the accumulation of capital under the control of the husband. Again, the struggle between genders continued while subordination of women took new forms in relation to changes in the basic economic and political structures of society.

During the 1980's and 1990's many people engaged in the informal sector. The combination of economic recession and the AIDS pandemic led to a dramatic restructuring of paid work in many countries, where the formal labour market was replaced with a range of precarious jobs and self-employed petty trade. While men's paid work decreased – and there is no evidence that they used time off to help women with the domestic labour - women's working days lengthened. They had to juggle cash-earning activities and the domestic labour. Within the informal sector, domestic work was one of the main available opportunities to the point that, for example in depressed mid-1980s Zambia, it superseded mining as a sector of paid labour force (see Hansen 1990). Domestic service was an attractive form of livelihood especially for those women who were structurally displaced from rural land access (for instance widowed and divorces women), as they could find accommodation at the employer's residence. Yet most urban households tended to rely on help from extended family networks, therefore recruiting girls from their rural home areas.

4.5   The new millennium

The new millennium witnessed a period of growing optimism, where many people found survival strategies by engaging in alternatives income-earning activities. Many engaged in artisanal mining of diamonds and gold. Many African countries shifted to mineral export,

following new national mining codes introduced in the 1990s to boost foreign investment in large-scale African mining. Overall, this situation encouraged "service-sector activities and African economic growth from low or negative rates to impressive growth of over 5 per cent in a number of mineral-rich countries in the 2000s" (Bryceson 2019, p. 322).

Empirical evidence of time use in Africa show that there was an overall reduction in domestic labour time in cities and towns, as opposed to domestic labour time in rural households (M. C. Blackden & Wodon, 2006). Lifestyle differences were increasingly marked, with second-generation urban dwellers constituting the burgeoning middle class. The latter could access high-quality education, comfortable houses equipped with refrigerators, washing machines, computers, cars. Clearly, this was particularly evident in those countries where mineral exports were growing. Some scholars shed light to social changes accompanying middle class growth. For instance Claire Mercer (2014) does this by focusing on houses as key sites where lifestyles are visibly in flux in Tanzania. In her study, differentiated domestic aesthetics "also provide new ways in which the 'old middle class' and 'new middle class' seek to distinguish themselves from each other as well as from their 'class Others' above and below them (Liechty 2003)" (Mercer 2014, p. 229). Certain types of urban middle-class women could participate in the paid labor force outside the home only through the subordination of rural woman performing domestic labor (Kiaga & Kanyoka, 2011).

Deborah Bryceson (2019) identifies three new trends in domestic labour which emerge over the new millennium:

> First, the expansion of the African middle class amid economic prosperity has led to increased demand for domestic workers in the capital cities and towns. Second, despite rising demand for domestic workers, de-agrarianization and high urban migration rates have pushed the supply of domestic labourers beyond the level of demand in many countries, compelling some female domestic labourers to look for jobs abroad, especially in wealthy oil-producing countries such as Nigeria, Gabon, the Middle East Gulf States or Europe. Third, the transfer of children from rural to urban areas to serve as domestic labourers in kin and non-kin related households has evolved towards pernicious forms of trafficking and child labour mistreatment in some places (Bryceson 2019, p. 324).

An increasing number of women migrate to the Middle East, especially from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Sierra Leone. Abbebe Kifleyesu (2012) registered the massive outflow of labor migrants from Eritrea to the Arab Near East, especially since the early 1970s, as a consequence of the economic problems resulting from the three-decade-long war

of liberation with Ethiopia. Both women and men sought fortune in oil-producing countries. The latter witnessed a significant increase in their wealth, due to the energy prices increase after the world energy crises in 1973 and 1979. In particular, women were likely to take up domestic work when they migrated and many of them became remittance senders. While between 1960 and 1980 the great majority of Eritrean migrants in the Arab Near East were men, in recent decades there has been a significant change in the gender composition of the migrant population, and more women have begun migrating. While Saudi Arabia is the most frequent destination for men (usually working in manual occupations), the Gulf States and the United Arab Emirates, and to some extent Lebanon and Yemen, are the favorite migration terminus for women (who usually are employed in the domestic and caretaking sector).

Bina Fernandez (2020) illustrates three main directions followed by contemporary Ethiopian migrants: to the North, via Sudan to Libya, and to Egypt, with the goal of crossing Mediterranean into Europe; to the South, with the aim to reach South Africa over land; to countries in the Middle East. The majority of migrants who follow the first two directions are men, irregular migrants whose duration of migration is often indeterminate. In contrast, the majority of migrants who follow the third direction are women. They might travel as regular or irregular migrants depending on specific official bans and measures on migration, and their pattern of migration tends to be circular: at conclusion of one contract, they usually return to the same or another Middle Eastern country on another contract. The author reports that, according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), regular labour migrants constitute only 30–40% of all Ethiopians in the Middle East, while the remaining 60–70% (300,000–350,000) of the estimated half a million Ethiopians in the region are irregular migrants.

However, one must consider that the great majority of African migrant labourers migrate internally. According to the 2015 UN International Migrant Stock Report, about 20.65 million out of the 244 million international migrants worldwide are from Africa, and 78 per cent of them migrate within the African continent. Therefore, African migration beyond African's borders involves about 4.5 million Africans out of a total population of more than 1.2 billion. The majority of African labourers find jobs in their own countries. Terms of employment are usually non-contractual and indefinite, and many people move from rural to urban areas to live and work within extended family networks (Bryceson 2019).

Deborah Bryceson (2019) remarks that in many African countries, "the practice of voluntary kin labour exchange for goods or services became more complex and took on an involuntary,

forced nature, arising from the emergence of a commercial intermediary taking a recruitment fee, or poor rural households, in the name of foster care, pledging their child for labour service in return for payment in cash or kind from more affluent urban kin" (p. 325). Girls can be recruited in different ways. Studies demonstrate that sometimes orphans and children born out of wedlock are perceived as a social and economic burden for the community (see for example Katarzyna Grabska et al et al. (2019) for the Ethiopian context). These children and girls might be offloaded on a person who transfer them from their home village to a middle-class/well-off household the urban area, and obtains pecuniary gain as an agent. Girls can be recruited through extended family ties based on different types of relations between rural and urban households. But they can also be recruited within non-familial relations, when their parents or other influential adults enter into agreement with formal or informal agents of various kind. In several circumstances, it is not clear if sending households' members receive a regularly a payment after girls have moved within urban households. Many studies on domestic workers in Africa demonstrate that children and girls are likely to experience harsh working conditions and face various problems in relation to excessive domestic duties, long hours of work and low or no pay, different forms of abuse, social isolation, among others (Erulkar & Ab Mekbib, 2007; Matheka et al., 2020).

One of the forms of children's recruitment is the so-called strategy of fosterage, an age-old practice between poorer and better-off households in numerous African countries. This practice has been described as part of socialisation of children and community solidarity, as well as social welfare strategy to tackle household financial crises (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985). In these arrangements children usually receive food and shelter in urban areas in exchange for domestic help. However, recent studies argue that the traditional institution of kin support "has transmogrified in some places towards forced labour or indeed slavery" (Bryceson 2019, p. 326). For example Ina Gankam Tambo (2014) points out that in Nigeria, in precolonial times, child fostering consisted in community based practices of child relocation regulated by customary law, accommodated in specific normative and moral frameworks (Gankam Tambo 2014, p. 17). Yet in contemporary Nigeria children are likely to be "exploited fostered children" (*ibidem*, p. 209): that is, domestic work is often situated between the so-called child fosterage practice and exploitative forms of domestic labour.

Deborah Bryceson argues that "the intervention of commercial recruiters placing children in unvetted, unmonitored households looms on the horizon as a tragic throwback to the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, Africa's darkest moments in labour history" (Bryceson 2019, p. 327).

Clearly, despite the global similarities local forms of labor exploitation present their own specificities. Many women and girls see the possibility to engage in different forms of domestic work as a first foothold in the city life, as an opportunity to access education and improve their life conditions. Being continuously exposed to risks of exploitation and abuse, domestic workers employ multiple strategies to improve their situations, and juggle family demands and personal ambitions (see Hepburn 2019).

4.5.1 Towards the recognition of domestic workers' rights

In view of these forms of exploitation in Africa, and elsewhere in the world, recent decades have seen increasing concern over domestic workers' labour rights globally. The ILO's Homework Convention 1996 (No. 177), which came into force in 2000, extended labour rights coverage to workers employed in their own home, but unpaid care workers are excluded from the Convention. In 2013 the Convention has been ratified by only ten countries. In 1999 the ILO adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO Convention No. 182) which has been signed by all ILO Member States by August 2020.

One of the most important Conventions has been the ILO Convention No. 189 "Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (C189), accompanied by Recommendation n. 201, promulgated in Geneva in 2011. The Convention requires that ratifying countries ensure equal treatment between domestic workers and workers from other sectors, for example in relation to working time, overtime compensation, minimum wages, daily rest, weekly rest, paid leave, social security protection, occupational health and safety, and beyond. Recent studies are questioning "in what ways, and under which conditions, what we identify as 'global rights' can be transferred to the level of 'local struggles'" (Cherubini et al., 2018, p. 719). That is, in which ways C189 and the global campaign for its ratification have been incorporated, fuelled or resisted, from a social movement perspective, in different local contexts. Further studies discuss historical forms of domestic workers' invisibility and question how international institution, such as the ILO, will address labor market informality alongside national and regional law reform (Blackett, 2019).

Post-apartheid South Africa witnessed one of the most remarkable efforts to recognize paid domestic work as a form of employment. A new labor legislation was established that included domestic workers and gave them the same rights of all other workers, with a national minimum wage, formal contracts of employment, formal registration, access to

annual increases, extensive leave, a pension fund, severance pay, unemployment insurance benefits (a world first), a national qualification in domestic work through trainings sponsored by the government (a world first). These measures also aimed to abolish racial colour discriminations, and to ease various social tensions such as those between female employers ('madams') and female domestic workers ('maids') (Nyamnjoh, 2005). In 2013, South Africa ratified the ILO C189.

However, Shireen Ally (2010) points out that even the efforts to turn "servants" into workers may produce recalcitrant realities and contradictory consequences, by reinforcing structures of raced, classed, and gendered inequality. The author argues that the formalization of hired domestic and care work in South Africa has reinforced the status quo of social inequality, facilitating the rejection of the public provision of care. Given these considerations, some scholars advance a critique of the institution of hired domestic care, yet without idealizing certain traditional gendered relationships, where care is socially undervalued and mostly unpaid. In particular, Zuzana Uhde (2016) suggests that a public model of care – as opposed to the market model of which hired domestic care is a substantial pillar – would allow for gender, class and cultural egalitarian relationships. In her words: "The public model of care promotes responsibility for care not primarily on a family basis, but rather on a basis of solidarity, and it also takes into account the care needs of lower social classes and marginalised groups" (Uhde 2016, p. 704). At the same time, the author focuses its attention on the gender bias within the public model of care which should be always problematized. These considerations – which prompt us to revitalize the social struggle for recognition of care and its value - are vital precisely because they open up space for broad reflection on the 'fundamentals of care', without losing attention to the varied registers of care and domestic work around the globe, with their multiples, complex, changing specificities in space and time.

4.6   Conclusions

In this chapter I have traced a brief historical overview of the changing nature of domestic labour in Africa, providing examples from different countries within the continent. First of all, I have drawn a few considerations on certain precolonial institutions, mainly referring to

Ethiopia and Tanzania. These brief reflections are pertinent as the legacies of slavery - as well as a complex set of subordinate forms of servitude and clientship - might shape contemporary living and working conditions of domestic workers, and the everyday power relations between employers and employees (Eastman 1994). Moreover, one must consider that in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa slave trading in the pre-colonial nineteenth century led to changes in labour patterns and domestic life. Slavery did not disappear after the official banning of the slave trade, and during the colonial period many former slaves continued to work in servile conditions for their masters.

During the colonial period, in many (but not all) African countries the majority of domestic servants who worked in the colonial homes were male. Men were induced to work as migrant labourers, while their wives and mothers were obliged to remain in their home areas with double workload on their shoulders. Colonialism strongly impacted gender relations, the sexual division of labour, and the types of political and social options available to women and men. African male were pushed into the cash economy, employed in mines and plantation, and drawn away from their 'hearth-hold' women who remained in *situ*, in their marital home areas. Yet colonial policies were contradictory and shifting, in some circumstances they encouraged women to move to urban areas in order to provide sexual services for the male workers, as well as to stabilize the workforce (see, for example, Parpart 1988). Anyway, colonial governments emphasized the role of male breadwinner, therefore undervaluing women's labour and their capacity of economic self-reliance. Christian missions contributed to promote a Wester model of monogamous nuclear family, with values based on male household headship and ideal housewife. A small group of salaried African men began to move to urban areas together with their wives, therefore forming part of an embryonic urban African elite based on monogamous Christian marriages. However, every context was different and presented its specificities. For example, although in many African countries the domestic servants were 'houseboys', in colonial Eritrea domestic work at the service of the Italians was predominantly a women's occupation. In this regard, it could be interesting to explore the experiences of "lonely" women seeking job opportunities in cities and towns during colonialism (see Barrera 2011).

After the Second World War, most regions of the continent saw a rapid urban growth. The expansion of peasant crop production and the mineral extraction became the main economic development strategies employed by post-independent national governments. Several women began joining their husbands in urban area or independently moved to cities. Indeed, scholars often report that during the post-colonial period there was a gradual 'feminisation'

of domestic work, at least in those countries where domestic servants working at colonizers' disposal were mainly men.

In many parts of Africa, when colonial expatriates departed urban households tended to rely on various forms of domestic help based on extended family networks. The usual practice was to recruit a girl from the rural area who performed domestic work in town, in exchange for accommodation, food, and in some cases educational opportunities. Overall, in many African countries labour relations moved forward with men employed in wage labour within different professional sectors, and women usually engaged in various family duties, or forms of kin labour exchange – that was unpaid - in cities. In the mid- and late 1970s, with the oil crises, the vast majority of African countries faced dramatic economic restructuring and government cutbacks. Both men and women began to seek alternative sources of income to survive, mainly engaging in non-agricultural cash-generating activities. Simultaneously, with the spread of AIDS pandemic throughout the continent many people, and especially women, were occupied with the care of migrant labourers who returned home sick. Many orphan children moved to town seeking home and support within kin and non-kin households. During the 1980's and 1990's many people engaged in the informal sector, as the formal labour market was replaced with a range of precarious jobs and self-employed petty trade. While men's paid work decreased, women's working days lengthened. Domestic work was one of the main available opportunities in town, especially for women structurally displaced from rural land access and devoid of better prospects (for instance widowed and divorced women). Most urban households tended to rely on help from extended family networks, therefore recruiting girls from their rural home areas.

The new millennium witnessed a period of growing optimism, with economic growth and a pronounced shift to mineral export. There was an overall reduction in domestic labour time in cities and towns, as opposed to domestic labour time in rural households. Lifestyle differences were increasingly marked, with second-generation urban dwellers constituting the burgeoning middle class, especially in those countries where mineral exports were growing. Certain types of urban middle-class women could participate in the paid labor force outside the home only through the subordination of rural woman performing domestic labor (Kiaga & Kanyoka, 2011). The practice of kin and non-kin labour exchange for services or goods takes on increasingly complex features, with the emergence of commercial intermediaries who recruit children and girls in return for payment.

In light of these trends spread in Africa and everywhere in the world, recent decades have seen increasing concern over domestic workers' labour rights globally. In particular, in 1999

the ILO adopted the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO Convention No. 182). The ILO Convention No. 189 "Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (C189) was promulgated in 2011. However, regulations of the sector have been elusive. Post-apartheid South Africa witnessed one of the most remarkable efforts to recognize paid domestic work as a form of employment, with a new labor legislation that included domestic workers and aimed to give them the same rights of all other workers. However, also the efforts to turn "servants" into workers might produce contradictory consequences, and reinforce structures of raced, class, and gendered inequality (see Ally 2010). A revitalization of the social struggle for recognition of care and its value globally – with the promotion of responsibility for care on a basis of solidarity, public model (Uhde 2016)– might be a way to foster gender, class and cultural egalitarian relationships of care.

5 REASONS FOR MIGRATION.
"WHEN I WAS THERE... THEN I MOVED TO TOWN".

In this chapter I will explore the complex set of reasons that push young women and girls to leave their villages of origin and move to towns and cities. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, women may move for a variety of reasons: to access education; to escape restrictive gender norms at home; to avoid or postpone marriage agreements; to escape conditions of poverty in the rural area and try to improve their lives, and the one of their families, by finding a job in the city; to explore the urban area and experience a new lifestyle; to fulfil family needs; and beyond. Behind their choices there is never only one motivation, but rather a combination of intersecting reasons. I will explore these aspects by bringing examples from interviews that reflect the situation of several women who work as domestic workers in both countries.

We should consider that migrant women experience various forms of structural violence (see Farmer 2004) during their life course. The impact of extreme poverty and social marginalization is profound, and it is important to never lose sight of the material dimensions that determine specific forms of oppression. Indeed, the term "materiality of the social" means that "social life in general and structural violence in particular will not be understood without a deeply materialist approach to whatever surfaces in the participant-observer's field of vision - the ethnographically visible" (*ibidem*, p. 308). For instance, when we talk about poverty we need to consider the material conditions of poverty. "Structural violence is structured and *structuring*", as Paul Farmer puts it drawing on the Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Farmer 2004, p. 315). In my study I always keep these consideration in mind, in tandem with the theoretical framework of the practice theory developed by Karen O'Reilly (2012), as I have illustrated in the previous chapter (see the section "migration as a practice"). Clearly, in my study gender-based violence emerges as a form of structural violence against women (see Declich 2020c, pp. 40-3). In this context of structural violence, I have tried to explore also in which ways domestic workers themselves describe poverty and other challenges charactering their lives.

I shall start by reflecting on the concept of poverty stemming from the narratives offered by several women during the interviews. The same term of 'poverty' may take different connotations in women's narratives, and the dominant discourse of poverty is not sufficient to explain the rural-urban migratory process. Household circumstances have a decisive impact on women's choices and future projects, thus the decision to move – even when

presented as only individually taken – has to be understood within the gender-context specific in which women's lives are embedded, within a complex set of social relations and obligations which regulate their lives. A social relational approach to decision-making (see Huijsmans 2012) might be useful "to untangle the complex circumstances behind migration" (Grabska et al., 2019, p. 109). I will examine these factors while providing - as much as possible - local, specific, historical informed analysis, without losing sight to those factors of material life (such as political, social and economic structures) in the contexts under study.

In this chapter I present women's narratives as they were reported at the time of our encounter (which took place in the urban area), specifically in relation to their life before migration and to motives behind migration. When I quote women's narratives I draw upon those interviews and life-stories which have been recorded and transcribed from Amharic (Ethiopia) and Swahili (Tanzania) into English. Women describe how was their life in the rural area, for example in relation to agricultural activities, school attendance, time spent with friends and peers, marriage arrangements, and so forth. Gradually, the reasons that led them to leave their villages of origin emerge, and it is clear that decisions are taken within very constrained options, being the result of a dialectic between opportunities and structural constraints, personal ambitions, future plans, social obligations and responsibilities. In this chapter I only briefly refer to the ways in which women's lives turned out to be after migration. Similarly, women's responsibilities and obligations towards their families once in town - such as the need to help their siblings access education and fulfil other family needs - will emerge in the next chapters.

In this chapter I focus on how women recount how their lives were before moving to town. Clearly, women's narratives are given from a specific point in place and time. In personal narratives, 'experience' is related to 'memory' (Willemse 2014, p. 40). Women are actually remembering what happened before migrating and why they decided to move away. This is why I quoted the expression "when I was there… then I moved to town" as a subtitle of this chapter (an expression that recurs in women's narratives). In this sense, their narratives are about how the passage of personal time is remembered and recounted (Brettell, 2002, p. S45). Experiences and memories of those experiences are continuously reshaped, and in turn are reshaping parts of a remembered past which allow them to position themselves in relation to current everyday experiences. At the time of our encounter they were working as domestic workers in the urban area, most of the time after having embarked on various working experiences. Their memories are influenced by personal life experiences after migration, and those of other people met or left behind. Similarly, their personal ambitions and future plans

are not static. They change over time and largely depend on available opportunities. Lastly, decisions are not only unilaterally and individually taken but always influenced or inspired (directly or indirectly) by other people (Grabska et al 2019, p. 112).

This chapter is structured as follows. First of all, in the section 'beyond the poverty discourse' I briefly problematize the notion of 'poverty' which is often mentioned – both by academic and non-academic studies - as the main factor behind rural-urban migration trends. Then I divide the chapter into several sections which take their titles from some of the various reasons that push women to move to town. Respectively: family circumstances (such as the death of parents); unhappy marriages; avoiding marriage agreements; restrictions on mobility; premarital pregnancy; educational opportunities.

Clearly these titles - which help me structure the chapter - are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they are very simplified but help us analyse some specific examples of motives for migration and shed light to other motives related to them. I have already said that there is never just an isolated motive behind migration. And so in several cases I take up the story of each single woman within each different section, to show how different motives appear within the same narrative and to shed light on different aspects of women's lives. The stories of many women will be resumed in the next chapter, in which I will illustrate what happened when they started working in town.

5.1 Conceptualizing poverty

In this section I will briefly problematize the notion of poverty. Since the 1980s, many scholars have taken part to a debate about poverty, prompted by in-depth analysis and qualitative assessments of the circumstances of the poor and their needs in different countries in the South, and especially in Africa. Robert Chambers (1983) argued that poor people have the right to define their poverty and design measures to overcome their problems. Scholars have attempted to bring together contributions from academics and practitioners while highlighting the need to link policy, institutional and grassroots efforts (see Jones & Nelson, 1999). This debate has shown the need to focus attention on action in the field, as well as the need to involve poor people and identify with them how they are actually coping with their deprived circumstances. New insights into culture and social structure have expanded the definition of 'poverty' (see Bahemuka 1998) beyond the narrow limits of income measures developed by economical approaches, and feminists anthropologists have highlighted the gender component of poverty (see Mandaville 1979). Amartya Sen (1998) cautions us

against the risk of providing inarticulate cold statistics of low income and rather look at the multiple ways in which the capabilities of each individual are constrained. As he puts it:

> There here is, of course, plenty of that [poverty] in the world in which we live. But more awful is the fact that so many people - including children from disadvantaged backgrounds - are forced to lead miserable and precarious lives and to die prematurely. That predicament relates in general to low incomes, but not just to that. It also reflects inadequate public health provisions and nutritional support, deficiency of social security arrangements, and the absence of social responsibility and of caring governance. A massive change can be achieved through well thought out programmes of public intervention, through international as well as national efforts, and this can bear fruit even before the general level of income can be radically raised (Amartya Sen 1998, p. 2, in Farmer 2003, p. 43).

As Paul Farmer (2003) points out, "the task at hand, if this silence is to be broken, is to identify the forces conspiring to promote suffering, with the understanding that these are differentially weighted in different settings. If we do this, we stand a chance of discerning the causes of extreme suffering and also the forces that put some at risk for human rights abuses, while others are shielded from risk. No honest assessment of the current state of human rights can omit an analysis of structural violence" (2003, p. 50).

Most studies in Africa mention poverty as the main driving factor that push young people to migrate from rural to urban areas and represent women and girls as victims of various structural forces. The assumption is that young people migrate from rural to urban areas to increase the level of income of households by sending remittances back home once in the cities. For instance Atnafu Adamnesh et al. (2014) explore how poverty and the lack of opportunities in rural Ethiopia drive migration, and see migration as the only available form of investment that poor rural people can make. In their study, inadequate plot sizes of land for each family are identified as one of the main reasons that push households to send migrants to the urban area. The majority of migrants – mainly working as domestic and construction workers in city – are not able to send remittances back home because wages are low and costs for urban migrants are too high. Despite this and other challenges - such as the extremely hard working and living conditions in city - migration is seen as the only option to face poverty and sometimes as part of a longer term strategy to improve their standard of living. This aspect in part emerges also in my study. In both countries, domestic work in the city seems to offer few immediate benefits and many risks, but female workers tend to value the city as a place that could allow them to change their lives in the future. Waiting, hope, the desire to believe in a better future or in the possibility that something can change, all

these elements play central roles (Pine 2014, p. S96). In my study poverty, together with the need to support families back home, has been often reported as a driving factor that push women to move to town. Yet through in-depth interviews and life stories multiple factors come to the fore. Thus a question arises: what does 'poverty' mean?

The definition of 'poverty' non only depends on local perceptions of wellbeing and poverty, which differ from one context to another, according to geographical area, social group and economic or political contexts, but it also takes different forms in individual narratives and is experienced differently by women and men. Through women's narratives I will show that the concept of poverty may be used to describe different situations and circumstances, such as a sudden household crisis connected with health problems of some household members, a serious dispute within the community, the lack of social networks and support from the community, a sudden emergency such as having to pay a debt, the lack of economic resources, and other factors. Girls' own evaluation of their socio-economic conditions differ, and motives regarding migration can be understood only analyzing the specific background of each individual.

For example, Sara (Tanzania) recounts that her family has become impoverished after an inter-household dispute that arose in her community of origin. She is from Kigoma region (in the northwestern corner of Tanzania), she was born in a village close to Kasulu town. The controversy regarded how the money earned by his father - a traditional healer who used to work both in the rural and urban area - were shared and utilized within the community. After this dispute, which initially resulted in a temporary separation of her parents, Sara had to interrupt her studies (she was attending standard 3, primary education).

> I don't know what happened, a disagreement arose within the community.. someone said my father had to pay a debt. My father used to travel and work here and there as a traditional healer. He used to work also in Morogoro, he sent money back home but my mother did not receive anything. My parents got separated, my mother moved to Tabora.. I was staying with my grandmother in Kasulu..Then our financial situation got worse and I dropped out of school (Sara, 16 years old, 25/09/19, Morogoro, Tanzania)

In her account the financial situation of her family in Kigoma region got worse after a family dispute, with the consequent lack of support from community members, and the temporary separation of parents. After her parents reconciled, Sara (at the age of twelve) moved together with them and her siblings to Morogoro town (more than 1000km from her home place), since her father was working as traditional healer there and they have other relatives in Morogoro. She started working as live-in domestic worker to fulfil family needs and help

her five younger siblings to attend education. The same is doing her older sister who is currently working in Dar es Salaam. Yet working as domestic worker is also an opportunity to pursue her education and find a better job in the coming future. So far, she has not been able to continue her formal schooling, but when I met her she was attending a two-weeks training course organized by the Morogoro TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in collaboration with CVM. She values the urban area as an opportunity to achieve her main ambition, that of working in an hair salon in the coming future.

Another example is the case of Ketema (Ethiopia). She recounts that the standard of living of her family changed when her father lost a land that was confiscated by the government after the fall of the Derg regime. Her parents and siblings moved together from their village in East Gojjam to the outskirt of Debra Markos. Unlike other sisters who got married, later on Ketema moved to her kin household in town, since her relatives offered her the possibility to pursue her education in exchange for household chores.

> We had a land, our father was a farmer but since in the past he was working as a secretary for the Derg regime, all his lands were confiscated (taken away by the government) so now we have nothing left.. Our land was confiscated because my father was accused to be a bureaucrat of the Derg regime…...this (the confiscation) was the cause of all our problems! It was also the main reason why we came from Chomega (in East Gojjam, rural area) and started to live in Debre Markos empty handed. So by then my goal became to work with my relatives in Debre Markos, so that I could finish my schooling... (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18)

I have been able to visit Ketema's mother who was actually living in the rural area located on the outskirt of Debre Markos town. In her words:

> Everything we had was confiscated..there was a small farm land that we inherited..that land is ploughed and sowed...in the past we had oxen we used to plough it by our own...but now we no longer have the oxen...there is only one cow. So the land is ploughed by another person for half division of the harvest...they plough the land and harvest it. They take half of it and we get the other half for the ownership of the land.. there is no income because everything we had was confiscated.. (Ketema's mother, 15/11/19, Ethiopia)

The first time that I met Ketema she talked in general terms about the poverty of her family, but her life story gradually reveals that in this case there is a specific event which hindered their life: "This (the confiscation of our land) was the cause of all our problems!"

The flexibility of the notion 'poverty' is accurately illustrated in the *International Handbook of Gender and Poverty* (Chant, 2010)*.* These scholars point out that women's poverty is not

only about income. Rather, it is multidimensional and multisectoral, it is experienced in diverse ways, in different spaces and at different times. The spaces may include, among others, the community, the home, the social policy arena, territories of disaster and conflict. Gender poverty is also impacted by a whole set of factors such as nationality, race, age, class, sexuality, the marital and fertility status, household composition and headship, labour market opportunities within the formal and informal economy, migration within and across national borders. As Sylvia Chant puts it:

> Many of these variables not only intersect with gender and poverty, but with one another, and exert diverse influences and outcomes depending on whether one's 'take' on poverty is filtered through the conceptual lens of monetary poverty, capability poverty, social exclusion, and so on; whether it is oriented more to 'objective'/quantitative or 'subjective'/qualitative/participatory measures; and/or is personal, domestic, local, national or global in its subject or spatial orientation (Chant, 2010, p. 2).

Different terminologies can be used to describe the relationships between gender and poverty. The term 'gendered poverty' entails an understanding of poverty and gender as flexible, not static notions, where different kinds of privation among women and men are considered, as well as their intersections with demographic, economic, social factors. The expressions 'gender-specific poverty' and 'gender gaps in poverty', on the other hand, usually refer to a specific type of poverty of material base. Sylvia Chant (2010) points out that in tackling women's privation we should consider a set of indicators such as legal rights in the family, access to land, vulnerability to violence, dignity and (self-)respect, as well as a set of subjectively experienced dimensions such as 'powerlessness', 'dependency' and 'time deficiency'. The same poverty interventions should address women's position within domestic units and in wider society, and not only their condition of poor women (their material circumstances).

At this point we should consider that poverty the issue of poverty is closely interlinked with that of gender-based violence: poverty and structural violence against women go hand in hand (Declich 2020c, p. 40). Women who do not respond promptly to their assigned role (the role of reproducers, or care workers) are likely to suffer various forms of violence, marginalization and social exclusion. We may think, for example, of sterile women, adult women without children, women too poor to have a dowry, women who get pregnant out of wedlock, divorced women without a social network who assist them. These women are most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Many domestic workers I interviewed in Ethiopia and Tanzania could be defined, using a Giulia Barrera's expression, "lonely women" (see

Barrera 2011). In both Ethiopia and Tanzania, several women report that they do not have a solid support network in their villages of origin, for a series of reasons that will further emerge within this chapter. For example, many women moved to the city when they were orphan adolescent girls. In some cases their parents and other influential adults were sick. Other women moved to the city to escape certain gender norms back home. It is interesting to note that, in this context, on the one hand women consider the city as a place where they can gain a certain independence beyond specific family obligations. But on the other hand, the only way to chase this independence is to perform the role of reproducers in a different form: by working as care workers in the city. The personal aspirations of women are inevitably linked to their role of responsible daughters towards their families (their role as care workers within the rural-urban household structure), albeit in a different place from where they were born, in the city. Then, in this context - and while continuing to perform care work - they try to carve out an alternative space for action in the city where they move, live and work.

From now on I will illustrate some factors that have been mentioned by women interviewed as driving factors that prompted them to leave their villages of origin. These aspects will further help us to problematize the dominant poverty discourse.

5.2   Family circumstances

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania women who describe their families as very poor have often experienced some kind of household crisis, for instance after the divorce of their parents, in case of health problems or the death of one or both parents or other family members. For instance Mulu (Ethiopia) reports that after the death of her parents she had no alternative than leaving her village. At the time of our encounter Mulu was 23 years old, she was working as bar worker in Debre Markos after having experienced exploitative situations as live-in domestic worker. In this case, she recounts that she was stigmatized and marginalized in her rural community (about 300km from Debre Markos town) after the death of her father.

> My father was sick, we went to Addis to heal him with holy water but he died. When I returned back to my village people were angry with me. They said that I hadn't had enough faith and this was why my father died. (Mulu, 23 years old, 16/07/18, Ethiopia)

Previous studies have noticed that in some contexts in Ethiopia orphans and children who are born out of wedlock may be neglected, seen as an economic burden on the community and sometimes considered as 'cursed' (Grabska et al. 2019, p. 153), in particular by those who have to take care of them. Marina de Regt (2016) shows examples of orphan girls who

grow up with other relatives, they are used for domestic work and not treated in a similar way as other children within the family. In particular, she emphasizes the negative role of aunts, uncles and step-parents who abuse girls psychologically, physically and sexually (2016, p. 32).

Although experiences of this kind also recur in my study, clearly this is not always the case and the death of parents is not necessarily related with experiences of marginalization and mistreatment. To start with, I illustrate some examples of mistreatments and forms of abuse suffered by women back home. Sara (Tanzania) was born in the rural area in Dodoma region. Her father has three wives, one of them (Sara's mother) is living in Dodoma region while the others are living in Moshi (Kilimanjaro region) and Arusha region.[33] As Pat Caplan (2000) has noted, the Swahili kinship and descent system is highly flexible. A broad range of ideologies surround gender relations and marriage, and so there is a range of reproductive and marital practices that people choose according to circumstances. For example, among the diverse types of polygyny there is also that of two or more wives strategically placed in different areas, so that men could easily pursue economic interests in each of them. This might entail having two houses in different parts of the village, or in different villages, or also in different areas of the country (2000, p. 57). Sara's case could match one of these examples reported by Pat Caplan, indeed her father's wives live in different areas of the country. Women, wherever they are, are relegated to the role of reproducers. Domestic workers like Sara perform this role by moving from area to area, from household to household, within hierarchical relationships with other women they work for, as I elaborate.

Until the age of three Sara remained in Dodoma with her mother, but then she was raised by other two women (step-mothers), first in Moshi and later on in Arusha.

> I was born in Dodoma region, my father (Chaga tribe) has three wives. I was living there with my mother. My mother is from Rugulu tribe from Kondoa (Dodoma region). When I was 3 years old my father came and took me to Moshi. My grandfather is living there (Moshi), so when I arrived they had to sacrifice a goat as traditional ritual requires. The

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[33] Her parents are Christian. In Tanzania polygamous or potentially polygamous marriages are common for non-Muslim people who have celebrated marriage according to rites recognized by customary law, as stated in the section "Kinds of marriage" in the *Law of Marriage Act*: "A marriage contracted in Tanzania whether before or after the commencement of this Act shall – (a) if contracted in Islamic form or according to rites recognized by customary law in Tanzania, be presumed, unless the contrary is proved, to be polygamous or potentially polygamous; and (b) in any other case, be presumed to be monogamous, unless the contrary is proved.

wives of my father are living one in Moshi and one in Arusha (Sara, 20 years old, 15/10/18, Morogoro, Tanzania).

In this passage she describes forms of mistreatments suffered at the hands of her step-mother who used to overwork her when she was living in Moshi.

> When I was in Moshi I was living with my mother (step-mother), I lived there but she was overworking me, I was a kid I didn't know how to wash clothes but I had to do it. Sometimes I was taking the cows to pasture, I was cutting the grass for cows while she was doing nothing all day.

She also recounts that she risked to be sexually abused by a man and how she was able to escape, by asking a truck driver for a ride.

> One day while I was cutting grass for cows I was crying a lot, so a person who was nearby tried to comfort me and told me "stop crying just go back home" but I was scared. After a while one man came and told me to go home with that man, but when we reached somewhere he started urinating, he tried to mistreat me (sexual harassment). I refused so he got mad, there were big trucks passing nearby which are usually carrying sand.. so I asked the driver to give me a lift to my place/home.

She goes on to say that after having suffered several mistreatments in Moshi, her father came and took her to his second wife in Arusha.

> I lived with my mom (step mom) for a while.. she was beating me, sometimes I was wetting my bed during the night but she was punishing me severely. She was keeping me awake the whole night.. Then my father came and took me away to another mother in Arusha.

She was supposed to attend school in Arusha, but her father decided to take her back to Moshi where she started her primary education.

> When I arrived in Arusha, my father told my mother (second step-mom) to enroll me in school, she agreed so that I could attend school and take care of her baby. I was washing clothes of her baby but my father came again and said "you cannot stay here". So he took me to Moshi at my grandmother's place, back where I came for the first time.

Sara completed the third year of Primary Education (Standard3) in Moshi, then she quit for a while due to the workload who made it difficult for her to attend school regularly.

> When I reached Standard3 I wasn't able to read and write simply because I was tired due to the workload.. Before going to school I had to sweep the floor and do general cleanness, and when I was back I had do other cleanness, graze livestock, and fetch water…

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In her narrative, she continues to report that during her childhood she moved from house to house, from town to town, growing up with different people and in several circumstances suffering from different forms of mistreatment. In particular, she continually refers to her step-mothers as the ones who always attempted to hinder her life. She moved from Moshi to Dar es Salaam, from Dar es Salaam to Arusha, from Arusha to Dodoma, from Dodoma to Dar es Salaam, from Dar es Salaam to Morogoro (where I met her).

> I went to my Aunt in Dar es Salaam (…) I stayed there for a while until my grandfather from Arusha region came and asked for me, he said "I want this child with me", my father agreed. So I moved to live with my grandfather in Arusha, then I went back to school up to standard 7. When I completed standard seven my father died. (…) At that time I was in standard 7, so I started to look for my mother. I managed to have her number, later on I moved to Dodoma region to my biological mom's place. I stayed there at Dodoma, until my aunt who was living in Dar es Salaam asked for me…so I went to live with her, she had a grocery (a small bar)…so I had to run it.

