“Yes madam, I can speak!”
A study of the
recovered voice of the domestic worker

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ABSTRACT

Events in the last few years on the global stage have heralded a new era for domestic workers, which may afford them the voice as subaltern that has been silent until now. Despite being constructed as silent and as subjects without agency, unionised domestic workers organised themselves globally, becoming more visible and making their voices heard. This culminated in the promulgation of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention No.189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (or C189) in September 2013, and the establishment of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) in October 2013. This broadening of the scope of domestic workers' activism has not yet received sufficient attention in academic research. These two historic events on their own have the potential to change the dominant discourse around domestic workers, by mobilising workers with agency to challenge the meaning of the political ideologies informing their identity positions of exploitation and subjugation.

My research argues that the political changes occurring currently on the international stage have significance for a construction of new domestic worker identities. In this study I explore the characteristics of 'resilience', 'resistance', 'empowerment', 'activism' and 'leadership' that domestic workers have experienced before, during and after the launch of the IDWF. Through individual interviews with the executive members of the IDWF, I am able to track domestic workers' paths of agency and the multiple sites of their resistance, and although conscious not to essentialise their experiences, determine whether they do have commonalities in their personal experiences that led them to activism. This study radically departs from most of the academic literature on domestic workers thus far, which tends to reproduce the trope of domestic worker as a victim of abuse and exploitation in an unchanging, monolithic and homogenised category of women.

The research conducted was qualitative, using in-depth and semi-structured interviews, because it is the most appropriate in highlighting and understanding the various voices and lived experiences of domestic workers. Drawing on the narratives of domestic worker leaders, this study was based on Feminist Standpoint Theory and framed within transnational feminist practices. The central analytic component of the thesis is the voice of domestic workers as subalterns, centred particularly on their intersectional negotiations within the realms of their work. As my aim was to give these women voice through my research process, feminist methodology was the most appropriate approach for this study, as it allowed me to render

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visible the complexities of the lives of domestic workers. The data derived from the indepth interviews was analysed through the use of thematic analysis.

I found that there were significant similarities in the experiences they shared on the path to activism. Most started domestic work at a young age and were exploited and subjugated. They all valued education and either had very little or none. All joined organisations or institutions outside of their employers' homes, where they either obtained an education and/or learnt new skills. In each of these organisations they networked and formed a collective identity. Many of these organisations were religious organisations that empowered them and shaped their paths to activism. All of the domestic worker leaders either formed or joined labour organisations thereafter, in which they eventually assumed leadership positions, and from which they campaigned for changes in domestic worker legislation and better working conditions.

As leaders of their unions, they were eventually nominated to leadership positions in the IDWF, which has become the site of transnational organising and domestic worker resistance. Although many gains were accrued under the banner of the IDWF, the implementation of C189 is still slow and the issues they face are still not addressed adequately.

The participants were executive members of the IDWF. A key recommendation is that domestic worker leaders from across the globe be included for a more comprehensive study.

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KEYWORDS

Domestic workers

Subalterns

International Domestic Workers Federation

Agency

Activism

Qualitative research

Feminist methodology

Standpoint theory

Postcolonial theory

Transnational feminist framework

Thematic analysis

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DECLARATION

I declare that '"Yes madam, I can speak!" A study of the recovered voice of the domestic worker' is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Susheela Mcwatts May 2018

Signed

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I want to thank my family whose unconditional love and support sustained me throughout the process of writing this thesis, especially the Naicker family and my beloved siblings, who are always there for me. I am grateful to my aunty Meena and uncle Sagi, who looked after me when my world fell apart. My friend Renee, across the miles, who is the best listener I know. Those long chats every weekend provided me with welcome breaks. Thank you to all of you for believing that I could do this.

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For my parents

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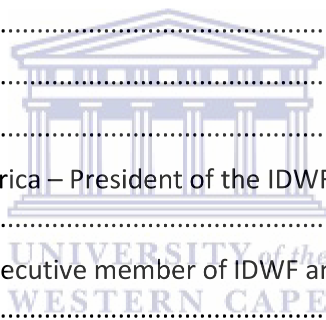
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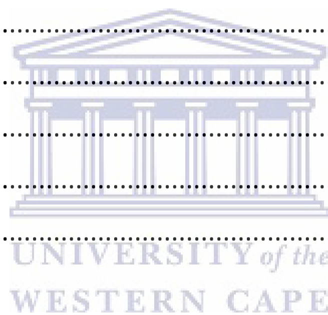
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PREFACE

> Often I felt as if my shoulders could not carry my memories: both the beautiful and the horrific.
>
> \- Halleh Ghorashi (2005)

Writing from the heart

It is a fact that when we write a historical narrative, it is hardly ever, possibly never, a neutral act and as Lather (1991, p.89) comments, "… there are no innocent positions"; one is always mired in or situated in one's own view of the past. Historical narratives are bound in subjective writing and interpretation – it is how we make sense of the past, given our own backgrounds, political beliefs and experiences. On reflection of my past, I came to realise why it was so important to me that I write on Black women's activism, and how it was irrevocably tied to my own identity. I understood that my research could not be unconnected to my past, to who I was and to my present life in and outside of academia. As Stanley and Wise (1990, p. 14) write: "feminism is not merely a 'perspective', a way of seeing; nor even this plus an epistemology, a way of knowing; it is also an ontology, or a way of being in the world". I was however not sure on how to combine my personal experiences into my research activities until I went to the University of Bergen, Norway in the fall of 2017 for a doctoral residency, and attended writing workshops to explore the potentials of situated writing with feminist scholars from Linkoping University in Sweden. The eminent feminist scholar Nine Lykke did a workshop on 'Autophenomography' and writing in scenes, and Redi Koobak on 'Writing the place from which one speaks". These seminars allowed us to explore intersectional writing and the multi-layered subject positions from which we write. More than that though, it allowed me to explore creative and critical writing. I learnt that using feminist methodology allows me to write in a way that unmasks my emotions, whilst opening the door to my activist and research background. In these workshops I wrote my story (or parts thereof) as a preface to the context of my thesis.

I offer my own story, or rather part thereof as way of situating my study, and to tender an explanation as to why this study was so important for me to undertake, and also offer the reader a glimpse of the "scent of [my] memory" (Brah, 1999, pp.14-15).

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Memories that linger

I am a South African. Just that full stop after that short statement says so much about who I am. I was and am shaped by race and ethnicity, that is, by identity and material politics. In a country where race, ethnicity and class were the identity markers that determined one's fate, the question of gender was less significant - to me in any case. Of course, that is not to downplay the intersectional oppression Black women faced being Black, poor and women. I do however believe that post-Apartheid South Africa gives us more freedom to examine how the construct of gender influences our lives as Black women, as Black people are relieved slightly of carrying the burden of race.

Since school-going age I was politically active. I lived in King William's Town and belonged to a poor but politically active family, who counted anti-Apartheid activists such as Steve Biko, David Russel and others as close family friends. At a very young age I understood the evils of Apartheid and how incumbent it was on us as Black people to overthrow the immoral regime. I was already an activist at primary school. When other children sang the national anthem at school and raised the flag on Republic Day, I refused to do so and my punishment with two other school friends was to wash the walls of our classrooms, whilst other children went home to enjoy the day with their families.

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I had to leave my hometown and the comfort of my family to attend high school however, as English was not offered as a first language at the 'Coloured' school I attended, and my family had ambitions that I attend an English-speaking university. As Black children we were not allowed to attend the White schools where both English and Afrikaans were offered. I was shipped off to Durban to stay with an aunt and her husband at the tender age of 14. In Grade 11, in 1979, I was chosen as an exchange student to Germany. I was amazed at how much knowledge those German students had about my country. I remember them telling me that the Immorality Act was justified by the Apartheid government through a biblical verse that said you could not mix your seed with that of a pig. I remember my shock and anger. I also remember when I made my homecoming speech in the assembly, the principal of my school telling me I should not be political. I ignored her, told my fellow students about my experiences and that we were even more oppressed than we thought. My aunt who taught at the school, told me that prior to that the staff had voted that I be Head Prefect, but after that the Principal insisted that I be Deputy Head Prefect.

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A year later I played a leading role in the school-boycotts of 1980 in Durban. My uncle was an activist and through him I met many other prominent anti-Apartheid activists such as Jay Naidoo and Pregs Govender, who mentored me and others on how to lead the protests. I witnessed and lived through the brutality of the Apartheid police who constantly had us running in fear, but yet those were heady days, fighting for our liberation, and are the ones I most treasure as I knew democracy and freedom were attainable. I was suspended from school in my final year, but allowed to study at home and managed to pass with an exemption to university.

I wanted to study journalism and the only university that offered the degree and that was close to home was Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape. I had to swallow my pride and apply for a permit to attend a White university. I decided that I was at Rhodes under protest. I joined the Black Student's Movement and was quite radical, assisting in mobilising students to protest. As Black students, we used none of the facilities that were on offer, for example swimming pools and tennis courts. Our reasoning was that one could not enjoy normal sports in an abnormal society and moreover, we had to remember where we came from – the lives of our families and communities outside of White privilege. We could not aspire to White middle class values.

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Living in residence, I often marvelled at the luxury my White peers had in being able to enjoy fashion or rugby or other pastimes, while as Black students we were consumed by politics. Wars were raging on the borders, young White men were being conscripted to fight in the war in Angola, and people were dying in the trenches in the then 'Rhodesia'. I did not enrol for journalism but a science degree, and failed in my first year. I was not interested in dissecting rats nor studying periodic tables – I was interested in Marx and Engels and my people who toiled in factories and mines, but lived in shacks. So I changed my degree to major in Industrial Sociology and Industrial Psychology. I could not find a job after graduating, as most jobs on offer for graduates were mainly for Whites, so my White peers found lucrative jobs in industry. Eventually I was offered a teaching job at the 'Coloured' high school in King William's Town. At the time, there were only five of us who taught at the school who had university degrees. The school boycotts still raged, and inevitably I, together with four other staff members who were the only ones who had university degrees, were expelled for inciting unrest. I was arrested and detained for a few hours and so was my uncle.

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With no job prospects in King William's Town and trying to escape being stifled under the watchful eye of the security police, I moved to Cape Town and joined the ANC, and so my activism continued. I was elected as an executive member of the city branch and my political education grew. Post elections I did a Master's Degree in Industrial Psychology, and whilst working for the Ethical Leadership Project, I initiated contact with the labour movement and in particular, the leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).

I was introduced to Myrtle Witbooi, the General Secretary of the South African Domestic Services Workers Union (SADSAWU) and Hester Stephens, the President. I invited Myrtle to speak at a conference I organised on Labour, and was completely in awe of her. I did some pro-bono conflict resolution work for SADSAWU, and was so impressed with the members of SADSAWU – their agency, their resilience and their strength.

The idea for this thesis finds its inception at a conflict resolution session I was facilitating for SADSAWU in 2013. As we did a SWOT Analysis of the organisation, I was struck by the number of gains these women had made in labour policy both nationally and internationally, yet were so modest about their achievements. I was intrigued that it was a South African domestic worker, Myrtle Witbooi, who was voted in as the first president of the newly-formed International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), and it was she who was invited to accept the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award in the United States, an award of which Nelson Mandela was a prior recipient. Similarly, it was a South African domestic worker, Hester Stephens who was voted in as the President of the African Regional Domestic Workers Network. I wanted to know the stories of these remarkable women and others like them, both nationally and internationally. I wanted to locate as well as understand the 'agency' of these women. Thus, I cannot claim neutrality in my study, indeed, the reporting and interpreting of history is never a neutral act. As Babbie and Mouton (2008, p. 40) maintain, "social scientists are intrinsically linked to their social and historical contexts. This implies that any form of value-free social inquiry is mistaken and impossible". I knew they were active and well known internationally on the labour stage, but their activism was largely unknown in South Africa. Rather, domestic workers were pitied and mainly only seen as victims of exploitation. I wanted to tell their stories and of other women like them. I wanted to show how domestic workers eventually reclaimed their voices, especially those from South Africa who were oppressed in multiple ways. It is from this background that my study originated.

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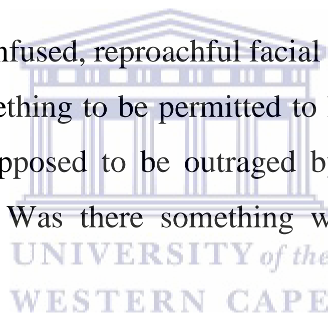
CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

Introduction

A provocative article entitled "My helper used my shower" by the South African columnist Khaya Dlanga appeared on my social media newsfeed on 7 July 2015 (Dlanga, 2015). In the article, Dlanga says that when he told people personally and via social media that his domestic worker used his shower when she was done working, they "… expressed shock, dismay and horror. Mostly horror". He goes on to say a relative who was staying with him at the time looked at him

> … with a sceptical and confused, reproachful facial expression. It seemed to me that this was not something to be permitted to happen. And I began to doubt myself. Was I supposed to be outraged by the fact that she had showered in my house? Was there something wrong with my lack of reaction?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What he found even more intriguing, was that those very same people who expressed their horror, "… would descend with vengeance whenever they saw someone call their helper, a 'cleaning lady' or 'maid'". Finally, he exhorts his audience to remember that "… they too are people".

His article unleashed a wave of responses in social media, most of them stating that if your domestic worker is good enough to cook, look after your children, wash dishes and do other domestic chores, then she is good enough to shower or bath in your bathroom. Some declared that domestic workers were the matriarchs of their homes, others gushed that they were their best friends and their confidantes. One said "she can do as she wishes when it comes to personal hygiene because I'm too lazy to do the cleaning of my house myself because I'm a working mom". Someone even said that "… I have even been to her family home and used her toilet. And ate from her table!" as if that was some feat on its own. All these comments

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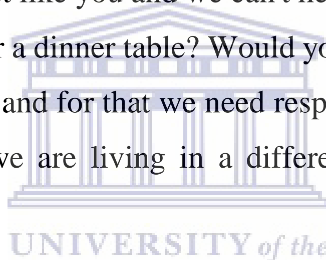
were from Black[1] and White people alike. A White woman mentioned that "… a hundred years ago the Black helpers even breastfed the White babies! My brother in law was one of them. We are all the same". Almost all of the responses were in this vein - there was no shock, dismay or horror. It is possible that those who were shocked, dismayed and horrified were too embarrassed to do so in the face of all the positive comments. Furthermore, many people wanted to know what the politically correct term was: 'maid', 'helper', 'nanny', 'servant' or 'domestic worker'?

Myrtle Witbooi, the General Secretary of the South African Domestic Services and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) and the President of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) retaliated on social media with the following commentary:

> Why should it even be mentioned that your helper uses the shower? Why should there be a debate on it, are we from a different planet that we don't exist? We have bodies just like you and we can't help it if we don't live in a house. Why discuss it over a dinner table? Would you like it if we discussed you all? We work for you and for that we need respect. So we don't need to be discussed. I thought we are living in a different world. Maybe I am mistaken?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Many other domestic workers added their comments to her newsfeed, their anger palpable. The above article and the furore that ensued contain many of the issues that are grappled with and debated within society, in domestic worker organisations, amongst academics and other stakeholders. Myrtle's exhortation "I thought we are living in a different world" and the question she posed thereafter, "Maybe I am mistaken?" is at the heart of this thesis. Domestic workers have always been constructed as passive and subject to exploitation and subjugation. Whether in defence of domestic workers' rights or against them, the domestic worker is still dimunitised and undermined, and is still spoken of as the object – to be patronised or controlled. However, events in the last few years on the global stage have heralded a new era for domestic workers, which may afford them the voice as subaltern that has been silent until now.

In a well-known article, Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) posed the controversial question, "Can the Subaltern Speak"? Antonio Gramsci used the concept of "subaltern," in his scholarly

[1] During the Apartheid era in South Africa, the population was classified into four main racial groups: Black, White, Asian (mostly Indian) and Coloured. The non-racist movement at the time preferred using the label 'Black' to all people of colour in South Africa. I use the term Black for all people of colour in South Africa in this study, unless forced to specify racial groups for reasons of clarity.

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works to refer to dominant and dominated relationships in history in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture subordination (Gramsci, 1971). Despite being constructed as silent and as subjects without agency, unionised domestic workers are organising themselves globally, becoming more visible and making their voices heard. This culminated in the promulgation of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Convention No.189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (or C189) in September 2013, and the establishment of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) in October 2013.

This broadening of the scope of domestic workers' activism has not yet fully received the attention it deserves in academic research. These two historic events on their own have the potential to change the dominant discourse around domestic workers, by mobilising workers with agency to challenge the meaning of the political ideologies informing their identity positions of exploitation and subjugation. By 'agency', I refer to Lister's (1997, p. 37) definition as "… the capacity of individuals or groups to embark on processes of autonomous self-realization". This agency is one that is considered as "located in a dialectic relationship with social structures" and "embedded in social relations". Thus, 'women's agency' refers to the strength women possess, their resilience and resistance as they direct their own lives through their own choices. When I asked Myrtle Witbooi what she meant by saying "I thought we are living in a different world" she responded by saying that the gains they have through their activism on an international stage should not be ignored, "people cannot treat us like they used to". Ida Le Blanc, a domestic worker from Trinidad and Tobago, observed:

> An international organization makes us stronger even at home. Being at the International Labour Conferences, our Minister saw that we are recognized internationally, and this helps to get them to realize that we are a stakeholder and have to be involved. They know we are well-informed from our international links. When we speak, they have some kind of respect. (Mather, 2013, p. 85).

Thus the formation of the IDWF have significant implications for domestic workers globally. Inherent to this study is a departure from the illusion of domestic worker passivity, and rather a demonstration that despite the dominant trope that they are victimised women without agency, domestic worker leaders have been mobilising globally. This study will attempt to show the symbolic and actual role of domestic worker leaders, in the gendered formations of

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fluid and changing identities, and their mobilisation through activism as they confront unjust laws and exclusionary politics in local and global politics.

Contextualising domestic work

Historical roots

In many countries domestic work as a profession is mainly a legacy of slavery that lasted throughout colonial eras up until today. In contemporary societies across the globe and in countries across the North-South divide, domestic work remains a poorly paid activity, performed by marginalised groups of society, usually by women of colour who are rural-migrants and who are easily exploited. In many Northern countries, migrants usually fill the need for labour that is low-skilled or unskilled, and are often excluded from the protection of important labour laws and regulation. In the Southern countries, local or other global southern citizens from poorer and usually rural part of the countries fill available domestic worker positions

The demand for domestic workers was boosted globally from the 20th century onwards, when middle-class women's education and participation in the formal economy increased substantially. Domestic workers became an indispensable part of households and an important cog in the wheels of the economy. In 2015, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that there were over 67.1 million domestic workers worldwide, the majority of whom were women (www.ilo.org.za). According to the ILO, domestic work constitutes the largest single labour sector in which women are employed. The ILO notes that "the lack of policies reconciling work and family life, the decline of state provision of care services, the feminization of international migration and the ageing of societies have all increased the demand for care work in recent years" (Gallotti, 2015, p. 1).

Despite the need for domestic workers who play an important role in the global capital economy, they are still oppressed and exploited. Domestic work is undervalued, not only because it is perceived to be unskilled work, but also because of" structural and historical" inequities in which the intersections of race, class, gender and geopolitics play a role. I discuss the historical roots and the global and local context of domestic work in greater detail in

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Chapters Three and Four. I discuss hereunder the concept of domestic work and the structural inequities present in domestic work.

Theoretical roots

The well-known article by Gisela Bock and Barbara Duden in 1977, entitled '*Arbeit aus Liebe-Liebe als Arbeit'* (Labour of Love - Love as Labour), sparked the fierce debates that raged between feminists all over Europe almost 38 years ago (Lutz, 2007). Their historical analysis revealed that "the making of the housewife was a product of modernity that first emerged as an ideal of the bourgeois classes and developed into the dominant female model during the late 19th and 20th century" (Lutz, 2007, p. 187). Although this article and the subsequent debates were important, it obfuscated the fact that Black, poor and immigrant women had been performing paid domestic work long before the 19th century.

Early feminist researchers mainly ignored domestic workers, and thus Oakley's (1974) ground-breaking doctoral research in Britain was influential in that she argued that domestic work was probably dismissed by researchers, as it was merely thought of as a natural part of women's sex role. Pateman (1983, p. 124) maintains that the idea that domestic work is regarded as a fundamentally feminine role is founded on the rise of patriarchal ideology, and the claim that "women's natural function of child-bearing prescribes their domestic and subordinate place in the order of things". In later years, the understanding of domestic work and its connections to changes in the socio-political and socio-economic milieus of society, has been augmented by a rich feminist scholarship, which integrates race, class and gender as intersecting social constructs and relations of power. It was understood that the experiences of the Black, poor and immigrant women who have been performing domestic work for centuries could not just be included into the existent theoretical models, because "their inclusion at the outset actually profoundly transforms the nature of those theoretical insights" (Duffy, 2007, p. 314).

Indeed, theorising a feminist analysis of paid domestic work is complex and multifaceted, as it requires the simultaneous, intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, nationhood and citizenship, and a structural critique of how patriarchy and capitalism facilitate the subordination of women and reinforce exploitative relationships between women.

Okin (1998) argues that the concept of gender as a social construct works to maintain the division between the public and private spheres, and the understanding of public and private

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spheres as independent domains has widely influenced Western thought and liberal-capitalist systems. Private households unquestionably are representative of the social divisions found in society, and reflect for instance the gender relationships that are prevalent in that particular society. The preservation of the artificial separation between the public and private spheres maintains the sexual division of labour as a natural process according to Okin, and inevitably relegates women to household responsibilities. Within homes, activities are executed to support and nourish human life and are considered to have reproductive properties, which are not considered as labour. Labour is understood as an activity directed at production and thus accomplished in the public sphere (Oakley, 1974; Pateman, 1989; Okin, 1998). The notion of reproductive labour has its roots in Marxist theory of historical materialism, which postulates that in order to understand the past and future possibilities of a society, one has to understand the production and reproduction of material life in that society (Marx & Engels, 1968). Marx and Engels distinguished between the production of material goods in the economy and the reproduction the labour force required to ensure that the economy was productive.

Using Marxist economics, Secombe (1974) analysed a previously ignored category of work, that is, the unpaid domestic work performed in homes. Thereafter, socialist-feminists started analysing unpaid work performed in homes in terms of Marxist economics (Hansen & Philipson, 1990). The types of labour usually referred to as domestic work encompasses care work or what has been termed reproductive labour. Reproductive labour has many special features that differentiates it from other forms of employment. It takes place in a private home, which is assumed to be not part of the formal economy and not under the control of labour inspection. Reproductive labour includes many tasks such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, laundry, ironing and at times, providing emotional support. Women and men confirm and reproduce gendered identities in the decisions taken about which tasks are allotted to whom and how much of it is done by whom. The choice of tasks is usually dependent on what are considered appropriate feminine or masculine tasks, with women usually feeling obligated to take on most of such tasks, as housework is generally considered women's work in society. The work is characterised by long hours, low wages and minimal legislative protection. It is also perceived as a dead-end job, with no prospects of promotion and no career ladder. Feminists have referred to the "array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally" as 'social reproduction' (Glenn, 1992, p. 1).

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Structural inequities prevalent in domestic work

Reproductive labour is at the centre of women's oppression (Glenn, 1992; Saptarri, 1999), as it produces hierarchies of domination and subordination which underlie gender relations (Dyck, 1990). Male privilege and male dominance in the public realm (and therefore social and economic power) is maintained through the gendered division of labour, which allows and facilitates men more opportunities to seek paid employment (Secombe, 1974; Gardiner, 1975). In contrast to tasks relegated to the private sphere that do not have economic value, actions in the public sphere are considered as productive work and epitomises the essence of power, rationality and masculinity, which has more social, economic and political importance (Oakley, 1974; Pateman, 1989). Thus domestic work is generally considered an intrinsically feminine role devoid of economic value and is valued less than then what is considered more masculine roles that dominate in the public sphere.

Reproductive labour is performed by working class women across diverse contexts, not only in their own homes, but also in the homes of other women. Thus paid domestic work becomes the nexus between the home and the market economy, where what is considered women's work gets a wage attached to it. However, it is still devalued because it is seen as women's work and women's work is normatively devalued. Thorton-Dill (1994) argues that if a capitalist, patriarchal society did not undervalue what is thought of as 'women's work', domestic workers would not be so exploited.

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Nevertheless, domestic workers are critical to the economy, as they do "the work that makes all other work possible", according to the Director of the National Domestic Workers Association (NDWA) in the United States, Ai-Jen Poo (2013, p. 36). They allow for their employers to pursue their careers, and Poo points out that, "if domestic workers went on strike, they could paralyze almost every industry" (Ai-Jen Poo, 2013, p. 36). Globally, "the productive contribution of domestic work is consistently ignored in official calculations of GDP" (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2014, p. 46). Indeed, from the 1970s already scholars were arguing that the "work of reproductive labor was indispensable to the ongoing reproduction and maintenance of the productive labor force and society and should be recognised as such" (Duffy, 2007, p. 315). However, Chang (2000) points out that many mainstream women's rights groups have not been active in attempts to improve the wages and conditions of paid domestic work, as professional women have historically relied on the affordability of domestic

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workers. Nevertheless, reproductive labour has become the site of women's agency and resistance, as will be discussed later in this study

Not all women have the same relationship to reproductive labour. Domestic workers are faced with discrimination where gender, race, class, nationality, ethnicity and other inequalities intersect, which have different outcomes than those resulting from just one kind of discrimination. There is both a gendered and racialized, as well as classist hierarchy that defines who assumes this work. The home can be viewed "as a microcosm of social inequality" (Lan, 2003, p. 527), reproducing the socio-economic distinctions embedded in wider society. Domestic work creates the conditions for various social categories which might, but actually never are kept separate, to come together, including class, race, ethnicity, nationality and gender (Dickey, 2009). Glen (1992) argued that labour in the United States of America (USA) was reproduced along racial-ethnic lines that were historically continuous, and Duffy's (2007) more recent study in the USA corroborated these findings. Duffy (2007, p. 331) found that while "White women are much more likely to be associated with the private forms of non-nurturant reproductive labour, racial-ethnic women are significantly overrepresented in both the private household and institutional incarnations of cooking and cleaning work". While Glen also found that Black women were overrepresented in 'back-room' work, that is, cleaning work, Duffy's study's emphasis is more on visibility than location, and interestingly she found that more public or visible reproductive work was performed by Whites, while invisible work was performed by racial-ethnic workers. Of course, race and ethnicity are not the only two social categories that highlight reproductive labour market inequalities, however as Glenn (1992, p. 116) maintains, "The racial division of reproductive labour is key to distinct exploitation of women of colour".

Indeed, the racial discrimination at the core of domestic work and the feminist dilemma of women subjugating each other is encapsulated in Betty Friedan's (1963), *The Feminine Mystique*, a very popular second wave feminist text, which was critiqued by bell hooks (1984). The first sentence in her book reads, as follows:

> The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone (p. 11).

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In this sentence what Friedan so passionately refers to is the monotony of domestic life, the boredom that housewives were experiencing in the USA. Friedan was not describing women of colour's lives in the USA though, she was writing from her insular world as a White, middle class, educated woman. In response, hooks (1984) wanted to know who would care for their children and homes if White women were given equal access to the labour market as White men. She charged that Friedan disregarded all women of colour and all poor women. She also "did not tell the readers if it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute than to be a leisure class housewife" (hooks, 1984, p. 2). Lorde (1984) eloquently posed the following questions in response to this dilemma:

> What woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman's face? What woman's terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as a ticket into the fold of the righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny? (p. 132)

More recently Romero (2002) questioned feminists who advocated for women to work outside of the home without promoting the notion that men should be responsible for domestic labour in their own homes. She argued that hiring other women to work in their homes propagated and reinstated the stereotype that housework is women's work. The institution of domestic work contests the very idea that gender experiences are shared amongst women, and that womanhood is a "monolithic category" (Fish, 2006b, p. 113); that is, it contradicts the feminist notion of the 'universal woman'. The household is a highly private, feminised space, and Fish argues that domestic work becomes the battlesite of women in an unequal relationship with one another, due to their differences in race and class and globally, with citizenship and nationhood.

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Modern day domestic work still has the traits of servanthood, and the relationship between employer and domestic worker still has the characteristics of master and servant (Romero, 1998). The employer overseeing the domestic worker, usually a woman, mostly has a "benevolent attitude" towards the domestic worker, "demanding loyalty and deference" and employees are treated "with the type of kindness reserved for domestic animals or pets and children, or at times even as a 'non-person'" (Romero, 1988: 320). Romero's study, confined to 'Chicanas' in North America, found that domestic work posed a paradox, as cleaning other people's homes could be demeaning and humiliating, however it could also pay better and be less dehumanizing than other jobs which have a lower status and require less skills. A review

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of the literature shows that this finding is not only applicable to 'Chicana' workers, but to most domestic workers globally. Indeed, Hansen (1990) notes that irrespective of race, time and place, the employment relationship between domestic worker and employer is problematic. More problems arise in this relationship due to the personal nature of the work being performed in a private space, compared to the contractual, organisational relationship between workers in industry or in offices and their employers.

Domestic work, as Anderson (2000, p. 20) notes, is the locus "for the reproduction of social relationships, in which moments of intimacy and affect are created and exchanged". The domestic worker participates in an extraordinary intimacy not of her choice. The domestic worker is very much part of the employer's household, which is very different to her own (Rodriguez, 2007). Emotion and affect are essential skills required in domestic work, Rodriguez maintains. Furthermore, she argues that the term 'domestic work' confines the worth of the extent and limits of the labour performed as the tasks and processes that comprise domestic work involve very skilled manual labour, and also mental and emotional labour. She becomes the "good soul" of the household earning minimum wages, the "good friend", the "permanent companion that could be replaced", "the psychic, the social, and the dirty work" (Rodriguez, 2007, p. 74). The fact that the home/workspace of the domestic workers is the intimate and private home space of the employer impacts on the power relationship between them. A review of the literature indicates that these tensions occur across the globe, because of the intimacy the workspace creates on the one hand and the distance based on class and other hierarchies on the other. Bonnin and Dawood (2013, p. 55) argue that "as the more powerful partner in the relationship the madam's role in that construction is primary, and she determines the meaning, access to and use of the workspace".

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Live-in domestic workers are often denied a family life, and even for those who live out, their working hours may not leave them enough time to enjoy a family life. Romero (2002) maintains that employers usually claim that domestic workers are part of their family, making it easy for them to deny their responsibility as employers and treat female domestic workers as proto-mothers. However, a scan of the literature shows that domestic workers do not appreciate an affective relationship, as it eventually leads to an unsatisfactory working relationship, and provides more opportunities for exploitation and manipulation (Constable, 1996, Hongagneu-Sotelo, 2001, Nyamnjo, 2006). Indeed, Myrtle Witbooi, who was also denied a family life when she worked as a domestic worker as will be discussed in Chapter Eight, summed it up at the My Fair Home campaign in The Hague on 20 June 2016, when receiving a book entitled *Bijna*

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familie from Ena Jansen, she said, “We are never family. We work for them”. I discuss the notion of domestic workers being part of the family in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.

As the labour performed is done in the privacy of homes, domestic work is generally linked to physical, social and political invisibility. As noted earlier, most of these women perform housework in their own homes as well as other households, rendering them doubly socially invisible and doubly exploited and exploitable. The concept of invisibility in domestic work is poignantly captured by Cock (2011) in her classic text of domestic work in Apartheid South Africa, who quotes from Ralph Ellison’s book, ‘*Invisible man’* (1952, p. 78) where the narrator states “I am an invisible man … I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. But I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me”. Indeed, Cock maintains that the underpinnings of liberal-capitalist thoughts have rendered domestic work socially invisible, and the latter, “is one of the central features of racism” (Cock, 2011, p. 1).

There is a contradiction between the anonymity and invisibility of the domestic worker and the intimate nature of her position in the household. Rodriguez (2007) uses the term ‘intimate anonymity’ to describe this peculiar paradox that defines domestic work. Domestic work includes tasks that are personal in nature, and thus the relationship between employer and employee is an intimate one, whether it is wanted or not. Indeed, Hansen (1990) maintains that it is only when worker and employer are seen to be dissimilar, can they have a good relationship, because these contrasts obscure the reality that they are intimately connected in the world they share.

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However, the intimate nature of the relationship between domestic worker and employer is also characterised by relations of power, where according to Bernadino-Costa (2014) the following occurs:

> … disempowerment, humiliation, bondage and dehumanization are experienced, materializing in the simplest of day-to-day attitudes of the employers, such as not saying good morning to the domestic worker, not talking to her, and talking about her as if she were not present. The contradiction within the social relations taking place inside the home is that while the worker takes care of the family and creates comfort, well-being, and cleanliness, she is treated as a piece of equipment or a slave, disregarded as a human being (p. 79).

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This problematic relationship between 'madam' and 'maid' is clearly evidenced in this statement by a domestic worker in Lindstrom-Best's (1986, p. 45) study of Finnish domestic workers in Canada:

> When that Mrs. noticed that I could take care of all the cleaning, all the dishes and all the cooking, in fact, I ran the entire household, she became so lazy that she started to demand her breakfast in bed. Healthy woman! Just lying there and I had to carry the food to bed.
>
> In one place where I worked the lady started to shout at me because I hadn't got up early enough to do the washing at 6:00 A.M. I told her that nobody shouts at me and I quit.

It is obvious that domestic workers will be resentful of the many demands placed on them and in fact, being treated as slaves. I did wonder though when reading the first quotation above, whether the domestic worker would have been as resentful if she had to serve a male employer his breakfast in bed, given the patriarchal and gendered societies we live in, where serving males are the norm. However, being exposed to a more luxurious standard of living other than their own could also give rise to frustrations and resentment (Cock, 1980). Domestic workers in the main have to portray themselves as subservient to their employers. Indeed, this relationship continues to reflect the larger inequalities nationally, internationally and transnationally while also serving as an ideological space reproducing and rationalising the privileges and authority of those who employ, and the subservience, subordination and subalternity of those who 'serve'. As such an interrogation of global and local dynamics and institutions of domestic work, including the focus on areas of activism and agency which has not been widely researched, remain an increasingly urgent area of research for those engaged in intersectional gender justice.

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Rationale of this study

Given the historical, current and structural inequities inherent to domestic work, most of the literature thus far has focussed on domestic workers as being oppressed and victims of exploitation and abuse (See for instance Cock, 1980; Fish, 2006a; Glenn, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2006). In this thesis I put forward an argument that the political changes occurring currently on the international stage, especially with the adoption of C189, which confirms that

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domestic work is 'decent work', and the formation of the IDWF, have significance for the construction of new domestic worker identities and for shifting global and micro dynamics of the institution of domestic work. The ILO defines decent work as being "based on the understanding that work is a source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in the community, democracies that deliver for people, and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and enterprise development" (Fish, 2017, p. 28). The IDWF was mainly formed to end poverty and exploitation of domestic workers globally, with its strategic goal being the development of the capacity to defend and advance the rights and protection of its members in particular, and all domestic workers in general; and in July 2016 it had 59 affiliates in 47 countries (WIEGO, 2018c).

The key goal of this study is to disturb and shift dominant scholarly and popular and public narratives on domestic work. My study radically departs from most of the academic literature on domestic workers thus far, which, as already mentioned, focuses mainly on the domestic worker as a victim of abuse and exploitation. Whilst it is important to acknowledge studies on how globally women who practice domestic service in a marginal and exploited position reflect global inequalities of south-north, gender, class, race and ethnicity, it is also problematic that such studies have tended to reproduce a unitary picture of the domestic worker as passive, vulnerable and submissive.

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The aims of this study are thus to:

- explore the agency of domestic worker leaders, through a local and global historical and contemporary analysis of domestic workers
- shift the debate away from the victim status assigned to domestic workers, through an exploration of the contemporary domestic worker leaders' activism
- understand how domestic worker leaders' experiences shape their agency and activism.

Value of the study

There have been a range of recent scholarly works on domestic worker activism and the transnational networking of domestic worker leaders, leading to the adoption of C189 and the formation of the IDWF (see for instance, Fish, 2017). The executive members of the IDWF and the other stakeholders involved with the adoption of C189 have also been interviewed a number of times, and some of their life stories have already been published (Fish, 2017). The

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value of this study lies in the analysis of the subjective life stories of domestic worker leaders, to unpack the narratives in relation to moving into activism and developing a better understanding of commonalities across contexts that might shape such agency and activist identity. Furthermore, in this study domestic workers are de-objectified by providing the domestic worker leaders who are actively mobilising on an international stage with a subjective voice. I am able to explore alternative narratives of resilience, resistance, empowerment, activism and leadership through individual and collective 'agency' to processes of change that challenge domestic workers' constructions purely as victims. There have also been many scholarly works on the institutionalised material and ideological dynamics of domestic workers, including the relationships domestic workers have with their employers (see for instance Ally, 2011; Cock, 1980; Romero, 1999; 2002; Shefer, 2012; Ullah, 2015).

This study will make a contribution to that body of scholarly research, as I explore the ways in which experiences in domestic work, including the relationships the domestic workers' leaders in this study had with their employers in particular, and other oppressive socio-political conditions shaping their material and subjective lives in general, have impacted on their path to activism. Through individual interviews with the executive members of the IDWF, I have attempted to track domestic workers' paths of agency and the multiple sites of their resistance, and although conscious not to essentialise their experiences, determine the commonalities in their personal experiences that shape their sense of self as leaders and their activism. Furthermore, Fish's (2017) study explores the events leading up to the formation of the IDWF. In this study I explore the impact of the formation of the IDWF on domestic worker leader activism, and whether the participants in this study perceive it as having value thus far. My findings will make a contribution to the literature on domestic worker organising and activism, and will have significance for other groups of workers constructed as subaltern, as well as contribute more broadly to scholarship on women's agency and activism, particularly as emerging from subalternity.

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Structure of thesis

This study is reported on in ten chapters. Chapter One has provided an overview of the study, its context, rationale, shape and form. In Chapter Two I discuss the theoretical grounding for my study, where the various literatures and concepts that inform my epistemology are examined. Chapter Three provides the global context in which domestic work is conceptualised. Here I trace the literature on domestic work globally and discuss key studies undertaken in other countries. In Chapter Four I examine the literature as it relates to domestic work in a South African context, and trace the growth of the domestic worker movement. In Chapter Five I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of domestic worker activism and agency. Chapter Six is devoted to the methodological aspects of my study, including the practical means of data collection and analysis. Of particular importance is my reflexivity as a researcher and how I locate myself in this study. In Chapter Seven I offer exemplary in-depth stories of the participants in the study to the reader. These stories were chosen as richer data than others, and although no two stories are the same, the ones I chose were broadly representative of all the stories I collected. Chapter Eight explores the participants' narratives on the journey to becoming activists. Chapter Nine analyses narratives on the reported role of transnational organisations that assisted domestic worker leaders to become internationally renowned activists, and also the impact of the ILO's convention 189 on their activism. Chapter Ten is the concluding chapter in which I discuss the key findings and conclusions, and the implications thereof for further research into domestic worker activism.

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CHAPTER TWO

THEORISING 'THE HELP'

Introduction

Both the book and film versions of the Academy nominated 2011 film, 'The Help', although very popular amongst mainstream audiences, drew widespread controversy in academia, which I will discuss below. 'The Help' is the story of a young White woman, Skeeter's relationship with two Black domestic workers during the Civil Rights era in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi. Skeeter, who is an aspirant journalist, decides to author a book exposing the racism to which 'maids[2]'— referred to as "the help"— who work for White families are subjected. The book is supposed to be from the viewpoints of the 'maids'. Herein lies the rub and of relevance to my study - a White woman trying to give voice to Black women's experiences and pain, depicting a tale of sisterhood, instead of the servitude that it was.

Duchess Harris, writing in the feminist blogsite, Feministwire[3]encapsulates much of the criticisms against the book in the following excerpt:

> The first two chapters were written in the voice of a Black maid named Aibileen, so I hoped that the book would actually be about her. But this is America, and any Southern narrative that actually touches on race must focus on a noble White protagonist to get us through such dangerous territory (in this case, Miss Skeeter; in To Kill a Mockingbird, Atticus Finch). As a Black female reader, I ended up feeling like one of "the help," forced to tend to Miss Skeeter's emotional sadness over the loss of her maid (whom she loved more than her own White momma) and her social trials regarding a clearly racist "Jim Crow" bill. So instead of incorporating a real Black woman's voice in a novel purported to being about Black domestics, the Skeeter/Stockett character is comfortingly centralized, and I can see why White women relate to her. She is depicted as a budding feminist, who is

[2] Domestic workers were and still are commonly referred to as maids.
[3] http://www.thefeministwire.com/2011/08/kathryn-stockett-is-not-my-sister-and-i-am-not-her-help.

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> enlightened and brave. But in reality, she uses the stories of the Black domestics in the name of "sisterhood" to launch her own career, and then leaves them behind. In my experience, the Skeeters of the world grow up to be Gloria Steinem. In a certain sense, The Help exemplifies the disconnect many Black women have felt from Feminist Movement through the second wave. For 20 years, I read accounts of Black women who were alienated from that movement primarily populated by middle-class White women.

Indeed, Griffin (2015, p. 147) argues that this book and film is "invested in the re/production of White dominance" and while it tries to give the appearance that it is focussed on people of colour, it does not confront Whiteness or racism. As it was in the period of Obama's presidency in the USA, hooks (2013) had this to say:

> Seen within the political culture and social backdrop of our time, wherein the greatest symbolic challenge to imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy has occurred (the placement of a biracial Black male in the White House and his Black wife and children) the publication of The Help can only be seen as a backlash, both against the movement to end racism and the feminist movement … had the book not been supported and fully backed by a conservative White-male-dominated publishing and advertising empire no one would have ever heard of this work. (p. 59)

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In this book and movie, Black domestic workers are objectified and painted as passive. They are seen as other to the norm of Whiteness. Although the novel is set in the 1960s, there are many issues and theoretical concepts that are still relevant today, and which have guided my research. For instance, Black workers were objectified and described as being passive and without agency - they are still today. Furthermore, the Black workers in the novel are seen as the 'other' to the norm of Whiteness – and they are still today.

This chapter delineates the theoretical foundations of the study, which is primarily located within a transnational feminist theoretical framework, as it centres on women organising across borders. Since most of the women in my study are women of colour, I privilege a Black feminist epistemology. I mainly utilise the principles of feminist standpoint theory and the key tenets fundamental to this study are outlined. Furthermore, this study investigates colonial discourse through the use of postcolonial critique and analysis. It unearths the silenced voices of domestic workers that have been relegated to the past, which rendered their opinions, narratives,

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aspirations and pains mute. A feminist, postcolonial lens provides me with a framework to understand how gendered power relations are reproduced and contested.

Feminist standpoint theory

This study is influenced by feminists such as Haraway (1991), Collins (1990) and Harding (1986), who advocated a theoretical framework that acknowledges that it is the standpoint or positionality of the researcher and the researched that influences all knowledge, and therefore such knowledge is not complete or the absolute truth. Collins (1997, p. 375) defines standpoint theory "as an interpretive framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power". For theorists such as Collins and Harding, standpoint "refers not to perspective or experience but to an understanding of perspective and experience as part of a larger social setting – that is, a standpoint is an intellectual achievement that reflects political consciousness" (Lenz, 2004, p. 98). The standpoint is not rigid or permanent, but fluid and dynamic, which can be momentarily stabilised so that dominant beliefs can be examined. Despite the researcher and the researcher's positionality, research that is bound to improve our knowledge of inequitable power relations and social injustice is pertinent and essential. In this study, the domestic worker leaders interviewed and I as researcher together generate the knowledge that I share by means of this dissertation. This is in keeping with feminist research, which advocates the belief in the significance of women's experiences, the understanding of women's lives in order to improve them, and ultimately realising the role of the researcher in this process (Edwards, 1993). Thus the focus and centrality of women and women's voices characterises all feminist studies, including mine.

Feminist standpoint theory advances feminism as the foundations of the human-related sciences, instead of the more conventional disciplines developed by men, for men, protecting men and promoting male identity (Harding, 1991; Hennessy, 1995). It challenges positivist conceptions that knowledge and truth are both universal and objective. It argues that research and knowledge production is not value-free, but dependent on contextualised experience - experience is seldom neutrally transmitted. Knowledge they claim, is partial, contested and produces power (Collins, 1990). As Weedon (1987, pp. 40-41) argues, feminist post-structuralism is itself "a mode of knowledge production which uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power

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relations and to identify areas and strategies for change". Women's subjugation is thus placed at the centre of knowledge production (Hartsock, 1983).

Transnational feminists take the position that being a woman does not necessarily mean one is a feminist. A feminist viewpoint is socially produced and not available to all women. Harding (1991, p. 140) maintains there is no "typical woman's life"; women's knowledge, perspectives and behaviour must be understood in terms of their social positions. Feminist standpoint theorists recognise that women are situated peripherally in society and subjected to various forms of subjection. This theory brings the experiences of women who are on the margins of patriarchal societies into the ambit of research and knowledge production, to challenge universal understandings of reality (Collins, 1986; Hartsock, 1998). As it begins from the position of the marginalised, its emphasis is on the concept of 'difference.' Thus all areas of oppression that women might be subjected to are studied, and not only gender. These include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical competence (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1998) and class (hooks, 2000), amongst others. Although feminist standpoint theory highlights difference, Harding (1991) cautions against interpreting this difference as inferiorities, which is common in the patriarchal constructions of difference. It is worth noting that although Western feminists might emphasise difference, women in other contexts might not; for instance, African, Coloured, Indian and White women in Apartheid South Africa chose to strategically overlook certain differences and inequalities in order to build a coalition against the oppressive regime.

Lenz (2004) also questions the emphasis on difference in this theory, as she argues that while it can reveal the deceptiveness of the universal, it does however mask what women have in common, and the shared conditions that promote comparable and associated, if not the same oppressions. Instead of investigating the conditions that create the rigid categories which challenge the unity among diverse groups, emphasising difference oppresses women within the categories in which they are placed. However, she does concede that theorists can take into account the multifarious contexts in which marginalised people experience oppression, and still "produce analysis that are both sensitive to individual perceptions and cognizant of the wider social forces that organize experience" (p. 100).

Harding (1991) argues that feminist standpoint theory does not claim that women's experiences in themselves are a dependable source for knowledge claims about nature and social relations. She argues that it is neither the experience nor the discourse, but the conveyed opinions and theory of nature and social relations that provide the basis for feminists' claims. Thus, a

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feminist standpoint does not occur in pure form in the consciousness of women, but is often regarded as the consequence of a struggle. Harding argues that the development of a standpoint then is a representation of the process by which an oppressed group becomes not only a group in themselves, but a group for themselves.

As a result of their particular social location, some people have a more complete knowledge and understanding of reality and arguably, oppressed groups have a more complete view than oppressors. From this point of view then, women's experiences of the world are different and more complete then those of men, due to their oppression in patriarchal societies (Harding, 1987). Theorists such as Hartsock (1998) provided the bedrock for the feminist notion that women did not necessarily know better, but that women know differently. There is no benefit for them to retain the existing patriarchal state of affairs, and consequently have an exclusive view of the culture from which they are marginalised.

Collins (1986) cautions though against dividing the world neatly between the oppressed and the oppressor. She maintains that individuals can be both members of dominant groups as well as of subordinate groups. She argues that each social group gives voice to its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge, because all people do not know all aspects of the various possible perspectives. Advocating dialogue, Collins asserts that "everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in order to be allowed to remain in the community" (p. 1236). In other words, standpoints should be debated instead of taken as fact.

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According to Lenz (2004), standpoint theorists ascribe their methodology to an 'outsider within' position. In other words, cultural practises allow for some groups to be included in the cultural practises, although they are unable to take part in them fully. Harding (1991) claims that women are often left out from the social order as there is a closer fit for men in the arrangement of the social order. The inequalities inherent to the power system are then exposed, and herein lies the value of the feminist standpoint theory. From this perspective, women's experiences may be validated and published in order to challenge the androcentric social order (Davis, 1981). Harding (1991) claims that being excluded from the social order has a further advantage to women, as a 'stranger' brings new information to the research process.

Collins (1986) argues that Black women in America are located at the intersection of various forms of oppression, offering standpoint theorists a useful vantage point from which to examine dominant discourses. She argues that in particular domestic workers working for White

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families have seen the demystification of naturalised social structures. This is true for domestic workers globally. Although intimately connected to the families for which they work, and despite mutual affection at times, as discussed in the following chapter, domestic workers are literally, the outsiders within, they never become insiders. Intimacy and affection may make the master feel uncomfortable that the servant is so close to the family's personal affairs, and this dissonance may even ensure that the servant remains an outsider. As Collins (1997) points out, sharing an intimate "physical space is not necessarily the same as occupying a common location in the space of hierarchical power relations" (p. 378). She cites the example of women of colour who share academic office space with White academic and/or middle class women in America. It is common, she says, for "women of color to clean the office of the feminist academic writing the latest treatise on standpoint theory "(p. 378). As Collins (1986) maintains, this distance is inevitable, as it does not matter what else the relationship between master and servant is, it is always a relationship of economic, social and personal inequality. Indeed, Marx argued "that, however unarticulated and inchoate, oppressed groups possessed a particular standpoint on inequality" (Colllins, 1997, p. 377).

Including women in the research process changes the research process, because the theoretical and methodological rules that traditionally excluded women are challenged (Handrahan, 1999). Conventional research tries to maintain a power hierarchy with the researcher being outside of the research process and being neutral. Even when it is not trying to, such research reproduces and reinstates a power hierarchy and facilitates an othering and objectification. Feminist epistemology however, includes self–reflexivity in the research process in order to minimise the power hierarchy between the researcher and the researched (Harding, 1991). There is a need for the researcher to interrogate his or her engagements with others and to reflect on his or her own background, cultural traditions and the relation to the researched (Harding, 1991, Haraway, 1991). I will be discussing reflexivity in the research process in more detail in Chapter Six.

Since Hartsock first named and defined standpoint theory in 1983, it has undergone many variations. It has also provoked a number of questions and criticisms. Among the questions are those posed by Lenz (2004), which include:

- What is the process through which a standpoint is achieved, and how can that standpoint be recognised?
- Is a stable, categorically clear identity a prerequisite for a standpoint?

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- Is it possible to have multiple, changing standpoints, and if so, how can the insights and analyses provided by those standpoints be communicated?
- Does the outsider within really have a privileged (i.e., more objective or less false) standpoint? (My question relating to this point is, if so, how can it be proven?). (p. 99)

These questions, Lenz (2004) argues, emphasise the difference between what is individual knowledge and what is group knowledge, and what is relative and what is universal that "often complicate (and frustrate) both standpoint theory in particular and feminist theory more generally" (p. 99). Thus, standpoint theory Lenz reasons, seeks to comprehend social structures from diverse locations.

Indeed, Hekman (2000, p. 19) argues that "if there are multiple feminist standpoints, then there must be multiple truths and multiple realities". However, Collins (1997, p. 375), in her response to Hekman, makes it clear that "a standpoint refers to historically shared, group-based experiences". The groups referred to in standpoint theory are not just an assortment of individuals, but units with their own realities. She argues that groups have longer longevity and therefore group realities surpass individual experiences. All individuals within the groups would not mean that "all individuals within the group have the same experiences nor that they interpret them in the same way", however, using the "group as the focal point provides space for agency" (p. 377). Furthermore, she argues, standpoint theory is more interested in the social conditions that gives rise to such groups than to individual experiences in socially created groups.

The domestic worker leaders in my study certainly do not all have the same experiences. However, I look for the similarities in their experiences and the shared group based experiences from which to examine their agency and activism. Indeed, Rollins (2009) argues that:

> relations of power can suppress and distort evidence in several ways. They can do so by inflicting fear, shame, and other uncomfortable emotions on potential informants, by depriving them of adequate hermeneutical resources to communicate their social experience to others, or by undermining trust between researchers and potential informants. (p. 222)

She advises that to counter this, the researcher should shift from the brief of collecting "individual social experiences to the task of articulating collective social experiences". This shift may result in an important phase towards empowerment, as informants realise that their

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experiences are collective and not simply individual, which influences their ability to act despite the power wielded over them. Rollins's argument is in keeping with Harding's (1991) notion that a standpoint is a collective achievement. Also, in my study, although I interviewed the participants separately, all of them were interviewed at conferences that they were attending as a collective. They knew that I was interviewing all the domestic worker leaders and were actually very eager to be interviewed as well. They knew that, although I was going to report on individual experiences, it was part of a collective experience that I was interested in. I will discuss the interview process further in Chapter Six.

Transnational feminism

Philosophical and Political Roots

Until the 1980s, it was assumed by Western feminists that women universally had the same oppression in common and that their activism stemmed from the same political ideologies (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Feminist theories were mainly drawn from the 'modernist' theoretical and philosophical traditions of liberalism and Marxism, Brah and Phoenix maintain. White Western feminist theories neglected to pay as much attention to inequalities associated with race, class and ethnicity as they did with gendered power relations (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984). Black feminists saw oppression as not emanating from gender relations alone, but acknowledged that it was inextricably bound up with race, class and other forms of inequality. They also examined the way in which feminism had its roots in the prevailing hegemony of the West (see, for instance, Lorde, 1984 and hooks, 1984). As hooks (1984) argues:

> All too frequently in the women's movement it was assumed one could be free of sexist thinking by simply adopting the appropriate feminist rhetoric; it was further assumed that identifying oneself as oppressed freed one from being an oppressor. To a grave extent such thinking prevented White feminists from understanding and overcoming their own sexist-racist attitudes towards Black women. They could pay lip service to the idea of sisterhood and solidarity between women abut at the same time dismiss Black women. (pp. 8-9)

Western feminism's epistemology, Collins (1990) maintains, has marginalised the experiences of Black women in the construction of knowledge and rendered them invisible; according to

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Mirza (1997) through the homogenisation of their experiences. Mohanty (1991, p. 54) suggests that it is in the course of homogenising and "systemitization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named". Those in power, she maintains, are able to render Black women powerless as they impose their own identities on them.

Reacting to Black feminist criticism, Western feminists endeavoured to include Black women's experiences by adding Black women's experiences to White feminist epistemology. However, hooks (1989) and Harding (1991) decried this 'addition' as it neglected to engage with experience at the intersections of race, history, culture and other social markers. Collins (1990, p. 222) argues that "… by embracing a paradigm of race, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualises the social relations of domination and resistance". Scott (1992) questioned whether 'experience' on its own has weight as an analytical tool. She urged that it be examined in terms of why people have the experience that they do, which in essence means paying attention to how identities and subjectivities are constructed, which will increase knowledge. She maintains that it is historians who have used experience to challenge prevailing ideological systems so that different standpoints could be considered. She does not suggest abandoning the concept of experience as an analytical tool, but rather argues the centrality of asking the question why people have the experiences that they do.

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Lewis (2000) similarly argues that although the socio-historical reason for the concept of experience needs to be kept, the analysis thereof has to be "widened, deepened and embedded." She also advises that consideration should be given to how experience is formed through "social, political and cultural relations which are themselves organised on the axes of power and which act to constitute subjectivities and identities" (173). Instead of essentialised identities and the homogenisation of all Black women's experiences, it allows for the conceptualisation of Black women as having agency and a diversity of experiences within specific historical and geographical locations (Hall, 1990). It steers the discourse away from one of victimhood to one of agency (Mohanty, 1992).

