Working on the Inside, Living on the Outside: Migrant Domestic Workers in Jordan

Diana Dai
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Under the supervision of Dr. Frances S. Hasso, Associate Professor in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies

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Abstract

Migrant workers are often seen as the archetypical excluded figure. This image becomes even more vivid and convincing when the worker is identified as woman, non-white, and poor. In response to this excluded figure, public and scholarly discourse has been focused on the language of inclusion and integration, which often implies expanding citizenship, amnesty, legal status, and other forms of juridicial clemency. This thesis pushes against the tendency to see exclusion and inclusion as a natural binary and with clearly demarcated borders. Instead, I argue that spaces and conditions of exclusion and inclusion are contingent upon and subject to state power and dominant discourses. What this means in relation to migrant domestic workers in Jordan is that being “included” -- whether by the law, by the family, by the state -- can often yield ambiguous results. Using the notion of inclusion as a starting point, my thesis investigates the complex dynamics of labor migration in Jordan and the Philippines, the role of both these states in the governance and “inclusion” of migrants/citizens, and the role of capitalist ideology in the exploitation of migrant domestics. I find that, on the one hand, being included into the law, family, or state subjects one to more control, surveillance, and discipline. On the other hand, being “excluded” from the law, family, or state can open up possibilities for more autonomy, choice, and consensual relations.
Introduction

In October 2015, I found myself in Amman for the second time. As a keen and bright-eyed student, I had dutifully signed myself up to participate in the IHP Human Rights program, sponsored by the School of International Training. Over the course of one semester, our cohort of twenty-seven students ventured from New York City to Kathmandu, Amman, and Santiago to learn as much as we could about “human rights in a transnational context.” Problematic as that may sound – and it was often problematic – the program gave me the opportunity to hear numerous local activists who were all committed to struggles within their immediate community. Jordan was our second stop, and I was most eager for that particular leg of the trip because I had been there the summer before on a handsomely funded service-learning trip called DukeEngage and considered myself somewhat of an insider. I knew a thing or two: what the food was like, how to get around the city, how they (the people) treated foreigners, and where one could find some young English-speaking, cigarette-smoking, brooding Arab musicians and artists who could tell my friends about the “real” Middle East.

I admit to my own over-confidence and self-obsession. I wish I could have displayed just a bit more thoughtfulness and sensitivity to my new surroundings. For what it is worth, I have many stories about other U.S. study-abroad students who felt the same desire for adventure and sense of moral superiority for having “seen” the Middle East as a “Westerner”. Throughout the writing of this thesis, and through other classes I took at Duke, my intellectual fetishization of certain issues popular in the study of this region – women, refugees, Islam, colonialism, democracy – became a little more dislodged with each day that I read, learned, listened, and questioned.
This thesis is the product of my experiences in Jordan during this visit and an additional research trip I took in the summer of 2016. But my exposure to domestic workers did not begin with Jordan, since I grew up in Hong Kong, a city known for its large population of migrant domestic workers. Between the ages of 13 and 15, my family employed a young woman from Indonesia – a “helper”, a term commonly used in Hong Kong to refer to domestic workers. Until her very last of work with us, I felt a certain uneasiness knowing that she was sleeping in the room next to mine. Seven years later, I continue to sift through feelings of guilt, confusion, and awkwardness from that period. I attended an international private school where many, if not all, of my classmates were raised and taken care of by one or more domestic workers. I grew accustomed to seeing large numbers of Filipina or Indonesian women populating the parks and sidewalks of the city every Sunday, as well as helpers lining up outside schools every day at 3:00 m., chatting and mingling with other helpers as they waited to pick up the children of their employers.

The mistreatment of domestic workers hardly ever entered my mind before I came to the United States for college. I remember a brief stint in high school where the issue of domestic workers’ rights was brought to my attention: our high school Human Rights Club spent a few weeks raising awareness about something called the “right to abode.” One of my good friends, a chatty, authoritative girl, was president of the club. Sometimes during lunch hour she would discuss the issues with me, telling me stories of horrific treatment towards helpers (“happening right here in Hong Kong!”) Most of the time, I listened absent-mindedly. “I was not horrific. Anybody with any common sense should know how to treat another person with respect.” And that was that. Other than the few weeks where the school halls were studded with posters with
black-and-white pictures of sad-looking women peering out a window, the issue of domestic workers was taken for granted.

The purpose of these confessions is to disclose and contextualize where I stand as a student interested in writing a thesis about migrant domestic workers in the Middle East: sometimes naïve and ill-informed, but not always. During my years in Hong Kong, I got to know some of my friends’ helpers very well; most of them I saw on a weekly, if not daily, basis. The worker from Indonesia that my parents had employed was also not entirely a stranger to me (we traveled around China for two weeks with her by our side). These are women that I have shared secrets with, laughed with, and been angry and frustrated with. Women who have made food for me, cleaned up after me, supervised, waited, and entertained me. Women whose personal lives I have always been curious to know about, but could never bring myself to ask. How to make sense of all this, and the emotions that I feel? This thesis is a first and significant attempt to do so, and although I certainly cannot extrapolate the insights from my own life to “make sense” of the practices, people, and experiences I discuss in this paper, it is also not possible to compartmentalize myself and my biases in my writing or analyses. This is a tension that I try to keep alive throughout this thesis, although I do not shy away from the reality that I might sometimes be unsuccessful.

In the remainder of this chapter, I begin with two analytical discussions, the latter of which includes my thesis outline. Following this, I include the economic and social background relevant to situating migrant domestic work in the Jordanian context. Lastly, I present my research methods. Within my analytical discussions, I introduce some major themes and concepts that set the stage for my research topic and theoretical contributions. The first discussion is dedicated to the question of agency: I analyze how agency is defined and used in
the literature on domestic work, and consider the implications of its use. The discussion focuses on how migrant domestics are embedded with, are constituted by, and contribute to the global processes and discourses that affect their lives, in both deleterious and beneficial ways, and how this reality complicates theoretical applications of agency. The second discussion has to do with the main organizing principle of my thesis: inclusion. In particular, I discuss what is at stake when we evoke the notion of inclusion, and why inclusion on the state’s terms will always be a double-edged, laborious struggle.

**Local as Feminine and The Implications of “Agency”**

This thesis began as an attempt to understand the structural-level causes and subject-level effects of an understudied migration pathway: the Philippines to Jordan, and along the way, Southeast Asia to the Middle East. Soon into my inquiry, however, I realized that this approach was limited and problematic. In particular, the problem arises when grand theories of globalization are used to understand or explain “local” instances of experience, resistance, or participation. Carla Freeman masterfully elucidates this when she argues that studies about globalization have implicitly followed a dichotomous model in which theory and global processes are rendered *masculine*, while local empirical observations (always about culture and people) are rendered *feminine* (Freeman 2001). The focus of my thesis is mostly *processes* that define globalization, for which Freedman provides a comprehensive baseline definition: “the spatial reorganization of production across national borders and a vast acceleration in the global circulation of capital, goods, labor, and ideas, all of which have generally been traced in their contemporary form to the economic and political shifts in the 1970s” (1008). These processes operationalize not only at the institutional or state level (i.e. guest worker programs, more stringent immigration policy, higher volumes of foreign trade and investment, more unequal
implementation of development projects and policy), but also at the subject level, in which individuals engage in practices that are “both embedded within and at the same time transforming practices of global capitalism” (1008). As I became aware of this tendency to see the global as masculine and the local as feminine, I soon became aware of it in other analyses as well, particularly in writings about migrant domestic workers -- and even more particularly, in writings about migrant domestic workers in the Middle East.

This brought me to the concept of agency, which I identified as an intriguing common thread among all the works on migrant domestic work that I consulted. As a social science project, there was no way my research could have avoided engaging with the question of agency. As a project about real people, I am invariably faced with the task of elevating them above victim status and maintaining their personhood, while also making the crucial analytical point that individuals are fully embedded within, constituted by, and affected by oppressive structures and ideologies (global capitalism, state power, nationalism, sexism, racism). This dilemma calls to mind the structure versus agency debate, within which this project is inherently invested. Indeed, all of the works I read on this topic were concerned with agency -- sometimes, I argue, in an obligatory fashion, as a way to avoid the charge that the women under study are being represented as passive objects. On the one hand, this analytical move perhaps grew out of the completely justified imperative within feminist studies to push back on the portrayal of women, particularly “Third World women,” as passive and oppressed (and thus opposite to the “enlightened” and “free” women of the West). One the other hand, I pose a delicate question: whether the readiness to name agency has evolved into a “familiar formulation” of the “third world woman” as someone who, by nature, is psychologically outside, against, and immune to ideology and structure. If, as Freeman argues, the “local” is not merely a set of effects of (and
thus, resistant and reactive to) globalization, but are also “constitutive ingredients” of its processes, where and how do we accurately name agency?

I saw the concept of agency being applied in a wide range of disciplines. For example, feminist writing in migration scholarship is careful not to perpetuate trafficking discourse (Agustin 2005; Mahdavi 2016, 14-17). Most are diligent to name their opposition to the outright application of purely economic models for understanding the migration of women, for example, push-pull theory. Thus, we avoid the trap of arguing that migrants’ decisions are simply determined by their economic circumstances (Oishi 2005, 13; Parreñas 2001; Mahdavi 2016, 19). We see the agency argument in scholarship on domestic workers in particular, some of which focuses on the political organization or agency of domestic workers, and others which focus on the micro, meso, or personal occurrences of agency even when the opportunity for collective mobilization is not there (Pande 2012).

On that particular point, Pardis Mahdavi’s *Crossing the Gulf* (2016) is one example of agency being found within the “intimate lives” of migrant domestics working in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City. Mahdavi understands the intimate to be “a space where migrants assert their agency and citizenship in the absence of their ability to do so vis-à-vis the state” (5). By focusing on intimate lives rather than economic behaviors, Mahdavi finds that immobility and mobility are governed by bonds of love and familial duties and not always by the codified rules of states. While state policies and “inflexible regimes” set the rules of mobility, migrant domestics make choices to stay or leave based on happenings in their intimate lives, which end up being spaces to “navigate and negotiate agency” (30). Mahdavi critiques the trafficking narrative used to describe the situation of migrant domestics in the Gulf. She writes that “essentializing domestic workers as products of their abuse rather than emphasizing the
complexities of their choices further challenges the agency of those who struggle to negotiate their potential courses of action, make decisions, and control their own lives” (75). Thus, for Mahdavi, migrant domestics have personal lives that are not necessarily governed by the conditions of their work life, which might include economic hardship, precarious legal status, or physical or emotional abuse. A longing for adventure, the freedom to explore one’s sexuality, or the wish to escape a stale life at home are all considered important dimensions of migrant life that must be acknowledged theoretically, as they often become sources of agentic action.

In a chapter titled, “Inflexible Citizenship and Flexible Practices”, Mahdavi present several stories of migrant domestics acting “creatively” and “flexibly” (77). She opens the chapter with a story about Lucinda, who followed her mother from the Philippines to Kuwait in the hopes of making enough money through domestic work so they both return. In the end, Lucinda’s mother found a new life for herself in Kuwait and Lucinda decided to stay because she felt there was nothing for her back in the Philippines. Lucinda enrolled in night classes and found a job as a data manager in a local hospital (74). Mahdavi uses this story to show how migrant domestics, as whole and capable human beings, respond deftly to their liminality, criminalization, and estrangement. Although Lucinda had no documents allowing her to remain in Kuwait, she arranged for such papers with the help of a local family. Despite her illegal status, caused by the “inflexibility” of the regime, Lucinda exercised her own flexible agency by deciding to stay.

Agency is also dealt with in Rhacel Parreñas’ book Servants of Globalization (2001), one of the most cited texts in scholarship on migrant workers and Filipina migrant workers. Using a “subject-level approach,” Parreñas draws our attention to “dislocations” between migrants and the macrostructures that pin them down into particular material positions, such as global
capitalism, patriarchy, state labor and emigration policies, family obligations, and class mobility or immobility (30-35). According to Parreñas, Filipina domestic workers exhibit agency when they negotiate these dislocations. Utilizing Butler’s concept of the “bind of agency,” Parreñas argues that the agency of Filipinas has a dual effect of “resisting” and “recuperating” power (34). One example of this “bind” is the reiteration of gender inequalities through the international division of reproductive labor. Parreñas shows how race- and class-privileged women reassign the burden of domestic work to migrant Filipina women. Some of these Filipina workers in turn reassign their own burden of domestic work by employing poorer women of a lower class background in the Philippines to look after her children (62). In their ability to transfer reproductive work to someone else, migrant Filipina domestics are exercising their agency, but in ways that reinforce power structures. Parreñas consistently conceptualizes agency as “enabled and limited by the structures that constitute subjects” (emphasis added, 24). She affirms later: “even though the forms of resistance that migrant Filipina domestic workers deploy against dislocations do not involve the direct diminishment of structural or institutional power, their acts of resistance must be credited” (34). Parreñas’ framing of agency as something both enabled and limited by structure strikes me as particularly paradoxical, perhaps circular. Migrant domestics can and do exercise autonomy, authority, decisiveness, and will as they move about their lives – I do not question that. The appropriate questions to ask, however are, first, why we would doubt these characteristics in the first place (or why we are particularly fascinated by women’s autonomy, authority, and will) and second, whether these characteristics necessarily constitute agency, especially when they feed back into hegemonic structures and ideologies.

Similar to Parreñas’ notion of agency as a recursive back and forth process between subjects and power structures, Gul Ozyegin (2001) in Untidy Gender argues that agency exists
because power is relational, and thus both employers and domestic workers influence and negotiate the work relation

Speaking in the context of Turkey and studying rural migrant women working in the city Ozyegin argues that, because power is relational, discourses of inequality end up being a resource for domestic workers when they use them to accomplish certain material benefits, even as those discourses also lead to their own subordination (18). This way of thinking allows us to acknowledge the contradictory effects of domestic workers’ subtle forms of agency in the face of “intimate” oppression. Ozyegin documents that domestic workers “inflict class guilt” onto their employers to obtain material benefits like wage increases (145) and deploy traditional notions of femininity to criticize their employers among themselves for being “bad mothers” and “not a woman” because they cannot do housework (149). Other times, domestic workers have “economic agency” in their use of earned money: “the salience of a sense of economic agency in women’s understanding of their own identities appeared when they went into debt to purchase a set of steel cookware or to help out adult children with clandestinely saved cash” (206). Like Parreñas and Mahdavi, Ozyegin’s examples of agentic action do not weaken or disrupt power structures.

Domestic workers might challenge the people and structures that subordinate them and navigate the obstacles, but can we say they are changing the terms of power relations or disrupting them? Perhaps there has been an overzealous application of agency as a theoretical concept so that feminist scholarship in particular is more likely to focus on the activities of the powerless rather than the structures of power. Are there less theoretically- and politically-burdened terms for discussing the negotiations, activities, and motivations of domestic workers? For example, could we use bodily autonomy to discuss the ability to decide how one moves their body and where and how one sleeps, eats, and seeks pleasure? Perhaps strategic decision-making
to describe how workers choose a course of action that may be easy or unbearably painful based on particular priorities. Finally, we could use affirmation of self-worth to describe how workers maintain dignity and wholeness in their understandings of self in less than ideal situations, for example, by deciding to work as a freelancer with multiple employees rather than one, or by keeping in contact with family and friends, or by manipulating social interactions with employers.

While these are certainly actions that indicate some autonomy, creativity, thinking, and self-protection by migrant domestic workers, they are not dramatically different from the daily doings of any reasonable person who must work to make a living. Following or forgetting lovers, parenting from afar, keeping in the boss’s good graces, and skirtsing the rules when necessary are part of the reality of getting by as one lives and works within capitalism. Parreñas and Ozyegin’s research shows, moreover, that the more “agency” we see by domestic workers, the more oppressive and reinforced existing systems seem to become. It would be more fruitful to theorize actions and their effects within the structures and conditions of economy, work, citizenship, and migration that produce and limit them. In other words, rather than foregrounding the autonomy of domestic workers, I contend we need to better understand the limited choices for survival in a capitalist society and how they help constitute our desires and subjectivities.

In general, agency as a concept is weak because it is vaguely defined and generously applied, in the process hiding much of what is discursively at work. Intellectual efforts to rescue “marginal” women from victimhood often works to glamorize even the smallest conscious or unconscious emancipatory actions, making me wary of the assumptions and consequences. Why are serious students of feminism and labor particularly surprised that domestic workers exhibit intelligence, stratagem, rationality, indolence, disobedience, extravagance and humor? Does the
fact that migrant domestics are predominately poor, non-white, and oppressed make such actions
agency by default? I keep these questions alive whenever I become too eager or enthusiastic
about the false promises of “agency” as an analytical or political concept.