While she was in Dar es Salaam, Sara was living with her aunt and uncle, she was working in their grocery and doing household chores at home. She was also able to start a basic course on hotel management at VETA (The Vocational Education and Training Authority) through the support of her uncle and aunt who paid the first fee. Yet when she realized that she was not able to pay an additional fee and continue the training, she left her kin household. She moved, together with her friend, to Morogoro city (where I met her). In Morogoro she started working as domestic worker with the aim of enrolling in a course at TVET. I will continue to explore her life story in the next chapter.

Another example of family circumstances that can prompt women to become domestic workers is that of Beatrice (Tanzania). She is 24 years old, she has been working as a live-in domestic worker in Morogoro town for six years. She is the first born out of six siblings. When her father died, her mother married another man and Beatrice was raised by several relatives, moving from house to house in her village of origin, which was located about 40km from Dodoma city. In one circumstance, before moving to Morogoro town, Beatrice also moved to a small town close to her village, assisting her female relative with household chores and helping her to run a small restaurant. As in the case of Sara, in the following quotation Beatrice explains how she grew up by moving from place to place:

> I was raised by many people because my mom had many relatives, so I was living with my uncle although before that I was living with mom, I was moving here and there... Shortly I can say It wasn't that good because the environment I was living wasn't best, I wasn't

comfortable (…) I have changed many houses because after the death of my grand mom, I went to my aunt from there I went to my step mom, from there I went to another aunt, there are places I stayed almost a year…ahah you know I lived in almost ten houses (Beatrice, 24 years old, 21/08/19, Tanzania)

In particular, she describes some challenges faced while shifting from house to house and especially when she was living with her aunt:

The biggest challenge was my age, I was a kid I was not totally aware of myself so there are places where I faced abuse, and it was because you live in someone's house who has to segregate you from his/her kids, even the place to sleep…they were sleeping in a good environment while I wasn't at all (…) When my grandmother died I went to live with my aunt (sister of my father). First of all, I was beaten too much when I was wrong, whenever I made a mistake. It happened that she kept beating me until my knee swelled and then she chased me away.. it was totally unfair! I will never forget that incident.

On the one hand Beatrice reports experiences of mistreatment at the hands of her aunt, on the other hand she recounts that other people, and especially her uncle, wanted to help her improve her standard of living. In these interviews many women tend to emphasize the hierarchical relationship with the 'aunts' they work for. These 'aunts' mistreat them and raise them at the same time. Men, for example 'uncles', rarely show up. They are often away on business. But women tend to describe these men as those who would like to protect them, despite the fact that it precisely these men who brought them to work in houses where they suffer exploitation.

I was only a kid, so I faced so many challenges…my aunts were asking my uncles to bring me there (at their houses) because I was their niece, so since Uncle wasn't aware of their truly intention, he came and took me into that house. He thought he was sending me to a better life, but in reality it was a hell due to Aunt's mistreatments. (…) He said I was living a poor life, he said that I had to change life and live a better one… but at my Aunt place after coming from school I found no food, she was just there doing nothing. I had to run home from school, and I had to cook fast for one hour… At that time I was just a kid but I had to bear it.

Beatrice stresses several times that at that time she was only a child: "the biggest challenge was my age", "I was a kid, I was not totally aware of myself", "I was only a kid, so I faced many challenges", "at that time I was just a kid but I had to bear it." In this way she underlines her current status of mature woman who works in town and has been able to (slightly) improve her living conditions. What is more, during her narratives she often

maintains that she has become a sort of 'role model' for other domestic workers in town, as we will see in the next chapter. In the narratives of many women, the different movements from house to house, from household to household, from village to town, from town to city, are described as small and gradual moments of transition towards maturity and adulthood. Women experience different forms of exploitation moving from house to house, and their growth process consists in becoming more aware of the risks and opportunities you may encounter, in learning to avoid some specific challenges and being able to grasp as many advantages as possible. This aspect emerges in the narratives of both Ethiopian and Tanzanian domestic workers. Now I shall present the case of an Ethiopian woman who moved to Debra Markos city due to difficult family circumstances.

Emebet (Ethiopia) is currently working as live-out domestic worker in Debre Markos town. She moved to town when she was 12 years old. During her life in town she has changed several types of jobs, but she has mainly worked as live-in domestic worker. In the following quotation she recounts that after her mother's death she had an accident, she broke her leg and she felt abandoned by her step-father. Her step-father brought her to Debre Markos, he left her with a woman who used to brew and sell local beer. He promised to come back and take care of her, but he never kept his promise, he vanished and never went back.

> A year after my mother died, I fell down and broke my leg. I did everything I could to get It recovered, I was even smeared with traditional medicine but my leg couldn't be healed, then my step father brought me here (in Debre Markos). They (my step father and those who came with him), said "for now on we will leave you here with this woman (a woman who sell local beer), but we will come back to take you'', they said this but they never returned back. Then this woman went to the *kebele* office (the smallest administrative unit in town) and she reported: ''she (Emebet) has no relatives, if she dies, let it be, this is none of my business; her relatives have abandoned her so how can I afford to nurture her?'' By then my leg was too much swelled, then the *kebele* and women's affairs office connected me to Mother Treza foster care center through which they sent me to Addis Abeba and I got the medication at Black Lion hospital (Tkur Anbesa hospital).

Emebet was sick. She was treated in the Addis Ababa's hospital for a while, thanks to the intermediation of a foster care center. But when her leg healed, she found herself alone (back to Debre Markos) and asked the beer brewer woman for help.

> Later on I got better and they (Mother Treza organization in Addis) said "there is no problem you will not live in exile (out of your birth place)". They said this, they sent me to Debre Markos but when I came here they (Mother Treza organization in Debre Markos) said to me

"healthy persons are not admitted'' (…) There was nobody I knew so I immediately went back to the woman who connected me to Mother Treza organization at the beginning. She sells *tela* (local beer) (…) And so I stayed with that woman, but later on she harmed me so much that I forgot the favor she did me the first time… I don't want to remember that moment (Emebet, 23 years old, 03/07/18, Debre Markos, Ethiopia).

Emebet continues by arguing that after her mother's death she felt abandoned also by her aunt, and so she refused the support that her aunt offered to her a few years later.

When I was a bit older my aunt came and said "let me take you with me" but she had abandoned me earlier. I am just upset about the fact that she didn't take care of me during the time my leg was broken and wounded and pus was dripping out of it. By then she left (abandoned) me die...because of her actions my mind hurts...in fact whenever I see her I start having bad feelings that I have already forgotten. And what is more the woman I first started to work said to me "Your relatives have abandoned you because they want you to die, they don't need you." For this reason my inside was filled with hatred towards my aunt and so when she came and asked me "let me take you with me", I replied to her "better I die than I go with you".

Once again, I noticed that - in her accounts – Emebet tends to describe her anger towards a woman (her aunt) rather than towards her stepfather. Yet it is her stepfather who abandoned her. As I will show in the next chapter, many women tend to justify and describe men's negative behaviors as 'natural', especially when it comes to sexual harassment. In contrast, they highlight the negative behavior of other women who didn't take care of them and disappointed them. At the same time, female employers in the urban area are often described both as exploiters and protective mothers in an ambivalent way. I will show this aspect in the next chapter. During her life course, Emebet changed several households in order to improve her position. The first time that I met her (during my first fieldwork) she was actually working as a live-in domestic worker. But when I returned back to Ethiopia a year later, the situation had completely changed. She was no longer working as a live-in domestic worker, she had moved to live-out domestic work and she had just given birth to a baby. The father of her child was a daily labourer at construction sites. Emebet used to work as a domestic worker, juggling different households in the city. Yet she alternated between domestic work and other casual jobs, for example as a daily labourer at construction sites. After giving birth, the father of her child had almost disappeared. He only sporadically showed up and gave her a little money for the maintenance of their child. When I met her, Emebet was one of the few women who had known CVM for five years. The trainings organized by the NGO in the previous years had allowed her to find some occasional job as

a tailor, as a cleaner in the University of Debre Markos and in a coffee shop, but she mainly worked as a part-time, live-out domestic worker. When I met her, she was an active member of the Domestic Workers Associations and was committed to engaging new women in the network.

So far, I have illustrated two cases of women who felt to be neglected by those people who were supposed to take care of them. In particular, the case of Emebet may represent an example of a woman without a support network in the community of origin. Emebet is an orphaned woman since she was a child: she lost both parents and remained with a stepfather. But the 'orphaned' women in this study are not necessarily those who lost their biological parents. Many women were raised by other family members during their childhood. See for example the case of Sara (Tanzania), whose biological parents were both alive. But she grew up with the different wives of her father, and with other adults. Orphaned women are those who, more generally, do not have a support network back home and seek some form of protection in the city. This is what happened to Emebet who, however, as in the case of many other domestic workers, in finding protection also found risks, exploitation and violence. I will now illustrate the case of women who left the villages as a result of unsatisfactory marriages.

5.3 Unsatisfactory marriages

In this section, I shall illustrate the case of two women who started working as domestic workers in town after the failure of their marriages. In the first case, an Ethiopian woman (Zebene) escapes an arranged marriage with a jealous husband. In the second case, a Tanzanian woman (Faraja) is betrayed by her husband and decides to move to another town at the suggestion of other people. Feminist studies on women's migration in Africa point out that gender relations, and conflict between women and men, are absolutely central to understand reasons behind women's migration, as well as why and how women and men experience changing economic and social pressures in different ways. In the 1980s, these scholars have challenged the myth - common among colonial official and postcolonial planners - that female migration was simply a derivative of male migration, and that women moved to towns and cities only with their husbands (Stichter 1985, p. 150). Deborah Bryceson reports the case of Tanzanian women who migrate as a result of a divorce, having consequently lost their usufruct rights to a land, or in order to send money back home after the death of a parent. In the case of divorce, women may also lose the support of their brothers and fathers and are no longer able to support themselves (Bryceson 1980, p. 23).

These are forms of structural violence against women. Other factors, such as premarital pregnancy, widowhood and barrenness are mentioned by Christine Obbo in her study on migrants women in Uganda (Obbo 1980, p. 88). Economic factors, such as obstacles to economic improvements in the rural areas and challenges in feeding family members, may be closely intertwined with reasons related to crisis of family status. In Obbo's study, unhappy marriages are often mentioned by women as reasons to migrate and so she draws attention to conflict between men and women. As Henrietta Moore (1988, pp. 95-6) points out, cases of husbandless women living in urban areas in Africa were mentioned in the 1960s by several anthropologists who explored increasing marital instability (Gugler 1969 p. 139, in *ibidem*), yet in the 1980s studies have further placed gender relations changes and gender conflicts at the core of their analysis of emerging class divisions and their effects on women's lives. Let's see what happened to the two domestic workers in my studio, one in Ethiopia and one in Tanzania.

Here I report the case of an Ethiopian woman who refused to get married a second time after having been married to a very jealous and domineering husband. When I met her, Zebene was 28 year old. When she was 19, after separating from her husband, she decided to move to Debre Markos town against the will of her father who wanted her to marry again.

> My family got me married and let me live as a housewife. When I lived with my husband I passed through a lot of situations... he was aggressive, he was too jealous (…) When finally I and my husband got separated my father put pressure upon me saying "you need to get married for the second time". I replied "No, I will not" and when I said this to him, his reaction was "go out, you are not even my daughter...go and find your father." Then I got out.. I got out of the rural area... (Zebene, 28 years old, 20/11/19, Debre Markos, Ethiopia)

Since she left her village of origin (almost 50km from Debre Markos town) Zebene worked as a domestic worker in Debre Markos and Addis Abeba, but she also worked in Kuwait for one year and in Lebanon for two years.[34] Zebene explains that after the divorce she found herself without any support in the village of origin. Once she moved to Debra Markos, she changed two households in which she worked, and where she suffered various forms of violence, including two attempts of sexual abuse. She moved from Debre Markos to Addis Abeba, from Addis to Kuwait, from Kuwait back to Addis, from Addis to Lebanon, and finally, from Lebanon back to Ethiopia. The money she earned abroad allowed her to pay school fees for her brother, and to help her mother move to Debre Markos (in the outskirts

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[34] Unfortunately, in this thesis there is no space to analyze the experience of those who have also worked abroad.

of the city). In Addis Abeba, after having worked abroad, Zebene got married again. But this man tricked her, he had debts she didn't know about, he stole her money and then disappeared. When I met her, Zebene was helping her mother brew and sell local beer in the outskirt of Debre Markos. Her ambition was to move to Lebanon again, or to another country abroad, where she could earn enough money and then start a business in Ethiopia (for example by opening a coffee shop). Experiences of violence characterize her narrative. Again, in this case Zebene is a woman lacking solid support networks in her birth place. When I met her, she was trying to build personal networks in the city. She had know the NGO for about a year. She was expecting to be able to attend the cooking classes that the NGO was organizing in collaboration with TVET. But above all, she hoped that someone could help her leave the country and find a better qualified job abroad.

As another example of women who migrate after the failure of a marriage, I here present the case of Faraja (Tanzania). This case is different from the other reported so far since, among the other things, she describes her family of origin as leading a middle standard of life. After the failure of her marriage she found a job as (live-out) domestic worker in Morogoro town, and then she moved to bar work. Faraja was born in Iringa region, in the rural area. She studied in Songea town (almost 500km from Iringa town) and got pregnant while she was attending Form2, the second year of secondary school (ordinary level). Then she delivered, she got married and moved to Dar es Salaam. In her words:

> I was born in Iringa region, my families lead a middle standard of life, they are not that particularly poor. My mother died, only my father remained at my home place. We were four, two girls and two boys. My father was working at Iringa in a Railway Company if you have ever heard about it... but then we moved to Songea (…) I studied up to Form2 (second year of secondary school), then I got pregnant so I had to quit school (usually it is not allowed to attend classes if you are pregnant). So I was just staying at home till I delivered a baby. I found my man (who got me pregnant) at Songea, he was a soldier (…) We started living together in Dar es Salaam (Faraja, 29 years old, 12/10/18, Morogoro, Tanzania).

She continues and explains that her husband had to go to Sudan and when he came back he was totally changed, he found another woman and Faraja decided to move away. Her decision to move to Morogoro town is influenced by the point of view of other people.

> I stayed with my husband for six years, we broke up after he went to Sudan. When he came back he was totally changed (…) I heard that he wanted to marry another woman. It hurts me since he ruined my life. I quit school because of him, then he was marrying another woman. So people were coming to my place telling me "your husband is going to marry

someone!". So I asked my friends if there was anywhere I could find a job, and they told me to go to Morogoro: "there are plenty of jobs, it depends on what type of job you are capable to do!". So I told them I could do anything.

Furaja left her child (he is currently six years old) to his father's family, and then moved to Morogoro with the support of her friends who helped her find a job. Usually the children remain with the mother's family, but in this case the son remains with his paternal grandfather, a police officer who, as Faraja explains, would give him the opportunity to study. Once in Morogoro town Faraja started working as live-out domestic worker, but then changed her position and when I met her she was actually working as a bar worker. Bar work exposes women to many risks of sexual abuse and leads to prostitution. Often the only way to earn a salary is to sleep with men after serving them drinks, otherwise you risk not earning anything. I will explore this aspect in the following chapter, taking up the story of Faraja.

Several aspects distance Furaja's case from other cases illustrated so far, both in terms of her individual background and in terms of her life and working experience in the urban context. Unlike the majority of women interviewed, Furaja reports that her family leads "a middle standard of life" rather than a poor one. She had her first working experience as a domestic worker in town at age of 27, very late if compared with the majority of women I have met. Her working experience as domestic worker was relatively brief if compared to that of other women. She worked for two years as live-out domestic worker, and then she moved to bar work. Moreover, she is one of the few women who had a child at the time of our encounter, yet unlike other women she does not emphasize the fact that she has to support her male child. Rather, she points out that her ex-husband's family is supporting him and is actually covering school expenses. This case, as many others, brings out the heterogeneity of women's migratory experiences. But this case also shows us, once again, that "lonely" women are exposed to many forms of violence. After divorce, many women are left without a support network. Often they cannot inherit the lands (as in the case of Zebene in Ethiopia), and therefore public policies continue to favor men. Women receive protection only if they remain in the position assigned to them by their families. But if something goes wrong, or if women make alternative choices, support networks tend to unravel. At this point the only alternative left to many women is to perform jobs that expose them to other risks of violence and abuse (like Faraja who works as a bar worker, and therefore also as a prostitute). In this space of risk, women try to find alternative ways to improve their lives.

5.4 Avoiding marriage agreements

In this section I will illustrate cases of women who report to have left their village of origin to avoid or postpone early marriage and other related practices such as marriage by abduction. Abduction may lead to marriages in which the woman is usually - but not always - forced to marry after kidnapping and rape. Fear of rape and abduction may be a factor which dissuades parents from sending their daughters long distances to school. This is confirmed by Alemeit, a young woman I met in Addis Abeba. She is from South Wello region (Amhara region) and she moved to Addis Abeba five years ago.

> The school was too far from my home, I used to walk more than one hour. I was lucky because my friends and I usually went to school together, we supported each other and so we were not afraid. You know if a man wants to marry you, if a man meets you on the road.. he chooses abduction as a strategy, he tries to approach you. And so my father told me to stay at home, I dropped out of school (she completed primary education). When several men asked my father his consent to marry me I decided to leave and I started fearing abduction more and more. My father found a good husband for me but I decided to move to Addis. (…) I went to Addis to help my aunt while she was pregnant and to attend school here, and then I moved to another house (Alemeit, 22 years old, 15/11/18, Ethiopia)

Although she is not continuing her formal education in Addis Abeba, Alemeit is actually attending a training to become an hotel cleaner. Her main ambition is to move to the Middle East and find a job there. And so women may escape from sociocultural factors (such as arranged marriage), but these factors are always combined to other factors such as the potential advantages and attractions of urban life, personal aspirations and social obligations of various kind. However, we should note that when women decide not to follow the path of life that other people have envisaged for them in their birth place (such as marriage), the new life trajectories are always closely linked to care work 'for the sake of the family'. Somehow, women continue to play a reproductive role in a different forms in the urban space. Alemeit does not marry in the village, but starts working for her aunt who is pregnant, she is supposed to take care of her child. It seems that women have no other alternatives. They continue to work for their families, whether in rural or urban households arrangements. Then, in this space, they try to build alternative paths, for example by changing the households where to work, by finding new households through their personal networks.

In some cases women's decision to migrate is supported by other people within the community, while in other cases girls move against the will of their parents or other controlling adults. In this section I mainly report the accounts of Ethiopian women, since in my study the issue of arranged marriages back home does not largely emerge within

Tanzanian women's narratives, the latter only briefly refer to other girls who got married back home. Before proceeding I briefly mention some figures about early marriage both in Ethiopia and Tanzania.

In Tanzania, according to the 2015-16 Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey 31% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 5% before the age of 15. Child marriage rates are as high as 59% in Shinyanga, 58% in Tabora and 55% in Mara. Rates are lowest in Iringa and Dar es Salaam. In rural areas on the border with Kenya, some girls marry as young as 11 (TDHS-MIS, 2016).

According to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey of 2011, in Ethiopia fifty-six per cent of girls marry before legal age and the Amhara region has the lowest median age at marriage: 14.7 years rather than 16.5, which is the national figure (Erulkar, 2013). A specific study conducted in East Gojjam reveals that most girls are married off between five and nine years of age (78%), and most boys between ten and fourteen (66%) (Emirie, 2005).

In the following narrative, Yamrot describes her preparation for early marriage when she was a child, as well as how she was engaged in household chores both at her parent's house and at her future husband's household.

> I think I was 8 years old... Even the day of my wedding event I had no idea that I was going to be married, I just heard there was a wedding of another one and I was getting ready to eat but they came and took me at night. Then my marriage was over and I remained at home with my parents […] They practice saying "let her go to the family of the husband and to her parents' house back and forth, until she is mature enough to live with her husband". They were running me an errand to bring water and do household chores back and forth, and so I was doing what I was told to do (Yamrot, 26 years old, 17/12/18, Debre Markos, Ethiopia).

Studies in the Amhara region illustrate that the age at marriage in the Amhara has decreased in the last five decades: "Compared with the Imperial era (1941–74) and the Derg era (1974–87), the average age at marriage has dropped from 12 to 7 years for girls and from 18 to 12 years for boys" (Shiferaw et al. 2018, p. 151). Anthropological studies in West Gojjam confirm this trend. According to Gunday Emirie (2005) within one generation the average age of a bride in West Gojjam dropped from 11 to 8 years, due to an increase of life insecurity related to both environmental and public health problems (droughts, HIV, malaria, etc.) in the area examined. She points out that many young men who are not sure that they will be able to afford marriage in the future prefer to arrange a marriage as soon as possible.

Abduction becomes a strategy in case they can't cover expenses related to marriage. Thus, marriage by abduction and early marriage turn to be culture-specific reactions to economic crises. She further illustrates that the land distribution policy may encourage early marriage in the Amhara region, as a young man who reaches the major age may receive a small piece of land (around 0.25 hectare) from associations of peasants only if he is married (Amera, 2004). Other factors are related to the gender ideology and various sociocultural customs, such as the importance given to the virginity of the bride. Parents fear that her daughter may lose her virginity through rape, a situation where the only way to avoid she remains single is to marry her with her abductor. In order to avoid these circumstances, parents prefer to marry her off at a very early age as a strategy to secure her integrity and virginity.

Yamrot adds:

> My parents just wanted to protect me, their wish was that I lived with them, got married, built a house of my own and remained there forever... By then my parents had a good land, they arranged a marriege with an eldest person saying "get married before our land and the food are taken away, before everything is finished." My father wanted me to live close to him, to build on his land (Yamrot, the same above).

During the course of our conversation, Yamrot displays a combination of mixed feelings and emotions in relation to her decision to migrate and avoid her marriage back home. This combination of divergent points of view and emotions, within the same personal narrative, allows us to understand that there is not only one way in which women think about themselves and represent themselves. Rather, personal narratives show us how alternative selfhoods are negotiated (Gardner 2002, p. 63):

> But now I sometimes feel bad for the fact that I didn't get married and build a family there....and other times I say to myself "it is good that my sister got me out of the rural area". If I had lived in the rural until now, I would have known nothing"...I would have spent my life digging like my mother...but still other times I say "I wish I stayed in the rural and never came to Debre Markos". At the same time I comfort myself saying "it is good that I came". It is when I recharge mobile card by myself and so on that I say to myself "it was good that I came to Debre Markos."

In this case, the decision to break away from the home area can be considered as a subversive act against specific patriarchal structures, such as early marriage. But this decision is also influenced by the desire to experiment new life opportunities in town. The urban area is seen as a place where one can access a 'modern life' reflected in the availability of better clothing, a greater variety and a higher quality of food, the access to electricity, transportation, and so

on. As Yamrot puts it: "It is when I recharge mobile card by myself that I say to myself It is good that I came to Debre Markos." In order to underline her point, she showed me her mobile phone.

When I met her, Yamrot was working as a live-out domestic worker in Debre Markos. She is from a village about 80km from Debre Markos town. She moved to town at the age of 12 to avoid early marriage, following the suggestion of her older sister who gave her the opportunity to continue her education. As I will show in the next chapter, Yamrot lived for five years with her sister[35] who was married in town, she took care of her sister's kids and helped her in doing household chores. Meanwhile, she was able to complete her primary education, she passed the National exam and later on, once she left her sister's house, she started working as domestic worker. In the meantime she was able to attend at least the first two years of secondary school. As I will show in the next chapter, she found a job as live-in domestic worker, then a job as daily labourer at construction sites, then she moved back to live-in domestic work. Finally, she started working as live-out domestic worker two years ago, when she got pregnant.

Previous studies present life stories of young women and girls from the Amhara region - and other parts of North Ethiopia – who flee from practices such as early marriage, marriage by abduction and rape, and move to cities (see Shiferaw et al., 2018). In the Amhara region in Ethiopia, in several circumstances the reasons that push parents to arrange early marriages for their daughter are not economic. Girl givers do not achieve any profit since no bride wealth is paid, but rather they must provide the young bride with a dowry. Similarly, girls takers do not gain a particular benefit. They also have to provide their son with a dowry that will be used to build a hut for the young couple near the groom's parents. Thus, "early marriage, abduction, and rape in the Amhara region are the result of a complex interplay of economic and sociocultural variables like the land holding system, marriage rules, and moral values" (Shiferaw et al., 2018, p.151). Economic and culture-specific factors have strong impact on each other. People may react to life insecurities and economic pressures by mobilizing culturally specific practices. In this perspective, girls who move to town escape from sociocultural factors which are specific reactions of a patriarchal society to life insecurity. My study demonstrates how public policies favor men who get both land and women who run the household. If women leave their husbands, or are left by their husbands in turn (for instance in case of divorce), they may lose their usufruct rights to land, rights

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[35] She is her childhood neighbor, from her birth village, who Yamrot considers and calls 'sister'.

that would have been subordinated to their marital status. As a result, they may not be able to support themselves unless assisted by other male members of the community, yet the latter might not be willing to help. And so the only possible way out of a condition of extreme precariousness and marginalization is to migrate to the city.

Clearly, the nature and consequences of patriarchal structures cannot be assumed, but rather have to be specified taking into consideration the relationship between history and patriarchy which takes different forms across space and time and is always subject to change. As Rita Laura Segato (2016) puts it:

> Considering transformations in the gender system, the history of the patriarchal structure is indispensable for understanding the social shift introduced by modernity. Correctly reading what this transition has meant and how intervention has readjusted and eroded preexisting hierarchies allows us to understand a number of current phenomena that affect society as a whole, phenomena that cannot be expressed or contained by the term *the woman problem*" (Segato, 2016, pp. 615-616).

For instance Francesca Declich (2016) illustrates that in Southern Somalia forcing people into monogamous marriages was an integral part of Italian colonial policy during the Fascist period (1910-41). While the indigenous practices of arranged marriages supported the new couple emotionally and materially through a web of social relations, the Italian forced marriage policy was implemented as a mechanism of labor control over women and men, and couples were then forced to work on the farms of colonizers. In particular in Gosha – in the Middle and Lower Juba of Somalia - forced marriages were imposed only on girls who were thus subjugated and tied to a European patriarchal norm of family structure, while men were given unrestricted access to a girl's body. Colonial era further promoted a new idea of masculinity in which male subjects were able to disentangle themselves from a set of responsibilities and ties of dependence within their community, as opposed to the submission and acquiescence of women. Thus, colonial practices of forced marriage were very different from the historical practices of arranged marriages, which ensured the new spouses and their children entry into webs of controlled social relations and familial protection during vulnerable periods of their lives. Given these considerations, we should contextualize arranged marriages agreements in specific historical and socioeconomic circumstances, and understand them "in terms of contracts among families in which individual spouses may play more or less autonomous roles, depending on their character and personal options" (Declich, 2016, p.111).

In my study, Ketema (Ethiopia) points out that marriage was the only option for her siblings to survive. I have already mentioned Ketema at the beginning of this chapter, in the section 'beyond poverty discourse'. She recounts that after her father's land was confiscated her family became impoverished, thus she and her siblings were left with no choice but to get married.

> We are three brothers and six sisters including me, we are nine in total.. They didn't learn. They all are married. They all have reached grade 6 or 7 but they all stopped it afterwards. We were very much poor back home so there was no one who could help us to proceed with our education. So the one and only chance for us was to be married. You know our father was a farmer, he had a land, but since he was working as a secretary for the Derg regime all his lands were taken away so now we have nothing left (…) and I also had no way of escaping this fate of getting married, but luckily I had to wait for my turn until all my siblings got married (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18)

At the end of this chapter, in the section 'educational opportunities', I will briefly show that Ketema has been able to pursue her Secondary Education and to obtain a TVET certificate while working as live-in domestic worker in Debre Markos. Yet I will give more details on her experience in the city in the next chapter.

Although in the narratives quoted so far women mention the will to avoid marriage back home as one of the factors that led them to migrate, most of these women also claim that marriage is an important aspect of their future projects. But at the time of our encounter they tended to give more prominence to other personal ambitions, such as the desire to pursue their education or to start a small business before marriage. Longitudinal research show that in the past decade there has been an increasing number of young women and girls who have moved from rural villages to urban towns and cities in several African countries. For instance, Ethiopia WIDE[36] is an on-going longitudinal study in 20 Ethiopian rural communities carried out between 1995 and 2013. This study shows that in 2010/13 there has been a decline in agricultural migration and an increase in urban and international migration, an emergence of industrial migration with a significant rise in young women and girls mobility. In 12 communities urban migration is perceived as mainly dominated by men, while in other communities more women than men are migrating. International migration includes destinations such as the Gulf (especially for women), Sudan and South Africa (Dom 2017, p. 379). Scholars argue that the increase in girls' migration may result in a delay in the age of marriage and in a reduction of the rate of early pregnancy (see Grabska, 2010; Hertrich

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[36] For more details see https://ethiopiawide.net/

& Lesclingand, 2012). Thus, girls' decisions about sexual initiation, marriage and reproduction intersect in different ways with the decision to migrate which also involves girls' ambitions and affects their future plans and life trajectories (see Temin et al. 2013).

In the following quotation Ketema's mother (already quoted at the beginning of this chapter) explains that her daughter repeatedly refused to get married going against her will. She used to say to her daughter: "get married like your sisters, be fruitful (deliver), nurture your children and take care of your husband (settle down)." But Ketema decided to work as domestic worker with the aim of pursuing her education and to find then a better job. As her mother puts it:

> When we said to her "get married", she used to reply "why? No! I don't want, I just want to continue my education". After refusing our request for several times, she went to Addis (…) What we used to say to her is "get married and settle down (get married, nurture your children and take care of your husband) like others do (just like your sisters), deliver and lead a family (just settle down)" but her stand was "I don't want " (…) We would be happy if she gets married like her sisters and starts to live settled and be fruitful (deliver)...for example these children that you now see in this house are the children of her sisters and brothers (…) We don't have the financial capacity to send her to school, we even can't help ourselves! As a mother I am personally so tired that I can do no work anymore...so now if she personally gets a job and saves her life ok but if no I say to her "get married and settle down" (Ketema's mother, 15/11/19, Ethiopia)

In contrast, Ketema's sister is proud to say that she is married, she has a husband and three children, unlike her sister. Ketema's sister recounts that Ketema went to Addis Ababa - instead of following her family's advice to get married - and was cheated by the person who promised to help her find a good job in city. He arranged Ketema's placement within a household in Addis Abeba, he obtained pecuniary gain as a result, while she never received her salary.

> He took cheated her and took her money (…) Unlike her we (the other sisters and I) have delivered our children, so we usually say to her "get married" but she responds "I will not get married". She replies "let me have a job or open a business of my own, at least I have to be in a better condition of living" (…) She doesn't accept to get married so if a man comes and asks about her, we say "wait, let us ask her" and we ask for her will, but she never says "ok". So if we force her… we say to ourselves "she will run away, she will be lost". Besides,

since she feels ill now and then,[37] we say to ourselves "let us leave her alone, it is enough if she stays healthy" (Ketema's sister, 25 years old, 15/11/19, Ethiopia)

She seems to stress the fact that – unlike her sister Ketema – she has been able to improve her life, without losing her parental approval, precisely through marriage. Gaining independence goes hand in hand with keeping interdependent relationships with her family.

> By now she (Ketema) is working in another house, and other times in this house (her mother's house). Personally I don't live in this house, I am married, I have three children, I live in a different area (she lives in the neighborhood). Mostly Ketema helps them (her parents and other relatives who pass by the house where we had this conversation) (…) we can never leave parents all alone.

And so the point of view of Ketema about female adulthood, about the way to gain some level of independence and improve the standard of living largely differ from that of her sister. I have quoted Ketema's sister point of view precisely to shed light on the heterogeneity of female experiences and the ways they talk about marriage and future projects. Indeed, we also find studies which show how marriage may be used by women as a strategy to gain respect and status in their community. For instance Susan Schaffnit et al. (2019) highlight that in rural Tanzania marriage often remains an essential pathway for young women and girls and facilitates their entry into adulthood even before 18 years of age. In many circumstances marriage permits women to fully participate in the local economy of the community, while the abilities of unmarried women are often questioned by community members and these women are thus excluded from taking part in activities outside the home (2019, p. 102). The same notion of "forced marriage" – often equated with "arranged marriage" - is historically constructed and in order to understand contemporary arranged marriages, it is crucial "to recognize the importance of the social networks into which the new spouses enter by wedding" (Declich, 2016, p. 109). Moreover, motivations of women to marry in specific phases of their lives should be considered together with those of women who escape or postpone marriage. By way of concluding this section I argue that marriage contracts are multiple, as are the positions and choices of women in relation to such marriages. "Early marriage" is not necessarily synonymous with "arranged marriage." At the same time, when I say that a female domestic worker in town escaped an arranged marriage back home, I don't necessarily mean that she is actually avoiding an arranged marriage as a

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[37] She refers to the fact that Ketema got sick (manly suffering from severe headache) when she was working as a live-in domestic worker in Addis Abeba, she had to be healed with holy water and then she went back to Debre Markos

whole, as in some cases she is just trying to postpone it and to see if there are better options available. But in this case, women's space for action is still limited and relegated to the same reproductive sphere that women have tried to avoid. A sphere that recurs in the city, in another form. In fact Ketema refused to get married, but what was the alternative? Working in the city as a domestic worker, within a family that did not pay her in the end, but where she served the household members contributing to the maintenance of that same household. Once again, the role of women remains relegated to the reproductive sphere. Some alternative options exist - albeit limited - but women can try to grasp them only within that reproductive space, made up of care roles, whatever form it takes. In this context, what does the word 'freedom' mean in women's narratives?

5.5   Restrictions on mobility: which (un)freedom?

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, women often mention restrictions on their mobility when they refer to their life in the rural area, as well as when they refer to their life in town. In reference to their life in town many women describe their work as behind closed doors, in the sense that their daily working activities as domestic workers are mainly performed within the house, while they would like to spend more time outside and explore the urban space.[38] Clearly, when women talk about their life in rural areas 'restrictions on their mobility' does not mean that they were not allowed to leave the house. Ester (Tanzania) describes her daily working activities in the village where she was born and raised, in Singida region (central zone of Tanzania), and where she lived until the age of 16:

> Singida life was good, but it was only agricultural based life so if you need money you have to involve yourself on cultivation, preparing farm, sowing, irrigate, wait for plants to grow, then harvest... it was a very long process that took time and energy. Earning cash was a bit hard, because you had to wait a long time for harvesting and sell the produces, that is why I opted to find an alternative way (…) We were typical farmers cultivating tomatoes, sweet pepper, vegetables.. We were cultivating those and other stuffs and I saw it as a very difficult task.. so I needed to move and see how life goes on the other side, I just wanted to see the difference between a farming life and a working life in a big city so I went there (to Dar es Salaam, where she has lived and worked for two years before moving to Morogoro city) (Ester, 20 years old, 15/19/19, Morogoro, Tanzania)

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[38] I will return to this point in the following chapter which explores life and working experiences of women in town.

Ester points out that the urban area allows you to earn cash, while in the rural area "earning cash was a bit hard", "so if you need money…" you have to move to town! But Ester is also curious about what happens in towns and cities, she needs to explore the urban life: "I had to move and see how life goes on the other side, I wanted to see the difference between a farming life and a working life in a big city."

When we look at how women describe their daily routine in the rural area, as well as that in the town or city of destination after migration, we should keep in mind that the sexual division of labour within and outside the home, in the rural and in the urban area can greatly diverge. The sexual division of labour is continually transformed and recreated as social and economic change occurs, as many feminist scholars have argued (see Mackintosh 1984), and the same concept of 'domesticity' – which is an historically and culturally constructed notion - cannot be universally defined (Declich 2015, p. 628). In my study several women explain that they were engaged in various working activities in the rural area, both inside and outside the home during the day. Yet in many cases their movement outside the home tended to be confined to specific activities such as livestock and agricultural tasks, and they could not move around freely for other reasons. More precisely, they felt to be often supervised by controlling adults who were afraid, among the other things, that they might have premarital relationships and get pregnant (see Erulkar and Ferede, 2009). In Yamrot's words (Ethiopia, I have quoted Yamrot in the section 'avoiding marriage agreements'):

> To begin with, I wasn't comfortable with the work in my village… you dig, you help during plough and harvesting all day long under the sun with them...there is no rest in rural areas. You work the whole day long and when you finally want to wash, they don't like it…they say to you "where will you go? Are you washing so that you don't work tomorrow?" (Yamrot, 26 years old, 17/12/18, Ethiopia)

Obviously the point of view of the women interviewed is influenced by the new life style they are leading in the urban space – at the time of our encounter - where most of the time they have greater access to water and electricity. For example in this case Yamrot refers to the possibility of washing and looking good, she asserts that in the rural area "when you finally want to wash they don't like it… they say 'where will you go'?" On the other hand, descriptions of the harsh working conditions in town are often combined with nostalgic feelings and memories of childhood moments back home.

> In my own village I used to play with my friends, we used to do experiments with leaves to heal fever and headache. I miss this... I used to do so many experiments! At that time I dreamt of being a doctor (…) There was no stress, there were ceremonies to attend and people did

not care too much... Here life is stressful, I just have to work. I don't even have time to go to Church due to the workload (the same above).