Femininity in sexist thinking, according to hooks (2000), is conceptualised in terms of helplessness and victimhood, and therefore she argues that feminists should not base the notion of sisterhood on women having victimhood in common. hooks argued that it was ironic that those who were often more privileged called attention to women's victimhood, and those who

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were most often oppressed and endangered had to centre their attention on surviving, and therefore did not have the psychological 'luxury' to think of themselves as victims. White women were spared confronting their own privilege, as all women were perceived as victims. They therefore did not have to challenge their own roles in oppressing others. On the other hand, Caraway (1992) suggests using the term 'segregated sisterhood' instead of 'sisterhood; to circumvent the paradox inherent in the term. She argues that "in the logic of combining these two terms, each invalidates and cancels the other, rendering suspect the animating symbol 'sisterhood' of a profoundly transforming social movement" (p. 3).

During the course of the 1980s, there was much debate about the best way to theorise the relationship between gender, race, class and sexuality. Scholars such as Bannerji (1993, 1995), hooks (1984), Collins (1990) and Ng (1988) addressed race and class relations, which created a new space for analysis. They critiqued the fact that often only certain indicators, for instance 'race' or 'gender', were singled out as sites for political contestation and mobilisation, which they argued masked the fact that they do not operate as "separate axes of power" (Butler, 1993, p. 117). Collins (2000) theorised that race, class and gender operate to create interconnected forms of inequality, or as hooks (2000) argues, as the interlocking systems of oppression that Collins calls the "matrix of domination" (p. 225).

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A new dialectic was opened, that between margins and centre, and social life at the margins was made visible (hooks, 1984). Different strands of feminism were understood largely in terms of "socialist, liberal and radical feminism" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82) and they differed significantly in how they theorised the concept of race and social class. The understanding that race, social class and sexuality were factors that set apart women's experiences dispelled the notion of women as a homogenous category. Bhavnani and Coulson (2003, p. 74) argue that, "the desire for universal sisterhood obscured the White, middle class reference point at the centre of Western feminism". Spivak also denounces the conjecture of a universal sisterhood (Spivak, Landry & Maclean, 1996). She argues that there is a tension between the needs of Third World women and Western women's feminism, thus the notion of a universal sisterhood and representation of all women is not possible. I discuss Spivak's arguments later in this chapter.

The postmodernist critique as taken up by Black feminists, of the liberal and Marxist perspectives and the claims of the universality of experiences had its roots "within anticolonial, antiracist and feminist critical practises" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82). Indeed, "postmodern

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theoretical influences … became a significant influence, in particular their poststructuralist variant" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82), which led to new theoretical underpinnings for the understanding of 'difference' (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Spivak, 1999).

The Concept of Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminist studies has as its focal point a range of theoretical and empirical methods that interrogate issues of gender, class and racial or ethnic inequality within a global context (Kim-Puri, 2005). "Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's 1994 edited volume, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* and M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 1997 edited volume, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies and Democratic Futures"* (Patil, 2011, p. 541) were the two scholarly contributions that began to shape the transnational feminist approach. At the core of both volumes was the examination of the similarities and diversities in women's experiences. Although differing in some aspects, the authors made four key arguments (Patil, 2011). Firstly, they critiqued the fact that at times transnational feminism has also been called 'global feminism' or 'post-colonial feminism'. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Alexander and Mohanty (1997) argued that these terms falsely signified the notion of a 'global sisterhood' that tends to obscure the diversity in women's experiences. Instead, Alexander and Mohanty argue that race and global capitalism locate women differently from each other. They argue that there is a need to move away from approaches that mask those differences. Secondly, they critique the notion of constructs such as local, global and the nation. They argue against the assumption that the nation is "a useful unit of analysis," as there is no "pure local that can be separated from a pure national" (Patil, 2011, p. 542). Instead they advocate shifting the unit of analysis across cultures. Indeed, postcolonial theorists such as Ashcroft (2009, p. 13) warns of the dangers of nationalism in all of its forms, and instead proposes the term "transnation", extending the postcolonial critique that the nation cannot be synonymous with the state. Thus, transnation according to Ashcroft, represents the utopian idea that national borders may not in the end need to be the authoritarian constructors of identity that they have become" (p.13). However, Zeleza (2006, p.92) reminds us that we have to be cognisant of the fact that:

> it is critical to distinguish between the repressive nationalisms of imperialism and the progressive nationalisms of anticolonial resistance, between the nationalisms that led to colonial conquest and genocide and those that sought

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> decolonization and liberation for oppressed nations and communities, between struggles for domination and struggles for freedom, and between the reactionary, reformist, or revolutionary goals of various nationalisms.

Thirdly, Alexander and Mohanty (1997) argue that gender inequality is not a constant, but changes according to the above-mentioned power differentials, which leads to different kinds of resistances and to various forms of feminism. Finally, they challenged longstanding "binaries in social and feminist theories", for example, Grewal and Kaplan maintain that their "focus on language and culture is necessary in order to understand the material conditions that structure women's lives" (Patil, 2011, p. 542).

Thus, transnational feminism is appropriate for my study as it "provides the analytic tools to address issues of structural inequities in groups that historically have been socially and economically disadvantaged" (Anderson, Reimer-Kirkham, Browne & Lynam, 2007, p. 178). Bhavnani and Coulson (2003) explain that the term 'transnational' implies the cutting across of boundaries of race, class, gender and nation, rather than the elimination of them. I am able to examine the ways in which the systems of capitalism, patriarchy and racism intersect to impact on the everyday lives of marginalised women globally. Also significant to my study, which will be demonstrated later, is Mohanty's (2003) description of transnational feminism. Of importance to the research questions I ask and discussed later, is how women forge solidarity globally to confront and challenge the exploitation and oppression of marginalised women. Mohanty describes transnational feminism as examining the essential role of self-governing factions of resistance that occur in the making or unmaking of the state. She argues that Western feminists tend to ignore the specific cultural social and political conditions of women. Even if they do write about these conditions, writing about subaltern groups from an outsider's perspective is dismissed by people they write about. This is because they are not insiders and did not have the shared experiences (Mohanty, 1997).

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Transnational feminism allows us to understand women's oppression through the notion of a gendered hierarchy and the power of colonialism (Brah, 1996). I am thus able to examine the agency of the participants in my study under conditions of oppression. Of importance is that by using transnational feminism as opposed to global feminism, I am able to investigate the stark inequalities between women with respect to geopolitical locations, wealth, education and race. Through the promulgation of C189 and the subsequent formation of the IDWN and then the IDWF, the ILO played a key role in the formation of transnational feminist relationships

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and solidarities, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine. Indeed, C189 has become an important locus around which domestic workers organise and contest their oppression. However, organising transnationally also has the potential to reproduce hierarchies. For instance, the IDWF works very closely with funders, NGOs and other international bodies from the global north, and there is the potential and the danger that class, race, education, wealth and geopolitical hierarchies will be reproduced. I will discuss these relationships further in Chapter Nine.

Transnational Feminism and Intersectionality

Transnational feminism examines the particular types of oppression as it occurs through the intersectionality of race, class, gender and other social identities, and as they occur in particular contexts. Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black American civil rights advocate and renowned scholar of critical race theory, coined the term 'intersectionality' in an insightful article she wrote in 1989 entitled "Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics". She too explains intersectionality as a system of multiple oppressions and uses a traffic intersection, or crossroad as an analogy to explain the concept:

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> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 4).

In this study, I draw on Brah and Phoenix's (2004, p. 76) concept of intersectionality as signifying "complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasises that different dimensions of social

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life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands." Lykke's (2010, p. 50) flags another dimension to the concept by describing it as both a theory and a method, with which to:

> analyse how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally, and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorisations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations.

Using intersectional theory as a focal point of my research, allows for me to take account of how structural conditions and social processes impact on domestic worker leaders' lives that are interactive, reciprocal and cumulative. In this sense, intersectionality offers my study an alternative to the single-axis framework offered by Western feminists. I cannot only focus on domestic worker leaders as women, or as women of colour, without paying attention to the many other combinations of 'othering' to which they are subjected.

Indeed, Davis (2008) maintains that in part, the popularity of the concept 'intersectionality' to feminists can be attributed to its appeal to the pressing theoretical and normative concerns of acknowledging difference between women. Furthermore, she argues that "it promises to address (and redress) the exclusions which have played such a distressing role in feminist scholarship" (p.70).

As I use the dimensions of race, gender and class as axes of power, pertinent to my study is Foucault's notions of power (Rabinow, 1985). Foucault maintained that people do not 'have' power, it is not possessed, rather it is a relation, and power relations change continually, leading to new points of resistance and the rise of new subjects. Thus where there is power, there is resistance. Intersectionality can thus be used not only to analyse adverse effects such as oppression and exploitation, but it can also be used to examine mobilisation and activism (Bernadino-Costa, 2014). By the utilisation of intersectionality in my study then, I am able to examine power relations from both sides of the coin; that is, on the one side the creation of oppression, exploitation and subjugation, and on the other, creation of political agency, mobilisation, activism and the creation of political subjects.

Transnational feminists successfully employ human rights frameworks to achieve local and global objectives of women and gender justice, and examine the commitment that transnational feminism shows to activism. Transnational feminism favours dialogue through various

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structures, so that multiple voices can be heard. In this study, I am interested in the ways in which women, in this case domestic workers, mobilise within their communities and across borders of race, class, gender and nation, and show solidarity in struggles they share. Furthermore, the study foregrounds a departure from Black women being regarded as passive victims, which has relevance for my study.

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial Studies (Edward Said, 1978; Gayarti Spivak, 1988; Stuart Hall, 1990; Homi Bhabha, 1994) began developing in the context of decolonisation in the 1950s, and refers to the deconstruction of Western descriptions of the world with respect to colonial and post-colonial power relations. In short, it emerged as a reaction particularly against European mainstream theories, which dominate in global scholarship and which render other knowledges invisible. It is a theoretical approach that interrogates the effects of colonisation, which usually includes human exploitation, repression and dependency.

Ashcroft (1989), who first used the term 'postcolonial' in his study *The Empire Writes Back,* defined postcolonialism in a later study (1998) as follows:

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> Post/colonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions of European[4] colonialisms, the discursive operations of the empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities (p. 187).

Postcolonialism is not about any one society, it is a contested term and the literature has provided different readings thereof. For instance, Hall (1996) describes it is a transnational process, Bhabha (1994) as a transcultural process, and Parry (2004) as an antagonistic struggle. A central tenet of postcolonial theory is that there are particular continuities between the colonial era and the postcolonial one, thus colonialism cannot be said to be relegated to the

[4] Post-colonial literature in present-day use now includes non-traditional colonies as is explained further down in this section.

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past. Postcolonial scholars usually criticise the economic and cultural oppression that followed in the wake of colonialism. They often expose how Western cultural hegemony is used as a ruling knowledge to both produce and maintain Western epistemology. They challenge Western rationality and its fabled creations of 'origin' and 'progress' (Gandhi, 1998, pp. 36-37), which are premised on the spin of 'civilisation and reason' as being White, and as the antithesis to 'savagery' as being Black, 'emotionality' as being woman and 'sexuality' as the racialised other. Herein the propertied White male is rendered invisible (Eisenstein, 2004, p. 75) and the colonised 'Other' as subaltern (Gandhi, 1998). Postcolonial scholars expose the fact that colonialism was entrenched in patriarchy, or as Mbembe, (2001, p. 13) so eloquently put it, in "phallic domination". They decried the fallacy that White men were natural rulers and Black men and women were incapable of self-government (Mohanty, 1991). They also pushed back against the colonial discourse that the North is "advanced and progressive" and the South is "backward, degenerate and primitive" (McEwan, 2001, p. 94).

A key concern among postcolonial scholars is whether postcolonial critique, as an important analytical tool of Western dominance, can only be applied to relations between colonisers and the colonised, or whether it should be applied more widely (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993). Much of postcolonial literature has focussed on postcolonial experiences of the non-European world (Bhabha, 1997; Fanon, 2008). Many scholars have however entreated that the postcolonial literature not exclude non-traditional colonies (Ahmad, 1995; McClintock, 1995; Sharp, 2009). As Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Maley (1997) argue, "…it is not a field of study which is exclusive to selected nationalities or cultures". Moore-Gilbert (1997) argues that postcolonial theory can be applied to many contexts:

> … post-colonial criticism can still be seen as a more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relation of domination and subordination – economic, cultural, political – between (and often within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present day of neo-colonialism. (p. 11).

One of the main perspectives of postcolonial scholars is that the present is postcolonial (Bhabha, 1992; McLeod, 2010; Spivak, 1993), because the vestiges of colonialism and

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imperialism continue to function, creating a colonial present (McLeod, 2010), which impacts on power relations (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Postcolonial scholars caution against understanding the 'post' in postcolonial as simply 'after', which closes the colonial era from the current one. Rather, 'post-colonial' "marks a decisive, though not definitive shift that stages contemporary encounters" (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993, p. 301). As Ahmed (2000, p. 11) maintains, postcolonialism is about "the complexity of the relationship between the past and the present, between the histories of the European colonisation and contemporary forms of globalisation". The complexity arises as the relationship swings between the notion that the present is completely distinct from the past, and the popular view that the present is simply a continuation of the past.

Of key importance to my study, especially with respect to migrant domestic labour, is Bhabha's (1994, p. 6) explanation of postcoloniality as "a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance". Indeed, postcolonial scholars are concerned with the representation of marginalised groups so that their voices are heard, without the appropriation of these voices. It is thus incumbent on scholars to pay attention to the "perceptions, motivations and beliefs" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 437) of these groups. In my study I am concerned with the invisibility of the domestic workers as a marginalised group, but also their "strategies of resistance". I heed Bhabha's advice in this respect, and pay attention to the "perceptions, motivations and beliefs" as discussed in Chapter Eight when I analyse the interviews with the participants.

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Subaltern studies

Subaltern studies is the theorisation of postcolonial studies, which challenges research that reinforces existing unequal power relations in society. It endeavours to challenge inequalities by providing the space for the agency of people outside of the West, and by exploring how they have developed their own knowledge systems. The most influential work in this body of scholarship has been by Indian scholars, which include Bhabha (1995), Chatterjee (1995) and Spivak (1988). Writers involved in subaltern studies project a history of India which is an alternative to both the elitist nationalist or colonial version embraced in the past (Guha, 1988; Spivak, 1988), and is said to be a reworking of Indian history (Said, 1988). The history that these writers put forward reflects the subaltern mass resistance to colonial rule in India.

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Generally, subaltern studies seeks to contribute to global and local struggles against injustice, and includes in its analysis gender and class inequality. The predominant aim of postcolonialism in the literature is an attempt to establish a native mode of (self) representation. The subaltern studies group attempted to locate and reinsert the voices written out of the dominant historical narratives (Chakrabarty, 1994).

Considered to be "one of the most influential and notorious essays in postcolonialism" (McLeod, 2010, p. 217), Spivak's "*Can the Subaltern Speak*?" (1988) initiated the notion of the 'subaltern' as the 'Other', which consisted of the marginalised groups of colonised societies. She examines the processes which construct the European self and its other, and the problems that emerge in the process of 'othering'. Spivak's essay entered Western academies just as "a new and powerful drive to discern and articulate something that was variously termed resistance, unconscious resistance, and sometimes, the agency of the oppressed" was emerging (Morris, 2010, p. 11).

For a quarter of a century, the classic construction of the subaltern has been the Third World peasant (Pandey, 2008). Initially this group comprised "subsistence farmers, unorganised peasant labour, the tribals and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside" (Spivak, 1994 p. 84). It is this figure, Pandey maintains, that is "superstitious, illiterate, ill-equipped, isolated and non-political" that abounded in the "received social sciences and historical literature" (p.273). Spivak expanded this group in her later works to include for example women and migrant workers in the global north (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The concept of subalternity can thus be applied to most marginalised groups, not only the colonised.

By introducing the concept of gender, Spivak (1994) demands that subalternity be examined beyond the confines of the material, by doubling the central question, "Can the subaltern speak?" and "can the subaltern (as woman) speak?" (p. 92). Thus, the meaning of the term 'subaltern' is challenged when identities of class, caste and religion are introduced, which is further complicated by the question of gender. The discourse is further problematised with the introduction of narratives of race and/or imperialism. The archive is examined to trace a particular history of colonialism, and the socio-economic and cultural relations between the coloniser and the colonised, and to consider its effects on the present. To be subaltern though, is not only to be subordinate or oppressed by patriarchal systems and discourses, but it is the

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distinct nature of the subaltern's situation within particular discourses that leaves her unseen and unheard.

Importantly, Spivak (1988) identified how instruments of subjugation contained within "colonial representational systems … which claim to identify and articulate subaltern consciousness" (Mcleod, 2010, p. 221) render the subaltern mute. Thus deliberating on female subaltern speech, she questions the traditional understandings of subjectivity, agency and representation, which are subverted by considerations of gender. The 'voice' of the female, in her deliberations, is appropriated and exploited to either support male authority or colonial patriarchy. She also argues that the impulse of the sympathetic radical Western intellectual to speak on behalf of subaltern groups appropriates the voice of the subaltern and also effectively renders them mute. Not only is the subaltern not heard, she is "not understood with accuracy", and that others do "not know how to listen" to the subaltern (McLeod, 2010, p. 223). Spivak's (1988) main tenet is that if "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 287). So, through an uncompromising reconceptualisation of history, the postcolonial scholar attempts to retrieve the voice of the subaltern (Guha, 1982).

Visweswaran (1996) also examined the ways in which female agency is contained. She does however, pay more attention to the possible "moments when an act of speech might puncture, even rupture, official discourse" (p.84). She contends that nationalist ideology served to contest colonialism, but it also sought to constrain women's agency, just as colonial notions of gender sought to silence women and curb their agency.

Feminist scholars have over the last few decades engendered post-colonial and subaltern studies. Black feminists have however cautioned against generalisations and Western feminism's Eurocentric and universalising narratives, as the historical and cultural contexts of women have to be taken into account, as well as the diversity in experiences in those contextual realities (hooks, 2000; Lewis, 2002; Lorde, 1984).

Visweswaran (1996, p. 87) argues that the universalising term 'woman' positions female subalterns in a patriarchal society, but there has to be a distinction "between 'Woman' as subaltern and the question of subaltern women". The common use of the term 'woman' in patriarchal structures situates women as subaltern and encourages their theoretical and ideological subjugation, and supresses their female agency. The term 'subaltern women' recognises gender is modulated by class and other inequalities, which necessitates that women

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be understood in relation to other women, thereby obscuring the space in which agency may be located.

Western women are continuously confronted by women, usually in the global south, who claim solidarity, whilst supporting a patriarchal, capitalistic system which chains them to exploitative conditions. Spivak and Gurnew (1986) however, maintain that the problems associated with speaking about people who are 'other', are not sufficient grounds for not doing so. They argue that the justification that it is just too difficult, can simply become an alternative way of silencing by default. Instead of constructing voice and silence as adversative binaries, each may be perceived to have a hint of the other, where voice may suggest agency, power and autonomy, and silence is suggestive of the marginal, the oppressed and the subordinate. Whilst heeding the warning against generalising women's experiences, Spivak's (1988) construction of the gendered subaltern is useful in understanding women in the postcolonial nation, and provides a guide for understanding the formulations of voice and its absence.

Spivak's work further demonstrates that models of analysis that are restricted to the national are increasingly being replaced by transnational modes of analysis, which are based on an analysis of global power and domination. That is why a transnational feminist lens is so important for my study – I am able to consider the relationship between power and gender in particular contexts, but also the influence of global structures.

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In my study, I attempt to investigate domestic worker leaders' subaltern voices, which is not an easy task. I situate Spivak's theory in my study to show how domestic workers find their voice through mobilisation, how they were silenced in the past and the present attempts to silence them. I am conscious of Spivak's admonishment that it is the compassionate inclination of the radical Western intellectual to speak for subaltern groups, who appropriates the voice of the subaltern and effectively silences them. In my study, domestic worker leaders, narrate their own pasts and talk about their efforts to change their futures. This study is about listening to voices that are rarely heard as women activists. To avoid falling into the trap of focussing on their oppression only and not noticing their moments of agency, I first listen uninterruptedly while they narrate their stories, however thereafter my interview questions are structured to allow these women to take a specific direction in their thoughts, to allow them to tell me stories of when they were victims, but also when they resisted. Their stories are entangled, complex and nuanced and speak to multiple moments of oppression and resistance that are not separate from each other, but bound up and woven into their life narratives.

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Domestic workers as subaltern

In the following chapter, I discuss the historical roots of domestic work and also American Black domestic workers roots in slavery. Suffice to say here that a century ago, the interrelationships between racism, gender and class were at the heart of feminists debates about anti-slavery struggles, as they are today in the debates about domestic worker struggles. Sojourner Truth, a woman's rights and civil rights activist, coined the phrase 'Ain't I a woman' in a speech delivered at a Women's Right Convention in Ohio in 1851, and which encapsulates some of the key elements in the debates on intersectionality:

> Well, children, where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter, I think between the Negroes of the South and the women of the North- all talking about rights-the White men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as any man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman? (Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech as quoted in Brah and Phoenix, 2004, p. 77).

Sojourner Truth's speech has resonance in the socio-economic, political and cultural 'othering' of domestic workers today and the injurious consequences thereof. Encapsulated in the phrase "none but Jesus heard me", is the inference that the inflictors of the pain and violence did not acknowledge their roles therein, just as the pain of domestic workers are seldom heard by the rest of society today.

Subaltern studies as explained above is seen to give expression to those who are disadvantaged, and who are suppressed and oppressed by elite and colonial discourses. In particular, the focus of Spivak's (1988) analysis is the female subaltern, whom she argues is marginalised by virtue of being female and marginalised because of economic conditions. (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, pp.

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79-80). I suggest in this study that the domestic worker leader as subaltern's voice has been retrieved from a history of silence through her agency and activism, thus validating and shifting erstwhile silenced voices from the margins to the centre.

If agency is identified as oppositional consciousness together with attendant forms of self-representation (Spivak, 1988) in postcolonial literature, then 'female domestic worker leader agency' in the context of my research also implies conditions of subalternity. By linking female domestic worker leader agency with subalternity, I am mindful of Spivak's (1988) emphasis on marginalised groups that lack a coherent political identity, and am cognisant of the historical conditions of domestic worker experience within national and global ideological structures.

Spivak's (1988) subaltern's voice cannot be heard. For Spivak, the subaltern voice continues to be silent or misread due to interpretive frameworks or no attention being paid to the significance of cultural specificity on gendered subjects. However, my research reframes the question "Can the subaltern speak?" more to the question on "how does the subaltern make attempts to speak?" This question requires a response to be more vigilant to the attempts at subaltern speech, and also the circumstances under which the subaltern can be heard. In other words, I try not only to locate the possibility of voice in my thesis, but I try to offer nuanced understandings of speech and its absence. Voice and silence are not understood as totally antithetical terms, as each may contain a trace of the other. This is understood in the sense that where voice denotes agency, power and autonomy, the contrasting silence denotes the marginal, suppressed and subordinate.

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Constructing non-Western women as the 'other'

In Said's (1978) influential book *Orientalism*, informed by the writings of Foucalt and the focus of studies by Bhabha (1984) and Spivak (1993), Said powerfully depicts how the non-Western 'other' has been formed by comparing of the west. However, the process of showing difference was not benevolent, it constructed the orient as inferior to the occident, laying the basis for treating the oriental 'other' as less than human. Indeed, Stuart Hall maintains that "discourses of exclusion mediate social relations between racialized individuals, groups, communities, and even nations and dominant groups" (cited in Racine, 2009, p. 182), and it is this social 'othering' that constructs subalternity and subjugation (Spivak, 1988).

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Lorde (1984) maintained that differences among women are institutionalised as otherness. She argues that difference itself does not separate women from each other, but the unwillingness to acknowledge the conditions that allow for such separation and ensure that the misrepresentations are dealt with, which are the outcome of discounting and misnaming those differences. When people are 'othered' she argues, exploitation and the disinclination to ignore difference, as the 'radical other' is incomprehensible.

In colonial narratives, White women were usually depicted as the civilised ones, scripting Black women as 'other' than civilised. As Lewis (2005, p. 12) wrote, the Black female body is "scripted negatively – as unreliable, sexually hyperdeveloped, untrustworthy, excessive, irrational, [and] immoral". Black women have also been represented as being passive and always the victim (Collins, 1990).

In Spivak's (1988) book '*Can the subaltern speak*?' she too examines the processes which construct the European self and its other. The problems of speaking about people who are 'other' are multifaceted, however as previously mentioned in this chapter, Spivak argues that it cannot be a reason for not doing so, as it could simply become another way of silencing.

Due to shared identity with the 'other', for instance being a woman, and simultaneously being different to the other, for instance due to race, there is an imperative that the analysis of the 'self-other' relationship not be reduced to a matter of interpretation. Instead, as argued by Bhabha (1994), the relationship between coloniser and colonised is imbued with uncertainty and "characterised by conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence" (p. 107). "The other is the object of both "desire and derision" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 96).

Scholars such as hooks (1984) and Spivak (1990) raise attention to another form 'othering'; where Western values, knowledge and power are favoured. Furthermore, Mohanty (1984) maintains other categorisations of difference such as race, ethnicity and class as processes of 'othering' have been applied to Black women living in the West and Third World Women. Mohanty maintains that the diversity in the lives of the women in the South are ignored, resulting in the stereotype of 'Third World woman'. She argues that the power inherent in feminist discourse is accrued by homogenising the experiences of Third World women. Mohanty describes how Western women present themselves and represent Third World women as such:

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> Universal images of 'the third world woman' (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the 'third world difference' to 'sexual difference' are predicated upon (…) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives. This is not to suggest that Western women are secular liberated and have control over their own lives. I am referring to discursive self-presentation, not necessarily material reality (p. 335).

In sum, Mohanty (1984) argues that Western feminism is guilty of essentialising women by depicting those from the South as 'victims', all women as being oppressed and as the subjects of power. She maintains that any analysis of women needs to be based on their socio-historical contexts.

Narayan (1997, cited in McEwan, 2001) warns against the "trap of culture-specific essentialist generalizations that depend on totalizing categories such as 'western culture', 'non-western cultures', 'western women', 'Third World women', and so forth". She says:

> feminist writings about women in the South, therefore risk falling into the trap of cultural essentialism", by depicting women as 'Western women', 'Third World Women', 'African women'…[and]…the cultures that are attributed to these various groups of women often remain fundamentally essentialist. They depict as homogeneous groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent. (p.99).

Constructing groups of individuals as the 'other' has also pinned groups down on axes of superiority and inferiority, where the superior group is perceived as the normal, not 'other', and an inferiorised group which is homogenous and possessed of a fixed, essentialised identity. Often, the feminist notion of 'difference' has been interchangeably used with the concept of the 'other'.

Criticisms of Postcolonial Theory

A major criticism of postcolonialism is that it has become entrenched in the Western academy, has become the 'go-to' language of the Western-based scholarly elite, and still excludes the colonised and the oppressed (Ahmad, 1992; McClintock, 1992). It has been accused of

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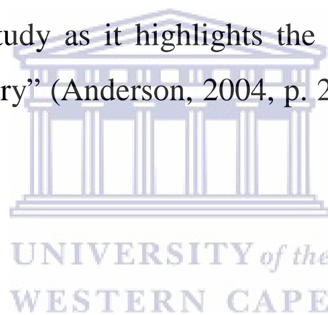
constantly backward-looking, with not much engagement with the future. Ahmad argues that the more sophisticated the theory has become, the more obscure it is – it has become too theoretical and does not address material or concrete concerns sufficiently, for instance, the reasons why colonial power relations persist. Scholars have also critiqued how postcolonial scholars do not write on postcolonialism's relationship with global capitalism, to their mutual detriment (Dirlik, 1994; Hall, 1996, both cited in McEwan, 2001). San Juan (1998, cited in McEwan, 2001) argues that postcolonial theorists ignore crucial life and death questions. For instance, McEwan (2001) argues they could consider questions relating to "inequality of power over control of resources, human rights, global exploitation of labour, child prostitution and genocide. With some exceptions … postcolonialism cannot easily be translated into action on the ground and its oppositional stance has not had much impact on the power imbalances between North and South" (p. 103).

I heed this critique - postcolonial studies, as evident in my arguments throughout this chapter, is particularly pertinent to my study as it highlights the practises of "dehumanization and human suffering throughout history" (Anderson, 2004, p. 240), which is relevant to domestic workers as subaltern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Conclusion

Relying on postcolonial studies as a framework, together with standpoint theory, intersectionality and subaltern studies, is not an offering as a panacea to the sufferings of domestic workers constructed as the 'other'. Rather, it is offering a theoretical perspective that is another lens from which to gain insights into domestic worker leaders as subaltern. This theoretical framing allows me to gain insight into the multiple axes of oppression that domestic workers are subjected to, and the struggles that their leaders have to mobilise against. Most importantly, it offers voice to domestic workers' leaders who have been and who continue to be rendered mute. It thus allows for competing and disparate voices to be heard in my research, without reproducing colonial power relations. Although feminists have engendered postcolonial and subaltern studies, this does not sufficiently address a transnational gender analysis, which is required for my study. Thus, I further look to transnational feminist scholarship in which to frame my study.

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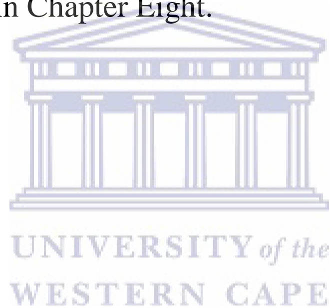
The critique of some points of feminist standpoint theory and postcolonial studies is acknowledged, but these conceptual framings remain valuable, especially to my research. Using standpoint theory, together with postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminism as a theoretical base for my research, provides me with a space for the voices of the participants in my research to be heard, and their experiences and opinions to be raised and documented. The domestic worker leaders in my research are thus drawn from 'the margins to the centre', where they are knowledge producers. This framework, which is located within these multiple but intersecting epistemologies and methodologies, also allows me to consider the experiences and perspectives of domestic workers interviewed as both specific to those individuals and indicative of larger social realities. Its focus on outsider within perspectives broadens the investigation of the domestic workers' marginalised points of view, as well as the relationships between the dominant and subjected individuals and groups in my study. Pertinent to my study is a central concern with the process by which a social and political consciousness develops from experience, as is evidenced in Chapter Eight.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CHAPTER THREE

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC WORK

Introduction

This chapter of my thesis provides a global perspective on domestic work, and I will briefly highlight those issues and studies that are pertinent to my research. There is no more appropriate time to explore the lives of domestic workers globally and across transnational contexts, as most of them in contemporary contexts are immigrant workers, whose lives are being discussed and debated on an international scale. Due to economic necessity, informal and care work in more industrialised countries, especially in the global north, are usually the reserve of marginalised groups, such as migrant workers from rural areas or other poorer countries. Workers in these countries are able to choose between many options, and are therefore not compelled to accept jobs such as domestic work with its accompanying low social status, lack of regulated employment conditions, low remuneration and exploitative working conditions. In the United States of America (USA), the new government of Donald Trump has made it even more difficult for low skilled workers from 'sending' countries such as Mexico to enter the country, and in Europe (Rothwell & Diego-Rosell, 2016) immigration rules have tightened, especially in the wake of Brexit, when the United Kingdom (UK) voted in favour of leaving the European Union (Currie, 2016; Tilford, 2015) The migrant worker is either lauded as a 'good worker' or a 'poor slave' (Anderson, 2015), who besides just crossing territorial borders, also has to cross cultural, social and psychic boundaries, whist entering into new relationships in entirely new situations (Tastsoglou, 2006). A large portion of these migrant workers are domestic workers (Anderson, 2015, 2007).

As mentioned in previous chapters, paid domestic work is carried out by millions of people globally. As far back as 1814, with the publication of the book *De la domesticicitè chez les peoples anciens et modernes*, written by Henri Jean-Baptiste Grègoire, a French priest who was actively involved in the French Revolution and who fought against slavery, domestic work was researched and debated (Sarti, 2014). The book focussed on the transformation of domestic work over time, and compared the labour laws and working circumstances of domestic workers

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in different countries, cities and regions. Thereafter, in 1897, one of the most important and well-documented books, *Domestic Service*, was published by Lucy Maynard Salmon, an American historian, professor and a suffragist (Sarti, 2014). Salmon understood domestic work to reflect the excesses of aristocracy, which relegated humans to subservience and dependence. During the Victorian era in Great Britain and the Post-Civil War in the USA, the ability to employ domestic servants, as they were known then, showed off one's class-status. Domestic work became one of the most important occupational categories for women in these western capitalist countries. Households were usually large and run by many servants, most of whom lived-in. The female servants were usually girls and women from rural working class origins, as they often did not have any work alternatives.

The first domestic workers in the USA were either African women who were slaves, indentured servants from Europe or indentured, indigenous Native American women (Caldwell, 2013). In the USA, the prevalence and intrusion of domestic servants in the home was generally frowned upon. Indeed, Degler (1981) maintains that the "demand for female labour [was seen] "as an insidious assault upon the home" and was described as "the knife of the assassin, aimed at the family circle" (p. 396).

Internal, national migration became a much talked about topic in the 20th century, and in 1969 Abel Chatelain published a book on migration, which focussed on the importance of domestic work in understanding urbanisation (Sarti, 2014). Antoinette Fauve-Chamoix then went on to suggest in her publication that women were in the majority in pre-industrial cities, as a result of rural girls migrating to the city to work as maids (Sarti 2014). However, scholars such as Ester Boserup (1970) and Lewis Coser (1973) suggested that domestic work was an archaic and even feudal remnant of the past, and argued that paid domestic work would cease to exist with the development of the service society. They associated the prevalence of domestic work with developing countries, and argued that in developed, industrialised countries the development of the service sector would make people-based domestic work out-dated.

As the literature shows, in developed service societies such as the USA and the UK and other European countries, paid domestic work has not completely disappeared, and in fact has become more common. The demand for domestic work further became an important conduit for migration, and both upwards and downwards social mobility for women. Urbanisation created a demand for staff in the homes of the newly rich. Indeed, as suggested by Milkman, Reese and Roth (1998), the size of a society's paid domestic labour is probably not determined

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by its degree of modernisation, but rather by its level of income inequality. Domestic work involved both men and women, but over time this sector became more feminised. Globally, women continue to dominate in this service sector as a result of society's perceived gender norms, and the status or value attached to these jobs. One of the reasons may be because care is feminised, devalued and underpaid, and at the same time what is associated with women is devalued, so if a woman moves into a job or profession, that job or profession becomes devalued.

Servants of globalisation

Globalisation in contemporary times has resulted in economic interdependency, and high migration rates are often due to nation-states' inability to provide political, social and economic security for their citizens. Women often bear the brunt of economic reforms, and are often the first ones whose jobs are terminated in societies with a high unemployment rate. There are more than 232 million international migrants globally, and approximately half of them are women (Carter & Aulette, 2016). The feminisation of labour migration has become a well-known fact and is a much researched phenomenon.

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Women migrate for different reasons, which include "gender-based violence against women as a consequence of civil wars, food insecurity, economic instability, human rights violations, corruption and attempts to escape human trafficking" (Gouws, 2010, p. 1). Literature on the international "maid trade" (Heyzer, Nijeholt & Weerakoon, 1994) categorises women from less-developed countries who migrate as "servants of globalisation" (Parrenas, 2001), as their "destinies are shaped by neoliberal economics and the structural inequalities between states, as well as patriarchies both at home and in receiving societies" (Staab & Maher, 2006, p. 87). Their labour follows the transnational capital flows, that is, from poor countries where labour is plentiful, to countries which are rich, but do not have a big enough labour force to cater to their needs (Portes, 1997, cited in Chin, 2003). In the receiving countries, they are given work that reflect mainly their 'feminine' traits, for example as care workers.

Global capitalism is enormously reliant on care work, of which domestic work forms a large part. Migrant workers form part of the "global care chain", which is a term coined by Arlie Hochschild (2000) to refer to the "series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (p. 13); that is, global care chains are transnational

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linkages created to support daily life. Care work is broadly defined in feminist literature as including “nurturant care and other social reproduction activities”, which also “includes forms of household and domestic labour” (Mahon & Robinson, 2011, p. 1). Typically care workers are women who leave their families and migrate from poor countries in the global south to work for rich families in the global north. Part of the global care chain is what is called ‘diverted mothering’ (Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994), which refers to poor women’s nurturant labour being ‘diverted’ to those children of more affluent parents. Hochschild (2000, p. 358) refers to this phenomenon as “importing maternal love”. The women themselves are trapped in cycles of poverty and the poorer children in turn endure poorer care, and future inequalities are perpetuated. Networks consist of “households that transfer their caregiving tasks across borders” … ”employment agencies, governments and their departments and other organisations and institutions” and these are regulated by a mixture of “international, transnational, national, and subnational institutions” (Fudge, 2014, p. 6). ‘Diverted mothering’ is especially predominant in the global south. Children of domestic worker migrants are taken care of by family members who remain in the rural areas or by day-care centres.

‘Diverted mothering’ is a particularly exacting consequence of women of colour’s oppression. In Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye,* which was published in 1970, the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, is a young Black girl who imagines she is ugly and whose main desire is to have blue eyes, which she associates with the accepted standard of beauty. Collins (2000, p. 93) writes in her book *Black Feminist Thought* that Pecola’s mother Pauline, “typifies the internalization of the mammy image. Paulina Breedlove neglects her own children, preferring to lavish her concern and attention on White charges and focusing her attention on White charges in her care” and that “only by accepting this subordinate role to White children could she, as a poor Black woman, see a positive place for herself”'. Collins (2000, p. 93) observed that “portraying the range of ways that African-American women experience internalized oppression has been a prominent theme in Black women’s writing”.

Lyons (2007, p. 106) describes globalisation as “a two-edged sword”, because in the face of the upsurge in transnational labour migration, unskilled migrant workers are especially susceptible to abuse and exploitation. They sell not only their labour, but also their personhood (Anderson, 2000) and their families. Indeed, most of the existing literature on migrant workers emphasise the vulnerable status of migrant workers, who are often depicted as passive victims exploited by unsympathetic employers. Unfortunately, there is often no legal recourse for the abuses they are subjected to, and it is known that state power favours capitalism, whilst not

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caring for the working classes sufficiently. Whilst migrant domestic workers are welcomed in times of economic upsurge, they are reviled and asked to leave when there is an economic downturn (Chin, 2003).

In Northern and Western countries relatively cheap migrant labour has become the norm (Nare, 2011). In European countries, the demand for domestic work differs for each country, and is dependent on their welfare states. Welfare services have suffered major cuts, and with more women having to enter the formal economy and with an ageing society, the demand for domestic care services has increased. Over the past forty years, migration (voluntary and forced) has changed the social fabric of Western Europe (Anderson, 2015). Countries such as the UK have reacted by restricting entrance and by increasing immigration legislation. The UK has never had a programme to allow entry for domestic workers, and most are on different types of visas, such as visitor, student, permanent residence European Union nationals and asylum seekers (Cangiano et al., 2009, cited in Anderson, 2015), and some are illegal. For a long period, the only way domestic workers could enter the UK was with their employers, and they had to live residentially with their employers. Employers were usually wealthy people entering the UK for business or on holiday. Anderson (2015) maintains that the migration then of domestic workers to Britain was not as a result of a significant need from British employers, but rather an attempt to enable the mobility of the very rich. She quotes Lord Reay, who spoke for government in 1990:

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> Looking at our national interest, if wealthy investors, skilled workers and others with the potential to benefit our economy were unable to be accompanied by their domestic staff they might not come here at all but take their money and skills to other countries only to keen to welcome them (p.193).

The number of migrant domestic workers living in the UK is almost impossible to determine, and yet despite this high number, they are perceived to be invisible. The reasons vary from being undocumented workers and the need to remain invisible, and the linguistic separation from the English speaking society, which leads to marginalisation (Hearn & Bergos, 2011).

Domestic work in Europe is likened to slavery by Virginia Mantouvalou (2006), as they most often work under exploitative conditions and are open to abuse. For instance, Platzer (2006) found that Swedish employers employed mainly immigrant workers, as they were deemed to be more accommodating, worked longer hours, worked for less pay and stayed for a longer

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period than their Swedish counterparts. Furthermore, household tasks are deemed suitable or not suitable depending on the worker's race, ethnicity, class or gender, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The Swedish, like other European employers, hire domestic workers mainly through their social networks, as they trust their networks to recommend workers who would be the best fit for their families (Gavanas, 2013).

Even small European islands such as Cyprus have seen an increase in migration, mainly from Eastern countries, since the early 1990s. As more women entered the labour market, the government of Cyprus invited foreign workers mainly from Sri Lanka and the Philippines to work on temporary visas. However, the presence of these domestic workers, although a necessity, was seen as a "threat to the well-being of the nation since it challenges the extent to which the latter may continue to be imagined as homogenous" (Spyrou, 2009, p. 160). Although perceived as a necessary evil, so reportedly mistrustful are the Cypriots of their foreign domestic workers that their children have internalised all their fears, anxieties and prejudices regarding the 'other', as evidenced in Spyrou's (2009) study of Greek Cypriot children's encounters with Asian domestic workers. One of his 12-year old respondents is quoted as saying: "Most people trust them. I think we should not, because she might, let's say, if she takes care of a child, teach him their [i.e. Filipino] religion, the manners and customs of their country, so that your child will grow up differently" (p. 160).

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Spyrou (2009) argues that pushing the nationalism dogma, that is, when ideologies are said to be in the national interest, masks racist attitudes. For instance, when the children in his study was asked what came to mind when they heard the word 'Sri Lankan': "45 percent said 'Black', 37 percent said 'domestic worker' and 18 percent said 'cleaner'"; while for the Filipinos "36 percent said 'domestic worker', 29 percent said 'Black' and 20 percent said 'cleaner'" (p. 161). They also mentioned "differences in religion, language and mentality" and some described them as "simple, poor and uneducated" (p. 161). In all their answers, the children 'othered' these women as very different to themselves, particularly at the intersections of race and class, this even from working class children. Tellingly, there were no significant differences between those families who employed domestic workers and those who did not. However, these children also perceived similarities between themselves and domestic workers and the positive similarities included describing these workers as being "passive, obedient and good-natured" (p. 163).

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The upper-class English poet, Robert Graves', comments about his nanny are often quoted as being representative of children's feelings towards their care-givers. He is quoted as saying that his nanny meant more to them than their mother, but said:

> I did not despise [Nanny] until about the age of twelve … when I found that my education now exceeded hers, and that if I struggled with her I could trip her up and bruise her quite easily. Besides, she went to a Baptist chapel (quoted in Delap, 2011, p. 95).

I agree with Delap's explanation that "In this single, perhaps deliberately brutal comment, he summed up much of the pain that children might inflict on servants, despite and perhaps because of their emotional dependency" (p. 95).

There are very few studies of immigrant White domestic workers. There are White women who form part of the immigration flow, for example, women from Eastern Europe who migrated to more stable capitalist societies after the dismantling of the socialist states, which left many women without work and deprived of a welfare state on which to depend (Mansoor & Qullin, 2006; Smith & Timar, 2010). In the USA, for example, whilst domestic labour is mainly dominated by Latin Americans in global cities, there are a few cities where White immigrants dominate, for instance the Polish in Chicago. Cheng's (2013) study of domestic workers in Chicago is focussed on why employers treat Mexican and Polish domestic workers differently. She found that almost all employers thought of Polish workers first when they decided to hire someone. They all stressed that "Polish people were hard working, reliable, and honest"; that "they were reasonable in terms of their fee" and that "they trust[ed] them easily" (p. 545). One of the many reasons was that they also believed that the Polish knew how to do things and use appliances and could learn quickly, as Poland was not so different to the USA in socioeconomic development. However, they often mistakenly compared Europe and not Poland to the USA. Poland certainly is different to the USA in socioeconomic development. Nevertheless, these rationalisations in my opinion are underpinned by racism and have no basis in truth.

They did not believe that Mexico was similar in socioeconomic development to the USA, which was disadvantageous for Mexican domestic workers. Most employers thought it was beneficial to have domestic care workers who shared a similar culture, however it is evident that they often conflated culture with race. They felt that Whites have the same culture, therefore they felt comfortable with White domestic workers. For those who could afford two domestic workers, they allowed the Polish to look after their children, whilst the Mexicans

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cleaned, also ascribing the division of labour to perceived cultural characteristics. Polish were like them, capable of “intimate and emotional work”, while Mexicans were better at “physical labour” (p. 548). Cheng (2013) argues that the Whiteness of these Polish workers is a social construction of these White female employers. Their Whiteness “is a process of becoming” (p. 546). It must be noted however, that the relationship between the Polish employee and White employer is not equal. The Polish domestic workers still face discrimination through their low status jobs and immigrant identity. As Cheng notes, they “are constructed the same and different at the same time by their employers” (p. 548). However, I would argue that globally, the difference in social position between employer and employee is lessened when it is White domestic workers rather than women of colour. It is my contention too, that at an interpersonal level, when White domestic workers experience better working conditions than women of colour, the employers are usually racist.

It is not only employers, but governments too that treat White domestic workers differently than women of colour. Indeed, Stasiulis and Bakan (2005) discuss how the Canadian government treats migrant women of different racial identities differently to each other. Canada imported domestic workers since the early 20th century. These women too were usually White women from Europe, who were provided with residence permits and who were deemed suitable wife and mother material for Canadians. However, the number of White women who migrated as domestic workers dwindled, and by the middle of the 20th century, women were ‘imported’ from what was known then as ‘Third World’ countries. Due to the lack of comparative socioeconomic development to wealthier counties, the Philippines and Caribbean became the major suppliers of domestic workers to Canada (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995). White women were given citizenship, whilst these women were denied residence status. It was only after an outcry from the public, that the government gave Third World women residence status, however they had to fulfil certain restrictions, for example, for two years they had to work as live-in domestic workers, they could not change their employment, and could not change employers (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995). This is a clear indictment of the Canadian government’s racialised policy.

The Philippines has the highest number of women emigrants in the world (Carter & Aulette, 2016), and has resulted in migrant workers being called “servants of globalization” (Parrenas, 2001). From the 1970s onwards, there has been increasing intra- and inter-regional migratory flows to Asia (Gaetano & Yeoh, 2010; Piper, 2004). Besides the Philippines, the major source countries in this region are Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam, whilst the Middle East, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Taiwan

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and Hong Kong are the major receiving countries, and Malaysia and Thailand are both sending and receiving countries. Moreover, half of the migrants globally are women, and 45% of those are from Asia (Gaetono & Yeoh, 2010). Migration to destination countries do not usually lead to permanent settlement, due to their restrictive policies that do not allow for the settlement of 'unskilled' labour (Piper, 2004). Furthermore, sending countries who are reliant on remittances are unwilling to lose their nationals permanently, and are not concerned with ensuring there are labour policies to protect these women (Yeoh & Huang, 1998). So concerned was Philippine President Cory Aquino about her country's national labour export policy and the reliance on this income stream, that she created the term 'national heroes', when addressing domestic workers in Hong Kong in 1988 (Gibson, Law and McKay, 2001). However, the migrant workers themselves did not appreciate their hard earned money flowing into the coffers of state development strategies, and when in 1982 they were forced to remit fifty percent of their earning through Philippine banks, they resisted and formed a group called United Filipinos against Forced Remittance, which was successful in the revoking of this executive order (Constable, 1997a). The migrants sent a clear signal that they would exercise their agency and were solely responsible for their economic fate.

In some states such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka, women's emigration is a source of controversy, "as women are often seen as symbolically representing the nation" and migration is perceived as threatening the "notions of domesticity, morality and motherhood" (Moors, 2003, p. 388). Sri Lankan domestic workers working in the Middle East for instance, are perceived as being abused, work in punitive conditions and stigmatised as promiscuous, which affects their own experiences and the way in which others see them, according to Moors. In Indonesia, political and religious organisations have criticised the state for not doing more to protect their migrant workers (Moors, 2003). As a result, migrant workers are more inclined to work in Malaysia than the Gulf States, preferring working with those of the same ethnicity (being Malay) rather than religion (being Muslim).

In the Gulf States, migration from the South Asian countries began in earnest in the mid-1970s, as increasing oil prices sparked a boom, and foreigners were recruited en masse to work in the construction and service sectors, with a growing demand for domestic workers and child-carers (Frantz, 2008). Female domestic and care workers, mainly from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines make up the majority of female labourers. Agents inform future employers which nationalities would be 'suitable for their needs' – this assessment is done based on the stereotyped and essentialised notions of national identity. For example, for parents who wanted

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their children to be conversant in English, they recommend Filipinas, as they are thought to be better educated, are more efficient and speak better English; whereas Sri Lankans and Indonesians are thought to be more industrious, capable of working in large homes and were less likely to be demanding more independence and asking for rights, such as having weekends free or having the use of mobile phones (Frantz, 2008). Although women's participation in the formal economy is increasing, it still remains relatively low in the Arab states. For working women their employment allows more leisure time and care for the children and the elderly, as Arab men do not generally help in the house (Kulik, 2010).

In most professions, social identity markers such as race and gender are considered to be illegal in the consideration of employment decisions, but not so in the case of migrant workers. In fact, most recruitment agencies use race and gender as actual selling points of migrant workers, as employers are allowed to specify their preferred workers' identities (Bakan & Stasiulis, 2005). They argue that "getting a nanny is like getting a custom-made dress: you don't just get one off the rack" (p. 70.) Female migrant workers are perceived to be more caring than male migrant workers, and an informal ranking system of preferred racial groups is also common. For instance, Bakan and Stasiulis found that in Canada Filipinas are considered by recruiters and employers as being "more giving and more trustworthy" (p. 80) than other nationalities, for example West Indian women, who are negatively stereotyped as being "aggressive, incompetent, and cunningly criminal" (p. 77).

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Interestingly though, Bakan and Stasiulis (2005) discovered that Filipina domestic workers were negatively stereotyped once they engaged in civil society protests. This is in keeping with Constable's (2009) and Piper's (2005) research, that in Hong Kong, Filipina migrant workers were referred to as "shrewd and politically savvy" once their activism in political organisations were recognised and publicised" (Constable, 2009, p. 161). They were then seen to be a negative influence on their more docile Indonesian counterparts.

Domestic workers in the Gulf States are subjected to the guidelines contained in the 'kafala', which is a sponsorship system that outlines the terms of employment for migrants in the Gulf countries, and structures the uses of migrant labour (Mahdavi, 2013; Parrenas & Silvey, 2016). Until January 2016, the sponsor and the employer were merged in the same category, thus in the event of a dispute and the employee's contract was terminated, the employee automatically became an undocumented or illegal worker. Migrant workers fell outside of the protection of the labour laws of the country, and labour unions were also banned so they were unable to join

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them. The ‘kafala’ was a deliberate attempt to construct the household as a private sphere that government could not regulate (Frantz, 2008). On 1 January 2016, reforms were made to the kafala system, and since then migrant workers have been allowed to look for other work, without penalty, when their contracts ended and can decide themselves to terminate their contracts, provided that they comply with the legal requirements of the contract, for example, by providing one month’s notice (Parrenas & Silvey, 2016). Unfortunately, domestic workers were not included in the reforms, thus their employment could be discontinued at any time and with no reasons provided. In addition, the ILO convention 189 does not cover domestic workers employed under the kafala system, and the UAE did not sign the globally endorsed instrument able to protect domestic workers, the UN’s 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Mahdavi, 2013). In June 2011, the UAE expressed its support of the new ILO Convention 189, but has still not ratified it, despite many protests from domestic workers and members of the IDWF. The announcement on 17 December 2016 that domestic workers will no longer be recruited through the interior ministry, but through the labour ministry in the UAE, was seen as a step in the right direction by the Human Rights Watch. However, Rothna Begum, the Middle East women’s rights researcher at Human Rights Watch says this “positive move will be largely symbolic unless the government also ensures that domestic workers have the same labor law protections as other workers” (Begum, 2016, np.). Up till the writing of this study this has not happened yet.

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An example of south to south migration are domestic workers from Ethiopia and Philippines who migrate to Iraq. Employment agencies in Iraq, as in most countries, contribute to the exploitation of workers, misleading them about how much they are to earn, and acquire huge profits, while the workers earn very little (Carter & Aulette, 2016). Even worse, workers are sometimes sold to employers against their will. They are also misled about their rights, for instance to leave their jobs, either to return home or to seek alternate employment. Furthermore, in Iraq too employers would confiscate passports so that workers are held captive against their will.

Nevertheless, Parerenas & Silvey’s (2016) research shows that many domestic workers in the UAE for instance display agency, and will not accept the exploitative conditions permitted by the administration, and their opposition takes the form of perhaps running away or more subtle tactics, and very few renew their contracts. Most prefer seeking employers who treat them well, rather than those who offer them a higher salary and treat them badly. As the authors note, not all are victims and not all are slaves. Wherever possible, they actively negotiate the terms of

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their contracts and try to secure their release if not satisfied; they also run away or change employers.

Sri Lankans make up half the labour force in Lebanon and, like in the UAE, many are subjected to abuse and violence (Abu-Habib, 1998). Abu-Habib's study shows that these violations are mainly ignored. The Sri-Lankan government 'tacitly' encourages the migration of labour, as the foreign exchange remittances play a significant part in its economy. Like most sending countries, the migrant workers families are dependent on them for their livelihoods.

In the case of Singapore, one of the top hiring countries, its Employment of Foreign Manpower Act does not allow for long-term immigration (Yeoh & Huang, 1998). Also noticeably absent are migrant worker organisations, and Lyons (2007) maintains this is due to a powerful state and an ineffectual NGO sector. The state is concerned about its excessive reliance on foreign domestic workers "and the perceived social and economic ills generated by the presence of these maids in large numbers" (Yeoh & Huang, 1998, p. 587). Controls, Yeoh and Huang (1998) note, take the shape of for instance a 'maid levy', often in excess of the salary which domestic workers receive in a month, a very expensive security bond and a compulsory bi-annual medical examination to ensure that the worker is able to continue employment. Furthermore, it is state policy orders that the employer's security bond is lost if the foreign domestic worker becomes pregnant, "disturbs the order of society" or stays longer in Singapore than authorised to do. Employers thus watch their employees carefully to the point where their surveillance is abusive. These policies and their related responses and practices contribute to the domestic worker feeling excluded from society and underscores her alienation.

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Rural-urban migration

In developed countries, migration usually happens from the southern countries to the northern countries. However, in developing countries, migration is usually from the rural to the urban areas and is central to urbanisation. The expansion of the informal sector becomes the wellspring for employment opportunities when there is a high unemployment rate due to an increase in urbanisation (Lall, Selod & Shalizi, 2006). The colonial administration hangover in many postcolonial countries worsens these crises, and results in large sectors of societies being marginalised, resulting in large-scale poverty. Most women who have migrated from rural areas to urban areas find themselves in the lower echelons of the economy and are employed

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as domestic workers. In some countries, they would have begun working as domestic workers as children. Mostly they work without pay as their employers say they are 'raising them', as is the case of Sonu from Nepal, whose case I discuss later. The truth is that they are exploited, with no consideration given to their physical capacity and wellbeing. Often their "culture, language, dress and race are considered inferior to those of dominant urban classes" (Bernadino-Costa, 2014, p. 74). Class, in combination with race, gender and age, determine the fate of these young girls.

When they reach adulthood and have acquired the necessary experience, they often develop coping mechanisms and rally against their oppression, such as "performing their tasks slowly, not cleaning the entire house every day, but just some areas, and negotiating with their employers" (Bernadino-Costa, 2014, p. 76). Bernadino-Costa maintains that these young domestic workers become subjects in their own right when they cease to sleep in their employers' houses. It is thus understandable that organisations and unions actively campaign that domestic workers find their own abodes. They gain more independence, are less exploited and they stop thinking of themselves as daughters of their employers. They are then also free to participate in union activities in their free time, and build relationships and solidarity with their peers. The union becomes the space where domestic workers are able to build a collective identity enabling the move towards empowerment and mobilisation (Bernadino-Costa, 2014).