This thesis is not meant to contribute to the debate about agency as it currently stands
(“do people have agency or not?”). Rather, I theorize the doings and subjectivities of migrant
domestic workers as effects of institutional and discursive systems of power. In that way, my
thesis follows a feminist postructuralist tradition, which pushes against “humanist” conceptions
of agency that assume identity to be continuous, rational, coherent, and knowable. Bronwyn
Davies’ masterful explication of what agency is (and is not) within feminist poststructuralism has
been especially useful for my analysis in this thesis:

Choices are understood as more akin to “forced choices”, since the subject’s positioning
within particular discourses makes the “chosen” line of action the only possible action,
not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively
constituted through one’s placement within that discourse to want that line of action. By
making clear the way in which a person is subject to discourse, poststructuralist theory
shows how agency is fundamentally illusory (Davies 1991, 46).

Throughout my research, I found Davis’ observation of being “subjected by discourses” a
powerful and precise description. At any point in time, the women I interviewed and spent time
with relayed experiences that reflected multiple, often contradictory, discourses. Desires too
were subjected to institutional arrangements, and dominant discourse (citizenship, femininity,
capitalism, nationalism, etc.). I acknowledge how pessimistic this description may seem. I agree
with Davies in that the poststructuralist perspective can open new doors for the concept:
The speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, can use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, and refuse or go beyond the other, both in terms of her own experienced subjectivity and in the way in which she chooses to speak in relation to the subjectivities of others (46).

Above all else, I focus on finding the contradictions, confusion, ambivalence, and skeptical tones. A great deal of that was expressed to me during my field work and my independent reading and analysis. I proceed with caution for the reasons that I have already identified in this section.

**My Thesis: Inclusion, Labor, and Struggle**

At the heart of my thesis lies a painful and difficult question: what is given up, forgotten, or concealed in the act of inclusion? In the following Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I attend to this question by examining three manifestations of the theme of inclusion, and subsequently, the desire and human need for it. The first I think of as juridical inclusion: a complimentary recognition by the state that one is a legitimate, law-abiding member of society. The second I tentatively call economic inclusion: an all-encompassing term that describes the validation of a person’s value, productivity, and usefulness. The third is remedial inclusion, which loosely describes acts by the government or by organizations that are intended to “correct a wrong” -- a gesture that signifies that a subordinate group is being looked out for. I demonstrate the particular ideological dichotomies of exclusion and inclusion – illegal/legal, disposable/valuable, powerful/powerless – and show that ultimately these unstable normative positionings collapse, become incoherent, and do not coincide with substantive, radical, change-worthy inclusion and exclusion.
How are these somewhat heady and vague descriptions relevant to migrant domestics in Jordan? We begin with the assumption that as migrants, as low-wage workers, and as women, this particular group of people faces marginalization, violence, and exclusion. They are excluded by the state, not only by virtue of their noncitizen status, but also when they are rendered illegal, illicit, or criminal subjects believed to pose a threat to those firmly “inside” the national community. Their racialized, classed, and gendered bodies are excluded in the homes they work in, among the neighbors who live on their street, and by the governments that recruited them. Along with the devaluation of their bodies, their labor is devalued, and they are considered to be non-productive elements of society, despite their necessity. And when the supranational organizations glance down, they see women who have not yet lived up to their full potential, who are not powerful, who are oppressed by their own cultures and people, and who do not (for some reason!) have the means to pick themselves up.

Thus, the migrant domestic worker is assumed to be the prototypically excluded figure. And it is against this unwavering assumption of her exclusion that the solution to include is brought up over and over again, in the three manifestations that I introduced above. “How may we bring her back into the fold of the law and the state?” “How may we increase her productivity and her worth to society?” “How may we fix her?” But the problem with these provocations quite obviously is that the migrant domestic’s exclusion, just like her inclusion, is ideologically and discursively constructed within existing power structures where states and capital interests dominate. Hence, one must seriously interrogate the boundary which separates inclusion from exclusion, and ask whether and how that boundary or distinction might be fabricated and false.

Chapter 1 of my thesis is an overview of regional and international labor migration in Jordan, the Middle East, and the Philippines after 1973, a relevant place to start since it lays out
some of the complexities of the particular migration pattern I am looking at (Philippines to Jordan). Chapter 1’s examines how state policies were crafted against global capitalist processes, exemplifying incoherence behind this notion of a “national inside.” The Philippine case is particularly of interest in how it maintains a notion of inclusivity while simultaneously relying on the export of millions of citizens abroad to work.

In Chapter 2, I examine the migrant domestics’ juridical “exclusion” through her condition of being an “illegal” migrant. One the one hand, juridical exclusion (being “illegal”) does indeed pose urgent problems to her well-being: she may be arrested or deported, she may not be getting good work or may not be getting work at all. On the other hand, juridical exclusion might give her certain opportunities: she may be getting better work, better conditions, or her “illegality” is secondary to financial matters (renewing a visa costs money). But a third point we must consider is what juridical inclusion can actually do for the migrant domestic: sometimes it is better work and much-desired stability, other times, distressingly, it gets her nothing. Juridical inclusion may not guarantee protection from arbitrary arrest, from false accusations of theft, from harassment, from confinement, and even from deportation. Therefore, in problematizing juridical exclusion (less migrant illegality) and offering juridical inclusion (more migrant legality), we might find ourselves reaffirming the (false) reality of a boundary between exclusion and inclusion – and, in the words of Amy Brandzel, “reifying the boundaries and borders of exclusion” (Brandzel 2016, 15).

The state, I argue, is always interested in reaffirming the notion that there is a pure, equal, unburdened “inside” space. But there are also instances where this reaffirmation involves bringing outsiders in. I argue that, fundamentally, this is about a capitalist interest in people’s labor-power. Again, speaking in the context of illegal migration, Nicholas De Genova states this
interest as such: “once within the ‘interior’ of the space of the nation state, ‘illegal’ migrants are presumed (like all other workers) to deliver their labor to market’” (De Genova 2013, 1189).

This leads me into the contents of Chapter 3, where I look at the nature of state-level and subject-level exploitation of migrant domestic workers by examining money. I ask how money is represented in the state’s discourse on migrant remittances, and I find that it can be shown as scarce or plentiful depending on the context. I also ask how money, as women workers’ wages, is a site of struggle and exploitation. I ask further under what conditions this exploitation occurs. Through various migrant narratives and previous research, I find notions of inclusion – deployed through language of care, loyalty, empathy, love – are again used in the subordination of migrant domestics’ labor. This analysis is complicated when I reorient myself to analyze “positive” social relations, the relations that migrant domestics have with their family, and with themselves. This yields complicated results. Caring for oneself and one’s family, particularly in a transnational context, often involves money, precisely because it is a far-reaching and totalizing form of valuation. Does this observation not suggest, then, the intractability of money and the limits of its liberatory potential for migrant domestic workers? What must we look out for when inclusion is premised on capitalist outcomes, such as increasing wages or having more to spend on consumption?

Chapter 4 attends to the efforts by governments and supranational organizations to “solve” exclusion through remedial inclusion. In response to the exploitation and abuse of “their” migrant women workers, for example, the Philippine government has sought to “empower” and manage their “vulnerabilities” (Guevarra 2007). The government does so, however, based on a neoliberal framework that “promotes economic competitiveness and entrepreneurship” in which they “embody an ethic of responsibility as citizens, workers, and women” (523). Thus, remedial
inclusion serves only to legitimize state power, by regulating labor (economic productive workers) and gender (good wives and mothers). I selected a fourteen-year long project implemented by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) from 2001 to 2015 and analyzed the ways it too reflected a form of transnational neoliberal governmentality that has now been thoroughly demonstrated by many other scholars in other contexts (Goldman 2001; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Guevarra 2007; Hasso 2009; Kunz 2013). My own insights on the UNIFEM project, and derived from a close look at a specific public awareness campaign that was implemented in Jordan in 2007 whereby several cartoons were drawn by a famous Jordanian cartoonist depicting common abuses faced by migrant domestics in the country. This campaign, along with the UNIFEM project as a whole, identifies the domestic workers’ problems as a private, individual, psychological issue originating from either her or her employer, and never from the government. Thus, UNIFEM’s “solution” in Jordan and elsewhere is private and individual in nature – namely, the project succeeded in enforcing a more comprehensive, standardized work contract that is meant to explicate very clearly the rights and obligations of each party. Hence, the remedial efforts taken by UNIFEM and the Jordanian government have indeed “included” the migrant domestic worker – not in a way that is genuinely empowering, but one that is arguably quite disempowering. The state includes her back in the home and back into the law, so that the underlying structures and institutions behind her exploitation remain unaddressed and hidden. Insofar as those underlying structures and institutions includes the home and the law, the state’s remedial efforts have in fact strengthened the preconditions of exploitation.

Taken together, chapters 2, 3, and 4 attend to the intricacies, struggle, and contradictions of inclusion in three forms. These struggles are, on the one hand, ideological, but they are also
personal and immediate. In my critique of inclusionary state gestures, and in my desire to point out the opportunities certain state-mediated inclusions create for exploitation, I am not disregarding the fact that activists and individuals sometimes fight for inclusion into the state as a matter of survival. Brandzel, citing Roderick Ferguson, discusses these “normative strivings” where “fantasies and seductions [of normative inclusion] are motivated by pain, and a desire to end the suffering and violence of exclusion” (Brandzel 2016, xiv). This struggle for immediate legal, economic, and political inclusion is precisely related to my intervention on agency. Just as agency can obscure oppressive structures and ideologies, so too can inclusion obscure the mechanisms which support substantive exclusion. While determined to make these critiques, I attempt to do so with respect and awareness of the pain and danger that takes place in real-time.

**Research Methods**

My research draws on three types of sources. The first type includes past literature and case studies, which I often consult for information and examples to illustrate an analytical point or to help construct a theoretical framing. However, I also try to engage critically with the existing literature – as I have done in this chapter – to contribute my own theoretical insights. The second type of sources I use include laws, reports by human rights organizations and research institutes, news articles, and materials produced by supranational organizations (particularly for Chapter 4). The third type of sources I use are interviews, field notes, and observations I gathered while I was Jordan in October 2015 and summer 2016. I conducted formal interviews with seven domestic workers, five from the Philippines, one from Bangladesh, and one from Sri Lanka. Four out of the five Filipina workers were part of the same social group, and other than interviewing them, I spent most of my time with them casually in multiple different settings. Their names are Carina, Mariana, Mia, and Rita. In my summer of “hanging
out” with these four women, I met many of their friends, acquaintances, and boyfriends and I had short, informal conversations with them about a random assortment of topics, usually not related to my research. I met the fifth Filipina worker, Angela, in October 2015. My interview with her was set up through a mutual Jordanian friend whom we both trusted. I was, unfortunately, only able to see Angela once. I lived with the woman from Bangladesh, Mina, for one month in October 2015. She was employed by the host family I was placed in as part of my study abroad program. I never formally interviewed Mina, but my roommate and I conversed with her every day, and often the topic was about her life in Jordan, her work situation, and her family. I met the woman from Sri Lanka, Miriam, I met at a rights-education workshop organized by the Adaleh Center for Human Rights in Jordan.

**People**

*Carina:* A married 33-year old mother of five. Carina is from Manila and has been in Jordan for 11 years. She has been back to the Philippines three times. When asked why she came to Jordan she says it was to help her husband, who didn’t make enough money working in the public sector (“in the municipal”). Carina needs to pay for the education of her five kids and “everything they want.” I consider her my first “friend” from that summer, since she is the one who connected me with the three other women in her friend group. Carina started out in Jordan as a live-in domestic for an older woman. She says that her Madam was “very good”, and that she taught her a lot about working in the home – how to cook Arabic food and also some important Arabic words. Carina worked inside the home for five years, after which she transferred to freelance work (which she has done for six years). Carina considers herself Christian, although her mother is Muslim: “I respect for my mother because my mother is Muslim. But my father is

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1 All names have been changed to protect the research participants’ privacy.
Christian, so I belong in Christian.” Carina has her own apartment, and she lives with two other Filipina workers (who are sisters). She also has three cats and loves singing karaoke at a Chinese restaurant near her home.

**Mariana:** A 34-year old widowed mother of two. Mariana is from Davao City, a major city on Mindanao island in the Philippines. Her husband died eight years ago of lung cancer, which was very tragic for Mariana and her children since she was already working abroad as a migrant domestic at the time (in Kuwait). During that time, Mariana’s family was also not speaking to her. She could only count on her husband’s side of the family to take care of her two children while she was away. When Mariana was in Kuwait, she worked for a family for about a year before running away and working on the outside for another year. After that, she traveled to Qatar where she said she had the worst time (she cycled through five different employers in five months). After Qatar, Mariana came to Jordan and had been there now for three years (between each country she returned to the Philippines for some time). In Jordan, she tried to work inside the home, but kept running into problems (the families wouldn’t pay her wages). So she decided to transfer to the outside. Her predicament is that she was working on a residence permit that had been expired for ten months. Mariana is waiting for the Jordanian government to extend amnesty so that her overstay fines will be forgiven. Then she plans to travel back to the Philippines.

**Mia:** A widowed 33-year old mother of three. Mia is from one of the provinces in the Philippines, and owns a rice farm. She first traveled abroad to work as a domestic in 2005 after her husband died in 2004. Her first country was the UAE, which she left after four years. Since coming to Jordan six and a half years ago, she has been working for a “big Palestinian” family who have three children (the eldest is in university in England, the second eldest is at university in Jordan, and the youngest is planning to study in England the following year). Mia feels bored
and stifled in Jordan. She doesn’t like the weather and doesn’t have any interest in going out anymore. Her work days are also quite long (more than 10 hours). During the Ramadan season, she can work up to 14 hours a day. Her feeling towards the family she works for are complicated as well: while she likes the “Sir” and children, she has major issues with the Madam. She was planning to approach the family soon and asking for a wage increase. She was working for 500 JD ($705) a month. If the family doesn’t agree to her conditions, she was thinking about going to a different country – most likely Hong Kong or Taiwan.

*Rita:* A 23-year old from the province of Pangasinan in the Philippines, Rita’s family lives “far from the city” on a farm. Rita comes from a family of five other children. Her 33-year old sister is with her in Jordan (they are roommates) and brought Rita over to work in Jordan three years previously. Rita seems to be a “semi” live-in: she only works for one family from Spain, but it doesn’t seem like she stays with them. The husband works for the UN while the wife stays at home, and they have three young children. Rita has been working for them for a year and loves it. Recently, they took her on vacation to Spain, by the beach. When she first arrived in Jordan, Rita worked for a Lebanese-American woman (and her kids) for ten months. She was not given any rest days during these months and did not like any of the family members. Before coming to Jordan, Rita studied to be a midwife. She eventually wants to work in a hospital in the Philippines.

*Angela:* Angela is in her mid-30s and from Cebu in the Philippines. She came to Jordan in September 2009. For the most part, it has been a miserable experience for her. The first family she worked for was wealthy and lived in the affluent suburb of Abdoun. She was severely overworked (the family had five children). When she approached her Madam about having more rest and time off, she hit her. Not wanting to continue, she returned to employment agency, who
found her a second employer. Angela’s second employer was a single man, a young professor at the University of Jordan who had his own house next to his parents’ villa. At this house, Angela was not fed. There were three other Filipinas with her who had to steal leftovers because they were never given any food. Angela also worked for seven months without being paid, and as a result, ran away. She went to the Philippine embassy, who gave her the option of staying in Jordan and continuing to work. She took the offer, and went back to her agency, and was then transferred to a third employer. Here, the situation became a nightmare. When her employer picked her up from the agency, he raped her in the car, and then forced her to work for him for only 200 JD ($281) a month. Soon afterwards, she was sent back to the agency. She was “trapped there” for two months, and was routinely raped. She was able to escape, and currently works for someone that I know (the friend is who connected us). Angela also has another Madam that she works for. Currently, Angela does not have her passport and she is trapped in Jordan. The last employer she had is holding onto it and will not return it. She is also seeking legal redress for what happened to her – with little success.

*Mina:* A 26-year old mother from Bangladesh who I met in October 2015. She has been in Jordan for three years and has been working for the same family since she got here. Although her employer was my host mom, every weekend, Mina was taken to the home of my host mom’s brother and cleaned their house. I believe she also cleaned another sibling’s house. Mina has two children. Her husband and her brothers are working in Dubai and she hopes to join them soon. During my stay with her and the host family, I found out that the host family was planning on firing her very soon. Mina has never had a phone since working in Jordan. When I left the family after a month, I left mine behind for her.
**Miriam:** Miriam has a unique story relative to the others that I heard. She’s an older woman from Sri Lanka, and she came to Jordan 30 years ago, in 1986. Before that, she was in Lebanon for some time. When she first came to Jordan, she worked for a Saudi family for 12 years. After that, she decided to freelance, and has stayed there ever since. Miriam married a Sudanese man in Jordan and has a daughter, Lucy, who is at community college in the U.S. Unfortunately, Miriam’s husband was deported very soon after Lucy’s birth. She does not know what has happened to him since; whether he is dead or alive. But Miriam says she’s happy. According to her there is “no community for Sri Lankans, but the help here [in Jordan] is too much.” She has a car, she has a home, and she also has her own bookshop downtown. Currently, she does domestic work for an American family and also cooks for some restaurants.