Edina in Tanzania was born and raised in a village in Morogoro region. She is currently working as live-in domestic worker in Morogoro town but she has also worked for six years in Dar es Salaam city. While she emphasizes that in Dar es Salaam she was never allowed to leave the house where she was working, she sometimes gets nostalgic for the times she used to play with her friends back home and together with them she used to help her father with the harvest.

> At my place (in the rural area, in Morogoro region) I was very free but there (in Dar es salaam city) I was in someone's house so I wasn't free…I had to stay inside until her (the employer) came back or maybe she decided to take you out but I wasn't totally free, no freedom of movement if I wanted to visit someone. The movement was just around the shop and it wasn't everyday, because she (the employer) was always mad and everything was inside the house. Going to the market/shop was rare… sometimes I just went and bought some bread and *chapati* (flat bread), especially when she forgot to buy them. But I usually I just stayed inside (Edina, 23 years old, 17/09/19, Tanzania).

At the same time Edina points out that before migrating her father used to control her and, unlike boys, she was not allowed to move around freely. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania societies are very hierarchical and have strong gender norms and gender-based inequalities. Gender largely affects women's lives since when they are growing up. Gender norms affect their responsibilities, the type of work they have to do at home and outside the home, their relationships with relatives, friends and other members of the community, their opportunities to access education, their ambitions and future plans. Many women recount that their lives back home are largely determined by the will of various controlling adults, thus gender differences emerge with respect to their opportunities to move around. As Edina puts it:

> At my place I was free, it was good because you know it is home and you feel like helping other people with the harvest.. I had friends, we used to play and help my father with the harvest. But you know, my father was a bit mean… if I come late, or I just went out without permission, then my friends might create problems. People control you, It is not like when you are a boy and you can go anywhere.. My father was angry, he became mad any time I came home a bit late.

On the one hand Edina seems to regret her life back home and she actually says "at my place I was free"; on the other hand she highlights the fact that when she was growing up boys were given more freedom of movement: "It is not like when you are a boy and you can go

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anywhere." When she talks about her life and working experience in the urban area, she claims that in Dar es Salaam she had no freedom of movement as she had to work and stay inside the house. But the situation slightly improves when she moves to Morogoro (where I met her). She gradually explores the urban space, she meets new people, she comes into contact with the NGO, and she develops new ideas about her future plans.

Sometimes women seem to regret a kind of lost freedom that they experienced back home. Vestina is from a village located in Mwanza region (about 950km from Morogoro town). She moved to Morogoro town when she was 13 years old and she has been working in the same household for seven years. In the following narrative Vestina remembers the times when she was younger, she was running a small business by selling vegetables back home and – in her words - she was "free to move from place to place."

> At home I was totally free, if I asked mom something she just permitted me to do so. But here (in Morogoro) I have to ask everything, it's a huge problem and I have to cope with the situation (…) So whenever I ask for permission to go out, if she (employer) refuses I have to obey. But when I was at home I was free to move from place to place. (…) I used to run a small business and sell vegetables. I was very happy waking up early in the morning to harvest vegetables and sell them (Vestina, 20 years old, 11/10/19, Morogoro, Tanzania).

Overall, women's experiences in rural and urban areas are discussed both in positive and negative terms, the emotions are mixed. The advantages of life in town are juxtaposed in a variety of ways against the disadvantages of life in the villages of origin, and vice versa. Vestina remembers with regret when she used to live in "peace and harmony" back home, pick fresh fruit with other friends from a land which – in her words - was "very blessed." But she also stresses that in Morogoro she can access a richer diet, she knows "how to wear nice clothes and look sexy".

> You know sister Angel (translator)...but I am happy here (in Morogoro)…and about my home place…when I am back to Mwanza I miss some Morogoro things, I think "maybe in Morogoro I would do this and this" (…) Our meals…you know, in our home life is very difficult and you just have porridge, but if you have peace, a person can be satisfied with only peace and harmony no matter how many meals you have per day. There (back home) we were having one meal per day, in the morning we had nothing until 10 AM, then we had *ugali* (a type of maize flour porridge) then until tomorrow….but since our land is very blessed you might find so many fruits during the fruit season, maybe mangoes, sugar canes, African egg plants, so when I was coming back from school and there was no food I could go and pick them and life was going on.. (…) It's like this, in Mwanza I was on foolish age so I was walking on bare feet, going to sell fruits and other things but I am not doing it here

anymore.. carrying a bucket, selling vegetables.. I can't do it anymore (…) But here (in Morogoro) I am having three meals! Now I know how to bath, I know how to wear nice clothes and look sexy!

In this context, a question arises: how can we define the term freedom? What kind of freedom do women aspire to when they say they are not (and were not) free, both in reference to the current life in the city and the previous one in the villages of origin? The concept of 'freedom' has many facets and does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it should be analyzed against the context of various degrees of dependence. In material contexts of resource scarcity neighborhood ties, webs of kinship relations and other relationships of various kind may provide the ideal of freedom from certain relations of domination (Declich 2016, p. 111). As Saba Mahmood (2009) points out, it is essential to investigate the practical and discursive conditions under which various forms of capacities of ethical action, as well as different forms of desires occur, including the desire for submissive positions under certain recognized authorities. The desire for freedom from norms, as well as the desire for subversion of norms, is not innate but it is deeply mediated by historical and cultural conditions (2009, pp. 24-25).

In my study, I would define the freedom that female domestic workers aspire to as an alternative space that they can carve out only within a wider space where their lives are embedded. The wider space is characterized by asymmetrical relationships where power, domination, subordination, love and care coexist. In this wider space domestic workers are relegated to reproductive roles, they are committed to providing and maintaining the functioning of the households, whether the rural or urban ones. By performing domestic work and taking care of various households' members, women ensure the maintenance of the broader household/family/community structure (the wider space). Domestic workers could hardly find their freedom and emancipation outside this space, they would lose any kind of support from other people. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned many of the women I interviewed in both countries do not have a strong support network in their villages of origin. They look for some kind of protection elsewhere, in the cities of destination, but they can find this protection only within the wider space that requires them to perform care work. Their goals and ambitions are constituted by a match of more 'individual' objectives (such as the desire to complete their studies, to invest their savings in small purchases for themselves), and the constant project to satisfy family needs and serve the household/family/community structure as a larger entity (by sending money back home and performing care work in urban households). Thus, the space of action that domestic workers

build is not detached from that wider space in which their lives are embedded. The freedom to which domestic workers aspire would allow them to maintain a balance between the different slices of the whole space, while giving more space to those smaller slices made of aspirations and objectives that we usually tend to define as more 'personal' or 'individual'. More precisely, freedom and emancipation correspond to the ability to expand the space of those aspirations which are detached from given family demands, social obligations and gender norms. This space of freedom therefore results from a slight enlargement of the small slices made up of individual objectives. But this space of freedom still takes place within the wider space that encloses it: the reproductive sphere, the space of responsibility towards the broader family/household/community. Within the larger space the women continue to give care and seek protection, within asymmetrical and hierarchical relationships and in a position of subordination to the people they work for. Ultimately, reaching a certain degree of freedom means keeping in balance the different parts mentioned so far. At the same time, it means 1) expanding the internal, limited space of personal aspirations; 2) maintaining the wider space of social obligations with its hierarchical relations; 3) but also reducing the excesses of power that threaten the women's need for protection. In some cases, the women who leave their birth places and move to the cities seek protection that they lost back dome, for instance because they haven't met certain expectations of their communities, and therefore find themselves more exposed to vulnerability, risks and violence. I will illustrate an example of this kind in the following section.

5.6   Premarital pregnancy

In this section I will report the experience of Zebenneth, an Ethiopian woman who left her village because she got pregnant after having had premarital relationships. She moved to urban areas in order to escape stigmatization and marginalization from the side of her community, as well as to support her child. Unlike the other women mentioned in this thesis, she is not from the Amhara region. I met her in Addis Ababa where she had moved after other migratory experiences. I will provide some details about her attempts to hide her pregnancy and about her living and working experiences before she moved to Addis Abeba. She is from a village close to Bonga town, in south-western Ethiopia (Keffa zone). At the time of our encounter she was working as live-out domestic worker, she was living with her friend's family, but her plan was to migrate to the Middle East. When I met her she was also attending a three-weeks training at an agency for those who want to work in the Arab

countries. I met her the first time nearby a broker agency and then we had a long conversation while drinking *bunna* (Ethiopian coffee) in a coffeehouse. In the interview quoted below she recounts that she decided to move to Addis when she got pregnant and delivered her child who she then left to her mother back home. Yet before taking this decision she tried to hide her pregnancy from her community, she moved from place to place and she passed through several working experiences:

> Before coming to Addis just while I was a student, I had a boyfriend and I delivered a child. I delivered a child and gave this child to my mother (…) My families are very hard, they don't want their identity to be ruined. At first I got pregnant while we were friends, I was a student by then (she completed the last year of primary education but she did not pass the national exam)... when I told him I was pregnant he said "you will abort." When he said this to me… such things are taboos in our community, aborting is very much taboo! In fact if my brothers had heard about it they would have killed him, they don't fear and they just say "how could you do this!" So I delivered my child going away from my family. At first they didn't know about my pregnancy and my boyfriend said I had to abort it… I thought about it for a moment and I said to him "ok give me money to abort." Frankly when I said this to him it was not because I wanted to abort but only to run away with the money (Zebenneth, 24 years old, 04/12/18, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia)

Zebenneth explains that at first she did not tell anyone about her pregnancy. She just left her home place and found a job in a town called Mizan Teferi (almost 100km from her village).

> That was a very hard moment for me, it is even hard to remember. Because if my family had heard about it (her pregnancy), first of all they would have killed me and second of all they would have killed one another with the family of my boyfriend (…) I disappeared, I moved to another area, Mizan Teferi, Maji Zone, having 100 or 200 Birr at hand...

She recounts that she had no one to rely on. She remained at the bus station, she found a job through brokers (intermediaries for recruitment process) and she was hired within a household.

> To tell you the truth I didn't even go to my relative, my life is a very terrible one, I swear to God, it is even very hard to remember! I simply went without having anyone I knew, I was just hired (…) In Mizan Teferi there are brokers around the bus station. (…) I simply went there having only my few clothes.. the brokers identify you as a person who is looking for a job...I don't know how can they identify you? They just call you and take you with them, they search for a job for you and get you hired.

She was hired in a house where she was in charge of preparing Enjera (a fermented flatbread). It was in that house that she delivered. Her employer agreed to support her during the pregnancy period. Zebenneth thus found a 'safe' place to give birth, despite all the risks.

> I used to bake Enjera, I just got hired in one Muslim family for 150 Birr of monthly salary I think.. While I was working in this house I delivered my child (…) She (her employer) came to know after sometime, she didn't know at first (about my pregnancy). By then I lost my appetite, I used to bake Enjera and the temperature was high, the sun was too strong there. I wasn't eating food and so she took me to the hospital, she found out by then. When she understood she didn't say anything to me because she didn't want to disappoint me. She simply kept quiet and I continued to do my work until I delivered.

Zebenneth goes on to say that after giving birth she looked for a better job opportunity and she moved to another area bringing her child with her. Her peer, another woman who was working in the same house, pushed her to move together. Indeed, the women's decisions are often influenced or inspired (directly or indirectly) by other people. In this case, Zebenneth was influenced by another woman who talked about job opportunities, but she also wanted to escape an abusive situation at her workplace.

> I delivered my child and then I don't know for how long I worked in that house (later on she says that she moved when her child was six months).. I moved to a desert area having my child because I heard that there was work there (…) In the house where I was working there was another servant who prepared stews.. She went out and another one started to work. The new one said to me "I will work here only for some time afterwards I will go to the desert to work, there is a lot of work available there, we will go together". At that time the brother of the Muslim family used to bother me, he repeatedly asked me to sleep with him but since I had enough of this situation I said to the new servant that I also wanted to get out, and she said "we will go to the desert together, there is a lot of work available there." In this way we discussed about it and we left together with my child. Fortunately my child didn't get hurt.

So they left together, but Zebenneth continued her journey alone since her peer decided to stop in a place of juncture (at the brokers station in Mizan town) where she had some friends.

> No! we traveled together by car, 20 Birr travel. We went together to Mizan, when we reached Mizan this girl said to me "I have to discuss with a friend of mine before going to the desert". We arrived at the brokers station, where brokers send servants to the desert. The desert is several kilometers travel from Mizan.. it is a whole day long journey! These brokers are like the agencies here in Addis who send servants abroad. Just like them, there are brokers who send servants to the desert. When we arrived in the office of these brokers, she said to me "I need to discuss with my sisters and friends who are here before going to the desert" but only

because I had no choice, I went straight. The broker told me: "you can't go having this child with you so please work here". I replied to him "I will not work here in Mizan city!" and he said to me "you have this child with you, if you find too much workload and your child starts getting sick come back immediately with him". I replied to him "no problem! If this is God's will, He will protect him". Then he said "ok go but please take care." So the girl (her peer) remained behind, (…) she remained in Mizan and we didn't meet afterwards. I had no mobile phone at that time.

This narrative shows that the intermediaries (or brokers, *dalala* in Amharic) are described in an ambiguous way. Brokers are those who send women to "the desert" (in Ethiopia) and to the Middle East, places full of risks and episodes of exploitation. But they are also protective figures. Zebenneth repeats that the broker wanted to protect her baby, he advised her to stop and find a job in Mizan city. But she needed to make money, she had no choice than take the risk. It is not clear which is the exact final destination that she calls "the desert", where she was sent to work. However, she mentioned Dima (Gambela region, at the border with South Sudan) as the place that she reached by mini-bus from Mizan Teferi before continuing her travel by truck. Through Dima road, she will probably reach some area in the south-western Ethiopia, near the Kenyan border.

It is a whole day long journey (to reach the desert). Indeed we spent one night somewhere in between. For example any kind of car didn't drive there, the minibuses didn't go there. We traveled until Dima by mini-bus, from Dima to the desert you may travel being on top of *Isuzu* as if you are maize (Isuzu is a kind of truck designed by the Japanese Isuzu motors production). Only the *Isuzu* goes there and no other kind of car (…) So it was two days journey in the end. The driver felt sad about me and said "I will not allow this child to go on top of Isuzu", he paid back money to those who reserved the drivers seats and he let us travel with him otherwise we (I and my child) would have traveled on top as if we were maize.

Again, the driver, the one who transports people along risky paths, seems to perform a protective function towards Zebenneth during the risky journey. Somehow the fact that she travels with her small child allows her to avoid further risks, as brokers and drivers protect her as a 'mother'. And so Zebenneth started working in that area where she remained almost one year and a half, but too high temperatures, her precarious health and the fear of losing her child pushed her to return back to her village of origin (close to Bonga town).

I found a job (baking Enjera) (…) but I easily got sick. Fortunately my child didn't get sick, he had only tonsillitis, he is very healthy. I used to follow him up even though I forgot about myself but… my child grew up a bit and It was very hard, his food expenses were high.. a powder of milk was sold 200 for one can per month there... and God is my witness that a

kilo of sugar was sold for 60 Birr! Due to these expenses the money at my hand got less, this time I got lost and returned back home missing.. I was blackened, it was very hot there, I returned back feeling headache so everything was very difficult. I didn't even bring my clothes with me, I only took my child with me and came back home (back to her home village close to Bonga town).

Zebenneth moved back to Mizan Teferi where she remained for a few months and then she returned back to her home village nearby Bonga town. Before moving to Addis Abeba she spent one year in Bonga to take care of her child.

> I went to Bonga (in a village nearby Bonga town). I brought my child to Bonga when he was able to walk. My mother got upset by then, she severely cried, I think she used to think I was dead... she didn't identify me at first (…) I wanted to come to Addis right away, but it was hard for my child to speak Kafa the language of my mother, so I had to wait in Bonga for one year until he learned to speak very well, until he could ask for food and water when he needed. (…) I stayed in my home village for one year for his sake (…) so it was only when he was 3 years old that I had the guts to leave him with my mother and I came to Addis.. By now my child is 7 years old.. in the coming February he will be 7 years old.

As we have seen, at first Zebenneth tried to hide her pregnancy, she left her home place and looked for job opportunities in other towns. Once back to Bonga she found the support of her mother and other community members who accepted to raise her child. But childbirth outside of wedlock had marked her life. She had been forced to flee and interrupt her studies. At that point, even once back in her home village, it would be more difficult for her to find a husband and get married. The burden of social exclusion fell on her, and so she decided to go to Addis Ababa in search of new job opportunities, and in order to assure a better future for her child.

> While I was in my home village I saw that among my childhood friends some of them went up to secondary school and the rest got married and so I hated the situation and I said to myself "I need to go to Addis" and I came. Then I said to myself "I should not spoil my life for the second time. I remained behind from school, so since it is said that working in Addis is good, I should work good and enable my child to learn."

Once she moved to Addis Abeba, Zebenneth worked as live-in domestic worker for three years changing several households, moving from house to house in search of a better working environment. Then she worked for one year as live-out domestic worker, which was her then-current job at the time of our encounter. The reasons that led her to move to Addis Ababa are multiple: she wanted to ensure a better future for her child ("I should enable my

child to learn"), she wanted to make up for the fact that - in her account – she had ruined her life ("I should not spoil my life for the second time"). She had lost the approval of her community and was not satisfied with her life ("I saw that among my childhood friends some of them went up to secondary school and the rest got married and so I hated the situation"). In her view, her future project to go to the Middle East could meet several needs. The need to fulfill family obligations (and economically support her child), as well as the need to achieve personal aspirations (such as the will to find a qualified job). The latter are never completely disentangled from social and family obligations, and vice versa. The Middle East embodied hope for a better future. In her imagination, through domestic work abroad she could earn enough money. She could have sent them to her son, mother and other family members, in this way regaining the esteem she had lost. But she could also have put aside some saving to start a business with her friend in Addis Ababa, for example by opening a coffee shop. The hope, a glimpse in the uncertain future, gave her the impetus to take a risk, the only way to access an alternative life, perhaps even better than the one she gave up by abandoning her studies and leaving Bonga. The desire to study is another element that pushes many women to leave their birth place, as I will show in the next section.

5.7   Educational opportunities

I shall begin this section with a brief explanation of the educational system in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In the current educational system in Ethiopia, primary education consists of a first cycle from 1 to 4 grade, and a second cycle from 5 to 8 grade. Technically, education is compulsory until grade8. Given the high number of children who drop out of school in rural areas, Ethiopia also offers some alternative basic education systems outside of the formal school which allow more flexible school schedules. Secondary education consists of two cycles: the first cycle from 9 to 10 grade, and the second cycle from 11 to 12 grade. Education is tuition-free until grade 10, and there are no entrance examinations, but students have to cover the cost of school uniforms, notebooks, pens and other school materials. Many domestic workers I interviewed in Debre Markos invested their savings to allow their siblings (and especially brothers) to buy uniforms and other school supplies. In the secondary school the language of instruction is English. Upper-secondary students (grade 11 and 12) have to pay school fees. At the end of grade 10, students must sit for a National Exam – the Ethiopian General School Leaving Certificate Examination (EGSLCE) - which allows those with higher grades to continue in the upper-secondary level (also called university-

preparatory education). At the end of grade 12, students have to sit another National Exam – the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) – in order to enroll in the Universities. The great variety offered by both public and private providers after grade 10 are the Technical and Vocational Education and Trainings (TVET) programs. The latter range from short-term informal training courses to formal certificate programs that last between one and three years.

As for Tanzania, primary school consists of seven years (from standard 1 to 7), which is followed by six years of secondary school: four years of Ordinary Level (Form 1 – 4); and two years of Advanced Level (Form 5 – 6). After the Advanced Level students must take the Advanced Certificate exam to attend college for three of four years. In primary school Swahili is taught along with English, while secondary school students are only taught in English. Like in Ethiopia, primary school is supposed to be free but costs of school supplies required to students are beyond many of their means. At the end of standard 7 students must sit a National Exam to move forward and enroll in secondary schools. Students with higher passing scores and funding might be placed in boarding schools, which usually are very far from their home area, while students with lower scores can access less prestigious and less expensive local day schools. Students who pass Form 4 (the last year of Ordinary Level) may move onto Form 5 and 6 (Advanced Level), which usually are taught in expensive boarding schools. The government choose the school that students may attend according to their exam results. Lastly, students who pass the National Exam at the end of Form 6 may continue onto Universities. Private and public Technical and Vocational Education and Trainings (TVET) programs are offered as an alternative, as follows: two years of Basic Vocational Trainings after primary school; two years of Advanced Vocational Trainings after Form 4 (secondary school, ordinary level); and two years of Advanced Vocational Trainings after Form 6 (secondary school, Advanced Level). However, like in Ethiopia there are also short-term informal training courses.

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, the lack of educational opportunities in the rural area is one of the reasons that leads young women and girls to a decision to migrate. In several narratives, women report that the double workload of livestock, agricultural activities and household chores in their villages of origin made it difficult for them to attend school every day. For instance Ester (Tanzania, already mentioned in the section 'restriction on mobility') asserts:

> When I was studying the school was a bit far, I used to walk for more than one hour from
> home to school.. On my side I was doing school works although at home there was a pile of

work, because I had to cook, go to farm and also help mom.. so it was like that. This was another reason why I didn't want to go on with school (Ester, 20 years old, 15/19/19, Morogoro, Tanzania)

The urban area is often seen as a place where one can access a better quality of education which is not available back home. Yet to say that the majority of women were looking forward to pursuing their education in town is quite reductive. School attendance (and in particular that of 'formal school') is not always seen as the first priority by women who move to town. Some of them maintain that when they were attending school back home, and they were thinking of the possibility to migrate to the urban area, their first aspiration was to find a job, to earn some money and fulfil family needs, to explore which opportunities (the educational ones included) the urban area could offer. In many cases their future plans have changed over time during their life course and migratory experiences. In some cases low quality of schools back home led them to think that there were better opportunities than continuing to attend formal education. Let's see how Ester describes the school in her village of origin:

> Honestly speaking, there were not enough teachers and they were not enough committed, they did not follow you up, unless they gave you…how you call it… homework, yes. We were so many (students) so even ourselves we were uncaring… maybe we weren't aware of the importance of education! So most of us were not serious on school matters at all.

Ester reports that during the National exam, at the end of the Primary Education, teachers helped students by giving them some answers. So some students were more likely to pass the exam than others. Yet she also maintains that some students (herself included) were not so happy with the idea of going to Secondary School (of course we should consider that in several cases this could also be the point of view of other influential adults).

> Honestly speaking teachers gave us some answers during the last exam (the National exam). Some students filled them on their sheets and some(of us)… we didn't because we didn't want to go on with school, thus we failed. Our fellows continued because they passed the exam, but you know most of them didn't make progress after Form1 (first year of Secondary Education, Ordinary Level)… After Form1 they quit.

This aspect recurs in interviews with other people in Tanzania. Even some NGO staff members told me that many parents tend to urge their daughters not to pass the final National exam at the end of primary school. This is due a number of reasons: on the one hand, the idea that formal school would not ensure you to access a qualified job; and due to conditions of poverty the families cannot afford to further support their children in continuing their

studies. On the other hand, there are reasons concerning gender dynamics and ideologies: sons are encouraged to study rather than daughters; parents fear that their daughters might have premarital relationships and above all that they might become pregnant out of wedlock; finally, once again, women are relegated to reproductive roles. In Ethiopia and Tanzania, but in different forms all over the world, the apparent efforts of governments to improve the educational level of the female population are contradictory precisely because states continue to reproduce gender ideologies that value women only if they play reproductive roles, in this sense contributing to the functioning of family/household structures at various levels. Clearly, the fact that Ester did not pass the National exam (whether on purpose or not) influences her future projects related to education. But during the interview she keeps saying that at that time she did not see the formal education as the best option to achieve her future projects.

> Honestly I just decided (to quit) on my own since there were no follow-up inspections on school issues, so I thought there was no sense in continuing with it… because I was not having a good background (on school) and at that time I wasn't fully aware of its importance. And also I wasn't understanding what I was taught in class! so I thought of quitting simply because I wasn't prepared to face the Secondary school challenge… I lost hope and then I quit and I thought it was better to do other things.

Migrants take decisions on the basis of their own perception of what education means, as well as of the benefits of formal education in comparison with other available opportunities in specific contexts. In some cases women may value other kind of trainings, such as certain apprenticeships and vocational trainings, rather than formal schooling (Hashim and Torsen 2011, p. 51). When I met her, Ester's ambition was to attend a tailoring course. At the time of my fieldwork CVM was organizing trainings in collaboration with the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) center. These factors certainly influenced the aspirations of Ester (who had known CVM for a few months) and those of other girls. However, Ester tended to argue that, unlike when she was a child, she now understood the importance of school. A woman I interviewed in Tanzania (Vestina, already mentioned in the section 'restriction on mobility') in reference to formal school told me: "Honestly speaking, I never liked school but I can encourage myself that even a big bamboo tree started as a smallest one on the ground". These statements also make me think about how much women were influenced by my presence. The fact that I had attended the University and was a foreign researcher led them to justify themselves in explaining why they did not consider formal school as a valid opportunity for their future. The point of view of domestic workers

about formal education is flexible and may change from moment to moment. In the following passage Vestina asserts that when she migrated and started working in town she did not wish to attend formal education (she completed Standard 4, the fourth year of primary school in Mwanza region). At the same time she reports that her "educated" [39] employers never kept their word, they never sent her to school:

> But my boss is educated enough so she can be kind enough to send me to school after working for a while. She once promised me that soon after arriving to her house I would be sent to school but since I arrived here… 2013,2014,2015…To date they didn't sent me to school and I am still working (Vestina, 20 years old, 11/10/19, Morogoro, Tanzania).

Her point of view on formal education changes during the course of her narrative, as well as her wishes and ambitions which largely depend on the actual available opportunities. Her perception of formal education is clearly influenced by the environment in which she is living and working. Indeed she says that sometimes she is jealous of her friend Zulfa who is currently going to school. She often feels left out in the household where she is currently staying, since everyone tends to value school and talk about school, and the youngest people in the house (except for her) go to school.

> Because right now everyone is going to school.. everyone is trying to increase the education level and I am bit jealous when I see Zulfa going to school. Also where I am staying (in the household where Vestina lives and works) they always talk about school...school. I really wish to know how to speak English, how to write, I really wish to be a tailor, I want to work with so many people…

From her words it is clear that she feels constrained in the environment in which she lives and works. She doesn't know clearly what opportunities she might aspire to, but she would like to travel, meet people, speak English with foreigners. All movements that are precluded from a life confined to the domestic environment. When I met Vestina she was attending a one-week training course organized by the Morogoro TVET in collaboration with CVM. She finally maintains that time is running out: "I am getting older and there will come a time when I won't be able to work as a domestic worker anymore". She would like to attend a tailoring course which might allow her to leave domestic work and shift to another job. Yet her future choices depend on the opportunities available in town, as she points out: "I am fed up with this work but I can't totally fed up if I have nothing else to do."

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[39] Both her female employer and the husband work in a national farmer organization (MVIWATA). She works as nutrition officer, while he leads agricultural projects.

Unlike the examples reported so far, in other cases women emphasize the fact that before migrating to town they strongly wanted to pursue their formal education, but several constraints made it difficult for them to do so. In some cases they were taken out of school by their parents or other adults, especially when the school was too far from their house. For instance Magreth (Tanzania) recounts that after her sister had a premarital relationship and got pregnant her father forbade other daughters to pursue their education. As she puts it:

> My elder sister went up to secondary level, but when she reached Form 4 she got pregnant.. so from that moment my daddy vows that he will never send his daughters to school. So I came here to work because I needed to continue my education (Magreth, 26 years old, 16/10/18, Morogoro, Tanzania)

Magreth was born in Morogoro region (rural area). She moved to Morogoro town at the age of 13, precisely because she wanted to attend school against the will of her father. Now she is 26 years old, she has worked as live-in domestic worker in several households during her life course. She has been able to complete her Primary Education in town and to attend the first three years of Secondary Education (Ordinary Level). When I met her she was working as a live-out domestic worker and she was also running a small by business, since she had been able to build her own poultry and she was selling chickens. In her narrative she recounts what happened when she decided to leave her home place against the will of her father. She emphasizes her ability to manage the situation. She describes the act of "escaping" or "running away" as a way to find a compromise between people who didn't want her to leave. In order to convince her father, she involved other people and somehow managed the situation. S

> There were two ways, a shortcut and a smooth road. I used the shortcut, my father used the smooth road. (…) My father went direct to the police station. So the police blocked me and asked me "why are you running away?", so I told them "My father didn't want to send me to school so I am going to town and I am sure that I will go to school there!" They asked me if I was so sure about going back to school and I told them "Yes I am so sure!" They took my statement. (…) They told my father to let me go, so we had an agreement and I came here... when I was here I found life tough and then I moved to another house.

Apparently, Magreth left her village entirely on her own initiative, against the will of her 'superiors'. But every time a woman moves to the city - whether against the will or with the approval of her family members – she eventually finds herself in a situation that confines her to specific care roles that somehow reproduce, albeit in different ways, the ones that she would have performed back home. Magreth convinces her father through the involvement

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of other people who act, one could say, as mediators or facilitators. But once in the city she found "life tough". The workload did not allow her to attend school. Over time, as they move from house to house, the situation of women can improve. But before reaching a bearable working and living condition (which was the one at the time of our meeting), they have to go through many forms of exploitation. In fact Magreth changed different households before she was able to attend the first two years of secondary education, and however, in the end she was unable to complete secondary school.

Let's now look at an example of an Ethiopian domestic worker. Yamrot describes how was the school in Lumame town (East Gojjam). I have mentioned Yamrot in the section 'avoiding marriage agreements' as well as in the section 'restrictions on mobility.' Yamrot left her village of origin when she was 12 years old. She has lived for five years with her older 'sister' (an older friend) who was living in Debre Markos town with her husband and children. For two years they all moved to Lumame town (about 40km from Debre Markos) where Yamrot attended her primary education. Similarly to Tanzanian domestic workers, Ethiopian domestic workers mention some limits of the educational system. In particular, Yamrot refers to the difficulties faced by students who suddenly find themselves having to study in English despite having no English background.

> When I was in grade 7 we suddenly started to study all subject matters in English! But we were all weak in English...What is more, when the system was first introduced we were not given books.. the books were not published, only teachers were given teacher's guide books. So since it was hard they (teachers) did not put too much pressure on us, they simply got us promoted. But later we were the ones who got hurt! If we had money, we could go and copy the teacher's guide but student's text books were not distributed. When we reached grade 7… it was at that time that English became the medium of learning for all subject matters for the first time. Since it was introduced for the first time, teachers got us promoted without us acquiring the knowledge, to avoid questions like "why did you let them fail?". So later when we joined grade 9 we knew nothing… (Yamrot, 26 years old, 17/12/18, Debre Markos, Ethiopia).

While making a list of the school subjects that she used to like more, she goes on to mention some setbacks that slowed down her learning process.

> There were so many school subjects that I liked, for instance a subject matter called science and then society, I also liked civics but I didn't know English…I also used to like sport subject (…) You know from grade 5 to grade 8 my teacher was a blind one. He didn't write in blackboards and so I remained a dull. We couldn't take notes and cope up with the speed

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of his speech, (…) but the exam questions were prepared by English teachers so I remained unprepared!

As I will illustrate in the next chapter, for a series of reasons Yamrot decided to leave her sister's house and found a job as a live-in domestic worker elsewhere. She was able to complete the first two years of Secondary Education while working within a household in Debre Markos town, but a combination of difficulties and setbacks prevented her from further continuing her studies. Then she shifted from live-in to live-out domestic work with the aim to attend a TVET college. So both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, many domestic workers who are unable to access or complete formal schooling see vocational trainings as a good alternative.

There are also cases in which women leave their villages of origin precisely because they want to continue their studies, but they change their mind as soon as they arrive in town. Or they talk about school as the primary goal to be achieved in the urban context, but they also decide to postpone school attendance. This is primarily because usually female domestic workers are allowed to attend school in exchange for household chores, without receiving a monetary payment. For instance Alemtsahy (Etiopia) decides to postpone school attendance as a strategy to protect herself from potential exploitative situations in the workplace. After the death of her parents Alemtsahy had to drop out of school. At that time she was attending the last year of primary education in her home village, which is located about 30km from Debre Markos city. When she shared to her brothers and other relatives about her desire to pursue education, they helped her find a job as live-in domestic worker in Debre Markos. Yet as soon as she actually found a job she apparently changed her mind about school attendance.

> My desire was to go to school, I mentioned this desire to my nephew. He said to me "you should go and work in other people's house" (…) He came and advised me by saying "as long as God gives you health, you will learn. For now instead of working to get money, you should learn." I replied "This is nonsense! What if the owner says something bad to me? First let me save money, then I will learn". In fact, as my speculation (good sense) told me, the first time I started working in that house she (employer) seemed to be ok, but later on she totally changed her behavior… Then I cursed her saying "Die young!" After that I stopped learning but for the coming future I am planning to start. (Alemtsahay, 22 years old, 25/06/18, Debre Markos, Ethiopia)

In this case, that of postponing school attendance is a real strategy to avoid the risk of exploitation. Alemtsahay does not want to leave the workplace empty-handed. She

emphasizes that her good sense ("as my speculation, good sense, told me") has been vital to predict a negative situation and to avoid the risk of being cheated. Her decision to postpone school attendance is therefore part of her strategies to achieve her goals. As I will show in the next chapter, Alemtsahay has not continued her formal education. But when I met her she was attending a cooking training organized by CVM in partnership with local experts. Her ambition was to be hired in a restaurant.

The last example that I shall provide before concluding this section is that of Ketema (Ethiopia), already mentioned both at the beginning of this chapter and in the section 'avoiding marriage agreements'. Ketema has worked as a live-in domestic worker in several (kin and non-kin) households, in Debre Markos and also in Addis Abeba. In the following chapter I will show that she has passed through several exploitative situations in the urban area (mainly when she was working in Addis Abeba), but she has been also able to pursue the first two years of Secondary Education and to obtain a TVET certificate in town. When I met her she was even attending several trainings organized by CVM in partnership with local representatives. Let's see how Ketema describes the school in her village of origin, highlighting a series of shortcomings that led her to seek a better quality in town:

> For example considering the educational offer, we used to learn in shifts, the teachers used to come and go out of the classroom whenever they wanted to...they didn't give enough attention to students, they had that kind of tendency towards students that goes like "let the students learn if they want to, and if they don't want to learn, leave them alone". There was no a system of emphasis and control as there is nowadays in other schools in cities (…), there was no one to help you. The situation was like that: if a person has to be successful, he/she becomes so by himself/herself otherwise he/she remains a failure. (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18)

More in general, she argues that there was a big difference between the educational offer she found back home as a child and the one she later found in the city. She also lists a range of challenges she faced – from recurring headaches to eyesight problems - and that made it difficult for her to attend school regularly, both in the rural area and when she moved to the city.

> In the past I used to have headache whenever I got angry and frustrated, but since I am now settling down I am starting to feel better and better... Nowadays whenever I start feeling headache I go to *Tsebel* (holy water), but now I don't feel sick like in the past (…) I am now ok but during the time I was learning, even when I was in secondary school (grade 9 and 10),

I used to skip classes, I went out in the middle of a class session, because the headache was beyond what I could endure (…) I couldn't attend school regularly.

Ketema recounts that after secondary school she did not get the minimum grade to continue in the upper-secondary level and so she decided to enroll in vocational programs (specifically, a TVET training program in the field of building construction). Since she did not have the financial capacity to pay tuition fees she started working in the household of her relatives in Debre Markos who offered her education in exchange for household chores. At that time, Ketema's parents and other siblings had left their village of origin and moved to Morogoro town, but they were actually living in the outskirt of Debre Markos, in the rural area. The long distance between her parents' house and the TVET college further pushed her to move to her relatives' household where she performed domestic work.

Unlike her sister who got married, Ketema attempted to continue her education by working as a live-in domestic worker in the city. She quarreled with her parents who wanted her to marry and accused her of not following their advice.

accused me saying "you are out of our will, you don't abide by our will"... This was what they wanted while what I want is to learn.. but to learn I had a shortage of money...the choices I had were between to accept the wish of my family and get married or follow my own choice (to be employed, earn money and further continue my education)…and when you go with your own choices you face a lot of challenges…I had nothing at hand!

In her role as a young daughter, Ketema might have difficulty in expressing personal preferences, desires and plans which apparently lead to more individual objectives. As she puts it: "the choices I had were between to accept the wish of my family and get married or follow my own choice…and when you go with your own choices you face a lot of challenges." As I will show in the next chapter, Ketema started working for a household in Addis Ababa, but the employers duped her. She did not receive a salary, nor she was able to attend school. When she managed to change household, back to Debre Markos, her condition improved slightly. When she then came into contact with CVM she became one of the most active members of the Domestic Workers Associations. In fact, she is one of the few women interviewed who has known CVM for more than three years. She values the urban area as the environment that, step by step, would allow her to slightly expand that limited slice of aspirations that we tend to define as 'individual', as I have mentioned in the section "which freedom?". Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, we also find cases where migration of women was strongly supported or mainly taken by their parents who wanted them to start or continue their education in schools of higher quality. There are also cases in which the decision to

leave the village was taken by adults without the will of their daughters. In any case, most of the time women report that they have 'high' expectations of their future life in town. But these expectations must always be understood within that larger space of social obligations, gender norms and reproductive roles that I mentioned in the section "which freedom?". Again, women cannot disengage completely from that sphere, nor do they conceive freedom in terms of disengagement from it.