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Besides, class and gender, caste also determines the fate of young girls who migrate from the rural areas to the urban areas in India. Those who belong to the lower classes and castes often have no other opportunities but to become domestic workers. According to Chakrabarty (1989, cited in Dickey, 2000), domestic workers, or servants as they are referred to in India, represent the "dirt, disease and 'rubbish" of a chaotic outside world associated with the lower class, that are in direct contradiction to the cleanliness and order of their own homes. Dickey (2000, p. 463) maintains that often domestic workers are regarded as a peril to their employers due to the "juxtaposition of spatial and emotional intimacy with class distance".

Similarly, gender, race and class exploitation due to a heritage of slavery has characterised domestic work in Brazil (Bernadino-Costa, 2014; Goncalves, 2010). There are 7.2 million domestic workers in Brazil, 93% of whom are female, 61.6% are Black and 38.4% are White (Bernadino-Costa, 2014). Income is determined by race, and racism, and then further determined by gender (Carneiro, 2003). Black Brazilians earn approximately 50-70 per cent less than other workers, and Black women earn 67 percent of what Black men earn, and are at

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the bottom of the salary hierarchy. Goncalves (2010) notes that the relationship of White women as employer and Black women as servant strengthens inequalities and aids the disrespect of domestic work as a profession, the repudiation of rights and the refusal to acknowledge any form of abuse suffered in the workplace. Furthermore, as in many other countries which will be discussed later in this chapter, the working relationship is often confounded by feelings of affection or friendship, and references to being part of the family that mask the true material and emotional exploitation of domestic workers.

Domestic workers in Brazil though have organised themselves and many are affiliated to unions and federations. In reaction to this mobilisation, Domestic Employers' Unions and Housewife Associations have sprung up in most parts of Brazil to organise and support employers, as the fear is that if the state endorses the rights of all workers, the employer will not be able to afford the costs incurred (Goncalves, 2010). Thus domestic workers organisations are faced with employer organisations that want to protect their privileges.

Like Brazil, the darker the skin, the more exploited women are in Mexico. In Mexico for instance, only 11% of Mexicans are from indigenous communities, yet 80% of all domestic workers are indigenous women migrating to the cities for employment (Fox, 2005). The economy in Mexico grows at a very slow rate, half of the population live below the breadline, and poverty is three times worse in rural areas than they are in the cities. Many of the employers in Mexico City are rich, White women, called patronas, who employ dark, indigenous girls and women as their domestic workers, ranging from ages 12-50, who are called 'chacha', 'gata' or 'criada', which translates more or less into the word 'wench'. Mexico has at least two million domestic workers and domestic work is the third most significant category of employment from which women derive their income (Fox, 2005). However, according to Marcelina Bautista, a former domestic worker who is now an executive member of the IDWF, and whom both Fox and I interviewed, the job earns little respect and is looked down upon by society. She says, "Because we do not have an education, we are made to feel ashamed, also because we are indigenous and have dark skins'.

In post-colonial Africa, there has been a rise of domestic work, so much so, that it is now the third largest employer of domestic workers globally (Marais & van Wyk, 2015). In 2016, the ILO estimated that there were approximately 5.2 million[5] domestic workers in Africa, although

[5] http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/media-centre/pr/WCMS_459465/lang--en/index.htm, accessed 23 November, 2017.

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this is not a true reflection as many are not documented. In Africa, women usually migrate to cities from rural areas. They usually leave their children at home with elders or siblings. More of the employers are now Black. The ability to hire a domestic worker is often seen as an indicator of class status. Hansen (1990) documents how in post-colonial Zambia, African employers failed to meet their domestic workers' expectations of a new and better life. Given the hardships that Black workers faced under colonial rule, Hansen notes that the realisation dawned on workers that their employers had not changed at all, they just looked different. They either ignored or did not know about changes in labour legislation, which theoretically would have guaranteed a better live for domestic workers, and like the colonialists of old, employers lamented that it was not easy to obtain 'a good servant'.

There are studies that show that Black domestic workers in fact favour White employers. Nyamnjoh (2006) writes that domestic workers in both South Africa and Botswana would rather work for White employers, as they are more likely to pay more and were less arrogant than Black employers, especially those from townships. In her research Fish (2006a) reveals that even Black Members of Parliament in South Africa paid their domestic workers very low wages. Bosch and McLeod's (2015) study shows that besides claiming that they had heard that Black employers paid their domestic workers lower wages, they also heard that they do not pay them on time. This was not the first-hand experience of domestic workers interviewed though, but rather anecdotal evidence. This anecdotal evidence could be based on a form of internalised racism or classism and/or an unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy. In a postcolonial and post-Apartheid context, it can become confusing when the employer who is perceived to be superior is no longer necessarily White, and racial resentment could cloud the employment relationship. However, theorising about the relationship between Black employers and Black domestic workers in South Africa is still fraught with tension. Ally (2011, p. 5) relates how an academic paper on "Black madams" in Soweto and presented by a student was rated racist by Andile Mngxitama[6] in the media. According to Mngxitama, "a research agenda that attempts to expose seeming 'Black-on-Black' exploitation and oppression, … was to efface – almost vindicate- the still dramatic power differentials that continue to still structure relations between Black and White" (p. 5). In any case, Ally (2010, p. 1) argues, there are not that many "Black madams" – they only made up "0.001% of the employing population".

[6] Andile Mngxitama is the founder of the Black First Land First (BLF) pan-Africanist and revolutionary socialist political party in South Africa. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_First_Land_First

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In Zimbabwe, Pape (1993) notes how after independence the Black employers were mostly working class and could not afford the minimum wages, and many simply terminated their employment instead of paying them the minimum wage. Payment in kind is also not an unusual occurrence in Africa, and Fish (2006a) maintained that by giving their domestic workers old clothes and food, employers felt that they were not doing their domestic workers a disservice. In fact, a review of the literature shows that gift-giving as a means to replace higher wages is a universal experience. Payment in kind in most countries has now been prohibited, whilst in South Africa it is limited to 25% of the total remuneration (Fish, 2006a). However, there are other nuanced practices of subsidizing wages with material goods. An example is the notorious 'dop system' in South Africa, where farmers paid their farm workers and their wives, who often worked in their homes, with cheap wine. Whilst this practise was formerly banned in 1961 it continued until the 1990s[7]. However, the Black Association of the Wine and Spirits Industry (BAWSI) took the farmers in the Western Cape to court in 2007, claiming that they still paid their workers clandestinely with liquor[8], resulting in many social and health related ills. For instance, violence, drug abuse and crime is very high in the Western Cape and South Africa has the highest incidence of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome globally (McKinstry, 2005).

Most employers in Africa reportedly look for immigrants or women from the rural areas, as they are perceived to be harder working than the locals, quieter and less likely to want to go home all of the time, as home is far away (Carroll, 2004). These women are usually more desperate for work and are therefore more easily exploited. For instance, Tswana employers in Botswana hire workers from the minority groups such as 'Basarwa' or 'Bakgaladi' and immigrants from Zimbabwe (Nyamnjoh, 2006). Most Tswana women refuse to hire Tswana domestic workers because they maintain they are rude, as they talk back, perceived as being lazy and are wanting to steal their husbands (Nyamnjoh, 2006). This ethnicized and classed perception of domestic workers is true in Zambia as well, where male 'houseboys' are favoured (Hansen, 1990).

It is not only an African perception that native-born workers are not as hard working and are less submissive than their immigrant counterparts. Staab and Maher (2006) note that employers in Chile paid less attention to the native-born workers' "quality or cost of their labour than on

[7] See https://www.health-e.org.za/2014/09/24/new-generation-falls-victim-dop-system/

[8] See https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/taking-w-capes-deadly-dop-system-to-court-362932

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their attitudes, their lack of deference, their refusal to perform proper servitude, and their sense of entitlement to make demands" (p. 93). However, in Chile, changes in the socio-political environment have provided native-born women with greater opportunities and privileges, increasing their expectations. Among these changes, the authors note, are increased regulation of the labour market and increased activities of national worker organisations. Mobilisation among domestic worker organisations has heightened consciousness among domestic workers about their rights, and employers receive fines if they do not adhere to labour laws. Employers thus turned to Peruvian immigrants to maintain the global master-servant relationship, the one of dominance and submission. What is seen as subservience however, whether from Peruvian domestic workers or their counterparts globally, is often arguably a result of disempowerment due to their political, economic, social or legal circumstances.

Legal systems and domestic work

Domestic work globally has been characterised by a lack of legal protection. The exclusion of domestic workers from certain labour laws is a worldwide occurrence, due to reasons such as the asymmetrical bargaining power, the seclusion of workers who live-in, and the notion that domestic work is women's work and linked to household tasks that women usually perform in the home (Tijdens & Klaveren, 2011).

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In many northern countries, such as Canada, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, domestic workers are excluded from certain labour laws such as minimum wage provisions. They are also excluded in many countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. In Africa, countries include Egypt, Mozambique and Senegal. In Latin America, most countries make provision for a minimum wage for domestic workers (Smit & Mpedi, 2011).

In the USA, many Latina domestic workers earn less than the minimum wage and work longer hours. A survey done by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) found that Latina's earned less than their White counterparts (England, 2017). They also found that besides race and gender, immigrant status also played a part in the working conditions of the respondents. The workers who earned the least and were the most vulnerable were those who were undocumented. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) found that not many employers and domestic workers knew about the wage and labour laws regulating domestic work. However, she found

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that exploitation was not only between races. Like in Africa, working class Latina immigrants who employed Latina domestic workers paid extremely low wages. Indeed, Das Gupta's (2008) study shows that domestic workers who shared the same ethnic background as their domestic workers paid them much less and expected them to work longer working hours. The methods they used in order to get their domestic workers to 'obey' included confiscating their passports and other legal documents, and threatening to report their workers to the immigration authorities.

In countries where domestic work is regulated, such as Chile, workers felt more empowered and liberated, as workers had contracts, and if unhappy, could apply for other work (Maher & Staab, 2005). However, Maher and Staab found that regulation did not formalise, nor elevate the rank of domestic work, but instead increased the demand for workers from Peru who were not empowered. Employers would much rather employ Peruvian workers on the grounds that they were "harder-working, educated, and clean; that they spoke better Spanish; that they cooked well; and that they were more devoted, caring, submissive, and service-oriented than Chilean workers" (Staab & Maher, 2006, p. 88). Unbelievably though, in the same study the very same employers stereotyped "Peruvian women as dirty, criminal, lazy, backward, uncivilised, uneducated, slow, and childlike. That is, Peruvian workers were simultaneously praised and stigmatized, sometimes in the same breath by the same person" (p. 88). The authors maintain that this dual discourse is intended to justify their choice of workers in a situation where there is increasing tension between the indigenous workers and the middle-class employers. At the same time, those who describe Peruvian women as having negative characteristics situate themselves as being "civilized, modern, and White" (p. 88). Staab and Maher (2006, p. 88) note that this "dual discourse" is not to be found only among Chilean employers. It bore a likeness to colonial powers speaking of natives as "spiritually pure but subhuman", to tales globally of immigrants being "hardworking but criminal", by masters who need their servants as individuals, but despise the "classes of people" from which they come. Unsurprisingly, many of the employers interviewed in this study saw Chile as a White society, and were in complete denial of the indigenous communities in Chile and the mixed heritage of most of the population. The imagined social differences between the Chileans and the Peruvians in the narratives of the employers in Staab and Maher's (2006, p. 104) study, the authors argue, underlined the distinctions they saw between Whites and the indigenous population, between a "developed, civilised state that is more European than Latin American and another that is backward, poor, and truly part of the less-developed world."

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Furthermore, the gender roles in Peru were described as being more traditional and patriarchal, whereas Chilean society was more gender-liberated, where the women were educated and respected, and were not as happy as Peruvian women to occupy a subordinate role in the household. Indeed, Constable (1997a) notes that casting domestic workers in the role of the uneducated or less intelligent than their employers is a strategy used to highlight the notion that employers are superior to their workers.

In Thailand, there are also no policies regulating domestic work, and domestic workers are reportedly generally exploited and abused (Muttarak, 2004). They are often underpaid, physically abused and receive insufficient food or even left-over food that should be discarded. This resonates with other studies on the dynamics between employers and employees, as a respondent in Archer's (2011) study, located in South Africa, remarked: "Once you know the food relationship, then you know the whole relationship" (p. 66). This is true for most countries. In Jordan for instance, a number of participants in Frantz's (2008) study reported that males, some as young as 11, refused to eat and drink anything that a domestic worker had prepared. Some insist that domestic workers stop cleaning and leave the room when they enter. When asked why, most responded that they did not like foreigners in their homes. Some employers may share eating utensils, but draw the line at washing their domestic workers' clothes with theirs. In India, the segregation between employer and employee is starker, with servants having a set time to bath, and dress in a certain way (Qayum and Ray, 2003). Like many South African domestic workers and their employers, as well documented in Apartheid times in particular, dishes, eating utensils and clothing are also separated (Cock, 1980; Fish, 2006a); Shefer, 2012). Qayum and Ray observe that although employers recognise that modernity and democracy requires workers to be recognised as having rights, "both employer and servants expectations (are) rooted in an older culture of servitude" (p. 548).

Du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker and Dickinson's (2010, p. 406) study shows that the extent to which a domestic worker is exploited by an employer is influenced by "the domestic worker's sense of self-worth and the employer's concern with equity." They argue that it is the employer's character and attitude that governs the power balance in the relationship. However, as shown by Maher and Staab's (2005) study in Chile previously in this chapter, if the labour market is regulated and the workers are able to mobilise effectively, they feel empowered and are able to resist exploitation.

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Mkandawire-Valhmu, Rodriguez, Ammar and Nemoto's (2009) study in Malawi showed that despite the employers of domestic workers being of a higher socio-economic class and having more material possessions than their employees, domestic workers in their households were able to maintain their self-worth. They viewed themselves as having value as they lived through hardships and were still able to be employed. One woman who was interviewed said, "I feel that my life is no different from theirs. The only difference I see is that I have gone there to work while they are the people with money. But our lives are the same. So I wonder why they discriminate against us" (p. 795).

Intimate relationships: discursive and material reproduction of inequalities

The trope that domestic workers are part of the family is not an uncommon narrative among employers across multiple contexts (see for instance Fish, 2016a; Jansen, 2016). Employees are often quoted as being part of the family. The family metaphor results often from the perception that domestic work is not 'real work' and from the intimate nature of the job relating to the tasks that need to be performed, for instance, washing someone's 'dirty linen' or other general care work. Hongagneu-Sotelo (2001) argues that as the home is not associated with work, but with family and relaxing events, paid domestic workers' labour is frequently thought of as being the same as the activities that women perform to show their love for their family. Hongagneu-Sotelo maintains that in the USA, some employers of domestic workers do not want to regard themselves as employers, and prefer describing their domestic worker as part of the family, which also makes them less accountable as employers. Anderson (2001) maintains that it obscures the fact that there is a hierarchical relationship between them, and allows the employer to alternate between defining the relationship as a paid one or as kin, depending on the circumstances at the time.

Using China as an example where the employer-employee relationship is obscured, interstate migration is common and domestic workers are called 'amahs', and those who have never married are called 'mahjej', which literally translated means mother and older sister respectively (Constable, 1996). Using this patriarchal and familial discourse serves to obscure the type of relationship between employee and employer, and suggests rather that they have a familial attachment. The domestic worker eats the same food as the family and is allowed to eat with them. Eating from the same pot in Chinese culture is a symbol for shared identity.

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Thus, the sense of being part of the family makes it difficult for domestic workers to challenge being exploited as they might be perceived as being ungrateful.

Nyamnjoh (2006) describes in his research how African employers start off their relationships with their domestic workers in a very informal way and iterate that they want to treat their workers better than their mothers were treated. However, before long the domestic worker is taken for granted, and as formal boundaries are not defined, this results in no contract nor benefits as domestic workers are said to be part of the family. They often share rooms with the children in the house and that is how they also justify their long working hours. For instance, in Setswana culture, when there is young girl at home, whether she is your child or not, she is expected to perform chores and there is no time limit set. Similarly, domestic workers as 'girls' are expected to perform chores outside of normal working hours. According to Fish (2006a), when employers and employees share the same racial identity, the differences in social position are lessened to a very large extent. Thus those in privileged positions try harder to assert their social power as it is far more threatened than when only class defines privilege. Racial inequality is thus not the only defining factor of social inequality.

Nare (2011) cautions against seeing all expressions of familial relationships as being to the detriment of the workers. In Naples, Italy, where she did her study, migrant workers were the most satisfied in their jobs, and used familial terms when expressing good relationships with employers. We cannot disregard the workers' own descriptions of how they felt about their employers, otherwise "we end up portraying migrants as dupes under false-consciousness" and "position ourselves as omnipotent observers, who can detect their 'true condition' as oppressed" (p. 406).

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Besides the creation of fictitious familial relationships with their domestic workers, globally, employers try to infantilise their workers in order to show their superiority (Anderson, 2001; Chin, 1998; Rollins, 1985). There is a linguistic establishment of hierarchy in the names with which employer and employee refer to each other. In Jordan for instance, live-in domestic workers are referred to as 'daughters' and are expected to address their employers by paternal and maternal designations such as 'baba' and 'mama' (Frantz, 2008). The fictitious familial ties and affection binds the workers to their employers, whilst at the same time infantilising the workers, entrenching an uneven power relationship. This narrative also characterized Apartheid South African domestic service dynamics, where domestic workers were (and in many cases still are) usually called by their first names (usually an Anglicized version rather

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than their own names) or infantalised by being called 'girls', whilst female employers are usually addressed as Madam, Mrs or Miss (Cock, 1980; Shefer, 2012). Male workers are also often not given the titles reserved for men of their ages, but rather called 'boys' or 'houseboys'. I will continue the discussion of the fraught intersectional dynamics of domestic work in the South African context in the following chapter.

As domestic workers were perceived as being part of the family and unfairly treated, the promulgation of C189 by the ILO ensured a significant shift in employer-employee relations. Domestic work was placed in the realm of labour law and "treated as a matter of employment and not family relations" (Fudge, 2014, p. 11). The ILO's conventions are the strongest mechanisms through which to make provision for human rights within the international law framework, as countries have to report on how they comply (Fish, 2017). The conventions are accompanied by recommendations for governments to implement; however, the ILO cannot force implementation and governments have to be willing to ratify. The ILO depends on willing governments with strong mechanisms of enforcement, supported by strong trade unions (Fish, 2017).

Despite this international standard, countries still differ on where the boundary is between what is considered work and what is not. For instance, Fudge (2014) uses the example of England, where workers employed in private households are not afforded a maximum period that they are allowed to work during the week, on length of night duty and a rest period weekly. Even more alarming, if domestic workers are considered (by their employers) as being part of the family, the minimum wage does not apply to them. The more the work relation looks like a family relation, the less protection a domestic worker is likely to get from human rights law (Fudge, 2014).

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The Control of Domestic Workers' Bodies

Since the days of slavery and colonialism, domestic workers have been vulnerable to sexual abuse. Robert Ellett, a former slave, explained in an interview that "In those days if you was a slave and had a good looking daughter, she was taken from you. They would put her in the big house where the young masters could have the run of her" (quoted in Graunke, 2002, p. 136). The limited regulation of domestic work which is performed in the private sphere makes the domestic worker still vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse. In a lecture that she presented, Ally (2010, np.) argued that:

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> The most pernicious vector of intimacy in domestic work is the sexual exploitation of domestic workers by their male employers. This is a form of dehumanization that has yet to be exposed in much the same way as the American South's racism was exposed in the way in which slavery crossed the boundaries through non-consensual and consensual inter-race relationships. The same is true of South Africa but we have only just started to touch the surface.

The immigrant domestic worker is the most vulnerable, as the fear is that if she complains she may lose her job and be deported (Graunke, 2002). In Ullah's (2015) study done in Hong Kong, she found that sexual abuse was the most widespread form of abuse, followed by psychological abuse and then physical abuse. Female employers, her research shows, commit the most psychological abuse, while the male employers are the perpetrators of sexual abuses. According to Abraham (2000), whether a migrant worker is abused is often determined by either class, race or economic status, or combinations of these social categories.

Some migrant domestic workers turn to sex work for increased autonomy, higher wages or to supplement their incomes (Constable, 2003). Poor labour laws in many countries leave them hardly any recourse from protection, and thus some move into the sex industry for higher wages and protection. Constable (2003) calls the challenges inherent to having to choose between limited options a 'bind of agency'. However, in many cases the workers themselves are blamed when their male employers make unwanted sexual advances and in some cases, where the workers are raped.

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Indonesia, the Philippines and Pakistan were some of the countries who were trying to introduce legislation to stop the migration of single women and those under the age of 30, to thwart the trafficking for the sex industry (Mahdevi, 2013). The Philippines, as an example, makes attending courses lasting several months compulsory to decrease the numbers migrating (Mahdavi, 2013). Nevertheless, these migrants are often regarded as 'sexually threatening' and in need of 'strict discipline', in countries such as Hong Kong (Constable, 1997b). They are seen to beautify themselves in public, speak a foreign language and some dress like men, causing great concern among the locals, who remember the Chinese 'amahs' of the past, who were said to uphold traditional Chinese familial values and who posed no moral or other threat to the existing status quo (Constable, 1996). In contrast to the uneducated Chinese 'amahs', Filipina workers often were very educated, with almost two thirds in 1989 having post-

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secondary school education (Constable, 1997b). Many of the domestic workers Constable interviewed were trained professionals such as teachers and nurses and others had university degrees. Thus their previous high status occupations contradicted their status in Hong Kong as 'servants'. Many insist on being called 'workers' and not 'helpers' and refuse to be called 'amahs' or even worse, 'servants'. In Iraq too, employers try to control Filipina workers' sexuality by banning them from being with other men (Carter & Aulette, 2016). In Canada too, Pratt (1999) says they are viewed as 'husband-stealers'. Often domestic workers are represented as hypersexualised, which serves to displace the blame of sexual harassment from male employers onto the worker. In most cases they are unwilling to draw attention to the unwanted sexual advances. Welsh, Carr, Macquarrie and Huntley (2006) found that Filipina domestic workers in Canada not only feared being deported, but often they did not know what constitutes sexual harassment and some thought that it is "something natural that their employer should be allowed to do" (p. 101).

Concerns over the sexualised othering of domestic workers is not only confined to Filipina domestic workers. Hansen's (1990) study reveals that in colonial Northern Rhodesia, European women employers were weary of employing local women as domestic workers as they were perceived as a sexual threat, and in postcolonial Zambia, the trend to hire manservants is still prevalent among Black women employers for the same reason. In South Africa too, Fish (2006a) found that White women were anxious about their domestic workers' sexual appeal to their male partners. Domestic workers are often fired when the employer is jealous of her sexual allure. Similarly, domestic workers are often fired when there is jealousy over the relationship fostered between the children and the worker, thus threatening the mother's affective bond with her children or her authority (Constable, 1996).

In Kayoko Ueno's (2010) study of Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers in Singapore, she examined how migrant domestic workers' identities were prone to being threatened and how they struggled to reconstruct them. Migration in Indonesia is termed "langgar laut", which literally means "crossing the ocean" and also means "crossing the threshold of home" (Williams, 2008, p. 345). This threshold, Williams maintains, "is both cultural and geographical, separating home and away, and self and other" (p. 345). Women cross from spaces of familiarity to spaces of the unknown, intensifying their sense of self. Workers are deprived of their usual "identity kit" that makes up their identity front (Ueno, 2010). Her gendered role that she usually plays in her own home is suspended. Added to this, their material belongings are often confiscated by agencies or they are not allowed to use them. Moreover,

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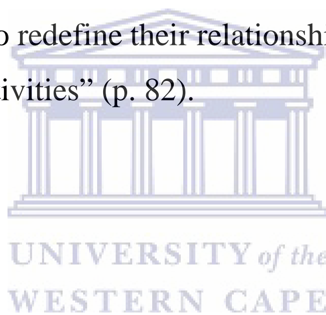
agencies impose a morality on them demanding that they "shall not indulge or be involved in any illegal, immoral, or undesirable activities, including breaking up families in Singapore" (Ueno, 2010, p. 83). This demand already pre-supposes that they will break up families if not stopped.

Their physical appearance often changes, because at training centres, regardless of individual hairstyles, applicants' hair is cut very short and all leave with similar short hairstyles. Thus their socially constructed femininity is undermined in order to limit their sexual appeal. To compensate, domestic workers try to reconstruct their identities by acquiring a new identity kit. As transnational migrants, they have the opportunity to reimagine and redefine themselves as salaried workers, as urban residents, as commuters, as consumers, women with not much free time (Williams, 2008). They make an effort to obtain new skills to boost their worth, so that they can be labelled as more than a mere 'maid'. Ueno's study shows that "they obtain additional roles in an attempt to change how they feel about themselves, to alter the meaning of being a domestic worker, and to redefine their relationships with others either by individual struggles or through collective activities" (p. 82).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Conclusion

As is evident from the discussion in this chapter, domestic workers globally face many challenges that are exacerbated by transnational and national migration, and that can only be changed by protection through state legislation and the enforcement thereof. Through domestic worker activism and with the formation of the IDWF, and the ratification of C189, more nations are pressured into ensuring that domestic workers have the same rights as other workers do. It is the implementation of policies offering protection that are difficult to monitor, especially across nations. Elias (2007) argues that a major problem is that universal labour rights are referred to, without any explanation how those rights can be obtained. Workers are educated about their rights when they join unions. It is imperative that the drive to organise and mobilise domestic workers is supported by sympathetic organisations globally. I discuss this support in Chapter Nine.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE LOCAL, SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC WORK

Introduction

I was the manager of the Ethical Leadership[9] Project about a decade ago, and hosted a national conference on Ethical Leadership in and through Labour. As mentioned in the introduction, Myrtle Witbooi, the General Secretary of SADSAWU, was one of the speakers that the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) sent to the conference. I was concerned about her ability to interact with the audience, because she was having trouble with her hearing aid that day. My concern did not last long. Within about five minutes into her speech, Myrtle had the audience on their feet, including myself and the other organisers of the event. She was a charismatic speaker who had an incredible rapport with her audience. Her passion for the labour movement in general and workers in particular was palpable. She ended her speech to thunderous applause. I was in awe of her. At that conference I met many members of the labour movement, kept in contact with them and became friends with some of them.

A few years later, Myrtle requested my services as a mediator when problems arose among SADSAWU's membership. I worked as a conflict mediator for the organisation without pay, and became intimately acquainted with most of their members. It struck me in these meetings how strong these women were, and I was astounded to hear about their activities on both the local and international labour stage. I knew immediately that I wanted to learn more about their activism and those of women like them in other countries, hence this study. In order to situate the activism of SADSAWU members in this study though, it is best to begin with giving a brief synopsis of South Africa in relation to domestic work as an institution and domestic worker activism. This seems especially important given the dominance of South African leadership in current international domestic worker activism, as will be discussed later.

[9] The Ethical Leadership Project was a joint project of all the universities in the Premier's Office and the Moral Regeneration Movement.

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An overview of South Africa and the politics of domestic work

South Africa is a complex and diverse country. The population of approximately 54 million South Africans is richly diverse regarding race, ethnicity, language, class and culture. However, there is a price to pay for diversity. The country's socio-political history is marred by political rivalries and the struggle for dominance. Its violent history is reflected crudely in the visual architecture of the country. For instance, as a commentary of the social life of Cape Town, the previous rector at the University of the Western Cape, from where I am conducting my study, Professor Brian O'Connell, always welcomed first year students to the university with the same set of PowerPoint slides. He visually presented the images of Table Mountain, the rich hub of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and the City Bowl, juxtaposed on the same slides with images of poverty-stricken township life, scattered with tin shanties, portable toilets and street vendors. Such is the paradox inherent not only to Cape Town, but all of South African life.

According to Heyns and Brand (1998) the bills of rights that usually originates from countries that have just emerged from a period of conflict are committed to ensuring that the circumstances that created the conflict do not develop again. The South African Bill of Rights, according to these authors, is one such piece of legislation, and South Africa's constitution has the most comprehensive anti-discrimination clauses globally. Given the atrocities of the past, its human rights policies, amongst them gender rights, are comprehensive and far-reaching. Black women have been the most marginalised by colonialism and Apartheid (Findley & Ogbu, 2011; McEwan, 2003; Meer, 2005).

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Yet the vast majority of Black women's lives have not changed significantly since the end of Apartheid according to Ally (2011) and Fish (2006a), starkly exemplified in the lived and material realities of domestic workers, comprising the largest category of working women in the country, and an important part of the fabric of South African society. Statistics show that 42.2% of Black women are in low-skilled occupations, compared to 1.4% of White women, while 58.9% of White women are employed in skilled occupations (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

Policies of the Apartheid era were deliberately designed to ensure that there was a pool of cheap Black labour, making it difficult for generations of Black women (and men) to obtain an education. Unskilled, the majority of Black women migrated to the cities from rural areas, to seek low-paying domestic work. Although the public education policies are the same for all

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racial groupings, it is mainly Black women who are still doing the 'dirty work' – cleaning and serving – maintaining the racial and class inequality of the past (Ally, 2011). Gender rights are thus mediated through race and class, and Fish (2006b) argues that paid domestic work encapsulates the intricacies of 'engendering democracy'[10] more than any other institution in South Africa. She notes that participants in her research always refer to domestic work as the 'last bastion of Apartheid'.

The major provider of statistical data on domestic workers available in South Africa is through Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). A Stats SA survey in 2016, as mentioned in Chapter One, indicates that there are over a million domestic workers in South Africa, accounting for about 8% of the workforce. However, these figures are open to dispute as domestic workers are employed in private homes, and thus accurate records are difficult to obtain. Moreover, most domestic workers are unregistered workers, as their employers try to dodge paying the minimum wage, pension funds and unemployment funds. These workers are almost all Black (88% African and 12% Coloured).

In Chapter Two, I discussed how the intersectionality of gender, class and race underscores oppression, which is usually embedded in structural relations. This is still starkly evident in South African Black women's lives. Although Apartheid is a legacy of the past, the ideologies that underpinned racism have to an extent remained intact, resulting in race and class inequalities that still mimic that of the Apartheid era (Burgard, 2006; Fish, 2006a). Employers, who now include more of the Black upper and middle classes, fail to acknowledge the degree to which their private lives perpetuate the disparities of the past. Due to the high unemployment rates, they often feel that they are being altruistic in employing a domestic worker to take care of their households, relieving them of the liability of ensuring that their servants at least earn a living wage. Domestic labour both institutionalises inequality and impedes the realisation of democracy in South Africa (du Plessis, 2011; Fish, 2006a). Fish argues that "the household as a political space where power is defined by race, class, gender and inequalities that are constantly negotiated – particularly when the micro private sphere is also a public labour site for domestic workers" (p. 6). Thus the imperative to achieve a democratic new South Africa requires the transformation of the private household. I have discussed the concepts of the private and public spheres in Chapter One and it must be noted that changes at governmental

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[10] In Fish's research, the term 'engendering' implies a deliberate analysis of gender from the perspective of democratisation.

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level in South Africa have not yet transformed the private household, where the old colonial nature of domestic works and the power relations still prevail.

In 1994, Delport prophesised that within a decade, the status quo of domestic workers would be transformed from "the exploited skeleton in the kitchen to that of a valued and protected member of the workforce" (p.180). In my study I attempt to ascertain whether Delport's prediction has been realised and if not, is it happening or going to happen and if so, what are the reasons for the transformation? In the next sections of my study I will show that even though domestic work continues to embody the racial and gender stratifications of a colonial and Apartheid past, domestic workers are mobilising through unions and have actively challenged and are still challenging the unfair labour practises that are inherent to their employment. My study will also show that Delport was correct too, in arguing that it will be women who initiate and ensure and put into place legislative frameworks to govern domestic labour. What Delport did not foresee, I think, is that South African domestic workers would initiate and be very instrumental in international activism and changes to domestic worker legislation globally. It is best to provide a brief summation of South Africa's Apartheid history that impacted domestic work directly, as a multifaceted socio-political history is beyond the scope of this study. I draw on the history of Apartheid, as the legacy of women's activism, in particular domestic worker activism, is inseparable from the racial, class and gender oppression that Apartheid epitomised.

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Apartheid, meaning apartness in Afrikaans, was a violent, oppressive system of racial segregation in South Africa, implemented by the governing political party, the National Party, from 1948 to 1994. The Group Areas Act was one of three acts of the Parliament of South Africa, allocating different residential and business areas to different racial groups. The majority of the Black population were forcibly removed to Bantustans or homelands, to prevent them from living in the urban areas of South Africa. Blacks, who constituted 75% of the population, were given 13% of the land (South African History Online, 2011a). The Black population was further divided into Indian, Coloured and African groups, with their own townships with higher statutes accorded to different sectors, the plan being to establish nation states and divide and rule

Homelands had their own governance structures with minimal public services and the least agriculturally fecund land. Black people were still required however to serve the White population, thus pass books or what was locally called 'dompasses' were developed to allow Blacks to gain access to cities and White suburbia. This legislation largely applied to African

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men; however, the Black (Natives) Laws Amendment Act of 1952 amended the 1945 Native Urban Areas Consolidation Act (South African History Online, 2011b). Black women were only allowed to access White areas if they were domestic workers or farm labourers. Even the school curriculum for women was focussed on improving serving skills, and domestic work was the main sector for the employment of Black women that was approved by the authorities (Fish, 2006a). Domestic service then became one of the few significant inter-racial contacts between White and Black people (Cock, 1980), although this relationship was structured in terms of racial hierarchies of power and inequality. The Master and Servant Act, introduced in the 19th century, to ensure that African workers were prosecuted if they were absent from work without a lawful reason (South African History Online, 2011b), was more for the protection of the employer than for the worker. Domestic workers had no voice, no rights, and no recourse to protection, in fact on their website SADSAWU calls it 'legal slavery' (SADSAWU, nd. a).

It is thus evident that the legal frameworks in place at the time ensured that the relationship between Blacks and Whites was one of master and servant. I discuss the implications of these laws for women such as Myrtle Witbooi and Hester Stephens, who participated in this study, later in Chapters Nine and Ten.

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Locating domestic Work in South Africa

During the colonial period, many of the British settlers brought their own servants, and throughout the 19th century domestic servants were mainly British women who lacked education and had no other employment opportunities, according to Cock (1980). The Dutch employed Xhosa and San women and children as domestic or agricultural servants, and some were abducted by the Dutch as slaves. With time, domestic service was only performed by Black people. With the intensification of racial divisions brought on by colonialism, Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie and Unterhalter (1983) maintain that the "servile status [was] the exclusive preserve of the colonised, and where masters are White, servants are Black" (p. 88). Van Onselen's (1982) research indicates that during the period 1890 to 1914, the greater part of domestic labour was performed by Black 'houseboys'. 'Houseboys' was a colonial term that was part of the master-slave relationship to infantilise grown Black men to ensure that they knew their place in the race and class hierarchy. Up until today, grown Black men who work as labourers are often called 'boys', and as mentioned previously, grown Black women are often called 'girls'. However, even then, Van Onselen's research indicates that domestic servants resisted their oppression. At night, the 'houseboys' formed a gang called the *amalaita*,

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a pejorative term used for Black male criminals (La Hausse, 1990), who openly challenged the society that sought to oppress them and sought to redress their exploitation. They would break into houses where other houseboys complained of low pay or of not being fairly treated (Van Onselen, 1980). According to La Hausse, "the identification of the *amalaita'* with urban forms of criminality was founded in the uneven ability of the state and its functionaries to grasp the complexity of African cultural and political responses to proletarianisation" (p. 81). In any case, when mining got under way, many Black men became miners, and domestic service became mainly the preserve of Black women.

The Apartheid era which followed on the colonial period saw job opportunities restricted according to race, and Blacks were not allowed to perform any skilled labour (South African History Online, 2011b). Even job categories such as clerical work and shop assistance were regarded as women's work, but African women in particular were excluded from these opportunities (du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson, 2010). As mentioned previously, the policies underpinning Black people's education was designed to ensure that they formed a large pool of cheap, unskilled labour. The education that young Black girls received, whether through mission schools or governmental institutions, reinforced the notion that domestic work was what they ought to be doing (Gaitskell, et al., 1983). Thus domestic work became the primary employment of Black women, and most migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas seeking employment, living in geographic separation from their own homes and families. Cheap Black labour was thus in abundance and available to White families, their privilege rarely questioned and, according to Fish (2006a), difficult to give up. In 1984, approximately 76% of White people had one domestic worker - even the relatively less affluent (Goodwin, 1984, cited in Fish, 2006a). Black men migrated to the mines to work and women to the cities, leaving their children and families in the care of usually old relatives. Fish argues that this disruption of usual family and community life enabled the state to increase their control, especially over labour.

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Cock's (1980) influential study, which I will discuss later in this chapter, bears testimony to the notion in the Apartheid years that Black women were deemed inferior. In her study, 68% of employers suggested they felt racially superior to their domestic workers. The following are just some of their comments taken from her study:

> They are mentally inferior. They don't think like us … you only
> get the odd one with a bit of intelligence (p. 162).

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> They are Black and we're White … you can't compare us (p. 163).
>
> Yes, they've just come out of the trees. I mean, they are at
> a lower stage in the evolutionary ladder (p. 162).

Domestic workers were exploited and often abused, and according to the Whisson and Weill (1971) study, as cited by Fish (2006a), improved working conditions should be left up to the "Christian Consciousness" of the employer. Social norms were thus demeaning and paternalistic, they degraded the very existence of domestic workers. There were no prescribed minimum wages, and workers were treated more like slaves than as servants (Gwynn, 2015). Workers tolerated this abuse and indignity, as they would lose their jobs if they showed any signs of dissatisfaction.

Cock (1980) described domestic work as an 'institution', as domestic work shared some of the same institutionalising characteristics of institutions such as prisons and mental institutions. Even more so is the fact that they were subjected to such psychological violence and for some, physical and sexual violence as well. It is no wonder that Mohutsioa-Makuda (1989) observed that the mental health of domestic workers was often far from stable, due to the brutalising impact of Apartheid that wreaked havoc on the social, political and cultural conditions of Black South Africans and violently dehumanised them. Indeed, Motsei's (1990) study revealed that domestic workers had to endure punishing physical, sexual and psychological abuses during the Apartheid era. Often these workers endured the abuse for fear of further punishment if they complained or else the loss of their jobs.

During Apartheid domestic work did not have a legal minimum wage and domestic workers were excluded from the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Unemployment Insurance Act, the Labour Relations Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Wage Act. Since there were no regulations controlling the relationship between employer and worker, the employment contract was highly informal and left up to the employers' discretion, leaving the worker unprotected and vulnerable to the whims of the employer. Employers failed to effect common law stipulations even when they did exist (Cock, 1980). This relationship reflected and reinforced the inherent inequalities between employer and employee (Flint, 1988).

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Not all workers were satisfied with the status quo. Trade unions invested in political education and by the mid-1970s, opposition to Apartheid was led by trade unions and not political parties (Meer, 2005). There was a huge increase in strike activity, and workers started demanding higher pay, often winning concessions. Many unregistered unions had formed and were semi-legal, that is, they could not represent their members under the stipulations of the collective bargaining act. The Wiehahn Commission was set up in 1979 to investigate and regulate this situation. They released their report in 1978, and in 1981 the Labour Relation Act (LRA) was passed, which replaced the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 and the Black Labour Regulation Act of 1953, which had excluded Black unions from participating in collective bargaining, but not from organising (Gaitskell, et al., 1983). The LRA allowed for the registration of unions with Black members and their participation in statutory labour procedures. However, the Wiehahn report did not cover domestic workers (Gaitskell et al., 1983). In August 1981, the commission recommended to parliament that extending trade union rights to farmworkers and domestic workers be investigated. However, Wiehahn cautioned that there were many considerations to be taken into account, which would count against formalising or structuring domestic worker conditions, which included the intimate relationship between worker and employer (Gaitskell et al., 1983).

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Although workers had won certain advantages, there was increased state control over the unions, and workers distrusted this involvement with state structures. Some, but not all domestic worker unions regarded the Wiehahn reforms with suspicion too. According to Gaitskell et al. (1983), this difference of opinion reflected the key differences between domestic worker unions, where two leanings had materialised. The first was related to organisations like the Domestic Workers and Employers Project (DWEP), which were liberal and church bodies, and the second were organisations such as the Domestic Workers Association (DWA) and the National Domestic Workers Union (NDWU), which were started by the workers themselves.

DWEP was founded in 1972 by Sue Gordon, a scholar and activist, with Leah Tutu, under the auspices of the South African Institute of Race Relations. According to Gaitskell et al. (1983), its aim was to foster better relationships between domestic workers and their employers, through means such as improving their wages and working conditions and the enhancement of their station in society. They were able to organise themselves under the radar of the state authorities, as their organisation included employers and they were mostly seen as non-threatening. Their work centred on resolving grievances from and improving the skills of

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workers in order for them to earn better wages. Its aim was “to bring about an improvement in the position of domestic workers by helping to create a better understanding between worker and employer, by revising working and wage conditions of domestic workers, and trying to improve their status and personal image” (Gaitskell et al. 1983, pp. 103-4). DWEP only tried to resolve individual cases of adversity, but did not advance the rights of all workers. It was dominated by White women, and when its members favoured the Cape Provincial Council’s legislative proposal that compelled employers to have a copy of the key to their worker’s room to be made accessible to the police when required, it heralded the beginning of its end (Ally, 2009). Members of the radical DWA were infuriated by this co-operation, and its head, Maggie Oewies, refused to share the same stage as liberal organisations which “… provided tea and sympathy rather than treating the roots of the domestic workers’ problem” (Herald, 19 October 1980, quoted in Gaitskell et al., 1983).

The fact that the majority of Black women were consigned to domestic work was the outcome of class, race and gender divisions over time. The oppression to which Black women engaged in domestic work were subjected was well-documented in a 1980 study by Jacklyn Cock. Her influential book, *Maids and Madams* (1980), is a study of women in both the rural and urban areas of Grahamstown and Port Alfred, and the rural areas in between in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Cock described the geographical area in which she did research as the ‘deep south’, but this phrase was also used to describe the institution of domestic service itself. Cock’s study was very comprehensive – using semi-structured questionnaires, she interviewed 225 employers and domestic workers, and 50 domestic workers were interviewed by Cock's field worker, Nobengazi Mary Kota. Kota was a part-time domestic worker herself and was able to establish a relationship of trust with the domestic workers interviewed. Cock argued that the relationship between domestic worker and employer was a microcosm of the socio-political relations rooted in the then Apartheid South African society. Cock described domestic workers as being oppressed by their race, sex and class. This was one of the first studies to bring gender into a racial capitalist analysis, which shaped the material and discursive contexts of Black women’s lives. Located in a socialist feminist framing, and drawing on notions of ideology, Cock was able to show how interpersonal relations was able the institution of domestic work served to reproduce master-servant relations in South Africa, thus reproducing White dominance and Black subservience, as well as normative gender binarisms and male privilege and power.

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Christine Qunta argued that "… life was predetermined by race in this country" (cited in Primo, 1997, p. 38). The relationship between servant and employer in domestic work, she argued, taught White South African children from a very young age to be racially dominant and assume White privilege. White children were then indoctrinated into believing the social order was as it ought to be, and o a large extent, Black children were too, especially through the education system (Biko, 1973; Hartshorne, 1992).

Cock's (1980) study not only highlighted the ultra-exploitability of domestic workers, but it also exposed, as mentioned before, the physical, sexual and psychological abuses domestic workers had to endure, and Motsei (1990) maintains this was one of the "best kept secrets" of Apartheid. Shefer (2012, p. 308) argues that:

> The overlay of White power and male dominance, the sense of White male entitlement to Black women's bodies endemic to colonial power, together with economic dependence, clearly facilitated a particular sexual and physical vulnerability of Black women living as maids in White households

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However, even then domestic workers did resist, but showed their resistance in covert ways, for example, stealing the possessions of their employers, breaking crockery, and taking longer to finish chores (Cock, 1980; Gaitskell, 1986), what I like to call the 'hidden script' of agency. Grossman (2004) argues that covert forms of resistance are at times presumed to be more effective than relying on the law to protect them. The silence of domestic workers may give the impression that domestic workers are passive, silent victims, however the silence, he argues, may be the presence of strategic and tactical thinking. He suggests that domestic workers assume silence and ignorance as a way of protecting themselves, or as a way of ridiculing their employers.

Blacks also learnt through domestic work to be submissive as Apartheid required, notwithstanding the resentment it generated. Steve Biko argued that "the Black man has become a shell, a shadow of man ... bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity" (1970, p. 29), and stated that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (Biko, 1971: np.). Biko wanted Black people in South Africa not to internalise the stereotypes foisted on them, and maintained that be free and to be human, they had to start believing in themselves and affirm their humanity by conquering their fears. Indeed,

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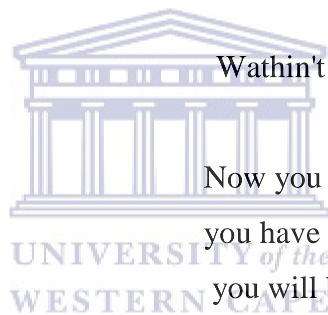
in the language of Fanon (1968), Biko was asking Blacks to not allow Whites to 'colonise their minds'. To be subjected to racism or cultural oppression was, according to Fanon, to "to be continually fed with cultural values and understandings which are not one's own, which are primarily hostile, and which consistently de-evaluates" one culture (Hook, 2004, p.95).

Cock's (1980) pioneering study made visible what was invisible, what was not talked about publicly, and exposed domestic work to be a key and indispensable cog in the Apartheid wheel. In this study, she also challenged the notion that 'sisterhood is global', as evidenced in the disproportionate power relations inherent in the relationship between employer and servant. Nevertheless, whether the submission showed was real or a pretence, Black women were organising themselves.

The Mobilisation of Domestic Workers in South Africa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Wathin't a bafazi, way ithint'imbolodo uzo kufa [11]

Now you have touched the women (Strydom),
you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder;
you will be crushed[12].

I contextualise the mobilisation of domestic workers through a brief history of the labour movement in South Africa. Although Black unions were banned for most of the Apartheid era, domestic workers formed part of the larger labour movement, which was a focal point for resistance and mobilisation.

Women's activism in labour unions started in the 1920s and 30s, and increased significantly in the 1950s (Berger, 1983, cited in Britton & Fish, 2009; Meer, 2005; Meintjies, 1996). Socialism was the creed that individuals with left-leaning politics in universities, labour movements and civil society organisations strove towards (Britton & Fish, 2009). International organisations and networks supported the mobilisation of labour unions at the time and it was in these unions,

[11] When women massively become political the revolution has moved to a new stage
[12] a Freedom Song sung by South African women protesting against the extension of Pass Laws to African women, 9 August 1956.

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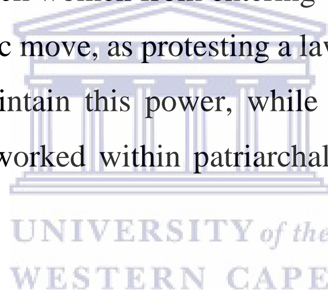
although confined to particular industries, that women obtained important training in how to negotiate with employers, how to mobilise workers for activism, and how to plan mass-action (Britton & Fish, 2009). Women were exploited by their employers, resulting in a demand to be unionised.

Black women showed an unprecedented militancy in the 1950s, which advanced their struggle significantly (Meintjies, 1996). One of the first national mass action campaigns was against the pass laws in 1956, described then as the 'African worker's handcuffs' (South African History Online, 2011c). Through the regulation of the movement of the African workforce, the state was able to control them from selling their labour freely. This campaign drew women from across the country and from all race groups, with the effect that many women were thrust onto the national political stage. According to Wells (1993, cited in Britton & Fish, 2009), women at the time fought against the pass laws, as they felt that they obstructed their spousal and maternal roles, and prevented Black women from entering White homes as domestic workers. She argues that this was a strategic move, as protesting a law from within traditional, maternal identities enabled women to maintain this power, while mobilising effectively for radical change. Thus they opportunely worked within patriarchal structures instead of challenging them overtly.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Later, in 1973, a series of spontaneous strikes took place in Durban, and surprised management, workers and the fledgling labour movement alike. The Durban strikes were pivotal in influencing workers to join emerging trade unions, which engendered extraordinary growth (Friedman, 2011). These unions operated under the aegis of the Trade Union Advisory Council, which later became the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Activism amongst women increased, as they received accolades for their work in these unions (Britton & Fish, 2009).

As a result of the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools, a series of demonstrations and protests led by approximately 20 000 Black school children in Soweto occurred on the morning of 16 June 1976. The police were called and violence flared. Many school children were killed. The youth uprising and the brutality of the state resulted in the political mobilisation of many organisations, including the ex-Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) members in the Western Cape. In 1981 FEDSAW formed the United Women's Congress (UWCO), which spearheaded many campaigns

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(http://www.sahistoryonline.org). On the domestic workers' front, the South African Domestic Workers Association (SADWA) was formed by the merging of regionally based domestic workers in February 1981. Workers immediately made their demands known and extended women's activism at a national level (Ally, 2009). One of their goals was to make visible what was invisible, namely that domestic work was an essential component of the labour mill.

In the mid-1980s the Black townships erupted into flames and violence. There was increased mobilisation among workers, including domestic workers, which brought about many legislative changes. In 1985, COSATU was established which garnered much support from workers. Ironically though, whilst trying to access power and promote gender equality, women within COSATU were being side-lined, due to the patriarchal leadership that characterised the organisation at the time (Britton & Fish, 2009). Gender equality was not perceived to be an important issue, and the prevailing nationalist and Marxist views were that women's rights would lessen the impact of the struggle (De Mel, 2001; Hutchful, 1999; Wieringa, 1995; all cited in Meer, 2005). Women's struggles were part of the national struggle for liberation from Apartheid, which was seen as the foremost struggle. For instance, the historical significance of women's struggle against Black women's inclusion in the pass laws in the 1950s, was situated in the larger national liberation struggle "where women were seen as part of a popular front, rather than within the history of Black women" (Hassim, 1991, p. 69). Dr Frene Ginwala, a senior ANC member who later became the first Speaker of parliament after the first democratic elections in 1994, wrote in 1986:

> In South Africa, the prime issue is Apartheid and national liberation. So to argue that African women should concentrate on and form an isolated feminist movement, focusing on issues of women in their narrowest sense, implies African women must fight so that they can be equally oppressed with African men. (Ginwala, 1986, p. 10)

Instead, the organisation of women took many forms, for instance, health and safety issues became one way of organising women, although bosses snubbed any requests to bargain around women's issues, for example maternity benefits (Primo, 1997). Furthermore, women unionists faced resistance from their male partners who opposed their attending meetings over weekends, and it was not uncommon, apparently, for women unionists to be told to make tea and clean offices (Meer, 2005; Primo, 1997) Women in South Africa generally did not occupy leadership

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positions at the time, although they were centrally involved in resistance politics, which created the space for them to raise issues of concern to women. Slogans such as 'the nation is not free unless the women are free' were widely utilised to incorporate women's issues in the national agenda (Britton & Fish, 2009).

In 1986, the United Women's Congress merged with the Women's Front, and it led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF) (South African History Online, 2011d). On the labour front, although the Apartheid regime had prohibited any organisation of domestic workers, they were already organising themselves. Domestic workers realised the importance of forming a worker-controlled organisations and several regionally based organisations were formed thereafter. The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and COSATU made available national structures that advocated unionisation, and the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) was established in 1986 (Fish, 2006b), which was a merger of five unions (Ally, 2008). As an affiliate of COSATU, workers were schooled more on the encompassing politics of the working class, marking a radical departure away from the usual agendas, which focussed more on domestic worker education and the improvement of worker and employer relationships (Fish, 2006a). Instead, the new union heralded "a new era of radical and active union politics by domestic workers" (Ally, 2009, p. 152). It recruited domestic workers to join their political community, and its posters exclaimed: "The future of our children depends on constructive and active participation in our struggles towards liberation. Comrades, don't waste time and energy, join SADWU now …" (Ally 2009, p. 172). At its peak, it had about 85 000 signed members (Ally, 2008). During the same period, academics started to critique the established status quo within domestic service that relegated Black women to slave-like conditions (see Cock, 1980; Gaitskell, 1982, 1983, 1986; Gordon, 1980). The union called on the approximately 800 000 domestic workers to make their voices heard and demand recognition for their contributions. According to Ally, thousands of domestic workers responded to this call and, bolstered by this response, SADWU launched a legislative campaign on 1 June 1989 for the extension of the protective legislation for domestic workers, by acknowledging them as workers and calling for a national minimum wage. Workers marched, petitioned and protested, and in 1991 a committee was constituted by the National Manpower Commission to probe and respond to the union's demands, an unprecedented occurrence. This signalled a major victory for the new union (Ally, 2009).

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Meanwhile, the strike and protest action in the country continued unabated, and on 2 February 1990 at the opening of parliament, FW de Klerk the then State President of South Africa, removed the legislative controls on 33 opposition groups, amongst them the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC) and the Communist Party. Gradually, the restrictive legislation embedded in the institution of Apartheid was dismantled. The negotiation to end White minority rule and its concomitant institution of Apartheid began in earnest, and on 17 March 1992 a referendum limited to the White electorate supported the reforms of de Klerk, which proposed the end of Apartheid that had been implemented since 1948. In April 1994, South Africa held its first democratic election, and the ANC, which was in alliance with the Communist Party and COSATU, won the election.

After the 1994 elections, women attained a third of the seats in national parliament, and at the end of the third national election, women composed 32 percent of the national parliament (Britton & Fish, 2009; Meer, 2005; Waylen, 2007). This unprecedented representation of women in both government and civil society structures was largely due to the decades of women's struggle for liberation against the shackles of Apartheid in labour movements and civil society organisations. The mood on the streets was one of hope and joyous celebrations, particularly amongst women's organisations, as there was a chance to build progressive organisations with gender rights as the focal point. However, as Britton and Fish observe, it was very difficult to transform gender rights, due to slow change in patriarchal power relations, the root cause underpinning gender inequality. Thus gender rights looked good on paper, but in practice, the public was not yet committed to transformation.

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In my interview with Myrtle Witbooi, she tells me that domestic workers were never on any political party's agenda before and even after the elections. Although they campaigned with the United Democratic Front (UDF), a broad coalition of anti-Apartheid organisations, she says their needs were never considered:

> I need to say this. Nobody, not even those organisations [UDF, ANC and SACP] ever thought of the domestic workers. We were never on anyone's agenda. There was never anybody that used to speak for us. We were simply some just forgotten women that was working for something. We had no voice. Honestly, I would say to you that we influenced them, because the ANC only started to talk to us when we went to talk to them about domestic

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> workers. It makes me stronger in a way, the love that I have for fighting for freedom. It made me stronger that I am in a broader struggle, but what angered me is that they never offered support. Even in 1994, when we had a democratic government, they never came and said "domestic workers, we want to speak to you. We again had to demonstrate, we again had to make our voices heard.