**Additional Interviews**

I conducted formal interviews at two human rights organizations: Tamkeen Fields for Aid and Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies. I interviewed lawyers, and mostly discussed the legal cases regarding domestic workers that the lawyers were involved in. I was also able to attend a rights-education workshop held by Adaleh for Sri Lankan domestic workers, where the women could ask questions, share stories, and receive legal advice.

**Places**

During my three months of fieldwork, I visited many different locations where migrant domestics congregated. The first was Second Circle (*duwar thanni*) in Amman. Much like other ethnic enclaves in other major cities, Second Circle has many businesses and shops catering to the migrant domestic workers community, particularly Filipinas. Some of these establishments are run by local Jordanians, but I have also been in establishments co-run by Filipinas. Carina and Ria’s apartment is on Second Circle, which is where many other migrant domestics live. I was also able to visit three different homes (Carina and Ria’s, and their friends’) because they
were throwing birthday parties. At these birthday parties, I met other migrant domestics, and a number of Bangladeshi and Indian men who knew the Filipina workers (some of them were boyfriends). At one of the birthday parties, the domestic workers’ Jordanian neighbors came down and enjoyed the party with us. Other than being invited to parties, I also hosted some gatherings. My apartment complex in Amman had a pool, so Carina and her friends would often come over and swim, or we would have dinner parties. I usually interviewed the workers in my living room.

I visited different malls with Carina and her friends on Fridays, the first day of the weekend in Jordan and the most common day of rest for migrant domestics. I also attended church with them once. The only location that I went alone to was a volleyball event organized by the United Filipina Organization (UFO), an Embassy-run organization for overseas Filipino workers. Every Friday, UFO holds sporting and entertainment events that are open to anyone. It was at the volleyball event that I bumped into the most men migrant workers (there were not a lot of them at the malls or at Second Circle, as far as I saw). Since I didn’t quite “look” Filipina, but was definitely not Jordanian, a lot of these men came up and tried to talk to me and annoyed me by asking for my number. I used these encounters as an opportunity to ask them questions about their work here. All of them worked in construction (in wealthier areas such as Abdoun and Abdali), and several of them worked in Aqaba, a coastal city and a special economic zone in Jordan.
Chapter One:

An Overview of Regional and International Labor Migration in Jordan, the Middle East, and Philippines After 1973

When one thinks of the movement of people in the context of Jordan, the mind does not immediately gravitate towards labor immigration, particularly labor immigration from Asia. Most scholarly and public discourse has been preoccupied with Jordan’s refugee population. Bordering Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, Jordan has been and continues to be a major transitory and host country for millions of current and former refugees, predominantly from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. According to Jordan’s most recent population census conducted in 2015, there are 2.9 million non-Jordanian residing in the country. With a citizen population of 6.6 million, this means that non-Jordanians comprise more than 30 percent of the overall population. Of the total 2.9 million non-Jordanians in the country, the majority of them are from surrounding countries in the region: more than 1.2 million are Syrian, followed by Egyptians at 636,270 (6.7 percent of the population), Palestinians without national ID numbers at 634,182 (6.6 percent), Iraqi nationals at 130,911 (1.3 percent), Yemenis at 31,163 (0.3 percent), and Libyans at 22,700 (0.24 percent). The 2015 census reports further that approximately 197,385 non-Jordanian, “other nationalities” reside in Jordan, making up 2 percent of the population (Ghazal, 2016).

But Jordan’s demographic proves even more complex than the census represents. For example, of the 6.6 million Jordanian citizens, 2.1 million are registered as Palestinian refugees with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), while still considered and counted as Jordanian citizens. Of the 1.2 million Syrians that are in Jordan, only

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2 In Jordan’s contemporary history, one can identify roughly four periods of refugee influx: 1) following the 1948 Palestinian-Israeli War; 2) following the 1967 Six-Day War; 3) after the 2003 U.S. Invasion of Iraq; 4) and most recently, since the 2011 Syrian Uprising and subsequent Civil War. There are also 3104 Sudanese refugees, 767 Somali refugees, and 1286 “other” refugees registered with UNHCR. The total number of refugees registered with UNHCR since August 2016 is 724,256 (De Bel-Air, 2016, 6).
655,831 of them are registered with UNHCR as refugees since August 2016. There are also 58,455 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR, and 4,818 Yemeni refugees – and while these are perhaps also underestimates of the respective refugee population, it is important to understand that not all of the 130,911 Iraqis and 31,163 Yemenis in Jordan are refugees (De Bel-Air 2016, 6).

These demographic realities prove important because they challenge the Hashemite state’s project of maintaining a “central territorial core” and a “central demographic core,” a strategy of rule that began with the British Mandate in 1920. Since one of the concepts central to this thesis is migrancy, I find it important to consider how these population changes have brought not only logistical and economic contradictions to the ruling family’s claim to legitimacy, but have also posed a threat to their strategy of personalized division – whereby the Jordanian population is “divided” and labeled into different constituencies, who are then discursively positioned against each other (e.g. “royalist East Bankers” versus “subversive West Bankers”), all the while appropriating Bedouin culture – a colonial cultural artifact – as authentically Jordanian. Within this system of divide, the Hashemite family has been able to place itself as the linchpin of peace in Jordan, “a lifeline,” claiming itself as necessary to stabilize the country’s many disparate identity factions (Bouziane & Lenner 2011, 155). These insights, while not directly the topic of my thesis, reveal some of the anxieties facing Jordanian national identity and their relevancy to the preservation of state power. As Joseph Massad argues, these anxieties are captured in the contradictory and separate deployments of a “popular nationalist discourse” and a “juridical nationalist discourse” (Massad 2001, 47), the former of which attempts to fix the nation in time and space (the nation is “infinite”) and the latter which allows the nation to remain elastic, “expanding and contracting while maintaining a central territorial core (the Transjordan
of 1925) and a central demographic core (those interpellated in 1928 and their descendants, unless they are politically disloyal to the state or if they are women who marry outside the juridical nation” (47). We can see how both of these nationalist discourses are troubled by the presence of noncitizen migrants. This occurs not so much because these noncitizen migrants are considered “outside threats” coming in, but rather, their territorial presence turns nationalist discourses in on themselves (and the subjects that are constituted by them), forcing one to consider what exactly constitutes the “national inside.”

This point becomes even more relevant when -- as a result of disquieting and momentous shifts in the global economy – many Jordanian citizens on the “inside” ventured outside of the national territory. Thus, it is important to realize that Jordan is a major migrant-sending country, and has always had a deep historical tradition of migration and movement among its indigenous, rural population – during the Ottoman period, as well as after the establishment of the British Mandate.3 The migration trend that is most relevant in the context of this research is the huge outflows of Jordanians emigrating to the Gulf states after the oil price hike in 1973. The incredible magnitude of this migration was fueled by a combination of economic and social factors in both Jordan and the Gulf countries.4 Most notably, when the OPEC quadrupled the price of oil exports in 1973, the oil-rich countries experienced a large influx of capital. In 1970, the OPEC had a trade deficit with the rest of the world of $3 billion; by 1974, they had a surplus of $60 billion. Such rapid and momentous increases in economic capital help expand the

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3 For example, some villagers in Jordan were drafted into the Ottoman army and sent to the Balkans, Anatolia, and Egypt during World War I. See Seccombe, I. (2014). Labour Migration and the Transformation of a Village Economy: A Case Study from North-West Jordan. In R. I. Lawless (Editor), The Middle Eastern Village: Changing Economic and Social Relations. London: Routledge.

4 The increase in educated Jordanians is often cited as one of the defining forces behind their migration to the Gulf states, particularly as high-skilled laborers. According to Richard Antoun, “formal classroom education, and intrastate and subsequently transnational migration became a standard part of a “life-path” for most Jordanian families” (Antoun, 2009, 14).
construction and infrastructure industry, which were materialized on the ground through large volumes of imported labor. Saudi Arabia’s second five-year development plan in 1975, for example, launched labor migration from surrounding countries that involved nearly 3 million migrant workers, 10 to 15 times more than the country had initially planned (Papademetriou 1991, 142).

At first, the oil-rich Gulf countries employed regional workers from Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Palestine, and Jordan. Within these national migrant communities, however, there are major variations. Yemenis in Saudi Arabia, for example, occupy coveted, elite positions as well as low status positions (Ibrahim, 1990). Among Jordanians and Egyptians, the migrant worker populations also vary. While the majority of workers were considered skilled – working as technicians, clerks, teachers, administrators, etc. – there were also Jordanian and Egyptians working in unskilled position in the construction sector (Papademetriou 1991, 142).

Soon after 1973, regional migrant workers were accompanied by an increasing number of workers from South and Southeast Asia.⁵ Workers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were initially recruited, joined by Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand around 1979, and then in the

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⁵ Again, I want to stress that this discussion on migration patterns after 1973 is not meant to imply that migration from Asia to the Middle East did not occur before then. If anything, it is important to understand that certain migratory patterns, for example from India to the Gulf states, are built on top of mercantile and colonial relations that existed before the establishment of individual nation-states. It is best to conceptualize the post-1973 migration of South and Southeast Asian to the Gulf as partially historical, but also with significant differences as the means of production and the kind of labor demanded as changed throughout time. Andrew Gardner, for example, explains that Indian migration to the Gulf can be seen as occurring in three stages (Gardner, 2010, 201). The first phase is characterized by Indian merchants who brought cloth, rice, and other foodstuffs to the Gulf, and transported pearls – the major commodity of the Gulf at the time – back to India. During this time, South Asian merchant families often served in high-level positions along with members of the ruling family. The second phase is characterized by the British presence in the region. As a result of the colonial administration, private-sector entrepreneurs, low-level bureaucrats, and other workers came from India to the Gulf to fill the colonial administration. The third phase and current “ongoing” phase is characterized by the development of the oil industry. Contrary to the past two phases, the main type of labor being demanded from South Asian countries were low-skilled, labor-intensive workers for construction and infrastructure projects.
1980s, sizeable numbers of workers were coming from Sri Lankan, Indonesia, and China to the Gulf states (see Choucri, 1986, 256-259). Non-foreigner (i.e. local) laborers who were considered unskilled (and thus could have also worked in construction industry, were transferred over to public sector jobs as the number of South and Southeast Asian workers increased. As Andrew Gardner and other scholars posit, this transferal from unskilled citizen laborers to unskilled foreigner laborers to occupy labor-intensive and “menial” work “formed a keystone in the redistribution of state wealth and, according to many analyses, in the tenuous legitimacy of the ruling families of the respective states” (Gardner, 2010, 202).

Perhaps the most important and most recent event that shaped the nature of regional and international labor migration to the Middle East was the 1990 Gulf War. While the number of workers from South and Southeast Asia were indeed increasing soon after 1973, it was not until after 1990, when a large exodus of regional workers in the Gulf states occurred, that Asian labor became the majority of migrant labor (particularly unskilled migrant labor) in oil-rich countries. As a result of the war, regional workers were expelled from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as a consequence of the other governments’ support of the Iraqi invasion. On the one level, this expulsion was treated as a sign of punishment and disapproval, but as a consequence, regional workers were seen as more politically dangerous and subversive (Castles et al, 2014, 180, Teitelbaum, 2009, 62), and thus no longer exemplified an ideal migrant workforce. For example, before 1990, the Yemenis enjoyed elite status as migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. They did not require work permits and were not beholden to a sponsor (kafil). Yemenis were also able to obtain a visa at any port of entry without their passports, and were the only migrant group allowed to own business in the country. However, these relations soured when the Yemeni government refused to condemn Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait on September 19, 1990. The Saudi
government henceforth required that all Yemenis obtain a residence permit, either by finding a Saudi sponsor or a majority owner for their business. As a result, a million Yemenis were expelled and sent back to Yemen, causing shocks both the Yemeni and Saudi economies. With regards to the latter, the Yemenis departure greatly affected the services industries, fueling the increase in importation of labor from Asian countries to occupy these service positions (Ibrahim, 1990).

Social and Economic Impacts of Jordanian Emigration

How does Jordan, a country with no oil-resources, fit into this complex picture of labor migration? And how did Jordan find itself also employing a large number of migrant workers from South and Southeast Asian countries to fill particular positions in construction, industry, services, and domestic work? The answer has a large part to do with the dramatic social and economic transitions taking place as a result of the Jordanian emigration to the Gulf, that increased the average household income of many Jordanian families and also filled the coffers of the government, thus enabling them to pursue their own construction projects, housing developments, and the like. Furthermore, the fact that many Jordanian emigrants returned to Jordan following their work abroad is also significant, particularly in that their time abroad would have greatly influenced how they reimagined social relations and class identity (Humphrey, 1990, 8).

By the early 1980s, nearly forty percent of the employed Jordanians were working outside of the country (Antoun, 2009, 16). Most of these emigrants were well-educated and high-skilled (even the many who came from village). Billions of dollars of remittances were sent back to families, increasing average household income, as well as government revenue. These economic transitions were indeed immense, distorting the economy. In 1984, remittances had
become “the largest single component of the Jordanian Gross National Product,” and it made up 25 percent of the GDP. (Samha qtd. in Antoun, 2009, 17; St. Louis Fed. 2016). Writing about the economic and social changes brought about by the migration of Jordanian men from rural areas, Richard Antoun writes that “remittances have produced cement rather than stone and adobe houses, glass windows with painted grilles rather than empty window apertures blocked with stone…and through household tax contributions…paved roads, streetlights, curbs, trash collection…” (Antoun, 2009, 15). Emigration to the Gulf is what partially drove the economic development of Amman (or other cities such as Irbid), by giving families to economic means to migrate from villages to urban centers within the country. Findlay and Samha, for example, suggest that in Jordan “the returning emigrant workers from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf seek to settle, not in their village of origin, but at the most prosperous locus of the entire economy: “Amman.” (Findlay and Samha qtd. in Seccombe, 2014, 141). Ian Seccombe working in the north-west region of region found that, due to emigration, found that “over half of those in employment on return to Jordan were commuting, on a daily basis, to work in the city Irbid.” (141).

The key takeaway about the Jordanian emigration abroad is that it had a great effect on reconfiguring and strengthening class identity, and the material means for families to realize particular class aspirations. Jordanian emigrants were often well-educated and highly-skilled, even those coming from the rural areas, indicating that they came from wealthier families. The higher incomes they earned in the Gulf would likely have bolstered this social status. Jordanian emigration also brought new wealth and increased urbanization, as Seccombe, Findlay and Samha, and Antoun’s research indicates, which results in specific patterns of consumption that a low-wage family is not able to engage in. Interestingly, the majority of Jordanian emigrants
moved to Saudi Arabia to work, particularly Riyadh. During this period, Saudi Arabia was well-known as a city that hosted tens of thousands of migrant workers, and also the most number of migrant domestic workers from Asian countries of any other countries in the region (Humphreys, 1990, 3). There is reason to believe, therefore, that Jordanian emigrants acquired new images of class presentation while abroad, that were mapped onto notions of domestic servitude that were already existent in Jordan but did not yet feature migrant, non-Arab women. Thus, a combination of factors led to the rapid increase in demand for domestic workers in Jordan -- from Asian countries in particular -- during the exact time period when Jordanians were themselves emigrating for work: the accumulation of material means to hire someone who is recruited from abroad, the symbolic value that a domestic worker has in terms of affirming one’s class position, new images of class presentation internalized by Jordanian emigrants while they worked in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, and changing gender relations and notions of (classed) femininity that by and large culturally stigmatized domestic work (especially, waged domestic work taking place outside the home).

**Domestic Servitude and Migrant Domestics in Jordan**

We can begin to carefully question the limits and possibilities of migrant domestic work by looking at how it is socially constructed in the Jordanian context. As such, I seek to understand how the symbolic figure of and the material need for the migrant domestic worker is

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6 In Abd Al-Rahman Munif’s and Samira Kawar’s memoir about their childhoods in 1940s Amman, they write: “Jaqaman called on to help him push the car, especially since Farha, the wife, sister, or maid – no one knew which of them she was – was not strong enough to do the job” (Munif & Kawar, 1996, 232). Finding information about domestic work in Jordan before the 1970s, at least in the English-language scholarship, has been quite difficult. Statements like these indicate that domestic servants were most likely either members of the extended families, or a similar counterpart. The fact that people could not tell a maid apart from a wife or sister is significant. Furthermore, Humphrey’s study claims that, before the immigration of domestic workers from Asia, “domestic servants were Arab women from poor rural households or from Palestinian refugee families from the camps in the suburbs of Amman employed mainly by the Amman middle and upper class” (Humphrey, 1990, 5).
a product of political and economic changes in Jordan that have transformed the urban landscape of Amman (where this research takes place), reconfigured gender and class relations, and foregrounded the home as a site were class, gender, and ethnic relations are produced and reproduced through the practices surrounding domestic labor. This history and these shifts, however, are in many ways difficult to trace. For one, due to a lack of census data, the number of domestic workers recruited from Asian countries – namely the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh -- can only be estimated. Michael Humphrey’s study from 1990 is the earliest research I have found that is specifically focused on migrant domestics in Jordan, and it provides some of the first estimates on how large this particular workforce is. Using survey and census data provided by Smadi et. al., Humphrey estimates that in 1984, the number of domestic workers was around 8,000, approximately 5.3 percent of the total migrant worker population at the time. The majority of these domestics were recruited through a combination of private labor agencies (in Jordan) and national labor offices (in home countries). By 2015, the officially reported number of domestic workers in Jordan was 50,000, and additional NGO sources have estimated an additional 30,000 undocumented workers (Tamkeen 2015, 7).