5.8   Conclusions

In summary, the motivations that push women to migrate are not easily captured in one dominant representation. Different motivations coexist and characterize the experience of every single woman and I have tried to highlight them by drawing on the specific background of each individual, through the analysis of domestic workers' narratives. Nor can the act of migration be easily categorized as a decision made by the women or by other people for them. Our perception of individual choice should be placed in a context where the 'individual' objectives - as we usually call them - are not detached from the broader set of collective objectives of the household/family/community to which domestic workers belong. More precisely, women's ambitions are not detached from the reproductive sphere (the space of care work) to which they are confined during their entire life, whether the live and work in their villages of origin or in the city of destination. Since women cannot completely free themselves from that sphere of care work, it is precisely in that sphere - made up of relationships of domination and subordination - that they seek protection, despite the risks, the experiences of exploitation which that space entails. I have illustrated the narratives of 'lonely women' (Barrera 2011) or 'orphan' women, a term which - as I have adopted it - does not necessarily refer to the loss of biological parents. Many women are 'orphans' because they do not have a solid support network in their villages of origin. In contexts of poverty and structural violence, these women lack or have lost the support of people who were supposed to take care of them, no matter if they are biological parents or other people in the community of origin. And so, where do these lonely, or orphan women seek protection? In the city, but always within the sphere of care work, performing domestic work within urban households. In that sphere, perhaps they might also carve out an alternative space - albeit limited - for the achievement of what we tend to call 'individual' objectives and ambitions. Female workers aspire, therefore, to slightly expand the space of personal ambitions which remains however bound by the wider space of care roles to which they are confined 'for the sake of the family'. At this point, what happens when the women arrive in town? How did

their life turn out to be after migration? I will explore this and other aspects in the next chapter.

6 LIFE IN TOWN.
"AN THEN I MOVED TO ANOTHER HOUSE".

In this chapter I shall explore what happened when women reached the cities of destination. By following women's narratives, I will also refer to their previous work experiences in other towns and cities, before moving to Debre Markos in Ethiopia and Morogoro in Tanzania. The subtitle "and then I moved to another house" refers precisely to the fact that during their life course women encounter many risks, and continuously move from house to house in search of better living and working conditions. Two questions arise: how did women's lives turn out to be after migration? and how can we define domestic work in this context?

When I met them, the majority of women I interviewed were working as live-in domestic workers in Debre Markos (Ethiopia) and Morogoro (Tanzania). Yet If we look at the previous chapter, it is clear that for many women this was not their first migratory experience. Many women had moved – often since their childhood - from house to house, from villages to towns, from towns to cities. As for the women's childhood, I was able to observe this aspect especially in relation to Tanzanian domestic workers. Tanzanian women originated from different regions of the country, and during their life course moved to different regions scattered across the country. In Tanzania the placement of domestic workers within the households largely depends on a series of factors such as their tribal background,[40] ethnicity, clan and sub-clan groupings (see Klocker 2007, p. 89; ILO 2016, p. 115). When placed in specific contexts, the distinction between these terms is hard to disentangle, in fact these terms tend to be adopted in an unclear and indistinct way in studies (see Declich 2002, pp. 31-32) . In my work I couldn't adequately understand and deepen

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[40] Natascha Klocker (2007) notes that he term tribe is widely used in Tanzania in a non-pejorative manner. The term ethnicity and tribe have separate meanings in Tanzania. Indeed, the term tribe has a more specific and localized meaning. However, we should consider that the meaning of words such "tribe", "clan", and others, is often unclear. In much literature about Africa the concept of "tribe" or "clan" has been criticized precisely for being imprecise, inadequate, with negative evolutionary connotations, and a result of colonizers' constructions (see Southall 1970). In the 1970s, the term "tribe" – which was too often used to assume the existence of well-defined borders – began to be replaced by the broader term "ethnic" in anthropological studies on Africa. Among the different approaches, Arnold Epstein (1978) considered not only the political and situational aspects of "ethnicity", but also individual elements under certain circumstances (see Declich 2002, pp. 31-32).

these aspects which would require a specific study on households composition and structures, as well as the involvement of various rural and urban households members. But in the previous chapter I have illustrated, for example, the case of Sara and Beatrice who - since when they were six or seven years old - moved from house to house and worked in several towns. In some circumstances they also assisted their relatives in running small businesses such as a grocery and a restaurant, as I will further illustrate in this chapter. But at some point in their lives they both found a way to leave those households and moved to Morogoro city (where I met them), where they found a job as domestic workers with remuneration.

Unlike Tanzanian domestic workers, most of the women I interviewed in Debre Markos – who left their villages around the age of 12 or 13 – originated from the Amhara region and tended to move within the Amhara region.[41] They moved to other towns in East Gojjam (of which Debre Markos is the capital) and to larger cities such as Bahir Dar (the capital of the Amhara region). Many Ethiopian women during their life course have also worked in Addis Ababa (the capital city of Ethiopia) which is perceived as a possible springboard to access new job opportunities in the city or find a job abroad. But aside from Addis Ababa, the women I interviewed in Debre Markos have not moved outside the Amhara Region. Obviously we must consider the limitations deriving from ethnic differences across the regions, but also the problem of linguistic differences in the different areas of the country. The latter problem is less present in Tanzania, where different regions speak the shared Swahili language as their first language.

However, both in Ethiopia and Tanzania domestic workers started working within households which were somehow linked to their communities/families/households of origin. It is not easy to identify and disentangle the various forms of hosting by pseudo-parents, parents, friends, acquaintances and also peers, as well as the diverse forms of domestic work in which women were involved during their life course. Creighton and Omari (2018) show the wide variety of household compositions in Tanzania, where individuals - as in other African countries - frequently change household and household members temporarily migrate. A huge variation of household behaviors exist across ethnic groups, religions,

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[41] The women I met in Addis Ababa came from different areas of the country. See for example Zebenneth, from Keffa zone (south-western Ethiopia), mentioned in the previous chapter (see the section "Premarital pregnancy"). But my dissertation work focuses most of its attention on the experiences of the women I met in Debre Markos (where I spent most of the fieldwork), with whom I was able to deepen a relationship and whom I was able to interview several times.

lineage, local customs and region (Van Aelst, 2014, p. 9). Migrants are at the core of issues of multilocality and translocality, they may contribute to the continuity of different social and kinship links between different spaces through their migration (E. Razy & Rodet 2016, p. 5). At the same time, they can use migration as a means to pursue their own aspirations for education, employment and independence (Hepburn 2016, p. 70). The prospect of upward social mobility might take centre stage in women's migratory path, which can be understood as "a long process of being in transit" (Thorsen 2006, p. 107). As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the main aspirations to social mobility for a "lonely" (Barrera 2011) or "orphan" woman who does not have enough support in her village of origin, might be a relationship with a wealthy person in the urban area who could provide a sort of protection that she is lacking back home - exploitation notwithstanding. Many domestic workers also hope to find a more qualified job and start a new life in the foreseeable future. The chance to work in cities might be valued as a road that offers new spaces for action which would not have been available in the villages of origin, albeit under specific constraints and always within the inevitable reproductive sphere of care work that I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

In my study, many women interviewed in both countries started working for someone (kin or non-kin) who offered them accommodation and education in exchange for household chores, either in Debre Markos and Morogoro or in other towns and cities across the country. This first working experience was often without salary, and in several cases promises made about school were broken from the very beginning. The majority of women then moved to other households to work with remuneration.

In the remainder of this chapter I will try to define domestic work as it can be conceptualized from the experiences of the women I interviewed. In doing so, I will outline a number of unclear relationships between adults that influence the placement of the women in the city of destination (especially at their first work experience), as well as their working conditions as domestic workers. By exploring women's narratives, I will describe how female workers – who often lack a strong support network in their villages of origin - seek some forms of protection in the city, and in doing do, they move from house to house. Finally, I will shed light on the asymmetric relationships that domestic workers establish in the workplace, and how they describe these relationships. Their descriptions will ultimately allow me to shed light on the intertwining of power, domination, submission, protection and care, which characterize these relationships, and more in general, domestic workers' lives. To begin with, I shall illustrate different forms of engagement in domestic work as they have been

described in studies on domestic work in Africa, and then link the relevance of my research to these typologies of domestic workers.

6.1   Forms of engagement in domestic work

Scholars have identified various forms of engagement in domestic work in Africa. For instance Ina Gankam Tambo (2014), in her study on child domestic work in Nigeria, distinguishes between three types of child domestic workers: children who work for a kin; children who work in the household of non-kin; and the house-help (2014, pp. 208-9). In this context, *children who live and work for a kin* do not identify themselves as "house-helps". They live and work in arrangements similar to traditional Nigerian child fostering patterns of educational fostering. They do not receive remuneration, they identify themselves as "family members", and usually do not report forms of mistreatments and do not feel to be exploited. In contrast, *children working for non-kin* experience more exploitation. These children migrate and relocate to urban households, therefore extending traditional fostering arrangements to the work in non-kin households. The aim should be an improvement of children's social status, yet it is likely that they experience several forms of violations of their rights in the place of destination. Lastly, *house-helpers* feel opposite from those who work for a kin, and worse that those who work in the household of non-kin. They usually experience severe mistreatments by their employers, they assume an inferior role in the household and feel to be totally excluded from the employer's family. As the author explains: "child house-helps share a 'hybridization' in their self-identification, which turns out to be the translation of exploited fostered children" (*ibidem*, p. 209). The author argues that in Nigeria actors on different social levels tend to identify the arrangements of children working in their houses as traditional patterns of child fostering. The latter in Nigeria's precolonial times consisted in community based practices of child relocation regulated by customary law, and were generally accommodated in a given normative and moral framework. Yet in contemporary child work in Nigeria "the given working and living conditions at the host family contribute to the transformation of the child domestic workers' identity into a hybrid one. They have been relocated as a *working child* and not as a kin" (*ibidem*, p. 17).

Another example of categorization of different typologies of domestic work has been illustrated by Michael Bourdillon (2007) in his study on child domestic workers in Zimbabwe. The author lists four forms of engagement in domestic work: help in the home; helping kin; fostering; formal employment (2007, pp. 17-32). In Zimbabwe the work of *children who help in the homes* may include, especially in poorer families, hours spent

fetching water and firewood, cutting firewood for cooking, and other tasks which are essential to the running of the home. Well-off families may hire domestic help to minimize work in the home, while poorer families usually cannot afford outside help. The workload is particularly harsh for girls who perform a variety of tasks such as cleaning, washing dishes and clothes, cooking, fetching water, taking care of infants and sick people, while the work assigned to boys, like tending livestock, takes up less time and is less onerous.

Before moving on to the other forms of engagement illustrated by Bourdillon, let's try to see what "the work in the homes" might correspond to, in the contexts under my study. If we look at the Ethiopian context, and specifically the Amhara region where I was doing research, Eva Poluha (2007) argues that "children in the countryside start learning their gender-specific work and by the age of seven, girls are expected to know how to perform their tasks. They have their own earthenware small jugs (*ensera*) with which they fetch water. Girls also clean and grind crops, learn to spin and to help weeding the fields. Boys run errands and look after small animals and, as they get older and bigger, they also look after bigger animals. Around the age of 14 boys start plowing" (Poluha, 2007, p.183). In the section *work at home*, she points out that girls in both countryside and town are heavily loaded with work; they clean, cook and look after siblings. In towns, even boys might help at home, they might wash clothes and run errands of various kind. But the work given to boys usually takes much less time, as compared to that performed by girls. Moreover, "families who can afford a maid servant often encourage their daughters to study rather than to engage in household work" (*ibidem*, p.188), but it is very likely that also girls living in the urban area are heavily loaded with domestic work.

Also studies in Tanzania show that women perform most household work, they are responsible for a lot of agricultural work and care for the children (see Rwebangira, 1996). However, we should take into account that the gender division of labour within households may differ from context to context, and much depends on specific gendered meanings attached to given tasks, as well as local taboos and practices (Van Aelst, 2014, p. 32). For instance, studies in the Uluguru Mountains[42] (Morogoro region) show that domestic activities are exclusively carried out by women with the exception of shopping for domestic items like salt (which is shared between family members) and securing fuel wood (which is mostly done by men especially when fuel wood is fetched from a long distance) (Mollel &

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[42] During the fieldwork I stayed in a CVM guest house which was located on the outskirts of Morogoro city. It was close to one of the entrances of the path that allows tourists to hike in the Uluguru mountains to Choma Waterfall, and walk through villages.

Mtenga, 2000, pp. 76-77). Yet these findings contradict other researchers who point out that women do all domestic work, fuel wood securing included. Clearly, local practices vary. For instance, Mollel and Mtenga (2000) point out that in the (matrilineal) community of the Western Uluguru mountain (Morogoro) it is not uncommon for a man to carry a child on his back and fuel wood on his head while the woman carries the hoe. In contrast, in other (patrilineal) communities in Tanzania the same practice is considered improper. For instance, in Iringa it is a taboo, as the authors point out:

> Iringa farmers (patriarchal) were embarrassed to see their male counterparts of Tchenzemau carrying babies on their backs and fire wood on their heads. In Iringa it is a taboo for a man to carry a baby on his back. This is a women job. It is also unheard of for men to collect fuel wood, let alone carry it on their heads. If men in patrilineal societies were to carry a heavy load the closest they'll do is to carry it on their shoulders not on their heads (Mollel & Mtenga, 2000, p.77).

We must keep these considerations in mind because the content of domestic work, and the gendered division of labour, must always be placed in context, not only in a diachronic historical perspective, but also in a spatial dimension within the same geographical context at a precise historical moment.

Now we can move to the other forms of engagement in domestic work illustrated by Michael Bourdillon (2007), which come closest to an idea of domestic work as a (paid or unpaid) work carried out by a person who serves a given household. He mentions *helping kin*, meaning children who are sent to help relatives (2007, p. 19). A relative who needs help may ask their siblings to send a daughter to live with her to help (see Robson, 2000). Indeed, in an extended domestic arrangement children are considered as belonging to the whole extended family, and care for children is shared among several kin who take responsibility for them. Children might be sent to live with grandparents or other kin as part of a traditional system of socialization and strengthening bonds of kinship (see Alber 2004). Kin often define children working for them as family members, their work is not considered to be employment, and they often are recruited at an age younger than those who are formally employed (see Oyaide 2000). This types of arrangements may provide safety, care and benefits for needy children and the whole family, but this system may also result in children being exploited, as several studies in different African contexts illustrate (see for example Jacquemin, 2004; Tetteh, 2014). In given circumstances children may find their own lives shattered as a result of the arrangements.

Risks also appear in the *strategy of fostering* (Bourdillon 2007, p. 23). The movement of people between households is a strategy commonly adopted by poor households to maintain their livelihood. Children may be fostered with kin and non-kin people. In these arrangements children usually receive food and shelter in urban areas in exchange for domestic help. Yet the strategy of fosterage might also fit into a more general pattern of patronage, in which poorer individuals receive support and access to resources in exchange for service and loyalty (Bourdillon 2007, p. 24). People consider patronage as a powerful or well-off individual bestowing favours on disadvantaged persons. And so patrons can easily support and help clients as well as exploit them in several ways. Thus, "child domestic work mingles patronage with exploitation in ways that are not easily disentangled" (*ibidem*). For many children it makes sense to take advantage of the patronage, where their alternatives out of domestic employment are even worse. In some circumstances patronage turns out to be one of the few possibilities available to disadvantaged children for improving their conditions. In my study many domestic workers - who do not have a support network in their home villages – seek forms of protection that these practices could somehow provide them. On the other hand, foster care strategies seem to disclose economic and sociopolitical relationships between adults, in which the immediate well-being of children is not considered as a primary objective. Fosterage – here the distinction between the term "fosterage" and "domestic work" becomes blurred - therefore reveals its political function (see Bledsoe 1990, p.72), it is linked to political patronage and clientage, and reveals ambiguous power relations between adults.

Finally, Michael Bourdillon defines *formal employment* (ibidem, p. 27) in relation to those children who have a formal contract with an employer to work as domestic workers. They can work on full-time or part-time basis. Children may live with relatives they grew up with and spend a few hours in domestic employment within other households. Other children live with non-kin people far from their homes. Many children have chores that occupy the whole day, even more than twelve hours. In many circumstances they do not have time for other social activities or they are not allowed out the house where they work. Their status as employees is often disguised, as employers tend to fuse children's employment with the idea that they are family members who provide domestic help and receive support in turn. In some case, the exploitation of child domestic workers might rely precisely on such kinship construction which remains to the benefit of employers (Klocker 2011, p. 20). At this point a question arises: how to define domestic work in relation to the experiences of the women I met in Ethiopia and Tanzania?

6.2   How to define domestic work?

In my study, the forms of engagement in domestic work mentioned so far overlap and in many cases cannot be clearly distinguished. First of all, in my study I cannot make a clear distinction between those women who worked for relatives and those who worked in the family of non-relatives. In both countries, many women started working within households in the urban area which were somehow linked to their villages of origin. Women might have worked for both kin and non-kin people. Sometimes It was not easy to understand if there was a blood connection with people for whom they worked. For example, many Ethiopian women mentioned aunts, uncles and cousins as those who provided accommodation on arrival in Debre Markos. Yet despite the use of kinship terminology, in several situations these people were not related by blood (see Gelaye 1998). Studies of children's perspectives on family relationships in Ethiopia point out that children themselves, in their definition of family, map kinship ties (including siblings, parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles), as well as social ties of friendship, "everybody" who live apart and help each other (see Kassa 2017). The same happened in Tanzania where, for example, the term *baba* can be used for a paternal uncle as well as for a father, and the term *mama* can refer to a mother's sister or a mother, but these terms can also be used for other affinities and people who are not related by blood. Studies in Tanzania show that young, rural girls are commonly recruited by kinship or other filial affinities popularly known as *Undugu* (in Swahili, this word literally means 'brotherhood/sisterhood'). This notion has its roots in other African concepts extended to include not only blood relations, "but also those that share bonds of friendship, ethnicity and 'tribal regions'" (Kiaga 2012, p. 3). Moreover, linguistic studies on kinship terms in Africa point out that in some cases it is impossible to provide an exact translation which would reflect nuanced shades of local meaning (Kraska-Szlenk, 2018, p. 53). Therefore, women might work within domestic arrangements who were strongly linked to their communities and families in the villages of origin. But these bonds of relatedness might go beyond blood relations (Declich 2015, p. 628).

In my study, I would define domestic work as a set of practices of various types, through which women meet the social roles that the community (and the state) have placed on them: that is, the performance of that care work that allows the wellbeing, the development, the functioning and the maintenance of rural and urban household structures. In my study, a woman might have worked with no remuneration for someone (kin or non-kin) who offered accommodation and education in turn, or someone who needed domestic help due to difficult

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family circumstances. The same woman might have then moved to another household (of kin or non-kin) to work with remuneration. She might have worked performing domestic chores within the house, but also helping relatives or other people working in the informal sector, in running some kind of business or other activities which generate cash. In some cases women were given the possibility to go to school, sometimes regularly, sometimes two or three times a week. Sometimes domestic workers with remuneration were paid on regularly basis, other times they were paid only a few months in a year. In many cases, promises made to them about schooling were broken. In some cases, a paid live-in domestic worker lived and worked within a certain household a few days a week. During the other days of the same week she might have moved to another household, for example to help relatives in town with domestic help, in this case without remuneration. Thus, the same woman might have been involved in different forms of engagement in (paid and unpaid) domestic work, even during the same week. The different forms of domestic work emerge along the women's narratives that trace their life trajectories.

From now on I will illustrate, through the analysis of women's narratives, some characteristics of domestic work that I have mentioned so far. In the following section I will show the experiences of two Tanzanian women (Sara and Beatrice) who moved to other towns before starting working in Morogoro (where I met them). Their stories offer us an insight into the migratory and work experiences that precede the transfer of women to the cities where I met them. As I have already mentioned, unlike Ethiopian women, Tanzanian female workers had moved - since their childhood - across different regions of the country.

6.3   Before moving to Morogoro city

The experiences of the two women I will talk about have some aspects in common. Sara moved to her "aunt's place" in Dar es Salaam to enroll in a TVET basic course while assisting her aunt in household chores, as well as in running a grocery store. Beatrice moved to her "granny place" in Mpwapwa town to start her secondary education, while assisting her granny in household chores, as well as in running a small restaurant. In both cases, women's expectations about schooling were only partly met. And so I shall explore the factors that prompted them to move to Morogoro and start working as paid domestic workers.

The first domestic worker I'm going to talk about is Sara. I have already mentioned her in the previous chapter (in the section "family circumstances"). She grew up with and she was raised by different people, moving from house to house and from town to town (see Caplan,

2000): her biological mother in Dodoma region, two step-mothers (her father's wives) and other relatives in Kilimanjaro and in Arusha region, her aunt and uncle in Dar es Salaam. Before moving to Morogoro town she moved to her "aunt's place" in Dar es Salaam. She was living with her aunt and uncle, she assisted them in doing household chores and in running a small grocery shop. Meanwhile, she was able to attend a TVET basic course on hotel management. At that time, she had completed the last year of primary education but she had not passed the final National exam. Her father died when she was attending standard7 (the last year of primary education) nearby Moshi (Kilimanjaro region). It was then that she decided to move to Dodoma region, where her biological mother was living, and then to Dar es Salaam at her aunt's place. In Dar es Salaam, her uncle paid the first fee of the TVET college. However, the workload made it difficult for her to attend the college and study. After a while her uncle was no longer able to pay the collage fee and Sara found a strategy to continue her education. Indeed, at the grocery where she was working a man used to approach her and so she asked him a loan to pay the fee.

> I was working while studying, so I was very tired because as soon as I was out of class I was rushing home to do cleanness and after that I was rushing to the grocery. I was very tired and my aunt was not giving me money, even my uncle was no longer paying my college fee and so I was going to quit my studies. At the grocery I found a man who helped me, he gave me money. It reached a point where I had to pay another fee, I went home and informed my aunt but she said "I have no money". So I went to my man and asked for help, I told him to give me 50,000 TZS while I was looking for the rest (Sara, 20 years old, 15/10/18, Morogoro).

Later, Sara asked the man for money a second time. She needed the money to attend an internship organized by the college. When he refused, she threatened him saying that she would have left him alone. In this way she managed to get the money that she needed to attend a field training.

> He was surprised by my second request, he said "No", but I told him "if you don't give me money I will leave you for sure". So he gave me money and when I completed the field training I had to look for a job.

In some circumstances women may mobilize relationships with male partners to achieve their goals, they may negotiate new identities even by transgressing specific norms of 'proper' and 'respectful' daughters, and challenging normative expectations of 'respectability' (Harem 2004, pp. 211-212). At this point Sara had completed a three-months basic TVET training. But her ambition was to enroll in an advanced course in order to be hired at a hotel. Sara was able to convince her aunt - who didn't pay her for the housework

– to pay at least the first tuition fee. Her aunt at first agreed, but the relationship between the two gradually deteriorated. They started arguing very frequently and Sara's workload gradually increased. In Sara's account her aunt, who had been initially described as a caring person, gradually became the exploitative aunt. In her words: "From that moment she started to mistreat me, she was overworking me… she came and gave me money to pay the fee, but she started overworking me too much!"

When she realized that she was not able to attend an advanced course, Sara left her kin household. She moved to Morogoro city together with other two peers who started working as bar workers, while Sara found a job as a domestic worker through their help. The three of them always kept in touch with each other and helped each other financially through small loans. Sara used to send part of her salary to her relatives scattered around the country, by using the money transfer M-PESA. At the same time, she wanted to save money with the intent to pay for an advanced course at TVET in the future.

Interestingly, during the course of her narrative Sara refers to different people both as those who have exploited her in several ways, and as those who have helped her in case of need. For example, in the previous chapter I have illustrated that Sara referred to her aunt in Dar es Salaam as the one who helped her to avoid exploitative situations that she had experienced when she was living with her two step-moms in Kilimanjaro and in Arusha region. With the support of her aunt and uncle Sara was able to attend a training at TVET college in Dar es Salaam. But now we have a sort of reversal of that situation. Her aunt becomes the person who seems to hinder her life, the one who overworks her and does not allow her to pursue her education. The experience of Beatrice, which I am going to illustrate, has some elements in common with that of Sara.

As we have seen in the previous chapter (see the section "family circumstances"), similarly to the case of Sara also Beatrice (Tanzania) grew up with several people moving from house to house (in Dodoma region). When I met her she had been working as a live-in domestic worker in Morogoro town for six years. Before moving to Morogoro, Beatrice moved from her village to Mpwapwa town where she helped her relatives in doing household chores and running a small restaurant. With the intention of continuing her studies, she moved to the house of a woman that during the interview she called "grandmother", then "little grandmother" or "granny", the owner of a small restaurant. During the interview she claimed: "she is my grandmother", but then she specified that she was not the mother of one

of her parents, but rather "she is like a granny, my father used to call her aunt."[43] At that time Beatrice had completed her primary education and she wanted to enroll in secondary school. At the "granny place", during the day she alternated between doing housework and running the small restaurant where, however, another domestic worker also worked. But unlike what she hoped, in the city of Mpwapwa the amount of work did not allow her to attend school every day. She reached Form2 (the first two years of secondary education, ordinary level) and then she dropped out of school.

> I first worked at my Grandmother house. I wasn't paid at all because you know I was like in my home. We agreed that she would have sent me to school but later I had to quit because the environment was not conducive. The workload was heavy, I had no time to attend school lessons. At the beginning I used to work and go to school but it was very hard, I reached form2 but I skep many lessons. After form2 I had to give up. There was also another domestic worker, she used to work mainly in the restaurant while I was very busy in the house. So I had to wake up at 4:00AM, I had to prepare breakfast and other tasks the whole day (Beatrice, 24 years old, 21/08/19, Tanzania).

At the same time, Beatrice repeatedly claims that when she decided to move to Mpwapwa she was proud of this choice. It was an important step of transition in her life. As she put it:

> Because I was eager to depend on my own, so I decided to go, I said to myself "I can be able to work and attend school".

Like in the case of Sara, one of the reasons that prompted Beatrice to move to her "granny place" was to avoid exploitative circumstances that she had experienced while living with other relatives in Dodoma region. In particular, I have already mentioned in the previous chapter that she reported experiences of mistreatments at the hands of her aunt. With the support of her "granny" she was able to start her secondary school, although she could not attend classes regularly. Like Sara, Beatrice decided to move to another city and find a paid job when she realized that her expectations had been only partially met. She borrowed 40,000 TZH from other relatives and moved to Morogoro town, where I met her.

She described her choices, and in particular the decision to migrate and find a paid job, as part of her gradual transition into adulthood, which she defined as a gradual process of awareness.

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[43] See Iwona Kraska-Szlenk (2018) for specific examples of the multiple uses and meanings of Swahili kinship terms.

> Before that moment I was not payed at all, I was not fully aware of myself. So when I was fully aware of myself I moved to Morogoro, I said to myself "I want my own salary now."

When I met her, she had been working within the same household for six years. Her monthly salary was significantly higher than that of other girls interviewed. Only two women (Beatrice included) out of the total respondents earned 100,000TZS at the time of my fieldwork. Her salary had changed over time, it had ranged from 40,000 to the then-current 100,000TZS. With her money, Beatrice helped her relatives build a small house. Other women interviewed referred to her as a role model. Yet her expectations about education had been broken. She neither got the chance to continue the secondary school, nor to attend a trailoring course (one of her ambitions).

In the next section, I shall illustrate the experience of an Ethiopian woman who, before working in Debre Markos city (where I met her), worked in conditions of severe exploitation in Addis Ababa. Her name is Ketema.

6.4   Before moving to Debre Markos city

I have mentioned Ketema in several sections of the previous chapter.[44] Ketema worked as live-in domestic worker in several (kin and non-kin) households, in Debre Markos and also in Addis Abeba. While in some cases she was satisfied about her accommodation and she found new opportunities to pursue her education, in other cases she experienced harsh forms of exploitation. Unlike her sisters, she refused to get married and decided to pursue her education. After her primary education she moved to her kin household in the town centre, nearby a secondary school and the TVET college. She was able to complete her secondary education, yet at the end of the secondary school she did not get the minimum grade to continue in the upper-secondary level and so she decided to enroll in a two-years TVET course. After having completed a TVET basic training in the field of "construction", she moved to Addis Abeba through a distant relative of her father who linked her to a household in the city. Ketema was quite satisfied with her life in Debre Markos town, during our conversation more than once she defines her relationship with her relatives as a "child-parent relationship" meaning that she was treated with respect, as their own daughter. Her situation totally changed when she moved to Addis Abeba. On the one hand she claims that she felt forced to move to Addis, she had no alternatives when she refused to get married. As she puts it: "My cousin told me 'If you don't get married now, at least you have to contribute to

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[44] See the sections "Beyond the poverty discourse"; "avoiding marriage agreements"; and "educational opportunities."

the family livelihood, you can go to Addis and support your family'. He told me this and took me to Addis" (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18, Debre Markos). On the other hand she hoped to find new job opportunities in Addis Abeba. A distant relative of her father linked her to a household in Addis Abeba and promised to help her find a job in her field of study. Differently from what she expected, she ended up working as a domestic worker and she was never paid. In this case the relationship between her relative and the employers in Addis Abeba is not clear, promises about job opportunities were broken and Ketema found herself in exploitative circumstances. In her words:

> He (my relative) knew my employer in Addis. I went to Addis, I thought I could find a job since I had a TVET certificate. He said to me "you will find a job in your field of study, I will help you" but when I arrived there (in Addis Abeba) he put me into a work of house servant... I started to work but I didn't receive my salary. I never received my salary... When I asked the employer "what about my salary?", she said to me "your relative will give it to you" (Ketema, 28 years old, 19/12/18, Debre Markos)

Ketema spent two years in Addis Abeba working as a domestic worker and she never received her presumed salary. Initially, she accepted this situation because both her relative and her employer told her that this was only a temporary accommodation. She was told that, in the meantime, her relative would have found a good job for her.

While working as domestic worker, she had no freedom of movement. She spent the whole day doing household chores within the house, but she also thought that in this way she would have been able to save money. She thought she would have been given her salary before changing kind of job.

> I never left that house, I never went out from the compound. Even when she (the employer) needed to go to the market, she just went out by herself to buy and bring things. I didn't go out, I didn't see anyone, I didn't talk to anyone neither by phone nor in person... I didn't have a mobile phone at that time. But whenever I asked her (employer) "what about my salary?", she replied "I will give your salary to your relative and he will give it to you". So I thought, "I just have to wait a bit, I have to work hard and I will receive my salary". For me it was difficult to find another job on my own because I did not know anyone at that time, but my relative told me "you have to work there (in the house) for a while, then I will find a job for you, I know many people!" But in reality I was just locked inside that compound for two whole years (…) Once in a while, my employer and my relative used to call each other, I remember she said to him "Ketema is fine, she is ok!", and so on.. She used to speak to him hiding herself because she did not want me to use her mobile phone, but I used to hear their conversation hiding myself as well (…) I worked hard, I had no time even for church. But

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she (employer) used to go by car, she had a car and never walked on foot! She even went to church by car and never asked me "do you want to join us?" [45]

All the workload fell on her (Ketema), nobody helped her, but instead the household members gave her orders and scolded her if she did something wrong. Sometimes relatives or other guests came to the house and the workload became even heavier. In the household there were a woman, her husband and a 'daughter'. Ketema explains that the latter was not the biological daughter of her employers, but rather the daughter of their relative. Yet while she was always protected and respected, Ketema was exploited and all the workload fell. Ketema sought protection in this house, she hoped to be treated "like a daughter". But this never happened.

> There was no one who helped me. The family size was small, there were the wife, the daughter and the husband who used to came once in a while because he was always outside, he used to work in other cities I think. But sometimes other relatives and guests came in the house and the workload was heavy. They did not help me. So no matter if I had worked hard, no matter how many chores I had done, she (the employer) did not appreciate my work (…) It was very tiresome. For example I used to wake up at dawn, I woke up at 5:30 and I started working...I used to wash myself and then I started preparing breakfast. I cleaned the house and then it was lunch time, so I prepared lunch and after lunch there were dishes to wash, I did laundry, I cleaned the house again. I had to prepare dinner too, and you know they often asked different kinds of dishes for dinner, lunch or breakfast, while when I was living with my relatives in Debre Markos I was not used to cooking so many dishes (…) When I said to myself "now I have finished my work, I can rest" she (the employer) was there… she was waiting for me only to give me more work.

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[45] In Ketema's account, during her stay in Addis Abeba she was not given the chance to go to church. This element also recurs in the accounts of many Ethiopian women who complained they didn't have enough time to go to church (or they were not allowed to go). Yet in women's lives religion played an important role as a provider of mental support. They could rely on religious figures like saints and Mary, who can intercede with God on others' behalf. Interestingly, in the article *Vertical Love* (2016) Diego Maria Malara and Tom Boylston illustrate the strategies employed by people to attain a certain degree of purity which is hindered by a number of factors inherent to 'modern life', especially in big cities like Addis Abeba. As they put it: "One recurrent example of this was 'not having enough time' to dedicate to church attendance because of one's work or family duties. Seeking saintly mediation is then an act of humility, the acknowledgment of one's imperfection. It allows busy, troubled people, lacking the time or energy to devote to what they consider proper religious practice, to enlist protectors to compensate for their imperfections, and to seek forgiveness and redemption on their behalf" (Malara & Boylston, 2016, p.14).

Time is described as always suffocated by the increasing demands from her employer. Indeed, "time can be a subtle instrument of psychological and physical abuse against domestic workers, in the hands of employers" (Marchetti 2014, p. 126). Let's see how Ketema describes the female employer's attitude[46] towards her, the way she observed her, controlled her and was ready to condemn every little mistake. She compares her employer to those employers one hears about - especially on TV - when listening to the experiences of those who have worked abroad (especially in the Arab Countries) and points out that such behaviour is not typical of an Ethiopian woman: "she was not like an Ethiopian woman!"

> She used to stare at me with that kind of anger in her eyes… if she ever found a fault in my work, even though I had worked all day long, she considered as I had done nothing. She simply stared at me with that kind of contempt, even though I had worked until my very last potential she treated me like I hadn't worked enough. You know, her way of treating me was not like that of an Ethiopian woman! For example if you have seen a film or something on TV about those who work in the Arab Countries, you might see that those people (the employers) look at you differently from Ethiopian employers. And so she was acting exactly like them, she looked at me in the same way, with the same kind of anger in her eyes. Despite my hard work, her way of treating me was like that…

In a similar way, Ketema compared her exploitative condition at the workplace with those experienced by women who work in the Arab Countries.

> When I hear people who say "there are many kinds of bad things done towards domestic workers in the Arab countries", I would say that the situation in which I was in wasn't better…Even though I was working in my own country and I was speaking the same language of the employer, my situation was no better, not at all!

More than once, during the interview Ketema pointed out that her female employer had prejudices towards her. She treated her without respect, she undervalued her work and she considered her to be inferior to other family members. As a consequence, her freedom of

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[46] As many other domestic workers in both countries, Ketema's descriptions focus on the behave of the female employer. In contrast, male employers are rarely mentioned as, in domestic workers' accounts, they are often away 'on business'. As Ketema puts it: "The husband did not come often, he came once in a while because he used to work and live elsewhere. Perhaps he came… I think he just came once in six months to spend two or three days in the compound and then he left again! So it is hard for me to describe him". However, as I will show elsewhere in this thesis, when male households' member are in the house they are described both as abusive (the women recount experience of sexual abuse and harassment) and as channels of support.

movement was restricted and also the opportunities to talk on the phone with her parents back home were almost denied. For a long time Ketema endured this situation. After two years, when she realized that she would never receive her salary, and that there was almost no way out of that situation, she returned to Debre Markos. At this point a question arises: what kind of agreement was in place between Ketema, her family back home, the relative who found her work in Addis Ababa, and the family where Ketema started working? Why did Ketema find herself in a condition of such exploitation? Who was she deceived by? And who took advantage of this situation?

6.5   Unclear relations

There is an element that emerges from the narratives cited so far: those of Sara and Beatrice in Tanzania, and of Ketema in Ethiopia. In many domestic workers' narratives, the relations between women, their families left behind, people who helped them find a job, and people for whom they actually worked is not clear. Sara and Beatrice moved to their "aunt" and "granny" places with the intent to continue their education. Their expectations were only partially met, but at least Sara managed to attend a basic TVET course, and Beatrice started her secondary education (although she could not attend classes regularly). In these two cases, people for whom domestic workers worked were – in women's accounts – at the same time those who had given them new opportunities; and those who had hindered their plans. Promises were kept, but only partially, and so Sara and Beatrice decided to seek new opportunities in Morogoro. In the case of Ketema, someone took advantage from her work and she eventually found all her expectations unfulfilled. When we look at these unclear relations, it is often not easy to understand who obtained pecuniary gain on behalf of women, nor what kinds of agreements existed between the parties. In this section I shall explore these unclear relations by continuing to explore the case of Ketema in Ethiopia, and also illustrating the case of Margaret in Tanzania.