In their struggles against the oppressive Apartheid system, activists had to leave the country and, according to Cock (1991), exile gave women the chance to form networks globally, and gave them the opportunities to learn from other women how to overcome the challenges and maximise the opportunities for mobilising in countries experiencing internal political struggles. When multiparty negotiations started for a new constitutional dispensation, women were excluded from the negotiation process (Meer, 2005). On returning to South Africa after liberation, these once exiled women were able to collaborate with women activists who stayed in the country, to strengthen alliance towards race and gender support. These women activists together formed the Women's National Coalition (WNC) (Meer, 2005; Meintjies, 1996; Primo, 1997). Essed's (1996, p. 141) argument that an important aim for building a coalition is that "it is a way of breaking the silence of lost hopes and frustrations" and articulate 'problems and needs that would otherwise remain unsaid", had particular currency for the WNC. The WNC mobilised women of different political affiliations around issues that were common to South African women (Primo, 1997). In fact, the WNC emphasised that it was important for women to articulate and take cognisance of the multiple and overlapping forms of dominance and oppression, rather than reducing them to only one dimension such as race or patriarchy (WNC, 1994). South African women saw the struggle for national liberation and gender equality as one struggle (Primo, 1997). More than 70 organisations formed the WNC, with more than two million South African women being able to access the organisation. One of their main motivations was the "fear that women would again be excluded from key political processes that were taking place and which were determining the future of South Africa" (WNC, 1994, p. 19). On behalf of South African women, the WNC had an important role in negotiating the content of the new Constitution (Primo, 1997). Women made use of this opportunity to make sure that women's issues and gender relations were a top priority to rectify the wrongs to which they were subjected. Although some argued that feminism was redefined in the period in South Africa (Steyn, 1998), women's mobilisation chiefly centred on the liberation and democratisation of the country, with gender priorities being secondary. The WNC terminated

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its association with political parties after the first democratic election, and when it decided that female members of parliament could not occupy official positions in its organisation, it led to the destruction of the WNC. This decision fractured and demobilised the WNC and it lost its political clout, while skilled leaders left the organisation to take up positions in parliament or in government departments.

In order to address the inequalities stemming from the Apartheid years, the newly elected ANC government implemented many policies, for example the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 and the Growth, Reconstruction and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. Transformation however proved difficult in both the political and the economic realm. Centuries of severe ethnic and racial fragmentation resulted in little changing, the majority of the poor remained poor. Fish (2006a) maintains that the structural conditions arising from South Africa's transition impacted the institution of domestic work in very distinct ways. Women bear the brunt of the endemic poverty and high unemployment rate most severely, leaving them still with not much choice but to seek employment as domestic workers, often as sole bread winners. Power groups, which included upper and middle class Black people, were still able to purchase the domestic labour of disenfranchised, poor Black women.

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In 1996, 170 women from COSATU, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Federation of South African Labour (FEDSAL), and the independent unions participated for the very first time as a collective in the National Conference for Trade Union Women in Durban (Benjamin, 1997). They were "drawn together by a desire to learn more about their common oppression" and met to "address the situation of working women" (p. 63). Benjamin notes that it was not an easy task getting these women to this conference. It took the Workers' College in Durban three years to set up it programme for women, called the School for Trade Union Women. It started in 1993 and was geared towards providing trade union women with the education, skills development and training from which they were largely excluded. Its popularity grew, and in 1995 it became a national programme for union women from all sectors, industries, unions and federations. The conference in Durban was organised so that discussion documents from the regional schools could be amalgamated. Some of the key points for discussion included unity in the unions, equality in the workplace, the right to of women to work, and a safe and healthy workplace. The conference was a resounding success and strong bonds of women across the union divides were formed.

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Meanwhile, SADWU was in trouble. Despite all its gains, due to intense internal conflict and financial constraints and a shrinking membership, the union dissolved itself in 1997. As Fish (2006a, p. 185) puts it, "paradoxically domestic workers lost their organizational platform through SADWU's disbanding during the same year that the Labour Relations Act legalized domestic workers unionization". However, while SADWU was experiencing difficulties, the National Labour, Economic and Development Institute (NALEDI) investigated the best ways to organise domestic workers. Trade unionism was an option touted, as they argued that the dissolution of SADWU could not be attributed to the 'trade union model' in general. Instead, it was a manifestation of the difficulty in organising domestic workers and the importance of more thorough strategising in future (Social Law Project, 2010.).

In 2001 the veterans of SADWU formed another union, the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU). These veterans, which included Hester Stephens (who was the first president of SADSAWU and still is) and Myrtle Witbooi (the first General Secretary and who still is), maintained that unionisation was the only way to transform the working conditions in this sector and ensure that they contributed to future labour legislative frameworks. Fish (2006b, p. 122) agrees with them, arguing that "union membership fosters workers agency at the individual level, demonstrating that through domestic workers' participation in a broader unionisation movement, they were able to engage with public policy reform, join a broader gender rights movement in South Africa, and actively participate in the democratisation processes". They were able to take advantage of friendships and allegiances established in the anti-Apartheid movements, such as the many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and gender organisations that sprung up and that could mitigate the socio-economic and gender-based divide. The motto of SADSAWU then was "Women won't be free until domestic workers are free". Leaders of SADSAWU were of the opinion that the struggle was going to continue in post-Apartheid South Africa - nothing had changed – and they were right. Their affiliation to COSATU allowed them to advocate for domestic workers' rights in governmental legislation as part of the nation building process.

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A year after it launched, SADSAWU established six regional offices and enrolled 11 000 members, whilst the Department of Labour (DoL) estimated that there were over one million domestic workers employed in private households (Fish, 2009). Membership recruitment became their primary goal in order to augment their organisational strength. The low membership rate was mainly due to employers feeling threatened by the unionisation of their

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workers and their concomitant empowerment. The new union still faced as many challenges as the old, including the recruitment of new members. Many employers forbade their workers from joining the union, and access to workers in private homes were difficult. Domestic workers were therefore reluctant to join SADSAWU, as they feared that they might lose their jobs. Not being able to maximise union subscriptions impacted severely on SADSAWU's financial sustainability. At the time, besides one national office bearer, all other office bearers were full time domestic workers, which impacted greatly on the time they could spend on strategising and growing the union. One of the strategic decisions they made was to align themselves with other gender based organisations, and in so doing were able to question the fact that South Africa listed gender rights as a priority it is Bill of Rights, yet domestic workers' rights were not prioritised (Fish, 2009).

One of SADSAWU's first acts of mobilisation and activism was to secure Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) benefits for their members. Fish (2009) offers an analysis of SADSAWU's first victory in changing legislation, as summarised hereunder. Due to the high unemployment rate at the time, which was estimated at 40 per cent, the leaders of SADSAWU sought to access this social security benefit for their members. Government structures investigated from 1991 until 2001 how to include domestic workers in the UIF policy as it was difficult to legislate in the private sphere. However, in March 2001, when the DoL presented their final draft of the UIF Bill to the Labour Portfolio Committee, domestic workers were still not covered, and the DoL requested another eighteen months to consider the inherent challenges in covering this sector. Unhappy with this decision, SADSAWU teamed up with the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE)[13]. With members of COSATU's parliamentary office, they joined forces with four NGOs, namely the Black Sash, Women on Farms Project, the South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference, to challenge the unconstitutional exclusion of domestic workers from the protective umbrella of the state. Collectively they were known as the Gender Monitoring and Advocacy Coalition for the Unemployment Insurance Fund (GMAC-UIF). They worked on strengthening individual submissions to parliament and highlighted how at odds the social security policy was with its actual aim of protecting the poorest of the working population. Witbooi's opening statements were an emotional appeal for them to consider the multiple roles domestic workers played in their lives as mothers, carers and cleaners, stating, "… think of your mothers because many of

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[13] The CGE is a Chapter 9 institution that was established in 1997 to promote and protect gender equality.

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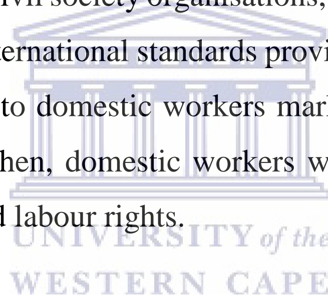
you were raised by domestic workers working for you while you are here now … if it were not for them in your houses, you would not be here today, if it were not for domestic workers working for the people of Parliament".[14]

Witbooi's words, together with the pressure extended from civil society and the strengthened individual submissions, struck a chord and a few days later, there was an announcement that the UIF would cover domestic workers as well. Furthermore, South Africa's adoption of the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) assisted in making the government accountable to the gender rights agenda of the post-Apartheid republic. Fish (2009) argues that by referring to an international convention such as CEDAW, the GMAC-UIF strengthened the state's commitment to keep in line with international practices. By discriminating against domestic workers by excluding them from a social security policy, highlighted South Africa's contravention of their supposed commitment to CEDAW. Thus the alliance of civil society organisations, the CGE, the unions speaking with one voice and the obligation to international standards provided the impetus for policy change. The extension of the UIF policy to domestic workers marked a critical victory for domestic workers in South Africa. Since then, domestic workers were intentionally included in state processes dealing with gender and labour rights.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However, Ally (2007) criticises state regulation of domestic workers being based on the construction of domestic workers as the 'poorest of the poor' and as being 'vulnerable', as it underscores the race, class and gender power imbalances that were inherent in the Apartheid state. By emphasising domestic worker vulnerability as the reason for legislative change implies that workers do not have the "capacity to effect change themselves, thereby extending the state's responsibility, and with it, its powers and reach" (p.7). Their struggles at unionisation are constructed as weak and ineffective. Thus, in the UIF case, while the state ensured protective rights, they retained their power to mete out those rights, and Ally argues, allowed the state to act on behalf of domestic workers to establish their conditions of employment, since they were constructed as vulnerable and therefore weak and ineffective.

[14] Myrtle Witbooi, General Secretary of SADSAWU, parliamentary public submission in Cape Town legislative chambers, March 2001 (Fish, 2009).

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In both Fish's (2006a, 2009) and my own research, domestic workers, their leaders and COSATU leaders tend to emphasise descriptions of domestic workers as "the poorest of the poor", 'vulnerable' and as "mothers", and often request their audiences to "think about your mothers" in their campaigns. Fish argues that in doing so, they reproduce the notion of domestic worker vulnerability, evoking sympathy from policy makers. In her interviews with employers and policy makers they maintained that they feel uncomfortable in the face of such rhetoric. Indeed, Fish (2006a) suggests that this rhetoric is perhaps chosen strategically by domestic workers "as a creative form of resistance distinct to this particular phase of South Africa's transition" (p.144). However, there is the possibility that domestic workers themselves may feel disempowered in the face of such a narrative. Negotiations at a global level at bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) may require that domestic worker leaders negotiate from a position of strength. I discuss these negotiations later in this study.

Nevertheless, the UIF victory was an example of how SADSAWU mobilised other organisations for legislative change, and how they are able to hold the state accountable. A few more benefits were also introduced and workers were protected from instant dismissal and were provided with job security. For instance, in a case appearing before the labour court, Ndlovu versus Pather, Ndlovu had been fired because she had to visit a clinic regularly because she was pregnant. Pather, her employer, maintained that she had left of her own free will. The court concluded that it was unlikely that Ndlovu wanted to resign, as she had serious financial difficulties, and it was crucial that she was able to work for as long as possible. The court found in Ndlovu's favour and ruled that it was unfair dismissal in terms of Section 187 of the Labour Relations Act, and her employer had to compensate her with 20 months' remuneration (Social Law Project, 2010).

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SADSAWU was involved in many other campaigns as well to improve the working conditions of this sector. South Africa's commitment to human rights, including gender rights, ensured that the state took the lobbying by SADSAWU seriously. These campaigns included ending exploitation of workers by recruitment agencies, ending sexual harassment at work, a skills development centre for domestic workers, compensation for injuries at work, and the global campaign for an ILO Convention for domestic workers (SADSAWU, nd.b).

Major gains were made, however, due to inadequate enforcement, not all employers comply with legislation. Furthermore, due to the growing casualisation of labour, where employers

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increasingly hire workers for only a few days a week, workers are not covered by the protection that the new legislation provides. As a result, many domestic workers are still exploited and do not earn decent wages nor have proper working conditions. For instance, in a study conducted in 2007 by du Preez et al. (2010) with 22 employers and 22 domestic workers, although all the employers interviewed were not averse in theory in providing their domestic workers with an equitable wage, across half of both their domestic worker and employer sample, they discovered that domestic workers earned below the minimum wage. With regard to UIF registrations, less than a quarter of domestic workers were registered. Even worse, only three domestic workers had a contract with their employer. Although the maximum hours per week a domestic worker should work is 45 hours, four domestic workers worked longer than that and five employers expected them to work more than the maximum hours. Both employers and domestic workers said that knowledge of the legislation brought about better working conditions for the domestic workers, as the latter knew their rights. However, they found that the income of the employer determined whether or not domestic workers earned above minimum wage.

Most domestic workers who do not know their rights are not unionised. Domestic workers are educated in unions about their legislative rights and are mostly able to demand the same in private households. This of course is one of the reasons why employers are so weary of employing a unionised worker or allowing their workers to attend union meetings. Unionised workers know their rights and according to Smit and Mpedi (2011), South African workers take the lead globally in being familiar with the processes of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA)[15]. In Chapter Eight, I will discuss how the CCMA empowers SADSAWU members. The ILO reports that domestic workers globally are very aware of their rights, since about 12.1% of referrals to the CCMA are from domestic workers whilst they constitute 8.7% of the labour force. However, despite unionised workers knowing their rights and demanding legislative justice in private homes, the fate of domestic workers in South African homes still remain bleak.

Domestic workers in post-Apartheid South Africa

[15] The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) is a dispute resolution body established in terms of the Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 (www.ccma.org.za).

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It is often heard in South Africa that Apartheid is not over. The majority of Black women still occupy the jobs on the lower rungs of the working class ladders and most are domestic workers. The institution of domestic work, according to du Plessis (2011), provides the link between the Apartheid and post-Apartheid social structure. So even in the aftermath of Apartheid, domestic worker organisations still struggle with exploitation and have had to utilise new methods of activism. Whilst having to actively fight against the previous Apartheid government, activists, especially those belonging to organisations that are in alliance with the ruling party, now have to co-operate and work together with the present ANC government, whilst holding it accountable. Furthermore, they have had to redefine their mandate and attract new membership in order to be sustainable. In the shifting post-Apartheid landscape, new patterns of affiliation were forged and domestic workers faced new challenges, but also had new possibilities. Whilst all efforts were made to address the gender equality in the public sphere in the new democracy, not much was done to alleviate the inequalities still residing in the private sphere, where domestic work is located, as evidenced in the new catchphrase among domestic workers, 'democracy stops at my front door". Du Preez et al. (2010, p. 406) maintain that "the legacy of Apartheid is not in racialising relationships, but in reinforcing the economic structures that facilitate and perpetuate unequal relationships". The unequal relations that they refer to was "between White employers and Black domestic workers" (p. 406). They argue that the economic legacies of Apartheid in this relationship will be more lasting than the racial legacies.

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Motala (2010), who wrote an article for the South African Civil Society Information Service, notes that domestic workers often relate how much better their employers treat their pets in comparison to them. Indeed, Julius Malema the leader of the Economic Freedom Front political party made international headlines when he told "the Oxford Union at Oxford University in the United Kingdom (UK) in November 2015 that rich South Africans took better care of their animals than they did of their domestic workers" (Shange, 2015). He said:

> The dogs of rich people in South Africa have got medical aid, but their domestic workers, and university workers, and the farm workers, the petrol attendants, the security guards, do not have medical aid (Shange, 2015).

It is an old colonial and Apartheid trope that Black people were considered to be less than human (Biko, 1973). Indeed, domestic workers agree that pets are treated better than they are, as evidenced by Motala's study, from which I quote:

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> The boss can also tell you what to do around the house. For example, she'll say wash the dogs even though it's not your job to do that. Then she'll tell me to put on sunscreen on the dogs because they get burnt. Now the dogs run away from me when they see me because they hate sunscreen. Have you ever seen a dog that use sunscreen? (Domestic worker in Johannesburg).

> I am starting to realise how we are exploited also now. These people have dogs that we must cook for and take them out for walks but that is not part of the agreement. (Domestic worker in Cape Town)

> Those dogs eat better than you and sleep better than you. (Domestic worker in Cape Town)

> I cook chicken for this dog and I eat it before giving it to the dog. Do you know that it must be roasted as well? (Domestic worker in Cape Town)

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Another legacy of Apartheid South Africa that still lives on is infantilising domestic workers. Domestic workers are often still treated like children in the house and called 'girls', alluding to the fact that their employers see them as not having any control over their lives. An employer in du Preez, et al.'s (2010, p. 404) study says, "the fact that she sleeps in, she doesn't pay rent, she doesn't have to buy groceries, to buy any toiletries, so basically I treat her as one of my kids".

Part of the family

In the foreword of a special issue journal on domestic work, Shireen Ally (2011) quotes from the literature to succinctly explain the complicated relationships prevalent in domestic service. I use Ally's quotes here as they are so powerful in their explanations of this intimate relationship between servants and their masters and madams. She starts her article with the following quote from Melissa Steyn's book '*Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*':

> He was a slightly-built, middle-aged White man, probably about fifty-five years old, dressed in a checked shirt and gaudy yellow shorts. The broad

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> Afrikaans accent with which he spoke English was barely audible from behind his hands. He was trying to speak through his sobs, which shook his entire body ... He was recounting an early memory.
>
> As a little boy on the farm in the Northern Transvaal where he grew up, he had loved his African nanny. He had loved to snuggle his head between her full breasts; he had loved the songs she sang to him in her language; he had loved the food she fed him. But as he grew up, his friends had taunted him for his affection for her, as she was 'net 'n kaffirmeid' [Just a nigger servant girl]. He had learned to deny his love for his first friend in life, and to call her names to prove his indifference. Now he was articulating a deep sense of loss and waste, anger at a social system that had raised him on lies and damaged his humanity. (Steyn 2001: i-ii, cited in Ally, 2011).

Steyn begins her book with the Black domestic worker, as Ally (2011, p. 1) eloquently puts it, as the "psychic repository of the encounter of Whiteness with its 'other' … where love and humiliation, intimacy and estrangement co-exist…" Not peculiar to South Africa, intimate bonds, uncomfortably and confusingly coupled with degradation have often defined the master-servant relationship, even during colonial times where violence and abuse, but also intimacy and affection, defined these relationships. Ally draws further from Alison Light's (2008) powerful analysis of this complicated relationship in colonial times in her insightful book *Mrs Woolf and the servants.* To quote from Ally:

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> It was not the abuse Virginia directed at Nellie, the difficult working conditions and dismal remuneration, nor the dramatic instantiation of class distinction that defined the relationship between Woolf and Boxall. More than anything, 'it was the ferocity of the feelings involved' (2008: xiv). 'After all those years of living together,' writes Light, 'they were like a husband and wife who ought to divorce, but can't; they were deeply, hopelessly, attached' (ibid: xiv). 'Service, in other words, has always been an emotional as well as economic territory' (ibid: 3), and 'domestic service ... a species of psychological and emotional slavery' (ibid: xxi), argues Light.

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> The capacity to entrust one's life to the care of a stranger 'is crucial to any decent community' (ibid: xxii), she argues. Humanity is defined where comfort and care are trustworthy in the interstices of strangeness and familiarity. That is the habitat of the servant.

It is also common for employers to say that they treat their domestic workers as part of the family in the new South Africa (Bonnin &, Dawood 2013; Cock, 1989; Du Preez et al., 2010; Durrheim, Jacobs & Dixon, 2013). Interestingly, Cock's (1980) study shows that domestic workers during Apartheid did not see themselves as part of the family, although the discourse 'she is part of the family' was drawn up by White participants in her study. Myrtle Witbooi too strongly objects to the family metaphor. In 2016 she was invited to receive a book by Ena Jansen, a Dutch scholar who titled her book in Dutch 'Bijna Familie', which translated into English means "Almost Family". Myrtle remarked then that "we will never be family, we work for them and want to be respected".

Romero (1999) argues that the family analogy is often used as it is supposed to justify the employers' patriarchal and matriarchal supervisory and disciplinary practices towards their domestic workers. Using the family metaphor personalises the relationship and helps perpetuate the asymmetrical power imbalance, and hides radical exploitative practices. Indeed, Bakan and Stasius (1997) maintain that 'maternalism', is central to the relationships these days between employer and domestic worker, or 'pseudo-maternalism' as King (2007) calls it. Values associated with maternalism such as caring, nurturing and empathy becomes double-edged, and also function as a means to curtail employee rights (Bosch & McLeod, 2015). King asserts that by assuming a maternal role, it is a confirmation of her 'superior self' in relation to 'the other'. Durrheim et al. (2013) argue that it is actually paternalism, as it strengthens privilege, by sanctioning the ordering of status hierarchy. Furthermore, they argue that "paternalism instils a sense of gratitude, obligation and dependency, rather than political resistance" (p. 162). They cite Jackman (1996, p. 14) who argues that by imitating "the father-child relationship, paternalism confirms the dominant group's superior moral competence reaffirming their power to define the needs of subordinates" (p. 162). They maintain that the contact between employer and domestic worker "allowed Whites to feel affection towards their domestic workers, without invoking ideological dissonance with the system of Apartheid" (p.153).

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In the South African context though, relationships between the sexes of different racial groups are still very strained, especially between White men and Black women. Revealing in this respect is a study done by Bosch and McLeod (2015), where they interviewed twelve pairs of domestic workers and their employers in Cape Town. They found that in all cases, only the female employers interacted with their domestic workers, with no interaction with the male employers. Cock's (1980) earlier study found that although the female employers interacted with the domestic workers, the boundaries were defined by the male employers. She argued that patriarchy still reigned supreme and suppressed women in South Africa, irrespective of colour. In my interview with Myrtle Witbooi, she says:

> You will not believe me, but if you as a domestic worker walk in the street or on the pavement during Apartheid, and a White man came past on the pavement, you had to jump off the pavement, otherwise he would just push you out of the way because he knows you are a servant. He couldn't be bothered, so we always had to make sure that we were not on the pavements or that we were not where they were.

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This attitude towards domestic workers was not confined only to the Apartheid era. There are many examples, but one striking example stands out. Independent Online (IOL) published a press article titled 'He came up to me and just klapped[16] me'. A 44 year-old domestic worker was on her way to work when a man jumped "from his car, slapped her repeatedly and threw her to the ground without any explanation" (Segar, 2014). This is how she describes her ordeal that occurred on 2 October 2014:

> He got out of the car and came straight up to me and just klapped me. Then he kicked me hard and I fell down. He hit me hard on my arms and legs. I fell hard on to the ground. My joints are all still sore – two weeks later. Each time I would fall to the ground, he would pick me up again and throw me hard down again. My shirt was ripped and the buttons came off it. I still have an (open) wound on my elbow. After hitting her, he left.

[16] Afrikaans word for smacked.

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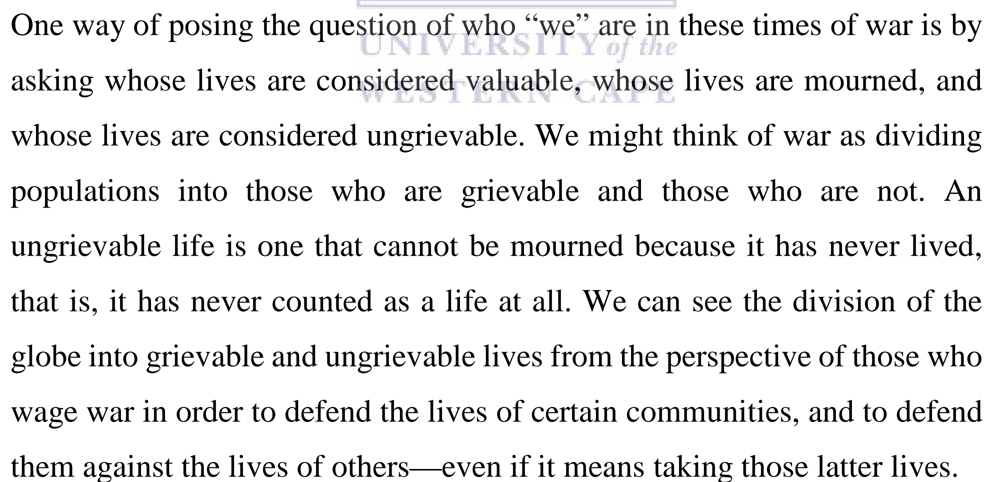
The perpetrator was a well-known cyclist and swimming school owner in a leafy suburb in Cape Town. Her crime? He thought she was a sex worker, as if that would legitimise his violent actions. Nevertheless, Black men and women are still constructed as 'other' or interlopers in suburbs that were demarcated for White people during the Apartheid era, and which are still predominantly White. Some of my colleagues and I who live in these so-called White suburbs, constantly complain that the neighbourhood watches in these areas profile and police Black people. For instance, when a Black person enters the suburb I live in, and he or she does not obviously look like someone going to work in a home, I receive a notification on my phone that a 'bravo' is in the area, a code-name for a Black person. Some even post this on social-media, on Facebook pages of our suburbs. Some of my colleagues who also live in so-called White areas also complain about the same behaviour in their suburbs. The fact that this woman was thought to be a sex worker, and the perpetrator thought that justified his behaviour also speaks to the 'othering' and oppression that sex workers suffer. This is an example of the notion of how society decides which bodies belong, which bodies are protected, or as Jasbir Puar (2017) puts it, which bodies are 'maimable' and as Judith Butler contends, those that are 'dispensable' or 'grievable'. As Butler (2009, p.38) so poignantly argues:



> One way of posing the question of who "we" are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all. We can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrievable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others—even if it means taking those latter lives.

In the local example above, that woman's life was considered dispensable by the perpetrator; whether a domestic worker or sex worker, she was a Black woman that he thought deserved to be beaten, as she did not count, in order to 'defend' a White community that did count from her 'disreputable' presence.

It is obvious from the above examples that not much transformation has been happening in South African households post-Apartheid. However, SADSAWU leaders are not only

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campaigning locally but have also made international linkages through non-governmental organisations and other civil society and political groupings ensured that members of SADSAWU are central to the international conversations taking place about transformation in the domestic service sector. I will discuss SADSAWU's activism in Chapter Nine.

Conclusion

South Africa has had a very turbulent history from the days of colonialism, throughout the Apartheid era until the present day. The country, notwithstanding 25 years of democracy, remains characterised by gross inequalities, and race, class and gender remain entangled with each other, shaping particular oppressive, exploitative and marginalising locations for Black, poor women who continue to predominate in domestic labour. Domestic worker lives, their suffering and their resistance have been integrally linked with the political and socio-economic situation in the country. Not much has changed in the ordinary domestic workers' lives, except that in post-Apartheid South Africa they can meaningfully challenge the injustices that they are faced with through their unions, although there are still many barriers to overcome.

The launch of SADSAWU and its accomplishments thereafter, succeeded in mobilising women towards activism that changed and created legislation for the benefit of domestic workers, even in the face of great structural inequality. With the establishment of the IDWF and South Africa's role therein, SADSAWU is strengthened. As a signatory to the ILO's Convention 189, the South African government has made great strides in changing the labour laws to include domestic workers. However, although the laws protecting workers' rights look good on paper, the greatest challenge to fair labour practises lies in employers not adhering to protective policies in place, and remains the greatest challenge the union faces.

Briton and Fish (2009) maintain that women's mobilisation in post-Apartheid South Africa is marked by the same characteristics and contestations that were present in the pre-1994 context. That is, in the continuing process of nation-building, there is often a struggle between whether race, gender or class should be prioritised. However, as the case studies in their edited book, *Women's Activism in South Africa: Working across divides* illustrate, "women are both confined by former systems of power and actively drawing from the strength of historical activism to respond to new demands in the building of a democratic South Africa" (Britton & Fish, p. 14).

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CHAPTER FIVE

DOMESTIC WORKER AGENCY AND ACTIVISM

Introduction

A review of the literature shows that domestic worker activism at both local and global levels has not received sufficient attention. Domestic workers have always been viewed as being 'unorganisable', mainly due to the notion that they work in private homes that are geographically dispersed, do not have a common employer to rally against, no central place to congregate, and often have informal employment arrangements that preclude them from workplace forms of mobilisation that leads to organised protests. The household is perceived as a space for private interaction and not a space for political action. The types of work they engage in, such as childcare, housework and elderly care, underpins the notion that they are unorganisable and are not political activists. Furthermore, as employers often construct domestic workers as one of the family, the intensely personal relationship between employer and employee, and the domestic worker's dependence on the employer, makes it difficult for domestic workers to unionise and to protest against unfair labour conditions.

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In this Chapter I discuss the theoretical foundations of domestic worker agency and activism, and provide an empirical overview of domestic worker agency and activism globally. The recognition that there are domestic workers who have agency and are politically active is important in conceptualising domestic workers differently to the victim-status assigned to all of them. This chapter provides the basis for Chapters Eight and Nine which chart how domestic worker leaders in this study have been able to claim political agency, and which follows their trajectory to becoming political activists on a global stage.

Theoretical underpinnings of agency and activism

A feminist, post-structural notion of subjectivity and agency underpins the understanding of domestic worker agency in this study, and discourse and power is viewed through a Foucaldian

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lens. Agency from a post-structural viewpoint interconnects power, discourses and social positioning that is always historically, geographically, politically and culturally situated (Butler, 2004; Lewis, 2001, Sudbury, 1998). It is also concerned with how power is exercised to either sustain or challenge dominant interests. Subjectivity is seen to be always in motion, always reconstituted; it is multiple and dynamic and is the understanding of how our identities are constructed amidst the multiplicity of social divisions, and how they function in different contexts (Weedon, 1987). Post-colonialism and post-structuralism subvert the notion of the universal woman, as previously discussed.

Other scholars, such as Hall (1996) and Giddens, (1984) have theorised on how individuals have used particular discourses to resist or to act, and a concern among western feminists has been the notion of Foucault's (1977) 'docile body', in which individuals become the effect of a discourse that denies them agency. However, discourses can be challenged and Giddens maintains that active individuals are knowledgeable agents, capable of playing a role in the production and reproduction of the social structure. Agency does not require individuals to either be complicit or to resist, it can simultaneously signify complicity and resistance. I use Honkasalo's (2009) explanation of agency to examine domestic worker agency as being:

> … intentional, individual, rational, and normative, aiming at social change in some measurable sense. An actor – to be a proper actor – needs a goal-oriented mind and the appropriate tools to achieve a rational goal, mostly considered as a form of social transformation" (cited in Jungar & Oinas, 2011, p. 258).

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While scholars such as Butler (1992) maintain that the post-structural shift away from identity is essential to the feminist political project, others such as McClure (1992) and Chow (1992) maintain that it weakens feminist action. McClure (1997) argues that it is at the very time that those on the margins are asserting their rights that the categories through which they mobilise and express their political resistance are being taken apart. Furthermore, Butler is challenged on her theorisation of subjection, as well as providing a narrow view of agency (Salih, 1997), and for also masking the impact of structure on agency (Bordo, 1993). Butler (1997) argues, however, that power produces the possible circumstances for a "radically conditioned form of agency" that surpasses "the power by which it is enabled" (p. 15). Butler's conception of agency then, is that although power has a subordinating effect, agency surpasses the effects of

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power that brings a subject into being. Butler's subject has the potential to destabilise the effects of power.

For women to have agency in the public sphere, they require access, voice and the capacity for contestation (Walsh, 2006). By access it is meant that a diverse range of women from civil society are at hand and, although essential, it is not sufficient as voice is also required. Walsh maintains that access without voice is only a symbolic effort reducing women to audience but not participants. Voice ensures that a diverse range of women are present communicating their interests, even those who were previously marginalised or repressed. Furthermore, women must be able to contest and challenge rules and practices that exclude them or their ideas, and sometimes those challenges must be successful in order to show that their voices have been heard and that institutions have changed.

Activism is generally understood in the literature as a political, oppositional and confrontational act. It is usually portrayed as a fight, or resistance to, or against something. I use the term 'political' in a broad sense in this chapter, to mean activities that challenge the edifices of power and the conditions under which people live. Thus, whether domestic worker leaders are organising workshops, classes, conferences, or marching, strategising, campaigning or even attending social events together –when they all come together for an event, they are able to elicit feelings of solidarity, which can be deemed political. Domestic worker activism involves a wide range of strategies and tactics, and incorporates the three features of what Tilly and Wood (2013, p. 4) describe as the key characteristics of social movements, namely:

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- A campaign, which is continued organising around shared claims.
- A social movement repertoire, which is collaborative political action; including petition drives, pamphleteering, public meetings, rallies, demonstrations and statements to public media.
- Concerted public representations, which are public displays of "worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment on the part of themselves and/or their constituents".

According to Jungar and Oinas (2011), when domestic worker leaders' campaign, they:

> … point to the circumstances that created their victim status, not to them as tragic figures. At the same time, they challenge existing power relations by going beyond dichotomous thinking and therefore draw attention to a

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continuum of connected stereotypes, economic injustices and political hierarchies" (p. 259).

The assumption usually is that activists are powerless and seek to confront or challenge power and Nielsen (2012, p. 437) maintains:

> …they strive to exercise their "influence within certain social or political fields". They become leaders according to how much they are able to motivate others to take action and join them. Thus activism has a dual purpose; besides opposing and confronting power, it also inspires others to take action, often referred to as 'mobilising'.

Mobilisation requires numbers and is intrinsically linked to agency; as the London Feminist Salon Collective (2004) notes, agency is found in the force of numbers. Mobilisation is often linked to mass social movements, and as Lovell suggests, "effective political agency [is] interactional and collective" (2003, p. 14). However, in order to form a collective, the individual has to be first inspired to act. Many scholars often refer to Bourdieu's socio-cultural theory in this regard. For instance, using Bourdieu's theory, Crossley (2001, p. 83) notes that an "agent's habitus is an active residue or sentiment of his [or her] past that functions within his [or her] present, shaping his [or her] perception, thought, and action, and thereby moulding social practice in a regular way". The focus though, should not be on "the subjected self", Lovell (2003, p. 2) argues, but "on the social relations of political (inter)action and the specific historical conditions of particular social transformations".

Many domestic workers are poor, women of colour and often middle-aged – they hardly fit the profile of activist. In many countries NGOs, women's movements, government structures and trade unions have joined forces with domestic workers' organisations to reform the institution. Domestic workers themselves have "created informal networks, mutual aid associations, cooperatives, and unions" (Boris & Nadasen, 2008, p. 414), and many have used education to assert agency, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight. As Boris and Nadasen note, domestic worker organisations have turned to labour laws and codes of conduct, not because they believe the state is predisposed to enforcing the law, but rather to ensure that the state is responsible for its labour practices, and thus improved working conditions for them. However, labour law's ability to afford protection to workers and in particular domestic workers has long been in question, especially since many are in informal employment. As many of these women have

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little or no other recourse, Boris and Nadasen maintain that these "social movement strategies" are crucial elements of labour campaigns (p. 414).

Removing the chains that bind

Before the ratification of C189, domestic work was not considered real work, and mostly mitigated against workers' own understanding of themselves as workers and thus unionisation. In the past, before the formation of the IDWN, "isolation, dependence and invisibility" (Gaitskell et al., 1983, p. 87) mostly impeded the organisation and growth of domestic worker unions. However, after the global formations of the IDWN and the IDWF, where organising, campaigning and speaking out took on an international impetus, there was an attempt to make the invisible visible, and many domestic workers felt less isolated and divided from others. As Hearn and Bergos (2011) maintain, you become visible through solidarity, when you are recognised by others.

However, although the formations of the IDWN and IDWF offered workers organising on an international platform and increased visibility, and they felt less isolated, historical research alludes to the fact that activism amongst domestic workers is not new, they have been fighting for their rights for a few centuries (Sarti, 2014). They formed community associations and support groups to reform the institution. In the USA, for instance, migrant workers formed ethnically-based worker centres from which they organised (England, 2017), and which Antonio a participant in this study later joined. This migrant centre, as well as many other organisations that domestic workers joined as discussed previously, provided advice, educated members about their rights, and provided skills and job training. Many of these organisations were also involved in direct protest action. The migrant work centre that Antonio joined in the USA later became known as the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA). Today, the NDWA has over 45 affiliate associations with more than 10 000 domestic workers (England, 2017). The release of the NDWA's survey regarding how working conditions are dependent on race, gender and immigrant status was widely publicised and received much attention. They made domestic work visible, a strategy which is part of their activism.

Miles (1996, p. 84) maintains that although domestic workers are perceived as passive, many are not, as they have the "skilful ability to take advantage of the job situation to negotiate control and to reap what benefits they could as a means to pursuing their own ends".

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Furthermore, as Scott (1990) argues, there are hidden forms of resistance, which may appear in public to be deference, but often it disguises disdain. Grossman (2004) on the other hand believes that domestic workers use silence as a form of resistance. He maintains that the inner person cannot be totally controlled and will fight even when silence is their only weapon of struggle.

Boris and Nadasen (2008) cite the example of Black American women who shaped their occupation to meet their familial needs, and if employers were abusive or withheld wages, they left their jobs, took food and borrowed best clothing, but they also organised. They recount the strike that shook the city of Atlanta in the USA in 1881, when domestic workers who remembered slavery formed a trade organisation called the Washing Society (or ridiculed as the "Washing Amazons"). They went from door to door to spread their protest and influenced 3000 washerwomen to join them. Since nearly all White households depended on Black women to do their laundry, the strike shook the whole of Atlanta. Hunter (1993, pp. 205-206, cited in Ally, 2005) maintains that it "revealed an astute political consciousness by making women's work carried out in private households a public issue", with Smith (1999, cited in Ally, 2005) arguing that they were successful in ensuring that domestic labour was "nothing less than 'the Great American question of the nineteenth century" (p. 855). Domestic workers who did other types of work also demanded higher wages. They were successful in raising all of their wages.

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From the 1970s onwards, domestic workers and their supporters have been demanding equal pay for equal work. At a Household Technicians of America (HTA) convention in 1972, the first Black woman in Congress, Shirley Chisholm, whose mother was a domestic worker, declared: "We want equal pay for equal work, decent working conditions and respect for the long, hard hours we work" to a cheering audience that was mostly Black and mostly women, the New York Times reported. She advised the women to:

> … organise and work together with the women's groups and labour and civil rights groups in your community, Hold meetings and rallies. Talk to the local press. Let everyone know you are first- class citizens and that you will not settle for anything less than a fair and equal chance to share in the fruits of this country (cited in Boris & Nadasen, 2008, p. 422).

All over the country domestic workers, motivated by the social protests occurring, fought for written contracts, increased their rights with their employers, and improved the image and respectability of their occupation. Thus the 1970s saw domestic worker organisations skirting

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traditional unionism (the HTA was an association, not a union) with its concomitant grievance machinery, organising and collective bargaining.

Since the days of the HTA, domestic work in private households have changed, not only in the USA but globally. In the USA, the gains of the civil rights movement saw Black American women being employed in other sectors, and household staff being replaced by foreign women when immigration took off in the 1970s (Boris & Nadasen, 2008). Domestic work has grown as a service sector, as families with both parents employed need to fill the "care-gap". This gap is often filled with immigrant women. Reminiscent of Myrtle and Hester's experiences of organising whilst taking care of their charges, organising then took the form of visiting playgrounds and ethnic shops, anticipating that they would meet domestic workers who cared for children and who shopped in these stores.

Employers in most countries prefer migrant domestic workers, as they are usually able to exploit their dependence on them for continued stay in their countries, as I have discussed before. However, immigrant women use multiple strategies to resist exploitative practises. Romero (2002) researched the experiences of Chicana domestics in the USA, and found that usually the main strategy they employ is to restructure the work process. For example, instead of living in, they choose to live out to. Living out allows them more independence and it ensures that they have clear working hours. Boundaries are often blurred for those domestics living in. By having clear working hours, they have more time to socialise and grow networks, which means that their job opportunities are increased. Furthermore, they set their fees according to the jobs that they do and not the hours. They are therefore able to perform many more cleaning jobs than their live-in counterparts, as the number of jobs they are able to take on depends on how efficient they are. Romero concludes that using all these strategies, their relationships with their employers become more business-like, which reduces the possibility of exploitation.

Anderson (2010) cites the case of how Filipino migrant domestic workers in the United Kingdom (UK) mobilised and staged a victorious campaign to address the immigration status of domestic workers. In the 1980s, Filipino domestic workers were only allowed into the UK if they entered with the employers with whom they were to work. If they subsequently left those particular employers, they were not allowed to work in the country, and dire circumstances left many no choice but to work in the country illegally. Due to the increasing number of workers who arrived at their door seeking support as they had no passports, were unpaid, had no belongings or suffered violence, the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers

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(CFMW), comprising activists, many of whom were organisers in the anti-Marcos groups, assisted some domestic workers and their supporters to form an association called 'Waling Waling'. They campaigned for domestic workers to be recognised as workers, to be able to change employers and for legal status of those who were undocumented. They organised around employment and immigration status, not country of origin, which was unusual in the mid-1980s. Multi-national organising was a new occurrence in Europe, and what was interesting was that many non-Filipinos began joining the movement.

As far back as the 1970s and 1980s, it can be seen that domestic workers were demanding to be recognised as workers, which they achieved with the ratification of C189. Anderson maintains that Waling Waling's demand to be recognised as workers affirmed the "dignity and value of their work", they were "not 'helping', but contributing socially and economically to households and wider society; they were not 'girls' but women (and men) who were often sustaining extended families back home. It also asserted their legitimacy as public actors, their right to be heard and to be treated with respect, and it was accompanied by the demand that this labour be recognised as a route to formalised citizenship." (p. 64).

As with Waling Waling, most domestic worker campaigns have both internal and external goals, that is, to win the campaign and increase their membership to build a movement. Indeed, many of the women leaders I interviewed reiterated that domestic worker organising always focuses on the growth of their membership and organisation. That is, in order to be successful in broader transformative campaigns to change society, they believe that they have to increase their membership base. Without using academic terminology, most of them spoke broadly about the same characteristics that Ackerly (2011, p. 228) maintains show organisations are operating in a rights-based way:

- using intersectionality analytically
- thinking about narrow issues with awareness of their cross-issue dimensions
- promoting the capacity for self-advocacy of their own people and those with whom they network
- working to make visible the complexity of forces that create obstacles to rights enjoyment through connected action, and
- working in ways in that enhance their strengths as well as those of other movement actors, including communities, staff, volunteers and other partners.

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Transnational organising

Domestic worker organisations worldwide have exhibited a transnational feminist politics, either by engaging in transnational networks, or by integrating what they have learnt from these networks into their own local and national activities. For many decades, domestic workers mobilised and campaigned in their respective countries. In some countries they were successful in accessing protection under the country's labour laws, although the protection did not compare favourably with those for other workers, and were mostly inadequate in regulating conditions of employment such as hours of work, fair wages and so forth. It was not always easy getting the support of the other trade union movements, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

From the 1990s their global activities took on an increased impetus, although women's organisations have long organised internationally (Friedman, 2003). Through transnational forms of organising and mobilising, organisations were able to exchange information, provide mutual support, and lobby and campaign towards the realisation of goals towards social justice for women. A striking example is one told by Ai-Jen Poo (2013), the director of the NDWA and co-director of the Caring Across Generations Campaign. She describes how they sought to pass a Bill of Rights for domestic workers through New York's state legislature.

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In the late 1990s, Poo with other domestic workers, mainly Asian, Latina and Caribbean women, built the Domestic Workers United Organisation, as there were no other organisations in that region to mobilise the domestic workforce. Even then, domestic worker leaders were able to elicit transnational participation and a global audience at their first convention, which saw the gathering of domestic workers from more than 12 countries who spoke six different languages. Finding a united voice, they "developed a united vision for jobs with dignity" (Poo, 2013, p. 37). It is apparent that domestic workers had a sustained campaign already from the 1980s to ensure that domestic work was regarded as decent work. By co-ordinating with seven other groups that organised domestic workers in New York's immigrant communities, mainly against human rights abuses and violence, they formed the New York Domestic Worker Justice Coalition, and launched the Bill of Rights campaign.

However, during the campaign's six years, they realised that they could not do it alone, as domestic workers were mainly invisible. Recognising that all people had links in some way or another to a domestic worker, they appealed to all kinds of people. They built a coalition "that

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crossed lines of race, class, gender, and age" and included workers such as doormen and security guards, farm workers, and those who "had family who were domestics, immigrant groups, women's organisations, faith-based groups, students and more" (Poo, 2013, p. 38). They ditched the traditional notion that the employer was the enemy, and saw them as partners instead. They found common ground, and by 31 August 2010, the New York Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights was signed into law, which covers approximately 200 000 domestic workers.

When the Bill was vetoed by a Governor, domestic workers "started a postcard and letter-writing campaign and planned several public events" (England, 2017, p. 379). On the eve of International Women's Day in March 2013, they gathered outside a state building and banged pots and pans. They announced more protest action, and the revised Bill was later signed by the Governor in 2013. This protest is an example of "embodied protest, that is, domestic workers occupying public space, making their bodies visible and audible" (England, 2017, p. 379). Banging pots and pans is a protest action often used by women in Latin America, and England maintains that it is a show of the domestic workers' links to other activists and their international networks. As they chose to stand in front of a state building, England says it shows their "material and discursive" engagement with the state (p. 379). Most domestic worker organisations do indeed protest in close proximity to state structures for the same reason, for example, most of SADSAWU's protest actions take place in front of parliament in Cape Town.

Protest action does not only occur through the unionisation of workers, but worker activism is strengthened by transnational and national organisations, such as human rights bodies and NGOs. They mobilise on a variety of issues and labour rights is just one of them. An example of international mobilisation around a domestic worker issue, is the story of Flor Contemplacion, a Filipino domestic worker. In 1995 in Singapore, Contemplacion was convicted for the murder of another Filipina domestic worker and a little boy in Singapore. There was evidence to suggest that the boy died of an epileptic fit in the bathtub, and the father killed the domestic worker who looked after the boy in a fit of rage, and subsequently framed Contemplacion. The protest action in the Philippines was unprecedented. Support for Contemplacion from human rights organisations and NGOs came in from across the globe. Tragically however, Contemplacion was still executed, which strained relations between Singapore and the international community. Another story that evoked international condemnation happened in 1995 when Sarah Balabagan was raped at knifepoint by her employer in the United Arab Emirates. She was a 15 year-old domestic worker from the

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Philippines and was sentenced to death for killing her employer in self-defence. The international community was outraged and many transnational organisations also supported the protests that occurred.

Domestic workers realised that their strength was in numbers and that they had more to gain by mobilising internationally. By making transnational linkages, domestic workers were able to achieve their goals in their own home countries and in 2006, domestic workers from around the globe, including those who advocated on their behalf, came together to form the IDWN (Boris & Fish, 2014). At an international conference in November 2006 titled 'Respect and Rights: Protection for Domestic Workers' in Amsterdam, participants recommended the formation of an international network. The conference was organised by the Federation of Dutch Labour, the NGO Irene and an international steering group consisting of members of WIEGO and others. The goals of this conference, according to Fish (2017), were threefold, namely:

1. The alignment of national organisations
2. To build an advocacy plan for domestic worker rights
3. To grow an international movement

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The IUF was tasked with playing a leading role in establishing the network and to lead the campaign for an ILO Convention on domestic work. The IUF, together with WIEGO, brought with them the "force of their experience, resource bases, and political capital to the effort to build political, organizational, and economic support for their aligned vision at each stage of the journey" (Fish, 2017, p. 34). In 2009 a steering committee in the name of the IDWN was established. Assisted by WIEGO and the IUF, members of the IDWN were able to represent their countries at an ILO Conference in Geneva, where the convention was put to vote on 16 June 2011 (WIEGO, 2018b). However, there were many voices missing, for example those from the Middle East, as unionisation was not encouraged, while some domestic workers had travel complications and some had language barriers that would have made participation difficult. Thus as Fish (2017, p. 39) notes, "these gatekeeping influences – the geopolitics of access to the ILO, economic resources, and language barriers – determined the composition of this first worldwide network of domestic workers".

In my interview with Chris Bonner, who is the Director for the Organising and Representation Programme at WIEGO, she says:

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> From the start, we have been involved in the IDWF. I mean right from the beginning of its history. The first conference of domestic workers in 2006 in Amsterdam, I was on the steering committee; I helped with the conference; facilitated the working groups, etc., and then from that we had a working group with the IUF. So right from the beginning, 2006 with the IUF, to help build the network. So we were in that steering committee, and we had an interim task team to try and get things going, so it was myself and Karin from WIEGO who was the international co-ordinator, so it was myself and Barbro Budin and somebody called Annetjie, who was in the NGO that organised the first conference. They took the initiative and then we were drawn into the steering committee.

Barbro Budin, who is the co-ordinator of Gender Equality and Trade Union Development Projects in the IUF, said that the IUF played a supporting role as they could provide the IDWN and subsequently the IDWF with an organisational basis, otherwise they could not access the ILO or for instance, attend conferences or obtain funding without being a registered organisation. They also provided them with technical support. Although they were criticised, she says, for their commitment to organise what was perceived as unorganisable workers, they nevertheless persisted. The relationships between the IDWF and these donor organisations might be unequal, due to the fact that the IDWF is on the receiving end, however, as Budin says, the leaders of the IDWN were very clear of what they wanted. They wanted to be recognised as workers, they wanted to speak for themselves and not have other organisations speak on their behalf, and they wanted an international convention.

From my discussions with the women in my study, I gathered that they also perceived the IDWF as being their 'home place', where they shared a collective identity and activities, could develop strong bonds and networks, and could therefore freely communicate their fears, their visions and seek support. They found strength in their numbers to act and to resist. As in any home, there were at times conflict that arose due to different personality types and leadership styles. Due to their commitment to their bigger causes however, they were always prepared to negotiate their differences.

Thus in the IDWF, domestic worker leaders are able to engender agency to secure economic, political and legislative justice and challenge the stereotype of victim. Besides the other reasons for its existence, it is encouraging to note that an organisation exists for domestic worker

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leaders that "empower(s) underprivileged women through a gender network experience of affiliation and engagement" (Bailey, 2012, p. 864). As Boris and Nadasen (2014, p. 80) maintain: "One thing is certain: household work might mimic the domestic service of the past, but IDWF embodies the new face of labor: female and mobile, searching for dignity and decent work".

Nevertheless, the IDWN's invitation by the ILO to discuss a convention was a turning point for domestic worker activism, and the ILO became a significant organ of change for domestic workers, and also was a crucial space for their advocacy in an international arena. The ILO is a tripartite United Nations agency consisting of governments, employers and workers of 187 member states. Their vision is to promote decent work for all women and men, and therefore function to create labour standards, develop policies and invent programmes to this effect, taking into account the views of all their stakeholders. The main aims of the ILO, according to their website, "are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues" (ILO, 1996-2018a). It has two functions, that is, (1) to pass international conventions and nonbinding recommendations; and (2) to provide technical assistance to governments in their national efforts to implement such regulations (Fish, 2017). The ILO cannot force governments to ratify its conventions, but depends on willing governments with effective mechanisms for enforcement and a strong trade union movement.

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The ILO's strategy for domestic workers includes wide-ranging activities at global, regional, and country levels in five areas, namely:

- Building and strengthening national institutions and, when required, adopting effective policy and legislative reforms and/or programmes
- Facilitating the organisation and representation of domestic workers and their employers
- Support in respect of ratification and implementation of Convention 189 and the implementation of Recommendation 201
- Awareness-raising and advocacy on domestic workers' rights
- Building the knowledge base on domestic work and exchange of experiences between countries to enhance actions and impact at country level. (ILO, 1996-2018b).

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Indeed, the ILO is one of the most vocal supporters of the rights of all domestic workers. However, according to Fish (2017), since its establishment in 1919, it had 98 international labour conferences, but only substantially considered domestic worker policy protections in 1948 and 1965. Luc Demaret, the principal advocate dealing with domestic worker conventions, is cited by Fish as saying that there was not enough pressure since then to compel the ILO to take action, however larger political movements are applying more pressure for the status quo to change. Since 2005 however, domestic workers started organising strategically.

As the ILO is a tripartite organisation, for every country the government, employers and workers' representatives are entitled to debate and vote, thus the domestic worker representatives of the IDWN were able to vote. Fish (2017) who was present at the ILC, gave her account of the actual proceedings. She relates how the IDWN leaders were hard at work behind the scenes and ensured that their real life experiences as domestic workers were taken into account when global policy was debated. In the ILC too, personal narratives were used as a tool to convey the dire need of a convention to protect domestic workers. She said stories such as those of Shirley Pryce, a domestic worker leader from Jamaica who slept in a doghouse, really influenced proceedings, as delegates were asked to "look deep into your hearts and your conscience", and put a human face onto the suffering endured (p. 173). In Fish's words, "… domestic workers like Shirley Pryce became living symbolic representations of the costs accrued in the historical failure to provide standards for this group of workers" (p. 144). However, these narratives also highlighted the fact that domestic workers were integral to the smooth functioning of the economy. Furthermore, they were not only victims, but capable survivors. As IDWN leaders knew how to campaign effectively, each day Fish maintains, they used their "bodies as visual placards" and the NGOs present wore clothing, such as aprons and other effects such as "campaign colours" to mark their presence at the ILC (p. 144). Indeed, the domestic worker representatives made history, according to Fish, as the ILC had to relocate in order to accommodate the sheer number of civil society organisations that were present.

With 396 votes in favour, the convention was adopted with 16 against and 63 abstentions. All Persian Gulf states supported the vote, whilst the United Kingdom was one of the countries that abstained (www.ilo.org.za.). C189 was a significant victory, not only for domestic workers, but also for the labour movement as a whole. The steering committee then decided to transform the network from one that was loose and informal to a federation. They developed

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a draft Constitution for an international organisation of domestic workers, and invited other local and national domestic workers' member-based organisations who were already working closely with the IDWN to become formal members (IDWF, 2018).

The IDWF as a site of resistance

In October 2013, nearly two hundred domestic workers from around the globe filled the auditorium of the Montevideo City Hall, Uruguay, singing SADSAWU's catchy anthem, "My mother was a kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy, that's why I am a unionist, a unionist, unionist", to launch the IDWF (Boris & Fish, 2014). The hall was packed with representatives from forty-eight organisations and forty-two countries, excluding the observers, advocates and technical staff who came to assist and witness the birth of an organisation that promised to change the lives of millions of women worldwide. For many of the domestic workers this was the first time that they had attended such an event, and for some it was the first time that they had travelled outside of their countries (Bonner, Budin & Pape, 2014). Uruguay was the country of choice for the launch as it was the first state to ratify Convention 189 of the ILO, Decent Work for Domestic Workers, 18 months before.

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In the process of the struggle to attain C189, many links were formed between international organisations, and global solidarity and transnational relationships were forged. Indeed, Boris and Fish (2014) point out that the North American delegates included "immigrants from Mexico and Colombia, underscoring the ways that the national intersects with the transnational and both intersect with global movements of people and jobs" (p. 78). Immigrant workers have assisted in building these transnational organisations as they have strong ties with their sending counties. In the aftermath of C189, domestic worker activism picked up speed. Since the adoption of C189, more than 70 ILO member states have put frameworks in place to ensure decent working conditions for domestic workers; 24 have ratified C189, 30 have embarked on law and policy reforms, and 18 are committed to extend protections to domestic workers (http://www.ilo.org.za). Chris Bonner from WIEGO says in my interview with her that the formation of the IDWF signifies an important part in the history of the labour movement, as it is an all-women's global union organisation, with a women leadership that was formed by a marginalised, poor sector of society.

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The IDWF has a 5-year plan that among others, includes strategic global campaigns, for example, basic protections such as collective bargaining, minimum wage, rest days and so forth, and has prioritised research on migrant domestic work. It aims to enforce the implementation of protections such as pensions, healthcare and more. The IDWF is able to "appeal to global institutions, participating through the IUF and the ITUC; mobilize coalition partners, allies, and member groups to protest governmental abuses; and generally alert the world to conditions on the ground" (Boris & Fish, 2014, p. 79).

Through their active campaigning to improve the lives of domestic workers, the IDWF became a site of resistance. Indeed, in his seminal work on prisons, Foucault (1975) posited that places and spaces are not only sites of dominance, they are sites of resistance too (cited in Bailey, 2012). They reflect, according to Wolf (1990, p.3, cited in Bailey, 2012, p. 859).), the needs of some groups of people to recreate the "social order in which they are dominant, as well as the attempts by those without such power to resist and survive in a way that is meaningful in their lives." Similarly, hooks (1990) developed the concept of 'home place' as an idiom for both power and resistance, for belonging and becoming. She charged that African-American women's struggles to make and sustain a home place and community went further than taking care of daily needs. It also had "a radical political dimension … despite the reality of political domination, one's home place was the one site where one could freely confront the issues of humanization, where one could resist" (p. 42).