Despite these modest figures relative to other major cities in the region, the estimates show that the number of migrant domestics in Jordan has increased more than six-fold, over a span of just thirty-one years. Such a rise reflects the rapidly increasing demand for migrant domestics by Jordanian families, a demand that is driven by real economic need for additional labor in the household, but also driven by new patterns of consumption and class “presentation” which consider domestic workers to be an essential “product” that confirms social position. Articulations of gender relations among a new landscape of economic relations were also important in determining the demand for migrant domestics in Jordanians households, and their
construction as lower-class, racialized, and lesser-women. The important observation that I made in my research was that the vast majority of employer-worker interactions were between women (the wife or daughters of the Jordanian family and the migrant domestic), which has important implications for how class, gender, and racial identities are negotiated across the labor relation. A plethora of studies have delved into the complexities of the woman-to-woman labor relation within domestic work. Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, for example, found that in India, hiring domestic workers was not only something practiced by higher classes; middle and lower-middle classes also found ways to hire a worker. “Given this”, they argue, “domestic workers in India not only perform undesirable work traditionally in the purview of the women of the household, but in so doing, make it possible for employers to aspire to and maintain middle-class status” (Ray & Qayum, 2009, 9). Similar to hypothesis about the symbolic function of domestic workers for Jordanian households, Ray and Qayum’s Indian families also express their class position by gaining the “ability to transfer reproductive work to a lower class…” (ibid.) They continue, however, by pointing out that employers rarely felt stable in their class positions, compelling them to “continuously engage in acts of boundary creation and maintenance to assure their class status” (10). These insights are by no means limited to the Indian context. Rachel Parreñas similarly describes the “international transfer of caretaking” as paramount to the idea of a “hierarchy of womanhood” (Parreñas, 2001, 73), as does Pei-Chia Lan when she discusses the “micropolitics” played out between women as they struggle to maintain their space, status, and identity within close physical proximity to each other (Lan, 2003). Thus, while it might seem that economic growth has allowed families to elevate their class position, gender inequalities are refurbished to fit a new social terrain, and these inequalities reiterate themselves in a different physical form.
In the Jordanian context, I find Fida Adely’s research on girls’ education compelling in how it elucidates Jordanian families’ aspirations to achieve a certain level of prestige in their social positions. As Adely argues, educating girls has come to be seen as an important signifier of that achievement. For girls themselves, education can be about prestige, but can also be about the power, capacity, and potential to look after oneself and one’s family (Adely, 2012, 161). At the same time, Adely has found that “despite assumptions about the links between a diploma and girl’s future economic and marital security, many Jordanians still conveyed ambivalence about women’s work outside the home and the types of work that are acceptable or suitable for women” (145). For some women, these ambivalences revolve around “sufficient modest, new forms of Islamic dress, and the propriety of interacting with males in the workplace…” (160). Of course, individual ambivalences and reservations are partially a reflection of inconsistent state discourse as it pertains to gender roles and ideal womanhood. On the one hand, targeted socialization of young people communicates certain gender expectations, particularly in a way that preserves a “culturally authentic” national identity. At the same time, the heterogeneous group of actors that make up the Jordanian state result in fluid and oftentimes contradictory notions of what constitutes ideal citizenship and Jordanian womanhood (157). This is further complicated by Jordan’s position as a political ally and “student” of the West, further effecting the interpellation of Jordanian women.

Amman as a Global City

New wealth from migration remittances are not the only economic changes that have had class and gender implications in Jordan. Structural adjustments programs in the 1990s, and privatization and increased neoliberal policy in the 2000s, have led to new forms of spatial ordering in Amman, having significant impacts on the city’s urban population (Daher, 2016, 45-
In the last decade or so, Amman -- where most domestic workers are employed -- has experienced particularly disquieting transitions that have influenced the way domestic workers are perceived by employers, and vice versa. I am referring to a range of neoliberal state practices that have produced a “re-emergence of Amman as a space of global engagement and entanglement” (Parker, 2009, 111). Christopher Parker’s essay on Amman as “neoliberal assemblage” is instrumental in understanding Amman not as “traditional” or relatively unsensational compared to other cities, but very much a locale that has its own aspirations of becoming a “global city”. Parker documents the changing topography of Amman and how they reflect the rapid accumulation of foreign capital and the reconfiguration of social relations. These are visual observations that I too made on my research trip to Amman: the cranes and scaffolding of skyscrapers at the al-Abdali Urban Regeneration Project (the ‘new downtown’), a “stylish” suspension bridge that connects Abdoun (an affluent suburb that also houses the U.S. and British embassies) to Shmeisani (another affluent suburb) to Abdali – thus creating a “triangular fusion of international finance, supranational authority, and local state” (113). These changes have, of course, had a profound impact on the spatial organization on the people of Amman. Most notably, new housing development projects are beginning to “target” low- and low-middle-income areas, exacerbating economic inequality and spatial segregation in the city.

What I have described in this section illustrates the great intricacies of local processes of globalization, which both migrant domestics and Jordanian families are effected by and contributing to. These local changes also speak to how the nature of state-subject relations are

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7 For example, the private firm Taameer Jordan is the newest addition to the already saturated luxury housing market. Taameer has partnered with the Greater Amman Municipality to “designate sites for low and low-middle-income housing development. This new project, known the al-Jiza complex, will include 15,000 residential units, accommodating 84,371 people. These unit will start at JD 21,500 (approx. $30,000), “a price beyond the reach of the 50% of Jordanians who live below the housing poverty line” (Parker, 2009, 112).
changing in accordance to political and economic interests. As Aihwa Ong describes, geopolitical and economic interests have “mutated” the institutions and ideology of citizenship as neoliberal policy restructures the global economy, in a way that complicates the divide between migrants and citizens:

The elements that we think of as coming together to create citizenship – rights, entitlements, territoriality, a nation – are becoming disarticulated and rearticulated with forces set into motion by market forces. On the one hand, citizenship elements such as entitlements and benefits are increasingly associated with neoliberal criteria, so that mobile individuals who possess human capital or expertise are highly valued and can exercise citizenship-like claims in diverse locations. Meanwhile, citizens who are judged not to have such tradable competence or potential become devalued and thus vulnerable to exclusionary practices…overlapping spaces of exception create conditions for diverse claims of human value that do not fit neatly into a conventional notion of citizenship, or of a universal regime of human rights. (emphasis added, Ong, 2007, 6-7)

Ong’s provocation is that the citizen and noncitizen are no longer sharply distinguished by conventional legal and territorial notions. Recognition by the state no longer guarantees one access to resources or rights, if it ever has. Citizens and noncitizens alike must prove their “right to have rights” by exhibiting characteristics that would be useful in the economic system: flexible, cosmopolitan, enterprising, and economically rational. An important part of Ong’s argument is how the reconfiguration of citizenship has led to uneven distributions of resources and rights within the “same lateral spaces” (122). This is also what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have referred to as the “heterogeneity of global spaces,” where simultaneous “practices of mobility,” “operation of borders”, and labor struggles have compressed diverse groups into
similar geographic spaces (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, 61). These close encounters have strengthened certain relations of inequality, while rendering other relations less relevant. One recalls Saskia Sassen’s concept of a “global city” as a heterogeneous space were selective concentrations of wealth and infrastructure are supported by the laboring bodies of low-wage construction, service, and domestic workers, most of whom are migrants moving with the capital flowing from their hometowns (Sassen, 2005, 30).

**Labor Exportation in the Philippines: Extractive Citizenship, Nation-Building, and New Heroes**

One of the earliest institutional marks of a labor management relationship between the Philippines and Jordan is a 1981 memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Minister of Labor of the Philippines and the Minister of Labor of Jordan.\(^8\) The MoU was created in order “to establish the premises for the protection and promotion of the employment and the wellbeing of their [Jordan and the Philippines] workers working in either country” (emphasis added). While this opening statement very clearly implies that the supply and demand of workers will be “mutual” or “equal” in volume and extent, Article 2 of the MoU contradicts this premise quite blatantly. Rather than reiterating the notion of reciprocity developed in the opening statement, Article 2 states that the “Minister of Labor of Jordan expresses the firm intent of his government to hire whenever appropriate Filipino workers…and the Minister of Labor and Employment of the Philippines also expresses the firm intent to provide such manpower need.” In 1988, the MoU between the two Labor Ministers was expanded into a bilateral agreement.\(^9\) This institutionalization of market roles is important because it establishes who the producers and

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consumers of labor will be. Jordan established similar market relationships through MoUs with other labor-sending partners, including Bangladesh (2012), Sri Lanka (2006), Egypt (1985), and Pakistan (1978).

The Philippine government on their part has been thoroughly committed to crafting a labor-exportation regime since the 1970s, and has institutionalized many migration pathways by signing numerous bilateral agreements with different host countries. Currently, it is involved in 13 bilateral agreements, the most of any country in the world. Bilateral agreements, on the one hand, increases the volume of migrants along those paths, while also solidifying the government’s control and regulation. For example, in April 2017, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia finally signed three agreements on labor and foreign relations during President Rodrigo Duterte’s visit to the country (Filipino workers have been migrating to Saudi Arabia since the early 1970s). Within these agreements, the government of the Philippines and Saudi Arabia agreed that they would cooperate on the fight against illegal drug use, which has allegedly been an issue within the Filipino migrant community in Saudi Arabia (Romero, 2014). One can clearly see in this the strengthening of state governance through the use of bilateral agreements, which in many ways, dispels the image of labor migration as both a chaotic, unpredictable landscape, and an outcome of individual conviction. At the same time, many top destination countries for overseas Filipino workers are not covered by bilateral agreements, including Singapore and Japan, indicating that the market forces of global capitalism often far precede the interventions of governments.

Coinciding with the 1973 oil price hike which brought billions of surplus capital to the Middle East region, the Philippines began fashioning itself as a supplier of labor for these newly capital-rich countries in the Gulf region. In 1974, under the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand
Marcos, the government enacted the Labor Code, explicitly endorsing the exportation of Filipino labor as part of the country’s national development strategy. Philippine government institutions were set up to sanction “legal” forms of migration, while direct recruitment by corporations or other governments were prohibited. Labor migration in the Philippines is set up through a complex network of private recruitment agencies and government institutions. Private recruitment agencies, who are in contact with multiple overseas employers, must be authorized by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) in order to grant contracts to migrant workers. In this way, recruitment agencies are subject to state control, but they also seek to maximize their own economic profits by cutting down costs that might empower workers in their migration process or when they arrive at their place of employment.

The Philippine’s labor export economy is in a large part influenced by colonial and neocolonial relationships that have delimited for the country a set of possible economic ventures. Colonial relations with the U.S., for example, hindered the growth of the Philippines’ agricultural sector, which the U.S. transformed into a capital intensive and urban-based industry that produced selective crops, primarily for U.S. export (Guevarra, 2006, 525). Escalating trade deficits and the devaluation of the Philippine peso forced the government to turn to the IMF and the World Bank. Unsurprisingly, structural adjustment policies that mandated trade liberalization and the refashioning of local industries for export. Resultantly, between 1970 and 1983, the Philippines’ external debt went from $2 billion to $24 billion (Ibid.). Such drastic economic tumults led to rapidly increasing unemployment, henceforth ushering in Ferdinand Marcos’ labor-export strategy. Dovetailing the economic boom in the Middle East, between 1975 and 1977, Filipinos were employed as construction workers, doctors, nurses, engineers, mechanics, and domestic workers in the oil-rich countries (Ibid.).
Since the 1970s, the Philippine labor-export strategy has not only served as a fix to local socioeconomic struggles, but has been subsumed by hegemonic neoliberal ideology and policy. In *Migrants for Export*, Robyn Rodriguez dubs the state-mediate migration industry “labor brokerage”, a “neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which the Philippine state mobilizes its citizens and sends them abroad to work…” (Rodriguez, 2011, 2). Rodriguez delves in-depth into how a specific form of “migrant citizenship” is used to engender consent and loyalty to the nation:

> The system of labor brokerage in the Philippines rests on a particular (one might dare say peculiar) sort of state-citizen relation. Under a regime of labor brokerage, Philippine nationalism is accomplished through one’s departure from the nation-state (xxvi).

Under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the content of the Philippine migrant citizenship has increasingly emphasized notions of heroism and neoliberal ethics. Anna Guevarra describes the transition from Marcos’ more compulsory labor migration to Arroyo’s emphasis on empowerment and choice:

> This ethic of responsibility exemplifies the state’s current emphasis on devising ways to govern the economic conduct of its citizens following a neoliberal market rationality of economic competitiveness and entrepreneurshi State officials claim that they are not “promoting” overseas employment but simply “managing” labor migration and facilitating the desires and choices of their citizens to seek “greener pastures” elsewhere (Guevarra, 2006, 527).

Furthermore, discourse and rituals around heroism are a way for the Philippine state to create a sense of membership and inclusion amongst migrants. Sending *balikbayan* boxes, for example, is a custom undertaken by millions of Filipino migrants in December whereby they
send a large box of gifts from abroad back to their families in time for the holiday season. The
now ubiquitous custom was actually a product of the balikbayan program introduced in 1973,
which “encouraged emigrants to come “home” to the Philippines” as tourists and investors.
Balikbays were given special incentives, such as the ability to bring back “two duty- and tax-
free balikbayan boxes in lieu of luggage upon returning to the Philippines, the opportunity to
purchase up to $1000 worth of duty-free merchandise upon arrival, and even the chance to
purchase land” (Rodriguez, 2011, 81). Such incentives and continuous rituals have sought to
strengthen migrants’ ties with their “homeland”, but are also meant to encourage the return-flow
of economic and material goods. Another iteration of the heroism discourse is Bagong Bayani,
meaning “new heroes” in Tagalog. As Rodriguez explains, the Philippine government had begun
referring to overseas Filipino workers as “new heroes”, portraying migration as an “act of self-
sacrificing individuals” (84).

With this emphasis on sacrifice came certain requirements about sending remittances. For
example, in 1982, Ferdinand Marcos passed an executive order stating that it was “mandatory for
every Filipino contract worker abroad to remit regularly in portion of his foreign exchange
earnings to his beneficiary in the Philippine through the Philippine banking system.”\textsuperscript{10} The
percentage that had to be remitted was set by industry: construction workers, seamen, and
doctors had to remit 70 percent their earnings, while domestic workers and “all other workers not
falling under the aforementioned categories” had to remit 50 percent of their basic salary. While
the mandatory remittance policy phased out after Marcos’ departure, a “Code of Discipline”

\textsuperscript{10} Executive Order No. 857 (1982). Retrieved at:
instituted by the POEA continued to encourage and softly mandate that migrants remit, still couched in language of duty and heroism.

As Rodriguez shows in her book on migrant citizenship: “familial responsibility is often represented as an extension of nationalist responsibility” (Rodriguez, 2011, 51). Taking care of one’s family is listed in the Executive Order as one of the main reasons why migrants should remit. This feeds into the notion that Philippine migrant women are sacrificial mothers whose sole purpose for working abroad is to provide income for the family. It is interesting how the encouragement of remitting to take care of one’s family applies equally to all overseas workers, but is actually institutionalized in a way that reinforces gender norms and inequalities. For example, Rodriguez had mentioned that while seafarers and construction workers had to remit 70 percent of their salary, domestic workers only had to remit 50 percent (63). This discrepancy may be instituted to account for the fact that domestic work paid less. Or, it could suggest that the Philippine government still considers men the main breadwinners of the family, even when women are expected to also work for their families. In other words, women migrants cannot, by virtue of their role as a secondary earner, provide the majority of their income to the family.