While working in Addis Abeba, Ketema did not receive her salary.[47] However, she was convinced that she would be paid sooner or later and she trusted what she was told in this regard. As she puts it:

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[47] Ketema was supposed to receive a monthly salary of 600ETB. The monthly salary of live-in domestic workers in Debre Markos ranged between 300 and 500 Birr, yet women who worked in Addis Abeba could aspire to receive a higher salary.

> You know, the employer made a deal with my relative so I don't know if she was giving him money and he didn't give me back.. I don't know, but for sure she told me "I will give your salary to your relative" and I didn't receive anything. When he said to me "there are plenty of jobs in Addis", I said "ok" (…) Because this relative of mine… he knew my employer in Addis (…) They made the deal for me, my employer and my relative. And so I thought "maybe this is a good time to go, I have to trust him" (…) I thought "maybe I am going to change my life and find a good job in a big city".

Ketema argues that also her parents were convinced that sooner or later she would be paid. In her view, her distant relative (in agreement with her employers) was the one who cheated her to gain her money.

> Even when my families here in Debre Markos wanted to know about my situation, about my safety, they used to call the relative who made me go to Addis… then he would call my employer to ask about me and this is how my parents were informed of my condition (…) He used to say "she is doing fine, everything is comfortable for her! And so perhaps after sometime I will send her to Saudi Arabia, I will help her find a good job there!" He used to fill them with a lot of lies…

As in the case of Ketema, many domestic workers in Ethiopia hoped that from Addis Ababa they could leave the country and work abroad. Hope pushed them to reach the capital city. In her narrative Ketema repeats several times, in a circular manner, what happened: the promise to receive a salary; the employer who told her she would save money for her. Then the disappointment, the employer who suddenly changed the version of the story, and Ketema who felt mad with despair.

> She (employer) told me "don't worry, I am saving your salary for you. I gave your salary to your relative so that you can save it through him" But at the end of my second year of work in that house I realized that I had been cheated… and then I felt like I was going crazy (…) after what she told me… she told me… when I said to her "now you will give me my salary and I will go back home", she replied "what salary are you taking about, have you been working in my house?" And then she told me that she had never given my salary to my relative and that there was no salary for me, she said "I know nothing about that". And then I got out of her compound, I got lost, I did not know where I was going… I did not know where to go, I lost my consciousness, I went insane...

At this point in the story a new figure appears: Dejere, the male relative Ketema was working for when I met her in Debre Markos. Ketema had worked within his household even before going to Addis Ababa. In her account, he saved her from her 'madness' and brought her back to Debre Markos. He is a relative from her father's side. As she put it: "he is my relative

from my father's side, he is the grandchild of our father's uncle. My father has a lot of relatives…" Ketema, and also her mother and sister which I had the opportunity to interview, often mentioned him as the one who 'saved' her. As Ketema's sister puts it: "he is the one who helped her when she was sick, thanks to him she recovered!" During the second year of her stay in Addis Abeba, when she realized that she had been cheated and that she would never receive her salary, Ketema started suffering from severe headache. In her account, Dereje was informed about this situation. He arrived in Addis Ababa and tried to understand what was happening. He took Ketema to the holy water center in the outskirts of the city, so that she could recover from her severe headache. Then they returned together to Debre Markos and Ketema took up working in his house, where she had worked and attended a TVET training before moving to Addis Abeba.

> When he arrived in Addis Abeba, he immediately took me to *tsebel* (holy water)[48], we stayed there for a while…He helped me wash in the holy water and then he brought me back to Debre Markos (…) I definitely left that house (in Addis Abeba) (…)When I think of it now, I think of that woman…she used to look at me like a devil. If you ask me now in which house I used to work, where that house was located, I don't know what to answer…and when sometimes I remember her, the only thing that I can say is "I lived with a devil for two years."

Once back to Debre Markos (and also at the time of our encounter), Ketema was working at Dejere's house. In her account, she now has more freedom of movement and no longer runs the risk of getting stuck within the house. Basically, her tasks consist in the housekeeping while the owners of the house are away for work. Moreover, she prepares food for them and she takes care of two children that spend most of the day at school. But Ketema doesn't work only at her relatives' house. Whenever possible, she visits her parents who live at the outskirts of the city, she looks after them by cooking for them and doing household chores in their house. As she put it, she usually goes "back and forth", moving from the house of her relatives to that of her parents, and vice versa.

The responsibility for what had happened in Addis Abeba was placed on the distant relative who found her accommodation in Addis for the first time. Ketema and also her mother and

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[48] In Ethiopia, *Tsebel* ('Holy water', blessed by the Ethiopian Orthodox church), is the site where spiritual cleansing services or baptism are offered by priests. Ethiopian domestic workers might have turned to the potential beneficial effects of *tsebel* to alleviate their illnesses. Informal shelters close to the holy water may offer temporary housing to women in distress, who are suffering from mental or physical illnesses.

sister claimed that they had been cheated by him. As Ketema's mother and sister put it, during a tape-recorded conversation in their house:

> *Ketema's mother*: He took her (Ketema) to Addis Abeba, everything was based on trust…we are all relatives after all…
>
> *Ketema's sister*: You know how rural people act…if they hear that there is a blood relation, they don't suspect at all, they trust people with blood relation…moreover, we all were leading our own lives, we didn't want her to go to Addis Abeba…but she suddenly went…
>
> *Ketema's mother*: You know, when she finished her schooling we said to her "get married", but she refused and she went to Addis. (…) We have a far blood relation with the person who took her. (…) When she finished grade 10 (the first stage of secondary education) and completed the TVET college in Debre Markos, he said: "I will find a job for her with the TVET training that she had completed". After that, when she was working in Addis Abeba (…) He didn't use to come and inform us about Ketema's condition (…) It's like he used to inform other people who in turn informed us. (…) And so these people in turn informed other people close to us (…) We don't have a mobile phone and so other people used to tell us "your relative said that she is fine" (…) But in the end he cheated us, he took everything she could have earned.
>
> *Ketema's sister*: He lied to Ketema and he lied to us. He said to Ketema that he would give her salary to us so that we could save her salary here, but he told us a different story. He told us "I have opened a bank account for Ketema, I have deposited her money into her account and so she is fine".

Again, relations between the parties involved are not clear. In revealing different conduits for girls' placement, some studies demonstrate that within extended family ties girls may by offloaded on a third party, pawning them to settle a debt (Bryceson 2019, p. 325). In some cases an extended family member may gain pecuniary gain as an agent, transferring the girl from her natal home to a well-off urban home (see Kippenberg, 2007). We might suppose that, for example, Ketema's family might have had outstanding debts with the man who sent her to Addis Abeba, and eventually he gained pecuniary gain as an agent. We might assume that this is the price Ketema had to pay for going against her families' wishes and refusing to marry. We might assume that Ketema experienced one of the few alternatives available to those women who challenge family expectations (as she didn't want to marry). But these are just suppositions, I could not verify if anyone knew the plans of that men or made an agreement with him. Everyone I had the opportunity to interview (Ketema, as well as her mother and sister) claimed that they had been cheated by him. In their accounts, he was the betrayer, Dejere was the saviour. According to them, he was living and working somewhere in the Amhara region but no one knew exactly where he was. As Ketema's put it: "We didn't

find out why he acted like this, he just disappeared and we have never met him again". I wanted to encounter other people, for example Dejere as well as Ketema's father, but they never shew up. However, we must consider what I have mentioned since the introduction of this thesis, and elsewhere in this chapter. That is, between the different parties involved there could be relations of patronage and clientage, socio-political and economic interests between adults who do not put the well-being of domestic workers as their primary objective.

Unclear relationships of this type also recur in the stories of female workers in Tanzania. In this regard, I would like to briefly illustrate the case of Margaret, a domestic worker whom I have never mentioned yet. When I met her, Margaret was 18 years old. She was born in a village located in the Iramba district, in Singida region of central Tanzania. She started her primary education in Singida but she dropped out of school when she was attending Standard 5. Indeed, at the age of eleven Margaret moved to Musoma city, the capital of Mara region in north west of Tanzania, around 500km from her village of origin. She reported that the decision was exclusively taken by influential adults. She didn't want to leave Iramba, but her relatives wanted her to move to Musoma. She was told that her aunt and uncle in Musoma could offer her a better education, and so a cousin from Musoma who came for a visit took Beatrice with him, they travelled together back to Musoma. Yet promises about school were broken from the very beginning, and Margaret remained for three years in Musoma without any chance to continue her education.

> They said "you will go to school", but instead they only made me work, I just performed household chores for three years… Three years without any sign that I might be sent to school (…) I was just working, cleaning the house, cooking, taking care of her child, washing clothes, fetching water, and so on. I didn't feel comfortable (…) I didn't know the city, my mother wasn't there and I was away from my friends. I didn't know why they (aunt and uncle) didn't send me to school, they didn't tell me the reason.. (…) For sure they were not facing financial problems, because you know they sent their children to a very expensive school! She had a huge shop and also her husband was a teacher before he passed away, so they were not facing financial difficulties (Margaret, 18 years old, 22/08/19, Tanzania).

Like in the case of Ketema (Ethiopia), Margaret argues that her parents weren't aware of the exploitative working conditions to which she was exposed in Musoma city, and in particular about the fact that she was not attending school. Like Ketema, she argues that she was not given the chance to communicate in some way with her family members back home. The latter were rather informed by her aunt. In Margaret words: "My parents were asking about my school progress since they were communicating with my aunt, but she was lying! She

told them that I was going to school!" Even in this case, the relationship between her parents and the relatives she worked for in Musoma is not clear. Margaret reports that for three years her uncles did not allow her to return back to Singida, despite the fact that "every day I was asking to go home". As she puts it: "she (aunt/employer) told me 'you will start school in a few months', and so I was waiting…" Margaret made the drastic decision to leave Musoma at the end of the third year, when she realized there was no possibility of positive change in Musoma. Moreover, in the meantime her father died and her mother in Singida felt seriously sick, and Margaret's goal became to find a paid job to help her mother afford medical treatment. Thus, after having spent three years in Musoma, at the age of 14, Margaret went back to Singida. After six months she moved to Morogoro city, where she found a job as domestic worker through the help of her 'sister' Adventura. The latter was a female childhood neighbour in Singida who at that time was living in Morogoro city.

In Morogoro town, Margaret started working within a household where she remained ten months and then she moved to another house, the one where she was working when I met her. She recounted that in the first house she was paid 30,000TZS that she was supposed to invest in the medical treatment for her mother. She didn't receive a salary in cash, but rather her employers used to send these money to her families in Singida (it is clear that there is always a link between rural and urban households). Margaret hadn't a mobile phone at that time and she couldn't communicate directly with her mother or other relatives in Singida, but she was usually informed by her employers about her mother's health condition. However, it happened that for some time she didn't receive news, and then one day her employers told her that her mother had died and that she had been already buried. In her account, in this way she was prevented from attending her mother's funeral, she was cheated as she was not paid, while her employers were pretending to invest her salary in her mother's health care.

> In the 4th month (of work) they (employers) were sending money back home, in the 6th month my mother was very sick so I had to send other 30,000TZS, and so they (employers) sent it. Then a month later, in the 7th month I was told again to send money, they sent it for hospital care, and so I kept silent, I didn't know that my mother was almost going to die…Later on I came to hear that my mother had died. They (employers) knew it but didn't tell me (…) My sister (her friend Adventura) informed her (employer), but she (employer) didn't tell me anything, she informed me only later when my mother had already been buried.

Also in this case the relationship between Margaret's employers, her relatives in Singida and Adventura is not clear. Her friend Adventura helped Margaret find a paid job as live-in

domestic worker in Morogoro town, where she was working as well. Margaret's employers didn't pay her directly, but rather they used to send her salary - to be invested in her mother's care - back to Singida (money was sent through a mobile money transfer service). According to Margaret's narrative, when her mother passed away Adventura informed her employers in Morogoro, but they avoided to inform her precisely to continue not to pay her. Adventura, which I had the opportunity to meet and interview, reported a similar side of the story. She argued that she was shocked when she realized that Margaret was not aware about her mother's death. After this inconvenience, Margaret decided to leave her position and she found another household where to work.

As soon as she left that house, Margaret stayed for six months with Adventura who was living with her three children. When I met her, she had been working for three years in the same household. Her working and living condition had slightly improved. In fact Margaret had the opportunity to attend a two-week TVET training organized by CVM in collaboration with the Mikumi TVET college. Her future plan was to save some money in order to attend a specialized cooking course in the future, so that she could find a job in a restaurant. Two or three times a week she helped her friend Adventura with the housework and took care of her children.[49] Margaret was investing the rest of her monthly salary in basic daily expenses, as well as to support (but not on regular basis) other relatives in Singida, and in particular three younger sisters who were living there. In her account, her relatives in Singida were supported also by another sister who was working as a domestic worker in Dar es Salaam. Margaret also had two brothers who were working and living in Morogoro town. Unlike her, her brothers were not contributing to the school costs of their sisters, nor to the well-being of other relatives in Singida because – as she put it – they were married, they had their own children to think about. I never got a chance to meet them.

From the narratives mentioned so far it emerges that domestic work in the city exposes women to many risks. Particularly at their first work experience - when the placement of the women in the city often depends on unclear agreements between adults – domestic workers might find many of their expectations unsatisfied. Therefore, during their life course domestic workers in both countries move from house to house, from city to city, in search of better living conditions. Women develop strategies to identify themselves - through a

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[49] At the time of my fieldwork Adventura had three children, she was living with them in a small apartment, while the children's father had abandoned them. She was alternating between part-time (live-out) domestic work and work at a stationary shop.

complex network of personal contacts - new households where they can work. As I said elsewhere in this thesis, female workers - often women without a strong support network in their villages of origin - seek some form of protection in the city. Ketema and Magreth found only exploitation, at their first work experience. This is why they then decided to leave the households where they were working under exploitation, and sought protection elsewhere. Ketema left Addis Ababa and returned to Debre Markos; Magreth left Musoma and moved to Morogoro. In the next section I would like to shed light on this continuous "search for protection" that characterizes the migratory paths of the lonely/orphan women. I will do this by illustrating the case of Bezoio (Ethiopia) and Magreth (Tanzania). Interestingly both women, while moving from house to house, establish interesting relations with their female employers, who are sometimes referred to as protector "mothers", and sometimes as "exploiters".

6.6   Seeking protection in the city

The first experience that I will illustrate is that of Bezoio, an Ethiopian woman who I have never mentioned in my thesis yet. When I met her, Bezoio was 20 years old. She is from a village in West Gojjam, about 150 kilometres from Debre Markos. Her parents divorced when she was a kid. For some years she grew up with her mother in her natal village, but when her mother became mentally sick she moved to another village, where her father and his new wife were living with their children. Her father owned land and wanted her to get married, but she strongly wanted to continue her studies. In her narrative, at the age of 9 or 10 she left her village without informing anyone in order to avoid an arranged marriage. At that time she had attended two years of primary education, but she used to attend classes only occasionally. She argued that her older siblings, with whom she shared both mother and father, had left the home village when their mother got sick. Three of them were in Addis Abeba, other two in different cities that Bezoio didn't know. They were not in touch, she didn't give me further information about them. Bezoio nostalgically remembered when she used to live with her mother, before the latter got sick.

> My mother told me: "I am now sick, but you must be strong", she used to advise me as such. My mother was the one who nurtured me...I came to my father place afterwards (…) because my mother was not in a good condition to protect me, so I had to live with my father and his wife (Bezoio, 20 years old, 21/11/19, Ethiopia)

This is one of the few cases in which a domestic worker emphasizes the fact that nobody – neither relatives, friends, or other acquaintances - was aware of her plan to "run away". In her words:

> I was very young, my father owned lands, and so to avoid the confiscation of these lands he wanted me to marry a man (…) so that he could still possess one of his lands by transferring it to my name. At that time, the only choice I had was to run away. I didn't tell anyone, instead I just ran away... I told my father that I wanted to visit my mother, I hopped into a minibus and I immediately came here (Debre Markos)

The short journey to Debre Markos is fraught with risks for a girl traveling alone. But for a lonely girl any encounter is potentially both a channel of risk and of protection. On the way, several people tried to approach Bezoio and talked about job opportunities. They told her that they would take her far away (for instance in the Afar region) to work, but Bezoio told everyone that she was going to visit her families in Debre Markos. In her narrative she mentions "people inside the bus". Only in one circumstance the translator (the one who translated and transcribed the recorded interview from Amharic into English) adopted the term *dalala* (in Amharic "broker").

> When those people who were in the minibus asked me "where are you going?", I said to them "I am going to visit my family" (…) A lot of people who asked me "where are you going? shall we take you to Berhale?" (in the Afar region, north-eastern Ethiopia) (…) There was also a woman, she said: "there is the son of my uncle here, you can go and stay with him". But I blocked all of them saying "oh no, I am just going to visit my family". There were brokers, there were many people inside the bus who said to me "let us take you far away with us".

Bezoio went on with her story, she described in details what happened when she reached the place of destination. She felt scared, lost and confused, her body shook, she didn't know what to do. But there was a woman in the bus station, a woman with the appearance of a respectful person. This woman stared at Bezoio, and Bezoio stared at her in turn. They talked each other, Bezoio confided to her having left her village to avoid an arranged marriage. This woman scolded her, she argued she should never leave her family as nowadays life in the city is beset with risks. Eventually, she became Bezoio's employer. This is one of the few cases in which a domestic worker started working for a person who (seemingly) wasn't linked to her village of origin. As she put it:

> When I arrived in the bus station, I got scared and frustrated...I was in panic, I wondered "where am I going?" I mean I felt like I was in a foreign country, a village I didn't belong

to, where everything was totally different from what I used to. When the bus just arrived in the bus station and everyone was told to get off the bus... at that time my entire body was shaking. Then I got off the bus, a woman was staring at me, I stared at her in turn. She later became my employer (…) When I saw her face and other physical features, she was that kind of person that you just judge to be a good person. And so I approached her, I said to her "I came here because of this reason, so do you want me to be you house-maid?" Then she replied to me "no, I am not from this place". I replied "if so, it is ok." And after having said this I started looking around… Meanwhile she continued to stare at me. I was physically very young and my outfit was that of a child...and so I think she got frustrated, and perhaps she said to herself "what happed to this child?" Then she called me back, but I couldn't hear her and I was already at the gate of the bus station, just about to go out...she called me back so loudly a second time, I turned around and answered "yes..." Then she asked me "why did you come here and where are you going?" I replied to her "I just quarreled with my stepmother and my father who were forcing me to get married. I run away for this reason". She was largely shocked, she uttered "by the name of the Lord, how can you do this in these days? Humans are monsters nowadays...whatever a family does against you, it is better to live with them...you chose to run away from your family and join the monsters!?" She uttered "oh Lord" and she scolded me very much....then she said "anyway, I live in another district, do you want to stay here or you want to come with me?" I replied "no problem, I will come with you." Then she took me with her...

The interpreter has transcribed - listening to the recorded interview - the way in which Bezoio describes the encounter with that woman. It seems that the girl and the woman are chasing each other. They approach and avoid each other with their looks, waiting for one of the two to say the right thing, in order to achieve their goal: to find a mother/employer; to find a daughter/domestic workers. Bezoio is looking for that protective mother who got sick in her home village. She is looking for a new mother in the city.

And so at the age of 9 or 10 Bezoio started living with and working for this woman who offered her education in exchange for domestic help. She reached grade8 (the last year of primary education), then she moved to another house since her employer was no longer willing to send her to secondary school. Bezoio changed several households, she also left domestic work to work as a daily labourer, but when I met her she was back to the first employer's house. She described her first employer as a loving, devoted and caring woman ("she was that kind of person that you just judge to be a good person") who helped her continue her studies. Then she described her as the one who hindered her plan to attend secondary school, a reason why she left her household. But at the end of the day - after having experienced several challenges as well as alternative work experiences as daily

labourer - she returned to her, the only one she could rely on. As she put it: "she was the one who nurtured me." In doing so, she followed the advice of people she made friends with over the years. After having completed her primary education, Bezoio visited her father and stayed with him for a month. And so even if Bezoio had "run away" to escape an arranged marriage, her migration didn't lead to a total rupture in family relationships. However, both her father and stepmother didn't appreciate the fact that she was studying, and so she left again. In her view, her stepmother turned her against her father because she feared that he would invest money in the education of Bezoio, rather than in her children's needs. Bezoio borrowed some money from her father and moved to Debre Markos. That was the last time she met him.

Once back to Debre Markos, Bezoio lived in a rented room that she found through the help of her classmate. She didn't want to work as a domestic worker anymore. Her main goal was to continue her education and she didn't want anyone (employer) to stop her. Thus, she started selling *kubet* (dung or manure) while attending school. She found the support of other people who helped her achieve her plans. Her classmate helped her find a room with good neighbors, her female neighbor who lived in the same compound taught her how to dry and sell the *kubet*, and sometimes shared food with her. This female neighbor is the second female person Bezoio describes as a protective figure. As she puts it: "She (her neighbor) sometimes interrupted her work to teach me how to dry the *kubet*, she used to say 'you should never give up'. And whenever I didn't have something to eat she brought me some food". Bezoio continued to live in this way for five months, but then she had to quit. The profit was not enough to survive and attend school regularly (which was her main ambition). Nonetheless, in her narratives she emphasized that for five months she was able to live an 'independent' life: "I was able to attend school regularly. I bought an exercise book, a pen and other materials by my own, but I didn't buy my uniform because I already had the one that my first employer bought for me". She soon ran out of money and shift to live-in domestic work. She found a female employer precisely while selling *kubet* at the market. This woman convinced her about the advantages of working as a domestic worker in her house. She promised her that she would send her to school and invited her to live in her house, rather than stay 'dirty' and lead a poor life without anyone's protection. Here is the third potential female protective figure. As Bezoio put it:

> I met my employer while I was selling *kubet*. She wanted to buy it and we started a conversation. She said "I live around this village" I replied "I thought you lived far, but I do know your village, I used to work as a housemaid there." She asked me "who did you work

for?"...I replied " this woman "...then she asked "so why did you get out of her house?", I replied "just because she lacked financial capacity to let me attend school." She asked "and so now you don't want to get hired in other peoples' house?" I replied "I don't want, I just want to learn, I know I might face challenges but since I am still young my troubles will be over tomorrow…if I work in other peoples' house, that work might have a bad impact on my education". Then she said "dear I will not hurt you because I have sisters who are motherless like you, and I will not hinder your education. So instead of learning while being dirty as you are right now, why don't you learn while working for me? You can attend school, there is no way I can hurt you, so please come with me".

Later on I realized that this woman was from the same home village of Bezoio's father (Bir-Sheleqo in Gojjam). At first Bezoio seemed to get along well with this woman and her husband, but after only two months the husband began to harass her and she had to leave. This is one of the few cases in which a domestic worker reports that, after having experienced sexual harassment, her female employer didn't blame her for having provoked her husband. As previous studies on domestic work (in other areas across the world) have noted, the veil of silence often surrounding sexual violence reflects the difficulties women face in reporting such incidents, which are further compounded by the fact that this form of violence might be closely linked to the country's slave-owning past. That is, sexual violence tends to be naturalized and incorporated into common knowledge, and female domestic workers are often considered "responsible for men's behavior, reinforcing the idea that men simply *react* to the sight of sexually provocative bodies" (Ribeiro Corossacz 2018, p. 398). Yet silence might also be a strategic response of resilience, rather than a denial of violence. And so we have "a silence of omission that does not recount certain events, and a silence of allusion that hints at them but without a precise description" (*ibidem*, p. 396). Bezoio's description seems to reproduce a silence of allusion.[50] Overall, both in Ethiopia and in Tanzania domestic workers - in their narratives - tended to justify the behavior of men because it was considered pertinent to their nature. They focused more on describing how female employers reacted to these situations. Usually in these circumstances domestic workers had no choice than leaving their jobs without receiving their final month's pay, and they often were fired

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[50] We must consider that the issue of sexual violence is very delicate to deal with. I have always avoided asking direct questions. Experiences of violence gradually emerged over the course of the narrative, often through vague, not explicit descriptions. We should always take into consideration the structural conditions of the ethnographic encounter, doing our best to respect the emotional state of the women interviewed (Ribeiro Corossacz 2018, pp. 390-391).

by their female employers. But in this case Bezoio felt the emotional support of her female employer. Again, the latter is described as a caring and protective woman.

> And when his wife started to understand the situation she felt so bad...I am sure she used to love me a lot...I mean, she used to understand my strong desire to learn (pursue her education) and everything else...for this reason she used to help me in different ways. We separated because her husband bothered me, but before leaving I told her the truth. I explained how much her husband tried to hinder my life and how much I was fighting within inside because I didn't want to hurt her feelings (…) then I got out, but even after we separated she wanted to help me in some way…

Bezoio details the moment she confided in her female employer the week before leaving the house, she told her what had happened. This element does not recur in the majority of other domestic worker's narratives, where rather women tend to emphasize the conflicting elements between themselves and the female employers who see them as a threat. In many cases, female employers rejected workers' claims of sexual assault and tended to defend or justify their husbands, but this aspect does not recur in Bezoio's account.

> It was hard for me find a way to tell her what happened (…) During that week I felt lost in thoughts… She used to ask me "what is wrong with you? There is a problem?" I stayed for a week brooding over what I should do and I used to reply to her: "there is no problem", But after a week I decided to speak out. I said to myself "how long should I live in this way?" (…) I didn't want to tell her about what happened but she held me tight saying "what is your problem, has someone done something to you?" (…) She held me in such a way…then I said to her "I just didn't want to tell you, but your husband is doing such things..." he tried to damage me several times and I passed that situation and now…at last he planned to do this, rape me...so.... And then she became so sad..."oh my Lord!" she said, "you are my sister and you will remain as such, I will account for his actions". She deeply felt bad...

Bezoio justifies the attitude of the man because – as she puts it – "this is a normal behavior that exists among men". With her words, she reinforces the idea that men are naturally inclined to react in a certain way when women are sexually seductive. This is especially the case if these women are their domestic workers, whose sexual harassment and rape in many contexts tend to be tolerated as a form of "sexual initiation" (*ibidem*, p. 398). Interestingly, Bezoio underlines her point while reassuring and comforting her female employer, as the following passage demonstrates.

> I started to advise her ""this is a normal thing, your husband didn't want to do what he did because I am more beautiful than you, but just because you know he thought "she is our

housemaid, she is very young so let me spoil her in one night" (…) This is a normal behavior that exists among men""…then she replied "ok! You are now my sister, you will always be my sister from now onwards, we will never be separated, I will support you with whatever you desire, I don't want you to get far from me"…we agreed and separated…

However, from that moment Bezoio and her female employer only randomly met. Their relationship was reduced to a few greetings whenever they bumped into each other: In Bezoio's words: "She didn't support me anymore. She used to say 'I will help you' but she didn't because I didn't go to her house afterwards. I greet her whenever I run into her but no more than this". The descriptions of the protective figures are therefore often ambiguous and fleeting. The same woman, within the same narrative, is described by Bezoio as a protective mother, as barely an acquaintance (almost a stranger). And perhaps the same woman goes back to being a protective mother at a later time, as I will show in the case of the first female employer that Bezoio met in Debre Markos.

While looking for another job, Bezoio moved back to the compound where she had lived for five months. A female teacher living in the neighborhood hired her as a domestic worker. She was the fourth potential protective figure. Bezoio worked in that house for one year. She faced several challenges and the workload didn't allow her to attend school regularly. And what is more, she again suffered harassment, and this prompted her to move to another house. Bezoio described her female employer in an ambiguous way. She initially described her as a respectable teacher, but later on she depicted her as the main culprit for her misfortunes. Unlike the previous female employer, this one didn't support her in the plan of continuing her studies. What is more, Bezoio argued that her employer was aware about her husband's aptitude, because he had already harassed their previous domestic worker: "the whole village knows this!" In her view, while her previous female employer wanted to protect her, this one took advantage of the situation to exploit her and make her a slave.

> She knew very well the behavior of her husband…because there was another servant before me, she grew up with them. The husband had had this servant as his second wife…the whole village knows this! (…) The wife herself brought her (the previous domestic worker) in the house as a victim (…) Thus, she (female employer) wanted me to stop my education, so that she could use me in her house, she wanted me to be her slave (…) The wife knew everything (…) it is something that she did intentionally!!

Again, Bezoio promised herself that she would never work as a domestic worker again. And so she started working as a daily labourer on construction sites. For two years, she alternated between daily work and school attendance. But she couldn't go on like this for long. Her

income was not enough to pay her room rent, and she couldn't attend school regularly. At this point Bezoio made a decision, following the advice of her schoolmates. She went back to the first employer. At this point in her narrative, Bezoio returns to describing the first employer as a protective mother. As she puts it: "she was the one who nurtured me", an expression that Bezoio had also adopted in relation to her sick biological mother in her home village. And so Bezoio moved back to the first employer's house. When I met her, she had been working in that house for two years. At the time of our encounter Bezoio was attending – although not regularly - grade 12, the last year of upper-secondary education. Unlike other women, her ambition was to enroll in the University, to become a doctor or, as an alternative, a lawyer. Bezoio's experience shows us that, paradoxically, women who are completely 'orphans' - completely lacking a support network back home – might gradually manage to carve out a space for action, and to find alternative forms of protection. In doing so, however, they run innumerable risks, from exploitation in the workplace to sexual abuse. Now, I will briefly illustrate the case of Magreth, a domestic worker in Tanzania whose experience has some traits in common with that of Bezoio in Ethiopia.

I have mentioned Magreth (Tanzania) in the previous chapter (see the section "educational opportunities"). She was born in Morogoro region (rural area, about 80 km from Morogoro town). In her account, she moved to Morogoro town at the age of 13 precisely because she wanted to attend school against the will of her father. Since her older sister – who was in secondary school – had a premarital relationship and became pregnant, her father forbade other daughters to pursue their education as a strategy to secure their integrity and virginity. At that time Magreth had just completed her primary education, but she had not passed the final National exam. And so she hoped to find both job and educational opportunities in the urban area. When I met her she was 26 years old, she had been working as a live-out domestic worker for about a year. During the previous years she had worked as a live-in domestic worker, moving from house to house like Bezoio and many other women in both countries. She started working within a household where a woman from her home village had previously worked. Once again, the link between urban households - where women move and work - and the rural ones is clear. Magreth worked for one year in that house without receiving the agreed salary. In her account, the female employer kept the salary with her. She told her she was saving her money, she would give it to her in the future. Yet Magreth never received her salary. She was living with her female employer and her two kids, plus other four kids whose mothers were living in other cities (Tabora and Dar es Salaam). The husband of her female employer was working in another city and they never met. Magreth

reported that before coming to Morogoro, she was told that she would have to take care of two or three kids. But when she arrived she found a different environment. The workload was heavier that she expected and she found herself jugging multiple tasks, ranging from household chores, cooking, washing clothes, and taking care of several children and other people who used to visit the house.

After one year Magreth moved to another house. She found the job through the help of her female neighbor, a domestic worker like her who put her in contact with a woman who was looking for a domestic worker.[51] Magreth worked for this woman for five years. Her employer was a widow woman who was working at the municipal office. She was living alone, she had children who were leading an independent life elsewhere. Magreth's employer was willing to send her to school, indeed Magreth reached the third year of secondary education, she attended school until when her employer passed away. Magreth describes this woman as a caring mother who cared for and loved her. As she puts it: "this was her desire. After having heard my story she decided to take care of me, she just loved me and sent me to school". At the same time, Magreth complains that her employer stopped paying her as soon as she started going to school. So attending school automatically excluded the possibility of receiving a salary. Just as in Bezoio's case (Ethiopia), descriptions of employers who exploit domestic workers alternate with those of employers who take care of them and support their ambitions.

When the employer died, Magreth soon found a new job with the help of a classmate. She found another caring female employer that she greatly appreciated. Yet, just like Bezoio, Magreth left that house when the employer's husband repeatedly tried to sexually assault her whenever his wife was out. Magreth describes in detail the strategies that the man repeatedly employed to achieve his goal, as well as those that she employed to work around the situation. But in the end she was forced to please him.

> When I woke up in the morning I found that he had left a pocket money of 35,000 TZS. I asked him why he gave me all that money. I tried to give the money back to him. He insisted that I should take money, but I took it and put into his bag. At night he came again and started knocking the door again (…) He came again, and again, I didn't open the door. When I woke up in the morning I found he had left money again. So at that point I started wondering:

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[51] Literally, the translator transcribed the recorded interview from Swahili into English "there is a mother without kids who needs a daughter", and then she transcribed in brackets "there is a woman without kids who needs a domestic worker".

"Why is this happening? This used to be such a comfortable place, why am I feeling so oppressed now?" In the evening he came again and forced me to accept.

As in Bezoio's case, in Magreth's account the neighbors were well aware of the man's behavior, as he had had the same attitude towards other domestic workers before her. Like Bezoio, Magreth eventually felt free to confide in her female employer and described the situation openly. But I want to remind here that - unlike these two examples (Bezoio and Magreth) - many women I interviewed in both countries described their experiences differently. They were often blamed by female employers for having provoked the husbands and were easily fired without receiving remuneration. In other cases, they left the households without reporting what happened, out of fear of the employers' reactions. In contrast, both Bezoio and Magreth described the latest dialogue with female employers as a 'romantic' farewell.

> When my boss (female employer) was back, I told her that I really liked to work there, I really loved her, but when she was away her husband harassed me so much, he forced me to sleep with him (…) And then she told me that she loved me so much and I was right, I had to go. She gave me permission to go, she gave me a bus fare to go back home. But since I had left my home village with a bit of misunderstanding with my father, in the end I didn't opt to return. I stayed in town, I found another job, I moved to another house.

Magreth changed other two houses before moving to the one where she was working when I met her. After the fourth year of secondary education (ordinary level) she dropped out of school. Her then-current ambition was to attend a TVET training that would allow her to start a business (she mentioned crop cultivation).

The narratives mentioned in this section show the ambiguous way in which domestic workers describe the people from which they seek some form of protection. In particular, Bezoio (Ethiopia) and Magreth (Tanzania) describe a given female employer in contradictory ways even within the same narrative. There is deep ambiguity between relations of domination and power, and those of love, protection, and care, as I shall elaborate in the next section.

6.7 Hierarchy and care

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania domestic workers in their narratives explain how, in their view, a caring and protective female employer should behave. I always mention 'female' employers, because in my study the women interviewed didn't talk much about male employers, as well as other male members in the households where they worked. Sometimes

they briefly argued that male employers used to work in other cities, and so the workers did not come into contact with them. In other cases, women simply argued that, unlike female employers, the husbands neither insulted them nor supported them, they simply ignored them. Male members were constantly in and out of homes, which were characterized by a continuous coming and going of people. However, male members were also those who sexually harassed women whenever they had the occasion. Yet also in this case, domestic workers tended to shift the focus on the attitude of female employers, since men's behavior was described as "natural". Many domestic workers in both countries argued that a good female employer should treat you "like a daughter", "like her own child". Therefore they emphasized the intimacy of a potential ideal relationship domestic worker (daughter) – employer (mother). The rhetoric of being "like one of the family" (Parreñas 2001, p. 142) might be used in domestic workers' narratives as a 'tactic' (de Certeau 1984) to achieve an empowering reversal of hierarchy viv-a-vis their employers. Yet these tactics cannot lead to a radical change of hierarchical relations, and domestic workers might tend to reproduce their positionality within certain power relations. This strategy of manipulating intimacy is significantly limited by structural inequalities which characterize the relationship between domestic worker and employer (Ally 2010, p. 78). These aspects already emerge in part in the previous section, through the narratives of Bezoio (Ethiopia) and Magreth (Tanzania). In this section, however, I would like to deepen the aspect of the complex link between power, domination and care within hierarchical relationships. I will do this through the narrative of Alemtsehay in Ethiopia.

If we look at the Amhara society in Ethiopia, the classical sociological literature represents the Amhara hierarchy as permeated with an obsession with top-down power and open relations of domination in different social arena, with a focus on the coercive aspects of power. Interestingly, Diego Malara and Tom Boylston (2016) question how these elements can be reconciled with the ethics of love and care that permeate the daily life, a key element to better understand the workings of asymmetry and hierarchy. These scholars provide a picture of the power-value relationship by exploring the ways people build, sustain, change, manage and live with asymmetric relationships in their family and religious lives within a dominant value system. In fact, unequal relationships which permeate social life of Orthodox Ethiopia also "include strong idioms of protection and care that can neither be reduced to power nor wholly separated from it" (2016, p.4). And so the best perspective from which we can understand love and hierarchy is "in the making of relationships, and in the exemplary models and social resources that are available to people in building relationships" (*ibidem*).

Most of these social relationships are "vertical", and so involve asymmetries of status and/or power. For most Ethiopians, vertical power is an unfortunate aspect of their existence that must be lived with in daily life. And so the question is "how to engage with power (divine, political, or parental) so as to manage its excesses, gain advantage, or address the requirements to care and be cared for that constitute so much of everyday life" (*ibidem*, p.12).