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Workers share organising strategies in their 'home place', the IDWF, and build strong linkages amongst themselves. For instance, Uruguay was able to monitor entire districts instead of just specific households, through a model it developed to protect individual worker complaints, and was able to ensure that employers were warned of their responsibilities (Boris & Fish, 2014). Most domestic worker organisations regularly organise campaigns around individual employers who have abused or exploited workers. This is often done however, in the larger context of the organisation's vision. Thus workers were able to share tactics on how to keep governments and employers to account, and to give support and advice to each other across the globe. Boris and Nadasen (2008, p. 428) maintain however, that:

> … the alliances are also premised on a racialized, gendered understanding of the occupation and similar ways that such workers across the globe are exploited and vulnerable. Their transnational feminism is not rooted in a notion of global sisterhood, but emerges out of a globalised economy and

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> takes into account the particularities of their lives and occupation, including their position as transnational migrants. These groups have also practiced a social justice feminism that recognizes divisions among women by race, class, ethnicity, immigration status, social responsibility, and legal rights.

Indeed, transnational feminism, as developed by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2000), is based on an argument that capitalism is a "system founded on inequality and exploitation" (p. 2). These authors maintain that it will be impossible to rise above the differences between First and Third World women to create a united international women's movement that can compel political and social change. They argue that transnational feminism is not "free of oppressive conditions" and no feminism is devoid of unequal relationships of power. Instead, inherent to transnational feminist practises are "forms of alliance, subversion, and complicity within which asymmetries and inequalities can be critiqued" (p. 2).

That there will always be asymmetrical power relationship between women from the global north and those from the global south may be true, however there is no denying that the IDWF benefited greatly from organisations such as WIEGO, the Solidarity Center and IUF, and without their assistance it is doubtful whether the IDWF would have achieved as much as they did on a political stage, which inevitably led to changes in the lives of many women. Fish (2017, p. 31) also argues that through the IUF and WIEGO, the IDWN "gained substantive political and economic knowledge" and it also gave them the pass into ILC proceedings". She quotes Ida Le Blanc, the General Secretary of NUDE in Trinidad and Tobago, who maintains that between WIEGO and IUF:

> …domestic workers and their organization from around the world would not have known where the ILO and the United Nations is, much less be able to speak out for themselves and participate at the International Labour Court and side events.

Indeed, it was Myrtle herself who said whilst addressing a Gender Commission of the ILO, "But on our own we can't do it. We need you, and we need everybody at the ILO" (quoted in Fish 2017, p. 79).

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Conclusion

The organisation and mobilisation of domestic workers is complex, particularly because of the nature of their jobs in the private sphere. Organising migrant workers is particularly challenging and they have often been described as 'unorganisable'. However, the literature reveals that domestic workers have been organising under the most challenging and oppressive conditions, and this chapter offers theoretical suggestions for understanding the agency and activism of domestic worker leaders. A focus on agency provides an understanding of domestic worker activism across multiple contexts.

In this chapter I also explored the transnational attempts at organising among domestic worker activists, which culminated in the formation of the IDWF. The IDWF has become a site from which domestic workers globally can wage their struggles and from which they can expect support. In Chapter Nine I discuss how the participants in this study perceive the impact of the IDWF on their agency and activism.

As I was about to conclude this study, I read a news article about a Facebook post that went viral and was shared over a hundred times about a domestic worker who earned a R1500 a month, a paltry sum of money by South African standards and below the minimum wage for working from 7am until 8pm, seven days a week (Shaikh, 2018). She was only allowed to visit her family once a month for one night, lived in a room with no electricity and was given left over food or dry bread to eat. Her story was shared on social media and sparked a heated debate, with most feeling very sorry for her and highlighting the conditions under which domestic workers worked. Some asked that the employers be named so that they could take legal action against them. She has since been offered a R3000 salary for working five days a week by a social media activist, with a legal representative of one of the banks cautioning society that the minimum wage had to be adhered to. Activism on social media is an effective tool that domestic workers can use.

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CHAPTER SIX

LISTENING TO STORIES IN JAKARTA: METHODOLOGICAL JOURNEYS

Introduction

A definition of feminism that is relevant to my study of domestic worker leader activism, is that of Ackerly and True (2010, p. 464), who define feminism as "… the search to render visible and to explain patterns of injustice in organizations, behavior, and normative values that systemically manifest themselves in *gender* differentiated ways". After the first wave of feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century, feminist scholarship advanced as a part of 'second- wave feminism' in the 1960s and 1970s, which according to Roth (2004, p. 1) "changed the political and cultural landscape". Philosophies on feminism and feminist theory evolved and a wide range of methodological discussions were introduced and practised (Landman, 2006). In this Chapter, I explore the domain of feminist research within feminist scholarship, elaborate on how the research was carried out and analysed, and discuss issues of ethics and reflexivity, which is writing the researcher into the research process, and my reflection as researcher on the research process.

I have already outlined the focus and the aims of this research in Chapter One, which to reiterate are to:

- explore the agency of domestic worker leaders through a local and global historical and contemporary analysis of domestic workers
- shift the debate away from the victim status assigned to domestic workers through an exploration of domestic worker leaders' activism
- understand how domestic worker leaders' experiences shape into their agency and activism.

Within these broader goals, the research questions in relation to the empirical data collected include:

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1. What personal factors, material, familial, interpersonal life experience, including employment experiences, play a role in the path to political activism for domestic worker leaders?
2. What are the social, community and political factors that play a role in the path to domestic worker leaders' political activism?
3. How has the experience of activism nationally and internationally shaped participants' sense of self and agency?
4. How do domestic worker leaders view the role of national and transnational activism for transforming the lives and agency of domestic workers globally?

I begin this chapter by discussing feminist methodology as a research tool.

Feminist research as a tool

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As this thesis is informed by feminist theories, it is appropriate that it be directed by feminist understanding of the research process and feminist principles of research methodology. Letherby (2003) maintained that the key defining characteristic of feminist research is not the research method(s) used, but instead the use of the methodological principles that underlie a feminist engagement with research.

There is no one feminist research methodology (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006; Harding, 1987), but across the diverse ways of doing feminist research there are commonalities. Feminist researchers advocate that there are numerous "pathways to scientific knowledge and multiple perceptions of what is true" (Beckman, 2014, p. 165). Since the 1960s when feminist methodology first began developing, it was faithful to its need to generate knowledge that inspired positive social change, especially with the needs of women as a focal point. What was important for me in conducting research was that I conduct "socially engaged research" - research that whilst producing knowledge, "also holds itself ethically and politically accountable for its social consequences" (Harding & Norberg, 2005, p. 2010).

A key area of concern for feminists was the problem of male bias in research and knowledge production (Reinharz, 1992), and "the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway, 1991, p. 189) to legitimise this position. According to Nelson (2001) in the 1980s,

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feminist scholars such as Keller (1985) and Harding (1986) wrote on how "objectivity, separation, logical consistency, individual accomplishment, mathematical abstraction, lack of emotion and science itself have long been linked to rigor and hardness" (p. 96), which are associated with masculine qualities. In contrast, "subjectivity, connectivity, intuitive understanding, co-operation, qualitative analysis, concreteness, emotion" and nature have been linked with "weakness and softness", which are associated with feminine qualities (Nelson, 2001, p. 96). There is a clear distinction between the feminist way of thinking and what is called the scientific accumulation of knowledge (cited in Nelson, 2001, p. 96), and the general academic research endeavour, which Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as a fundamental representation of imperialism and colonialism. Unequal power forces shape the knowledge production process and determine how the 'other' is represented, and Smith (1987) maintains justifies existing social hierarchies. The knowledge and theory produced from the positivist paradigm represented women as 'other' and inferior (Nelson, 2001). Ackerly and True (2010) maintain that "feminist theorists' challenge of the androcentrism of science and social science was necessary in order to make the political import of their research questions visible" (p. 468).

Feminist scholars rejected the assumed dichotomy between object and subject, that is, the distinction between those who developed knowledge and those about whom knowledge is being developed. Truth, the positivists posited, is harnessed with scientific objectivity. Harding (1986) cautions against understanding subjectivity as the opposite of objectivity. She claims that understanding feminist research practise, that discloses the "class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself" as part of knowledge production, adds to the "objectivity of the research and decreases 'objectivism' which hides this kind of evidence from the public" (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

Scholars and feminists such as Gibson-Graham (1994), Harding (1987) and McDowell (1992) questioned whether there is a specific feminist method of doing research. Harding maintains that a research method is the method utilised to gather evidence, a methodology is a theory or an analysis of how research should be performed, and an epistemology is a theory of knowledge, what knowledge is possible and how it can be both adequate and legitimate. Feminist epistemology informs feminist methodology; "in particular, who can be agents of knowledge, what can be known and how knowledge is validated, and the relationship between knowing and being (ontology)" (Landman, 2006, p. 430). According to Landman "feminist epistemology was the basis for the development of method and methodology". Letherby (2003), maintained that the key defining characteristic of feminist research is not the research

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method(s) used but instead the use of the method. Feminist research is thus characterised by its methodology (Harding, 1987) and its epistemology rather than its methods.

Feminist standpoint theory as a research epistemology

Feminist standpoint epistemology, identified by Harding (1986), is the basis for a feminist research methodology that is grounded in the lived, material realities of women's lives and is the epistemology that underpins my study, which will be discussed hereunder.

Standpoint theory was discussed in detail in Chapter Two, however it would be useful to provide the key tenets here, as summarised by Landman (2006, p. 431), which speak to the methodological framing of my study.

A feminist standpoint:

- explores relationships between knowledge and power
- deconstructs the 'knowing feminist'
- is grounded in women's experience and recognises the role of emotions and gendered embodiment
- takes into account diversity of women's experiences and the interconnected power relationship between women
- acknowledges that knowledge is always partial.

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In recent years, since feminist standpoint theory was first developed in the 1970s and 1980s (See Smith, 1974; Harding, 1986, 1987), it has become more "nuanced". Wiley (2003, p. 28, cited in Intemann, 2010, p. 779) describes the epistemology as consisting of "two main theses" regarding the situatedness of the researcher:

1. The Situated-Knowledge Thesis: Social location systematically influences our experiences, shaping and limiting what we know, such that knowledge is achieved from a particular standpoint.

2. The Thesis of Epistemic Advantage: Some standpoints, specifically the standpoints of marginalized or oppressed groups, are epistemically advantaged at least in some contexts.

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Both theses have been interpreted in different ways that have been problematic. These interpretations (see Intemann, 2010) are beyond the scope of this study, however it is important to note Wiley's (2003, cited in Inteman, 2010, p. 785) argument that the feasibility of a standpoint is dependent on not assuming that the social categories are essentialist in nature and that the "standpoints of the oppressed are automatically epistemically advantaged". Rather a standpoint is "a critical consciousness about the nature of our social location and the difference it makes epistemically" (Wiley, 2003; cited in Intemann, 2010, p. 785). A standpoint does not result from where the researcher is located socially, but "achieved only when there is sufficient scrutiny and critical awareness of how power structures shape or limit knowledge in a particular context" (Wiley, 2003; cited in Intemann, 2010, p. 785). Indeed, Hirschmann (1997, p. 75) argues, "a standpoint does not come 'naturally' or spontaneously to anyone. Rather, it must be achieved through 'struggle,' where in lies its 'liberatory' potential". The critical consciousness required to reach a standpoint is accomplished by a group, not an individual, that is, individuals in dialogue with each other. This argument has significance for my study and I will elaborate on it in Chapter Ten.

According to Harding (1991, p. 31), a standpoint also "intends to map the practices of power, the ways the dominant institutions and their conceptual frameworks create and maintain oppressive social relations". Harding (1991) has based her contention that knowledge production occurs in social locations that are shaped by hierarchical power relationships on Hegel's argument that the master-slave relationship has its roots in the master and slave having qualitatively distinct standpoints in culture. In terms of this study, research has shown how domestic workers usually mobilise to form unions or other organisations as they share similar experiences, and that there is a relationship between those experiences and the oppressive hierarchical conditions that they are subjected to (see for instance the studies done by Ally, 2008, 2009; Parrenas & Silvey, 2016; Piper, 2005). In these aforementioned studies and many others on the oppression of domestic workers, the researchers have shown how for instance socio-economic systems function to maintain the oppression of domestic workers as a group, that are then presumed to be marginalised.

Lykke et al. (2014) have argued that the notion of a politics of location, and the claim that knowledge production is situated, have methodological and ethical consequences. They advise scholars to determine who is the "I"/"we" of the text and directs them towards reflections on the politics and ethics of representing and engaging with the "object" of study in their texts" Furthermore they argue:

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> …according to a majority of contemporary feminist scholars, the researcher "I" as well as the research "object" must be understood as situated not only in one-dimensional categorizations in terms of gender or race or ethnicity or class or nationality or sexuality or dis/ability or age or other social categorizations but in a multiplicity of intersecting power relations (Lykke, et al., 2014, p. 3).

Lykke et al. (2014, p. 3) cite Puar (2007, p. 212), who argues that 'multiplicity of power relations' should not be thought of as permanent categories, but rather as "assemblages", that is, as "interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherence and permanency".

FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPALS OF THIS STUDY

DeVault (1999, p. 30) posits that feminist research is mainly about "excavation", that is, "to find what has been ignored, censored and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible". As mentioned previously, a distinguishing feature of feminist research is its methodology rather than its methods (Harding, 1987). It is noted too, that what makes research feminist is the application of its key principles, instead of the methods employed or topics chosen for research (Beckman, 2014).

DeVault (1999) summarises some of the key principles of feminist methodology:

> [Firstly], feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of "excavation," shifting the focus of standard practice from men's concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women…. [Secondly], feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process. In response to the observation that researchers have often exploited or harmed women participants, and that scientific knowledge has sustained systematic oppressions of women, feminist methodologists have searched for practices that will minimize harm to women and limit negative consequences. [Thirdly], feminists seek a methodology that will support

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research of value to women, leading to social change or action beneficial to women (pp. 30-31).

All three principles of feminist methodology as elucidated by Devault above, are integral to my research. I discuss all three principles here as they relate to my research.

Firstly, feminist theorising enables me to expose the unjust gendered nature of domestic work and to interrogate the complex distinction between public and private, personal and political. One of the overriding issues that concerns feminists is the relative invisibility of what occurs in the private sphere, which is the personal or domestic sphere, usually inhabited by women, as discussed in Chapter One. One of their aims is to make public and political the experiences of women that occur in the domestic sphere. Carol Hanish (cited in Lee, 2007) coined the slogan "the personal is political", understood to mean that matters customarily thought to be personal and that occurred in the private sphere, were intrinsically linked to a public sphere where women had less value. Through the use of this slogan, Hanish appealed for the politicisation of what was thought of as 'women's issues'. Much criticism, mainly from outside of the West, has been directed at the understanding of the private-public sphere dichotomy. These commentators contend that both spheres are needed and are always already political (McEwan, 2001), and that women had to resist the binarism inherent to the public-private debate. In my research I show that although domestic work takes place in the private sphere, domestic workers make a political contribution to the public sphere – it is an indispensable occupation with important economic, political and ideological repercussions. I have quoted Poo (2013, p. 36), the Director of the NDWA in Chapter One, who maintained that "if domestic workers went on strike, they could paralyze almost every industry".

Indeed, besides understanding oppression as a form of political and personal subjugation, feminists also see oppression as being embedded in global power and economic relations (Dubois & Oliveiro, 2009). Pertinent to my study is how the voices of the participants are closely connected to the process of consciousness-raising or conscientisation. Through the process of conscientisation, researchers and participants embark on a journey together to make sense of their lives and experiences, and to connect the personal to the political and the structural systems of power and privilege (Freire, 1970). According to qualitative feminist researchers, conscientisation is the first step in the process of social change (De Vault, 1999; Hesse-Biber, 2007). The qualitative methods I employ are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

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The second principle is linked to my research in its attempt to 'hear' women's voices, and to challenge the marginality and invisibility of women in traditional social science research, its androcentric bias and positivist orientation (Devault, 1999; Harding, 1987). Reinharz (1992, pp. 16-17) underscores the importance attached to the experience and voices of women in the quote below:

> Many feminists have written that "finding one's voice" is a crucial process of their research and writing. During this phase the researcher understands a phenomenon and finds a way of communicating that understanding [...] [feminist research] takes us beyond "fighting patriarchy" and shows us what we can do. It illustrates how some people have struggled for the right to be producers of knowledge without being trapped into the reproduction of patriarchal ways of knowing.

My study is based on hearing and understanding the voices on the margins, those from the standpoint of domestic worker leaders, and bringing them to the centre. They offer their own standpoints and experiences. I do this with the full understanding that all knowledge is partial and situated (Haraway, 1988) and that I, the researcher, and each individual participant, are caught up in a "multiplicity of various power relations" (Lykke et al., 2014, p. 3).

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Reinharz (1992, pp. 16-17) succinctly elaborates on the importance of "finding one's voice" in the research process when she writes the following:

> Many feminists have written that "finding one's voice" is a crucial process of their research and writing. During this phase the researcher understands a phenomenon and finds a way of communicating that understanding […] it takes us beyond "fighting patriarchy" and shows us what we can do. It illustrates how some people have struggled for the right to be producers of knowledge without being trapped into the reproduction of patriarchal ways of knowing.

I was not an impartial observer of the women in my study's truths. I was emotionally invested in their stories (and their experiences), and I wanted to capture their voices as authentically as possible in – as Harper Lee said in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view … until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (1960, pp. 85-87). Thus using a feminist approach, I was able to interrogate my role as researcher, which I discuss in more detail later, be aware of the power hierarchy

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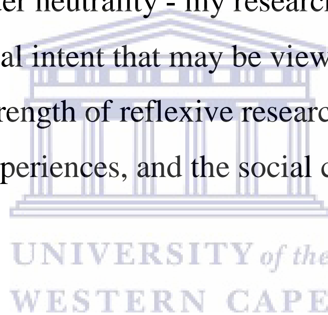
embedded in this role, and appreciate and understand the intricacies of the every-day lives of domestic workers. Moreover, using feminist methodologies and epistemologies, which have at their core consciousness raising and a commitment to change, is the perfect research method from which I could examine domestic worker leader activism.

Finding my own voice in this research process has been very significant for me. When writing my own story in the introduction, I was assailed by the wonder that I could so freely write about a period of my life where my voice was meant to be silenced through an oppressive regime, because I was Black and because I was a woman. My voice was never really silenced, I fought back as explained in the introduction of this study. I felt a sense of liberation in being able to listen to the voices of domestic workers in this study without claiming neutrality or objectivity, as demanded by a positivist framework. Rather, it is a strength of feminist methodology and reflexive research.

The third principle relates to gender neutrality - my research is not gender neutral, but gendered, with a particular political intent that may be viewed as 'biased' by empiricist researchers, but once again is a strength of reflexive research. It examines the activism of women, their agency and lived experiences, and the social change that follows.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Feminist methods

According to Harding (1991), feminist standpoint theory does not advocate adherence to one particular method. Specific techniques associated with feminist methodologies generally are data gathering tools such as in-depth or semi-structured interviews, life-story and narrative interviews, group interviews and participant observations. From the feminist perspective, the feminist method is simply an approach to research, that which can be appraised as legitimate and valid knowledge. The linkages between theory, method and action is an integral part of feminist research. Indeed, Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 151) argues that feminist research is "political work" with the production of knowledge at its core, and is targeted at "empowerment, action and ultimately social transformation."

Questions regarding validity, reliability and objectivity, which are a pivotal part of scientific research, and usually defined in accordance with the principles of the natural sciences, are understood in feminist research within its own 'parameters' (Landman, 2006). 19th Century positivists argued that those who conducted research should not let feelings contaminate

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research, according to Westkott (1990), who maintains that the patriarchal bias evident in this notion ensured that women remained the 'objects' of research. Historically women were largely excluded from the construction of societies and the rules that govern them. The standpoints of men were deemed universal, diminishing the role of women's experiences (Smith, 1987). Within the feminist research paradigm, attempts at objectivity include ensuring that the research process is thought to be anonymous, confounding the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Westkott, 1990). With respect to the reliability and validity requirement in positivist research endeavours, Landman (2006, p. 431) argues that "Human research subjects respond to the process of the research, which creates its own unique dynamic that cannot be replicated in other places and at other times".

In order to transform the way in which research is done, Smith (1987) urges feminists to do more than just 'add' women to research projects. Rather, descriptions should be provided of how women are located in their daily lives, and these locations should be linked to the bigger socio-economic frameworks of society. Smith advocates institutional ethnography as a method that conveys the linkages between institutions and daily activities. DeVault (1999) uses households as a way to explain these links. The traditional understanding of the household as a private space makes the subordination of women acceptable, as it denies the ways in which the household tasks and childcare usually performed by women support society's economic structures. However institutional ethnography understands households to be connected to several other institutions that organise home life.

I attempt to show in this thesis how domestic leaders who participated in my study's daily experiences are linked to the larger economic patriarchal frameworks of societies. On the margins of society, I will show how the intersections of their race, gender and class further disenfranchise them. It will become evident that the women in my study resort to activism as a consequence of their resistance to the unfair treatment and abuses of the capitalist, patriarchal societies to which they belong.

In keeping with feminist methods, I discuss hereunder the role of the researcher, the participants in my study, the interviews conducted and the analysis thereof.

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My role as researcher

A feminist methodology emphasises the researcher's experience and positionality in the research process. I adopt Hartsock's (1987) standpoint theory in this research, as I am sensitive to the risks of privileging my own viewpoint over others. Thus reflexivity is a key tool used in my research. Maguire (2008) maintains that reflexivity is one of the most important contributions by feminists to research, and is a way researchers are able to locate themselves and reflect on the way their own "biases, feelings, choices, and multiple identities" influence the research process. According to Harding (1987), reflexivity allows the researcher to be on an equal level as the participants.

I agree with Berger and Luckman (1991) that both the researcher and the participant are creators of accounts, and that their social location effects how they experience and describe it. Thus there cannot be only one 'true' way of describing the social world. As Bloom (1997, p. 111) maintains, "feminist methodologies strive for more reciprocal and less mystical relationships between researchers and those respondents whose lives are the focus of the research".

Thus, as a feminist researcher, I integrate reflexivity in my research process, that is to be aware of my actions and role in the research process. I was however aware of Gergen and Gergen's (1991, p.77) caution to researchers - "is there nothing left but to reflect on our own subjectivities, and then to reflect upon the reflection in an infinitude of self-reflexive iterations?" - not be caught up in interminable self-reflection.

Feminist researchers such as Harding and Norberg (2005) and Sprague (2005), identified three ways that the researcher is deemed to hold more power than the participants; that is, the researcher is in charge of the research process, the researcher analyses and reports on the data, and frequently the researcher has a higher social status than the research participants, which could lead to the 'othering' of research participants. Reflexivity and the recognition of differences are not enough to remove the power differentials between the researched and the researcher. The moment one engages with participants as the researcher is the moment that power is introduced into the relationship, even if all other social categories such as race, class and gender are similar.

Being of the same gender too, is not enough to have insider status. Gender is not a "standalone category but is always and everywhere related to other differences and mutually constituted by

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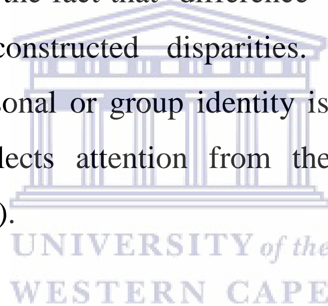
these differences" (Davis, 2014, p. 23). In Chapter Two, I referred to hooks (1984) and Collins (2000) who made the argument that White heterosexual feminists ignored the experiences of women of colour and failed to recognise their own privileges. Arguably, such privileges continue to operate in different ways, in different contexts with different nuances.

Patai (1994), critiques the popular notion that by situating oneself verbally in the research process, all power differentials are erased. She argues:

> A current popular strategy is that of 'situating' oneself by prior announcement. … Sometimes these tropes sound like apologies; more often they are deployed as badges. Either way, they give off their own aura of fraud, for the underlying assumption seems to be that by such identification one has paid one's respect to 'difference'- owned up to bias, acknowledged privilege, or taken possession of oppression- and is now home free. But this posture has no impact on the fact that 'difference' in today's world comes packaged in socially constructed disparities. More than a verbal acknowledgement of personal or group identity is required. Indeed, such rhetoric once again deflects attention from the systematic nature of inequality (1994, p. 36-37).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Davis (2014) and Lykke (2014) advocate thinking intersectionally to overcome the trap of creating identity categories, especially locating oneself from one category. Davis advises that one should rather compile a narrative about how one's location moulds and has an effect on one's positionality. She argues that:

> The assumption is that your social location will inevitably shape the ways you look at the world, the kinds of questions you ask (as well as the questions you haven't thought of asking), the kinds of people and events that evoke sympathy and understanding (as well as those that make you feel uncomfortable or evoke avoidance) (p.23).

All of the domestic worker leaders that I interviewed were marginalised women of colour. I realised that my being a woman of colour and from southern Africa made it easier for me to obtain their participation in this study. One of the reasons could have been that most of us came from colonised countries and have had experience of being part of the marginalised social

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strata. I realised that it was the fact that I shared a marginalised status with these women, although probably not to the same degree, is one of the reasons why I embarked on this particular study in the first place. Throughout the conversations we had, I used pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' and especially with the South African worker leaders, I felt a shared bond – this could be as we were all victims of the oppressive Apartheid system, and all of the previous generations in my family had biographies similar to the women I interviewed. Even so, I realised that I enjoyed a class privilege different to theirs, and it was incumbent on me to interrogate this privilege in the research process. I too was an employer of someone who assisted me with cleaning my home on a part-time basis. Although I realised that being truly reflexive is complicated, I did not think it would impede my ability to strategically position myself, engage with the participants, hear their voices, interpret their experiences and write an analysis thereof.

I am very aware that my analysis and methods construct a limited narrative about the women, and the organisations to which they belong, that I focus on in my research, although I do subscribe to DeVault's (1999, p. 65) view that we should build "more from what we share with respondents as women than from disciplinary categories that we bring to research encounters". I recognise my own commonalities with the women in my study, and I am able to therefore share my personal stories and those of some of the participants, beyond just an analysis of interviews. This is common in feminist research, as scholars advocate conversational interviews in which researchers disclose stories about their own lives (Oakley 1981). Reinharz (1983) also advises that the researcher get to know the multiple lived daily contexts of the researched, so that the other aspects of their lives are also fully revealed. I was unable to do so, as I met most of the participants in a country that none of us lived in, as I will explain later in this chapter, and I would not have been able to afford visiting each participant in their own countries in order to experience their lived realities. I did meet Myrtle Witbooi and a few other South African domestic worker leaders at social occasions, but I did not get to know their families or the employers of those who worked as domestic workers. I discuss this predicament further in my conclusion at the end of this chapter and offer possible solutions.

I was not an objective observer as I conducted my research – my own history was intimately tied to the research process. My identity of being a South African, and particularly living in Cape Town (the location of my research site in South Africa), combined with my understanding of the socio-cultural norms of the country, gave me insight into the lives of South African domestic workers. I have had relationships with domestic workers all my life cleaning my

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home, as mentioned before, and those of family and friends, as it very common for middle-class (and upper class) South Africans to engage domestic help outside of the home. Also, given my relationship with women belonging to SADSAWU, due to my work with COSATU as mentioned previously, I was familiar with the conditions of their lives, their struggles and concerns. Thus I felt very much part of the stories that were told. I was pleased that times had changed, and unlike Cock (1980) who did not personally conduct in-depth interviews with the domestic workers in her study, I conducted my own interviews. Cock believed that the Black women in her study would be too intimidated to speak to her, a White woman. A Black fieldworker conducted the interviews on her behalf. Unfortunately for Cock, given the political unrest at the time, there was an additional fear that the workers would suffer repercussions if they spoke to her, from both their employers and the community.[17]

I took to heart Spivak's advice, which is quoted in Landry and Maclean (1996):

> Our privileges, whatever they maybe in terms of race, class, nationality, gender and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge; not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions. To unlearn our privileges means, on the one hand to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view. On the other hand it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take us seriously and, most important of all, be able to answer back (p. 415).

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Since there is relatively little research carried out on domestic worker leader activism, it was imperative to go into the field, both locally and internationally, to listen to their mostly unheard stories, which included mobilisation and activism to improve the lived realities of domestic workers globally. As a methodological tool, I also employed what Enrique Dussel (1996) calls 'ethical listening', as cited by Bernadino-Costa (2014). Ethical listening means to "ethically recognize the existence of the ones who were faded and silenced by the hegemonic episteme" (p. 73). Listening to domestic workers in my study, allowed me to "undermine the power of the hegemonic speech" globally, especially about women of colour, "who are viewed by the

[17] 'Necklace' killings, which involved placing a burning tyre around someone's neck were rife in the 1980's for supposed Black informants.

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hegemonic episteme as deprived of rationality and therefore unable to tell their own histories" (p.73).

Participants in this study

Most of my interviews were conducted at two conferences. Myrtle Witbooi knew that I wanted to interview the leadership of the IDWF, and told me about a conference that was being held in Jakarta in Indonesia, that was going to be attended by most of the leadership. The conference, titled Labor Migration: Who Benefits? A Global Conference on Worker Rights and Shared Prosperity, took place from 10-12 August 2015 in Bogor, Indonesia at the Novotel Bogor Hotel. It was sponsored by The Solidarity Center, a non-profit organisation aligned with four labour federations and co-sponsored by Migrant Care Indonesia. Its stated mission is to "help build a global labour movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent, and democratic unions" (Solidarity Center, 2018, np.) The conference was focused on cross-border labour migration globally. Although the conference was not open to the public, Myrtle was able to obtain an invitation for me. I was able to interview all of the IDWF members present, except for the General Secretary. All of the participants were willing to be interviewed, and my sense was that they thought of me as a friend of Myrtle's and therefore trustworthy. Furthermore, I got the impression that the fact that I was attached to a university gave me credibility. The General Secretary of the IDWF, Elizabeth Tang, though did not want to be interviewed as she was too busy. She was not a domestic worker, but held a professional position in her union, and she brushed off any efforts I made to talk to her. Of course this bothered me and being weary of being 'pushy', I did not approach her again. I was later able to interview her and some other members at a workshop held for domestic worker leaders from the African continent in December 2016 at COSATU in Cape Town. She was much friendlier and I sensed it was because all the members of SADSAWU and COSATU who were present knew me and welcomed me effusively into their space at the workshop. However, her attitude made me aware that even though feminist research advocates reciprocity as an essential component, intersubjective research is very complex.

There are 15 members of the IDWF executive and alternate members. I was able to interview 11 domestic worker leaders and one member from WIEGO and one member from the IUF. I recognise that 11 women interviewed do not constitute a representative sample of domestic

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worker leadership, and that the range of experiences of domestic worker activism is much wider than the women interviewed. However, their experiences and life narratives can be used as being representations of some of the key aims of this research. My small sample is supported by a review of subject-related literature by Marais (2014), who found that sample sizes in qualitative studies vary from between two participants to as many as 50 or more. The interviews I conducted gave rise to autobiographical narratives; however, much of the information about the lives of these women is incomplete. The aim was not to introduce a large autobiographical framework. The main focus of interviews was to obtain information relating to the key areas of the research.

Participants were informed that their real names were not going to be used, in keeping with the global standard ethical codes of conduct in research with human participants. All participants in my study however informed me that they would not mind if their names were used, and that they would not be compromised on any level. Nor would using their real names inhibit them from sharing any information. All of the women gave me permission to use their real names and seemed to prefer that. In fact, they were proud of the fact that they were chosen to be interviewed and were recognised as leaders in their profession. Furthermore, as they were leaders in the public terrain, it would have been difficult to ensure anonymity anyway. They were pleased to be given the opportunity for their voices to be heard, and that they were able to share their experiences. For them it was another act of activism. I therefore use their participants' real names in this study and return to this decision later in the conclusion of this chapter.

The women interviewed were:

- Hester Stephens, South Africa – President of SADSAWU and African Domestic Workers Network (ADWN)

- Myrtle Witbooi, South Africa – General Secretary of SADSAWU and President of IDWF

- Sonu Danuwar, Nepal – Executive member of IDWF and Home Workers Trade Union of Nepal (HUN)

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- Antonio Pena, Columbia - Executive member and National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)
- Lita Anggraini, Indonesia – Executive member of the IDWF and national Network of Domestic Workers Advocacy (Jala PRT).
- Gillian Attwell, Trinidada and Tobago – Executive member National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE)
- Elizabeth Masamba, Kenya – Executive member Kenya Union of Domestic, Education Institutions & Hospital Workers (KUDHEIHA)
- Marcelina Bautista, Mexico – National Union of Domestic Workers; Latin America Coordinator of the IDWF
- Lulu Omar, Tanzania – Executive member Conservation, Hotel, Domestic and Allied Workers Union (CHODAWU)
- Josephine Mtimaukanena, Malawi - Commercial Industrial and Allied workers Union
- Elizabeth Tang, Hong Kong – General Secretary of the IDWF
- Chris Bonner - Programme Director at WIEGO
- Barbro Budin - Co-ordinator of Gender Equality and Trade Union Development Project at the IUF

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There is much heterogeneity in experiences among domestic worker activists. However, the women I interviewed represent the experiences of domestic worker activists, and their accounts are valuable to my research. Although experiences differ greatly among these activists, there are also similarities which bind them together, which will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Qualitative interviews

In this study I used qualitative methods to analyse concrete cases in their temporal, local and global contexts. Qualitative research centres on the views and experiences of the participants.

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"It assumes that reality is socially constructed and not an objective 'given'" and its aim is "to explore underlying social processes and values in their particular social context, to lay open the individuals' experiences and inferred meanings". (Froggatt, 2001, p. 433). In this study, it was utilised to explore domestic workers' lived realities, experiences, and activism, through an interpretation of that world, through the women who participated and shared their stories in this study.

When feminist researchers conduct qualitative interviewing, the focus is on women's lived experiences – their attitudes, interpretations and understandings – as well as on women's voices (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative interviewing favours relationship building between interviewer and interviewee, and according to Hesse-Biber, often lends itself to a rather relaxed and casual interviewing technique, and in this process the interviewer frequently reveals information about herself. It allows for the researcher to relinquish control over the research process and instead make possible mutual co-operation (Reinharz, 1992). The interviews are "contextual and negotiated" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27), enabling the researcher to hear stories from the perspectives of the participants and in their own words (Charmaz, 2006; Devault, 1999). Devault (1999) describes qualitative interviewing as a method whereby both the participants and the researcher acknowledge the structural organisation of their experiences, and are able to determine possible areas for transformation.

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In this study, individual, in-depth semi-structured interview techniques were used. Semi-structured interviews are similar to obtaining life-story narratives, as one of the main objectives is to give voice to domestic worker leader stories on how the events in their lives shaped their activism. As noted previously, the aim was not to obtain complete autobiographical narratives. Semi-structured interview methods were used to obtain autobiographical information as it pertained to answering the research questions in this study. In the interviews that I conducted, I recognised what Smith (1987, p. 48) meant when she said that the participants were the "expert practitioners of their everyday world, knowledgeable in the most intimate ways of how it is put together, and its routine, daily accomplishments". I followed Devault's (1999, p. 48) advice on adopting a "marginal location" in the interview process, as a learner interested in the narratives of the participants and their interpretations thereof, without passing judgement. I am usually described as a good listener, so I had no problems in listening to the participants, and at times my silence worked as an effective probe, giving participants time to work through their answers, without hindering the flow.

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There are many principles one can use when trying to formulate the questions to ask in a qualitative interview, but I followed Bryman's (2012) suggestions that questions should be formulated that would help answer the research questions, and that the order of the research questions had to flow. The order of the research questions could be altered at any time to ensure a smooth flow. Bryman also cautioned that the researcher used language that the participants understood, and that leading questions should be avoided.

This research is mainly founded on fully transcribed individual interviews that have been tape recorded and in some cases notes have been taken. A few of the interviews were conducted in two sittings.

The interviews

The interview guides (Appendices 3 and 4) consisted of a loosely structured set of open-ended questions, which provided me with some control over the interviews, whilst allowing me to follow the lead of participants (Charmaz, 2006). The questions were loosely structured to find out more about the personal lives of the participants, their work life, their political affiliations, their ideological aspirations and their activism.

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At the start of the interviews, I explained my study to the participants and shared the goals thereof. I ensured that I answered all questions that the participants might have had before the start of the interviews. I also explained that they could stop the interview at any time and had the choice to answer questions or not, without providing any explanations. I encouraged them to inform me if they felt any discomfort with the questions or the probing. To put the participants at ease, during the course of the interviews, I often offered real life examples from my own life. It was easy for me as a woman of colour, who had endured discrimination for most of my life and was on the fringes of society during the Apartheid era in South Africa, to be empathetic and actively involved in a two-way discussion, that shared pain, frustrations, humour and a deep understanding of the frailty, but tenacity of the human spirit. Sharing my experiences of my politically active life also helped to strengthen the rapport between the participants and me. I could for instance, evoke humorous anecdotes of standing in front of parliament with members of SADSAWU and haranguing the 'honourable' members of that institution, who always hastily scurried past us, trying not to make eye contact.

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At the end of the interviews, the participants again had an opportunity to ask questions as they wished and to add any other comments that they had. All interviews were conducted in English, which was often not the first language of the participants. I enlisted the help of translators, where the participants could not communicate in English. In this context, I was fortunate that most of the interviews I conducted were at a conference on immigration in Indonesia, and non-English speaking participants travelled with two translators who knew them well and were familiar with the work they did. I was well aware of Temple and Edwards's (2002, p. 2) caution, "that to conduct meaningful research with people who speak little or no English, English speaking researchers need to talk to the interpreters and translators they are working with about their perspectives on the issues being discussed". One of the translators translated from Spanish and Mexican to English and worked for Women in Formal Employment: Globalizing and Organisation (WIEGO). WIEGO was one of the donors of the IDWF and was very closely involved in in the organisation of domestic worker leaders from the inception of the IDWN. I discuss WIEGO in more detail in Chapter Nine. The translator, who was actually a researcher at WIEGO, knew the domestic workers and their activism well and understood the rationale and aims of my project. I had met her socially before the interviews, and knew that her perspectives on domestic worker activism were similar to mine and her translations would be acceptable for my research. The other translator accompanied Sonu Danuwar, a participant from Nepal. She had translated for Sonu ever since she started travelling internationally. She was thus well versed regarding Sonu's story and views. I noted that the communication did not appear to be hindered by the fact that the interviews were conducted in English.

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Most interviews lasted two to three hours, although they did not all follow the same sequences. They also varied in length and complexity. I used a combination of narrative and semi-structured interviews methods, ensuring that the women who were part of this study were able to exercise individual, emotive moral agency. Meyers' (2002, p. 5) understanding of agency is the ability to use skills "that enable individuals to conduct their own self-portraits and self-narratives and that thereby enable them to take charge of their lives". Using feminist methods of interviewing allowed the participants to describe their experiences in the ways that they wanted to, and allowed me to develop an equal relationship with interviewees, who were able to introduce new research questions based on their own lived experiences. The women I interviewed have all been interviewed quite a few times by researchers and in public contexts, and have thus carved self-portraits and self-narratives many times; in fact, they appeared to have narratives they wanted to share. The questions I asked in the semi-structured interviews

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often elicited narratives, or parts thereof, of the respondents' lives and at times unanticipated issues arose. I did not want to interrupt the flow of words that inevitably resulted in a narrative, and allowed the participants to speak without interruption. Together with the semi-structured interviewing process, I was able to explore the way in which domestic workers assemble all of their experiences into a coherent narrative of self. I adopted Gergen and Gergen's (1988, p. 17) notion that personal stories are "vehicles for rendering selves intelligible". The authors claim that "narrative accounts are embedded in social action" and "events are rendered socially visible through narratives" (p. 18). I could tell in the interview process that Gergen and Gergen were correct when they maintained that participants usually actively crafted descriptions and accounts of their lives and did not just 'passively' narrate their experiences. Indeed, as Hardy (1968, cited by Gergen & Gergen, 1988, p. 18) wrote. "we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative". Using this eclectic approach allowed the participants freedom in interpretation of the questions and how to reply to them. It also allowed me to change the number, sequence and phrasing of questions as required and to pursue unanticipated lines of enquiry. These interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

I present the participants' stories as part of my thesis to inspire, but also to inform and learn about how domestic workers became activists and committed themselves to collective action. Most of these women's activism cross regional, national and international boundaries, and some have long histories of political activism, whilst others are relatively new to collective action. Each of their contributions is significant in their countries, but also at an international level. The narratives shared a common thread of processes that are related to their becoming activists and the challenges they face in their collective work.

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I found that once the interviews started, that most of these women had stories that they wanted to share. I did not have to prompt them too much, there was little I needed to say, except ask a follow up question that was on my interview guide. Most of the time they had already answered them before being asked. I was not merely a passive receiver of the stories being told. Writing myself into the research process allowed for personal interaction with relevant emotive responses, all permissible and encouraged in feminist research as previously discussed.

At the end of the interviews, the respondents and I often engaged in discussions relating to their narratives. This is an important part of the research process that Freire (1970) refers to as 'conscientisation'. We were able to work together to make sense of their experiences, Freire

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maintains, to connect the personal to the political. However, as Silverman (1993) cautions, narratives do not necessarily represent the 'truth', but rather interview data provide us with a glimpse of the experiences of participants, with whom we have partial encounters.

Making Sense of the Data

On researching feminist methods of data analysis, I found that although there was plenty of literature on data analysis, there was a relative dearth of literature available on what makes data analysis a feminist analysis (Froggatt, 2001; Lister, 2003; Savage, 2000; Schiellerup, 2008). Lister, citing Ribbens and Edwards (1998), maintains that it is a relatively neglected part of feminist qualitative research. This difficulty might be perhaps endemic to the very way qualitative research is conducted. Lister also cites Mauthner and Doucet (1998) who describe it as "unsystematic" and "messy and confusing and uncertain" and as a "researcher's most vulnerable spot; whereas researchers we open ourselves up for scrutiny" (p. 48). They explain that it is difficult to write about the back-and-forth interaction between the "data, the intellectual biography "of the researcher and the core theoretical debates in the relevant literature" in a "logical, sequential, linear fashion" (p. 48). Furthermore, it is a "cyclical process that requires a revisiting of data, its generation, analysis and interpretation" (Froggatt, 2001, p. 436). To confound the process even further, there are "multiple voices that inform representations of reality, and debates about whether the interpretation of data reveals or constructs meaning" and whether "different kinds of analysis lead to different kinds of meaning" (Savage, 2000, p. 1493).

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Researchers analysing qualitative data mostly use either thematic analysis, discourse analysis or a narrative approach. Implicit to thematic analysis, is the notion that there is a match between the outcome of the analysis and "some external reality" (Savage, 2000). Silverman (2000) describes the narrative approach as focussing on how cultural resources are utilised to form stories derived that are usually locally produced. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe narrative analysis as research conducted with the accounts of a person relating their experiences first-hand. According to Savage (2000), narratives offer a means to go beyond the descriptive in order to explore "aspirations and moral imperatives" (p. 1497).

I used a mixture of both narrative and thematic analysis to make sense of my data. I concur with Coffey and Atkinson (1996:20), that there are "multiple practices, methods and

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possibilities of analysis" and that "analytically speaking, there is more than one way to skin a cat". In the preliminary stages I began by transcribing the data collected by means of interviews, and then used coding to organise and reflect on the research data I collected through field notes and the transcripts. Coding, as part of thematic analysis, is a tool for organising large amounts of data into recognisable and analysable parts, whilst retaining the connection to the whole. Certain phrases, words or sets of meaning are grouped into larger sets of meanings. Key themes and sub-themes were deduced from the significant concepts. After the identification of each theme, I reflected on the data again to make sense of it, and a comparative analysis of the experiences of women was undertaken. Thus as consideration is given to process and meaning, it is similar to narrative analysis (Savage, 2000). The process of reflection involved in coding, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue, is more important than the process of coding itself. After transcribing, I organised and categorised data after reading through the interviews a few times.

After undertaking thematic analysis, I explored the narratives in the data collected. There are many types of narrative analysis. The narrative analysis I employed follows the example of Savage (2000), and is "loosely formulated" and "almost intuitive" (p.1497). The research of Savage "follows the example of Coffey and Atkinson (1996), who in turn draw on the work of Labov (1982)" (Savage, 2000, p. 1497). Labov argued that narratives have structural units that are connected to their 'social functions'. These 'structural units' can provide the essence of the story (abstract); provide the circumstances in which it occurred, the people involved and so on (the orientation); can tell you what happened (the complication); an assessment (the evaluation); what eventually occurred (the result) and the signing off (the coda). All the elements do not necessarily have to occur in a particular narrative, nor do they have to occur just once or in any particular order. Stories are to be found within the data, which allows for creative thinking about the data and its interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). At times, narrative analysis allowed me to make sense of data that I could not easily do with thematic analysis. I was also able to link these narratives to socio-historical and socio-political frameworks.

The analysed data generated assisted in addressing the research questions and drawing links with the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Throughout the process, even before I conducted the interviews, I kept reflective notes and wrote memos. Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994) maintain that most feminists argue that it is very important that we ensure that we explain how we come to conclusions, but accept that there is no accurate solution in

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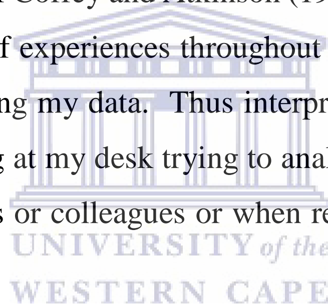
determining how this can be done. The best one can aim for is a critically, reflexive approach, whilst considering the consequences of one's choices. What one includes and omits, the narratives that take precedence, often depends on the positionality and social context of the researcher (Schiellerup, 2008). As there are no standard formats for analysing data, different techniques are applied, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996, pp. 6-7) state:

> For some authors, analysis refers primarily to the tasks of coding, indexing, sorting, retrieving, or otherwise manipulating data. … From such a perspective, the task of analysis can be conceived primarily in terms of data handling […]. For others in the field, analysis refers primarily to the imaginative work of interpretation, and the more procedural, categorizing tasks are relegated to the preliminary work of ordering and sorting the data.

In my study I took the approach of Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Schiellerup (2008), that is, my analysis is an interpretation of experiences throughout the research process, and not only at a particular point after collecting my data. Thus interpretative moments came at different times, not only when I was sitting at my desk trying to analyse the data, but also for instance, in conversations with participants or colleagues or when reading literature. I will discuss the analysis in later chapters.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Ethical issues

There are significant differences among feminist researchers about what ethical research is and whether ethical research is even possible (DeVault, 1999; Patai, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). Patai maintains that the feminist notion that ethical research is doing research for women is simplistic, and researchers should at all times question their own conduct. Kirsch (1999) in fact contends that part of what makes research 'feminist' is a fundamental research ethic. Maynard and Purvis (1994) too maintain that 'integrity' and responsibility' are endemic to the feminist research process.

This study had me continuously questioning my own ethical conduct. I could not with all honesty say that this study was solely done to advance the interests of domestic workers. I was acutely aware that I would be benefitting greatly by using marginalised women as my subject material. All I could do was to remain true to their stories and write their stories focussing on

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their strength and agency, and to trust that the knowledge being developed has value for all stakeholders.

In terms of the concerns about 'using' the women we research for our own gain and research purposes without giving much back, I have minimised this concern as much as I can by my own personal relationship and political relationships with the women concerned, and my own political activism. I have documented elsewhere in this thesis my personal relationship with SADSAWU and COSATU, and the ways in which I have been working with them.

I ensured that due care was taken of a number of ethical issues, in order to comply with global and local standardised and regulated ethical procedures. These included obtaining the informed consent of participants, ensuring that they were not harmed in any way and respecting their privacy. I attach the letter to interviewees to elicit their consent as well as an example of the consent form as Appendix I and Appendix 2 respectively. Participants participated on a voluntary basis and knew that they could leave the study at any point. Before the interviews, participants were informed about what the topic was, the aims and objectives of the study, the scope of the study, approximate interview time, and I asked for permission for audio recordings, which they agreed to. I also informed them that I obtained permission from the Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape to conduct the proposed research. As confidentiality and anonymity were regarded as prerequisites of qualitative research, I reassured participants that I would not use their real names, however as discussed earlier all of them assured me that they did not mind me using their names. As activists, their employers were aware of their political activities, so none of them were afraid that they might lose their jobs if identified. In fact, they welcomed the use of their own names. I discuss this further under the conclusion below.

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Conclusion

This study is located in a feminist research methodology, and I have attempted to be true to those principles at all stages of my research. However, there were also times in my study I was unable to comply with feminist methods as described in this chapter and as advocated, which caused me much anxiety. For instance, I do not comply with the prerequisite for confidentiality and anonymity. As explained earlier in this chapter, this was mainly due to the participants' preference to be named, and that it was evident that given the high public profile of participants,

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their identities could be easily uncovered. In my study, there was no need to protect the women as they were known activists and wanted their stories told, wanted to be recognised for the work that they were doing. To not do so, would have meant that I did not 'hear' them. I would also have been doing the disempowered constituency that they served a disservice. Their stories that led to their becoming activists were usually the stories of most domestic workers, and in a sense, using their real names made their stories 'real'.

Another concern was Reinharz's (1983) advice to get to know the multiple lived daily contexts of the researched, which was not always possible due to financial and time constraints as this is a transnational study. I am reminded of Ruth Behar's (1996) ethnographic memoir, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, in which she speaks of the anxiety and how ethically charged it is to get close to the lives of your participants, just to leave when the funding dries up or when the summer vacation comes to an end. She says, then you are required to "please stand up, dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write down what you saw and heard" (p. 5).

A solution perhaps is that as women's activism, and in this case domestic worker leader activism, is now constructed on the local, national and international levels, and there is much movement between these levels, I would agree with Fonow and Cook (2005), that new forms of partnerships and research collaborations are essential. As this is a doctoral study it was not possible. However, to do justice to this important area of work and the geopolitical contexts of the participants, future research teams should include transnational scholars. As Ackerly and True maintain (2010, p. 470):

> More than attention to gender and women, the feminist researcher brings to the study of contemporary political and social phenomena, a commitment to revealing the concealed, intersectional exercises of power, much of which are now global. Just as second wave feminism aimed to expand the notion of the political into the realm of the so-called ''personal' and 'private', so too a major impetus of feminist activism at the beginning of the 21st century is to globalize our conscious-ness not just to the global dimensions of problems, but also to the global dimensions of their solutions.

Finally, there were many moments in this project that I could not capture, that I wished I could. The complete heart-ache I felt when listening to stories that ravaged souls, the flickering expressions ranging across so many emotions - from hope, to despair and back again; the fear,

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the vulnerability, but also the resoluteness and the pride. The smells and noise of Jakarta where I conducted my research surrounded me, the visually arresting Bali where I tried to make sense of my data seduced me. At times, I just wanted to have a holiday, to lose those women in the billion granules of sea-sand – and yet they followed me, I could not leave them behind. The irony of the two worlds that I was inhabiting at the same time, mine and theirs, the sameness, but difference in history of was not lost on me – my privilege that I could take refuge in, and their lives of domestic toil and activism that there was no escaping. In a sense, it was impossible for me not to be transformed.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

STORIES OF THE HEART

Introduction

I realised when reading the transcriptions of the participants in my study, that although I have done semi-structured interviews, I have to tell some of the narratives that emerged through the interviews, especially as it pertains to domestic work. They are too important not to tell and will situate my study, before I do an analysis of the interviews. I am inspired by Mohanty (2003:235) observation that "It is by paying attention to and theorizing the experiences of communities of women and girls that we demystify capitalism as a system and …envision anti-capitalist resistance". The stories hereunder allows the reader to share in Mohanty's vision of women resisting the exploitation they are subjected to.

These stories of the women in this study contain many vignettes, quotations and information that will assist me in answering the research questions in later chapters and provides the reader with examples of the lives domestic workers lead on their paths to activism. I choose a few extracts of the life stories of four participants that are broadly representative of most, as I am unable to tell all of their stories in this study due to space constraints. They will provide context to the analysis that follows. I have to however knit each story together and at times paraphrase from the interviews, so I am conscious of the fact that I have to represent their stories correctly. I will try my best to ensure that their authentic voices are heard in my words and include their direct quotations as much as possible. These stories tell of the lives these women lived. The extracts I choose are a retelling of the personal struggles and triumphs they faced as domestic workers, who later became leaders.

The story of Myrtle from South Africa – President of the IDWF and General Secretary of Sadsawu

Myrtle started domestic work in 1966 at the age of 20. She completed her schooling at the age of 17 and had passed Standard 8, or Grade 10 as it is now known in South Africa. She wanted

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to become a nurse, but could not enrol as she did not have the requisite identity document that specified her race. She had to wait for years for the document and by the time it arrived, she was already working as a domestic worker and had lost interest in nursing. Most of her other family members worked in the factories in Cape Town. While they were able to stop their work week on a Friday afternoon and enjoy the weekend with their families, Myrtle only had Sunday afternoons free, from 2pm until the evening. The unfairness of this situation led her to question why her life as a domestic worker was different to theirs. When asked, her employer confirmed that there were no laws regulating domestic work. Other domestic workers in the area in which she worked told her that they also had to work until 9pm most evenings, and also had to work seven days a week. That is when she knew that she had to fight this unjust system, and Myrtle the activist was born. As she says in her own words "… and then I decided we have to do something for ourselves. Let us stop complaining, and that is how it actually started".

She lived in the back room of her employer's house in Sea Point. Sea Point is an affluent, ocean-facing suburb in Cape Town. After a year or two with her employers, she got married, but later divorced. As she says, "the trouble started when they said your husband is not allowed to stay with you". She had a baby that her employer allowed her to keep, but her employer also had a child that was badly burnt and who cried a lot, and in the end she could not cope taking care of both children. This badly burnt child was the reason for Myrtle giving up her dream of nursing too, as she says, "I wasn't interested in nursing anymore, because I was working with this family and their one child was badly burnt and wanted my attention, and I loved her very much so I stayed with them for 12 ½ years". She had to give her own baby to her mother to take care of, as her employer was also going to have a baby and her baby had to be gone by the time her employer was going to give birth. The next time Myrtle saw her baby was when she was one years old and she stayed with Myrtle's mother until the age of 11. Myrtle worked all day and cooked for her employers and in the evening babysat their children, as they enjoyed going out. She shrugs off the unfairness of it all by saying, "Of course with Apartheid laws, we couldn't go out late at night, there were no busses, we couldn't go to beaches, [except the dangerous rocky one], nothing like that, because Apartheid laws prohibited domestic workers from doing anything like that. So that was my situation. You stayed in the back room, reading books, and that is how you got educated, from reading".

As a married woman, she was not allowed to live with her husband in the backroom dwelling. Or she had to choose between her husband and her child, which one could stay with her. She describes the situation as such:

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> My husband always promised her [the eldest daughter] that when we have our own little house, and when they don't chase me and my husband all the time, because they used to chase us all the time, because as a domestic worker we were not allowed to stay with our family. They even wanted to separate me from my other daughter, and that is when I decided no. I was not going to be separated from a second child. Or they say your husband must go or your child. In the middle of the night, at three o clock they would say "choose, your husband or your child". Which one must go? Your husband or your child? Then my husband would get up and go to his mother.
>
> When my husband would come back the next day, they would say "choose, your husband or your child". Then my husband said this was too much.