The jobs that Filipino men and women are allowed to occupy begin with how the state educates and trains its migrant labor force prior to and during the migration process. Rodriguez expands on how the Philippine state uses training and education programs that discipline gender, constructing the Filipina as “a caring, docile, meticulous migrant care worker” (Rodriguez, 2008, 799). As citizens of the Philippines, Filipinas do not have the right to reject invasive forms of regulation, such as proof of marriage and mandatory pregnancy tests. While the Philippine state itself does not regulate Filipina workers in this way, they do give host country’s jurisdiction over how they “select” for particular workers, and often this can mean proof of marriage or pregnancy
tests. Jordan, for instance, shows marital status on the worker’s work contract with the Jordanian employer. Their marital status is also shown on the informational sheets that are laid out in recruitment offices. By virtue of the fact that the Philippine government prioritizes diplomatic economic and political relations with the signatories of their bilateral agreements, Philippine citizens, particularly women, are not guaranteed protection from invasive information gathering or gender discrimination.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out the primary social and economic transitions that took place during the 1970s when Jordan and oil-rich countries began to demand migrant labor from South and Southeast Asia, and the Philippines was ramping-up to provide this labor. The purpose of this discussion is to present the specific complexities of migration in Jordan that are often missed within migration and political science literature. Most scholarly works and public discourse focus on Jordan as a refugee-hosting, or a labor emigrating country. In this conceptualization, there is no room for discussion on the modest but growing population of non-regional migrant workers who are living in the country, and what implications their presence has for the study of Jordanian national identity. The first section of this chapter has hopefully offered a nuanced and detailed overview of what economic, migration, and economic forces were at play in the region that resulted in the recruitment of thousands of migrant workers from Asia after 1973, a number which has now swelled to the millions. Finally, this overview should illustrate a different kind of “migrant-receiving” country, that is not the highly-developed, Western liberal democracies usually featured in literature on domestic workers. In the Jordanian and Middle Eastern context, questions of migrant integration and experience, as well as citizen encounters with migrants,
cannot be understood through “conventional” critical frameworks, such as colonized/colonizer, periphery/core, South/North, or Third World/First World.

In the second half of the chapter where I discuss the origins and implications of the labor exportation strategy in the Philippines, I hint at the provocation I made in the Introduction about the shortcomings inclusion, especially in terms of citizenship. In the case of the Philippines, we have seen that specific national scripts, symbols, and rituals are paramount to building a sense of community and belonging among the millions of Philippine citizens working abroad. Intuitively, it should seem that a thesis about migrant domestics in a foreign country should chiefly concerned with integration or exploitation within the country of work. However, part of the argument that I want to make, which I attempt to explicate throughout the remainder of this thesis, is that a status of citizenship can simultaneously entitle one to “rights,” as well as subject one to discipline, control, and violence. This leads me directly into the content of my next chapter, which discusses the obscurities – indeed, the violence – of inclusion into the state.
On March 21, 2015, the Jordanian Ministry of Labor began a campaign to rectify the “illegal” status of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who were working in the country without valid work or residency permits. This “attempt to weed out undocumented foreigners in its workforce” comprised of an amnesty period that would last 60 days -- in which undocumented migrants had the opportunity to “legalize” their work and residency status by visiting a Labor Directorate -- and also included a moratorium on the hiring of all migrant workers, excluding workers for the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) and domestic workers (Medenilla 2015). For migrant workers, the amnesty period canceled any retroactive fees that the worker had accrued from staying in Jordan on an invalid residence permit, known as overstay fines, and only required that they pay the fee of renewing their work permit (if expired or invalid), and/or their residence permit (if expired or invalid). However, this provision had important conditions: if a worker rectifies their status in the first month they only had to pay for

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11 In August 2016, the Jordanian Ministry of Labor estimated that there are more than 800,000 migrant workers in Jordan, but only 300,000 of them hold valid work permits (Jordan Times 2016). Of the migrant worker population, 50,000 are domestic workers, and 30,000 are considered “irregular” (Tamkeen Fields for Aid 2016, 7).

12 According to the 1973 Residence and Foreigners’ Affairs Law, Chapter 3 Article 22(a): “A residence permit shall be valid for one year and be renewable subject to the requirements prescribed in this Law.” Chapter 3 Article 34(a) states: “Any foreigner who enters the Kingdom lawfully but who fails to obtain a residence permit or who overstays his permitted period of residence shall be liable to a fine of 10 JD ($14) for each month overstay or any part thereof.” Article 34b states that this fine increases to 15 JD ($21) after the first month of overstay.

13 According to the 1997 Regulation of Employment Permits Fees for Non-Jordanian Workers, a work permit is 300 JD ($422) for non-Arab workers (excluding agricultural sector), 180 JD ($254) for Arab workers (excluding agricultural sector), 120 JD ($169) for non-Arab worker in the agricultural sector, and 60 JD ($84) for Arab workers in the agricultural sector. Work permits are valid for one year and are subject to renewal fees equal to the first-time fee.

14 According to the 1973 Residence and Foreigners’ Affairs Law, Chapter 3 Article 23, the fee for a residence permit is 10 JD ($14), and the renewal fee is 6 JD ($8).
the current year’s renewal fees; if the worker rectifies their status in the second month, they would be need to pay last year’s and the current year’s renewal fees. While residence permits only cost 6 JD ($8) to renew, renewing a work permit costs 300 JD ($422) for a “non-Arab” and 180 JD ($254) for an “Arab” worker. Renewing in the second month of the amnesty could thus amount to more than 600 JD ($846). In practice, the likelihood of migrant workers being able to afford these fees (especially as a one-time payment) in the span of only two months is low, especially since the monthly wages of migrant workers do not meet or barely meet these renewal amounts.¹⁵

Regardless, this extension of “debt relief” for overstay fines is a major financial benefit of the amnesty policy for undocumented migrants, especially for those who have accrued several hundreds of dollars of overstay fines and are unable to leave Jordan as a result (I heard of a Sri Lankan worker who had been in Jordan for eight years without valid residency). Thus, while the amnesty period might not have been entirely that useful for workers that wanted to stay and work in Jordan, it is quite useful for undocumented migrants that want to leave the country. (This is, perhaps, exactly what the Jordanian government’s intention was – “cleansing” the labor market of unmonitored, irregular migrants). In response to the notice, the Philippine government and Embassy in Jordan made moves to ensure that all of their workers were aware of the policy. Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in the

¹⁵ As of February 2017, the official minimum wage in Jordan for citizens is 220 JD ($310). For migrant workers, minimum wages are quite complicated, are not consistently codified in law, and are not standardized. For example, while minimum wage in the QIZs is set to 110 JD ($155) by law, domestic workers do not have minimum wages set in law (they are “covered” under the labor law, but through separate bylaws that were implemented for them in 2009. These bylaws did not include a minimum wage). Furthermore, there is a differential pay system for migrant domesticics, based on their nationality (each sending country unilaterally sets their own minimum wages for their workers). Filipinas, for example, are paid the highest of any nationality, at $400 (283 JD) (France-Presse, 2012), while Sri Lanka requires the monthly wage to be $200 (141 JD) (Mendoza 2011, 10).
Philippines stated that “irregular OFWs” in Jordan should “heed the Jordan government’s offer of amnesty and legalize their stay. This is for your own good” (qtd. in Medenilla 2015). While comments like this give the impression that amnesty periods are rare and exceptional, they are implemented very often and across all of the major migrant-receiving countries in the Middle East region. Since 2004, Lebanon has implemented at least four periods of amnesty, always “under special circumstances.” In February 2017, the country extended amnesty to Sri Lankan migrant domestics only as a result of the “close bilateral relations” between the two countries (“Lebanon to Extend Amnesty,” 2017). In August 2016, Qatar implemented a three-month amnesty period, its third in twelve years (Migrant-rights.org, 2016), and just this March 2017, Saudi Arabia also implemented a 90-day amnesty (Shalhoub & Hameed, 2017). The country’s last amnesty was in 2013, and nearly 5 million workers sought legal redress – the largest of any previous amnesty periods. (Migrants-rights.org, 2016). Jordan’s last amnesty period before this one was just a year earlier, from March to May 2014 (Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 202).

Amnesty periods occur so frequently and predictably that migrant workers now can anticipate approximately when they will come, and as a result, they factor them into their financial accounting. Carina’s account of amnesty in Jordan, for example, describes it as a regular strategy for not only fine forgiveness, but also for getting free tickets back home:

She [the maid] waits for amnesty from the Embassy. Then she have a free ticket. Then go home in the Philippines. I have a lot of friends like that.

Mariana also describes the “waiting for amnesty” strategy in Jordan, and how it allows her to avoid paying the exorbitantly high fees of renewing her residency permit:

My ID is 10 months expire, so if I renew, I need money 700 JD. So I cannot renew it in 10 months, so my overstay is working every day…This is my problem now. But inshallah
I have passport, they amnesty, I will go to the Philippines, I have money to buy ticket.

It’s very easy.

And in Kuwait as well:

I stay in “outside” I think for 1 month and 3 years. And then I go to Philippines. They [Kuwait] have coming amnesty in four months. I buy my own ticket to Philippines.

Carina and Mariana’s experiences with amnesty, periods of illegality, and mobility reveal the intricacies and contradictions inherent in state practices that govern and regulate the movement of migrant labor across borders. In particular, I am struck by their calculating tone when they relate to me how amnesty periods can be strategically used – in a way, appropriated -- as a way to save money. In other words, rather than paying several hundreds of dollars to renew a residency permit, it makes more financial sense to let the permit expire – rendering oneself temporarily “illegal” -- then wait for amnesty to “forgive” the overstay fines. In some incidences, one might even get a free ticket back to the Philippines, provided by the Philippine embassy in conjunction with the host country’s amnesty.

The implementation of an amnesty policy could, on the one hand, be perceived as the Jordanian government’s quick-fix to “illegal” or “irregular” migration. As a close political ally and client state of the United States, Jordan is expected to exhibit progress in the realm of “human rights”, as per the guidelines of Western agencies (Brand 1998, 95-173). But more than just an issue of upholding diplomatic airs, the amnesty policy demonstrates the imperative of maintaining a discourse of integration, to be achieved through “forgiveness”, “pardonung”, and a further “extension” of the law. The act of integrating, which an amnesty period invariably is, reaffirms the line between a problem-free “society” and a problem-ridden “outside of society” through its performative quality (Schinkel & van Houdt 2010). Schrover and Schinkel, for
example, argue that a “discourse of alterity” allows for “binary oppositions” such as migrant/citizen, illegal/legal (Schrover & Schinkel 2013). This discourse of alterity emerges through “discursive problematization”, such as defining, claiming, legitimizing, expanding, and sensationalizing certain “objects” on the ground. In doing so, the state is able to draw boundaries between what they regard as “outside” and what they regard as “inside.” The language and practices of integration and exclusion – a product of these discursive formations -- are then deployed to reaffirm that such boundaries exist. These are exactly the discursive effects that, I argue, Jordan’s amnesty period achieves. Such an insight fundamentally shows how demonstrations of inclusion and integration are used over and over again to mark a boundary between “inside” (equal, ideal) and “outside” (dangerous, illicit), particularly in relation to the state. Schrover and Schinkel expand on their argument by saying that such effects enable the “cleansing” of ‘society’ from problems that it attributes to “outside of society” (1133). Thus, a discourse of integration and the material practices which support it affect not only those elements that are “outside” (migrants, illegals) – it also constitutes, constructs, and disciplines the subjects that are labeled “inside” (citizens, legals).

While Mariana and Carina’s physical participation in the amnesty procedure invariably brings them into the fold of “integration”, their calculating tone poses a stark contrast from the notions of forgiveness and pardoning that amnesty is usually understood to be. Within that nuance, I would argue that they push against the ideological and discursive characteristics of amnesty, but take with them the material benefits it yields, “using the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse, [and] go beyond the other” (Davies 1991, 46). In the end, integration is a double-edged sword: it might provide certain material benefits for undocumented migrants
(though not always), but allows states to bring them back into the fold, disciplining them and then differentiating them in a more systematic and formalized way.

Following these insights and these empirical observations, in this chapter, I argue that there is no notion of “inside” or “outside” society (defined by the state), and thus no notion of being truly “included” or “excluded” by the state either. If these realms seem distinct at times, it is the effect of state power and practice. Through its institutional structures – namely, an immigration regime – the state enables illegal activity just as much as it enables legal activity. In the first part of this chapter, I examine the condition of being (il)legal, and find that domestic workers are never really “legal” even when they might be. The second part of this chapter focuses on how this indistinction of (il)legality is further exemplified in the “commercialization of legality”, where material well-being (i.e. the need to work for a higher wage, the need to work in better conditions) takes precedence over “being legal”. Here, I present my observations on an informal market for documentation and legal status, where migrants, government officials, private individuals, and recruitment agents all participate. This informal market directly subverts the normative discourse on integration (as an ideal to be achieved), since it demonstrates that the losing and gaining of legal status is hinged to material incentives and needs.

**The Embedded Structures of (Il)legality**

Many scholars have illustrated the production of the inherently meaningless distinction between “legality” and “illegality”. Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, for example, focuses on the condition of illegality as a product of the clash between the demands of “open-border” neoliberalism, and the demands of citizenship, which “requires some degree of closure to the outside” (Garcés-Mascareñas 2012, 35). Migrants legality can depend on a wide range of practices, all of which would arguably be state practices despite not always originating from the
law or a government representative. Xiang Biao and Frank Pieke have argued that legality can be the outcome of “bureaucratic statuses manufactured and commercially supplied in the process of migration” (Biao & Pieke 2009, 2). This is particularly relevant for migrant domestic workers in Jordan, since their residency permits are contingent on a private, financial arrangement with a single “sponsor”. Based on costs, paperwork, language barriers, and other bureaucratic and commercial processes, migrant domestics may not always find “legality” preferable. On the other hand, the condition of “illegality” can also be an experiential or phenomenological condition, by which face-to-face encounters with law enforcement, employers, and recruitment agents might render migrants “illegal” or “criminal”, even when they have followed all the appropriate juridical procedures (Willen 2007). Confinement in the home, racial profiling by law enforcement, and false criminal accusations were some of the many experiences that migrant domestics in Jordan have to juggle because their presence challenges the boundaries of sovereignty and national identity.

At a global level, discourse about migration invariably includes the issue of illegal migration. As Martin Baldwin-Edwards write, illegal migration is frequently treated in popular political discourse as a “problem”, akin to other non-legitimate economic activities such as smuggling goods on the black market. The activities that are said to comprise illegal migration are plentiful and varied: unauthorized entry, fraudulent entry (entry with false documents), visa overstaying, violation of the terms of a visa, a change of employment that is not authorized by the host country, and rejected asylum seekers who continue to clandestinely stay in a country (Baldwin-Edwards 2009, 1450). Historically, “illegal” migration is embedded within the institution of legal labor migration. After the 1973 oil shock, the Middle East and newly industrialized economies in Asia rapidly became capital-rich and faced a labor shortage.
Baldwin-Edwards argues that the politicization and expansion of short-term labor migration as a result of these economic transitions -- most notably through emergence of guestworker programs -- is what helped construct and define illegal migration.

Within the literature on migrant domestic workers, there has been an implicit assumption that the exemplary state of legality is citizenship, enshrined in the “right of abode”. Since citizens do not have limits to their residency and work, and are technically entitled to a wide range of benefits that migrants do not enjoy, the tendency has been to treat citizens as included and stable, whereas noncitizens are excluded and precarious. Pardis Mahdavi, for example, discusses the vulnerabilities that migrant workers face when they are undocumented, or when they lack a more permanent residency status (Mahdavi 2016, 71-94). She describes the kafala system as an “inflexible regime” in which migrants must use “flexible” strategies to navigate, such as borrowing money from local friends to renew a visa. The focus here is always on the immigration system, its failings and inconveniences, and the instability of the migrant worker. On the other hand, the citizen is assumed to be outside of these particular state practices. A volume on migrant domestics in Asia and the Middle East, edited by Sara Friedman and Pardis Mahdavi, for example, makes this distinction quite clear. In the introduction, it states that “the migrants’ vulnerabilities before the law derive in many ways from their status as noncitizens who lack the protections and benefits that ostensibly accrue to juridical belonging” (Friedman & Mahdavi, 9). A citizen/noncitizen distinction – particularly in assuming that the former is immune to immigration control -- reaffirms the normative position that being legal, exemplified through citizenship, protects one from the precariousness and danger of illegality.
Does Legality Exist?: Conversations in Jordan

The entrance of the Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies was tucked underneath a large shady tree on a quiet, residential road. Inside, the office was small and makeshift. When I walked through the doors that morning, I thought there was no one there. The office was quiet, and none of the lights were on. A few moments passed and an older women shuffled out of a room in the back of the office, and when she saw me idly by the doorway with my cumbersome, black backpack, she approached me with an earnest smile. I greeted her, but due to my limited Arabic skills, was unable to sustain a conversation, much to my embarrassment. I strung together what little vocabulary I knew and told her that I was there for a meeting at 11 o’clock, and that I had called two days before to schedule. She nodded, still smiling, and ushered me from the doorway to the main office space. Just as we were moving, a young woman with a stern face framed with a bright yellow hijab stood up from behind the first cubicle on the right. As she came out from behind her desk, she greeted me in English, her firm, deep tone filling up the quiet room. Her name was Heba, and she was a lawyer trainee, having just graduated from law school in Jordan. I told Heba who I was, and that I was here today for an interview with one of Adaleh’s lawyers about migrant domestic workers. She nodded, and led me into the cubicle across from hers, gesturing for me to sit down in the chair beside the desk. Heba then told me that not all of the lawyers were in the office right now, but that there was one, Mr. Salem, who was. She would go ask him if he had any time to speak with me, to which I responded with an enthusiastic nod. I then watched as Heba briskly walked down a hall at the back of the office space.