There is a deep ambiguity between relations protection, domination, love, power and care. Care and love are asymmetrical, it is not easy to disentangle relations of care and love from relations of coercive power, nor is such disentanglement necessarily something that people themselves desire. Love is not necessarily egalitarian, it operates in a field of interaction of differences, rather than producing unification. More broadly, care and love have a broad political, legal and religious ramifications, and so it is interesting to investigate the actual situations in which individuals experience the need of caring and being cared for. In order to understand these aspects, let's see how the Alemtsehay at the same time condemns and praises the behavior of her female employer (potential protective mother). The latter exploited her, beat her and insulted her using derogatory terms such as *gered*, within asymmetric relationships that recall master/slave relation. But in her narrative Alemtsay also describes how an ideal, protective and caring female employer should behave. In her account, if a female employer takes care of you, values your work and treats you like a daughter, in this case you are willing to "keep silent", to "keep your head down", and in this case, "it is not a problem if she beats you" to correct your mistakes.

When I met her, Alemtsehay had been working as domestic worker in Debre Markos for 4 years. After the death of her father she moved to Debre Markos with the idea of continuing her studies. When she realized that school attendance in town meant to work without receiving a monthly salary she changed her mind, she gave up school in exchange for a salary (500 birr per month). The decision to postpone school was used as a strategy to protect herself from a risk: that of being exploited and then having to leave the house empty-handed. Indeed, the workload was heavy, she used to work all day without rest, she usually woke up at 5AM and stopped working around 9 or 10PM. People for whom she worked treated her without respect and she was often insulted. In particular, during the interview she emphasized the bad temper of her female employer who became nagging and surly, she used to increase her workload at every turn, she threatened to cut her salary if she broke an item in the house. In the following passage Alemtsehay provides an example of how her employer insulted her by using offensive terms and beat her:

She used to tell me "you are a real *gered* (servant), this is the level you belong to" (…) One day I prepared scrambled egg for her son both for breakfast and for lunch. I had too much workload that day, at lunch time I wasn't in time to cook other dishes. I was grinding maize and I was told to wash cloth in the meantime, besides there was no light so I couldn't prepare other dishes for lunch. Her child started to cry so I gave him left-overs of breakfast. Then she came after work and asked the elder child, "what did he eat for lunch?", he replied "scrambled egg", and so she yelled at me "why the hell did you do that? You are lazy, you are a *gered* (servant)! Then she picked sticks and started beating me.

In describing her female employer's disrespectful attitude, the way she used to insult her and call her *gered*, Alemtsehay depicted how in her view an ideal, respectful employer should behave. An ideal employer is the one who takes the best care of her and treats her like a daughter. Alemtsehay also refers to the fact that employers should be afraid of losing their domestic workers. In fact, if the latter feel to be undervalued they can easily leave their jobs and look for an alternative, for instance other forms of daily work.

A good employer should treat me like her children, and if there is something I should work on, she should politely show me the proper way saying "it is better if you do it this way." She should advise me as such. But my former employer acted in another way, she used to tell me "why the hell did you do that?" It was ugly, I was offended...I was repeatedly belittled, she used to say "you are a *gered* (servant) so you will always be stupid and lazy!" A good employer should not speak in this way. In fact I am poor and you (the translator) know it, nowadays we can afford nothing with 500ETB (her monthly salary). And so while I am working I keep my head down, but my employer should treat me like a daughter otherwise nowadays there is no one who simply keeps silent being mistreated and beaten, because there are other working options. For example I can work as daily labourer, I can say to myself "I will work as domestic worker only for one year but later I will start working as a daily labourer."

In this way, Alemtsehay speaks explicitly about how female workers can react to situations and threaten to leave their jobs. At the same time, however, she refers to a hierarchy employer-employee that is always maintained, and that the domestic worker is willing to maintain if her work is not underestimated. As she put it: "And so while I am working I keep my head down." This aspect recalls the notion of 'tactics' formulated by Michel de Certeau (1984). The latter refers to everyday practices through which the subjects are able to carve out spaces of resistance for themselves. But these 'tactics' are not socially transformative, they cannot change the inner inequalities or resolve structural power hierarchies. Rather, sometimes workers through their tactics may contribute to the reproduction of those relations

of domination to which they are subjected. The narratives of women might be a way they adopt to refuse to be seen as powerless, a tool to express and achieve a sense of self-esteem, "despite the impossibility to (always) change subjects' positions within the broad postcolonial and patriarchal order" (Marchetti, 2014, p.163).

When Alemtsehay talked about her current female employer who - unlike the former one - had a good attitude towards her, she stated:

> You know, it is not a problem if she (current employer) beats me when I commit a mistake. But the case of my former employer was different, she simply got angry about everything, she didn't consider that to err is human…If she didn't mistreat me I would have treated her like my mother, I wouldn't leave that house.

She decided to endure that situation for a while (she remained in that house for one year) on one condition: that she could earn and save some money. And this in why she changed her mind on the possibility to attend school (and so working without remuneration). In her words:

> She (employer) said to my families: "I can't pay her full salary if I am going to cover her schooling expenses: so she should either simply work with full salary given to her, or I will reduce some amount of money from her salary, if she wants me to send her to school." Then I said to myself: "let me first save some money, and then I will start going to school".

When I met her Alemtsehay had moved to another house. She had been working in the same household for three years. In her account, her current female employer (unlike the previous ones) treats her with respect, as if she were her daughter, and consequently Alemtsehay is willing "to keep her head down" in her presence. She no longer feels to be undervalued, a sign of respect is the fact that the people for whom she works don't make her eat leftovers from their meals, but rather the same food they eat.

> The current employer is very nice, she considers me just like her child. Whatever mistake I do, she doesn't scold me. She says to me "I don't have a reason to advice you because you are mature enough, you can lead a family of your own by now". She is just like a mother to me. (…) They (household members) do not separate me from them, I eat what they eat too, I do not eat just leftovers. Unlike my former employers, they do not say to me "you are a *gered* and so you can't eat what we eat".

When I met her Alemtsehay's situation had certainly improved, at least in the way her employers treated her. However, it must be borne in mind that she probably would have had a harder time complaining about her current employers in my presence. In both countries,

domestic workers described specific discriminatory attitudes and forms of mistreatment mainly suffered in the past years, within households other than the current ones. But they had much more protective attitudes towards current employers. Statements such as "my employer is very good, this is the truth", "God will count my sins if I don't tell the truth", were common. Women probably also feared they might lose their jobs because of their complaints. This is one of the reasons why I sought to investigate their previous work experiences. Having said that, the fact that these women were attended the NGO activities at the time of my fieldwork might be seen as an index that they had more freedom of movement than other previous circumstances.

Alemtsehay said that in the current house she was no longer mistreated, but she also reported that her workload remained the same and her free time was very limited. She was currently living with a couple of husband and wife and four children. The most positive change was that, as she put it, "there were no sticks", meaning that she was not beaten. Apart from this her working conditions were harsh.

> I have no rest, the main thing I thank God about is that the current employer's behaviour is good and I am no longer beaten. Other than that, there is no change at all, even the salary is the same (500ETB). My employer is better than the former one, there are no sticks. But for the rest, household chores are never-ending (…) I don't have spare time, they never say to me "this is your free time so you can go out and relax." I never have time to sit down and rest idle. But what has changed is that they never complain about me.

If we consider that Alemtsehay had left her village of origin to continue her formal studies, it is clear that her initial plans had changed over time. Alemtsehay no longer continued formal schooling. However, her current employers allowed her to attend some trainings courses organized by the NGO in collaboration with the TVET trainers. Alemtsehay highly valued these courses as a channel for finding a more qualified job in the future. When I met her she was attending a one-month cooking training, her ambition was to be hired in a coffee house, in restaurant, or to start a small business with other women. On the one hand, she considered domestic work – the household where she was working - as a safe place where to plan her future, gain some money, acquire new skills (for example by attending the TVET trainings). On the other hand, however, she also stated that her ambition was to stop living, as she put it, "under someone's patronage." As she puts it:

> I just want to get out of domestic work and start another work, I want to be hired in a cafe or to start my own business. If my wish is fulfilled and I get got out of domestic work, I don't care If I sleep without having dinner. If I am able to get out of domestic work then I will do

whatever work is available to survive, if I get a good job then I will eat enough, and if no it is not a problem, I will simply sleep even without having dinner. My wish is just to be free, I do not want to live under someone's patronage where you are valued the least.

This point is interesting and shows, once again, the ambiguity, the many facets the women's point of view on domestic work and the asymmetric relationships which entails. In this thesis I have argued several times that, in both countries, women seem to aspire to a freedom that does not release them from the hierarchical relationships that permeate their lives. This is because women - often without support at home - seek protection in the city. And if they totally escaped these relationships they would probably lose any chance of finding protection, they would be even more subject to episodes of violence (which also occur within those relationships themselves). In this context, the intertwining of power, domination, dependence, need for protection and care emerges, as I have argued in this section. But in the narrative just quoted above, Alemtsehay seems to say the opposite. That is, she doesn't want to live "under someone's patronage". Indeed, in women's accounts domestic work is also as a trap from which they would like to escape, even at the cost of giving up some privileges of living with well-off people 'under the same roof': a high quality of food; the availability of electricity and water; and so on. The women seem to grasp from time to time the enabling and constraining elements of their lives as domestic workers, and seek to make meaningful the continuous changes that they experience. Enabling and constraining aspects change their own nature: the enabling ones become constraining and vice versa. The main aspiration of many women is to experience a radical change able to reconcile different aspects of their lives: individual aspirations and family demands. In Alemtsehay's words: "I just want something that can immediately transform me". Again the question arises: What kind of freedom are we talking about?

The point is that women see domestic work as a potential place where to find protection, but also as a first step to access other types of work, to have a more 'independent' life, perhaps by finding a more qualified job, starting a business, marrying a wealthy person in the city, coming into contact with an NGO that opens up new possibilities for you, and so on. For many women working as domestic workers is a "transitional strategy" (Uhde 2016, p. 689). The first step is to find employment finding accommodation in families, the next is to work for different households, in the attempt to live more independently and acquire greater autonomy with respect to employers. The final goal is to find an alternative job in another sector (*ibidem*). But these goals are always imagined within that space of care work that reproduces itself in different forms during the life course of the women. Therefore, a more

'independent' life does not mean a life outside that reproductive sphere, which inevitably implies asymmetric relations where power, protection and care coexist.

6.8 Conclusions

In this chapter I have shed light on a series of apparently ambiguous and conflicting elements that characterize the experiences of domestic workers once they left their villages of origin and started working in the cities. Do these 'lonely' (Barrera 2011), 'orphan' women find the protection they aspired to, once they arrive in the cities of destination? Partly yes and partly no. This protection exposes women to many risks, experiences of exploitation, violence and abuse. In fact, it is a protection that takes shape within hierarchical relationships, where domination, protection, love and care are confused and coexist. But perhaps these risks would be even greater if women left the domestic sphere in which they work and live. To find protection, women must limit the risk of further marginalization and social exclusion. And they can only do this by responding to the care roles that the society (and the state) assigns to them. After all, their placement in the urban households, and their experiences in the domestic work sector in part depend on unclear relationships and agreements between influential adults. These agreements emerge precisely within that rural-urban household structure that needs care work to survive and place all this work on women's responsibility. But once in the city, women try to manage excesses of power and move from house to house to improve – albeit slightly - their working conditions. Furthermore, many women see domestic work as a temporary work, a first step to embark on other types of work that the villages of origin would not offer. So they seek protection within the households, but they also try to free themselves from the 'trap' of domestic work, and plan to build a more independent life in the future. Obviously, the latter is never thought of as free from the social and reproductive obligations to which women, in different forms, will always be relegated. How do women develop individual and collective strategies, while moving from house to house, to achieve these goals? Through the mobilization of personal networks of different types, as I will show in the next chapter.

7   PERSONAL NETWORKS IN WOMEN'S LIVES

I this chapter, I shall take the lived experiences of female domestic workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania as a point of departure to examine the ways in which they mobilize and utilize various forms of personal networks to achieve their goals and face challenges. In particular, I look at personal networks which are not readily apparent in women's lives, and which may emerge outside the employers' household and be strategically used in case of need.

In describing domestic workers' lives, scholars have often mentioned the isolation of the workplace that leads to experiences of confinement in private homes and restrictions of movement (Lutz 2013, p. 3). Given the isolated and privatized nature of domestic work, when it comes to women's personal relationships scholars have explored the relationship between domestic workers and people for whom they work (see Rollins 1985), as well as the relationships of domestic workers with their parents and relatives back home, mainly focusing on the role of the birth family in decision-making processes (see Camacho 1999). Further studies focus on the role of brokers within the dominant discourse of trafficking and exploitation (see Jones et al. 2014). Little attention has been given to other types of relationships that women establish in the locality of work, such as friends, peers, neighbors, various acquaintances and other contacts.

One of the few exceptions is Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) study of Mexican undocumented migrant women in California. The author examines how female domestic workers informally collectivize their experiences and share information through extensive networks outside the work place. In her words:

> Mexican undocumented immigrant women whom I studied create and rely on informal social ties among themselves. While domestic workers still experience isolation on the job, the network interactions allow women to exert more leverage in negotiating the jobs with their employers. Women teach one another how to negotiate pay, how to placate employers, and how to get the job done in the most expedient manner. These exchanges generally occur 'off the job' in multiple settings, at baby showers, after mass on Sundays, and in other informal social gatherings. The sharing of information modifies the privatized, asymmetrical employer-employee relationship; domestic workers' ability to tap into their employer's networks for job referrals helps them find multiple jobs (Hondagneu-sotelo, 1994, pp. 60–61).

The author also illustrates the down side of domestic worker's networks, for instance when a more experienced domestic worker provides a new arrived one with a job and with job

training, by taking on her as a "helper." The new arrived "helper" is often trapped in an exploitative relationship with exceedingly low pay, but this condition can also serve as a springboard to obtain her own new job.

Despite their precarious lives, domestic workers continuously establish and reinforce social ties and interpersonal relationships which may play a pivotal role in times of trouble (see Awumbila, Teye, et al., 2017; Klocker, 2007). For instance, Mariama Awumbila, Joseph Kofi Teye and Joseph Awetori Yaro (2017) have explored how migrants in the domestic work and construction sectors rely upon social networks in the migration process in Ghana. These authors illustrate different types of social capital employed by several categories of migrants for their livelihoods. Social networks facilitate migration, enhance economic survival, provide social support and maintain links with family members left behind. Yet they are also utilised to exploit vulnerable migrant workers, therefore revealing unequal power relations within the same network.

We should employ a nuanced understanding of the role of social networks in migration processes and trajectories, and how these impact on migration outcomes, as social networks reveal multiple configurations at different phases of the migration process and under different contexts. A study of rural-urban migration in Ghana further "challenges portrayals of brokerage purely as a 'migration business' and takes an approach that shows how migrants use brokers to further their own agendas" (Awumbila, Deshingkar, et al., 2017, p. 3). Indeed, brokers and migrants might build trust underpinning risky and complex journeys. Brokers play a range of often contradictory and multiple roles in mediating migration for domestic workers. While in some cases these roles reinforce patriarchal ideologies and there are clear cases of exploitation, in other cases brokers work in the interests of domestic workers, help them increase their bargaining power and meet their aspirations. And we should also undertake a nuanced understanding of the mediating role of intermediaries and brokers, taking into considerations multiple layers underpinning the recruitment process (see for instance Awumbila et al., 2018; Castle & Diarra, 2003; Whitehead & Hashim, 2005). However, I have already mentioned in this thesis that, in my study, both Ethiopian and Tanzania women rarely mentioned brokers as the facilitators of the migration and recruitment process. They mainly mentioned relatives, friends, acquaintances of various kind, people that in some cases we might also call "brokers", but women rarely used this term.

Sociologists and anthropologists have broadly adopted the concept of networks as an analytical tool for their studies of urban social relationships in Africa (see Mitchell 1969).

In particular, personal networks have been described as ego-centred, personal networks which link ego to friends, acquaintances, workmates, kinfolk, etc. They have been analysed in detail for their specific characteristics, such as the personal network content, directedness, durability, intensity and frequency. But where does this idea of 'the network' come from?

7.1 'The network'

The recent book *Anthropology After Gluckman* (R. Werbner, 2020) points out that, in the 1950s, members of the Manchester School largely influenced and contributed to the development of the social network analysis[52], which currently might bring together scholars from multiple disciplines, ranging from sociology, anthropology, economics, mathematics, statistics, psychology, computer science, and beyond (see Freeman, 2004). The same Clyde Mitchell helped found the leading journal *Social Networks*. According to Richard Werbner,

> It remains an open problem to understand and explain how and why it is that the growth in the development of this field stopped short when it came to influence on comparable, now robust mainstreams under rubrics of 'relationality' (Strathern 1995, 1996) and Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005)" (Werbner 2020, p. 307).

The turn by Clyde Mitchell and A. L. ('Bill') Epstein to the idea of 'the network' came in the early 1950s, after the Manchester seminars organized by Max Gluckman, and the publication of the works of John Barnes (1954) and Elizabeth Bott (1957). In the 1950s, members of the Manchester School formulated mathematical concepts in sociological language for the analysis of interpersonal relations, a turn to mathematics which had been somehow anticipated in structuralist theory by Radcliffe-Brown.

The latter suggested a relational analysis which might be "mathematical, in the sense that it will apply non-quantitative, relational mathematics […] that hitherto comparatively neglected branch of mathematics, the calculus of relations, which, I think, is on the whole more fundamental than quantitative mathematics (Radcliffe-Brown 1957: 69)" (quoted by Werbner 2020, p. 133). Mitchell considered the relational turn as a valuable approach for the analysis of the relationships of people, especially in large-scale urban societies. Barnes further argued that some techniques and theorems of graph theory could be applied to ethnographic studies. Yet while Barnes adopted the term 'network' only in relation to some kind of social field, Epstein and Mitchell talked about an ego-centric network and recognized

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[52] See in particular Chapter 5, *Relational thought, networks, circles* (pp. 132 – 148).

'individuals' as particular persons, an aspect which had a great importance in what came to be known as social network analysis. In Epstein's words:

> A network in this sense is always egocentric: it exists only and is defined with reference to a particular individual. As Barnes remarks, each person sees himself at the centre of a collection of friends. If follows therefore that the network is always 'personal', for the set of links that make it up are unique for each individual (Epstein, 1969, p. 109).

Unlike Mitchell, Epstein did not used diagrams of linkages, and did not represent patterns in figures, matrices or graphs. These tools were rather adopted by Mitchell who turned from sociology to mathematics to analyze in detail the morphology of personal linkages. He measured the durability, the frequency, the intensity, the density, the content, the anchorage, and the reachability of personal networks. The work of Pnina Werbner (1990) was groundbreaking. She applied advanced computer programs, mathematical model and matrices to the comparison of elite and factory workers networks among Pakistanis in Manchester. While exploring issues of resistance and power struggles in gender and class relations, she analyzed inter-household relations among women in what she called the 'interdomestic domain', and further argued that in these interdomestic networks we can find the infrastructure of urban relations. This approach suggests that "for relational thought to be fruitful for social anthropology in particular, even apart from mathematical sociology, social network analysis needs social institutional analysis – it has to be informed by the observation and interpretation of cultural performance, by the recognition of kinship structures, and by the processual analysis of social situations" (Werbner 2020, p. 142). Pina Werbner's considerations still guide us. Anthropological research should in fact invest various resources for the study of these 'inter-household relations' (or 'interdomestic domain'), and more generally of household structures. Research on domestic work would be greatly enriched by such an approach, which however requires the mobilization of several researchers in an interdisciplinary perspective. Also in my study, I believe that many limitations are linked to the lack of knowledge of the complex dynamics that regulate household structures in Ethiopia and Tanzania. A deep study of these household structures, in relation to domestic work, would allow us to better delineate differences and similarities which characterize domestic work in both countries (for instance in relation to the recruitment process of domestic workers; the placement of the workers in the cities; and other aspects).

Mitchell and Epstein investigated how individuals in urban Africa – in particular urban dwellers of Zambia – maneuver, negotiate and manipulate others, such as acquaintances,

friends, kin and conjugal partners, in the face of daily uncertainties. Epstein noticed that in Ndola, the 'extremely fluid field' where he carried out research, much of the individual's behavior seemed to be, at least at first sight, 'random or haphazard', and focused his attention of these casual social encounters. Drawing from Elizabeth Bott's (1957) distinction between close-knit and loose-knit networks, he distinguished between the 'effective network' (consisting of clusters of persons fairly closely knitted together) and the 'extended network' (relatively open, where the various members of Ego's network do not necessarily know each other).

Sociologists and anthropologists have broadly adopted these concepts of networks in their studies of urban social relationships in Africa. For instance, Nici Nelson (1978a) explored how women who produce and sell local beer in Nairobi utilize their personal networks to survive from day to day in an uncertain market. Drawing from Epstein, she distinguished between effective networks and extended networks. Due to the high degree of residential mobility in Mathare (a Nairobi squatter area) the 'instrumental' effective networks that Nici Nelson described had few multiplex links, less content, intensity and durability than most effective networks described elsewhere. By means of the solidarity expressed within their effective and extended networks, women were able to solve individual problems and challenge daily risks to which they were exposed. Yet the author argues that they did not express their anger in terms of a need for social change, they did not operate as a group in the political arena, they still had an incomplete consciousness of the political, social, and economic factors that contributed to their socially demeaned and economically depressed position in society.

7.2   Beyond apparent ties

The analysis of network resources, with their enabling and constraining effects (Hondagneu-sotelo, 1994; Portes, 1998), is very useful to analyse and bring to light women's strategies to carve out personal and collective spaces of action. In particular, looking at personal networks, we can investigate how domestic workers manage their lives interacting in complex contexts, and how these contexts influence and constrain them in multiple ways. We find the traces of the life course, the structural circumstances, and the choices made by domestic workers, while keeping in mind the narratives that they produce - and that give meaning to their lives - and how they position and identify themselves among others. As McCarty et al. (2019) put it:

> Although each personal network is indeed unique, by looking at it in a given moment or following it up during a certain period, we can gain insights into the main factors structuring people's lives while keeping in mind the sources of variation, the narratives that people produce that give meaning to their lives, and how they identify and position themselves among others. (McCarty et al. 2019, p. x).

My intent is precisely to look at personal networks which are not readily apparent in women's lives, such as personal networks which may emerge outside the employers' household and be strategically used in case of need. One must consider that in exploring personal networks I employ as synonymous many English terms which possess multiple nuances. Yet recent studies provide detailed analysis of how terms such as "relation", "relationship", "connection", "contact", and many others, have been used and can be differentiated in the English language - and particularly in the anthropologist's English (see Marilyn Strathern, 2020).

In my study, personal networks in women's lives are not readily apparent for a number of reasons. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania domestic workers did not talk at length about social ties. In order to get more insights in their lives, and therefore explore these aspects, it is clearly necessary to build up a relationship of confidence and trust with them. This is particularly challenging, since domestic workers are not easily reachable, they hardly have time off and remain often marginal and invisible to researchers. Thus, you have to think to creative ways to get in touch with them, to spend more time with them, and therefore to conduct in-depth interviews and life stories. Of course, my research was facilitated by the NGO through which I could access most of the domestic workers interviewed. Despite of this, many domestic workers did not inform their employers about our conversations since they were worried about their reaction. This limited our time available. Women used to arrange our meetings either when nobody was in the house (the workplace) or after sporadic activities out of the house, such as after having been at the market place. This already reveals a way domestic workers display inventive ways of dealing with several forms of obligations and pressures.

As I have already mentioned in the previous chapters, women described their lives as very isolated and confined to the employer's household, sometimes claiming that – in previous working experiences - they were not allowed to leave the house unaccompanied. Domestic workers narratives were full of moments of silence. Statements such as "I never go out", "I do not have friends", "there is nobody I can rely on", were common. As Neema (Tanzania) put it:

> For example on Saturday, after religious ceremony I may meet Beatrice and others (domestic workers), but after the ceremony everyone goes back home. I can't call Beatrice and ask her: "Please come and chat with me." I mean, I can't ask my employers for an official permission to go out and meet my friends. This is impossible.

At the same time, mobility was a central element in their lives. Women showed moments of expansion whenever they explained how they moved from one household to another, and their plans to leave domestic work and find a better job in the foreseeable future. Again, the combination of mixed feelings, moments of silence and expansion, was part of their self-representation (see Gardner 2002). New network resources may emerge precisely at such moments of transition from place to place, from employer to employer, and may be strategically used in times of need. Such kind of connections, which at first sight may seem short-term and weak, can be potential long-term ties to be used in the coming future. Even one single contact may be the one that facilitates a change, it can be mobilized in the attempt to improve one's live.

In the following section I illustrate the life stories of Minew (Ethiopia) and Neema (Tanzania) to explore personal networks of women in different phases of their life: from when they decided to leave their villages of origin to their life and work experience in their cities of current residence. I take their lives stories as a point of departure to explore the role of network resources in migration processes, with both their enabling and constraining effects, and various relationships mobilized by women in the urban area. As many other life stories, the cases of Minew and Neema reveal a complex gendered context in which women's lives are embedded, and the complex interweaving of personal strategies and social constraints regulating them. Personal networks are here understood as complex, dynamic entities which undergo deep transformations over the life course, "as relationships form, strengthen, change in content, dissolve, water down, or are dormant, being partly coordinated with other ties and partly in isolation" (McCarty et al., 2019, p. 29).

7.3   The case of *Minew* and *Neema*

Minew, a 23-year-old Ethiopian woman, was working as a live-in domestic worker Debre Markos at the time of our encounter. She was between 12 and 13 years of age when she left her village of origin and moved to town to avoid an arranged marriage. She started working for some distant relatives who offered her accommodation and education in exchange for household chores. After having completed her primary education, she found a paid job as a live-in domestic worker. She thought it would allow her to support her families, and to

pursue her education in the coming future. She worked within two different households that she left after having experienced several forms of exploitation and abuse. She also worked as a day labourer at construction sites before moving back to live-in domestic work. When I met her, she had been working within the same household for three years. Her plan was to move to a bigger city and find a better paid job.

Neema, a 19 years old Tanzanian woman, was born in the rural area of Dodoma region. At the age of 13 she moved to Morogoro to continue her primary education against the will of her father. She was told that her aunt and uncle in Morogoro were willing to host her and send her to school in exchange for domestic help, yet promises about school were broken. In her attempt to juggle family demands and individual aspirations, she started working for a married couple who agreed to cover her school expenses. She moved to another house when her male employer tried to coerce her into having sex. At the time of our encounter, she had been working within the same household for three years. Like Minew, her plan was to move to a bigger city.

7.3.1 Moving to town

One of the reasons why Minew left her village of origin (about 80 km from Debre Markos) was to avoid an arranged marriage. In her narratives, she described her preparation for her future marriage which was arranged when she was about eight years old. She was engaged in household chores both at her parents' house and at her future husband's household. She was supposed to bring water and ran errands back and forth until she was mature enough to live with her future husband. As we have seen in the narratives of other women, her decision to break away from the home area was a subversive act against specific patriarchal structures (see Tamene, 2007), which are the result of a complex interplay of sociocultural and economic variables (including marriage rules, moral values and the land holding system) (Shiferaw et al., 2018). Examples of women who had fled arranged or abducted marriages recur in the accounts of Ethiopian women, while the Tanzanian women briefly mentioned arranged marriages in a few cases, but mainly in reference to other women. Nevertheless, in both countries women shed light on strong gender norms and gender-based inequalities which affected their lives since childhood. Gender affected their responsibilities, the type of work they had to do in or outside the home, their relationships with relatives, friends and other members of the community, their opportunities to access education, as well as their ambitions and future plans (Creighton and Omari, 2018; Pankhurst, 1992).

Neema moved to Morogoro (about 300 kilometres from her village in the Dodoma region) to attend school against the will of her father. She reported that her older sister – who was in secondary school – had a premarital relationship and became pregnant, and so her father forbade other daughters to pursue their education as a strategy to secure their integrity and virginity. In her narratives, life back home was confined to specific working activities such as household chores, livestock and agricultural tasks, and unlike her brothers, adults prevented her free movement. Migrating to Morogoro was a subversive act against restrictions placed on her mobility back home, as well as a way to experience a new urban lifestyle. This is not to say that Minew and Neema, like other women interviewed, referred to their villages and families in exclusively negative terms, or that women's migration led to a rupture in family relationships. On the contrary, the ability to support family members who stayed behind was almost always part of the women's migratory projects. Moreover, once they arrived in the cities they were confronted with new forms of gender oppression and constraints on their mobility.

Descriptions of the new harsh working conditions were often combined with nostalgic memories of childhood. A combination of mixed feelings, moments of silence and expansion, characterized their narratives and their self-representation. This is in line with James Wilce (1998)'s observations of "troubles talks" in Bangladesh. The author shows how people continuously negotiate different forms of selfhood in their narratives. The latter display a dynamic tension between social embeddedness and autonomy, rather than a rigid dichotomy between the two, and can be conceived as channels for the constant renegotiation of personhood. The same individual may shift from talking about his/her life in terms of connectedness to kin and community to other representations of herself/himself as a very autonomous individual (see Wilce, 1998, quoted by Gardner 2002). Thus, while Neema mentioned restrictions on mobility in her place of origin as one reason for migrating to Morogoro, she was also nostalgic for the times she was not under control of her current employers, when she used to play with her friends, help her father with the harvest and pick fresh fruit from the land that – in her words – was "blessed." Similarly, Minew sometimes seemed to regret not following the will of her parents who had wanted her to get married, have a family and live in the rural area where they owned land. On other occasions, she emphasized the advantages of 'modern life' that had arisen out of her decision to migrate, such as the possibility of better clothing, a richer diet and electricity. In order to underline her point, she showed me a mobile phone that she had bought a few months before our meeting.

Women's decisions were never taken individually and unilaterally (see Grabska et al., 2019; Huijsmans, 2012). As Minew put it:

> I thought life would be better in the city. I hadn't enough money to move and plan… It was only because of other people, they said to me ''it is better if you go to Debre Markos, go there and work as a domestic worker.'' If it wasn't for this advice...I mean, I didn't have money, I couldn't afford the house rent… but one day Alemtsehay said to me ''you will not pay a house rent, you will not have food expenses, so it is better for you to go and work as a domestic worker.'' Then I said to myself ''I will make some money, let's go.'' (Minew, 23 years old, 03/07/18, Ethiopia).

In line with other case studies on internal migration (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005), my research demonstrates how neighbours, friends, relatives and other acquaintances – whether based in women's villages of origin or somewhere else in the country – play a pivotal role in facilitating women's migration and access to employment once they arrived at their destination. Minew followed the advice of Alemtsehay, an older women and former neighbour who was working as a live-in domestic worker in Debre Markos. One day on a visit to their village, Alemtsehay suggested that Minew find an alternative to her marriage. She put her in contact with distant relatives in Debre Markos who could offer her education in exchange for domestic work. In Minew's account, she and Alemtsehay managed to convince her parents and other influential adults of the advantages of her choice.

> Alemtsehay came home, she was also my mom's friend she knew everyone there. She told them that there were relatives in Debre Markos who needed a domestic worker. So since they trust her and at that time I wasn't able to attend school anymore, I mean I was only depending on field activities, so in the end they agreed and told me "yes you can go and work" (Minew)

Neema left her village when her uncle told her that he was willing to send her to school. Having trusted contacts in the city increased the likelihood of being allowed to go. During a visit to her village, her uncle talked with her parents and then took her back to Morogoro. Unlike Minew, promises made to Neema about schooling were broken from the very beginning. She worked for two years in her uncle's household without any chance of continuing her education. In her words: "They told me I was like a daughter for them, they said they were willing to send me to school, but instead they only made me work for two years."

Examples of broken aspirations show how, in certain circumstances, network resources may have constraining effects. As I have already mentioned in other chapters of the thesis, studies

in Tanzania indicate that female children are commonly recruited by kinship or other filial affinities which include not only blood relations, "but also those that share bonds of friendship, ethnicity and 'tribal regions'" (Kiaga, 2012, p. 3). [53] In several cases, the notion that a domestic worker is 'one of the family' obscures legitimate employer-employee relationships, and the difference between employment and fostering becomes blurred (Bourdillon, 2007). In Neema's case the relationship between people for whom she worked and her families back home was not clear. Neema argued that her parents were not aware of the exploitative working conditions she endured in Morogoro, or the fact that she was not attending school. She explained that she was not given the chance to visit or communicate with them. Her uncle used to visit her village and informed her parents about her situation. Two years passed before Neema took the drastic decision to leave her uncle's house. She waited this long because her uncle had previously told her that he was covering part of her mother's medical treatment during a period of illness.

For many women, the ability to support family members, whether these were resident in villages of origin or in urban areas, was part of their migratory project. During her stay in Morogoro, Neema used her meagre salary to allow other relatives to buy better quality food and satisfy other needs. At the same time, she saved a small amount of money that she invested in more individual objectives. The combination of financial support for relatives and her personal savings was, in any case, very small. In a similar way, Minew's salary contributed to partly covering the school costs of her younger brothers. Nonetheless, Neema and Minew both hoped to find a better job with a better salary in the foreseeable future. As demonstrate in the following section, women continuously mobilized personal networks to achieve such goals.

7.3.2   Developing personal networks in town

This section explores the relationships that Minew and Neema developed after moving to urban areas. These personal networks are not readily apparent, may emerge outside the employers' household and are strategically used in case of need. On arrival, women had a few contacts that were largely based on kinship or linked to the village of origin. As noted above, Minew's childhood neighbor Alemtsehay had put her in contact with distant relatives

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[53] In many circumstances the use of the western concept of "family" risks obscuring a number of complex social interactions (see Declich, 2020). In recent research scholars utilize local concepts of kinship networks to illustrate the ways in which mobile people manage different dynamics of relatedness (see Bonfanti, 2020; Massa, 2020).

in Debre Markos, while Neema only knew her uncle and the other members of the household. As Neema explained:

> The first days in Morogoro I felt lost, I didn't know anyone. The workload was heavy. I mean, I was used to doing housework in my home place, but my uncles' house was huge. I had to serve many people who passed through that house, my uncles' relatives and friends they also used to come with their kids. Sometimes I was given piles of clothes to wash. I didn't know what to do, I felt so clumsy. She (her aunt in Morogoro) taught me everything.. It was not easy. I felt lost because I didn't know anyone in the city (Neema, 19 years old, 08/10/19, Tanzania)

Women gradually developed new ties during their first year of work. Minew, who unlike Neema began attending school, made friends with her classmates. Classes provided important moments for social interaction, even if time available outside school hours was very limited. As Minew stated: "Sometimes we played together at break time. There were other domestic workers, we discussed how to solve our problems and change our situations."

For Neema, the only opportunities to develop new contacts occurred when she met with her two female neighbours of her same age. Such occasions, albeit very limited, enabled her to share personal experiences and gain valuable information about challenges and opportunities in town.

> There were my neighbors. Sometimes Fauzia (her neighbour) came, she paid me a visit because my aunt knew her. But for those you could meet maybe on the street or at church it was not easy... My aunt didn't want me to talk with strangers, I had to stay inside the house the whole day until she came back. Besides I couldn't go to them (uncles) and ask "I need permission to visit Fauzia", it was very difficult. I had no freedom, I mean I always had to reason why I was going to meet her. We used to meet sometimes, we made stories, we exchanged good ideas, but I always had to offer an explanation for what I did. She told me there were women in Morogoro looking for a domestic worker. She told me "If you start working for her you can get a salary" (Neema)

Minew and Neema did not talk at length about their personal networks. They described their lives as very isolated and their freedom of movement largely depended on the will of people for whom they worked. Neema reported that during her first two years in Morogoro she rarely left her relatives' house. Even when she went out to go to the market or to run errands she was usually accompanied by her aunt or other household members. As she put it: "Everything was inside the house, sometimes she (aunt) took me with her to the market or

somewhere in the city, but it was rare. I usually stayed inside." This greatly limited the possibility of establishing external social ties.

The restrictions on mobility that women had experienced in their villages of origin and tried to escape recurred in different forms in the urban context. The chances to explore the cities were rare also because of the heavy workload: Minew and Neema usually worked every day of the week from early morning until the evening. Minew stated that when she was going to school she also often had to work at night.

At the same time, mobility was a central element in their narratives. As we have seen, they both started working as domestic workers at a very young age, and during their life course, they passed through various households. Minew and Neema exploited every available interaction – no matter how sporadic, quick or random – to find alternative margins of manouvre and to improve their situation. Neema found another job as a live-in domestic worker through the support of her female neighbor – a fellow student (and part-time, live-out domestic worker) whose teacher was looking for a domestic worker. After Minew completed her primary education, she left her distant relatives, who could no longer cover additional school expenses, precisely thanks to the help of her female schoolmate, also a domestic worker, who put her in contact with a female broker (this is one of the few cases where women mentioned a broker). The latter helped her find another household. In this case, the broker was depicted as a facilitator of the migration process. This is in contrast with the dominant discourse in Ethiopia that reports examples of brokers who persuade women and girls to migrate, and bring them to exploitative situations to benefit financially (Jones et al., 2014).

Minew did not depend on Alemtsehay to find new work. Indeed, in both Ethiopia and Tanzania, even when women were first brought to the cities by relatives or other people from their villages of origin, they would later mainly use other personal networks developed in situ to obtain subsequent jobs. Nevertheless, as I show later, Alemtsehay remained an important reference point in Minew's life. Minew thus started working for a married couple with children, and although she had to abandon her studies, for the first time she received a monthly salary. Her plan was to save some money, which she also needed to invest in her brothers' education, and to start her secondary education at a later date. Meanwhile, Neema started working for a teacher who covered her school expenses (but did not provide her with a monthly salary), although the workload made it difficult for her to attend school every day. Since she also needed to financially support her families in the rural area, her plan was to

alternate between school attendance and paid domestic work. She occasionally received pocket money from her female employer, because she assisted her in selling groceries.