However, before they moved away Myrtle was busy organising the domestic workers in her area. She was singled out because one of her strengths was that she could read and write:

> Mathilda asked me if I mind reading her letter. So I said no, I don't mind and she gave me the letter and the letter was full of sad news from her family. Mathilda then went outside and told the workers "Here is a domestic worker that can read and write. She speaks English, she reads books and everything." Then, slowly but surely, the domestic workers used to stop me in the street and ask me to help them.
>
> That is when the idea came to me to ask them to ask their employers if we could do something on a Saturday, so that they could also learn to read and write. Then the Catholic Church heard about us and they wanted to help us and that is when they set up this organisation for domestic workers. It started with us, the domestic workers, we decided that we wanted to be educated and we decided we wanted to learn to read and write. At that stage, when I was a domestic worker, I used to earn R32 a month. When we started to mobilise, we earned up to R100 a month. We always used to fight with the government, we always used to tell the government, but they never listened to us, but we never stopped, because we became very strong. What makes us hurt is being separated from our children, it is also like you feel that you don't belong anywhere, even amongst your own people. For instance, I wrote a letter to the newspaper in 1967, saying what is wrong with domestic

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workers? Why is it that we must suffer like this? It was the Clarion newspaper and I posted this letter.

After leaving her employer, Myrtle went to work in a factory, where she mobilised the workers and became a shop steward. She says:

> I was shop-steward and was needed in the factory and had to attend meetings, my marriage started crumbling. My husband could not cope with this, and another thing was that my husband loved women, he had a weakness for women and I could not live with that, and I just said one day, "sorry, I had enough", and he became a friend, we were like friends for years, and I was left with three children, my youngest one was seven, my other one was ten and the other one was fifteen. My husband then fell in love with a 15 year-old girl who was at school, and he got married to her. Her mother gave permission that they could marry, but I coped with my three children on my own. I have never got twenty cents from my husband over the years, I never went to Court, as I didn't believe in asking for money, and I told him this. The strangest thing about this is I helped my husband in setting up his business with his second wife. So many times he came to me. I think that is why God bless me, because I didn't hate. For me, if you can get through being a domestic worker in the Apartheid era, which was bad, you can do anything.

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She recalled how difficult life was as a Black woman and as a domestic worker under Apartheid and provided me with numerous examples. She became militant and was jailed a few times and says: "Some employers like me being militant, some hate me, but I could not be bothered. It was our right to speak up for ourselves. If other workers feel they can do it, and you feel you can do it, then do it. That is how my life is repeating itself".

She goes on to speak on her election as President of the IDWF:

> In 2013, when we formed this International Domestic Workers Federation, I didn't know that they were going to put me up as president, because I realised that I am over 60, and needed to step down now. Then this man, aged 88 who is from Geneva and know me a long time went onto the stage and said he had a message for me from the front, before they were going to elect me. He said "Myrtle, you are just starting on that road once again, and you are

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going to walk that road, and we are all going to follow you on that road, so your task is not finished Myrtle."

He is a trade unionist, but he knows me for a long, long time. They have been supporting us all our life, the domestic workers in South Africa. His federation is in Geneva, and they are also now a supporter. He said "before you say no to what is going to happen here, think about that road, and think about the road you must walk. But we are going to be behind you Myrtle." When I saw the workers all voting for me, the voters have trust in me, I said to my daughter that I am sorry, I wanted to retire, but I can't.

It is about what we have achieved. We have freedom, and if we don't make use of that freedom, we are going to lose it, so what is the point, and that is my task. My task is to see that the message goes into the world. They were earning R800 per month, now they earn R1000 per month. That is no salary. The Minister of Labour was standing next to me and I challenged him. I said to him "I am so glad you are here. Do you have an answer for these workers? When are you going to look at a decent wage for them?" You know, it is that determination. You cannot change the world, but you can encourage them, you can give them that hope, and we can do it. We can. That is important. We want to have a million workers in this federation soon, but we don't just want a million workers, we want the workers to be empowered to know their rights in their own country. I have been to Lebanon three weeks ago, to form the first union in an Arab country, the first union. Immediately, they sent a letter to them, while I was still there, saying sorry, you cannot have a union because you are immigrants and this is not your land of birth, and things like that. We are fighting against things like this. But it is hope for some countries, domestic workers are standing up, because of the message that the IDWF is spreading. We are free, the ILO made us free, so why must you be oppressed in that country? That is our task. The IDWF's task is to make sure that domestic workers understand that it is mostly about convention, what it is and what does it say? It is about labour laws affecting domestic workers, not only in South Africa, but in the world.

On her links with political parties in South Africa, she says:

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> I was always an ANC member. I went to meetings, I went to Lusaka and met with the leadership of the ANC, but it was always about domestic workers. The ANC called us in, a delegation of us in 1984, they called us to Lusaka. That time we only had an organisation of domestic workers in Cape Town and they had a little one in Port Elizabeth, but we were all different. First of all they spoke about freedom and everything they were planning, how strong the domestic workers were, what role we can play in the fight for freedom, and then they said we need to mobilise the domestic workers and also to form one federation for domestic workers. In 1985 we formed the first union for domestic workers, even before COSATU was born. We were part of the talks for COSATU, also, in Lusaka. The ANC wanted to put me up as Councillor, but I was not interested, as my role were domestic workers. At one stage, I was part of the SACP, but I am no longer active in those things. Yes, if the ANC tell me I must attend a meeting, I go, but I only vote for them now. of course we were part of the UDF. I was always involved in the civic organisations, I was part of the Mitchells Plain Civic and I was part of the Kensington Civic. I was involved in all the ground struggles. I was Chairperson of the Housing Action League in Mitchells Plain, where we fought for the rights of the domestic workers against banks, etc. and I was involved in the GetNet and the SACP and ANC, but it was always at grassroots level.

She however laments the fact that these political parties that they supported, did not support the domestic workers' struggle. She says:

> I need to say this. Nobody, not even those organisations, ever thought of the domestic workers. We were never on anyone's agenda. There was never anybody that used to speak for us. We were simply some just forgotten women that was working for something. We had no voice. Honestly, I would say to you that we influenced them, because the ANC only started to talk to us when we went to talk to them about domestic workers, and then they called us over, Florrie De Villiers (deceased) and myself.
>
> It makes me stronger in a way, the love that I have for fighting for freedom. It made me stronger that I am in a broader struggle, but what angered me is

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that they never offered support. Even in 1994, when we had a democratic government, they never came and said "domestic workers, we want to speak to you". We again had to demonstrate, we again had to make our voices heard.

Today, most of these organisations are riding on our backs, because all of a sudden, because of the ILO Convention, they want to teach domestic workers in the world. Every day, people ask "Myrtle, do you lead this organisation"? They claim they are going to work for domestic workers and help us. I have never heard of them before. NGOs, all of a sudden, they are going to educate domestic workers. When they do get the money, who do they educate?

She maintains that even the labour federation COSATU did not support them:

We hate it that people want to ride on our backs. Even COSATU. COSATU never knew what the ILO was all about, they didn't know what the convention was all about. They were riding on our back, and now you hear COSATU is doing so well for the domestic workers. I got up and said "no, the domestic workers are doing well for COSATU. We are giving you a voice now. We are giving you a platform at the ILO. You were always there, but you were never involved. You just go and sit there, and now, for the first time you went with the domestic workers after we had to drag you here." So I would say that we as the domestic workers, we are making people aware that we are there. Listen to us. It is not the other way around, but I must say, from a broader perspective, Florrie De Villiers (deceased), she taught me about the other side of it, the other struggle. "Myrtle, while we are fighting for domestic workers, we are also fighting for freedom for our country." Because of her, I became more of an activist. I was fighting for domestic workers, but I also started going to meetings, protests and things like that. It does make me stronger. I never ever had the attitude that I want to be in power or that I want to be something. I always just wanted to be something to do with the domestic sector. It was never in me. My children once made a joke, saying that I must just work and get one month's pay, then you finish. But it was a joke. To me it was never about that. Many people said to me that I should become a women's right activist, or women's rights empowerment,

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> but this is what I like: domestic workers' rights. There are still so many challenges, there are still so many things. Yes, we have fantastic labour laws but how many domestic workers know about it? How many domestic workers understand it? The employers understand it, so that is our task.

I needed to know whether she was ever scared, and this is what she said:

> The only time I got scared was one night when my daughter phoned me and my daughter said that the police were there and Peter, my baby son, said to the cops "my mommy is tired of you". He was still a child. My daughter said she thought the cops were going to hit Peter and that was the only time I felt scared. The second time was when they locked me up with Alan Boesak, Desmond Tutu and them. We were locked up for talking about our rights. I remember it was my birthday and the cops started singing and I got so angry, how dare they? They still said to us "you will not have Kentucky[18], you will have pap" because they liked to terrorise us.

And where were her children now and what were they doing?

> My children supported me, as they are all educated, thank God. Up to today, my son in law send pocket money every month. The one thing that I am very proud of is that my son in law is a highly educated man, but wherever he goes in the world, even the universities he took me to, he says that his mother in law was a domestic worker and he is so proud of her. He was the first Black guy that got a Nelson Mandela Scholarship that year because Nelson Mandela was looking at people that put themselves through university and he did it by working in a kibbutz. Then he went overseas to do his Master's degree, he decided to get married to my daughter, he took her with, and they decided to get married in England and then decided I must come to England. That time my union had no money.
>
> I will never forget it, the domestic workers bought me an outfit, and he paid for my ticket because we had no money in our organisation and at the reception when he had to make a speech. His mother was there and I was there. He said that he wanted to say in front of all his friends and family, "the

[18] Kentucky Fried Chicken, a brand of take-away food

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day when his mother in law decide she doesn't want to work anymore, her home is with us. She is going to stay with us, whether she is ill, whether she is going to need a nurse and the reason for that is, is because my mother in law gave me this wife, because of her sacrifices as a domestic worker, and raised her single-handedly, and I want to thank her for it." His mother said "and what about me?" He said "mommy, you are fine, you have a husband, and you have everything. My wife is what her mother made her." If I tell my son in law now that I want a ticket to visit, he will book that ticket now. That is just the type of person he is. I am so grateful that my daughter found a good husband and that she is happy. Although she must travel with him, and she says "Mommy, we can never settle." The relationship that the two of us have. Every year he says "it doesn't matter where we are going to stay, whether we stay in South Africa, you are going to stay with us. Yes, God has been good to me, in fact, God has been great.

I need to say that I lived with no interest in a man, I just lived for my children. When my last child, my son, finished matric I remember the excitement, going to town, waiting there the evening for the results, but he was confident that he would pass. My two daughters was already working by that time. He came home and said "mommy, I passed." I told him that now he had to understand that I cannot take him further. I brought him up to find his own way, all three of my children. My son said "thank you Mommy." I said, "God, I did it." Jackie, my eldest daughter who lives in Genadendal is another miracle. She had a learning problem. Whenever it came to exams, she flopped out, but when she came to standard seven (grade 9) she said "mommy, I am sorry, I cannot do this. I cannot study, I am going to leave school." I told her that she was going to have a very hard life and she was going to end up working in a factory.

The principal came to ask me not to take her out of school, and I said I cannot force her to stay. I was working for the domestic workers' union and there was a company that worked with plants. The guy phoned me to say that he was looking for two ladies to work in his company. I told Jackie about it, that she had to clean plants, and she said she will take anything. She was there for two weeks and I got a phone call from the drug counselling centre,

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saying they heard about me and that I worked with the domestic workers. They were looking for someone who had a bit of schooling, who can make tea and maybe learn to do filing. It was an Afrikaans lady and I told her about Jackie and asked if I could bring her in.

My daughter still remembers this today. I took her down to Groote Schuur road to the drug counselling centre and introduced my daughter to Isabel. If she didn't want to go back to the plants, she could start. Jackie was working there for six months when Isabel phoned me to say she wanted her to learn administration, and that Jackie was so clever. Today, my daughter is the financial manager of that drug counselling centre. It has been 30 years since I took her there. When she started working, she bought her brother and sister their first bicycles, she bought a lounge suite for our house. For seven years, she didn't want a cent of her salary, not a cent. You know Sue, when that child got paid every month, she came to this office to bring me her pay-cheque and used to say I should decide what I want to do with it, until one day, I said "Jackie, I want to do something for you". She told me that she wanted to go for her learner's license because the centre said it would be nice if she could drive. When SAMWU decided to close down, the funders decided to give each of us six months' salary. I then told Jackie to take six months' salary of her money and pick out a car for her. So she got her first little car. She is still working at the centre. She was the administrator, then worked in accounts and now she said her boss told her the other day that they want her to become part of the funding proposal committee. Jackie is like me. I used to go around the factory and look what other people were doing, and that is how I equipped myself. Jackie used to sit with the bookkeeper and saw what they did and how they did it, and then they offered her the job. She said she went on her knees and asked "God, can I do this?" She wrote to her sister, Linda, and my son in law told her to take the job. She even went to the pastor at the church and spoke about the big responsibility the job was and the pastor also advised her to take the job, as she has been with them for 27 years, so obviously they saw something in her. So, she took the job and the first year, I was so proud of my daughter. They called me to the AGM and in that AGM the drug counsellor said that for the first time, they had the

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most perfect financial report. It never happened before. I told her that I was so proud of her. Every year they say they get perfect reports since she has been in that position. She does not have matric, she taught herself.

My son also made it. He was made IT manager at his company, he does all their projects for them. I don't like the company he is working for, you know Black empowerment, but he said as soon as he gets something better, he will move on, but, you cannot move on today until you know you have got something else. Linda studied finance. I think now that the children are growing up, she might find a half day job in finance. She says it's just for pocket money, she is going to get bored as the children are growing.

The story of Sonu from Nepal – Executive member of IDWF and Home Workers Trade Union of Nepal (HUN)

Sonu worked as a domestic worker from the age of 7, she is 29 now. She starts her story like this:

When I was first hired, I was told that I would be playing with the other kids, and taking care of the kids, but from the very first day, I was never allowed to play or look after the kids. I had to do all the household chores, like cleaning, the dishes, washing clothes, cleaning the house. When I was 7 years old, I didn't know how to wash properly, and I had washed the dishes near the well, they had a family water well, then the dishes was still dirty, so when the grandmother of the house saw the dirty dishes, she slapped me. They were a big family ad she had seven other siblings. She says:

When I was first taken, actually, the employer spoke to my father, and my father was ill at the time, so he let me go easily. Later on, when I complained to my father that my employer does this, my father did not show any reaction. I think it may be that my father was ill. My mother did not care at all.

They never paid me, it was like, my mother used to come every week, and they used to give her some uncooked rice, about 2 or 3 kgs. They used to

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give that as payment, and sometimes, they would give my mother old clothing.

Then my father got sick and passed away. In our religion, you had to have funeral rights for 13 days, and for that my family needed money. Maybe at that time, my family took money from the employer, and I then had to work there to pay off everything that my family owed. I used to ask my employer often, if the debt was repaid, and they always said no, I haven't repaid the debt yet. I ran away from that house. I don't know whether the money was repaid or not.

Sonu went back home and her mother, a domestic worker herself, found her a job in Kathmandu. She came from the Javanese region and her first job was in Java, about 30 minutes from her home. She says:

When I arrived in Kathmandu, I felt that the work was not as hard as before, because in my previous job, even though I was very small, I had to go to the forest to gather wood, to cut grass for the cow, so when I was working in Kathmandu, I felt that the work was not as hard. I was working in Kathmandu, I didn't look left or right, just did my work, and there was one organisation that had a door to door campaign, that came to my employer's house, and they had just started an outreach, a campaign, for child labourers to be sent to schools. They saw me and told my employers to send me to school. After three or four days, I was sent to the informal school. It was a nine-month course, so I first started with that informal course, I didn't go to school directly. The informal classes were only for about two hours a day, so I had to finish all my work in the morning, and by 11 my work was done, I would then go to the school, and return by lunch time.

After nine months, I had this feeling of how would I feel if I was sent to a real proper school, how would I look, would I wear a uniform? I spoke to my employer and they said that I couldn't go. At first they didn't have a problem letting me go to the informal school as it was only for two hours, but going to a proper school would require going the whole day, and they

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> did not agree to that. Later on, the same organisation, CWISH[19], came and spoke to my employer about sending me to school and then my employer agreed, but said that all the fees and expenses, the organisation had to bear. The organisation sent me to a morning school that started at 6 o' clock until 10 o'clock and they paid for my uniform, the school bag, shoes, and everything. Then only did my employer send me. Until I reached class 10. Then they paid for my expenses for school only. I worked for the organisation and I saved a little money, and with that money, I went to college, paying my own expenses.

Again, Sonu was not paid and says:

> At first, they alluded that they would pay me 300 rupees, and I thought that maybe before I went to school, they gave the money to my family, but once I started school, they didn't pay anything at all, there was no talk of it at all. Actually, I don't know, when I went to the informal school, my employer said that they paid my family, but I spoke to family members, and they said they didn't receive anything.

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Sonu says that her employers were rich:

> At first the husband was a government employee and the mother was a teacher, and after they retired, they opened a very big department store, like a wholesaler, because other stores would buy from them as well. When I joined them, they were already retired, and the employer also used to deal with lands.

She describes the work she had to do in the household, she was 10 or 11 then:

> I used to do everything. In Java, with my previous employer, I wasn't allowed to cook because they didn't eat the things I touched, but when I came to Kathmandu, I basically had to do everything; cooking, washing, cleaning, etc.
>
> I never felt like my employers got me to the house because they loved me or cared for me. I always knew that I came there to work, and I always had that

[19] Children and Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH) is a child rights organisation working for child domestic workers' rights in Nepal.

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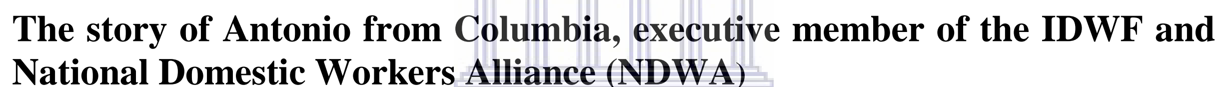
> love for studying, and I felt like if I did a good job, they would send me to school and they would continue allowing me to school, so if I don't work, if I go here and there, they wouldn't let me go to school, that was my motivation, going to school.

Sonu carried on working for this employer, waking up at 5am to go to school and did housework when she returned at 10.30am. She did this until she completed her schooling and went to college. She was 27 when I interviewed her and was with the same family since she was 8. She said that they were nice people, but the only thing was that they did not pay her. She was newly married having met her husband, a migrant worker, through Facebook and who knew her sister. At the time of the interview, she was doing a degree specialising in social media and mass communications. She wanted to be a reporter, but was also thinking of going into labour law.

She was still not paid, but had plans to go and live with her husband when obtaining her degree.



The story of Antonio from Columbia, executive member of the IDWF and National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)

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Antonio was 38 and pregnant with her first child at the time of the interview. She started domestic work at the age of 15. She started working as a domestic worker as her parents were trying to prevent her from getting pregnant at a young age as her sister did, she says. After a few stints as a domestic worker and in one in a supermarket, she landed a job with the brother of the president. Here below is her story:

> The lady treated me very bad. They didn't like that I ate the bread that they ate. She preferred that it was spoilt, rather than have the women eat it. Two other ladies also worked there. She would buy a different type of bread of us. It was a cheaper type of bread that she bought for the maids.
>
> I stayed there like half a year, I didn't like the way we were treated by the lady. After my brother died, and my sister was also working, I wanted to be with my mother for a while, so I came back, but without no money or nothing, I had to go back to Bogota. I wanted to study or something like that, and I went back to another job taking care of an elderly lady, she

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suffered from Alzheimer's, but I liked taking care of her. If she didn't treat me well, I would think that she is just sick.

For example, she would confuse me with someone at the factory that belonged to her husband. She thought that the husband had an affair, and she confused me with that lady, so she would try to kick me out of the house, or hit me with a broom or stab me with a knife. After a while, I wanted to earn a little bit more money, but I didn't move, because the husband could not find someone else who was patient with the lady as I did, so I had to stay for another year.

I moved away to another family, but I regretted it, because I felt it was a bad decision. I worked with another elderly lady, but she didn't pay me much, and then another lady offered me a job where I would earn much more, but when I arrived there, I had to work until 3 am in the morning, so it was very hard. I was there almost two years, it was bad because I broke things in the kitchen quite a bit, and everything I broke was deducted from my salary. I was very emotional, because I was either very happy or very sad, and it was poor working there, and it was complicated, so I asked my cousin to help me find a job taking care of children.

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That is when I started working for the diplomat family, at the age of 23, it was super-easy, the lady was super-nice as well. After a year, they moved to Maryland in the US and they asked me if I wanted to go with. When I arrived with the employers, they asked if I wanted the legal wages that was paid in America, or if I wanted to get paid in Columbian wages, so I said Columbian wages. In reality, I thought and I knew, they weren't paying what they were supposed to be paying in America. The lady explained it to me. The lady was like super-rich, but she could not pay me that amount, but what was really uncomfortable to me when I arrived, was the way she changed, the way she treated me. In Columbia, I was the one in the group of girls that got paid the best. When I felt met the other group in the US, I was the one who earned the least. But, more than the money, I wanted to study for example, and they always put barriers to that.

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In about half a year that I was there, I started to pressure her so that she could give me permission so that I could go out to study, to learn how to drive, but she always had excuses. So I told her that I could do it, and she said that I cannot. So one day, I met other girls that was in worse conditions that I was, and I told this employer that this was unjust and unfair. Sometimes she came back from speaking with someone else, e.g. when she came from a party, and people at the party told her that I like to talk to the other girls and information, so the employer was afraid that I would escape, because it happened a lot. So I told her that I was not going to leave, I would work, but that I was tired and she wasn't helping me. I accepted that she paid me a little, but I wanted a permit to learn how to drive, I wanted to learn a little bit of English, etc. She was very upset but after 15 days of that, they started talking among themselves how the girls left for many different reasons. When one day the lady said "they left, they left", I said "yes, they are leaving because of the unfairness, and I am helping them to find another job". So the employer started to respect me a little bit more, and she helped me find a job for another girl. That is how I learnt about the organisation, CASA which is an abbreviation which means home.

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It is an organisation that defends the workers and immigrants in general. I became a volunteer and at the end, I realised that I was an activist. I was very upset that they brought you from your country to humiliate you, and they expect that you should feel grateful that you were brought to the US, even if they didn't pay you a fair salary, even if they treated you badly, and that is the reason why I ended up fighting for the migrant workers.

The story of Lita from Indonesia, executive member of the IDWF and National Network of Domestic Workers Advocacy (JALA PRT)

I also interviewed women who were executive members of the IDWF, but never worked as domestic workers before. One such remarkable woman is Lita Anggraini, and here is her story.

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Lita was raised in an upper middle-class family in Semarang, a city in Jakarta. She hated seeing poverty of those around her and it troubled her deeply. Her grandmother had a significant influence on her life. She says:

> My family, especially my grandmother, educated us that we as human beings have a social function and if we do something, you must do it with all your heart, and with love, and you must give your life to the work that you do.

Her grandmother helped her neighbours who were poor and saw to the sick and needy in the neighbourhood. Lita attended university and studied in the Socio-Political Department. Although her parents expected her to find a job in the civil service after graduating, she became an activist and joined a political group. She noticed that poor women suffered the worst forms of oppression. To help alleviate the abuse and injustices that women faced, Lita and a group of her friends formed he Yogyakarta Women's Discussion Forum. They were however hounded by the military police for organising demonstrations and for championing gender equality. Affected by the death of an abused domestic worker in 1992, Lita and her friends decided to concentrate on helping domestic workers.

Once she began working with domestic workers, Lita realised that in order to empower these women, they had to be educated and established the School for Domestic Workers in 2003. She understood that most of these marginalised women were brought up to accept their fate and usually were constrained by religious and cultural norms. The main aim of the education provided by her school was to instil confidence and so empower these women. They identified women to attend this school in the following way:

> First we identify domestic workers with potential to be educated, and how sensitive and responsive they are to situations, and if they have initiative to take action and willingness to organise and gain support, how to campaign, how to convince people and women in the community to tame the problems. They are chosen to attend the school and then sent back into the community to practise what training and knowledge they have received.

Realising that most domestic workers are isolated and invisible in private homes, she set up houses in several neighbourhoods where women can meet and share experiences. Upon graduating from her school, graduates were given the opportunity to become leaders in their groups.

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In 2004, these informal groups joined to form a domestic workers' union, the first of its kind in Indonesia. It registered with the Department of Manpower in 2007, and have actively but peacefully demonstrated for domestic workers' rights. Realising that a national movement was necessary, she established the national Network of Domestic Workers Advocacy, which lobbies for domestic workers' rights. There are five unions attached to this network and all are affiliated to the IDWF.

Conclusion - stories yet to be told

In the next two chapters I analyse the narratives above as well as the other narratives I collected in terms of my research questions. The other women I interviewed are all members of unions that are affiliated to the IDWF or belong to organisations that support the work of the IDWF. They are all very proud of being activist and have asked me to mention them by name, which I have done in Chapter Six.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

RECOVERING VOICES: THE ROAD TO ACTIVISM

Introduction

The next two chapters charts my own personal journey with domestic worker activists, the narratives I collected, the analysis thereof in terms of the research questions I am asking and a dialogue with the larger conversation that I am joining within the scholarship on domestic workers.

In this chapter, I discuss the key themes that emerge in domestic workers' narratives on their journey to becoming activists and international leaders. When unpacking the themes prevalent in the narratives, I found that there seemed to be common processes that contributed to the development of political consciousness and becoming activists. I discuss these processes and ultimately their journeys on the road to activism hereunder.

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I first discuss the early years some of the participants, most of whom were child domestic workers. I discuss the exploitative conditions that they were subjected to and the agency that they developed in resisting such slave-like conditions. I then discuss the organisational networks they joined which contributed to the development of agency and served to instigate their mobilisation and activism. For the participants in this study their narratives flag the value they place on learning. They prioritised education and this is linked to their becoming activists, as they had a thirst for knowledge that shifted their understandings through reading and learning. I then discuss the role religion played in developing agency and becoming leaders that wanted to serve their constituents. Thereafter, I explore the link between domestic worker leaders' activism and the relationships they have with their employers. A common thread throughout this chapter and the next are the political factors that influenced domestic worker mobilisation and activism.

I do not claim that the experiences of the women I interviewed are representative of all domestic worker leaders, however I believe that many of the issues that they shared, for instance, the discrimination that they faced; the education that they sought; their leadership aspirations and

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the desire for better lives for themselves and their peers, are typical of the lives of most domestic worker leaders.

I am conscious of the fact that by sharing four stories in the previous chapter that there might be some overlap in extracts and quotations, however in this section I discuss the implications those extracts and quotations have for my study.

The early years

Most of the women I interviewed began domestic work at a very young age; most were in their early teens. They all had similar stories to tell. Those who had left school at a very young age were in the majority and having received very little education, they sought to usually help their impoverished parents and siblings through domestic work; one of the very limited avenues open to them for employment. Studies have shown that most children enter domestic work because of extreme poverty, where parents are usually unable to support their families and children have to go out to work (Kehily, 2008; Nengroo & Bhat, 2017; Pal, Pal, Tiwari & Bharati, 2011). According to Kehily (2008, p. 1), "as long as poverty exists in all its nakedness, child labour is bound to exist in either open or disguised form". Other factors "include a large family size, unemployment, lack of educational facilities, parental illiteracy and ignorance about the importance of education" (Pal et al., p. 377). In my study, some began domestic work as young girls who were assisting family members with their cleaning duties in the homes of their employers, and then just carried on being domestic workers. Such findings corroborate local studies such as Marais and van Wyk's (2015) study in South Africa, where assisting family members was the point of entry for most domestic workers.

According to the ILO, child domestic workers are children between the ages of five and 17 years, who perform domestic tasks in the homes of third parties or employers with or without remuneration[20]. The ILO estimates that in 2012, approximately 17.2 million children aged between five and 17 years were engaged in domestic work globally; 5.7 million were boys and 11.5 million were girls[21]. The ILO's Minimum Age Convention 1973[22] , sets the legal age where children are allowed to work at 15, however compulsory education has to be completed.

[20] International Labour Organisation. Child domestic work: Global estimates 2012. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/ipecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=23235.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Minimum Age Convention 1973 (C138).

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Where a state's economy and educational facilities are not sufficiently developed, the minimum age might be 14. The overall aim of this convention is to protect children from exploitation and abuse. Another convention to protect the interest of child workers, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999[23] (WCFL), focusses on the prohibition and elimination of four categories of child labour. Domestic work undertaken by a child falls into two of those categories, namely:

- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; and
- Work, which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

According to Article 3 of the United Nations trafficking Protocol[24] , if the intention of the adult taking the child is to exploit the child's labour, even if the parent/s agree to the working conditions in a contract, it amounts to trafficking. Both the Minimum Age Convention and the WCFL have given rise to a global consciousness about the forms of exploitation of children that can exist and sought a collective response to the problem. Furthermore, although the Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention (C189) does not prohibit children from working, it does specify that the compulsory education of children must not be compromised by the undertaking of domestic work.

In all of the cases of domestic worker leaders who started out as child domestic workers, their education was not completed before they started working, and their labour was exploited. Indeed, in all cases the Minimum Age Convention and the WCFL was contravened. These were just more examples of conventions and protocols not being implemented and regulated as they relate to domestic workers. Sonu from Nepal, for instance, was only seven when she was bonded to her employers through her family's debt.

The early years were traumatic for most of these young workers; for instance, some had to leave their hometowns and some worked for families that did not speak their own languages. An example is Marcelina from Mexico, who was 14 at the time she became a domestic worker.

[23] C182

[24] Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, (2000, A/55/383 Annex 11) supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime 2000 (2000. A/55/383 Annex 1).

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She came from a poor family and had many brothers and sisters whom she had to help financially. Marcelina only completed primary school. Howell (2017) found in her study on domestic workers in Mexico, that most domestic workers did not have advanced schooling, most did not have the mandatory primary schooling required, and most entered domestic work in their teens. Marcelina, like other child workers in my study, did not have much of a childhood, and abuse and exploitation were her primary experiences. She reflected on her early years, and said she was so young that she had no idea what it meant to work and take responsibility. She says "… because even if it's true that women know how to do the work from home, but when you are being paid for it, it's different. It demands something from you". She would much rather have played with the children that she was charged to take care of. She, like the other young child workers, had to be taught how to do the cleaning duties, take care of children, clean cars and clean gardens at a very young age. Marcelina says she can remember how toxic the chemicals were that she had to clean with and how they damaged her hands. Often, no allowance was made for their inexperience, and abuse inevitably followed. Marcelina recalls for instance, that once when cleaning the washing machine, and it started "shaking" and she did not know how to stop it, her employers hit her with a clothes hanger. She said that was how she was usually punished.

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Abuse of young child workers is a global phenomenon, despite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children insisting that a child's best interest should always be the most important consideration in determining all actions affecting children (Moorehead, 1997). Most of the domestic workers in my study suffered some sort of abuse at a young age. Elizabeth came from a rural area in Kenya and became a domestic worker at 16, because her father had to have his leg amputated and she had to work to support her family who were poor. She also recalls being abused when not being able to perform her tasks properly. Similarly, Sonu, who had to become a domestic worker at the age of seven in Nepal to repay her father's funeral debt, had the same experience. She explains:

> When I was seven years old, I didn't know how to wash properly, and I had washed the dishes near the well, they had a family water well, then the dishes was still dirty, so when the grandmother of the house saw the dirty dishes, she slapped me. Even though I was very small, I had to go to the forest to gather wood, to cut grass for the cow, otherwise they would hit me.

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The abuse included the shocking living conditions these child workers had to endure. Food was usually rationed and of poor quality. Indeed, as cited previously, once you know the food relationship, then you know the whole relationship. Marcelina, for instance, says that her employers took great pains to measure what they ate. Another example is Antonio from Columbia who was also only 15 when she started domestic work. She recalled how her employer would rather have the bread that they eat get spoilt, than allow the domestic workers to eat it. They were supposed to eat a cheaper type of bread. I can only ascribe class discrimination as the reason why Antonio and other domestic workers were not allowed to eat the same type of bread as their employers. It was probably to ensure that the servants remembered their place in the class hierarchy, and to signify that they were not worthy of eating the same foods.

In the same vein, class is probably one of the social indicators that account for why some employers refused to eat and drink anything that a domestic worker has prepared. For instance, Sonu said "In Java, with my previous employer, I wasn't allowed to cook because they didn't eat the things I touched". The domestic workers in Frantz's (2008) study in Jordan had the same experience with their employer. This is not surprising, as often the employment of servants by middle-class homes is a designator of status and class (Ray & Qayum, 2009), as discussed previously. In Sonu's case, as she was Hindu and so were her employers, her caste may also have contributed to their not wanting to eat the food she cooked. Although Tolen and Dickey (cited in Froystad, 2003) suggest class, rather than caste, is the more important factor in mediating the relationship between master and servant in Indian or Hindu households, I agree with Wasiuzzaman and Wells (2010), that it is difficult to differentiate between the effects of caste and class in the employment relationship. Indeed. Froystad (2003) argues that the practices of exclusion are so entrenched that it is difficult for either the servant or the employer to provide an explanation for it. For example, servants do not eat with the employers, and that is so much part of the relationship that no explanation is usually asked for and no explanation is usually given. The reason might also be attributed to the notion that "both employer and servants' expectations (are) rooted in an older culture of servitude" as evidenced by Ray and Qayum's (2009, p. 548) study in India.). Hester and Myrtle also mentioned that they did not share eating utensils with their employers during the Apartheid era in South Africa. This was not surprising, as previous studies mentioned in Chapter Four corroborated their claim (see for instance Cock, 1980; Fish, 2006a; Shefer, 2012). Both class and race were important mediating factors in the employment relationships in South Africa.

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The appalling conditions the child workers experienced were not only limited to them. The ones who were a bit older when they became domestic workers were also treated harshly, and this put them on the path to activism. Some domestic worker leaders were a little bit older when they became domestic workers. For instance, Myrtle recounts that she left school at the age of 17 and wanted to become a nurse. However, she had to wait for years to receive her identity document in Apartheid South Africa. To bide the time, she became a domestic worker. The political situation in the country and the way she was treated, or as she says the scars she accumulated as a domestic worker, put her on the path of activism. The conditions were inhumane; for instance, you could not live with your children and when your parents died you were expected just to bury them and return to work. She says that when one of her parents died, her employer even had the temerity to say you could cry when your work was done. Of course she says she did not want to cry then; so the attitudes of employers towards them made them want to fight back, she recalls.

Once again it is apparent, that no matter the laws and conventions in existence to protect domestic workers, if there is no enforcing of their implementation, domestic workers will continue to be exploited and abused. The rise of young domestic workers above their slave-like conditions that held them hostage, makes their journey to the executive of the IDWF all the more remarkable and worthy of scrutiny. It will be shown in this chapter that it is the agency that they developed and the resistance they felt towards these exploitative conditions that thrust them on their roads to activism.

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Developing agency in organisational networks

Members of the IDWF that I interviewed were almost all part of organisations and societal networks that operated to empower their membership base. The first step on the road to activism that almost all the domestic worker leaders took in my study was to join organisations outside of the family houses in which they worked. These were either social, religious, educational, political or labour organisations. Most of these organisations were broadly concerned with social justice and larger mass democratic struggle against Apartheid. It was striking that when they spoke of their experiences prior to joining organisations or unions, they emphasised their feelings of oppression, disempowerment, exploitation and subjugation. However, when they discussed their experiences after joining the organisations mentioned above, the dominant feelings related to agency and empowerment. The organisations they

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joined were not only spaces of mobilisation and activism, but they also served to restructure and give new meaning to domestic worker lives. They were able to make connections with like-minded people and reflect on and discuss their jobs.

Lita, for example, was not a domestic worker but an activist who established a domestic workers network in Indonesia that is affiliated to the IDWF. Lita's organisation assisted domestic workers who presented with women's issues; for instance, assisting victims of domestic violence, those who needed support for their children, and other problems that affected marginalised women. They campaigned against some of the issues these women presented with and ensured that these women were assisted and their skills upgraded.

These organisations were able to show domestic workers that they had a membership of women just like them, and they could thus see themselves in each other. By forging a collective identity, they were able to embrace the fact that they were complex beings with feelings and emotions. They reinforced each other's worth and valued the education they received, not only through structured activities in these organisations, but also from each other. In most cases, domestic worker leaders reported that after joining these organisations, they felt empowered and no longer thought domestic work was an unworthy profession. As Marcelina says:

> Quite frankly, as I started to work, I didn't like domestic work, because it was very marginal. It discriminated in a way because it's a job that is not valued by society. I remember when I was younger, and I was doing this work, many people discriminated against me. That didn't make me feel good. So all the work I did in the Church was to be more aware and I saw the value of the work and also, because it was a job, thanks to this, I was able to maintain my family. I also saw myself in many other women, who were in the same situation that I was. I think that that's what helped me to be here.

Forging a collective identity as domestic workers and as women of colour allowed for the formation of alliances across common goals, resulting in these organisations serving as incubators for mobilisation. As Parmar (1990, p. 106) notes, "to organize self-consciously as [Black] women was and continues to be important; that form of organization is not arbitrary, but is based on a political analysis of our common economic, social and cultural oppressions". Sudbury (1998, p. 13) also saw the importance of these organisations as spaces for mobilisation and commented thus:

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> Black women's autonomous spaces offer fertile ground for the examination of the intersection of economic, ideological and political structures, forces and counterforces ... Yet these organizations have been largely ignored by sociologists and historians alike.

Not much has changed since Sudbury made these comments about Black women's organisations; that is, the organisations that domestic workers usually join as a precursor to activism and unionism are largely ignored by scholars.

Even child domestic workers who joined organisations reported feeling more empowered. Participation in organisations increased their agency, usually by providing them with education and skills training. Often the training was directed at teaching children strategies to make better decisions and to solve problems, thereby increasing the children's psychosocial competency (Jensen, 2007). Ahsan (2005) refers to Save the Children (an NGO) as an example, where children are taught to negotiate with their parents and employers when needed (cited in Jensen, 2007).

Migrant domestic workers also have many of these organisations championing their cause. These organisations waged important campaigns on behalf of migrant workers, and existed to provide support to the migrant communities, especially those who want to exercise agency and change their circumstances. An example of such an organisation is the Asian Migrant Centre in Hong Kong, where migrant care workers are encouraged to participate in entrepreneurial activities facilitated by the Centre. These activities help them become financially secure, whilst resisting their economic marginalisation and unleashes what Gibson, Law and Mckay (2001) calls their "multiple economic identities", that is, being both domestic worker and business person at the same time.

Another example is the Migrant Resource Centre in London, which offers weekly literacy support sessions to migrant workers. North's (2017) study explored a group of domestic workers from India and Nepal's engagement with different forms of learning, and found that "different combinations of different forms of learning may be important to support literacy learning that is both useful (or "functional") and "empowering" to particular women" and that "particular learning needs are shaped by their lived experiences, practices, and aspirations" (p. 197). She advised that close attention be paid to find out what kind of learning the women themselves valued. Like the women in my study expressed, they enjoyed these interventions,

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not only for the education they received, but also for the supportive friendship groups they formed. They also indicated that the learning was associated with a change of confidence and identity.

I found that most of these networks as discussed above, functioned to educate and to instil a sense of servant leadership, defined, discussed and critiqued hereunder, which were two very important aspects in empowering these women, and were determinants in them becoming activists. Those organisations that instilled servant leadership were usually religious organisations. Religious organisations, Williams (1998) found, were usually responsible for the creation and perpetuation of personal and group identity, which was especially important for migrant workers. I discuss both attributes separately hereunder.

Carving a pedagogy for domestic worker agency and activism

Paulo Freire (1970), the celebrated Latin American educator and liberation theologist, believed pedagogy was a process of liberation, that is, he believed that education had the potential to liberate the oppressed. Through his work, marginalised people were able to tell their stories and to tap into their political rights. In his liberating education he uses the concept of 'conscientizacao', translated to mean critical awareness, which is the process by which the marginalised become more aware of the sources of their oppression, which leads to empowerment and thus liberation from their oppression (Thomas, 1992). The narratives of participants in this study indicate how much they valued learning, whether formally or informally, how they developed a critical awareness of their oppression through organisations and unions that empowered them and put them on the road to activism.

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Many women enter domestic work as they are not able to access formal education, and many participants raised this as a reason why they entered into domestic work. This is the case for instance, for women in the rural areas of Indonesia. According to Lita, the reasons are two-fold; firstly, the economy cannot support the number of its citizens wanting to access higher education and secondly, women cannot easily access education as a result of gender discrimination in families. Women have to work to ensure that their male siblings can afford to go to school, and they also have to forego schooling to work and support their families. Indeed, girls from poor homes having to forego their education in order for the boys in the family to be educated is a global problem. Patricia Lone from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a United Nations (UN) programme, had this to say:

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> When a poor family considers how much a daughter can help in cleaning, cooking, collecting wood and water, and looking after younger children, and how little opportunity there will be for her to get a paying job even if she is educated, then the returns rarely seem to warrant the expenditure. So it is usually the daughters who are withdrawn from school. Even when girls are enrolled, the burden of domestic chores stands in the way of educational progress
>
> …Close behind poverty follows tradition. And perhaps the strongest tradition of all is the idea that sons should be educated because they will be the breadwinners of their own future families, and the supporters of their aging parents. A girl's work, though it may be longer and harder, is considered less likely to bring in monetary income. And in cultures where marriage means that a daughter becomes part of her husband's family, the incentive to educate girls is weaker still. Yet when asked, many poor families will say that they want their daughters to be educated (https://www.unicef.org/pon96/edgirls.htm).

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Besides helping their families with domestic chores at home, girls from poor homes often also have to find jobs. The obvious choice of work with no schooling requirements would be domestic work. Indeed, having to work and support families were the reasons most domestic worker leaders gave me for entering domestic work. However, all had a passion for learning.

Such was Shirley Pryce's passion that she had to sleep in a dog house to attain an education. She worked for a family for nine years and wanted to study. However, she was a live-in domestic worker and her employers didn't approve of her having time off. When she enrolled for evening classes, she returned to find the door locked. They did not answer the doorbell nor opened when she knocked, so she slept in the dog house. This happened repeatedly, she maintains (Pryce, 2017). After attaining her education, Shirley started organising domestic workers in Jamaica, and no longer works as a domestic worker, but is the Founder and President of the Jamaica Household Workers Union (JHWU). In fact, Shirley's story was told at the International Labour Court (ILC) at the ILO, and she became the first domestic worker granted voting rights for the passing of C189 (Fish, 2017).

Almost all of the domestic workers I interviewed spoke at length about their desire to learn whilst working as domestic workers; acquiring new skills, and about enrolling and completing

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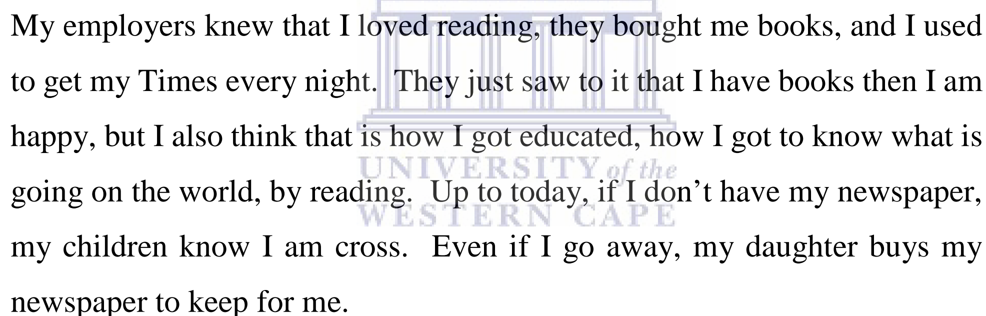
courses. They felt that an increased level of education would provide them with better opportunities, would allow them to demand better wages and benefits, but also more importantly increase their self-esteem, confidence and make them feel better about themselves and what they did. As many were denied what they would think was a good education, I picked up almost a fervour among them to learn and gain more skills. Most did not have the time to do so as they worked seven days a week, but they somehow managed to find extra time, usually on Sundays. Some such as Lulu from Tanzania, worked as domestic workers in order to find money to study. She had completed her schooling and was encouraged to do A-levels, but had no money to do so. She obtained a diploma in business information technology, but continued to be an active member of the union. In the case of Myrtle and other South African domestic workers, the Apartheid laws ironically served some good cause. Black people were prohibited from going out at night, there were no busses for them and they could not go to safe beaches; they thus took refuge in reading in their spare time and so started their education.

Myrtle says:



> My employers knew that I loved reading, they bought me books, and I used to get my Times every night. They just saw to it that I have books then I am happy, but I also think that is how I got educated, how I got to know what is going on the world, by reading. Up to today, if I don't have my newspaper, my children know I am cross. Even if I go away, my daughter buys my newspaper to keep for me.

The extra-familial organisations that most domestic worker leaders joined provided workshops and other classes that improved their skills, taught them about their rights and generally educated them. My research suggests that the educational opportunities provided by these organisations, such as the one founded by Lita in Indonesia as mentioned in the preceding section, empowered these women to take control over their own lives and to exhibit agency. The organisation that Lita founded later became a school for domestic workers. Lita's school in particular, offered sessions on organising, knowledge and skills transfer, advocacy, campaigning and using computer information technologies. These organisations often further offered seminars on societal constructs such as gender, race and class, and the effects of intersections on their lives. Organisations such as these enlightened and educated their members to increase self-awareness and to empower them to change their and other lives around them. Empowerment is an ongoing process, according to Tromp (2008), and is realised

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by assessing opportunities, information, support and resources continuously. In terms of this definition, domestic worker leaders that I spoke to were certainly empowered. They were empowered to find their own voices and to recognise the power thereof in effecting change. Most of these organisations paid a lot of attention to consciousness raising, thereby increasing social and political consciousness and an awareness of their oppression.

Many of the domestic worker leaders I interviewed spoke about the benefits of education and why it was important to them. Some just had an innate love for learning, such as Sonu, the child-worker who obtained a college degree, but was still a domestic worker when I interviewed her. She said:

> I never felt like my employers got me to the house because they loved me or cared for me. I always knew that I came there to work, and I always had that love for studying, and I felt like if I did a good job, they would send me to school and they would continue allowing me to school, so if I don't work, if I go here and there, they wouldn't let me go to school, that was my motivation, going to school.

It was a NGO Children and Women in Social Service and Human Rights (CWISH, Nepal) that turned her life around completely. CWISH works in three programmatic pillars, namely child protection, rights to education and family empowerment (http://www.cwish.org.np/). They implored her employers to allow her to do a 2-hour course every day. She says:

> When I studied at that unofficial school, I really had the urge to go to a formal school, wear uniform, have bags, etc., and I wanted to join a formal school. While I was at the unofficial school, we had sharing, some of the child labourers who were at the school said their employers would be sending them to formal school afterwards, and I also wanted to go, so I spoke to my employer that I also wanted to go to formal school, but they didn't allow it. Then I asked the staff at CWISH who was teaching me to talk to my employer again. When the CWISH people spoke to my employer again, my employer agreed to let me go to school, but they would not bear the expenses, so the organisation paid for my school admission, bags, school books, everything. I arrived back from school at 10.30 and still completed all my work for the day.

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Sonu obviously wanted to be like other children, where attending school was the norm. Besides making representations on behalf of the child workers to their employers, CWISH also empowered their charges, even going as far as teaching child workers to speak to their employers. When the course was finished, Sonu and others were encouraged to establish a small group, called Good Friday that would meet every week and share experiences, including their hardships. When later on more child labourers from other CWISH groups attended their meetings, the name was changed to Domestic Child Club, and Sonu became the secretary. One of the first campaigns they undertook was to advocate that schooling should be compulsory for all children; this was the start of Sonu's journey into activism. They knew that some children were embarrassed about being child labourers, so they went to different schools, did presentations, explained what it meant being a child labourer doing domestic work, spoke about their rights and to their credit, many different child clubs and groups were established. The formation of the Domestic Child Club led to the formation of a domestic workers' forum.

Some child workers such as Sonu managed to attend school in the little spare time they had. Despite the fact that scholars found that young child workers did not do as well in class as children who did not work (Bezerra, Kassouf and Arends-Kuenning, 2009; Chandra, 2008), there are exceptions, and Sonu for instance, went on to graduate with a university degree whilst working as a domestic worker.

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Antonio from Columbia also desperately wanted to study further. She worked full time, but on Sundays she had some extra time, and that is when she took some technical courses and that is when more opportunities opened up for her. She went to church, joined youth groups and that is how she started her activism. When her employer refused to give her permission to study, to learn English and to drive, she joined the organisation called CASA[25] as a volunteer, an organisation that fought for the rights of workers and immigrants in particular. CASA, according to Antonio, taught her and others much needed skills in becoming leaders, avoiding abuse from employers and also how to heal from violence and humiliating experiences. They also imparted life-skills, such as how to know oneself in order to make better decisions, how to get mentally and emotionally stronger, and how to persist against the odds in domestic worker activism. She says that whilst volunteering for this organisation, she realised she was an activist. Of interest was that she said that the campaigns they embarked on were about personal transformation and not necessarily about their wants. For instance, the General

[25] Casa means home in Spanish.

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Somatic Course that was organised for domestic worker leaders, strengthened them emotionally for leadership challenges. The courses centre on getting to know yourself; how to become self-aware in the midst of fear, and how to take care of your emotional and psychological health. Antonio describes these courses as a form of meditation. Such was the value of these courses that at times Antonio even paid others to do her chores and look after the children, in order to give her time to attend. She proudly says in figurative speech that CASA was the university that she never got to attend, and the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which is an affiliate of the IDWF is her Alma Mater, the place where she did her doctorate.

Upgrading her skills was Marcelina's priority as well. She says that for many years there were many NGOs that trained, educated and empowered domestic workers in Mexico, as there were over 12 million of them and not many had formal education. It was the dream of most to further their studies and acquire new skills. In Howell's (2017) study in Mexico, she also mentions that the dream of obtaining further education was a theme that recurred throughout her interviews, as education was deemed to play an "important role in the survival strategies of poorer rural and urban households" (p. 399). In Marcelina's case, it was only after she received training from these NGOs and improved her skills that she started organising domestic workers, and was able to put into practise everything she learnt.

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When interviewed, Josephine from Malawi and other young leaders believed that they were chosen as leaders in their unions because they were literate, they had some schooling and knew how to communicate with people. They attended workshops where they were trained and that gave them the edge. Lulu for instance entered domestic worker to earn money in order to do a tertiary diploma, having completed her schooling. She thought she was chosen as a leader, as she was an active member and was able to write proposals and reports. Besides having a university diploma, she was lucky enough to attend different courses on leadership. Other skills, such as computer literacy, are basic skill that domestic worker leaders need as well. Attending global conferences and making speeches and taking notes goes with the job. I recall when I was facilitating a conflict-resolution session with SADSAWU, Hester the President was very upset as the younger members gossiped about her not being able to use the computer. Although NGOs and universities did assist SADSAWU members by providing many courses on Saturdays for domestic workers to acquire these skills, Hester explained that it was not easy to become fully computer literate if you did not have a computer of your own, as you could not

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practise. The price of computers put them out of reach of many domestic workers and it is mainly office bearers who work in offices that would have the use of computers.

For Myrtle too, being an outspoken leader and sitting on many committees required that she had computer skills. When the ILO asked Myrtle in 2009 to chair the IDWN, she realised that she had to start using the computer very quickly. She recalls:

> …. but the funniest part of it was that I never worked on a computer, but everybody else was doing it. I know the computer, I see the computer, and I stand next to the computer when Elma types my letters, but I don't work on it, but I didn't say anything to them. So now we will have to work on the computer, I will have to take stuff from the ILO from the computer and check on it. When I got back, I said to Elma[26], "Elma, where is that old computer of Tony[27]?" She said it was in the drawer and I said 'bring it here, put it here in front of me." I said to the computer "you are not going to conquer me! I am going to do it." Two months later, I could respond to the ILO, I am not perfect, Geraldine[28] still helps me, this one still helps me, but I know how to negotiate, I know how to open stuff, I can respond my emails. I am not perfect, but when I draw up something, I ask them to help me, and things like that, but I did it! I said to myself "you are not too old to learn." Whenever we have a meeting in the ILO, South Africa and COSATU, made me a speaker, for South Africa, and then the government come to me and say "will you speak for South Africa on domestic workers? Just the way you speak, just tell these people in the ILO." That is how it happened.

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As emerged in participants' narratives, in order to be domestic worker leaders it is also important to get to know the labour laws of the country, and to get to know the legal institutions that operate in your country. I was fortunate enough to be invited to a joint workshop presented by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) for SADSAWU members in March 2018. The CCMA "is a dispute resolution body established in terms of the Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 (LRA). It is an independent body, does not belong to and is not controlled by any political party, trade union or business" (CCMA, 2018). Members of SADSAWU were schooled on

[26] Elma was the administrator in the COSATU offices in Cape Town
[27] Tony is the General Secretary of COSATU in Cape Town
[28] Geraldine worked in the COSATU offices at the time

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how to refer labour disputes to the CCMA. The SAHRC on the other hand is a Chapter 9 institution, that is, it is provided for by the Constitution of the country to protect democracy. Its mandate is the following:

- promote respect for human rights and a culture of human rights
- promote the protection, development and attainment of human rights
- monitor and assess the observance of human rights in the Republic (SAHRC, 2016).

Members of SADSAWU were also provided with information on how the SAHRC operated, how the SAHRC could assist them, and how they could refer any complaints to them. It was very useful training and empowered the leaders present. Domestic worker organisations have these kind of workshops on an ongoing basis.

The non-union based organisations that the workers in this study joined, were usually stepping stones to either joining unions or forming unions. Indeed, it is usually a deliberate strategy on most of the organisations' part not only to increase the number of members they have, but to also create many alliances with other labour groups, justice groups, students and even employers (Bapat, 2014; Boris & Nadasen, 2008; Goldberg, 2015; and Poo & DWU, 2010, cited in England 2017). In doing so, the fight for domestic worker rights is framed within the broader framework of structural inequalities. In unions and some of these organisations they receive a political education where they usually begin to understand the sources of their oppression, or in Freire's (1970) terms develop a critical awareness. Through processes of collective learning and knowledge production members are able to create their oppositional tactics and practices. Included in this education is often the rights of domestic workers, the legal frameworks in which they operate, and how to counter the prevalence of exploitation. As most of the members are domestic workers or were previously domestic workers, peer mentoring is standard practice. As Gillian says: "So, for me teaching other people what I know, I think that is one of the greatest things out of the union"; many other interviewees agreed with this sentiment. Gillian and her colleagues in Trinidad were able to teach domestic workers about their rights and the laws that cover them, by hiring a car and a caravan to go into different communities. She says that it educated them and it educated her, in fact, it made her a little stronger.

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The role of religion in domestic worker activism

> Surely God does not change the condition of People until they change that which is in themselves.
>
> - Quran, Ch 13, V111
> Painted on the wall of SADSAWU Hall at Community House

> Faith is the source of my power.
>
> - Iman Ali, the 4th Caliphi
> Painted on the wall of SADSAWU Hall at Community House

I have not been able to find any literature on the influence of religion on domestic worker activism. However, the ability of religious institutions to mobilise women is not a new phenomenon, nor is religion's role in the liberation from other forms of oppression. Indeed, Liberation Theology which emerged in Latin America (Mayo, 1999), focused on the role of human agency in the liberation from oppression. In the social sciences too, many scholars have documented how people pray as a means of reducing stress, and that prayer has a positive effect on well-being (Krause, 2004; Kwilecki, 2004). Ozorak (1996) too maintains that women use cognitive strategies and their faith to empower themselves in trying times. However, Freire argued that traditional religion can be fatalist and functions to preserve the status quo, that is, it explains oppression in terms of God's will (Mayo, 1999). Religion can also have negative effect on the career advancement of women, as Gama and Willemse (2015) argue that historically, religion has been one of the factors that was responsible for the inadequate educational opportunities offered to women. They cite the USA as an example where the education of women was directed towards studying the scriptures under male supervision and guidance, ensuring that they were not independent thinkers. One of the other goals of the education of "American women was to make them more efficient in performing household chores in the confines of marriage and reproduction" they argued (p.726).