After a few minutes of waiting, Heba returned with Mr. Salem, a spritely man dressed casually in a short, blue plaid shirt, faded black pants and shoes, with round glasses perched on his nose. After exchanging more greetings, names, and information, Mr. Salem settled into his
office chair, and Heba pulled up a chair next to me (she would act as our translator). Despite their initial reticence upon meeting, Heba and Mr. Salem became intensely engaged in my questions about the legal issues that faced migrant domestics in Jordan. Despite the fact that Mr. Salem worked at Adaleh mostly on torture cases (a few which did involve migrant domestics), he spoke emphatically and pointedly about legal letdowns and struggles involving domestic workers through the year. As my interview proceeded, I too became drawn into the conversation – this was one of the few candid conversations I was having with Jordanians about domestic workers. For the most part, even with most of my Jordanian friends, I often felt like I was prying too much or being too forward when I asked people about how they felt about domestic workers. The topic seemed to make people uncomfortable, I observed, and oftentimes I was met with a few nods here and there before the topic was changed to something a bit more familiar but no less political – literature, Palestine, the police, communism. And so, Heba’s and Mr. Salem’s expertise and experience on the issue was heartening, and they too expressed the same appreciation towards my interest in the topic, since they both felt that it was politically and publically an unpopular issue to care about. In fact, in the middle of our interview, Heba confessed to me that even her family was “fighting against what she was doing” at Adaleh for domestic workers: “they believe that the worker is an alien. They say to me: ‘why are you trying so hard to fight for the rights of the alien?’”

Oftentimes before Heba or Mr. Salem could finish an entire story, the other would be reminded of another case. In the end, I was offered a chaotic mosaic of legal problems that migrant domestics commonly faced, information that has been partially documented and corroborated by other human rights organizations: administrative detention, false accusations of theft and other crimes, deportation, poor implementation of the Labor law and work contracts,
From this lengthy conversation at Adaleh, along with additional conversations with migrant domestics, I realized that the condition of being “legal”, of being fully “law-abiding”, is never really achieved or respected. One of the cases that Mr. Salem told me which illustrated this point clearly involved the use of arbitrary deportation enshrined in the Residence and Foreigners’ Affair Law of 1973.\textsuperscript{16} Mr. Salem had worked on a case involving an Ethiopian domestic worker. This worker worked for a “high-ranking person in government” for three years and received no payment at all from him during this time. When she approached her employer about this issue, he contacted officials in the Ministry of Interior who were able to “recommend” the worker for deportation. It was only when she was already at the airport that she was able to call the Adaleh Center. Lawyers at the Center told her not to board the flight, and that they would work with her to file a lawsuit and appeal the government’s decision to deport her \textit{and} claim the proper wages for her work. The Center paid the 300 JD ($422) fee necessary to file an appeal in the High Court of Justice, a civil court that deals exclusively with appealing administrative decisions. Adaleh lawyers questioned the justification for the worker’s deportation: “we asked what this decision was based on, why did [they] deport her, and how she was a threat to the national security of Jordan.”. According to Mr. Salem, the five judges on the Higher Administrative Court looked at the case “in a very particular way”, in other words, treating it as exceptional. In the end the judges’ rulings were no surprise – they claimed that according to Article 37 of the Residence and

\textsuperscript{16} According to Article 37 of the Law, the Minister of Interior may expel any foreigner from the country without stating a reason.
Foreigners’ Affair Law, “the person who made this decision is not obligated to explain why he made it” (in the words of Mr. Salem).

There is ample documentation on the use of arbitrary deportation for dealing with migrant subjects, and as a result there has been no lack of scholarly and public attention on this figure of a “deportable noncitizen” (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). But deportability is part of a wider set of repressive tools that states use to define the boundaries of a national community. It is, in other words, not an exceptional, transgressive use of force, but located on a continuum of state practices – along with population placement, displacement, ghettoization, administrative detention – that maintain the “integrity” of state space through confinement and forced movement (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). What I contend, therefore, is that certain state practices which might seem “particular” to migrant workers are not enacted in response to their intrinsic outsidershi Rather, the repetition of these practices, their performative aspect, is what constitutes them as “outside society” (and thus constituting “society” along with it). Of course, institutions like the Constitution have enshrined certain provisions, such as a Jordanian national’s right to not be deported, giving the impression that there is a “safety zone” defined by boundaries of citizenship which protects one from state violence. At the same time, the loss of Jordanian nationality is codified in the 1954 Nationality Law under Chapter 5, and can occur if subjects “commit or attempts to commit an act deemed to endanger the peace and security of the state”, among other several other transgressive actions. Outside of the law, however, deprivation of Jordanian nationality does and has occurred. A high-profile example of this is when over 2,700 Jordanians originally from Palestine until 1949 had their Jordanian citizenship revoked between

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17 Chapter 2 Article 9(i) of the Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan states: “No Jordanian may be deported from the territory of the Kingdom.” Retrieved online from: http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b53310.pdf.
2004 and 2008. Such a move, again, can be singled out for its performative, internal, and productive power, and is part of the Jordanian state’s strategy of personalized divide, which separates and labels the “inner” population (i.e. the citizenry) into different constituencies (subject to different treatment and resources) (Shryock 1997, 57-59; Bouziane & Lenner 2011, 155). Thus, it is not that these Jordanians were “not Jordanian enough” that made them vulnerable to the state’s power; it is the act of revocation itself that validates the notion that such identity boundaries exist – specifically, that there are inherent and coherent distinctions between “Jordanian Jordanians” and “Jordanian Palestinians.”

Yet, revoking citizenship does not necessarily have to occur for one to experience state violence – even violence that is seen as only reserved for foreigners. For example, in 1997, a Jordanian national was away in Yemen, and upon his return to Jordan, the governor of Amman issued an order for his deportation (Bourouba, 2014, 48). Another case, from 1984, involved a Jordanian man and his wife. According to the details of the case, the Jordanian wife was ordered to be deported, despite the fact that she possessed Jordanian nationality (naturalized through her marriage to the Jordanian citizen) (Bourouba, 2014, 47). A third example is the case of a Jordanian man in his yearly twenties who came from the West Bank to Zarqa (in Jordan) where his parents were living, in 2006. In December 2006, he was arrested for theft, released 20 days later, and then rearrested in January 2007, when he was put into administrative detention pending deportation (Human Rights Watch, 2009, 20). According to his statements to Human Rights Watch, the man possessed a Jordanian national number and all of his family lived in Jordan.

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Despite this, he stayed in administrative detention for six months, and the results of his plea to not be deported are unknown.

These cases, although not all with bad endings, elucidate the many ways that Jordanian citizens are subject to state violence, despite being on the “inside” of society. My point here is not to argue that the situations of “migrants” and “citizens” can be equated (I am well aware of the disproportionate use of deportation and harassment that migrant workers face). However, I am arguing that acts of immigration control – including the most egregious, deportation – should not be conceptualized as practices enacted upon subjects after the fact of their legal status. Doing so would overlook the inherent inequalities within migrant communities that allow them to make diverse claims of membership (see Aihwa Ong 2007; Vora 2013) and also the inherent inequalities within the Jordanian citizenry, which also become visible with attention to gender and class (see Amwai 2005; Almala 2014). These insights become even more compelling when we look beyond the realm of immigration and legal status, to focus on other dimensions of inclusion, such as access to economic resources (Adely 2012). Thus, state practices should be considered as contributing to the legitimacy of legal status (as definitive markers of inclusion), which give the illusion of coherent and clearly demarcated conditions of exclusion and inclusion.

Staying on the law, we can perhaps see this point explicated even more clearly with the use of administrative detention in Jordan. Administrative detention, realized through the 1954 Crime Prevention Law, is yet another state practice that attempts to “cleanse” and maintain society be labeling and then dealing with problems deemed “outside” of it. The Crime Prevention Law allows unelected officials of the executive branch – the governors of Jordan’s 13 governorates and district administrators (mutasarrif) – to detain people who are “about to commit a crime or assist in its commission,” those who “habitually” steal, and anyone who poses
a “danger to the people” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, 4). In practice, the Crime Prevention Law is enacted on many individuals who fall outside even these arbitrary provisions. Essentially, the law allows executive officials to circumvent standard criminal procedures, eliminating the possibility of judicial oversight. As Mr. Salem told me, the Adaleh Center receives many cases of administrative detention, some where workers have been detained for more than a year. A 60-age Human Rights Watch report from 2009 describes the use of the Law in the following manner:

Among those detained outside of the scope of the Crime Prevention Law are women and men in “protective” custody, and foreigners. Governors invoke the Crime Prevention Law…to place women in “protective” custody because family members, generally men, have threatened these women’s lives for perceived moral lapses…Authorities occasionally detain foreigners administratively when they lack proper identification or residency documents but cannot be immediately deported (Human Rights Watch, 2009, 2).

Thus, application of the Crime Prevention Law is, if anything, gender-specific. Jordanian women are placed into administrative detention – called “protective custody” – if she is threatened with violence. This kind of forced custody exemplifies the notions of paternalism and guardianship that underpin women’s citizenship in Jordan, a topic that scholars have elaborated upon and cited as a major indication of citizenship’s inherent inequality (Almala 2014). For migrant workers, the Crime Prevention Law can be seen as a precursor to their deportation, or can become deportation’s replacement (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Within the realm of citizens, this law can also be a way to “remove” people from a certain space without necessarily having to move them across borders.
The intricate and messy interactions between citizens, migrants, and these particular practices of the state -- arbitrary deportation measures, administrative detention, revoking citizenship -- truly begs the question of whether the condition of being “legal” can ever be achieved, and also whether citizenship can protect one from immigration control and other state violence “reserved” for migrants. This question is not about weak “rule of law”, which considers these transgressions of the state to be “arbitrary” based on a normative position that law is morally good and equitable. Instead, these feelings of arbitrariness and indistinctness is completely characteristic of the state and the law and reveals the fact that state-sanctioned boundaries are neither real nor permanent. The law, in these incidences, could only be considered “arbitrarily” applied under the assumption that there are commonsensical, predetermined categories and “rules” which protect some people and not others. But the state does not respond or recognize these categories. It creates them, and in these creation, (re)creates itself.

Embodied Illegality

As Sarah Willen and other scholars have argued, illegality is as much of an embodied condition as it is a juridical condition (Willen, 2007). In her essay on migrant workers in Israel, Willen’s calls for a “critical phenomenological” approach to the study of migrant “illegality”, with the goal of continuing to destabilizing the idea that “illegality” is a static label that one simply has or does not have. Willen finds that, due to fears of deportation and arrest, migrant workers in Israel experienced troubled sleep, bodily vigilance, stress, anxiety, and other bodily disturbances (17). Life as a migrant induced certain habits, such as sleeping in one’s clothes at night or taking side streets to avoid being seen (26). Willen’s research elucidates the way that the
condition of being “illegal”, regardless of one’s juridical status, is always embodied and experienced.

Due to the limitations in scope of this thesis, my chapter can only present a few ethnographic sketches of how migrant domestics in Jordan also embody a condition of “illegality”, but the examples abound. Racial profiling by law enforcement occurred on a daily basis for many workers – Mariana talked about being stopped on the bus in the morning by the police, who demanded papers and money from her on multiple occasions (“maybe he want drink coffee but don’t have money” was her hypothesis). An even clearer example of my point is when domestic workers are falsely accused of actual crimes, particularly theft. Mr. Salem told me that it is common for workers to file theft cases against workers when they run away, so to provide a defense against themselves if the worker accuses the employer of mistreatment. Relatedly, Thoraya El-Rayyes’ documentation of employers’ perspectives towards domestic workers in Jordan found that employers often felt afraid of workers. One female employer reported the following:

I prefer she doesn’t have a phone…I can’t understand what she is talking to her family about. And it is possible that one of her relatives will also come here…when they are in the car, they memorize, they memorize the landmarks. I don’t want to accuse anyone, but I want to protect myself from the things that I hear about. They start to ask, “What is this area called?” So I become anxious about leaving her at home alone, about taking her out with me. You become really anxious all the time…and when I come to leave the house, to be honest, I protect the house, I lock it. I don’t leave the key with her – I am afraid, to be honest, that she will run away. Her passport is with me, because if I give it to her I
don’t know what she might do with it…you are worried about her well-being but at the same time, you don’t trust her (El-Rayyes, 2015, 11).

The relationship between employers and domestic workers can indeed be fraught with tension and distrust, a topic that I expand on in Chapter 3. The main observation that arises from these employers’ narratives right now, however, is not simply an issue of distrust, but also a perception that the domestic worker might do something criminal, violent, or harmful. The most common reaction to these perceptions, therefore, is confining the worker in the house – physically locking her inside and not giving her a key when everyone has left for the day.

On one of my visits to Jordan, I was placed in a homestay family that engaged in this exact practice. The family employed a woman from Bangladesh, Mina, a twenty-six year old moth who had been working for the family for three years. On the first day of our stay, just as my roommate and I were leaving in the morning for class (we were the last two members of the household to leave), Mina rushed up to us and demanded (really demanded) that we remember to lock the door from the outside. My roommate and I were confused – why lock the door when Mina was still in the house? We thought that perhaps we had misunderstood her, since there was a language barrier between us. Shrugging our shoulders and nodding half-heartedly, the two of us turned around, went through the front door and closed it. Before even setting a foot down the first step of the stairs, we heard Mina banging on the door from the inside, shouting at us to lock the door with the key that we were given by our host mother. I remember that on that particular day, my roommate and I did not think through clearly what exactly the point of that instruction was. We thought that perhaps Mina had her own key, and she just wanted us to lock the door so she wouldn’t have to worry about a stranger coming in while she was in the house. It was not until a few days later when we realized that Mina did not have her own key, and that locking her
into the house was to ensure that she did not leave during the day when everyone else was out. More than that, Mina’s vigilance in reminding us every morning for a month to lock the door – by banging and shouting loudly whenever she did not immediately hear the key sliding into the lock after we’d closed the door – was because our host mother told Mina off if she came home and found the door unlocked.

The practice of confining domestics in the house is a daily enactment of the notion of “illegality” that is already supported by multiple juridical provisions, such as the Crime Prevention Law. As Willen’s argues, “illegality” follows the migrant everywhere, “profundely shaping their subjective experiences of time, space, embodiment, sociality, and self” (Willen 2007, 10). These insights and observations provide yet more support for the notion that (il)legality is constituted by discourse and practice, and are not actually static or real conditions.

The Kafala System: Historical Insights and Contemporary Patterns

There is often an assumption within the immigration and migration literature that legality, in terms of a physical possession of the correct documentation, is governed mostly through state sanction. This holds particularly true for literature on migration in the Middle East, in large part due to the preoccupation with the kafala system, otherwise known as the sponsorship system. The sponsorship system is a type of guestworker program that is officially and unofficially implemented in all major migrant-receiving countries in the region: Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Based on my searches (limited to English sources only), there has not yet been an authoritative history written about the origins of the kafala system. An exception to this is research done in social anthropology by Anh Nga Longva, who traces the system back to labor relations present in the Gulf region’s pearling industry before the 1950s (Longva, 1999). As Longva writes, pearl-diving (al-ghaus) was a
labor-intensive and dangerous form of work, undertaken by divers that were debt-bonded to their captains, who were in turn beholden to boat-owning merchants (104). This relationship is further explicated through a conversation with one of Longva’s interlocutors, a Kuwait man in his late sixties who recalls his experience as a pearl diver in 1948:

ANL: What was deducted from the diver’s share at the end of the ghaus?

Abu Khaled (AK): First of all, his salif (loan)...Second, the amount spent on the food and water consumed by the diver during the season.

ANL, surprised: Are you saying that in addition to working under such hard conditions that divers also had to pay for the little they ate?

AK, shaking his head: Listen, you make it sound much worse than it really was. Remember that people had no choice. They had to make a living either from the desert or the sea. The salif was not a bad thing because the diver did not have to pay it back…the captain had no right to demand to be paid. What he was entitled to was the diver’s work…if the diver wanted to go to another captain, he had to ask this new captain to pay for his release. If he simply left, the diver would be arrested for absconding. (excerpt from 105)

Longva’s interlocutor goes on to describe how the merchant bore the cost of the whole expedition, and in that way, opened up opportunities for the divers. The interlocutor finishes with the following statement: “the rich did not only make the poor work for them, they also took care of them, gave them enough to eat. And remember: when you are poor, you see things differently” (106).

One cannot help but be struck by the similarities between these labor relations and the labor relations between migrant workers and their employers within the kafala system. Longva
herself warns the reader to be “cautious not to draw an exact parallel” between the two relations, but she does note the “striking similarities.” In particular, the notion of mutuality, and the system of exchanging labor (supplied by worker) for worker’s needs (supplied by employer), certainly illuminates some important insights in the current *kafala* structure. Thus, like all contemporary guestworker programs (and other labor-extracting institutions) around the world, the *kafala* system can be seen as an incidence of historical forms of labor relations adapting to new means of production.