Minew and Neema were confronted with new challenges and, in particular, new forms of gender oppression in the households where they moved to. Once again, they used personal networks to deal with the situation and to eventually change their workplace. Minew recounted that she had a heavy workload, but that, at least in the first six months, she had a good relationship with her employers. Her tasks consisted in doing household chores, taking care of children, running some errands that also enabled her to establish new contacts outside the house, for example when she went to the market. Moreover, she occasionally helped her female employer in her small clothing store. As she put it:

> It could happen that she (employer) had to go away, so I replaced her at the shop for a while. On those occasions I made new acquaintances, for example with people who worked in nearby shops (Minew).

She told me that free time was very limited, but sometimes she would ask for time off to go to church and pray. She strategically used these moments to meet with former schoolmates. In her words:

> I felt uncomfortable because I was given no chance to go out for example to buy my own stuffs. And so when I needed to find peace in my mind I asked to go to church an pray. Sometimes I managed to date my former schoolmates and this is how we met.

The situation changed dramatically when her male employer, who was often out of town on business, returned to Debre Markos for an extended period. On a number of occasions when the wife was out, he sexually harassed Minew. The situation deteriorated when her female employer blamed Minew for provoking the man, and she eventually left the house without receiving her final month's pay.

> He tried to rape me, I refused, I said to him: "I am not working here because I don't have something to eat or drink, this is not my case. Instead I am working here because I had to abandon school and so I want to bring a change in my life, so leave me alone!" He replied: ''it is not a problem, my wife will not see...'' and he tried to rape me again... One day she said to me "why did you sit with my husband? Why did you speak with him?." She became jealous, but I personally had no such an intention, but her husband on the contrary…I got out of that house for this reason. I said to her: "I am not comfortable living with you so let me go." She became mad: "Where the hell will you go??", she grabbed me by the arm saying this, and so I simply went out of that house without telling her what had happened, it was hard for me to do so. I simply went out without having my salary.

For a few days, Minew was offered free accommodation by Tigist, one of her former female schoolmates, who was working as a live-out domestic worker. Tigist's relatives helped her find another job in the neighbourhood.

> That family was very kind to me, especially that woman... she was a very kind person. When I called Tigist, her families asked her about me, "why is your friend coming?". She told them that I was looking for a job, and when I arrived they said "oh, she is a very beautiful girl, she has to be careful!"[54] They started cautioning me about the risks in the city, because at that time I was more beautiful than now. Now my beauty is somehow spoiled because I work hard, but at that time I was very beautiful. They warned me: "there are men who could cheat you." They were very good people, so they let me start working in the neighbourhood, in the house of a friend of the wife's sister.

With her new live-in job, Minew's salary was higher than before, but she was mistreated by her employers and other members of the household who insulted her for every little mistake. However, she was happy to receive better pay and the fact that she was living close to Tigist gave her psychological support. As in her previous workplace, the situation deteriorated when her male employer started to harass her. Minew again turned to Tigist to help her find new accommodation.

Neema was confronted with a situation similar to that of Minew. She felt more satisfied in the new house compared to when she was working for her uncle. Although she complained that her female employer used to shout at her for any mistake, and often felt unrespected, she was happy to be given the possibility to go to school, if not regularly, at least three times a week. Yet the situation changed when her male employer repeatedly tried to coerce her into having sex while his wife was out. Neema found emotional support in female neighbors, in particular one woman called Zulfa, also a domestic worker, who encouraged her to leave her workplace without informing anyone. This sort of radical decision has been acknowledged by other studies on domestic work as a strategy of survival and a way to avenge mistreatment (Cock, 1980). When she left the house, Neema was offered free accommodation for a week by Zulfa's relatives who helped her find another job.

The issue of sexual harassment and assault has been investigated, among others, by Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz (2018) in her study of female domestic workers in Brazil. According to Ribeiro Corossacz, the veil of silence surrounding sexual violence reflects the difficulties women face in reporting such incidents, which are further compounded by the fact that this

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[54] She refers to the risk of being sexually abused.

form of violence – closely linked to the country's slave-owning past – tends to be naturalized and incorporated into common knowledge, and that female domestic workers are often considered responsible for men's behavior. The author argues, however, that silence can sometimes be a strategic response of resilience, rather than a denial of violence. Both Minew and Neema told me that they had been partly briefed by other domestic workers about the advantages and disadvantages of working in particular households. For example, Minew explained that she had heard of a woman who had previously suffered sexual harassment in the same household. However, she badly needed money, and this household offered her a better wage and so she had no choice but to take the risk for a while. She was therefore able to save some money and then she changed her position relying on her personal networks. This is an example of how decisions arise out of a dialectic between opportunities and structural constraints. The actions taken by women to overcome challenges reveal what Natascha Klocker (2007) has defined a "thin" agency that is enacted within restrictive contexts where few other alternatives are available. The access to certain personal networks makes this agency "thicker" by broadening the range of opportunities.

Following the experience of sexual harassment, Minew temporarily abandoned domestic work and worked for about a year and a half as a day labourer on construction sites. Tigist put her into contact with two other girls working in this sector. Many Ethiopian women interviewed had also worked for short periods on construction sites, including the repaving of Debre Markos' main streets with cobblestones. Although Tanzanian women had not worked on construction sites, in both countries, women had alternated between domestic work and other forms of labour in shops, bars and markets. For instance, at the time of our encounter Neema sometimes worked as an assistant in a stationary shop alongside her normal duties as a live-in domestic worker. While working on construction sites, Minew was living with two other female peers, with whom she shared a room and food. During periods of financial difficulty, when they were unable to pull resources to pay the rent, they jointly negotiated the terms with the owner by providing domestic services in other rooms of the compound. This is an example of how women establish support strategies on encountering new people and learn to create a safer environment. While exploring new places, they were producing their own localities in relation to others, they were engaged in place-making projects which were strongly bound up with their personal and social identity (see Moyer, 2004; Turton, 2005). Minew told me that sometimes she regretted doing the domestic work and that the working conditions were very harsh, but during this period she had been able to establish new relationships in town and to explore the city. She also started a relationship

with a man who promised to help her save money to enrol on a TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) course, but later he left Debre Markos and disappeared. During that period Minew participated in different voluntary organizations and associations involved in self-help and other social activities, such as *iddir* (established to provide mutual aid in burial matters but also to address other community concerns), *mehaber* (social/religious associations) and *iqqub* (credit associations) (see A. Pankhurst & Mariam, 2000). Given the limited free time available Minew participated in these organizations only sporadically, but they still provided potential points of contact.

Several Ethiopian live-in domestic workers complained that, unlike the people they worked for, they were not involved in these types of gatherings which were considered to be important practices of mutual support in their villages of origin (see Kebede & Butterfield, 2009; Mulugeta, 2009). The situation tended to change when they moved from live-in to live-out domestic jobs or did other types of work (like in the case on Minew), because they had less restrictions on their mobility at least outside work hours. This issue emerged less in the accounts of Tanzanian domestic workers, although here as well women who were able to participate in social activities were usually live-out domestic workers. For instance, Neema mentioned youth groups in church that she did not have time to attend, unlike her live-out peers.

Despite the limited participation of domestic workers in various community-based organizations, women mobilized alternative strategies to provide each other forms of emotional, practical and material support. In some cases, women were offered free accommodation while looking for work or were given small amounts of money by other domestic workers. Minew spent around a week within the family of Tigist, a live-out domestic worker, before working on construction sites, and the same happened to Neema after she left the household where she had suffered sexual harassment.

Moreover, both Minew and Neema, as well as many other women interviewed, described how, during hard times, they would borrow small amounts of money from other domestic workers with sufficient financial means. In turn, and when able to do so, they were willing to lend small savings to needy workers. There was no explicit agreement that dictated timeframes and methods of repayment, but women's narratives revealed that money lending occurred quite regularly. However, loans were very small, and usually used to cover small daily needs, as domestic workers very rarely had substantial savings. The loans were vital, for example, when women had to suddenly leave a house and they needed to pay a room for a night. In Tanzania, women tended to use an electronic money transfer system (namely M-

PESA) for sending money, which was available on their mobile phones (see Maurer, 2015; Miller, 2018). This system allowed them to send money to each other even when they moved apart and no longer worked in the same locality. For example, Neema had remained in contact with her domestic worker friend, Zulfa, who no longer lived in Morogoro at the time of my fieldwork, and sometimes they would send each other small loans. As she put it:

> She is a friend who likes to give me advise on life issues. She is a very good friend and also a good adviser, we talk about how to save money and how to build our future after having worked as a domestic worker. She is always ready for me, we used to laugh together. You know, she helped me a lot when I needed an accommodation... Now she is going to school and so sometimes she may ask for 5,000TZS… for example last month she told me "I am stuck, I need 5,000" and so I just sent her 5,000 (through M-PESA). Whenever I can, I just send her something freely because her success is also my success, and she does the same to me (Neema)

In Ethiopia, on the other hand, these kinds of systems were not used by domestic workers and loans between women usually occurred when they were able to meet each other or though the intermediation of other people. Neema emphasized her feelings of friendship toward Zulfa, a feeling supported by elements of reciprocity where affection and calculation did not contradict each other (see Mains, 2013; Salvati, 2018). Their relationship involved affection, esteem and the mutual exchange of material goods. They supported each other according to their abilities and invested strategically in their relationship to obtain advantages in the short term as well as in the near future. Both in Tanzania and Ethiopia, these kinds of relationships were based on trust, and those women who proved to be unreliable were gradually excluded from the networks of mutual support while those who were considered trustworthy were gradually included.

When I met Minew and Neema, they had been working as live-in domestic workers in the same household for three years. According to their accounts, their living and working conditions had improved compared to the past, especially in relation to the way they were treated by their employers, as well as in terms of freedom of movement. Minew stopped working on construction sites when Alemtsehay – who had first facilitated her migration – left Debre Markos and proposed her as the replacement in the household where she had worked for five years and where she had established a good relationship with her employers. Something similar happened to Neema, who started working in the household where Zulfa had previously worked as a live-in domestic worker. The common act of passing on jobs is particularly important in enabling women to exercise a minimum degree of control over

labour resources (Granovetter, 1995), as illustrated in Francesca Decimo's (1996) study of solidarity networks and economic strategies of Somali immigrant women in Naples. Notwithstanding the fact that most women's employment remains extremely precarious, their continual movement does not necessarily lead to a dispersion of the acquired resources.

During my fieldwork, Alemtsehay had a two-year-old son and was living in Bah Dar (the capital of the Amhara Region) where she alternated her time between part-time domestic work and other types of labour in shops. Minew's plan was to join Alemtsehay in the near future. She was investing her salary in the education of her younger brothers back home, but she was also saving some money to attend a TVET training in Debre Markos. Zulfa had moved to Dar es Salaam, where, like Alemtsehay, she alternated between domestic work and work at her relatives' grocery store. Neema was investing her earnings from live-in domestic work and her intermittent job in a stationary shop to support her families back home, and was also saving money to attend a short tailoring course. Her ambition was to join Zulfa in Dar es Salaam and to find a better job there. As she put it: "we are also planning to buy a sewing machine if we are able to collect enough savings."

Both Minew and Neema claimed that marriage was an important aspect of their future projects, but they tended to give more prominence to other personal ambitions, such as the desire to pursue their education and to find a more qualified job before marriage.[55] Although their living and working conditions had slightly improved compared to the previous years, when I met them both Minew and Neema had not achieved many of their initial goals. They were reformulating personal plans and ambitions, such as valuing other kinds of training courses (TVET and tailoring) rather than formal schooling. Both had also been members of the NGO Domestic Workers' Associations for about a year. Despite their broken aspirations, they still valued the urban setting for enabling them to improve their lives and those of their families. The use of personal networks played a pivotal role in their attempt to achieve these goals.

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[55] I have already mentioned in this thesis that, as many scholars have indicated (see Temin et al. 2013), migrant girls may be exposed to new ways of thinking about marriage, and the increase in girls' migration in many African contexts may result in a delay in the age of getting married, as well as a reduction in the rate of early pregnancy.

7.4   The nature of personal networks

As Minew and Neema's stories demonstrate, women's personal networks transformed as they changed household, job and locality. Having a mobile phone clearly helped them keep in touch with one another. Many women interviewed were able to obtain a mobile phone within the first two years of living in the city, either because they were able to buy it or because it was given to them by their employers. Yet in several cases domestic workers (especially in Ethiopia) recounted in interview that they easily lost contact with women who no longer lived or worked nearby. At first glance, many of these contacts may appear weak in terms of intensity and durability. However, this is not always the case. It is true that while these ties can be easily interrupted, they can also be "intermittently activated" (Jacobson, 1971, p. 634) in times of need. For example, Neema found support in Zulfa when they were neighbors, but they drifted apart when Zulfa moved to Dar es Salaam, nevertheless Neema hoped to join her in Dar es Salaam in the coming future. This is an example of ties that are active when women live nearby and that become latent when they move apart (see Nelson, 1978b), and remain on hold until the right time.

While in some cases women considered some people as "mere" acquaintances, in other cases they established deep bonds of friendship on the basis of similar characteristics such as the common place of birth, similar age, level of education and status. Neema considered Zulfa to be a good friend: their bond had strengthened after Zulfa's relatives hosted her for a week when she left a job. In these cases, friendship relations were supported by elements of reciprocity, where affection and calculation did not contradict each other (see Mains, 2013). Among the people she considered to be good friends, Minew included her former schoolmate Tigist who offered her free accommodation, as well as two female peers who she lived with while working on construction sites. The latter had initially been acquaintances who Tigist had introduced to Minew, but they subsequently strengthened their relationship when they shared a room, food and money for more than one year. Neema and Minew both invested strategically in their relationship with other domestic workers to obtain short-term advantages. Sporadic ties also often played a significant role in facilitating access to alternative, more distant social circles and associated resources and information, such as news about job opportunities (Kuschminder, 2016). Overall, many relationships that women established with each other cannot be statically defined as strong or weak. Minew found a job in Debre Markos through the help of Alemtsehay, and later mobilized other contacts to find other jobs and overcome several challenges she faced in the city, but she relied again

on Alemtsehay after her time spent on construction sites. When I met her, she referred to Alemtsehay (who was six years older) as a sort of role model, and the only person who could help her move to a bigger city.

My research also found situations in which women's relationships were characterized by conflict. Conflict could occur between women working in the same household or neighbourhood, sometimes prompted by their different place of origin or religion. For example Burtuqal, an Ethiopian woman from the Amhara region who I met in Addis Ababa where she was working, told me that she lost her job because a female colleague from Bonga repeatedly tried to turn her against their employers. She recounted how this woman used to accuse her of breaking glasses and other goods in the house. In Burtuqal's words: "she was from Bonga and was very jealous because I was the one who was usually sent outside to the supermarket or to run errands. So she broke things and would blame me: she is the one who broke it!" Similarly, Zebenneth[56], an Ethiopian woman from Bonga who I met in Addis Abeba, reported that she lost her job because of a female colleague from Gondar (Amhara region). In her words:

> The reason I got out of that house is this one. Imagine that this is the daughter's house and the house of the mother is in front of it. I mean, they were within the same compound within one fence, they were connected, there was only a corridor separating them. I used to work for the daughter. Another servant from Gondar used to work for the mother. Whenever a guest came, they all ate in the mother's house. The daughter's family rarely had dinner in the daughter's room. In the last case I cooked for them, but when they were eating in the mother's house there was that servant from Gondar who used to cook. This servant used to be very jealous of me, she was very jealous of my condition. For example, I was the one who was usually sent to the supermarket and outside whenever they needed to buy something. The daughter was working for an NGO, she used to spend much time out of the house. But the old mother used to stay inside, she sent me to ran me errand while the other servant was cleaning the house or cooking. Then the servant from Gondar began to raise a question like "why should not she do the same work that I do? After all the daughter's family is having dinner here." She was very jealous, and so whenever she broke an object in the house she blamed me, she said to the old mother: "Look what she did! She broke it!" Besides the old mother listened to her, because the old mother always stayed with her servant, while the daughter used to work in an NGO, she was often outside and so they were all against me. Thus, even though I loved the daughter, it became difficult for me to work in that condition..

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[56] I have mentioned Zebenneth in the chapter "When I was there… then I moved to town", in the section "premarital pregnancy."

it was very hard. One day she even accused me of secretly stealing *enjera*. It came time I could no longer handle the situation, I got too upset about such difficulties. I and the other servant had a fight several times, and so I said to myself "our dispute will get worse in time." For this reason I didn't want to continue to work in that house and I got out. And then I moved to another house (Zebenneth, 24 years old, 04/12/18, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia)

Other conflicting or competitive situations among domestic workers working in the same household occurred when one of them was accused, by the female employer, of provoking her husband and having sex with him. It could happen that domestic workers accused each other in order not to lose their jobs. Yet the same women who entered the competition supported each other in other circumstances. A domestic worker could accuse a colleague of stealing food in the house, and at the same time she would help her find another job. That is, elements of mutual support, competition and conflict could coexist (see Pat Caplan & Bujra, 1978). Ultimately, personal networks are complex, dynamic entities which undergo deep transformations over the life course, as relationships may form, weaken, strengthen, dissolve, form again and change in content (McCarty et al., 2019).

7.5   Conclusions

This chapter has discussed how domestic workers continuously establish and mobilise various kinds of personal networks to achieve their goals and overcome challenges that hinder their precarious lives. Many women in Ethiopia and Tanzania describe their lives as isolated and dependent on the will of their employers. At the same time, mobility is a central element in their lives. During my fieldwork I could not 'follow' (Epstein 1969a, p. 112) the women along the urban paths. As I also explained in the methodology of this thesis, domestic workers are not easy to reach and they hardly have time off. Clearly, exploring the urban context and making daily encounters allowed me to trace some relationships that characterize their lives. But in my work I have mainly tried to follow their life trajectories, and their personal networks, through the analysis of their narratives. In this chapter - through the narratives of Minew in Ethiopia and Neema in Tanzania - I have shown that, once in the city, domestic workers are confronted with hard working conditions, forms of mistreatment and abuse, new forms of gender oppression and restrictions on their mobility, and many of their expectations are unfulfilled. In the absence of institutional social protection, domestic workers create their own strategies of survival and resistance outside formal channels. They change several households and alternate between domestic work and other forms of daily

labour. Domestic workers provide each other with various forms of support and lend each other small amounts of money.

Most of the personal networks that women mobilise cannot be rigidly categorised as strong or weak. Women develop various ties which range from strong bonds of friendship to mere acquaintance relationships. Conflictual relationships also occur and, in the same relationship, elements of mutual support and competition can coexist. Links between women are frequently interrupted as domestic workers move between different households and cities, but they can also be reactivated in later circumstances. Finally, sporadic and apparently weak ties can have an important role in women's lives and, in particular, they are strategically used in times of need.

Personal networks are dynamic and change across life events, such as migration and unemployment. By examining personal networks we can investigate how domestic workers manage their lives and interact in complex contexts and retrace their life paths and choices and the structural circumstances in which these unfold. At the same time, analysing personal networks allows us to consider the narratives that women produce, through which they give meaning to their lives and position and identify themselves among others.

In the next chapter, I will link the lived experiences of female domestic workers to CVM projects involving domestic workers, and more broadly, to the international policy plans for the improvement of domestic worker' rights.

8 A FIGHT FOR RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION

In this chapter I shall link the lived experiences of female domestic workers illustrated in this thesis to the NGO projects involving domestic workers, and more broadly, to the international policy plans for the improvement of domestic workers' rights. So far I have described the experiences of female domestic workers, by following their personal narratives, mainly in relation to their life before they came into contact with CVM. But when I met them in Debre Markos and Morogoro, the women knew about CVM projects and regularly attended the meetings of the Domestic Workers' Associations, even if most of them were new members. Once in contact with the NGO, many women began to take an active role in campaigns for domestic workers' rights, and in particular in the campaigns for the ratification of the ILO Convention 189 'Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers'. The representatives of the Domestic Workers' Associations, those who had known the NGO for more time, had become role models in the eyes of other workers, as I will show in the first section of this chapter. In the second section of this chapter I will show the projects of CVM that works in collaboration with international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), and the relevance of the ILO Convention 189 for the improvement of domestic workers' conditions at national and international level. Then, I will examine the point of view of various activists advocating for the recognition of domestic workers' rights in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In doing so, I shall draw on interviews carried out with members and representatives of domestic workers' associations, trade unions and other organizations and institutions in both countries. This chapter also draws on information collected after my fieldwork, especially from my attendance at online conferences and webinars on domestic work in Africa. For instance, an International Webinar on 20th October 2020 was attended by various representatives of the following organizations and institutions: the IDWF; the ILO in Ethiopia; the Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA); the National Networks of Domestic Workers in Ethiopia; the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Union (CETU); the General Secretary of Conservation, Hotels, Domestic Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU); and others. This event was part of the larger CVM project "Creation of a Support Network for Domestic Workers in Ethiopia and Tanzania" (2017-2020).

In the last section of this chapter, I shall shed light on some ambiguities which might come to the fore precisely when projects fostered by workers' organizations and other activists

aim at the formalization of hired care work. Lastly, I will offer my conclusions and argue that an integrated approach is needed which accounts for women's strategies both within and outside formal channels of support, where domestic workers themselves can take a leading role in fostering new solutions for the improvement of domestic workers condition.

8.1   When domestic workers meet the NGO

As I have shown in the previous chapter, when domestic workers are isolated socially and have no contact with associations, trade unions and other labour organisations who are fighting for their rights, they themselves may employ alternative strategies of survival and resistance outside formal channels. They mobilise different forms of emotional, practical and mutual support. Personal narratives illustrated in this thesis show that despite of a set of limitations and obstacles to the possibility of interaction with each other, domestic workers take advantage of every available situation to exchange relevant information on job opportunities, and more broadly, on both the opportunities and difficulties which they may encounter in the urban context. Many domestic workers I interviewed who then came into contact with workers' organizations are now joining in the International Campaign for the Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189. In particular, Ketema, Emebet and Yamrot in Ethiopia, and Beatrice and Vestina in Tanzania are leaders of the Domestic Workers Associations. At the time of my fieldwork they were the only women I met in Debre Markos and Morogoro who had come into contact with CVM for more than three years. I have illustrated their experiences and analysed their personal narratives in this thesis, but up to now I mainly referred to their life experiences before they had known the NGO. Like the other domestic workers interviewed, during their stay in town they changed several households of work, confronted with both enabling and constraining situations, while juggling the need to fulfil personal aspirations and family needs. For instance: they had access to school, but no salary and several forms of mistreatment; or, a monthly salary, good relationship with employers, but no chance to go to school; or, monthly salary, school attendance, but sexual harassment. However, every time they were able to escape a specific challenge, and they often relied on the support of other domestic workers who helped them find another job. When I met them, their living and working conditions had slightly improved compared to the past, especially in relation to the way they were treated by their employers, and to their employers' willingness to allow them to attend specific professional trainings, albeit sporadically. They were considered as role models by other members of the Domestic Workers' Associations.

For instance, Beatrice in Tanzania was considered by other domestic workers like a successful woman for a number of reasons: she was working within a well-off household (her male employer was an entrepreneur in the automotive sector, while her female employer was working as a secretary in a local NGO). Her monthly salary was higher than the one of other domestic workers; with her savings she was building a house in Dodoma. Yet apparently she had less free time and freedom of movement than other women. I have found difficult to make appointments with Beatrice for the interviews, she didn't have free time and her employers rarely allowed her to attend the meetings of the Domestic Workers Associations. This also applied to other women, but Beatrice was one of the domestic workers more difficult to reach. All her expectations about education had not been met, as in Morogoro she neither got the chance to continue the secondary school, nor to attend a tailoring course which was one of her ambitions. However, when I met her she had recently attended – together with other domestic workers – a two-week course on "domestic service" at the TVET Mikumi center organized by CVM in collaboration with the TVET center. Beatrice reported that this was the first time she had been given the opportunity to attend a course or training of any kind since when she was living in Morogoro. At first her employers did not want her to attend the course, but they then agreed as long as Beatrice found a replacement. She found a domestic worker from Dodoma region who could replace her at work for two weeks. Other women in the neighborhood could not attend the TVET course precisely because they did not find a replacement in time, and CVM staff members said that this situation had created fractures and discussions with some employers (Beatrice's employers included).

With her ability to put aside small savings from year to year, Beatrice had managed to build a house in her home village, which is one reason why the other workers admired her so much. Talents and vocations were described by women as something which God had bestowed upon them. As Beatrice explained, she used to send her savings to her mother in Dodoma region, by using an electronic transfer system (namely M-PESA). With those savings, and at her suggestion, her mother and uncle had started a small business: they bought cereals, stored them and sold them once prices were higher. They had used the profit of this activity to build a small house in the rural area. This house was still uncompleted, but they were already renting it to one person at a low price. Once the house was completed they would have rented it at a higher price. Beatrice described herself as the leader of the business, the one who had the idea and was able to give directions for its success. The ability to support her mother and other relatives in Dodoma was largely part of her future plans. Her aspirations

have to be understood within a complex set of social relations, where the acquisition of identity, selfhood and autonomy co-exist with the development of intergenerational family relations, rather than being disengaged from them. Meanwhile, Beatrice was building her own 'autonomy' in Morogoro. While feeling the uncertainty and the unpredictability of her future, she was reframing other ambitions. She gave up on the idea of attending formal school, but she wanted to invest her savings to pay for an intensive TVET course. She mentioned an hotel management course and a cooking course. She didn't have a clear idea of the work sector in which she could work in the future, available opportunities were uncertain. Yet she wanted to find a better paid job, for instance in a hotel, and seemed to be worried about the passing of time. As she put it: "there will come a time when I won't be able to work as a domestic worker anymore". Yet Beatrice was also a leading member of the Domestic Workers Associations. In her accounts, it was now part of her ambition to strengthen the Associations and advocate for domestic workers rights. The same was true for the other leaders of the Associations in Tanzania and Ethiopia, but also for other member who had recently come into contact with the NGO. Individual and collective forms of agency employed by domestic workers in the previous years to improve their situation were gradually incorporated into the Association's strategies aimed at improving domestic workers' lives.

Also Ketema and Emebet in Ethiopia were seen as a role models by other female workers. They were the leaders of the domestic workers' Associations in Debre Markos. For example Ketema - as I have already illustrated in this thesis- was working as a live-in domestic worker for her relatives in Debre Markos when I met her, after having experienced severe forms of exploitation as a live-in domestic worker in Addis Abeba. She did not have a salary, but unlike other women she had managed to attend several training and courses (trainings organized by CVM, but also trainings external to the NGO). Her plan was to enroll in further, more intensive and advanced trainings to find work in the hospitality industry, or perhaps find a job in the Middle East. CVM involved her in the various meetings with the trade unions in Addis Abeba. She was one the main spokespersons for the activities of the Associations and was always at the forefront during the awareness campaigns of the NGO. This is a reason why the other workers admire her. Of course, I take into consideration the fact that everything the workers told me was influenced by my position as a researcher and a member of the NGO. These women shared with members of the Associations their personal experience as domestic workers, as well as that of other women they encountered, and the knowledge of the urban context. This time the goal was to strengthen the Associations by

involving new members, and to share domestic workers' challenges and strategies of resistance with Trade Unions in the battle for domestic work rights. Indeed, informal ways of organizing among domestic workers outside formal channels might have a political element and play a key role in developing collective strategies of resistance (Hepburn 2019, p. 46). Many domestic workers interviewed who then come into contact with workers' organizations are now joining in the International Campaign for the Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers globally, which is one of the main goals of CVM projects, as I elaborate.

8.2   CVM projects to support domestic workers

The objective of my research has also been to assess the experiences of the people involved in CVM projects - and in particular domestic workers (the so called beneficiaries) - in relation to the activities organized by the NGO, such as specific meetings of the Domestic Workers Associations and educational trainings, and the impact of these activities in their lives. Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania the NGO supports the creation of domestic workers' Associations, whose members meet regularly (there are more than 2000 members both in Ethiopia and Tanzania). The first Associations in Ethiopia and Tanzania were established between 2010 and 2013. At that time the NGO did not carry out specific projects on domestic work, but rather HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs aimed at promoting the capacities of communities and civil society organization (CSO) to uphold the needs/vulnerability of vulnerable groups, especially orphan children, women and girls. Within these projects, CVM began to support domestic workers (who were called "housemaids" in its projects) to become less vulnerable to HIV. By uniting "housemaids" in Associations, the girls could more easily be linked to existing government and communities structures: enrolment in school, HIV education and treatment, economic strengthening (CVM 2013, p. 1). This is how the first Associations were born. The first Association was established in Ethiopia in 2010. Currently, there are 33 Domestic Workers Associations in Ethiopia and 42 in Tanzania plus a national network in both countries. The involvement, empowerment and capacity building of Associations have the objective to facilitate and strengthen support networks for domestic workers and build local organizations, which aim to enhance and promote domestic workers rights. During their meetings, members of the Associations share their life and work experiences, and develop mutual support strategies, as well as ways to engage with new potential members and strengthen the associations. Members have been enrolled in

combined trainings in labour laws, reproductive health, time management in the workplace, communication and professional skills, among others. Further trainings on domestic workers' rights have involved employers as well. Members of the Domestic Workers Associations also periodically engage in income generating activities (IGAs), for instance in baking Injera and leather processing in Ethiopia, in dried fish processing and cosmetics/soaps production in Tanzania. At the time of my fieldwork both in Ethiopia and Tanzania there were no IGAs going on, aside from the ones carried out by the Associations of returnee migrants domestic workers in Addis Abeba.

During my fieldwork CVM was organizing specific professional trainings for domestic workers in collaboration with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centers in both countries. Courses were provided on different topics including cooking, food and beverage management, elderly and child care, arrangement of the home, housekeeping, necessary safety measures, prevention and management of risks, hotel management, accommodation services, and other trainings aimed at professionalize "domestic service". The latter was the title of the certificate of attendance issued by the TVET center in Morogoro, while in Ethiopia it was called "hospitality". These trainings consisted of courses lasting about 120 hours distributed over 30/45 days, or even over 15 days for those who could temporarily leave the workplace (the household) and attend an intensive training for two weeks. The latter possibility was present only in Tanzania (Morogoro) at the time of my second fieldwork, as the NGO was collaborating with the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) Mikumi center (about 120 kilometres from Morogoro Municipality). Participants were given room and board for two weeks at the VETA Mikumi center. Yet in order to attend training domestic workers usually had to find another woman who could replace them in the workplace (the household) during the period of their absence. A maximum of 15 domestic workers could participate in each training cycle. Most of the participants were new members who had come into contact with CVM from a minimum of two months to a maximum of one year. All these activities have been facilitated by the NGO in strong partnership with different local leaders and representatives of the community in both countries.

More broadly, CVM projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania promote and facilitate coordination between institutions and trade unions as regards the implementation of actions and policies that protect domestic workers and recognize them as a professional category. In particular, the NGO facilitates the organization of meetings, workshops and social exchange tables involving various representatives of institutions at National, Regional and Local level, Trade

Unions and Domestic Workers Associations in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Supported by the involvement of international actors such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) - which is the only global trade union led by women - the NGO also contributes to the International Campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 "Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers" (C189) in both countries. At the time of my fieldwork the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU) in Tanzania was an affiliate of IDWF. In contrast, when I started my fieldwork in Ethiopia IDWF did not have Ethiopia as an affiliate. But something changed at the end of 2018. On 24 October 2018 I was in Zanzibar, I was interviewing a CHODAWU representative in Stone Town. At one point during our conversation, the woman received a text message on her mobile phone and interrupted our conversation. She checked her mobile phone and then exclaimed: "now we also have Ethiopia as an affiliate!" She enthusiastically showed me her whatsapp chat. She had received a message on a whatsapp group where an IDWF representative wrote: ""I am glad to inform you that the Mulu Tesfa Domestic Worker Association in Ethiopia has been approved by the IDWF Executive Committee to be an IDWF affiliate. Now we have 22 Affiliates in Africa!" The *Mulu Tesfa* (literally meaning "full hope Change-seek") Domestic Workers Association was the first Association established by CVM in 2010. It became the first IDWF affiliated association in Ethiopia. In the subsequent years, also Congo, Burkina Faso, Botswana and Benin became affiliates of IDWF that currently has a total of 25 affiliates in Africa.

CVM works in collaboration with international organizations like the ILO and IDWF for the promotion of women's rights and equal opportunities beyond specific country case studies, aiming at the acknowledgement of domestic workers' contribution at global level. Among the other activities, CVM/IDWF/ILO regularly organize Training of Trainers (ToT) for domestic workers, local government leaders, trade union officials and other representatives in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Participants are trained on several issues including the current situation of domestic workers in the country, rights of domestic workers, organizing and leadership skills, labor laws and ILO C189. Among the various activities, these trainings aim at developing action plans to lobby government for the improvement of domestic workers' conditions in terms of payment, enforcement of written contracts, access to social protection, the right to a safe work environment, and more broadly, to advocate for the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 'Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers'.

8.3 The ILO Convention No. 189

Recent decades have seen increasing concern over domestic workers' labour rights globally, for a number of reasons. First of all, "the non-disappearance or even the 'return of domestic workers' has been observed almost everywhere in the contemporary world since the 1980s (…) Furthermore, with the expansion of intercontinental migration in the wake of neoliberal economic globalization, the 1990s saw the emergence of a global domesticity market", the analysis of which involved many fields of study (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. VI). The growing interest in domestic workers has emerged not only among scholars, but increasingly among non-academic actors, in civil society organizations, social networks, media, and so on. Organizations like the ILO have worked to make known the number of people involved in domestic work as a strategy to change perceptions of this undervalued sector, and to make visible its economic and social worth. One of the most important events that we must consider is the ILO's adoption of Convention 189 and Recommendation 201 concerning "Decent Work for Domestic Workers", which was promulgated in Geneva in 2011 and entered into force in 2013. The Article 1 of the C189 defines domestic work as work performed in or for a household or households, within an employment relationship and on an occupational basis. For the purpose of the Convention:

(a) the term "domestic work" means work performed in or for a household or households;

(b) the term "domestic worker" means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship;

(c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker.

Thus, it covers "those who live in and out of the household; who work on an hourly, daily, monthly or other basis; who work for a single household or multiple households; and who are employed either by the household or through a service provider. Regardless of the working arrangements, the factor that brings them together is that their activities are performed in or for private households" (ILO 2021, p. 5).

In its Preamble, the Convention sheds light on the persistent undervaluation of domestic workers and their contribution to the global economy. It highlights that domestic workers, who are often migrants or members of disadvantaged communities, are neither "members of the family", nor "servants", nor second-class workers. The Convention requires that ratifying

countries ensure that domestic workers enjoy decent work like workers from other sectors, while taking into consideration the specificities of the sector. The Convention sets a number of minimum standards covering different areas: basic rights of domestic workers (Article 3, 4, 5, 6, 11); information on terms and conditions of employment (Article 7); hours of work (Article 10); remuneration (Article 11, 12, 15); occupational safety and health (Article 13); social security (Article 14); standards concerning child domestic workers (Article 4); standards concerning live-in workers (Article 6, 9, 10); standards concerning migrant domestic workers (Article 8,15); private employment agencies (Article 15); dispute settlement, complaints, enforcement (Article 16, 17).

In relation to basic rights of domestic workers (Article 3), the Convention states that Member States must recognize, respect and promote a) freedom of association and collective bargaining, protecting the rights of workers and employers to establish and join federations, organizations and confederations; b) eliminate all forms of forced or compulsory labour; c) abolish child labour; d) eliminate discriminations in respect of occupation and employment. Each Member must set a minimum age for domestic workers (not lower than that established by national laws), and ensure that workers who are under the age of 18 and above the minimum age of employment are not deprived of compulsory education and the opportunity to participate in further vocational trainings (Article 4). The ILO conventions against child labor (no. 138 in 1973 and no. 182 in 1999), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 have prompted many non-governmental organizations to foster programs to protect children against the worst forms of child labor. In particular, the Recommendation 201 attached to the Convention states that Members should take measures to protect domestic workers under the age of 18 by (a) strictly limiting their hours of work to ensure adequate time for rest, education and training, leisure activities and family contacts; (b) prohibiting night work; (c) placing restrictions on work that is excessively demanding, whether physically or psychologically; and (d) establishing or strengthening mechanisms to monitor their working and living conditions. Yet in order to avoid observing these children's rights an increasing number of employers might describe their underage workers as "kept relatives". Indeed "twenty-first century domestic service practices that are widespread in Africa are contributing to reproduce a generation of young people who are probably unpaid, barely if at all educated, and ill-prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow" (Hansen K.T. 2019, p. 147). As my study also showed, the tendency to define domestic workers as "family members" in many African countries is not only a reaction to international labor standards, but has its roots in recruiting practices based on family networks. However, we must

consider that faced with the risk of being labeled as carrying the worst forms of child labor, many employers may emphasize the way they define domestic workers as their "children".