Religion has played an important role too in the lives of migrants, especially in their new destinations, and has been theorised since the 1950's by Handlin (1973, cited by Williams,

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2008), who wrote about America's migration experience. In recent studies on transnational migration, religion was identified as an important component in the lives of migrant workers in the context of the USA (see Levitt, 1998a, b; Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003; Yang and Ebaugh, 2001, all cited by Williams, 2008). However, studies have also shown that religion is an important factor in migration globally. God is constantly invoked from the departure to entry in the new country and in everyday life, and Magat (2007) contends that this is probably because migration is filled with adversity and crises.

As Magat (2007) explains:

> The process of migration has been described as a 'theologizing process' and studies have shown that immigrants not only continue their religious practices in the new country but become more religious than before. If they were not believers before migrating, they become believers when they migrate, with the Church and its affiliated groups becoming surrogate extended families. Williams charges that while Handlin documented the significance of religion in immigrant communities in their new destination countries, he did not address the religious networks that supports the migrants. Accessing spiritual resources, Williams argues, enables migrants to gain access to a diverse range of power (p. 606).

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When women migrate, their subjectivities shift, and Gilligan (1993) argues that women acquire a sense of morality that favours care and connection. Gilligan's findings are corroborated by Liebelt's (2011) findings in a study of Filipina care workers in Israel. Liebelt argues that to understand the subjectivities of these women, "the understanding of the female political subject has to go beyond conceptualizations of either subordination or subversion, of either repression or resistance" (p. 88). Instead, she argues that the focus should be on women whose subject formation is embedded in Christian practices and morality, which prepare them for "the feminized, racialised and devalued employment niche of migrant care and domestic labour ... Their ethical formation is deeply embodied in that the remodelling of their envisaged selves ultimately depends on corporeal discipline and training" (p. 88).

I found when interviewing the women in my study, that the Christian practices, the care and connection, that both Gilligan (1993) and Liebelt (2011) speak of, often went hand in hand with a sense of servant leadership for all the domestic worker leaders I spoke too, not only those who were migrant workers. However, I could not find any literature on domestic workers

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being described as servant leaders. The term servant leadership was first coined by Robert Greenleaf (1977). He did not narrowly define the term, but broadly encapsulated it as following:

> The Servant-Leader is a servant first … It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead…The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (p. 7).

The central feature of being a servant leader, according to Greenleaf, is going beyond one's self-interest. When people receive services and guidance from others, they will in turn serve and lead more people. The quest of the servant leader is to provide opportunities for followers to grow, and they are motivated by the need to serve (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Greenleaf maintains that the need to serve is vital for good leadership, and Reinke (2004) argues that it fosters a responsibility towards the community. According to Van Dierendonck (2011, p. 1231), "serving and leading becomes almost exchangeable. Being a servant allows a person to lead; being a leader implies a person serves".

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Chen, Chen and Li (2013) maintain that spirit-centred leaderships, which include ethical leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership and charismatic leadership, have many common characteristics, and can thus be classified as the transformational leadership schools. The transformational leadership theory stresses leaders' influence on followers, as the leaders "act through vision, intellectual stimulation, inspiring motivations, and paying individual care" to inspire individuals.

Spears (1995, as cited in Van Dierendonck, 2011, p.1232) identified ten characteristics of a servant leader, namely:

1) Listening, emphasising the importance of communication and seeking to identify the will of the people
2) Empathy, understanding others and accepting how and what they are
3) Healing, the ability to help make whole
4) Awareness, being awake
5) Persuasion, seeking to influence others, relying on arguments not on positional power

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6) Conceptualising, thinking beyond the present-day need and stretching it into possible future
7) Foresight, foreseeing outcomes of situations and working with intuition
8) Stewardship, holding something in trust and serving the needs of others
9) Commitment to the growth of people, nurturing the personal, professional, ad spiritual growth of others
10) Building community, emphasising that local communities are essential in a person's life.

Judging by the ten characteristics above, these strands of servant leadership can be found in most of the stories of the domestic worker leaders. I am however mindful that this theory does should not have a deleterious effect on the construction of domestic workers as leaders, as their identity construction is more complex. Furthermore, the terminology and concepts such as 'a servant first' and 'natural feeling wanting to serve' could be seen to harm the hard-won agency of domestic workers, and might reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with domestic work, for instance, that marginalised sectors should want to serve others. However, I am also aware of the inherent contradiction in the fact that Servant Leadership Theory has been formulated as a management theory for business leaders, and that domestic worker leaders have a working class identity.

The domestic worker leaders I interviewed had however the propensity to attend to the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977). I draw on some examples here and start with the story of Marcelina as it pertains to servant leadership. In order to escape the grind of her intolerable work conditions, she joined a church group to learn handicrafts, where extracting verses from the bible, they reflected on their own lives as domestic workers. Marcelina says that the church gave her a new appreciation of domestic work and understanding that through domestic work she was able to take care of her family, something she could not do otherwise. She learnt that domestic work was not only about a mission to serve, but also to rescue herself and others by taking back their rights. She also learnt that, although they were not respected as domestic workers, human rights in the workplace is extremely important. A group of older domestic workers mentored her about issues pertinent to domestic work and labour law, and by the age of 17, she was organising groups of domestic workers. She says:

> So I continued with the working groups, I attended seminars, and my work was to contact other domestic workers, and we got up to 30 women and we went to spiritual retreats, so the retreats were very special, because for

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> example, the priest would speak to us about gender, about sexuality, self-esteem …

She thus got to learn about organising, an activity crucial in activism, and was subsequently invited to participate in a congress of domestic workers from Latin America and the Caribbean, where she learnt further leadership skills. She returned with increased skills to organise her peers and further the goals of her own and their education, the latter being very important to her. Indeed, most Mexicans from poorer households place emphasis on education, and this is well documented (Howell, 2017).

The empathy for her fellow domestic workers drives Marcelina's commitment to serve and support them. Being a domestic worker herself, she understands their poverty and their suffering, and the exploitative conditions under which they work. In September 2000, she opened a support, training and personal development centre for domestic workers in Mexico City. When I interviewed her, the organisation was doing very well. Workers were able to attend training, find jobs, seek advice, and the centre also acted on their behalf in labour disputes.

Elizabeth Tang, the General Secretary of the IDWF, is a proponent of Freire's liberation theology. In my interview with her she describes how the principles of liberation theology that she learnt at university were what stayed with her long after she finished university. At university she joined the Catholic Student Federation, and in this organisation she learnt about taking care of the poor and marginalised. Although she never worked as a domestic worker, she says she also felt the need to serve. She needed to live Freire's teachings, and the best way to do that was to lend her voice to the plight of marginalised women. In Hong Kong, where she lives, she spent her entire life organising workers. In 1990 she formed the first migrant domestic workers' union, and has since then not stopped representing domestic workers. She maintained that 'democracy' and 'freedom' were principles by which one should live.

Wanting to serve also plays a significant part in Myrtle's activism. She is at the age where she could retire and do so comfortably. She says that her children have urged her to retire as they are able to support her financially. They think she deserves a rest and should spend time with them and her grandchildren. Besides, they say, she wasn't there for them when they were growing up as she was working and was a committed activist. However, Myrtle says she is not ready to relax and just be a grandmother, her work is still not done; her empathy for her peers, her desire to serve them by fighting against their oppression, and the suffering of migrant

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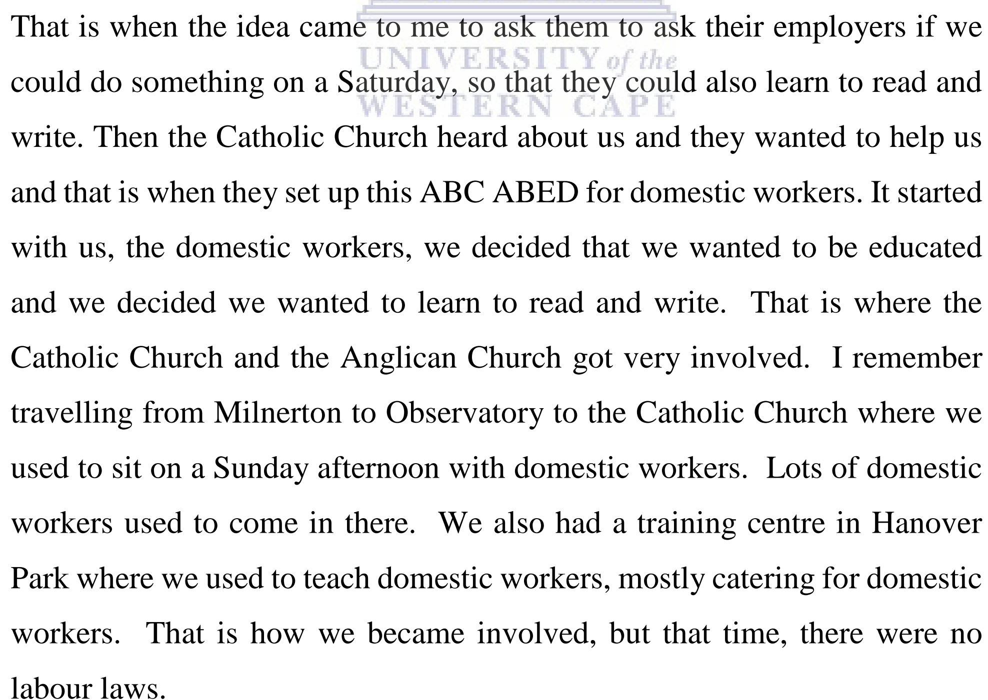
workers infuses her with the will and determination to carry on with her fight, and makes her one of the more powerful domestic worker activists. Her desire to serve other domestic workers stretches back many years; as far back as 1974 she received the Fair Lady award for empowering other workers to speak for themselves, an example of her servant leadership. The award is even more surprising since it was obtained in Apartheid South Africa.

Myrtle invoked God often in her interviews with me. She went to a Dutch Missionary School, where she learnt to read and write, and went to church regularly. Education was a tool used by missionaries to convert the Coloured and African populations to Christianity, whilst the colonists, Gama and Willemse (2015) maintain, wanted Africans to be trained to be good labourers. It would serve the interests of the colonisers if the African population was tradition-bound with no formal education (Zungu, 1977; cited in Gama & Willemse, 2015). This reasoning by the colonists was the basis for the "marginalisation of non-Whites, particularly Black Africans, which started in the colonial era and extended into the Apartheid system" (Gama &Willemse, 2015, p. 726). Myrtle was taught by the missionaries how to read and write, but it was shocking to her when she got to know other domestic workers who were illiterate. She recalls: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> That is when the idea came to me to ask them to ask their employers if we could do something on a Saturday, so that they could also learn to read and write. Then the Catholic Church heard about us and they wanted to help us and that is when they set up this ABC ABED for domestic workers. It started with us, the domestic workers, we decided that we wanted to be educated and we decided we wanted to learn to read and write. That is where the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church got very involved. I remember travelling from Milnerton to Observatory to the Catholic Church where we used to sit on a Sunday afternoon with domestic workers. Lots of domestic workers used to come in there. We also had a training centre in Hanover Park where we used to teach domestic workers, mostly catering for domestic workers. That is how we became involved, but that time, there were no labour laws.

The church thus played a pivotal role in increasing the literacy levels of domestic workers at that time in Cape Town. Myrtle's overwhelming desire though was to help domestic workers. She says:

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> Many people said to me that I should become a women's right activist, or fight for the empowerment of women, but this is what I like: domestic workers' rights. There are still so many challenges, there are still so many things. Yes, we have fantastic labour laws, but how many domestic workers know about it? How many domestic workers understand it? The employers understand it, so that is our task. You see, we are working with people that for instance, if you give a domestic worker something to do, maybe she did not understand what you were saying, but she is not going to tell you. Late afternoon she will say to you "what was that word you said this morning, Sue"? Then you will realise that she was lost. Now you must have the patience to explain to her. Many people will not have that patience to explain to that worker. Whereas I, because I come from there, I understand how I had to learn.

Again, as in Marcelina's case, Myrtle felt that because she was also a domestic worker she understood her peers, and felt the need to help them, showing empathy and stewardship in her leadership style. She attributes her ability to speak out against injustice and not be scared to God: "I think there I discovered that God has given everyone a talent, and my talent was that I could speak and that I don't stand back for the government and I didn't stand back from employers". Similarly, she attributes the fact that she does not hate her oppressors to God, saying God blessed her not to hate. She instilled her deep faith in God in her children. She tells me of the time when her daughter was offered a job and did not know whether she could do it, how she went on her knees and asked God for help. Hr daughter also went to the Pastor of her church to ask whether she should take the job. Even when Myrtle's son passed his final year at school and thanked her, she said "God did it". Of her life to date, especially the fact that her family is doing so well, she says, "God has been good to me, in fact, God has been great!"

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Myrtle's audiences always comment on her ability to speak at large gatherings without any prepared notes. I have seen her in action a few times and she speaks passionately and eloquently, with her audience usually clapping at the incisive points she makes, and she draws standing ovations regularly. She attributes this ability to God. It is this ability to speak to large gatherings too that placed her on the road to lead workers. This is how it started, she says and it is God's doing:

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> I still didn't know that time that God has given me a talent. The night we had the meeting here in Salt River, in a hall, there was about 275 domestic workers, and he[29] made a speech for me. I didn't know that I had this talent, and he gave me this speech. As I went to the stage, I had the speech in my hand, and all of a sudden, I put the speech away and just started speaking, from who I am, and they didn't know that I was a domestic worker, and immediately, all of us just clicked. We started talking and the workers decided that I was the Chairperson. I didn't know what a Chairperson was.

After working as a domestic worker, she worked for a while in a factory. In the factory she became a leader as well and attributes to God:

> My boss called all of us, 450 people, together to say that the union was there. I also just went to the meeting as I wanted to know what was going on. He said that the union negotiated that everyone got an increase, and I think God made me do it, but I put up my hand, and said "excuse me Sir, what union was here?" He said "your union." I again said "what union?" The girls were all looking at me, but the he factory was just about 8 months old. So I said "why do they come and speak to you? Why don't they speak to us?" I was just asking. All of a sudden the workers started clapping. Then I said "I think we need to talk amongst each other. Why must we just accept what you are telling us here? I am sorry sir. I don't know how this workers feel, but this is the way I see it. This is not right what you are doing. You are actually imposing a R2.00[30] on us, you don't ask us how we feel."

It is evident that Myrtle showed many characteristics of servant leadership. She was aware of and understood the needs of her peers and was able to communicate them to make a difference. For both Myrtle and Marcelina, the belief in God influenced their leadership style. For Marcelina in particular, it was working closely with religious institutions that led to her servant leadership.

For instance, Marcelina says:

[29] A journalist who became her best friend at the time.
[30] South African currency.

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> Sometimes we are asked if we are born or are we formed into leadership, but what I am saying is that some we have, and some we learn. I learnt a lot of things because of feeling sad, because your work is not valued, because your work is being discriminated against. So, I remembered that the priest, Ivan, who was our priest who gave us the training and who spoke to us, not as a priest, but as a person who saw us as young people that had dreams, and had no other opportunities, because of the work that we were doing, in my case, domestic work. We would always come in and share with him what happened during the week. We would say that the employers yelled at us, we couldn't go to school, as we worked too much, or sometime we would say "I don't like this job anymore", and he would say "you cannot feel bad because you are a servant", and from our reflections, he would say to us that Jesus was also a servant to others, and that He turned the other cheek, but that we didn't really want to turn the other cheek either. I think it helped us, little by little.

The priest thus compared their being domestic workers to the servanthood of Christ. Osmer (2008) notes that, 'servant leadership is that which influences the congregation to change in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ' (p. 192). In this sense the priest was the servant leader, as he influences his congregation to also practise servant leadership. The biblical teaching is that a leader has to have the moral power and ability to be humble and willingly serve others, as demonstrated by Jesus who washed his disciples' feet. As Marcelina and her peers were religious, the priest was able to quote from the bible to make them feel better about themselves, by making them believe that what they did mattered and who they were mattered, as Christ mattered despite practising servanthood. In this way the stigma of doing domestic work was lessened. By invoking the name of Christ he gave them hope, and rationalised the fact that poor women were domestic workers and the exploitation that they had to endure.

Lita on the other hand, was influenced by her grandmother to practise servant leadership. She was not a domestic worker, but a university graduate who was a domestic worker activist. What was striking was that she did not speak about her university education much, but about the education she received from her grandmother. Her grandmother taught her that human beings have a social function, that whatever they did, they had to do with all their hearts and with love, and that they had to give their lives to the work that they did to serve humankind. With these

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values in mind she made fighting against domestic worker exploitation her life's work. She assisted in opening a school for domestic workers that later became a network, and to which five unions were affiliated. She says doing this was her duty as a woman, as a human being, as a worker and as a citizen.

I have mentioned previously that Lita chose not to get married, as she says she was too busy as an activist to look for and find a partner. She also mentioned that marrying young in Indonesia was a norm, and as she came from a middle-class family and was the only daughter it was expected of her. However, her family came to understand her commitment to the domestic worker struggle and was happy as long as she was. This kind of commitment to the marginalised is a feature of servant leadership that was apparent among most of the domestic worker leaders. Leadership often involves showing the example of self-sacrifice. However, Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) maintain that leaders might use self-sacrifice as an expression of loyalty and dedication to an organisation or a cause or as a symbolic expression of courage and conviction, but also as a strategy to earn credibility and acceptance as a role model.

Antonio too showed a kindness and service to her employer who had Alzheimer's, and an empathy to her fellow workers that is reminiscent of servant leadership. She had the following to say: "They [her family] teach you that helping people is good. Since I was a little girl, I liked to help people and they said that it was okay to help people and I felt good doing it". Myrtle's empathy for her burnt charge, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and staying with her employers to assist in looking after this child stems from her religious background and her desire to serve those less fortunate than her. Hester nursed her employer throughout his struggle with terminal cancer, having worked for the one family for 25 years and having raised their only child. Indeed, care work deeply affects the lives of domestic workers. They enact the spiritual values of care and compassion.

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The compassion that Marcelina felt for her fellow workers extended to extreme generosity. When she applied for and received a scholarship for three years with the MacArthur Foundation[31], she was expected to use the money for herself to further her training on leadership or to attend courses at a university. Instead, she formed the Centre of Support and

[31] "The MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, we work to defend human rights…" (https://www.macfound.org/).

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Training for Domestic Workers. She also used the scholarship to give 40 other domestic workers funding to attend workshops and training. At the end of the three years, she received another scholarship for two years from the Ashoka Foundation[32]. With these funds, she was able to strengthen the base of her organisation. It is apparent that Marcelina practised servant leadership, where it was important to give back to her peers. As she says, she could have taken the money, received further education and left. However, her commitment to the domestic worker fight would not allow her to do so. She believes she had many more opportunities than others, and she had to give back. What makes Marcelina's story more remarkable is that not having sufficient money impacted on her relationship with her husband, as he too did not have a stable income. Their marriage was put under great strain because of the financial instability. However, instead of keeping scholarships and funding she received for herself, she chose to share it with her peers, a reflection of her generosity of spirit and her servant leadership. I found the same generosity of spirit in Myrtle's story. Myrtle's husband "had a weakness for women" as she says and divorced her and married a much younger woman. Yet, she still helped him and his new wife set up a business. Once again though, she attributed her selflessness to God, and said that she was blessed because she did not hate.

Although I have shown that religion has played an important part in the servant leadership of some domestic worker leaders, who also used the church as a vehicle of change and empowerment, many of the ordinary membership of domestic workers, especially migrant workers, are silenced through the church. That is, the church can also function to maintain the status quo. My study is on domestic worker leaders and not on the ordinary domestic worker congregation, so I do not have concrete examples in my study. There are however examples in the literature, such as a case study related to Filipino migrant workers that illustrate the more problematic discursive functioning of the church in maintaining and rationalising oppression, illustrating how the church can also be an example of what Bourdieu termed "symbolic violence". The church can be guilty of "the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 192). It must be noted though that it is not only the church that is culpable of practising symbolic violence; employers usually do it as a matter of course. Many domestic workers feel obligated to their employers, as they receive food, second-hand clothes and the occasional gift, as

[32] "A global organization that identifies and invests in leading social entrepreneurs -- individuals with innovative and practical ideas for solving social problems" (https://www.ashoka.org/en).

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discussed previously. Bourdieu (1977) calls it a “mode of domination” and argues that gentle violence is usually used whenever “whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible” (p. 192).

The Iglesia ni Cristo (INC) is a Filipino church that has expanded to different parts of the world. Religion is very important to Filipinos and more than 80 percent of Filipinos are Catholic (Magat, 2007). Topali’s (2013) study in Greece shows that although the church functions to uphold group solidarity in Filipino immigrant communities, it also serves to silence domestic workers, as it proposes that obedience is the ideal behaviour for female workers in the employer-employee relationship. In the Philippines where the church was founded, it forbids its members from joining labour unions, and according to Topali (2013), the church itself takes on the function of recruitment agency and labour union. The church is able to demand obedience, because besides the Filipino nation being mostly religious, there are businesses in the Philippines that only employ the members of this church, because they are the idealised workers. They have to apologise to the church and to the businesses by which they are employed if their work is deemed unsatisfactory.

In Greece, the church prohibits its members from joining labour unions and recruitment agencies, and also forbids its members from joining the Filipino Workers Association, KASAPI-Hellas, a dynamic immigrant association. Reminiscent of the injunction to Marcelina to follow the example of Christ, Topali (2013, p. 627) maintains that the church requires that “employees are supposed to obey and serve their employers as they serve Christ: like slaves”. An official of the church is quoted as saying:

> OK, here slaves are the servants. Be obedient to those who are your masters. With good will rent your services as to the Lord. So the doctrine here, the teaching here is that the servants or the employees when they are working, they should be working as if they are serving Christ himself (p. 628).

The official went on to say:

> Slaves obey your human master with fear...and do with a sincere heart as though you were serving Christ”. Imagine that? Do this not only when they are watching you because you want to gain their approval, but, with all your heart do what God wants as slaves of Christ. Do your work cheerfully as though you serve the Lord (p. 628).

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When questioned on how the Greek employers react to the obedience of their workers, the official said:

> She will see that this girl of mine never complains and always does her job and even more than I ask her. And even if she doesn't have a good behavior in the beginning, slowly-slowly she will change. She will become calm and she will love her. And she'll say that this servant is the best I've ever had (p. 631).

Of course, not all workers have bought into the church's ethos. As an informant told Topali:

> Yes, sometimes the way they talk, sometimes they talk harshly when you know yourself that you are not stupid at all, and they treat you as one. But we are not slaves! That's sometimes ... [laughing] ... but ... we have to accept that we are helpers […] and that we suffer (p. 635).

It is evident that this church in Greece functions to exact obedience from its immigrant community. In similar vein, Magat's (2007) study of the Filipino community in Rome also examined the notion of servant-hood, and how the gendered interpretation of servitude has a bearing on the belief about domestic worker subservience. Like the domestic worker leaders in my study, domestic workers in her study are not only involved in church activities because of a belief in God, but also for the services that the church can offer them. The state structures do not offer migrant workers much assistance in Italy, however the church plays a significant role in assisting them with services. The church is also a "microcosm' of Filipino society, offering familiar cultural traditions, fellowship and belonging" (Magat, 2007, p. 608). As in Greece, the clergy in Rome also act as employment agencies for migrant domestic workers. However, the services rendered are accompanied by the demand for religious servitude. Magat quotes the following passage from the bible that is used to justify the subservience of domestic workers:

> Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ … knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free (p. 610).

Magat (2007) argues that there is no doubt that the Catholic Church in Rome allowed the Filipino immigrants to succeed, however their biblical understanding of servitude within a colonial cultural context has subjected Filipino domestic workers to obedience and servitude, to the extent that some workers compare their suffering with that of Jesus Christ. However, the

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Catholic Church is also known to be progressive in it fights against oppression globally. In fact, both the Catholic and Anglican churches played a significant role in assisting Black people to fight against injustices in Apartheid South Africa, and had a role in the liberation struggle. This is also evident from the interview I conducted with Myrtle, where she mentioned that they sought assistance from the Catholic Church to provide literacy programmes for domestic workers. Nevertheless, the church, especially the Catholic Church, is a patriarchal institution and the servitude it exacts is gendered, particularly in respect of domestic workers.

However, no matter the depth of servitude domestic workers are conditioned to display, they can still develop agency especially through education. Magat (2007) recounts the story of Selica, who worked in Italy since she was 14 years old and dreamt of going to college. She was however not allowed to leave the house except on her free days and even then she received extra tasks from her employer to complete. Her aunt though discouraged her from telling her employer her dreams to study further and instead advised her to suffer and offer her dreams to God and to shoulder the imperfections of her employer as a spiritual challenge. To her aunt's consternation, Selica had the strength to confront her employer several times. She attributed this confidence to each of the travel experiences that she had. In my opinion, each travel experience brought with it its own education, and education is often accompanied by a sense of self-esteem and agency, as I have discussed before.

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It is evident then that religious institutions such as churches can play a big role in shaping identities. This is evident in my study, and not surprising because of the centrality of religion in these women's lives. Religion has the power to transform women's lives and can either lead to empowerment or domination. It is clear in the lives of domestic worker leaders, that being religious and being educated through religious institutions helped empower them on their roads to activism.

Jumping off pavements: oppression as an agent of change

Each of these women's narratives is set against a backdrop of their own life circumstances, the employers they worked for and a larger political climate in their own countries, which helped to shape their own activism. One of the first reasons that they venture into activism is to counter the exploitation and abuse that employers subject them to, which is well-documented in the literature (see for instance Ally, 2009; Cock, 1980; Motsei, 1990) and that has previously been

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discussed in this study. In fact, COSATU issued a statement in February 2017 that it was "troubled by a spike in the incidents of abuse of domestic workers in South Africa. The federation has been troubled by a number of workers, who have been reporting incidents of abuse by their own employers to the federation"[33]. Unfortunately this is a global phenomenon, as reported by the Human Rights Watch[34]. The literature review showed that employers look for immigrants or women from the rural areas, as they are perceived to be harder working than the locals, quieter and less likely to want to go home all of the time (Carroll, 2004; Hansen, 1990; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Staab & Maher, 2006). These women were easier to exploit as they were usually dependent on them. I found this to be true in my study too.

In Antonio's case, her South American employers who were her compatriots were rich diplomats who treated her very well; she earned the most in her circle of peers. As soon as she went with them to live in the USA, her employers did not want to pay her what other domestic workers were earning and she was the least paid among her peers in America. When she started making demands to be paid more, to learn to drive and to study, her employer turned nasty and their relationship deteriorated.

As discussed in Chapter Three, most domestic workers globally preferred non-native employers. Gillian from Trinidad and Tobago worked for four national and two non-national employers, and preferred working for the non-nationals. She said that with the non-nationals, she was only required to do the cleaning. With those that were native-born, they generally exploited her and required her to do everything, which included cleaning, cooking, babysitting, ironing and many other tasks. The non-nationals also paid her much better wages. Lulu from Tanzania also mentioned that her employers who were from Europe and worked for an international NGO treated her exceptionally well. These non-natives only expected her to do babysitting, albeit a long day from 7am to 5pm.

However, despite being treated badly by their employers, which often set them on the road to activism, domestic worker leaders often showed empathy towards their employers. For instance as mentioned before, Myrtle stayed with one of her employers for 12.5 years, because their daughter was badly burnt and she had taken care of her since she was a baby and loved her very much. The child cried often and needed all her attention, so she had to send her own child away to live with her mother as she could not take care of both children. The often

[33] http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/rise-in-domestic-workers-abuse-in-country-worrying.
[34]https://www.hrw.org.

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unreciprocated emotional labour that is a frequent part of domestic work is well documented in literature "and this emotional labour was not only in relation to children, but also in managing the emotions of parents" (Delap, 2011, p.5). Indeed, Fish (2017) calls domestic work a 'neo-colonial industry', and Romero (cited by Fish, 2017) contends that colonialism stains every part of the global care chain.

Another example is one that I mentioned before of Antonio's employer who suffered from Alzheimer's and thought Antonio was the woman who worked with her husband in his factory, and with whom she thought he was having an affair. She would try and kick and stab and hit Antonio with a broom and kick her out of the house. Yet Antonio felt nothing but pity for her. She said she liked taking care of her, and if she did not treat Antonio well, she would put it down to her illness. When she wanted to find new employment in order to earn a little bit more money, she could not as the husband could not find another domestic worker who was as patient with the wife as she was; so she stayed another year.

Along with the ill-treatment from employers, domestic worker leaders also had to contend with the political climates of their own countries. However, it is only Myrtle who spoke at length about the political situation in her country South Africa. She recounts the pain and horror of growing up and working in Apartheid South Africa, the racist employers she inevitably had, and how it inculcated a high level of racial and class consciousness in her. When interviewing her, it was apparent that she was more politicised than the other participants and her narrative was more political. Not only did the political organisations fighting against Apartheid and the labour unions play a part in shaping her political awareness, her own inhumane experiences in Apartheid South Africa that destroyed her family life and robbed her of her dignity, placed her directly on the path to activism. She remembers how she, her family and peers were treated as sub-human beings.

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She recalls how as domestic workers they 'jumped off pavements' at the sight of White men, as they would be pushed out of the way otherwise, as they were servants. They tried their best to be inconspicuous at all times, for fear of attack. The Apartheid police too, were continuously harassing them, breaking down doors literally, and Myrtle says she learnt how to survive this racial persecution from a young age. I suggest that it is these experiences that inoculated Myrtle against the fear of speaking out against immoral authority. How can it not, when she was repeatedly jailed for rebelling and for speaking out against injustice during Apartheid?

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Myrtle lost both her husband and her eldest daughter to Apartheid. They were subjected to repeated racial abuse:

> … my husband was a little dark of complexion, and my husband was a lifesaver. My employer asked him to teach some of the White children to swim. She would tell her sister's children and her brother in law's children "come, Cedric is going to teach you to swim". So they were very liberal, they were not that "verkramp[35]". They were very nice. All of them were in the swimming pool. Next door to us an Afrikaner family just apartheid police moved in, and this woman looked over the fence and of course she saw this Black guy touching the White children in the swimming pool and that very night, the police kicked down our door. Five times since I worked there. They did that every night until they were satisfied when we moved away.

She had to choose between her husband and her eldest daughter, as she was only allowed one live-in family member, because of the pass laws. As she explains, the pass laws which I discussed previously in this study, were reserved for African people, but Coloured domestic workers were regulated by the 'key law'. Coloured domestic workers could not be out late, could not lock their rooms and if police had any suspicions that they had visitors sleeping over or were involved in any political activity, their doors were usually kicked down and their rooms raided. She had to choose her daughter to live with her as she was only little, so her husband had to move away from his little family, which sounded the death-knell for their marriage. Ultimately she had to give up her daughter too, as she had to take care of her employers' children and she could not cope with housework on top of it. Furthermore, she was scared for the safety of her children, because the Apartheid police did not discriminate between adults and children, as she recalls, "Sometimes, they took little children to jail. They take the mother and child to jail, they say you are not allowed to play, you had no permission". Her family life totally destroyed, she says: "A lot of tears and a lot of things but today, when I look back, I realise that that is what made me what I am today."

Hester Stephens on the other hand worked as a domestic worker for 53 years, and 25 years with the family that she still works for. Unbelievably, although the discriminatory laws of Apartheid have long since been abolished, almost as long as Hester working for her last employer, she still is unable to invite her guests to her room that she has on the property of her employers.

[35] Conservative

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Her employer has to approve and supervise all visits, despite her working for this family for decades. Like Myrtle, Hester had to give up her own son for the new-born child of her employers. This is what she had to say:

> When I eventually had the time to go visit my son, he called me "auntie". Sue, how do you think I felt? I was more a mother to that other child of my employers. My heart breaks …

For many, growing up as women of colour and poor defined their life experiences. Losing family was part of the tragic experiences that put them on the road to activism. For some, their political consciousness and resultant activism developed later in life, especially for all the child workers I have already discussed in preceding sections. Their personal experiences as domestic workers motivated them sufficiently to resist their exploitation and oppression, and the organisations they joined provided them with political voices to challenge their oppression.

From my interviews it was apparent that employers were not always regarded as the enemy – some treated their employees fairly and were considerate, whilst some exploited and/or abused their workers. Those who had a good relationship with their employers fought against the inequalities inherent in the system of domestic work and its legal frameworks, which has the power to oppress within societal structures. Whether some employers were indeed not guilty of exploitation is not the issue, what does matter is that domestic workers thought they were not exploited. For instance, one of the leaders of SADSAWU's employers had a house built for her, to which she could retire. It is hard to rally against or resent employers who show you kindness, and easier to mobilise against the system as a whole. Another example is an argument I had to mediate between two members of SADSAWU. The one member's employer is a psychologist and advised and counselled her employee, Thandi[36]. Thandi felt that the leadership of SADSAWU was unfairly harsh on her and the only comfort she received was from her employer, who became her confidante. She eventually resigned from SADSAWU. In this case, the employer was a trusted ally, whilst the union was not.

Although not all Myrtle's employers treated her with respect, she had a soft spot for the one with the burnt child. After she wrote a letter to a newspaper about the conditions of domestic workers, a reporter came to visit her, as she recalls:

[36] Not her own name.

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> When this coloured guy came to the door, he asked for the servant. He didn't ask for the woman who wrote the letter. He said he is looking for the servant, then he said 'the nanny', he said several names and then my employer came down the passage, and asked who the guy was looking for, and I said that he was looking for your servant, your nanny, so I don't know which name you are going to say who is working for you. She then said "no, I have someone working here, but she is my helper. She works in my house but she is my helper." He then said he is looking for Myrtle, and she said "Myrtle is standing right in front of you." So I said to him, "ok, so you are looking for somebody who wears a three-piece uniform who wears a cap on her head, I just don't know what colour. You didn't think that a domestic worker could write that letter, but that letter comes from me. I wrote that letter, my employer didn't even know that I wrote that letter." He became my best friend. He was the one that set up my first meeting. He was the one that put an article in the newspaper about me that I want to help domestic workers.

It is ironic that the other person used several pejorative terms to refer to her, and the person protecting her dignity was her White employer. This man was probably used to domestic workers being referred to by many names and was not sure which one Myrtle was referred to in her employer's household. As mentioned in Chapter Four, employers usually referred to their domestic worker as 'the girl' and many still do (Cock, 1980; Shefer, 2012). Although she could not live with her family in the room she had due to the Apartheid laws, and although she eventually had to send her daughter to live with her mother, Myrtle showed great understanding and appreciated the kindness her employer showed her, as she says:

> My wedding was held at her house. We still phone each other now and then, but she is in Israel now with her daughter. Last year, she phoned me and said "Oh Myrtle, you are making news, I am so proud." So when I got an award in 1974, Fair Lady awarded me, I took my employer with me on stage.

I found however, even where employers were kind, salaries were still deemed not sufficient. Long hours were a common complaint. Most worked seven days a week until late evening and had a few hours off on a Sunday. The long hours are what catapulted Myrtle to activism. She compared her working conditions to those of family who worked in factories and worked a five day week. Antonio too became an activist due to poor working conditions, as she says:

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> I was very upset that they brought you from your country to humiliate you, and they expect that you should feel grateful that you were brought to the US, even if they didn't pay you a fair salary, even if they treated you badly, and that is the reason why I ended up fighting for the migrant workers.

Conclusion

What was apparent from the stories I heard from the women I interviewed, was that despite being portrayed as passive victims, they have actively been involved in a struggle to improve their own lives and those of millions of other women and men involved in domestic service. There seemed to be a relatively clear trajectory to activism that was common to most participants. Most started domestic work at a very young age and therefore did not complete their education. All entered domestic work as they were very poor and did not have any other viable options. They all valued education and learning, and saw it as a means of improving themselves.

Others who could not attend school, joined organisations and attended classes to learn more skills. Invariably, these organisations such as NGOs, civil society organisations, labour organisations and churches provided them with many educational opportunities that empowered them. Many domestic worker leaders were either socialised or had an innate desire to serve others and practise various forms of servant leadership.

What was apparent to me from all the interviews I conducted, was that all the domestic workers resisted the negative stigma and social devaluation attached to being a domestic worker. The organisations that they attended are partly credited for instilling a sense of community and a sense of pride for in them for the work they did. In fact, they were proud of being domestic workers, and were vocal about how they were able to change their own lives and those of millions of other women. In Marais and van Wyk's (2015) study too, the authors maintain that despite societal perceptions, the participants in their study viewed domestic work as any other job, and took pride in the work they did daily. They did not hold themselves accountable for lack of choice. In fact, Gillian says:

> After joining a union, I had a better view of things, like, for me in the beginning, domestic work was, well, sometimes it still is, a discriminatory job, because I have been through discrimination while doing domestic work.

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> In the beginning yes, I was totally ashamed of being a domestic worker, but now, after all these years, I am proud of what I am doing, because, in a sense, I am giving back to society, I play an important role to society, taking care of families.

My findings and those of Marais and van Wyk (2015) were in direct contrast to Lawler's (1999) findings that working-class women's exposure to negative class judgements contained in dominant cultural rhetoric often generates powerful feelings of shame and inadequacy in themselves. This was probably because the women I was interviewing were a group of highly politicised and agentic domestic worker leadership. Also, Mahoney and Zmrozcek (1997: p.4) point out, some women reject the assumption "that they strive to rise out of or escape from their working-class beginning".

As I listened to these women tell their stories, I felt anger at the exploitation and victimisation they endured, but realised that the dominant narrative was one of liberation as a result of their resistance to oppression, exploitation and subjugation. Like Gillian, most felt that domestic work was a worthy job as they could give back to society. Even those who had furthered their education, and now worked full time for unions and federations or even carried on being domestic workers, displayed a type of agency that Hoerder (2015, p. 15) argues to be a "women's self-assertion and strategy to use domestic work as a stepping stone for better jobs and better lives for themselves" and members of their families. They understood their jobs as being integral to the working of the larger economy, an important cog in the wheel, as Gillian went on to say:

> I believe, overall, it's a great contribution back to society. To me, if I as a domestic worker, if I don't go out to do your work, you can't go out and do your work, so if I don't come to your house, you can't leave your house, because I basically do everything for you.

Similarly, although Sennett and Cobb (1977) maintain that feminist research is able to bare the veiled damages class inequality inflicts on working-class women, oppressing their selves, subjectivities and inter-personal relationships, my research shows that although domestic worker leaders were no doubt impacted by and suffered due to class, raced and gendered inequality, they nevertheless rallied against their oppression. By seeking more skills and mobilising to fight for a better life for themselves and their families, they demonstrate an agency that Ortner (2013, cited in Howell, 2017) defines as incorporating "a number of

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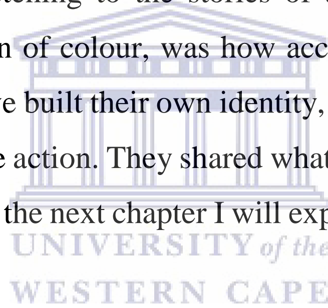
interrelated ideas revolving around self-confidence, around the idea of being able to make things happen in the world, around activity rather than passivity, around energy and will" (p. 158).

To treat domestic workers only as victims is to deny them voice. It is to deny that they are actively mobilising to free themselves from the shackles of exploitation. It is to negate the sentiments expressed in Shirley Pryce's[37] poem that she wrote for the International Labour Conference in 2011: "I am a domestic worker watch me grow, I can stand with you toe to toe" (quoted in Fish, 2017). This is not to undermine however, the realities of their lives and the exploitation and abuse that they do suffer on a daily basis. Speaking to the domestic worker leaders themselves was a liberating experience. It was "a space for an absent subject and absent experience to be filled with the presence of the actual women speaking of the actualities of their daily world" (Smith, 1987, p. 107).

What was clear to me, when listening to the stories of all the domestic worker leaders I interviewed, who were all women of colour, was how accurate Harris (1991) was when she maintained that Black women have built their own identity, not by sharing their stories of their victimisation, but through creative action. They shared what they believed to be central in their journeys in becoming activists. In the next chapter I will explore the activism in which they are engaged.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[37] Shirley Pryce is the President of the Jamaica Household Workers' Union and the former head of household for the prime minister of Jamaica.

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CHAPTER NINE

RECOVERED VOICES

> Since the beginning of slavery, we were there…We say a simple message, support us in our struggle. The whole world is on a fever and now we need to give antibiotics…
>
> (Myrtle Witbooi making a public speech at the ILO)

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Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed the journey the women I interviewed embarked on to become activists. In order to become activists, the women had to recover their voices and speak out against the injustices with which they were faced. At the heart of my study is the exploration of the dialectic between domestic worker vulnerability and the agency they exert by actively mobilising and transforming the conditions of their employment. I have already identified the conditions in which domestic workers continue to fight to end all forms of oppression and exploitation. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which domestic worker leaders have worked and are still working collectively to transform their working conditions, and by extension their living conditions and society.

In the literature, domestic workers have always been constructed as victims of many oppressive practices. Often they are oppressed as being women of colour, of being under patriarchal control and of being dependent, especially if migrant workers. My main aim in this chapter is to belie the myth of passivity, and to demonstrate that through their organisations that they have formed and joined, and through their leaders they fight back. In this chapter, I show that the standpoint of domestic workers is achieved through struggle in group processes (Hirschmann, 1997).

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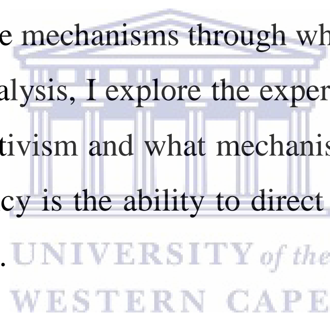
Domestic worker leaders' involvement in different types of organisations, including worker unions, civil society organisations and state organisations, are acts of resistance to the unfair labour practices that they encounter. By analysing the stories of their leaders. I intend showing that many domestic worker leaders are self-defining and active subjects, despite being entrenched in patriarchal, racial and class discourses. It is paradoxical that they are subjected to exploitation and abuse, despite the employers' unquestionable need of their domestic workers. What comes to mind when confronted with this need is Ai-Jen Poo's (2013) warning as mentioned in Chapter One that if domestic workers went on strike, almost every industry could be paralyzed, "the entire economy would tremble" (p.36).

Domestic worker leader agency in this study is understood not only in terms of specific praxis, but also as a mode of knowledge production based on domestic worker activists' subjective experiences. Of interest to this study, is thus the experiences and contributions of domestic worker leaders through their individual and collective processes of change on all levels. In this chapter I attempt to understand the mechanisms through which domestic worker leaders come into being and 'speak'. In this analysis, I explore the experiences of women I interviewed, in particular their strengths, their activism and what mechanisms they put in place to cope with the situations they faced, as agency is the ability to direct one's own life through individual (and collective) action and choice.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The construction of alternate discourses

The London Feminist Salon Collective (2004, p. 30) maintains that agency is the desire to "offer hope and the possibility for engaging with and challenging structural, determined inequalities". Or as Myrtle Witbooi so succinctly put it:

> You cannot change the world, but you can encourage them, you can give them that hope, and we can do it. We can. That is important. We want to have a million workers in this federation soon, but we don't just want a million workers, we want the workers to be empowered to know their rights in their own countries.

In terms of understanding political agency from the perspective of domestic worker leaders, I use Crossley's (2001, p. 83) interpretation of Bourdieu's theory that an "agent's habitus is an active residue or sentiment of his [or her] past that functions within his [or her] present, shaping

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his [or her] perception, thought, and action, and thereby moulding social practice in a regular way". For example, Myrtle and Hester came from poor households in South Africa and were subjected to the brutal effects of Apartheid. They worked as domestic workers from a young age and were politicised very early on in their lives, mainly in anti-Apartheid and labour organisations and structures. Their politicisation shaped their thoughts and perceptions, and motivated them to act in order to realise not only social, but also political and economic transformations in their own and other's lives. Each of them had 'transition moments' during which their silent resistance emerged and increased into "larger collective action" (Pero & Solomons, 2010, p. 11-12).

In this chapter, I show how domestic worker leaders are able to resist structural constraints and challenge dominant oppressive discourses that construct them as passive. They are actively involved in the construction of alternative discourses that construct them as active agents capable of bringing about change. It is not my intention to present domestic worker activists as a homogenous group. They belong to many different social categories such as race, ethnicity, class, language and even political positions. However, it is important to recognise the commonalities between them in the spaces that they do occupy, in order to foster a collective identity and sense of empowerment as activists. I am also not arguing that it is only those domestic workers who are formally elected as leaders and who are activists who have agency. As Gamburd's (2000) study shows, those who are not in leadership positions do not necessarily show active resistance nor are they fully compliant, but that does not mean that they do not possess agency.

For instance, Pratt (2012) has shown in her study, that even with the severe trauma that accompanies being separated from their families, migrant domestic workers have exercised agency. In her study that examines the effects of separation, she questions the extent that Western feminists are complicit in the damaging effects of live-in programmes that migrant workers are subjected to, as they also benefit from them. In her study she shows that the "trauma' these women are subjected to, should not be mistaken for "passivity" (p.70). She refers to the play *Nanay* (a Filipino word for mother) which was staged in Vancouver that aims to show how migrant women and their children are using their voices to tell their own stories, and to ensure that only they determine how they are represented. In her study, Pratt shows how the stereotype of passive, docile and wretched migrants women are disrupted by the agency they exhibit in resisting this stereotype by participating in creative endeavours. Indeed, I have discussed in the previous chapter that, despite the fact that many domestic worker leaders were

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separated from their families, which contributed to their emotional trauma, and despite their inhumane living and working conditions, they exerted agency by challenging these dominant discourses of oppression to become worker leaders and activists.

Many of these organisations and associations educate workers, as discussed in the previous chapter, and by methods such as role-playing taught in workshops, they instil confidence in workers to challenge their employers and labour law, and offer leadership training, worker's rights courses and even citizenship training. Domestic workers learn about these associations by word of mouth; friends tell friends about the support that is available from these organisations. One such association is Solidarity Center, based in the USA. I was introduced to the Solidarity Center through Myrtle. They invited me to participate in a conference on migration in Indonesia, as mentioned previously, where I was able to interview members of the IDWF. The mission of the Solidarity Center is "Empower(ing) workers to raise their voice for dignity on the job, justice in their communities and greater equality in the global economy" (Solidarity Center, 2018). The Solidarity Center, with other NGOs and labour organisations such as WIEGO, whose main aim is to put "work, workers, and workers' organizations at the center of development discourse, policies and processes" and to "build capacity among the working poor" (WIEGO, 2018a, np.) have been instrumental in changing the lives of millions of workers around the world, by funding and empowering domestic worker organisations.

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Some domestic worker leaders, such as Myrtle and Antonio, did not have to join organisations to learn to exercise agency. Antonio for instance says that she realised when she became a migrant worker in the USA and met other domestic workers from around the world that "abuse does not come from where you are or who you are, it is whether you allow it". It is an inner strength. She says joining organisations allows her to obtain more knowledge to give better explanations to peers why it is necessary to get together, to mobilise and to organise. She says it is important to use their collective power for many and not just a few, and to help those especially with few economic resources.

Organising from rocks, parks and other spaces

My study shows that despite the barriers to organising, domestic workers can organise and did organise, and did not need private homes in which to do so. Although employers always mention that domestic workers are part of the family, but do not treat them as such, that

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motivates them to resist their subordination. For instance, Myrtle lived on the coast in Cape Town with her employers in Apartheid South Africa. She had this to say about organising:

> In Sea Point we had a situation that there was a beach where domestic workers could go, only if you had your overalls on and also it said on a sign: SWIMMING FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS ONLY. BE CAREFUL, IT IS DANGEROUS. It was like an open pool with rocks, and in between you can play, and if the water comes, you must run a mile. It was dangerous and it was for domestic workers only. So we did not swim, but sat on the rocks. Also when you take the White children to their beaches, you were not allowed to go into the water, so you had to stay on the one side, you cannot even sit on the bench, because it was not for coloured or Black people. So we sat on the rocks and got to know each other and shared our stories. That is where we usually made our plans …

Hester on the other hand did not live on the coast as Myrtle did, but inland in an upmarket suburb with her employer. She took her charge to the park almost daily and that is where she met other domestic workers. They socialised, swopped stories of how they were treated by their employers and recounted how badly the system was failing them. She says that is when she resolved to fight against this oppression, and she started organising the workers in her street in her employer's garage. Indeed, the oppression that many encountered, especially the political oppression, did not stop many domestic workers from mobilising, in fact it spurred them on. Many mobilised in the organisations that they formed or joined, especially in the labour organisations. For instance, in Sonu from Nepal's case, when she became a teenager and was too old to belong to the domestic worker organisation for children, she and others formed the Domestic Workers Forum, from which they ran many successful campaigns.

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Belonging to domestic worker unions and other organisations gave all the women I interviewed the relationships, the resources, the knowledge and capacity to take the actions they desired, knowing their strength was in their numbers. This notion of activism concurs with Lovell's (2003, p. 2) argument that the focus should not be on "the subjected self but on the social relations of political (inter)action and the specific historical conditions of particular social transformations", as mentioned previously. Belonging to unions shattered the isolation domestic workers often experience, which hampers their ability to take action. In unions, they

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were able to form bonds of equality with their peers, in sharp contrast to the hierarchical relationships they experienced with their employers. In the words of Berndino-Costa (2014):

> In addition to strengthening the collective, the union is a space for the restructuring of the subjectivity of these agents, in which they collectively affirm their humanity by transcending the sexist, patriarchal and racist determinations that they face on a day-to-day basis. In other words, the unions are spaces for the construction of friendship, affection and attention, where each woman is recognized as a unique and full individual by her companions and friends (p. 76)

Unions often lay the foundations for political mobilisation and are usually responsible for educating their members about campaigns, their rights the codes and how to hold their employers accountable.

Both the current and historical ways in which domestic workers organise both nationally and globally have significance for all marginalised workers. As they are often rendered vulnerable, due to being excluded from the usual labour laws protecting workers, many domestic workers have concentrated their organising efforts in the community and used social justice strategies. As discussed previously, where there are large numbers of immigrant women working as domestic workers, besides unions, neighbourhood centres and associations enable workers to organise independent of the employer, as organising attempts are embedded in the community rather than the workplace (Boris & Nadasen, 2008) Through these associations, organisations and NGOs, workers are then connected to larger political and social struggles. For instance, Myrtle and Hester belonged to labour organisations and were influenced by a well-known South African struggle icon called Florrie De Villiers, who was a domestic worker and is now deceased. She taught them that whilst they were fighting against their oppression as domestic workers, there was a broader struggle that they were involved in, that is, the liberation from the shackles of Apartheid. Myrtle attributes her political activism to joining the ANC, going to political meetings and joining protests. She became a well-respected member of the movement, and was even invited to join liberation talks outside of the country.

Other leaders went into the communities to organise workers, for example Gillian's union in Trinidad used caravans to go into different communities to educate domestic workers about their rights and persuade them to join their union, and Lita from Jakarta established schools in various cities in Indonesia for the same reasons and to campaign against unjust practises.

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The aims of some of the organisations that assist domestic workers with their organising attempts might not always be in alignment with the personal goals of the domestic worker leadership. For instance, Marcelina from Mexico explains:

> I participated in a Latin American meeting of domestic workers. After that meeting, I started to put in practice everything I have learnt, and little by little, I started to know more domestic workers' groups. I continued organising in Mexico. The group of women who were leading us belonged to NGOs, and they gave us training, organising, workshops … At that point, I didn't take many decisions, we did what the NGO asked us to do. I think I was like that for about 10–15 years, and I think there came a time in which I learnt more in the movement. I said that domestic workers should form a trade union. So, they didn't allow us, because they were an NGO that received funds to lead us, but we, or at least I, when I started to learn more; I saw how other organisations from other countries in Latin America were organising, and I wanted to do the same in Mexico, but they didn't allow it, so in 2000, I decided to separate from this organisation, and after I learnt a different way of organising and having these questions, my objectives and those of the NGO's were not compatible, so I decided to leave.

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It is obvious that the NGO wanted to retain the status quo as its funding was dependent on it, that is, it wanted to pursue its own aims and goals. Forming a trade union was not part of its vision, so Marcelina had to leave the organisation to pursue her goal of forming a union. Such was the influence of Marcelina on its membership base that the NGO worried that if she left the organisation it would be declared bankrupt, and when she did eventually leave, it ceased to exist.

Speaking out

> ……we might not be highly educated, we might not have a degree but we have a good brain. And God has given us the ability to speak out. And that is how domestic workers […] are now organising themselves: domestic workers are speaking out.
>
> Myrtle Witbooi – IDWF President

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Brabro Budin from the IUF remarked that the IDWF was revolutionary in that it produced many leaders in a very short space of time. She believed that many people have capacities that have never been used before, and it took an organisation such as the IDWF to empower these women and unleash their innate leadership. Furthermore, the solidarity and support these women had in these organisations made it easier for them to lead. She thought it was important to see the potential among them. She says:

> There is so much wasted intelligence among the millions and millions of domestic workers. If all of them have been given the possibility to go to school, to continue their studies when they were young - we have the proof, some of them has the ability to become ministers in their countries. If only they were given the opportunity to develop their own capacities.

Budin says it was incredible to see, over the course of two years at the ILO, how these women grew. She says, "Some of them could have died rather than stand up in front of a podium at a plenary session to speak, but they did it, and they did it very well". That may be true of some leaders, but some of the women I spoke to had already developed their leadership abilities and had conquered their fear of speaking. The women in this study had much to say about how they came to speak. In fact, Myrtle says in Afrikaans to me, "*My mond, ek praat te veel*", translated to mean, "My mouth, I speak too much". Myrtle believes her ability to speak her mind, speak out against abuse and speak to draw in the crowds is a 'God-given' talent that has made her a domestic worker leader. For others such as Sonu from Nepal, the ability to speak was learnt. She too is puzzled about how she found her voice since she never spoke much. However, she says since she started going to school, she became very outspoken, having learnt the ability to speak to large gatherings of people. Her newly found confidence could be attributed to the schooling she received, as she said:

> I feel maybe because I had that in that nine months, they instilled it that even though you are a child labourer, you still had your rights, so that was instilled in me at a very young age.

Sonu maintained that the ability to speak out was very important, because she says:

> … if there is any abuse of any kind, you must be able to share, not keep it to yourself, and it is you that has to do it, nobody can do it for you, and because I am outspoken, if there is anything I talk to people about it, I don't keep it in, so that I am not abused.

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Domestic workers in this study expressed that they were scared at times, but this fear drove them to action. In relation to her speaking out against her oppression, Myrtle says, "I said what I wanted to say, I was not scared, I was angry, and I think my anger caused that I was not scared". Antonio from Columbia agrees with Myrtle, and when questioned on her confronting her employers who were exploiting her, she said, "I am afraid of course, but that is also what pushes me to do something, because no-one is going to do it for you."

Marcelina from Mexico on the other hand says she was scared often. However, it was her drive to demonstrate to other people that nothing is easy, that you have to pick yourself up when you fall down, that motivated her. She says she has seen many domestic workers leave the struggle because they were scared. What kept her going was her vision of where she was headed, and the fact that there were thousands of women that needed her. Many people have helped her on her way, and that gave her the strength to go on. Once again, Marcelina's desire to serve others above her own self-interest is apparent.