In contemporary terms, the system functions by tying short-term residency to short-term employment. For domestic workers, a sponsor is a specific person in the household that she will be working at. Not only does the sponsor act as an employer – they enter into a work contract with the domestic worker – but they also take responsibility for her residency in the country of work (they “sponsor” her). Many scholars have written about the exploitative nature of the system. Andrew Gardner, for example, observed how the system allows governments to transfer the responsibilities of immigration enforcement to employers (Gardner 2010, 196-223). Due to the bonded nature of the sponsor-worker relationship, workers are not allowed to switch employment without switching a sponsor. Relatedly, workers have a difficult time leaving their employment contract without forfeiting their sponsorship (note similarities with the historical description above). Workers are only allowed to lawfully leave a contract if they are able to prove in court that their employer has violated the contract (i.e. withheld wages), or if their employer/sponsor terminates the contract. This latter scenario is very uncommon, given the fact that employers pay extremely high fees to the recruitment agency to hire a worker in the first place. In terms of the former scenario, where workers terminate the contract, Mr. Salem, and other human rights lawyers and activists who have documented this issue find that workers filing
lawsuits rarely occurs, due to many barriers in place that make it infeasible for workers to access the appropriate judiciary institutions. This is one of the primary factors driving the high case of “criminal” runaways in Jordan and other countries. Despite not having a kafala system by name, Jordanian laws in effect replicate many of the same features observed in the Gulf countries. For example, in the 2009 Regulation of Domestic Workers, Cooks, Gardeners and Similar Categories, it states that “if the worker runs away without good cause attributable to the householder, the worker shall cover all financial obligations set forth under the signed contract of employment, in addition to repatriation costs.”\textsuperscript{19} The clause of “without good cause attributable to the householder” is something to be decided in civil court, and since migrant domestic workers do not have sufficient access to those courts, there is little chance that such a clause could be disproven. Therefore, domestic workers who runaway are almost always penalized for running away, which constructs them as criminal subjects.

**An Informal Market of Legal Documentation**

On the one hand, the sponsorship system can be regarded as “inflexible”, as Pardis Mahdavi has called it (Mahdavi, 2016). At the same time, it can also be regarded as a system with many moving parts, loosely strewn together by the bureaucratic actions of everyday people. In other words, rather than a well-oiled and smoothly running machine, the sponsorship system – and by extension, the states that “run” it – are subject to error, confusion, and improvisation, and migrant domestics take full advantage of this. While it is possible to conceptualize the kafala system as an example of the state’s forceful power, in practice, the system is much more “fluid”, and seems to be contingent upon the much more elusive and nuanced incentives of the multiple actors involved. Throughout my fieldwork, I began to piece together a kind of informal market

for visas, passport, and cash where domestic workers, recruitment agents, and private individuals alike partook in. For private individuals (including government officials, recruitment agents, and others), the kafala system could become a source of income. For migrant domestics, this appropriation opened up possibilities for alternative working arrangements other than the live-in kind. Thus, with this in mind, one could argue that conditions of legality and illegality were not always solely in line with the government’s intention, but rather produced through individual trades and purchases.

The presence of an “on-demand” characteristic to legal migration have been observed in other contexts as well. Most notably, Biao and Pieke’s research on Chinese migration to the United Kingdom made one of the following conclusions:

…the state started with a carefully crafted discourse on “good” and “bad” migration, but ended up with a migratory reality that produces these categories on demand. What results is a regulatory arms race between migrants and state agents that may restrict the total number of migrants that are let in, but on the basis of criteria that have been firmly appropriated by migrants themselves and that have often very little to do with the original intentions of policy (Biao and Pieke 2007, 13).

Biao and Pieke’s observation that the migration process has been “firmly appropriated by migrants themselves” is based on the fact that a large part of Chinese migration to the UK is facilitated by ethnic enclaves and social networks – Chinese “migration professionals” both in China and in the UK can manipulate biographical evidence to help would-be Chinese migrants “pass” the UK immigration policy, commercializing the distribution of labels such as “legal”, “illegal”, “low-skilled”, and “high-skilled” (20). While the authors did find that migrants did
draw on non-Chinese migration professionals when finding new employment, a large part of this informal market was still mediated between former and would-be Chinese migrants.

For migrant domestics in Jordan, the story proves quite different. While I did witness this trend of “commercially supplied” legality, I cannot say that it was a process controlled by migrant domestics themselves. This is because, by and large, the “professionals” that helped to supply either documentation or money to migrant domestics are not other migrants, but rather embassy officials, recruitment agents, or or private individuals who are otherwise unrelated to the recruitment of domestic workers. In a publication by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) on migrant labor recruitment in Jordan, investigators found that staff from both the Philippine and Sri Lankan embassies have partook in the “recruiting” or “hiring out” of domestic workers while they were sheltered on embassy grounds. The report records allegations of embassy officials allowing migrants to stay in the embassy shelter, while letting them out to work without proper documents (Mendoza, 2011, 27). Upon their return, embassy staff would “allegedly partake of the wages these migrants earn.” This arrangement could also benefit the migrant domestic, who uses it as an opportunity to seek different work outside of the home or alternative to the live-in arrangement (28). Finally, the third party that benefits materially from arrangements like this are employers. Hiring a domestic worker through the formal channels made up of recruitment agencies and the Labor Ministry is considered long-winded and expensive. Faced with these difficulties, employers seeking a part-timer might work directly through embassy contacts. According to the Philippine Labor Attaché in 2010, this is also practiced by some Jordanian government officials and U.S. embassy personnel who want to hire domestic workers from the Philippines (28).
In the same MPI report, investigators found that recruitment agencies actually benefit financially from migrant domestics running away from their employers (back to the agency) or their employers “returning” the worker themselves. If, for example, a worker is employed for a month, but decides to go back to the agency after that, the recruitment agent will charge employers for “having” the worker for a month, “refunding” only a part of the initial cost of hiring. The recruitment agent will then quickly try to find a new employer for the domestic worker, hiring her out again for another couple thousand dollars (31).

Without a doubt, this practice is highly exploitative, and does not – unlike the situation with embassy officials discussed above – provide any opportunities for the migrant domestic. Mariana witnessed this practice occurring at her recruitment agency in Qatar, and describes the appalling details of how it occurs. Here, she is telling me about a particular worker who she saw at the agency after the worker’s employer “returned” her:

They have also the Filipinas who returned to the agency. Haram. This all broken (indicates skin on forearms). All broken. Because she wash the house of the Madam, the clothes. No washer, make like this (uses hands to making hand-washing gesture). And then they have Clorox. And then, the maid not give the food. The madam not give the food. And when she comes to the agency, she is sick. She is very sick, and the hand is broken.

By this point in the conversation, Mariana’s voice is shrill and loud, her arms waving around manically (Carina is sitting quietly by her side on the couch, eyes lowered to the ground):

When the employer returned her to the agency, you know what happened? The manager said to employer: “You can apply again. You see the books, there are a lot of pictures with the Filipina. You can apply for another one.” I too much fighting with the manager.
Next day, I go back in the agency. He [the manager] said: “Why you are here? You go to
the accommodation, why you are here?”
“I want to talk to you, sir.” I told to him.

[Mariana, speaking as manager] “What happened to you Mariana?”
[Mariana] “Why is this girl Filipina yesterday the employer returned, why you ask for
him to apply more girl Filipina?”
[Mariana as manager] “What’s the problem? This is the business.”
[Mariana] “No!”

This frightening scene played out by Mariana indicates just how much bodily violence some
migrant domestics experience in their places of work. In Chapter 3, I delve more deeply into how
the migrant domestics’ body can be devalued to such a point of “disposability,” where she
becomes an object to her employers and recruitment agents. For the moment, I make the effort to
stay on the point I am making here, which is certainly linked. Namely, that despite the
ideological construction of “illegal migrant” as sometimes “bad,” “criminal,” “dangerous,” and
“outside” – a sentiment that we have seen employers feel – to recruitment agents, these
constructions have much less bearing. What becomes more prominent are the “dull economic
compulsions” of capitalism. Recruitment agents profit from runaways and “illegals”, and their
“bottom-lines” are ultimately what helps draw the limits and boundaries between the legal and
the illegal subject. The migrant domestic is, perhaps, ultimately a worker (labor-commodity)
first, and a migrant second. Thus, rather than being subject to rigid laws, or law enforcement, or
other conventional notions of exclusion from the “nation”, the worker is merely “left to the
natural laws of production” (Marx, 1887/2015, 528).
Being “Outside”

Private individuals who are not linked to the recruitment business also appropriate the system in similar ways. The abundance of all these actors has been instrumental in facilitating the drive towards “outside” work that many migrant domestics desire, or at the very least, want to try out. In other scholarly work, I have seen the term “outside” work also described as “freelance” work – a term that seems to have also originated from domestic workers themselves (Johnson & Wilcke, 2016, 135-159). In my fieldwork, migrant domestics in Jordan used “outside” and “inside” to describe, quite literally, the space of their work in relation to the home: “outside” designates freelance work, where domestics reside on their own and pick up jobs on a freelance basis, and “inside” designates the live-in arrangement, where domestics reside inside the home of their employer. I soon realized that “outside” work was almost always preferable to “inside” work, even if “inside” work could sometimes provide more stability and less immediate expenses (domestics do not have to pay their own rent or buy their own food, for example).

Harkening back to the earlier discussion on Longva’s research in Kuwait, we can see how “inside” domestic work is the “intended” arrangement of the kafala/sponsorship system, and is based on a discourse of mutuality, guardianship, and a labor-for-needs exchange. A market for documentation, however, has made “outside” arrangements more attainable, and subverts the sponsorship system’s ideological underpinnings, despite its procedures still remaining in place. We see this in how Carina describes to me the benefits of “outside” over “inside”:

If you stay your home, your home in Madam, you don’t have a freedom. Because your Madam, she handle you. She Madam, she take care of you, because she is your sponsor. But if you outside, you free your sponsor. You have a freedom, you have a time. You’re the one who handle your time. If you want to go to work, if you don’t want, it’s ok. Because you handle your time, because you are outside.
**Going “Outside”**

The first method of working on the “outside” is to run away from the home of a former employer and work without valid documentation or sponsorship. This method is what is conventionally perceived, giving the impression that “outside” workers are always “illegal”, always on the run or in hiding, and socially isolated. However, there exists another method of going “outside,” and that is to enter into an agreement with a sponsor who will allow the domestic to work for others on a freelance basis. Carina, Mariana, Rita, and many other women that I met passingly at parties fell into this group of workers. This kind of sponsorship arrangement means that the “employers” of the worker are not her sponsor, allowing for more autonomous work conditions, and in some ways, a more consensual relationship with the sponsor.

The mechanics of this arrangement are further explicated by Mariana’s description below. The “Jordanian man” she references, her sponsor, was an employee at the recruitment agency who brought her to Jordan. Mariana had run away from her former employer seven months before (a Syrian family who was not paying her wages). For some time she did cleaning jobs without a valid residency permit (*iqama*), racking up overstay fines every day for months. Then, the Jordanian amnesty policy was implemented (meaning her overstay fines would be erased), and she took the opportunity to try and get back into formal domestic work. She went back to her old employer, who told her that even though she didn’t have to pay overstay fines, she still needed to pay for her own residency permit and work permit, something she could not afford. An employee at the recruitment agency overheard her predicament and approached her with the following offer:

This is the Jordanian man. He told to me “I will help you. You can make your *iqama* using my name...I said “How much money?” He said “500 JD, just 500 JD.” I said “oh
my god, where I take 500 JD, I don’t have work now, you know I don’t have papers, and I cannot work good because I don’t have papers.” He told to me “It’s ok yaani, you can pay to me not one time. You can pay to me 100 every month.” So I am very happy at the time. And then he make my iqama, my id. So the 500 JD, I can make it 5 months. I will pay 100, then 100. So the time, I pay.

Mariana describes how the Jordanian man would let her pay the fee of her iqama in increments, something she would not have been able to do if she went directly through the Jordanian government. Thus, on top of the fact that she is now able to work “outside” (this Jordanian man was not hiring her, he was only offering to be her sponsor), she is also able to get documentation in a more financially manageable way. On the Jordanian sponsor’s side, he is “renting” his name -- his sponsorship -- to her for a fee that is much higher than the actual fee of renewing either a work or residence permit, allowing him to make a profit of around 200 JD ($281). This is not a practice limited to Jordan by any means; “renting” has been observed by Johnson and Wilcke in Saudi Arabia, as well as by Longva in Kuwait in the 1980s and can range from several hundred numbers to several thousands (Longva, 1999, 107; Johnson & Wilcke, 2016, 140). Johnson and Wilcke, and Longva have also observed in their contexts that individual locals set up businesses and “rent” their name out to multiple migrant domestics at a time, always charging more than the standard, government-issued fee, but allowing migrants to pay in increments so that they can afford it. However, the process proves even more detailed. Mariana continues:

I told to him “I want to hold my passport.” And he told me: “Ok, you can pay me 200, then I will let you hold your passport.” So, I pay 200 JD, he let me hold my passport.

In this section, Mariana reveals a common practice among these “sponsorship renters”: holding the passport of the worker as a form of insurance that she will continue to pay her increments. As
Mariana tells me, if one wants to hold onto the passport, one has to pay more. The passport thus acts as warranty – a valuable commodity that can be priced and valued by cash. Here in Mariana’s story, I am made privy to yet another document that is traded in this market, passports.

As Mariana continues, I begin to understand just how so:

The work here in Jordan is not good. There is the Madam not need too much cleaning for their house. The work is not steady every day. It’s too much difficult, the work for the Filipina here. And what I do? I make the loan, my passport. To the Arab man. So I loan my passport, with interest. You know why? Because my daughter tell me: “Ma, I need big money now, for the entrance, for the enrollment.” So I said “oh my god, what I do my money, I have only 50 JD, only 40 JD, I need to pay rent my house.” So what I do? I make the loan my passport. So until now, maybe next month, I get inshallah my money I will take my passport in the next month.”

Here, Mariana describes how she “loans” out her passport for money whenever she needs to send large amounts of money back to her family. She gives her passport to an “Arab man”, this man gives her money. Mariana is then expected to repay the money, but with interest – only then will she get her passport back. Although I was not able to get any more information about this practice, one can imagine how local Jordanians could earn a sizeable amount of their income from these kinds of transactions, particularly if the interest rates are very high.

Mariana’s details about moving between states of illegality and legality, contingent upon her participation in this informal market of documentation, illustrates the hazy line that exists between outright exploitation and free-acting agents. Along with observations made by other authors about the kafala system being used as a means of income and exchange, it can be said that the standard notion that immigration systems are about keeping people out do not
necessarily have much bearing in this context. Furthermore, this commercialization shows that oftentimes it is not the state who decides who deserves legality, but rather the informal market, which is both an effect of capitalist ideology, and also institutional residue of the formal immigration system.

**Conclusion: “The Dull Compulsion of Economic Relations”**

In this chapter, I raise several points that complicate the present narrative that regulatory failures of the state are ultimately or solely responsible for the exploitation of domestic workers. Research that focuses only on the shortcomings of illegality or being undocumented and over-celebrates reforms to strengthen legal status, invariably upholds the importance of the state and the need for traditional state-centric models of governance. Furthermore, arguments that are framed around domestics illegality implicitly uphold citizenship within the host country as a kind of desirable, utopic ideal. The literature on transnational migrant domestic work almost always omits the conditions of work for citizens, and almost always positions the migrant domestic worker as the poorer, more exploited non-citizen counterpart of a wealthier and protected citizen. This framing disguises the fact that citizenship is an imperfect and highly unequal terrain, and by no means is a guarantee that state violence will not be done unto you.