The Convention also states that domestic workers must be protected against all forms of violence, harassment and abuse (Article 5), and must enjoy fair terms of employment and decent living conditions that respect their privacy (Article 6). Domestic workers have to be informed of their terms and conditions of employment (preferably through written contracts) (Article 7). According to the Convention, during periods of daily and weekly rest or annual leave live-in domestic workers are not obliged to remain in the household, and have the right to keep their travel and identity documents (Article 9). Weekly rest should be at least 24 consecutive hours. Overall, State Members must ensure equal treatment between workers in relation hours of work, overtime compensation, periods of annual leave, daily and weekly rest, (Article 10) and in relation to minimum wage coverage (Article 11). The Article 18 of the Convention calls upon Member States to implement its provisions:

> Each Member shall implement the provisions of this Convention, in consultation with the most representative employers' and workers' organizations, through laws and regulations, as well as through collective agreements or additional measures consistent with national practice, by extending or adapting existing measures to cover domestic workers or by developing specific measures for them, as appropriate.

The accompanying Recommendation No. 201 (that is not open for ratification), provides practical guidance concerning possible legal and other measures to implement the Convention's principles and rights. It includes things such things as promoting health and safety trainings for domestic workers, model employment contracts, and providing information to migrant domestic workers. To give an example, the accompanying Recommendation states that in taking measures to protect domestic workers from abuse, harassment and violence, Members should a) establish accessible complaint mechanisms for domestic workers to report cases of violence, harassment and abuse; b) ensure that all complaints are investigated and prosecuted; c) establish programmes for the relocation from the household and rehabilitation of the victims, including the provision of temporary accommodation and health care.

The effects of the Convention on different countries are not easily measurable, but campaigns led by activists, NGOs, Domestic Workers' Associations, workers' movements, support networks of various kinds, have had political effects such as the adoption of a minimum wage (for instance in Kenya) or the creation of a trade union (such as in the case of Rwanda) (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. XIII). A positive effect in Tanzania was the

increase of the minimum wage for domestic workers by 55 per cent in 2013 (it is revised every three years), while in Ethiopia registration centers, training facilities and information centers for migrant domestic workers in different parts of the country have been established (ITUC 2016, pp. 22-23). Ten years after the adoption of the Convention, the ILO reports state that while worldwide significant progress in legal coverage has been achieved (for instance in the areas of working time, wages and maternity protection), "important gaps in implementation and decent work deficits remain" (ILO 2021, p. 1). Currently, 35 Governments have ratified the Convention.[57] The six African countries who have ratified the Convention are Mauritius (2012), South Africa (2013), Guinea (2017), Madagascar (2019), Namibia (2020, not in force), Sierra Leone (2021, not in force).

Since when the ILO C189 was promulgated, external pressures in several countries were brought on efforts to regulate domestic work, including unionization. In 2013, 47 domestic workers' organizations held the founding congress of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), which is now an affiliate of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF).

> In carrying out its mission to build a strong, democratic and united global organization of domestic and household workers aiming to protect and advance domestic workers' rights everywhere, the IDWF has played a vital role in building the capacity of fledgling organizations of domestic workers around the world (ILO 2021, p. 224).

The IDWF currently represents over 590,000 domestic workers through 81 affiliates in 63 countries around the world[58] (IDWF/WIEGO 2021, p. 9). It counts 25 affiliates in Africa. Tanzania became an IDWF affiliate in 2014 and Ethiopia in 2018, while I was conducting my first period of fieldwork research, as I have already mentioned. In advocating for domestic workers' rights in Ethiopia and Tanzania, CVM collaborates with international organizations such as the ILO and IDWF which promote the inclusion of domestic work in the scope of the Ethiopian legislation, and the ratification of the ILO C189 in both countries.

Recent studies are questioning "in what ways, and under which conditions, what we identify as 'global rights' can be transferred to the level of 'local struggles' " (Cherubini et al., 2018,

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[57] Ratification by region: Latin America (13), Europe (10), Africa (6), Caribbean (5), Asia-Pacific (1), North America (0), Middle East (0). The first countries were Uruguay, the Philippines and Mauritius in 2012, and most recently Mexico and Namibia (not in force) in 2020, Malta (not in force), Norway (not in force), Antigua and Barbuda (not in force) and Sierra Leone (not in force) in 2021. See the updated list of ratifying countries at the following link: Ratifications of ILO conventions: Ratifications by Convention

[58] See the full list of IDWF affiliates at the following link: All Affiliates — English (idwfed.org)

p. 719). That is, in which ways C189 and the global campaign for its ratification have been incorporated, fuelled or resisted, from a social movement perspective, in different local contexts. Further studies discuss historical forms of domestic workers' invisibility and question how international institution, such as the ILO, will address labor market informality alongside national and regional law reform (see Blackett 2019). As Karen T. Hansen (2019) points out:

> Because domestic service is performed within the private household, it is difficult to categorize as labor in a formal sense or as informal work, and therefore domestic service is problematic in the context of labor union formation. These are among the reasons why the private becomes political on the home front in domestic service (Hansen K.T. 2019, p. 145)

ILO Convention 189 is an important step in the process of achieving political and economic recognition of domestic workers, and it may be a pivotal incentive for collective mobilization. The Convention can hardly cover all the specific and peculiar contexts of each country, but "it does 'create' domestic workers and, in so doing, allows them to lay claim to this status" (Jacquemin and Tisseau 2019, p. XIII). Looking at the role of domestic workers in the negotiation of this convention is an important research perspective. In the next section I shall illustrate the efforts of various activists, women and labour actors involved in the struggle for domestic workers' rights in Ethiopia and Tanzania. Support networks are mobilised at local, regional, national and international level, and emphasise the need for domestic workers themselves to be on the frontline. Yet the efforts to organise domestic workers also face many challenges, and much remains to be done to achieve decent work conditions for this group of unprotected women workers.

8.4   Advocating for domestic workers' rights

Many activists in Ethiopia and Tanzania maintain that their main strategy to advance domestic workers' rights is to mobilise and strengthen a support network at national, regional and local level. A representative of the National Network of Domestic Workers in Ethiopia stated:

> Do you see how many organisations and institutions we are involving? We have IDWF as a main international partner and we work with CETU (called Isamaku in Amharic). At national level we participate in national conferences, we are on the frontlines in requesting our rights! Our main government partner is now the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, but we also involve the Women and Children and Youth Affairs and other relevant offices. We ask for the implementation of written contracts for domestic workers, so we are working very

closely with local Private Employment Agencies (PEAs). We advocate for the rights of domestic workers into the education system, and so we bring Educational Offices and TVET colleges into our campaign! And then we involve so many actors … so many actors within the civil society too!" (Personal communication, 3 December 2019)

She goes on to say that it is essential for domestic workers to take a leading role in the network and to speak in their own voice.

> Our aim is to build our dignity as domestic workers, our confidence because we have to be proud of our competences and skills as workers. We are employing a capacity-building strategy to fight for our own rights in the workplace … because we have the right to receive a good salary … we are workers as all other workers!

In the following interview a representative of CHODAWU in Tanzania explains how domestic workers strengthen their groups and lobby the government through awareness campaigns.

> In the last three years we have seen developments through a number of activities. There have been broad awareness campaigns and especially a media campaign in which domestic workers' leaders and other members participated. We are promoting new trainings on workers' rights … from these new female leaders have come up from the groups of domestic workers. Nowadays we have domestic workers' branches in Tanzania which are led by domestic workers themselves. But what matters most is that domestic workers are proud of themselves: we are domestic workers! (International Webinar, 20 October 2020)

In the IDWF official website there is an updated list of the activities carried out by IDWF, CHODAWU in Tanzania and other activists. For example in February 2016 IDWF organized a lobbying meeting to the Minister of State (Policy, Parliamentary affairs, Employment, Youth and Disabled) in Dodoma city.[59] The aim was to introduce IDWF and the role that it plays to protect domestic workers in Tanzania; to brief on the activities and measures which have been taken by CHODAWU and domestic workers; and to lobby and ask to speedy the ratification of ILO C189 which was expressed by domestic workers. As a more recent example, on the 9th October 2020 workers and branch leaders under the union CHODAWU gathered and attended five days of Training of Trainers (ToT). The aim was to develop new skills to negotiate for domestic workers' rights with employers, and to campaign for the ratification of C189.

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[59] See the official IDWF website at the following link: International Domestic Workers Federation — English (idwfed.org)

Both in Ethiopia and Tanzania task forces have been formed with various labour activists to promote the ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189. Yet unlike Tanzania, in Ethiopia the involvement of trade unions might appear to be ambivalent. On the one hand, trade unions are interested in promoting the Convention and advocating for domestic workers rights; on the other hand, since domestic workers are outside the labor legislation, trade unions end up not having legal competence to defend their interests. A representative of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) argued that in Ethiopia the first step to be achieved is the inclusion of domestic workers in the Ethiopian Labour Proclamation No.1156/2019.

> As we all know, the Ethiopian Labour Law does not cover the issue of domestic workers, it does not see domestic work as work and domestic workers as workers, and also the very recent amended Labour Law neglects to cover the issue of domestic workers … but it also indicates that the Council of Ministers could issue the regulation. So why don't we prepare a proposal for the Council of Ministers? (Personal communication, 18 December 2019).

Indeed I have already illustrated in the introduction of this thesis that if we look at the Ethiopian Labour Proclamation domestic work is simply defined as a set of private services which are excluded from the coverage of the Labour Proclamation [Articles 2 (16) cum 3 (2) (c)]. The Proclamation also indicates that the Council of Ministers can issue the regulation to change this. Many campaigns for the rights of domestic workers in Ethiopia explicitly target 'migrant workers' (meaning the ones who find a job as domestic workers abroad), precisely because internal domestic workers are not recognized as workers in the labour law. It is therefore challenging for activists to carry on 'explicit' battles. The IDWF website also mainly lists actions targeting 'migrant domestic workers'.

Overall, a representative of the African Regional Women's Committee emphasises that the only way to engage civil society to promote domestic workers' rights is to empower domestic workers who have to take the lead in this campaign and demand what they need:

> But you know, in reality we have many federations that say "we support domestic workers" but many of these federations are not really doing something for domestic workers. So the only way that African countries would get C189 is when domestic workers take control of their lives, when they take the lead in this campaign! We should not wait for a federation to do it, we as domestic workers have to go to them and tell what we want! If we don't do that, even the ratified C189 will be only a piece of paper! (International Webinar, 20 October 2020).

The activists emphasise two main aspects: the need to mobilise a support network at various levels, and the need for domestic workers to be in the frontline and speak in their own voice. At the same time, both in Ethiopia and Tanzania domestic workers and other women's activists point out that despite all the effort they have failed to achieve significant improvements in domestic workers' rights. In particular, formal workers' organisations face many challenges organising domestic workers and there is still little awareness of domestic worker associations' existence among domestic workers themselves. Hepburn (2019) writing about Zambian domestic workers elaborates on 'the limits' of efforts to unionise workers who are employed in households and the role of informal solidarity building. A member of the Trade Union CHODAWU in Tanzania, stated during a focus group discussion:

> The problem is when we want to gather and involve new domestic workers who do not know about our existence, especially those who live with their employers. Because usually you can't tell your employers the truth, you can't tell them that you are coming here … So if I meet other domestic workers in the *daladala* (minibus) … this is a way to exchange ideas, talk about CHODAWU and share problems. But there are many women that you do not easily meet, they just stay at home they do not take *daladala* … or sometimes we meet other women in the supermarket, in markets maybe when we go to buy small stuff. So we meet and try to convince them to join the association … they usually agree though the problem is how they will tell their employers that they want to join the association. So to gather here is a huge problem!" (Focus group discussion, 11 September 2018).

Several domestic workers interviewed in Tanzania told me that it was initially very difficult to attend CHODAWU meetings. Sometimes they had to invent lies (such as a family problem) to their employers to be allowed to leave the workplace (the home). In their accounts, at first they even didn't trust the trade union, but when I met them they argued that thanks to CHODAWU and CVM they were more aware of those workers' rights that they previously ignored. In their accounts, as the domestic workers became familiar with the CVM Associations, they managed to involve new members including those unpaid workers which government measures for decent work often fail to protect. That is, for instance, unpaid girls who had been transferred from their rural natal home to better-off households in the urban area as part of traditional institutions of kin support.

At the time of my fieldwork, several community-based organization (CBO) in both countries were collaborating with CVM, mainly helping the NGO in finding domestic workers in the neighborhood, communicating with their employers, so that new domestic workers would

get involved in the NGO activities, and become members of the Domestic Workers' Associations. Interestingly, a man representative of a CBO in Ethiopia argued:

> When labour activists came with this idea of advocating for domestic workers' rights, honestly at the beginning we were very surprised… we wondered "In what angle did they see domestic work as a social problem?!" For example if you have a relative or other good relations in the rural area you may find a domestic worker who is your blood relative… maybe she is leading a low standard of living in the rural area, she can come to live with a relative in the city. And so you may say to her family "send your daughter to us, don't worry we will nurture your daughter like our own daughter" … But it is also true that nowadays domestic workers may find themselves in very exploitative situations (Personal communication, 18 July 2018).

Another male representative member of a CBO frankly stated:

> There is no need to lie, we don't provide support for domestic workers. Indeed, when CVM came with this idea of supporting domestic workers we didn't understand which was the problem. I mean, now we are working with CVM, we help CVM with the selection of domestic workers, we nominate them and bring them to the Associations. But there is no other way we can support them. And I tell you the truth, it is very hard to nominate and meet a domestic worker. Even with our involvement the selection process is very hard. It is not like when you help the orphan children or disabled people and organize social activities for them.

He pointed out that employers always fear that their domestic worker would definitely leave the house and find another job. In his view, this fear is reasonable. He argued that nowadays it is difficult to find a good domestic worker who doesn't leave the employers' house. In his view, it is likely that domestic workers will disappear in the future. This idea recurred both in Ethiopia and Tanzania, as a point of view of different people from the community.[60]

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[60] Interestingly, this is a belief that has accompanied many "Westerners" from the nineteenth century to about the eighties of the twentieth century, as Raffaella Sarti (2014) points out: "For a long time, scholars assumed that domestic service (especially live-in) would decline or even disappear because of household modernization, social progress, and development of the welfare state" (2014, p. 280). This belief "was shared by people who simply noticed, and often regretted, that hiring a (good) servant was becoming increasingly difficult; by people who thought that servants would be replaced by a new kind of domestic worker, more independent and similar to factory workers; and by people who pictured a completely new society without any kind of servants" (*ibidem*, p. 284). Yet "while at the beginning of the twentieth century many people expected that domestic service would (soon) disappear, by the end of the century not only had there been a

First of all, when you try to provide a domestic worker with a training outside the house she works in, the owner thinks that she will go away and never come back. The owners' fears are reasonable because they are busy the whole day, they need a domestic worker who covers this gap in the house, a girl who takes care of their children, but nowadays it is difficult to find a good domestic worker who remains in your house. It is not like in the previous times... in the past you could easily get a girl form the village. But nowadays girls from the rural area want to make money selling qtel (a thin long grass often used during coffee ceremonies in Ethiopia), they may find a job as daily labourers, most of them are not interested in working as domestic workers, they prefer to find other jobs in the city, maybe they can be hired as a dish washer in a big city, or other easy jobs. I personally believe that domestic workers will disappear in the future.

He continued reporting the challenges faced by the community leaders during the selection process of domestic workers in the neighborhood.

The employers think that she (the domestic worker) will abandon them. And also the girl will say to the employer, in front of us, "No, *Gashe[61]*, I feel comfortable in your house. These people are saying that they will train me and so on, they will take me out from this house so I will never take the training". We even faced situations of this kind! A girl said like that, even though she was not living in a very big house, she reacted in this way and so not only employers, but also domestic workers themselves sometimes do not want to follow us.

Finally, he explained the strategy adopted by the community leaders to involve new domestic workers - as well as their employers - in CVM activities.

By the way, since we, as *Iddir[62]* members, we are also employers… I mean since we also have domestic workers in our houses, we can talk with other employers and let them understand that their domestic workers will gain further skills through the trainings provided by CVM and the TVET college. (…) CVM told us to find and nominate domestic workers and so we thought "let's start from our own houses and then involve other domestic workers!" That is, we involved domestic workers who were working in our own houses, then we involved other domestic workers working around our village, we selected and brought them to the Associations. For example, I took a domestic worker who works in my mother's

revival of paid domestic work but new forms of domestic slavery were also being denounced" (*ibidem*, p. 300).

[61] *Gashe* (literally, 'my shield'). In the Amhara region, this is a polite way to call a man employer or a man of respect who is older than you (see Tamene 2007, p. 78).

[62] *Iddir* is an Ethiopian CBO established to provide mutual aid in burial matters, but also to address other community concerns (A. Pankhurst & Mariam, 2000).

house and another one who works in the house of one of the *Iddir* leaders and so on,.. We carried out the selection process in such a way. But when we moved to other houses far from our village it was very hard… going from home to home to the employers' houses and persuading them and so on, it is not an easy task.

In both countries, these community leaders also mentioned their attempt to develop possible written contracts to be included in the foreseeable future, as a way to improve domestic workers rights. Yet this project – firstly elaborated and fostered by the NGO - was often rejected both by employers and domestic workers, as I shall elaborate.

8.5   Within and outside formal channels of support

At the time of my fieldwork, the NGO staff was distributing a sort of formal contract prepared according to some standards proposed by Trade Unions in both countries. Yet regarding written contracts, many domestic workers interviewed claimed that they feared a contract would bind them 'forever' to their employers. Another aspect that we should take into account is that, in the contexts under study, it could be considered culturally wrong, or not appropriate, to ask for contract with people (kin or non kin) closely related to domestic workers' families. This request might be interpreted as you do not trust these people or suspect them (Mulugeta 2012, p. 19).

With few exceptions, both in Ethiopia and Tanzania the multiple agreements made for domestic workers were informal and verbal. Usually, they were stipulated between influential adults with no clear agreements about the responsibilities of the worker. Ethiopian women who had worked in Addis Abeba mentioned the brokering agency where written contracts could be produced for both internal and international migrants. But usually this was a further step for those who wanted to find a job within a household who was completely unrelated to the village, community or families of origin.

Post-apartheid South Africa witnessed one of the most remarkable efforts to recognize paid domestic work as a form of employment. A new labor legislation was established that included domestic workers and gave them the same rights of all other workers, with a national minimum wage, formal contracts of employment, formal registration, access to annual increases, extensive leave, a pension fund, severance pay, unemployment insurance benefits (a world first), a national qualification in domestic work through trainings sponsored by the government (a world first). These measures also aimed to abolish racial colour discriminations, and to ease various social tensions such as those between female employers ('madams') and female domestic workers ('maids'). In 2013, South Africa ratified the ILO

C189. Interestingly, in her study of domestic work in post-apartheid South Africa, Shireen Adam Ally (2010) points out that even the efforts to turn 'servants' into workers may produce recalcitrant realities and contradictory consequences, by reinforcing structures of raced, classed, and gendered inequality. The author argues that the formalization of hired domestic and care work in South Africa has reinforced the status quo of social inequality, facilitating the rejection of the public provision of care. She remarks:

> So it was utterly surprising that on asking them what difference democracy had made to their lives, many domestic workers repeated, over and over again, that things were actually "worse than before". They denied any knowledge of the new laws even as they claimed them, some refused to sign mandatory contracts of employment, and others refused to sign mandatory contracts of employment, and others refused their employers' effort to register them with the government for unemployment insurance (Ally, 2010, p. xxii).

The author points out that – like in postcolonial Zambia (K. T. Hansen, 1989), Tanzania (Bujra, 2000), and Zimbabwe (Pape, 1993), among others – in South Africa democratic values have coexisted with continued servitude relations within paid domestic work. In these contexts, there is a deference to the power of either employers or the market to retain the employment relationship as poorly paid, low status, and non-contractual. Shireen Ally suggests that,

> while the market and the employers are part of the explanation, we have to engage the politics of paid domestic work *as an intimate form of labor* to understand why the effort to turn "servants" into workers produced such contradictory consequences and recalcitrant realities (Ally, 2010, p. xxiii).

Domestic workers were refusing to be registered with the state, as well as to sign contracts, and they were rather choosing to informally negotiate the conditions of their work.

As Shireen Ally puts it:

> It turns out that while the state's efforts assumed paid domestic work is a form of work like any other, and could therefore be formalized and depersonalized like any other, domestic workers are *not* workers like any other. Domestic workers' workplaces are not impersonal organizations that can be easily regulated through a depersonalized industrial relation system. Instead, domestic workers' workplaces are the intimate spaces of family life, and with their work goes all the close, personal, contact, emotions, experiences, and intimacy that is the fabric of families and households (Ally, 2010, pp. 73).

Although the case of South Africa in very different from the Tanzanian and Ethiopian contexts, especially if we consider the specificity of white racism during apartheid, also Ethiopian and Tanzanian domestic workers utilize this intimacy as a way to control their work. They carefully cultivate personal relationships with their employers, they use their employers' dependence on them to regulate working conditions and wages, and strategically mobilize forms of power from the intimacy of their work. Thus, also in my study action plans for the formalization of domestic work sometimes might clash with local realities. In different circumstances, the solutions proposed by formal structures and organisations need to be adapted to the various complex realities in which women's lives are embedded. It might happen that a given solution does not meet the needs of domestic workers in a particular situation, or it is not considered to be appropriate by the potential beneficiaries. Therefore it would be very important to identify in what circumstances - within each country - specific tools for the formalization of domestic work could prove to be effective, under what circumstances they would not be, and what alternatives could be elaborated to improve the situation of female domestic workers.

If we consider the example of written contracts, the latter might be very useful for instance when women suddenly leave a given household after having experienced abuse, and find a job as domestic workers within households that are not related to their families or communities of origin, for example foreign families in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia or in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. But in most cases, when women work within family networks, formal written contracts (which are potentially useful for guaranteeing women's rights) are currently difficult to apply because they are commonly perceived as a risk, as something that might undermine the relationships of trust between rural-urban households and somehow even worsen the way female workers are perceived and treated by their employers. The same domestic workers often do not want to sign a written contract, either because they are afraid of betraying the trust of other people, or because they fear that the contract will further and permanently bind them to the households where they work. This leads us to consider the importance of an approach which integrates the strategies employed by domestic workers within and outside formal structures and avenues as a way to foster alternative solutions and include as many women as possible. An important role in identifying alternative solutions can be played by the same domestic workers who, during their life course, reinvent themselves as "intermediaries" to help other women find a better job. This aspect in part emerged in the previous chapter. I believe that their role should be enhanced within the projects of NGOs and international organizations. These women, who have accumulated

knowledge throughout their lives – and from the 'intimacy' of their work - could act as facilitators to ensure safe migration and decent working conditions for other women, and more broadly, to purse a 'risk reduction' approach.

8.6   Conclusions

In conclusion, an integrated approach is needed that takes into consideration strategies of survival and resistance and forms of support developed by women who earn a living as domestic workers, both within and outside formal channels. If not, the risk is to ignore and possibly silence a complex set of women's strategies which are not readily apparent but call for our attention. An integrated approach makes it possible to identify advantages and disadvantages, in specific circumstances, of given potential solutions and tools fostered by workers' organizations and activists for the formalization of hired care work. It also makes possible to identify alternative strategies of action while taking into account the diversity and complexity of domestic workers' experiences. These considerations further advance the contribution ethnographic research may make to political action, precisely through listening to the voices of those women who are usually merely depicted as victims to be saved. Domestic workers are active and resourceful agents who also act as potential 'intermediators' and facilitators to ensure safe migration and the protection of other female workers from the worst forms of exploitation. The projects undertaken by NGOs, international organizations of different types and the global unions such as the IDWF - which seek to recruit new members, strengthen their support networks, and foster new solutions – needs to involve these female potential intermediaries in their action plans. The latter should always take into account individual and collective strategies of resistance employed by women and call for solidarity at several levels, formal and informal.

9 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis shows that the lives of female domestic workers are closely linked, during their entire life, to a set of social obligations, gender norms and reproductive and care roles from which they can hardly escape. Care work reproduces itself in various forms in the different phases of their lives: during their childhood in rural areas, when they move to the city, when they are domestic workers, and when they shift to other occupations in the city. In my study domestic work could be defined as a set of practices of various types through which women meet the social roles that the community (and the state) have placed on them: that is, the performance of that care work that allows the wellbeing, development, functioning and maintenance of rural and urban household structures at different levels. In this thesis I have therefore tried to keep in mind how the individual experiences of female workers are influenced by structural factors that manifest in different forms of violence, risk and constraints during the life courses of women.

First, I will outline some aspects that recur in both Ethiopia and Tanzania and which characterize the experiences of female domestic workers. Domestic workers leave their rural birth places and migrate to the city, usually as adolescent girls, for a number of coexisting reasons. On the one hand, working and living in the city would seem to open up alternative life options, as life in their villages of origin, with the related forms of structural violence towards women, do not give them many alternatives to getting married, raising a family, performing agricultural activities, and sometimes selling the products in nearby markets. Several women see migration to the city as a strategy to 'free' themselves from specific gender regimes, social obligations and forms of control over them exercised by influential adults. At the same time, they hope to find some form of protection in the city. Indeed, we should consider that most of the women in my study could be defined as "lonely women" (see Barrera 2011), or "orphan" women, a term that I do not use to mean a domestic worker who lost her biological parents but to women who lack strong support networks in their villages of origin, or protective figures. This might be due to a number of reasons. It is important to underline this aspect, because it helps us to define the concepts of freedom, choice, emancipation and perception of risks also on the basis of the support networks that women had before migrating. For some women the risk of social exclusion and "social death" (Vigh 2006) in their villages of origin might be worse than the risks that the life in

the city entails. Working in the city, with all its risks, also means for them seeking a form of support and protection that is lacking back home.

Sometimes, the people who were supposed to protect domestic workers back home are sick or, more generally, their condition of poverty does not allow them to offer protection and support. But women may also lose the support of other people for reasons of structural violence: because they refused an arranged marriage; they got pregnant before marriage; because they divorced, or their mothers divorced, and lost any usufruct rights to land as well as the support of other people; to mention a few. All these reasons expose women to a condition of social exclusion, greater vulnerability and poverty. Working in the city would seem to offer a way out of the condition of social exclusion, with the possibility of creating new relationships and finding new forms of protection. Furthermore, the urban environment could be a springboard to access a quality education, move from domestic work to a better job, meet wealthy people available to help out, get in touch with an NGO that opens up new opportunities, start a business with other people, marry someone wealthy, and so on. These aspirations, expectations, and hopes feed women's lives, within a continuous tension between action and the ability to wait for the right moment to arrive: the moment when that occasion, perhaps unexpected, manifests itself and (to use an expression adopted by many women) "transforms" your life. The urban context is also full of risks, and women are well aware of this. But they are also aware that someone might win the game, and they might be that someone. In other words, hope helps them to cope with an uncertain future.

From what I have argued so far, it would seem that the motivations that push women to migrate are ones we usually tend to define as individual choices. This is not exactly the case. First of all, we must consider that the need to support family members in the villages of origin, in the city of destination, or in other areas of the country, is almost always part of domestic workers' migratory projects. Women tend to set aside their meagre savings to allow, for instance, siblings to attend school or to help a sick community/family member pay for medical treatment. Sometimes the savings allow family members left behind to buy products to sell at the market, or to buy some equipment for the house. It often also so happens that women, especially at their first work experience, are not given a salary. Sometimes the people they work for send money to their families, without paying the domestic worker directly. In fact, being an 'orphan', 'lonely woman', not having a support network back home, does not mean that you do not have to support someone left behind or that you do not feel the burden of it. This further demonstrates that the migration of women also depends, to a large extent, on the decisions of other people, both in their villages of

origin and in the place of destination. But it is also true that the women themselves then use migration as a strategy to achieve certain goals and carve out alternative spaces for action. Thus, migratory paths depend on a combination of individual, collective and structural elements.

Personal ambition, the apparently individual choice to leave the village and go to the city, must be understood within a broader migratory framework, where different social actors come into play. Sometimes women's work is used to settle disputes among families, even to settle a debt issue that resonates with literature concerning pawnage and the transition from pawnage to slavery in Africa. I couldn't analyze this aspect which would require an in-depth, interdisciplinary team study on specific household dynamics and arrangements. But unclear relations between people who organize domestic workers' placement within urban households emerge from the testimonies of the women, and of the few of their family members (mothers and sisters) whom I was able to interview. In some cases, their migratory paths seem to be part of a broader and almost inevitable path to which women are relegated, and which goes beyond the individual choice to migrate. The migratory path emerges from deep-rooted practices, which see the transfer of women from household to household, where they perform care work and protect the functioning of the household. At the same time, in the absence of better alternatives in their villages of origin, women might consider migration as a strategy to improve their lives and find new life options that would otherwise not be available.

The women move when they are adolescent girls, but also, in some cases, as little girls. At this point, however, I would like to underline a difference that, in my study, emerges between the experiences of Ethiopian and Tanzanian domestic workers. The Ethiopian women come from villages in the Amhara region, usually no more than 100 kilometers from Debre Markos, where I interviewed them. During their life courses they tend to move to towns and cities in the Amhara region, in areas where people from the Amhara ethnic group speak Amharic as their first language (which is also the official language of Ethiopia). They may also move to Addis Ababa, the capital, which could be a springboard to leave the country and work abroad. In contrast, the Tanzanian domestic workers I interviewed in Morogoro originate from different regions of the country, such as Morogoro, Mwanza, Singida and Iringa. Before reaching Morogoro (where I met them) they might have moved in different regions of the countries, even very far-flung areas. In part this is due to the fact that people from different regions share Swahili as their first language, therefore language barriers are

lower than in Ethiopia. But we should also consider that tribal background might play an important role in recruitment and migratory trajectories.

Given the condition of my fieldwork in my study it has not been possible to explore in depth the issue of the "ethnic" background of the domestic workers. I emphasize this aspect here because I think that in order to understand domestic workers' displacement along their migratory trajectories it is important to consider how the ethnic backgrounds of various actors come into play. In particular, in Tanzania the distinction between terms such as tribe, ethnicity and clan is not clear in the research, and is difficult to disentangle (see Declich 2002, pp. 31-32). However, in both countries women tend to work within households that are somehow linked to their communities/families of origin. Multiple aspects of domestic workers' displacement can be understood only through interdisciplinary research, taking the structure and workings of households, the "interdomestic domain" (Pina Werbner 1990, p. xvii), and intra-household decision-making processes, as a point of departure of studies on domestic work. I emphasize that both the differences and similarities between domestic work in Ethiopia and Tanzania can be observed in this dimension, which requires further investigation.

In this study I have shown that when they work in their villages of origin and when they move to the city, female domestic workers establish relations of subordination with the people they work for. These hierarchical top-down, employer-employee relations might recall past master-slave relations, hierarchical systems of dependence, with their various forms of political and commercial alliance and patronage. If we look at some studies on slavery (Declich 2020a), we might even assume that some domestic workers are part of a network of people who descend from slaves, or freedwomen (and freedmen). I don't have the tools to test this hypothesis. My study – which is mainly based on the analysis of domestic workers' own narratives – would not allow me to do so for now, and the issue becomes even more complicated if we think of the differences between Ethiopia and Tanzania on the issue of slavery. I believe that this should be considered as a hypothesis in possible future investigations on the issue. What is important to point out now, however, is that in order to understand the experiences of domestic workers, we must necessarily place them within a series of hierarchical relationships of dependency, as well as sociopolitical and economic relations involving various actors, which come into play within and outside the workplace. The subjectivity of women is played out within this framework of social stratification, and only in this framework can we attempt definitions of concepts such as 'freedom', 'emancipation' and 'choice'.

Both in villages of origin and in cities of destination, women carry out, in different ways, care work and the reproductive role assigned to them. The roles and social obligations in the places of origin that some women seem to want to escape, recur in different forms in the urban context. Some domestic workers might have avoided an arranged marriage, or even postponed the time to have children. But, in the city, they take care of the children of others, they take care of the house and the household in general, they dedicate themselves to the functioning of an household. In general, they move within a migration process which is almost inevitable, within deep-rooted rural-urban trajectories, the functioning of which depends on the care work carried out by women. Within this space, female workers continuously develop both individual and collective strategies to carve out alternative spaces for action: they move from household to household, from town to city, from city to town and villages, and back to the cities. They mobilize personal networks to improve their living conditions, individual and collective forms of support. In this context, they are exposed to new forms of gendered violence, they take various risks. Thus, they also seek protection. A protection that these 'lonely', 'orphan' women at least in several cases probably did not have back home.

The hierarchical and power relationships that characterize the life of women in their villages of origin reappear in different ways in the urban context, inside and outside the workplace. In the villages of origin the women used to work in conditions of exploitation for uncles, aunts, step parents who overworked them, and often did not have the opportunity to pursue their education. The city appears to offer new educational and work opportunities. Yet in the cities the women depend on other people they work for. Sometimes these people are relatives who become their new employers, for instance uncles who live in the city. They largely control domestic workers' lives and influence their movements and choices. It is within these relationships of domination and subordination that women take care of their superiors (the employers, the relatives of the employers and other people they work for), but also express the need of protection and being cared for. Thus, we could define the freedom that female domestic workers aspire to as an alternative space that they can carve out only within the wider sphere of care work in which their lives are embedded. This wider sphere is characterized by asymmetric, hierarchical relations where power and domination, care and protection inevitably coexist.

At this point, I would like to attempt to pinpoint the various moments in this thesis where this ambiguous entanglement, the tension between power and care, emerges. The entanglement emerges at different levels, and at different moments. On a structural level, it

emerges within the reproductive sphere, which determines the functioning of rural and urban household structures. The burden of care work that falls on women is continuously reproduced and strengthened in different ways also by the two states, for instance through public policies and the reproduction of specific ideologies that confine women to reproductive roles. At the level of women's personal narratives, it emerges 1) when domestic workers remember and recount how their life was before leaving their villages of origin, in particular in reference to their relations with influential people with whom they grew up and for whom they worked; 2) in reference to their relationships with various people who organized their placements in urban households; and 3) when they describe their life once they reached the cities of destination, in particular the relations with their employers and other people within and without the workplace.

In women's accounts of relations with influential people, these people are depicted as those who took care of them when they were still children, and, on the other hand, as those who hindered their plans, exploited and mistreated them, and treated them differently from their peers. It seems as if, on the bases of their very early age experience, domestic workers become aware of a too strict relation between care and exploitation. The recognition of this too strict bond is also one of the aspects that pushes women to change households and cities, in search of a better working environment. As for experiences in towns and cities other than their original place of birth, domestic workers tend to describe the relationship with their employers, and in particular with the female ones, in ambiguous terms. Female employers are referred to as the potentially protective mothers that were missing back home, and that domestic workers look for in the city. But these women (and other household members) are often described – at the same time, and within the same narrative – both as dispensers of love and care, and as exploiters. The employers offer accommodation and food to the orphaned domestic workers, and perhaps even the possibility of going to school in the city. But they also use humiliating and derogatory terms towards them, they pay meagre salaries or nothing at all, they often do not keep their promises to send them to school. Here the relations of domination and subordination recall, perhaps, master/slave relations.

In domestic workers' narratives, the descriptions of employers mainly concern the female ones, as the men of the household are often elsewhere. They go in and out of the house, sometimes they are out on business, maybe in other cities, and then they return home. Without their domestic workers, the female employers – who often work outside the home during the day – would have very heavy workloads, looking after the house and its members including their children. The burden of reproductive roles falls on all women, but the

hierarchical relationships between middle-class female employers and rural domestic workers shift most of the workload onto the shoulders of the latter. In domestic workers' accounts, the descriptions of their relations with men are less detailed. However, male household members are also described in ambiguous terms: on the one hand they are depicted as potential protective figures, on the other hand as those who, at the earliest opportunity, take advantage of the situation and harass domestic workers.

This context is full of risks and episodes of violence and sexual abuse against women occur, but life is risky also outside the workplace (out of the household). Thus, domestic workers can hardly find the fulfillment of their goals outside of specific relations of dependence and subordination. The more precarious and uncertain domestic workers' lives are, the more they need protection and mediation with superiors and they grow vulnerable to dependency on other people they can hardly overcome completely. It is very unlikely that the 'emancipation' of women could take place outside the reproductive sphere to which they are continually confined, and which manifests itself as a form of structural violence. Within this sphere some space for action gradually makes its way. Women make new acquaintances, have encounters inside and outside the workplace, mobilize personal networks and step by step they get some results, albeit minimal. Hope in the turning point: the opportunity that can change your life feeds the choices, strategies, movements of women. By mobilizing personal networks, the women move from house to house, and when I met them, their working and living conditions had improved slightly compared to past experiences where (for example) they would not have been able to join in NGO activities or the meetings of the Domestic Workers Associations.

Focusing on women's life trajectories reveals that domestic work, although it entails exploitative elements, can also serve as a 'bridging occupation', a channel to upward social mobility. The aspired social mobility is not easily attainable and in fact countered by many constraints and risks. By sharing information on potential opportunities and risks in the city, by developing strategies to negotiate better working conditions with their employers, domestic workers pursue an approach of risk reduction. They gradually shape a "culture of migration" (Hahn & Klute 2007) that should be valorized in the projects of the NGOs and the international organizations who advocate for domestic workers' rights. Interestingly, some domestic workers reinvent themselves as facilitators, as intermediaries for other women who are facing specific challenges. The role of these intermediaries might be essential in projects aimed at improving the situation of domestic workers rights. The task of ethnographic research lies precisely in shedding light on these potential elements – which

at first sight might not be obvious – and exploring how they could be used in projects of international cooperation, and specifically, in development projects on domestic work.

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