Elizabeth Tang, the General Secretary of the IDWF, mentioned to me in her interview that it is very hard for some domestic workers to overcome their fears and speak out, because of the culture of the society in which they lived. She used Asia as an example, and said it was harder for domestic workers to become leaders in countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh, because they were not even included in the caste system. So there were many challenges to overcome before they were even confident to speak in front of people. They also face the obstacles of being women and of being leaders in a patriarchal society. The fact that Sonu became an executive member of the IDWF, and was certainly not scared to speak out, shows how strong and confident she really is. Tang[38] maintained that the Latin America women leaders were very strong and aggressive, as they had a long history of people's movements and feminist organisations that supported domestic worker struggles in their countries. In fact, Chris Bonner from WIEGO thought the Latin American women very difficult to deal with because of their aggression.

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It is possible to grow leadership qualities in domestic workers, by fostering solidarity among them and by providing them with opportunities to learn leadership skills. My findings concur with those of Gamson, Fireman and Rytina (1982), that the ability to speak out against injustice is usually sparked by a supportive group environment. As discussed in the preceding chapter, these worker leaders were usually members of societal organisations and labour organisations

[38] I use Elizabeth Tang's surname from hereon, as there is already another Elizabeth in this study.

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that functioned to empower them. For instance, it was only after Gillian joined a union, overcame her embarrassment of being a domestic worker and went out to educate her peers with the union, that she overcame her fear of talking to people. She says that joining the union made her stronger and gave her courage.

At the ILO for instance, before each plenary session at the conference, the women first met and sang together to foster these bonds of unity and to give each other courage, and clapped and cheered without inhibition. I witnessed this first hand at the conference I attended in Jakarta. The freedom songs they sang at the conference venue seemed to give them an added boldness, and strengthened their solidarity as they sang together and felt the emotions the songs conveyed together. I also shared a hotel with them, and before and during meetings they sang. I noticed that most were songs that members of SADSAWU usually sang at meetings I attended with them. They even chanted "Amandla! Awethu! translated from Xhosa, a South African language, to mean "the power is ours".

It was with disbelief then, that I read Fish's (2017, p. 95) account of the proceedings at the ILO, where domestic workers were repeatedly told to "behave" when they sang, cheered and clapped. I found it ironic that the institution that they approached to make their voices heard, was intent on silencing them, and I agree with Fish when she says it reinforced "their outsider status" (p. 95). Lourde Trasmonte, chair of the Committee on Domestic Work in 2010, actually said "Please refrain from clapping and showing your emotion here". Besides the patriarchal notion that emotions should be kept out of anything 'serious', I was reminded of the anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes' (1992, p. 430) writings on emotions:

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> …emotions do not precede or stand outside of culture; they are part of culture and of strategic importance to our understanding of the ways in which people shape and are shaped by their world. Emotions are not reified things in and of themselves, subject to an internal, hydraulic mechanism regulating their buildup, control and release…In other words emotions are discourse; they are constructed and produced in language and in human interaction. They cannot be understood outside the cultures that produce them.

I agree with Scheper-Hughes that emotions are a discourse and need to be understood within the culture that produced them, the culture of activism and in particular, the culture of women of colour fighting against their oppression. In this case, the domestic workers used actions such as clapping, cheering and singing to 'speak' for them, to indicate their happiness or

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unhappiness with the proceedings. In South Africa, from which the protests songs that they sung originated, the marginalised often express their emotions through song. In the haloed chambers of the ILO singing and clapping was probably unacceptable behaviour as legal discourse is favoured, however that is outside of the ordinary domestic worker's activist language. The fact that their emotions were policed by ILO officials and they were infantilised by being told to "behave", was a clear sign of the unequal power relations that were inherent in the proceedings. For some, such as Shirley Pryce, who once slept in a dog-house, as mentioned previously, and is the founder and president of the Jamaica Household Workers Union (JHWU) that was the most significant memory she had of the proceedings (Fish, 2017). In her field notes of the proceedings, Fish notes that domestic workers referenced this situation frequently and they felt that the "stifling of their voices" was symbolic of "the larger power struggles they faced" (p. 95). They felt that the way they were treated was the way in which they were treated at home.

Barbro Budin commented, and I noticed, that it was the women from the Southern countries who were more vocal, more energetic and freely espoused their ideas, whilst domestic workers from the North were quieter. Budin thought that although women from the North had their own struggles to contend with, they had to re-learn to struggle. Chris Bonner contended though that they had more experience and had a longer history in capacitating trade unions. However, they have not played a big role in the formation of the IDWF.

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Being activists

I asked all the respondents I interviewed what made them become activists. I posit that it is less difficult for some to become activist than others. For instance, given my own history of activism and of others I know, it is easier to participate if you come from a home where there are activists or when you are socialised and politicised into becoming one. If you had suffered under oppressive regimes such as Apartheid, or subjected to race, class or gender discrimination, it is easier to 'become one'. However, there are those who sympathise with the subjugation and oppression experienced by others, and who act out of a strong moral compulsion.

Sonu from Nepal's foray into activism began after she turned 16. Those no longer able to belong to the children's labour group because of their ages, formed a new collective called the

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Domestic Worker Forum. One of the major campaigns they embarked on was the eradication of child labour and the compulsory schooling of children. Strategically they used the reasoning that unemployment of adults was high due to child labour, to embark on their campaign. Their campaign was very successful, and Sonu boasts that Nepal does not have much child labour anymore. With assistance from donors and other international labour organisations, they were successful in establishing a trade union in Nepal.

Although excluded from collective bargaining, domestic worker leaders in my study engaged in different types of activism, which are not mutually exclusive and function to inform each other. One of the types is to publicly demonstrate (campaigning or lobbying), in support of, or more often, to oppose public policy, legislation and ideologies that affect them. They also engage in community or grassroots activism, by organising activities to make domestic work more visible, that is awareness-raising campaigns, and to increase involvement in their projects, by building networks and thus increasing their allies. Community activism also serves as an educational tool, as it often informs and enlightens participants about local and global events. It functions too as a form of coalition politics, as different community organisations and non-profit organisations have the chance to mobilise around issues that they have in common.

Constable (1997b, p. 209) argued that "despite the important improvements that domestic workers' organizations have helped bring about, the overall structural position of domestic workers remains relatively unchanged". Ally (2005) maintains that the reason for this is what she calls the 'association model', that is non-union based organising. She argues that the latter fails to differentiate between advocacy initiated by workers themselves and the delivery of domestic worker 'services' by organisations that do not have domestic workers as their members, such as human rights organisations and NGOs. She maintains that this sets up workers as recipients of services, and does not empower or capacitate workers to do their own organising. She further cites Gibson, Law and Mckay (2001) who say that constructing domestic workers as victims disrupts their won agency. She concludes that "In the end, while the association model may be useful for expanding the range of representation available for domestic workers, it functions to undermine rather than enhance the work of unions, this emerging model of representation potentially weakens the collective cause of workers" (p. 198).

Not all research supports Ally's argument. For instance, a NGO assisting domestic workers, the Asian Migrant Centre (AMC) in Hong Kong, has helped them fight against their victim

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status. In 1995, the AMC gave up their usual services such as crisis counselling, to concentrate on organising grassroots migrant workers into unions, and by 2000 there were three such domestic worker unions (Gibson et al., 2001). These unions engage in usual union business, such as campaigning against minimum wages and raising consciousness to resist exploitation. Furthermore, these unions formed the base from which to encourage saving groups and the participation in what they called the 'Reintegration Programme', where women combined their savings and invested in ventures back home, thus creating "sustainable economic alternatives to … circular or recurrent labour migration" (Gibson et al., p. 378).

My research too does not support Ally's argument. On the contrary, the non-domestic worker organisations have aided the agency and mobilisation of workers greatly – two such examples are the Solidarity Center and WIEGO, which I have discussed previously. Although they do not have domestic workers as members, they continue to support their struggle by providing them with much needed resources, both financial and human, providing them with skills training, educational workshops, conferences, and a platform from which to speak and mobilise. WIEGO, as already discussed, supported domestic workers from the beginning to form a network, through the ratification of C189 at the ILO, and the formation of the IDWF. They have dedicated members assisting the IDWF every step of the way. In fact, when I attended the conference in Jakarta where I met the members of the IDWF, I mistakenly mistook members of WIEGO for members of the IDWF, as they were with them all of the time. Members of the IDWF mobilised and did their own organising and did not require empowerment from WIEGO, but were supported by them.

Furthermore, there are non-domestic worker leaders in the IDWF, that is, leaders who never worked as domestic workers. Of significance, the General Secretary of the IDWF, Elizabeth Tang, never worked as a domestic worker, but the domestic worker leaders voted for her, because of her experience. Nor did Lita Anggraini, whose story I discussed previously, who opened up schools to empower domestic workers and who established the National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy in Indonesia, an affiliate of the IDWF. Both are committed activists for domestic worker rights. Both Elizabeth Tang and Lita are university graduates who were activists since their student days. Lita is so committed that she attributes her not being married at 46 to her activism, that is, not having time for a personal life as she was kept busy organising, playing an advocacy role and networking. She also went on a hunger strike in 2015 in the name of domestic workers in Indonesia, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

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Joining domestic worker organisations changed the personal lives of many leaders too. The education and skills they learnt empowered many of them to take control of their personal lives. For instance, Gillian walked away from an abusive marriage, because as she started seeing the positives in her life, she could no longer tolerate abuse. She said that she was no longer satisfied with being discriminated against by her employers and her family. She was worthy of love, and women had to stop thinking that they could not do better. The union gave her that courage, she maintains.

Domestic worker leaders are not strong all the time, nor are they fearless all the time. They are human and have the usual gambit of emotions, so sometimes they get depressed and sometimes they feel that they cannot go with the lives they lead anymore. Antonio says that it is difficult to fight for what you want when you are depressed. She laments the fact that domestic worker leaders do not have access to treatment for mental health, nor access to organisations where she says they can "learn to strengthen [themselves] again. If they are available, they are expensive". She reflects that maybe there should be more schools that teach them how to lead and how to defend themselves without humiliating others. I find it remarkable that, whilst often on the receiving end of humiliation in the course of her work as a domestic worker, she would care that others who inflicted it on her are not humiliated in turn.

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The impact of the IDWF on domestic worker agency and activism

For Myrtle, it was not only the ability to speak out against oppression that was important, it was also the ability to speak without fear that was an important facet of being a leader. The formation of the IDWF assisted her in being able to do just that. For instance, when she went to Lebanon to assist the domestic worker leaders there in forming the first union in an Arab country, they immediately received a letter from the government stating that they could not form a union, they were immigrants and not entitled to form a union in a country that was not their land of birth. Myrtle says those are the kinds of attitudes that the IDWF empowers them to fight against. She says:

> But there is hope for some countries, domestic workers are standing up, because of the message that the IDWF is spreading. We are free, the ILO made us free, so why must you be oppressed in that country? That is our task. The IDWF's task is to make sure that domestic workers understand

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> that it is mostly about the convention, what it is and what does it say? It is about labour laws affecting domestic workers, not only in South Africa, but in the world. So, the IDWF became a voice to encourage workers to speak out for themselves. That is what the IDWF does, they encourage workers to speak out.

Indeed, the formation of the IDWF has not only empowered workers, but also ensured that governments pay attention to workers' demands. For instance, Sonu says:

> Whenever we had a delegation visit us, we invited government, talking to the government talking about our rights. Seeing the law pass, domestic workers were also integrated into that right now. Previously, whenever there was any violence against a domestic worker, the police never accepted our request to make a case, now we can go to the police station and file a case.

Antonio too says that her involvement with the IDWF changed how she applied the knowledge she learnt. She said in the past she would assist in organising, because of her own initiative and because she felt that domestic workers should not be taken advantage of. Now she says, with all the experience she has gained in the IDWF, there is more awareness on her part, more strategy that is employed. In her activism, she now has the ability to assess many options for successful outcomes.

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Some domestic workers, such as Esther, became leaders and formed unions only after the adoption of C189 in Geneva. Esther mobilised other domestic workers to join her in Ghana to form the Domestic Services Workers Union. The adoption of C189 and the formation of the IDWF gave her and her peers the impetus and courage to start organising, to ensure that there were laws protecting them, and also to address their grievances with employers. This was an important initiative in Ghana, because about 78% of the working women in Ghana are domestic workers. Esther too credits the IDWF for her new found knowledge and skills. She is particularly grateful to the executive, in particular Myrtle, who she says motivates them and from whom they learn. She describes Myrtle as having high energy and who served rather than was served, and for those reasons Myrtle was unanimously elected as their president she says.

Lulu too, credits the IDWF for her new found knowledge. Besides international travel, the IDWF affords them the opportunity to network with members on an international stage and share experiences. She says it helps to know that everyone has similar problems and that makes them feel not so alone, but part of a community. She goes on to say:

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> I have even learnt how people are networking, how people work together and how unions work. So now as a co-ordinator, I need to learn more than the normal members of Chodawu. I have learnt from the IDWF on how to become a leader, how to improve your union and how to be better on different aspects. I even read different websites now.

Although all saw the worth in the establishment of the IDWF, some felt that not enough has changed. In fact, Gillian says the more things changed, the more they stayed the same. She felt that the ILO Convention and other labour laws have their worth, but it is the implementation in countries, or lack thereof, which was problematic. She mentions that in Trinidad, although the labour minister at the time said that he would implement C189, he never did. Similarly, Lita laments the fact that C189 was not implemented in Indonesia. The government's argument is that legislating a minimum wage will cause mass unemployment in Indonesia. As mentioned before, she went on hunger strike in February 2015. Her demands were that the Indonesian parliament and government deliberate and pass the Domestic Workers National Law, since the draft of the law was submitted to them already in 2004. She also wanted parliament and government to ratify ILO Convention 189[39]. Sadly, her demands were not realised. Sonu again feels that the cogs in the wheel of the then IDWN and now the IDWF turn very slowly. She says its activity in the Asian region is almost non-existent. It is the unions in Nepal that put pressure on the Nepalese government. Even in Thailand, according to Elizabeth Tang, it took the government only six months to promulgate regulations that gave domestic workers minimum wages, overtime payment and holidays; however, at the time of the interview it still was not implemented. The same can be said of the nine states in India she said, who agreed to the minimum wages, but never implemented it. They did however implement the decision to give scholarships to the children of poor families. So although many countries ratified C189, the implementation thereof remained a challenge.

However, despite the low rate of implementation of C189, Tang says the formation of the IDWF heralded many advantages. Among them is the fact that domestic workers' organisations are linked to a global federation, and that gives them many benefits. The IDWF helps these organisations gain recognition in their own countries and supports their activism. Trade unions and governments also take them more seriously, and the plight of domestic workers can be raised on an international stage with bodies such as the ILO. The IDWF also assists domestic

[39] See http://www.idwfed.org/en/activities/indonesia-lita-anggraini-on-hunger-strike-to-fight-for-domestic-workers-bill

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worker organisations with strategic planning, that is tailor-made for their situations, to reach their short and long term goals.

The IDWF has raised the visibility of domestic worker leaders, and they have become well known in their home countries. The press often follows them eagerly, as they make the news regularly. The press then becomes their voices. An example is Marcelina's Centre of Support and Training for Domestic Workers, which has a big impact on the press in Mexico and is well known, as they were the first organisation led by domestic workers. In the past, no press attended any events, least of all those they staged on a Sunday. However, they are now well positioned in the media, and the press attend all their events when invited, irrespective of which day it is.

Elizabeth Tang agrees that although domestic workers have been abused and exploited for almost as long as this category of work existed, it is only recently that they are capturing the attention of the media. She says even in India, where abuse of domestic workers is rife, journalists are now reporting on the abuse, not to the extent that that they should, but at least it is being reported. Tang thinks the reason for the extra coverage by the media is that, with increased activism, they have also captured the attention of the public, so now people will want to read about it.

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The ratification of C189 has changed the perceptions of domestic work globally and there is an increased awareness. Elizabeth Tang says that not long ago, people in her country, Hong Kong, told her that there were no domestic workers or very few. Of course, statistics show that Hong Kong has one of the largest populations of migrant workers. Like she says, even if they had domestic workers working in their homes, they would still say that there were very few. That is probably because domestic work was always regarded as invisible work, as discussed in previous chapters.

There is also the potential for conflict among the members of the IDWF, as Chris Bonner says:

> Of course you also have the question of leadership. Myrtle is very strong, you know, in bringing people together internationally, but it is not easy. The different languages, cultures, ways of doing things, I mean, the potential for conflict and trying to hold it together, is not easy. You're re-sorting the congress you know, and the Latin Americans are difficult, which is often. You seem to find the Latin Americans in all the networks, difficult. We could see that, so you need a strong leadership who can manage that. It is a balance

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> between a strong leadership and good working structures, balanced with being able to manage relationships …

The IDWF's members are however very strong women who are able to transcend differences. As Spivak (1990) argues, by 'speaking with' people from other places and cultures, you open yourself up their influence and the possibility of them 'speaking back', and you find other ways of knowing and being. These women were able to do exactly that, to learn from each other and create a united front to effect both political and social change. Maybe not to the extent that change is desirable, but change nevertheless.

Mohanty (2003) notes that:

> In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because, no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how difference allows us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities (pg. 225-226).

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I agree with Mohanty. My argument is that although the power differentials might make the goal of unity difficult to achieve, it is achievable no less. It would be impossible to dismantle the inherent power hierarchies, however from my research it is evident that there is a commitment to foster bonds of solidarity and to be reflexive of practises that entrench power hierarchies.

Domestic worker organisations' relationships with other stakeholders

As they are excluded from workplace bargaining, domestic workers have to lobby the state to act on their behalf. However, their needs are rivalled by the interests of other influential stakeholders. They have to continually hold elected officials accountable, which is often a difficult task. To strengthen their fight, domestic worker organisations in many countries have pursued working in a variety of different seats of power, and have sought representation in legislatures and executive branches of governments. Domestic worker organisations have also

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formed strong alliances with political parties in many countries, such as the Workers Party in Brazil which is a strong ally, and SADSAWU in South Africa, an affiliate of COSATU, which has an alliance with the ruling ANC party. Alliances such as these ensure that the state is responsive to workers' demands. Although domestic worker organisations form close alliances with other community and political organisations, they do not necessarily adhere to their political narratives, rather they interpret and adjust them to the issues they are facing as domestic workers and in particular, working class women of colour. For instance, Crueza de Oliveira, the founding member of the Bahia Female Domestic Workers' Union and President of the Female Domestic Workers' National Federation in Brazil for instance, shares her experience of going to the Unified Black Movement's meetings:

> When I first began to participate, I hadn't actually been invited, I just turned up. At the start of the 1980's, the language used in the Black movement was highly academic …. It was difficult for a domestic worker to understand what they were saying. I knew it would be difficult for me to understand what they were saying, but I thought to myself: 'the language they use is difficult and I understand almost nothing of what they say, but I know that the issue concerns me because they are talking about Black people. So regardless of whether they have PhD's or better economic conditions than me, as a domestic worker, it concerns me because I am a Black person too. So I thought the space belonged to me, too, and I was determined to stay. I stayed and I've participated in the Unified Black Movement for years now (quoted in Bernadino-Costa, 2014, p. 78).

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Besides the struggle of women for labour rights impacting on the fight for race relations, it also impacts on gender relations. In Brazil for instance, the incorporation of the National Secretariat for Women's Workers (SNMT) in the national trades' union body (CUT) has ensured that the agenda is not only comprised of labour class struggles, but policies for gender and race equality are also engaged with (Goncalves, 2010). The SNMT has since its inception included the most important campaigns staged by women in its objectives, for example the legalisation of abortion in Brazil. The strong link between domestic worker struggles and the fight for racial and gender equality is also starkly exemplified by the Brazilian government's creation of the Special Secretary of Women's Policies (SPM) and the Special Secretary for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), which have the status of a ministry. Both ministries have included domestic workers as an important concern in their respective national plans and drafted policies

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that address the economic marginalisation of domestic workers (Goncalves, 2010). Furthermore, the government has created a permanent forum for dialogue with the National Federation of Domestic Workers (FENATRAD) in Brazil, to debate problems and to obtain rights for domestic workers. These changes with respect to domestic workers' rights are mainly due to intensive activism on the part of domestic workers.

Fish (2017) maintains that the ILO proceedings changed the relationship between domestic labour and governments. Governments were forced to examine their practices, and brought their "diverse ideologies, practises, and dependencies [and] … the larger struggle for rights into realistic focus" (p. 209). Domestic worker leaders felt that they were free to raise issues that some could not raise in their own countries, and could hold some of their governments accountable for conditions in their own countries. As an official of the ILO observed, it was almost impossible for governments to deny the human rights of these women in such a public forum. The domestic workers cause was backed by what Martin Oelz, the ILO's legal specialist, called "the Big Five", the strongest allies of the domestic workers and the proposed convention. These countries had particular persuasive powers and included in the Big Five, was the Brazil, whose labour minister's mother used to be a domestic worker. With South Africa, Brazil had the "most developed legislative frameworks in place for domestic workers" (Fish, 2017, p. 209).

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With respect to domestic worker organisations' relationships with mainstream labour movements, historically they have not done much to assist domestic worker unionisation. Bonner, Budin and Pape (2014) cite the example of the request from the IDWN for trade unions to include domestic worker delegates in their negotiations with the International Labour Court (ILC). The unions did not all agree to these requests. This exclusion and disregard is surprising, given that the most working women on the globe belong to this category of employment. This is also the case in South Africa. Although COSATU has been lauded by the ILO in 2004 as an admirable union for supporting domestic workers (Ally, 2005), Myrtle maintains that this has not always been the case, as evidenced by this quote on one of their pamphlets:

> Cosatu … now we are in the dumps and you just leave us like that. You talk about how you are umbrella and you give us all a shelter. But how come you don't give the domestic worker a shelter? … You don't know what a struggle we have got in the backyards …We cannot [survive] without a union that knows our struggle.

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COSATU was dominated by male unionists who, Myrtle maintains, did not regard domestic work as real work. Although Grossman (1997, cited in Ally, 2005) concludes that the response thereafter to the plea from domestic workers was half-hearted, I have been visiting COSATU and SADSAWU from about 2005, and know that Tony Ehrenreich, the General Secretary of the Western Cape, did later provide SADSAWU with office space and other resources. They are still able to organise from these offices.

Historically too, worker unions ignored migrant workers, as they usually required extra union investment such as translation services and legal representation; they were usually dismissed as being unorganisable (Hearn & Bergos, 2011). Also, as Shirley Pryce maintains, men usually dominate unions and they often express the view that domestic work was "not really their issue or priority" (Fish, 2017, p. 205). However, domestic workers could not be ignored for long, as in most countries they formed the majority of the labour force. When migrants too saw the benefits of joining the unions, Hearn and Bergos (2011) argue "that they were among the most committed, articulate and effective union activists … which empowered both unions and migrants" (p. 71).

Since domestic workers have been organising themselves, many unions in their respective countries have been willing to include domestic workers in their labour movement agendas, although domestic workers claim that exclusion persists. When national unions do however take domestic worker unions into their fold, the latter are able to organise much more effectively and accrue more gains. For example, when Waling Waling was formed, they turned to the Transport and General Union (TGWU) for recognition and to put pressure on the state. The newly elected Labour government decided in 1998 to incorporate domestic workers travelling with their employers into the immigration rules (Anderson, 2015). Anderson (2010) concluded that the "regularization and subsequent legislation made a significant difference to the lives of thousands of workers and their family members and developed a lasting sense of political agency" (p. 73). It was a major victory for over 4000 illegalised domestic workers.

In Mexico, Marcelina says their activism resulted in domestic workers being placed on the national agenda. They managed to elicit respect from political office bearers who in the past ignored them. Their government at the time of the interview had not ratified C189, and social security and legislation for domestic workers were national priorities. Being affiliated to the IDWF has empowered them, as they know they are part of a global struggle and they are able

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to gain attention internationally. On a personal level, she has the opportunity through the IDWF to co-ordinate the activism of a continent's domestic workers, which is no mean feat.

With the emergence of the IDWF, the trade union movement was strengthened generally. Chris Bonner argues that the IDWF succeeded in profiling an awareness of domestic workers struggles and this has brought the support of unions aboard. Barbro Budin says:

> I can tell you that many of our union leaders say that it has been really healthy for the trade union movement, with the domestic workers coming in, because they have proven that even in the most difficult working conditions and situations, it is possible to change if you unite if you really are convinced, because they have really moved mountains.

The role South Africans play in the global domestic worker struggle

South Africa is at the forefront of the international domestic worker struggle. As mentioned previously, SADSAWU played a significant role in the formation of the IDWN and at the ILO conference. Both Hester and Myrtle travelled to Amsterdam in 2006, and with 41 other domestic worker organisations and 15 international organisations, the IDWN was born (Fish, 2017). It was SADSAWU's freedom song, 'My mother was a kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy, that's why I am a unionist' that the conference delegates sang, and it was a South African chant "Amandla! Awethu" that delegates chanted at the ILC. It was Myrtle that the ILO approached to chair the network and later became president of the federation. Barbro Budin says that Myrtle played a big role in the IDWN, and that made her an obvious choice as IDWF president. She mentions the reasons why she thinks Myrtle was unanimously elected as president as follows:

> Because she really is the voice of the workers, she is not afraid of speaking up and she can really reflect all the problems that the domestic workers face, so well. She really has the heart, you can see that she is passionate about these issues, and that she is not only talking it, but it is really important.

Similarly, it is a South African, Hester, who is the Chair of the African Domestic Worker's Federation. Like Elizabeth Tang, both Chris Bonner and Barbro Budin think it is the long history of political struggle and the strong trade union movements that Black South Africans

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engaged in that placed them at the forefront of the domestic worker struggle, and the experience of Myrtle in that struggle makes her a natural leader.

The fact that African women lead the domestic worker struggle globally is remarkable, because there have been many factors that have worked against the entry of Black women's voices in public spaces, for instance, "the state's hegemony in gender initiatives, the legacy of colonialist misrepresentation or silencing of African women, and the methodical co-opting or depoliticising of women's movements by postcolonial governments" (Lewis, 2002, p. 77), and yet Black women have nevertheless been active in politics and labour organisations.

South Africa has a long tradition of organising domestic workers and has one of the stronger domestic worker unions globally. SADSAWU has a very good relationship with government, and Chris Bonner actually thinks that the government is a bit scared of SADSAWU, who have grown in strength and have become much increasingly sophisticated. Barbro Budin says even at the ILO, when the convention to make domestic work decent work was being debated, it was the South African government that was most supportive of the domestic workers and the convention that they proposed. They were able to boast extensive legislation to protect domestic workers, such as laws covering basic conditions of employment, unemployment insurance, minimum wage agreements and maternity protection, which other countries could refer to when setting their own minimum standards (Fish, 2017). This was noteworthy in the face of its turbulent and anti-human rights past, or maybe it is because of its past that the South African government was at the forefront of domestic worker legislative victories. Support also came from the governments of the USA, Namibia, the Philippines and Latin American countries. However, the voices from South Africa were the strongest. Barbro Budin however maintained that the domestic workers were not as strong in Johannesburg as they were in Cape Town. That was probably due to the fact that they had strong leadership in Cape Town, such as Myrtle and Hester, who are the General Secretary and President of SADSAWU respectively. According to Chris Bonner, the Cape Town branch seems to have more ideas, they have study groups from other Africa countries, have built African and global networks, and have formed a choir.

At the negotiations at the IDWN, South Africa stood out. It had the most developed legislative frameworks in place and had strong links with NGOs and the most civil society representatives (Fish, 2017). The South African contingent regarded the convention as a means to address wider global issues and were able to “put tangible legal instruments on the table”, founded on

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the victories gained in the new South Africa (Fish, 2017, p. 213). South Africa's legal advisors at the ILC could link South Africa's existing legislation with "this first international instrument for domestic workers" and indeed, as Fish maintains, it was "South Africa's history of transformative politics [that] infused the domestic worker negotiations" (Fish, 2017, p.213).

Indeed, the President of the IDWF who happened to be South African is celebrated globally. She has won international awards, such as the Weight of the Domestic Workers from Belgium and the George Meany- Lane- Kirkland Human Rights Award, an award of which Mandela was also the recipient. At this awards function, she made an emotional speech narrating her life history. Poignantly she said:

> They say, "but Myrtle, you are a member of the family". And I say, "if I were a member of the family, I'd be sitting at the table, eating your food and you'd be washing the dishes".

Domestic workers joined her on stage and before they left the stage, hundreds of convention participants joined them in singing: "My mother was a kitchen girl, my father was a garden boy, that's why I'm a unionist"[40] SADSAWU's song seemed to have been adopted as the struggle song of domestic workers around the world. Another award worth mentioning is the Global Fairness Award she received in 2015. At the awards evening, Jason Furman, Chair of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors remarked that "It is thanks in part to Myrtle's work, that millions of domestic workers around the world are better off today." Myrtle's speech had everyone on their feet clapping, as she accepted the award on behalf of the global domestic workers' movement, and asked all those with resources to support C189. She reminded the audience that "the struggle is not over yet" (Fish, 2015).

Conclusion

To summarise, domestic worker organisations such as unions are working class women's movements, usually women of colour, in which class, race and gender intersect. Once seen as categories of oppression and exploitation, in domestic worker organisations they intersect to propel women into political mobilisation and activism, and contribute to the agency of these women (Bernadino-Costa, 2014).

[40] See https://www.solidaritycenter.org/domestic-workers-receive-human-rights-award/.

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The trajectory of domestic worker activism in most countries can be summed up as follows:

Workers mobilise around labour rights and social justice issues, and start meeting in neighbourhoods, churches and community halls. Workers strategise about building organisations in different areas, towns and cities to grow their membership. They organise meetings, workshops and conferences to form political and labour associations, which form the foundations for creating unions, which are then affiliated to other worker unions, organisations and federations. Domestic worker organisations usually form alliances with other self-interest groups and international organisations such as the ILO, and other organisations such as WIEGO and the Solidarity Center that can provide them with funding. Alliances are also usually built with other organisations usually campaigning for women's rights, children's rights or racial equality, and in some countries such as Brazil, their standpoints are included in organs where public policies are discussed and monitored (Goncalves, 2010). It is thus evident that collective action is necessary for domestic worker empowerment.

However, there are other factors that impact on their organising attempts. Global factors, including recessions, have impacted on the shift from full-time domestic work to part-time. Most of these part-time workers are undocumented, and are therefore not under the protection of legal frameworks. This among other factors impedes their ability to organise effectively and make claims. Full time, most often live-in workers too, have their challenges. They often work six to seven days a week, with long hours, hampering their ability to join movements and organise. From my work with SADSAWU, I know that besides their long hours, they earn such low wages that they often do not have enough money to travel and to attend meetings. For migrant workers, other factors such as differences in nationality, race, ethnicity and languages also pose barriers to organising. Despite these challenges, domestic worker leaders are still actively mobilising and creating transnational networks to change the lives of millions of domestic workers world-wide.

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As mentioned previously, domestic workers demanded that they speak for themselves. And so they did. They have been at the forefront of their own struggle, and their gains can rightfully be accredited to them.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

> …freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. … unless we see in visible and practical terms that the condition of the women in our country has radically changed for the better, and that they have been empowered to intervene in all spheres of life as equals with any other member of society.
>
> - R.N Mandela[41]

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Can the subaltern speak?

At the heart of this study was the question posed by Spivak (1988), "Can the subaltern speak?", which is an intriguing question for me given that I am South African schooled in resistance politics, which encourages the oppressed to speak for themselves. Using a subaltern theoretical framework, I was able to shift the debate away from the prevalent one in the literature of domestic workers being subaltern (see for instance Lai, 2010; Odem, 2018; Sun, 2009), and passive victims of exploitation at the mercy of capitalist mechanisations and patriarchal control, as discussed previously. The literature reviewed in this study also revealed that domestic workers have mostly been ignored by state legislation globally, and had difficulty engaging with power structures. Indeed, domestic workers have always been perceived as victims and vulnerable. Ally (2009) has shown in her study how workers themselves feed into this discourse of vulnerability, in order to gain concessions from the state. In this study however, I tried to

[41] President Mandela's inaugural speech in 1994 Mandela, R. N. (1994). State of the nation address by the president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Retrieved from http://unpan1.un.org.ezproxy.uwc.ac.za/intradoc/groups/public/documents/cpsi/unpan035001.pdf

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shift the gaze away from the exploitation and subjugation of domestic workers, and instead examined the agency and activism of domestic worker leaders.

An examination of Spivak's work revealed that she increasingly favoured transnational modes of analysis, above national models of analysis, to determine the relationships between power and domination. In this study I employed a transnational feminist theoretical framework from which to examine domestic worker leader activism and agency. This is an appropriate framework from which to launch my enquiry, as domestic worker leaders are organising both nationally and transnationally, even though they are aware of the nuances of the different geopolitical contexts. I was thus able to examine the relationship between domestic worker leaders and global power structures, while not assuming a unitary experience in different national and geopolitical contexts, which also emerges from their narratives.

Although Spivak (1988) asks her readers to pay attention to the voice and silence of the subaltern, paradoxically she also expresses a particular thread in feminist thought, which argues against the possibility of subaltern speech, due to its limited understanding of subaltern voice and agency. Spivak claims that the subaltern voice remains muted or misunderstood as a result of the interpretive frameworks she is subjected to as a gendered subject. In this study I offer the possibility of locating voice through the narratives of domestic worker leaders as subaltern, notwithstanding the contradictory task of presenting subaltern voice to which Spivak has powerfully alerted us. I felt comfortable doing so, as in a later interview, Spivak (1992, p. 46) made the following comments:

> When you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere.... the only way that speech is produced is by inserting the subaltern into the circuit of hegemony, which is what should happen, as subaltern. Who the hell wants to museumize or protect subalternity? Only extremely reactionary, dubious, anthropologistic museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference. To do a thing, to work for the subaltern, means to bring it into speech.

Spivak (1992) does however warn that the subaltern’s entry into capital progress and consumption, and access to forms of education provided by those in power, might mean the end of subaltern status. Although the domestic worker leaders in this study cannot be said to have made any significant progress in terms of capital accumulation and consumption, they

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mostly desired education, and joined institutions and organisation to learn new skills and, for some, to obtain a formal education. Most of the skills and education obtained were from organisations that were donor funded. Heeding Spivak's warning, that might have signalled the end of their subaltern status. These organisations have empowered them and they were able to join networks and assume leadership positions from which to speak out against their exploitation. Indeed, in the introductory chapter I posed the question whether the domestic worker leader as subaltern could speak. In this study, it is clear that domestic worker leaders have taken control of their lives and exhibited agency by inserting themselves "into the circuit of hegemony" (Spivak, 1992, p. 46). By means of a summary of the findings of this study and the significance it has for domestic worker agency and activism, I am able to demonstrate the recovered voice of the domestic worker leaders as subaltern.

Summary of research findings

This study is premised on the critique of how the majority of academic literature has portrayed domestic workers as victims of exploitation, while not much attention is given to their agency and activism. Scholars have argued that living in poverty for a long time, without having many choices available (Mbigi, 2005), makes changing their identities and their lives almost unattainable (Marais & van Wyk, 2015). I argue in this study that domestic worker leaders have agency and are politically active, and have the ability to change the identity-position of domestic workers globally. Their activism was moved onto a world-stage with the ILO's promulgation of C189, which signified a very important occurrence in the history of domestic worker activism. Global players finally realised the importance of domestic workers in the economy, and that they could no longer devalue domestic work just because it is regarded as women's work and located in the private sphere. One of the most important benefits of C189 was the fact that domestic worker leaders were able to form the IDWF, which had implications for how they organised. Being part of an international federation meant that domestic workers could organise transnationally, which had consequences for new domestic worker identities that are neither essentialised nor unitary.

The foundations of this study have their roots in a postcolonial feminist framework. In this study I traced the historical roots of domestic work both locally and in a global context, and demonstrated that despite being portrayed as victims without agency, domestic workers as women of colour played a significant role in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Despite

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being 'othered' and even under severe oppression, domestic workers always had the ability to mobilise. I examined colonial discourse through the use of postcolonial critique and analysis. A postcolonial analysis allowed me to examine women's mobilisation and resistance, and examine how gendered power relations intersected with class, race, ethnicity and citizenship are reproduced and contested.

The methodological framework of this study also has feminist underpinnings, as is evident in the interviewing and analysis techniques I employed as outlined in Chapter Six. Participants were active collaborators in the research process, and I utilised a self-reflexive praxis, allowing me to examine my power as a researcher (Devault, 1999; Harding, 1987). I took heed of Hesse-Biber's (2007) injunction that by "disclosing their values, attitudes, and biases in their approach to particular research questions and in engaging in strong reflexivity throughout the research process, feminist researchers can actually improve the objectivity of the research" (p. 10).

I briefly summarise the findings as discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine below, and the implications of such findings.

In discussing the subjective experiences that placed the domestic worker leaders on the paths to activism, I was conscious of not esssentialising their experiences. However, in the thematic analysis undertaken, there were definite similarities that defined their experiences. My study shows that most domestic worker leaders who were executive members of the IDWF worked as domestic workers from a very young age and experienced harsh, exploitative working conditions. They all valued education, although they had very little of it. I posit that it is the resistance they felt towards the conditions that they had to endure and the oppression that they felt, that contributed to their wanting to improve their own working conditions, and thus their own lives and those of other domestic workers.

All the domestic workers in this study joined organisations in which they developed networks and in which they could form a collective identity. These organisations included social, religious, educational, political and labour organisations, usually concerned with social justice issues. Goncalves (2010) maintained that globally, women's involvement in social movements has increased women's empowerment. In this study too, these organisations served to empower their members, by offering literacy support, imparting skills or being directly involved in the education of their members. Using a Freirian approach to education, I demonstrated in Chapter Eight, that domestic workers participating in this study realised that their experiences of

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oppression is not a fate they could not change; once they understood the structures of their oppression, their lives could be changed.

Education was an ideal that all the participants in my study said that they strived towards. Most joined organisations in which they learnt new skills or received an education. Education empowered these women to take control over their own lives and to exhibit agency. Furthermore, their literacy and skills attained facilitated their paths to leadership positions.

By joining labour organisations such as unions they were able to access resources and receive a political education that further empowered them. However, Elizabeth Tang the General Secretary of the IDWF mentioned to me that the political education received in unions was not enough, as it was done randomly and on an informal basis; her ambition was to formally organise political education for domestic workers. She argued that for domestic workers to be free, they have to understand power structures and how to use that power. I concur with Tang. From my observations and work with SADSAWU members, though most of the members were politicised to an extent, it was the leaders who received the opportunities to network on a bigger scale nationally and who travelled and made international linkages who were most likely to be more politically knowledgeable. They were more empowered than ordinary union members, as the political knowledge gained often included knowledge of global legal frameworks as they pertained to domestic work, as was evident in the conversations with the participants in this study.

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An unexpected finding was that religious beliefs and meanings appeared to powerfully shape the path to activism. In the literature reviewed, religion is seen to be a double edge sword – it can function to promote activism but also to instil and expect quiescence, that is, it can mobilise or demobilise agency and activism. In the case of domestic worker leaders, an important finding is that most were religious and believed in God, and some also felt that their actions were God-ordained, especially in the case of Myrtle Witbooi. Although most domestic worker leaders demonstrated remarkable empathy and wanted to assist others, as in the case of showing Servant Leadership as discussed in Chapter Eight, none felt inclined to serve others as a result of biblical exhortations, as in the examples in the literature as demonstrated in Chapter Eight. This is a significant difference between domestic workers who become leaders and those who do not. Indeed, the religious organisations that the domestic worker leaders joined served as a powerful cradle from which to develop leadership skills and foster collective identity and solidarity.

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As mentioned previously, it is well documented in the literature that domestic workers are often exploited and abused by their employers (see for instance Ally, 2009; Cock, 1980; Motsei, 1990). In this study too, I have shown that all of the domestic worker leaders were exploited at some stage and some were abused. Often this exploitation and abuse was possible due to the lack of legal frameworks regulating domestic work, for instance in the Middle East, or due to the political laws of the country, for instance in Apartheid in South Africa. Thus the exploitation of domestic workers is facilitated by socio-political factors. I have shown in this study however, that the possibility exists to resist exploitative practises and abuse through unionisation. In labour organisations domestic workers learn new skills, are politicised and have support to resist their oppression. Furthermore, when they know their rights, they are able to resist. For example, on 17 May 2018, a woman in Singapore was charged with not affording her migrant domestic worker safe working conditions (http://www.channelnewsasia.com). She ordered her domestic worker to clean a glass ceiling located on the second floor of her home on four separate occasions. The domestic worker had to stand on the glass ceiling, thereby endangering her life. If found guilty, the employer faces a very hefty fine or jail sentence. In this study some of the domestic worker leaders argued that the inequalities that enabled abuse were built into the system of domestic work from which their oppression stemmed, but they also acknowledged and reported on the possibility of positive human relations between themselves and their employers at a more subjective level.

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In Chapter Nine, I discussed the adoption of C189, the formation of the IDWF and the impact of its formation on domestic worker activism. From the mid-1980s already domestic workers globally were demanding to be recognised as workers. Although they had been fighting for their rights for a few centuries (Sarti, 2014), and were already organising internationally before the formation of the IDWF (Friedman, 2003), they were geographically dispersed. However, they persisted and were able to exchange information and provide mutual support to their organisations globally. These transnational linkages were strengthened and they came together to form the IDWN in 2009. Assisted by organisations such as WIEGO and the IUF, they were able to bring their demand for a convention to the attention of the ILO, and in 2013 C189 was adopted.

As mentioned in Chapter Nine, since the adoption of C189, legal frameworks ensuring decent working conditions for domestic workers have been implemented in more than 70 states affiliated to the ILO; 25 member states have ratified C189, 30 began law and policy reforms and 18 pledged their commitment to extend protections to domestic workers (ILO, 1996-2017).

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The adoption of C189 signals the recognition of the economic and social value of domestic workers, and impels governments to expand on the current legal frameworks they have in place for domestic worker protection. As emerges in this chapter, their victory has empowered domestic workers even further. Domestic workers across the globe are able to call the IDWF their home, and it has become the site of their resistance. The IDWF is able to launch international campaigns on behalf of domestic workers, and is able to support member organisations with their own campaigns on a national level. With the formation of the IDWF, domestic worker struggles have become more visible and they are able to garner more support from the international community.

A key finding of this study though is that some domestic worker leaders believe, despite the ratification of C189 by many countries, that the implementation is slow and therefore not much has changed. I discuss the implications of this finding hereunder. In the interviews many participants spoke of how jubilant they were when C189 was adopted and hoped that it signalled the end of their problems, but their problems persisted. They were very disappointed that although many countries have ratified C189, there were many countries that did not and where abuse was rife, for instance in Middle Eastern countries, where no significant changes have taken place in their labour laws. The IDWF is also still young, having been formed at the end of 2013, and is beset with organisational and leadership matters that needs addressing. Only time will tell whether the formation of the IDWF has the potential to change the marginalisation, exploitation and abuse – physical, emotional and financial – with which domestic workers are faced.

Although the adoption of C189 and the formation of the IDWF, as discussed in Chapter Nine, rendered domestic workers more visible than before, the issues they faced are still not being addressed adequately. In the introduction I referred to Myrtle Witbooi saying "I thought we are living in a different world. Maybe I am mistaken?" Being the President of the IDWF, Myrtle probably expected that the conditions under which domestic workers worked might have changed, thus her reference to "living in a different world" and realised that they might not have. Although I chose to write on the agency and activism of domestic worker leaders, I am aware that domestic workers globally are still subjected to very harsh working conditions that are changing slowly with the increased unionisation of members. One of the issues they face is being *women* entering the labour market - the organisations involved in the adoption of C189 did not pay much attention to domestic worker's gender rights and their needs as women participating in the labour market (Fish, 2017). An example is migrant workers who are not

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allowed to bring their children into the country in which they work. Another example is that C189 does not use the term 'rape', thus sexual abuse, and other forms of violence and abuse, especially against migrant workers, is still widespread with no legislation to protect them (Fish, 2017). Indeed, the lack of visibility of all women engaged in cleaning work is referred to in a November 2017 social media posting by Barbara Ehrenreich, well known scholar and founder of the Economic Hardship Reporting Project. She 'tweeted' the following in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein[42] sexual abuse scandals "Our current sex harassment discussion is woefully class-skewed. Too much about actresses and not enough about hotel housekeepers"[43].

Domestic worker unions in their own countries too are beset with problems. For instance, leadership succession in SADSAWU is a major concern. Indeed, whenever I was asked to do workshops for SADSAWU, other members of COSATU asked me to introduce succession talks, which inevitable led to conflict. When Myrtle Witbooi and Hester Stephens, the General Secretary and President retire, it will be difficult to fill their positions. Myrtle has been criticised by members of SADSAWU and external stakeholders for not sufficiently grooming successors. Indeed, this problem is pervasive, as Chris Bonner mentioned in her interview, you see the same leaders at every conference and workshop. She jokingly said some have become jetsetters, so it is very hard to give way for new leaders.

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In any case, as with other organisations, there will always be problems. Certainly, the formation of the IDWF did not herald the end of domestic worker hardship nor their activism, as the findings in Chapter Nine signalled. Myrtle Witbooi acknowledges that the struggle is far from over and might just be at its beginning stages. She mentioned in her interview that a 88 year-old trade unionist from Geneva said to Myrtle on the stage at the ILO conference before she was elected:

> Myrtle, you are starting on that road once again, and you are going to walk that road, and we are all going to follow you on that road, so your task is not finished. The domestic worker leaders have accomplished so much, their work is not done, but it behoves us [the audience at the ILO] to acknowledge

[42] Harvey Weinstein is a former wealthy, well-known film producer who was accused of sexually abusing many women actors.

[43] The sexual scandal raised the level of awareness about the abuse women from all walks of life have to endure to the extent that well-known film personalities brought activists as their invited partners to the Golden Globes, an awards event in Hollywood. Meryl Streep, a renowned actor was accompanied Ai-Jen Poo, the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and co-director of the Caring Across Generations Campaign, an organisation that campaigns for the long-term care of the elderly and those with disabilities.

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> the great strides they have made to provide fair working conditions for millions of women around the world.

Indeed, as I conclude this study, Myrtle is leading a delegation of domestic worker leaders again at the ILO again seeking a Convention against gender based violence in the workplace. Working alongside them are WIEGO and other worker leaders and trade unions representing workers in the informal economy. I am unable to report further on this development as the process is ongoing, but needless to say that the IDWF will probably continue lobbying the ILO for better working conditions for domestic workers globally.

Contributions of this study

A significant contribution of this study is the destabilisation of the popular trope of domestic worker passivity in the literature. There has been little research done on how domestic workers show resistance to the oppressive conditions they have to endure and become activists. In this study, by exploring the life stories of domestic worker leaders, I pay attention to more than just their relationships with external stakeholders and their oppression in general. I excavate the richness of the lives they led on the journey they followed to leadership and activism. I undertake several layers of evaluation in trying to understand how the marginalised come to resist, by articulating resistance and agency across multiple and different contexts. By examining the life experiences of domestic worker leaders across different geopolitical contexts, I flag the commonalities of their experiences, whilst trying to avoid essentialising these experiences. The similarity in their narratives on their journeys to activism show that, despite globalisation and the impetus for countries increasingly to adopt a human rights framework in the development of their citizens' constitutional rights, domestic workers continue to suffer intersectional injustices as they did a century ago. Despite the global recognition by important bodies such as the ILO and the internationalisation of the domestic workers' movement through the formation of the IDWF, the institution of domestic work is still devalued and reflects global inequalities, although the leaders are affirmed and valued on an international stage.

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I have already mentioned that unions such as SADSAWU face problems with succession when the current leadership retires. By understanding the factors that provide domestic workers with

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agency such as education, skills development and joining organisations that empower them, as shown in Chapter Eight, unions are able to fast-track the development of potential leaders and increase the number of domestic worker leaders globally.

An important aspect of this study is that the mapping out of a trajectory of agency and activism of domestic worker leaders is probably generalizable across many sectors of society who are multiply marginalised, although more studies are required to confirm this suggestion. This study too highlights the fact that although women have agency and are politically active, global gender and intersectional inequality still persists, where women are still in an exploitable position, and their work that is domestic labour and reproductive care in particular and femininity in general is devalued. Thus, it is important to note that although this study challenges the erasure of the image of resistance and agency among domestic workers, it does not create a binary of victim-agency.

Limitations of this study and areas for further research

The findings of this study are limited as they pertain only to domestic worker leaders who are executive members of their unions and the IDWF. For a more comprehensive study, domestic worker leaders of unions globally could be included, as they are all politically active and have transnational linkages through the IDWF. This would increase the sample size and produce richer results. Furthermore, a comparative study could be done with those domestic worker leaders who belong to labour organisations not affiliated to the IDWF, to compare gains accrued and the impact of the formation of the IDWF. Besides the qualitative interviewing conducted, there is scope for further research using focus groups to extend the understanding of domestic worker activism begun in this study.

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Another area of research could be a comparative study between domestic worker leaders who are activists and domestic workers who are not activists, to determine whether there are general differences in subjective experiences between the two groups. This would determine whether these experiences influence activism.

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Conclusion

Throughout the research process, I reflected on the impact of this research on me, besides the eventual obtaining of a doctoral degree. Reading about and listening to the incredible life stories of the strongest women I know, touched me and changed my life. It was a journey unlike any other I have undertaken. Being part of their world for periods at a time expanded my own horizons, I was touched by their humanity in the face of adversity and their generosity of spirit. Being a Black, politically active South African woman who grew up in a working class home, and the resultant over-identification politically with women who were oppressed, made me glad that I was able to challenge the stereotypical notions of these women only as victims without agency. I was grateful that I was doing feminist research, and did not have to be concerned about objectivity or distancing myself from the research. However, at times I felt like a fraud, my life was so much easier than theirs. Although I was regarded as an 'insider', I was really an 'outsider' with a different race and class - what did I really know about their lives and the hardships they had to endure? After much thought I agreed with many feminist theorists, that the boundaries between 'insider' and 'outsider' were fluid and permeable and one could occupy both positions simultaneously (Collins, 2000). I knew that I was privileged to be an insider too, I was sensitive to all the nuances of the research, and had insider information on important areas of the research that could only strengthen the research (Collins, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2007). However, I was always aware of how the information at my disposal shaped this study. I have shared their stories and shared many dreams, hopes and fears. I am privileged.

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DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION SHEET

Research on the agency and activism of domestic worker leaders

This research project seeks to understand the subjective experiences of domestic worker leaders that leads them to activism both nationally and internationally.

This study hopes to contribute to the existing literature on the agency and activism of domestic workers and the exploitation and subjugation faced by them.

The research is being conducted by Susheela Mcwatts, a doctoral student in the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape and supervised by Professor Tamara Shefer at the same institution.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you should only do so if you fully understand the aims of this study and would willingly like to participate in it.

If you agree to participate in this study, you would be required to sign a consent form at the beginning of the process that will protect you and inform you of your rights as a research participant. I look forward to your participation if you decide to do so.

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DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Yes madam, I can speak!" A study of the recovered voice of the domestic worker

I , …………………….hereby give my consent to participate in this research project, which is an exploration of the agency and activism of domestic worker leaders nationally and globally.

- I understand that the research is being conducted by Susheela Mcwatts, a doctoral student at the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape.
- I have been fully informed of the aims of the study and I am participating on a voluntary basis.
- I have not been unduly pressured into participating in this study and understand that I am free to leave at any time of the process without any consequences.
- I understand that all information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that my identity will be kept anonymous.
- I agree that the data collected will be used for a doctoral study and could be published in reports and/or publications.
- I understand that the audio-recordings will be transcribed and kept in a locked, secure place that only the researcher has access to.

Signature ……………………………..

Date …………………………………..

Place …………………………………..

Researcher …………………………….

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APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DOMESTIC WORKER LEADERS

1. Please introduce yourself by name and your position in the IDWF.

2. Where are you from and which union do you belong to?
   Prompt:
   - What is your position in it?

3. What is your current age and marital status?
   Prompts:
   - Does your work as a domestic worker influence your being married/not being married and how?
   - Do you live together in the same country and if not, is that because of your job?

4. Do you have any children and if so, how many?
   Prompts:
   - Tell me a little bit more about them – how old they are and what they currently do?
   - Do they live with you?
   - If not where do they live and why do they live there?

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5. Why did you start working as a domestic worker and at what age?
   Prompts:
   - Describe your family life at the time.
   - Describe the schooling that you had.
   - Are you still a domestic worker?

6. Describe your life as a domestic worker from your first job to your current/last.
   Prompts for each job:
   - What were your tasks and how did you feel about performing them?
   - Describe your employers in terms of race, nationality and ethnicity.
   - What were their occupations and how did they treat you?
   - Did they have any children and what was your relationship with them?
   - How many hours per day did you work and how many days per week?
   - Describe a typical day at work.
   - How did you generally feel in this household? Please elaborate on anything else that you would want me to know about each household.

7. Which organisations did you join outside of your jobs and why?

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Prompts for each organisation:

- Describe these organisations and what activities they undertook.
- What was your position?
- Describe the people that you met and what you did together.
- Did this organisation have any influence on you and what was it?
- Do you think it helped you become a leader and how did it?
- Do you think it helped you become an activist and how did it?
- Did you influence any members of this organisation and how did you do so?

8. When did you join a domestic workers union and why did you do so?
   Prompts for each union:

   - Describe your union activities.
   - Describe your position in the union.
   - Did the union influence you and in which way?
   - Did you influence any members or potential members and in which way?
   - Do you think belonging to a union helped you become a leader and why?
   - Do you think belonging to a union helped you become an activist and why?

9. Do you live in your own country and if not, why not?
   Prompts:
   - Describe the political situation in your country as it impacts on you as a domestic worker.
   - What were the political factors in your country that encouraged you to become an activist?
   - Do you think the legislation covering the employment of domestic workers is sufficient? If not, what should be changed or included?

10. Did your union change ideologically and politically after the establishment of the IDWF and how?
    Prompt:
    - Did the establishment of the IDWF herald any changes and what were they?
    - Did the way you mobilise, organise and campaign change, and how?
    - What are the advantages and disadvantages of your union's affiliation to the IDWF?

11. Describe how and why you became an executive member of the IDWF.
    Prompt:
    - Did being an executive member of the IDWF change your life and how?

12. Did the adoption of C189 change the lives of domestic workers nationally and globally, and how?
    Prompt:

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- What are the advantages of the establishment of the IDWF for domestic workers generally?

13. Did the establishment of the IDWF change the lives of domestic workers nationally and globally and how?

14. What would you say made you become an activist and what are the major influences on your being an activist?

15. How does being an activist impact on your family life?

16. Is there anything you would like to add?

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APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR ELIZABETH TANG[44] AND PARTICIPANTS FROM WIEGO AND UIF.

1. Introduce yourself by name and your position in your organisation.

2. Describe your career journey up to now and how you have come to occupy the position that you do.

3. What is your organisation's relationship with the IDWF and how do you assist the IDWF? (This question not for Elizabeth Tang).

4. What were the changes that domestic workers experienced after the establishment of the IDWF both nationally and internationally?

5. How are domestic workers organised and mobilised globally?

6. What are the most challenging aspects of organising domestic workers on a global basis?

7. Describe the role the IDWF plays in empowering domestic workers to resist oppressive mechanisms in both their own countries and globally.

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8. Has the IDWF and the adoption of C189 the ability to change domestic workers identity positions of exploitation and subjugation to ones of agency? Describe why you think so if you do.

9. How does the IDWF prepare domestic workers for leadership roles?

10. Are there differences in agency, activism and leadership styles between the women from the global south and those from the global north, and what are they?

11. What role does South Africa in general and SADSAWU in particular play in domestic worker global leadership and activism, if any?

[44] Elizabeth Tang, the General Secretary of the IDWF was not a domestic worker previously and the questions in Appendix 3 wold not be applicable to her.

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