I began this chapter with a discussion about the limits of inclusion, particularly in the form of juridical inclusion. I argued that Jordan’s, and other countries’ extension of amnesty were, on the one hand, an effort to bring migrant workers back into the fold of disciplinary power, and one the other hand, appropriated by migrant domestics to meet their own material ends. Furthermore, I reason that acts of integration are intended to reaffirm the line between “inside society” and “outside society”, resulting in a “discourse of alterity” that allows for “binary oppositions” such as migrant/citizen, illegal/legal. My research in Jordan has led me to
I discover that the condition of legality can never actually be achieved by migrant workers, since they are still subject to criminalization, racial profiling, confinement, and other violence even when they “follow the rules.” I also find that, in terms of state violence and immigration control, not even Jordanian citizens are necessarily immune from these practices. In the last two sections I examined the *kafala* system. On the one hand, the *kafala* system is undeniably a system that allows for bonded labor and debt-bondage, a point that has been historically traced to labor relations present within Gulf’s pearl-diving industry. I then proceed to show how the rigidity of this system is, again, appropriate by different actors within a market, acting upon economic incentives. Of course, this market exists on top of an existing matrix of power relations and oppressive ideologies, positioning migrant domestics at the bottom with the least amount of leverage. Within the “immigration system”, migrant domestics are subject to the state. Within the informal market of documentation, they are subject to the “natural laws of production”, which, as Marx argues, means dependence on capital, a “dependence springing from the conditions of production themselves” (Marx, 1887/2015, 528). At the same time, the “dull compulsions of economic relations” reconfigure the relations between certain actors to mimic not a citizen/noncitizen divide, or an illegal/legal divide. Rather, the relations are much more akin to relations determined by capital and money, the topic of my next chapter.
Chapter Three:
Acts of Conversion: Surplus, Scarcity, and Extraction

“Just as capital has moved around restlessly seeking the highest returns, so people have also been moving further afield in search of higher wages, or a better life, or just to broaden their horizons.” – Asian Development Bank, *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in an Era of Global Uncertainty* 2009-2010, 79

At Mecca Mall, I wait in a rusty metal chair under the glaring yellow sign of Western Union, and watch as Carina peers through the smudged, glass of the counter, watching the attendant process her money transfer to the Philippines. After about seven minutes, she receives her receipt, looking at it with a furrowed brow as she slowly makes her way to where I’m sitting. She offers the receipt my way and I clumsily stick my nose into the large slip of paper with tiny, pixelated numbers printed on it. Through the frenzy of numbers, I catch a faded “62.000 JD” printed on the page. It is less than I expected, and I found it difficult to conjure up a reaction – so I merrily bobbed my head up and down and avoided Carina’s eye. As a kind of reassurance for both of us, Carina quickly converts the amount in her head and concludes out loud: “4000 Philippine money.” She looks me in the face and raises an eyebrow like she usually does when she’s trying to make a point: “A lot.”

I understood the psychological comfort of converting from a strong currency to a weaker one. For me, it’s a convenient way to turn a measly handful of quarters into 10 Hong Kong dollars, or a $10 bill into “almost 100.” These small incidences of exchange in my mind often had its consequences. For me, the different exchange rates often left me overspending while I was in the U.S. Purchasing a $50 textbook online did not seem as severe as purchasing something that was nearly 400 HKD, an amount that I would not have given up so easily had the
context been right. For my mother, on the other hand, the exchange rate shocked her into spending even less than she usually would. Walking through an American supermarket, she paid close attention to all the little, yellow price tags, intermittently exclaiming that it was “so much… in Hong Kong this would be x dollars!” In an amusing but inconvenient way (my mother and I fought often fought about money), the exchange rate between U.S.D and HKD was interpreted by my mother and I in different ways, depending on context, and depending on our particular mindsets. Sometimes the numbers compelled one to see excess and surplus, while other times the change in values across national borders shocked one into submission, signaling scarcity and the need to conserve.

I begin the chapter with this light-hearted anecdote because it illustrates clearly the dexterous, contradictory, and circular movement between notions of scarcity and surplus in understanding money as an object, as a mediator, and as a totalizing form of valuation. Situated in the context of transnational domestic labor, I am interested in the ways that transnational subjects (here being domestic workers) make sense of and struggle with money in their lives. Money takes on many forms, and the labels that are given to money often change depending on the scale of our analysis and what the nature of the exchange is (remittances, wage, payment, etc.). These forms can certainly be framed as enabling economic freedom for women, and for “their” home countries. On the other hand, money, whether it is remittances or a wage, is constructed ideologically through the lens of gender and race. There exists a tension between these two framings – money as surplus, as excess, as freedom and money as scarcity, as lack, as extraction.
This chapter is loosely divided into four sections that deal with the object and ideology of money in its multiple forms. In the first section, I study how logics of money are present in the discourse surrounding remittances, in particular, how monetary valuation allows for a flexible, ever-changing, and politically contingent framing of labor migration and its protagonist, the remitting migrant. But I understand remittances not just to be a crucial component of contemporary neoliberal development discourse – a subject that scholars have already written extensively about – but also as wages en masse. Working off this conceptualization in the second section, I deconstruct remittances by analyzing its gendered and racialized formation, which ultimately brings us to the domestic worker’s body – how it is inscribed, “marketed”, and “used”. As feminist scholar Neferti X.M. Tadiar argues, inscribing bodies to fit capitalist modes of productions requires racialization and the imposition of certain “laboring dispositions” based on notions of class and gender (Tadiar, 2009, 103-142). At the global level, such bodily processes result in the hierarchization of women based on their national-ethnic biosocial profile.

In the third section, I stay at the subject-level and look at money as the women workers’ wage. I analyze the struggles, “opportunities”, and exploitation that takes place over the wage, but also extend my analysis into other forms of abuse such as overworking and objectification. I complicate this narrative by looking at how “the personal” and the inclusionary is integral to acts of and justifications for exploitation between employers and workers. In the final section, I analyze the using of money – as a means of consumption and as a social mediator. I consider how money delimits the nature of social relations of migrant domestics with their families and also consider the limitations of “economic freedom.”
Section 1: The Remittances Discourse

Neutralizing Remittances and “Practical Arrangements”

In 2016, the World Bank published their twenty-sixth Migration and Development Brief, an annual report that updates the international development community on trends in migration and remittance flows. Since 2013, these briefs have been published by a sub-organization of the World Bank called the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOWMAD), a “global hub of knowledge and policy expertise on migration and development” (World Bank Group, 2016). Within the 2016 brief, like all previous briefs, readers are inundated with figures, numbers, graphs, percentages, bullet points, and tables, a visual confirmation of KNOWMAD’s so-called “expertise”, and a confirmation of remittance’s numerical, hard-fact nature. Under the section titled “Remittance Flows,” the following statement is made:

Remittances set home by international migrants from developing countries are estimated to have risen to $432 billion in 2015, an increase of only 0.4 percent over the previous year (emphasis added, 5).

Coupled with the swath of other visual and numerical representation of the 2016 Brief, I am left utterly confused by this statement. Is $432 billion supposed to be a lot, or not enough? Have remittances risen, or have they decreased? Readers are asked to celebrate the fact that remittance flows are “larger than official development assistance.” At the same time, remittances are still less than the volume of foreign direct investment (FDI) – private capital flows – but with an important caveat: migrant remittances are “more stable” than FDIs (5). Should FDIs ever go awry or prove unreliable – and of course they will – than the hard-earned income of individual, self-sacrificing, enterprising migrants will get us through the day.

As Timothy Mitchell argues, these indistinctions belie an important rhetorical convention that turns “imaginings” into “empirical objects” (Mitchell 2002, 234). As he argues in the
context of development in Egypt, “the value of what people produce, the cost of what they
consume, and the purchasing power of their currency are determined by global relationship of
exchange” (230). Indeed, the “practical arrangements” of publications such as the Migration and
Development Brief force us to qualify migrant labor and migrant earnings relationally, and these
relational, ideological constructions are contingent upon existing structures of power and
oppression. Georg Simmel elucidates this point more abstractly when he states that “the value of
objects, thoughts and events can never be inferred form their mere natural existence and content,
and their ranking according to value diverges widely from their natural ordering” (Simmel, 2005,
56). According to Simmel then, “objects” such as migrant labor, FDI, and ODA are infused with
their value by nature of their relation to each other, and it is impossible to conceive of their value
independently. The development discourse’s compulsion to assign monetary value to various
social processes, migration being one of them, “neutralizes” these processes so that they can be
compared and normatively framed. In this specific instance, remittances (earned, “good”,
commemorative) are numerically and morally superior to development assistance (handed-out,
undeserved). But, in relation to foreign investment, remittances – and the labor that goes into
generating remittances – could never keep apace in terms of size. Where remittances are seen as
preferable is due to its stability, its dependability, and its controllability. FDIs might be more
lucrative, but one must be wary of too much speculation.

A Fact: Unremitting Remitters
The individualistic and “earned” assumptions attached to remittances can be understood
as an articulation of neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes “entrepreneurial freedoms and skills
within an institutionalized framework characterized by strong private property rights, free
markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, 2). These ideologies are simultaneously deployed and
dissimulated by “experts” who talk and write about remittances within the international
development community. International financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank, along with various intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labor Organization (ILO), make up an institutional network that packages normative assumptions about human endeavor and potential as indisputable, calculated fact, as exemplified with initiatives such as KNOWMAD (Hernandez & Coutin, 2006). Policy experts incessantly give validity to the remitting migrant subject, as she populates the reports, fact books, and infographics of prominent international policy institutions. This idea of a “remitting subject” fully captures a range of value systems present within the discourse on remittances – the remitter is someone a state profits from, someone a state can grow (economically) from, but someone who willingly remits and does so by her own determination.

The comparative and relational representation of remittances renders it an alternative source of income, something outside of traditional forms of state governance and revenue generation, because it is the product of the individual achievements of migrant subjects themselves. But, if anything, governments’ ability to claim remittances as their own, as “nationally-produced” income, relies on the solidification and expansion – not the relaxation – of state-centric governance. Most notably, this includes an expansion and commitment to state-level, bilateral agreements, where the movement of people are and must be sanctioned by the governments that “own” those people. Other than policy and institution, however, the discourse on citizenship – the reaffirmation of citizen-migrant subjects’ inclusion in the national community – is instrumental to the claiming of migrant remittances.
Section 2: Wages en masse, Bodies en masse

Filipina Remitters, Filipina Bodies

Today, at $29.7 billion, the Philippines is the third highest recipient of overseas remittances, behind India and China. This high volume of migrant earnings elucidates not only the high economic stakes of migrant remittances in the Philippines, but also the contestations between states and subjects over the nature of these remittances and how they should be managed. On the one hand, remittances can be viewed as a monolithic conglomerate of cash flowing back and forth between countries along post-colonial and neocolonial pathways, but I follow the lead of some scholars who deconstruct remittances by understanding how the exportation of labor has effected, implicated, and marked the individual body of the worker. For example, Tadiar’s work links the export-oriented development strategies of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s to the expansion of the “warm-body export industry” that in the 1980s and 1990s (Tadiar, 2009, 103). This expansion, Tadiar argues, is linked to the explosive increase demand workers in the service sector, which Pardis Mahdavi dubs “intimate labor” (Mahdavi, 2016).

Tadiar’s work is mainly focused on “domestic bodies”, which means the individual body of the domestic worker, as well as the collective body of the nation (Tadiar, 2004, 113-158). As she argues, bodily violence in its most literal form is “precisely the practice of engendering national racial difference as the basis of their human devaluation (i.e., their production as objects without subjectivity, as household tools or appliances), and correspondingly, of the greater appropriation of the surplus value of their labor” (104) From the perspective of the Philippine government, who is simultaneously interested in the “profit” of labor-exportation and the longevity of a coherent, unified national community, Filipina domestic workers are regarded as “merely bodily synecdoches of a beleaguered nation” (105). There exists, in other words, a central contradiction between extraction, on the one hand, and attachment, one the other hand; a
disavowal of the feminized, racialized, and commodified domestic worker and her labor, as well as a celebration of the value she produces.

Relevant to the context of the Philippines, then, is the notion of a “feminization” of migration. This sweeping generalization, however, often overlooks the significant variations between female emigration flows and their proportion among all migrant workers. For example, while Albania’s migrant population are thirteen percent women, 56 percent of Filipino migrants are women (Robert, 2015, 20). Hence, the figure of the migrant women, particularly as a low-income, unskilled, and involved in intimate labors, is always (and necessarily) visible, despite the within-country variations and the fact that women represent but half – not more than half – of the world’s transnational migrants.

One must ask, then, how the preoccupation with the “feminization” of migration is contingent on an obsessive interest over what happens to the Filipina domestic worker’s body. In many ways, the universal “caring” of the Filipina’s body articulates, first and foremost, an ardent thoughtfulness for the well-being of the “national body”. This is, for example, exemplified by the case of Flor Contemplacion, a domestic worker who was executed in Singapore in 1995 for murdering another Filipina domestic and her ward. According to Tadiar’s analysis, despite the obsession with Contemplacion herself, “it became clear that the contention that her impending execution sparked was in truth over the role of the Philippine state and its national strength vis-à-vis a developed Asian nation, Singapore (Tadiar, 2004, 124).

But more than that, this episode of national fervor and “care” -- what “happens” to the Filipina domestic worker -- has often been attributed to the local, “traditional” cultural practices. This is certainly the discourse that we see on the Gulf countries. However, the racialization and gendering of domestic workers is carried out by countries of origin as well, through gendered
and racialized practices of labor management which strive to make the Filipina domestic more “competitive” on the global market, and also driven by local gender norms and ideologies (Polanco 2015). On the former point, one can see this playing out as neoliberal qualities of citizenship and gender in the Philippines factors refurbish notions of femininity to make them competitive on the global market. Geraldina Polanco, for example, argues that not only does the state seek to have a “comparative advantage” in the labor brokering business by producing the docile, trustworthy, English-speaking worker – they also find ways to ensure that workers have knowledge of cultural norms in the receiving destinations (Polanco 2015). Polanco shows how labor brokering has come to resemble a highly competitive business, where employers have become ever pickier with the quality of their worker – her race, her language abilities, her personality, her skills, and her education. “Culturally-tailored”, according to Polanco, is the newest feature that Filipina workers have that other Asian women lack (2). Polanco’s study shows us how the gender limits of Philippine citizenship can also be effected by neoliberal practices, and in fact, “new” notions of femininity such as cultural awareness are becoming just as important as traditional notions such as docility.

What is ultimately described here is, according to Anna Tsing, the appropriation of differences (by the state, but also by employers and recruitment agents) in “constituting the basic relations of production…making people into labor is not easy. It involves what one might call ‘labor subjectification,’ that is, the process of creating laboring predispositions. In our world today labor subjectification basically never happens without the coercions and temptations of gender, race and national status” (Tsing qtd. n Neferti, 2009, 135). The implications of this “niche-based global capitalism” describes the global practice of reading racialized, sexualized, and gendered bodies and perceiving them as possessing certain skills, certain dispositions, based
on biosocial profiles. Domestic work is particularly implicated in this practice because it is ultimately perceived as labor that is hinged on the performance of one’s body – and in that way, one’s “identity”, “who they are.” In the context of Jordan, it helps to rationalize a differential pay system that gives different wages to “different” women. Statements about domestic workers’ abilities based on their nationality are also expressed by their employers, which are informed by the differential pay system (if Filipinas are more, they must perform better) and simultaneously reaffirm the differential pay system’s legitimacy (the Filipina performs better, because her wage says so).

The differential pay system in Jordan is also the outcome of institutional battles. While Filipina workers are paid 400 JD ($563) a month, workers from Bangladesh are paid only 170 JD ($239). This system of differential pay is not codified in a comprehensive Jordanian regulation, nor is it merely upheld by the community on their own volition, but is rather the outcome of MOUs and bilateral agreements between Jordan and the countries of origin (the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh). In February 2008, after a series of reports documenting abuses against Filipina workers, the Philippines suspended deployment of domestic workers to Jordan in order to bargain for higher minimum wages and assurance that workers would be better treated. The demand for workers from the Philippines was so high that the Jordanian government conceded to the terms in order to resume relations. The Sri Lankan government pursued a similar strategy in August 2009, as did the Indonesian government in 2010. While the former has resumed relations, the Indonesian government has not yet lifted the ban on their workers going to Jordan. Just around the time of the Indonesian ban, Bangladeshi workers began entering the country -- first as agricultural workers, followed by increasing numbers of domestic workers. This trend was institutionalized by another MOU in 2012. As I mentioned, Bangladeshi workers have been
taking the lowest amount of pay out of all the other nationalities, followed by Sri Lankans, and then Filipinas. This hierarchy has often been attributed, also, to the “quality” of each country’s governments -- the Philippine state knows how to prepare and train their women, the Sri Lankan state does not.

Section 3: Earning Wages

Bodies, Wages, and Employers

On my second trip back to Jordan, I was placed in a Palestinian-Jordanian host family that employed a woman from Bangladesh. Mina, a twenty-six-year old mother, had been working for the family for three years. At first, things went pretty smoothly, if not a bit tense, as my roommate and I adjusted to the family’s schedule and rituals. About a week into our stay, however, tensions escalated. I came back one night after spending the evening with my friends, and just as I walk into the room, my roommate swiftly closed the door behind me and sat me down on our bed. She tells me that she had an embarrassing incident with our host mom, and wanted my advice. She told me that during dinnertime that night, she (my roommate) was eating by herself in the kitchen, while Mina was washing up at the sink. They got to chatting, and Mina eventually came over and sat down with my roommate at the dinner table, showing her a picture of her family. They began giggling, and at that moment our host mother came into the kitchen and snapped at Mina to get up from the table, scolding her for taking so long to finish the chores.

I listened intently to the story, and tried to get as many details as I could. Things grew uncomfortable in the household, as we weren’t sure how to approach our host mom and two host sisters about the topic. About two days later, while my roommate and I were on our computers in our room, one of host sister knocks on our door and asks if she can talk to us. We went out into
the living room, where our other host sister and host mom were already seated in the yellow couches. I could hear pots clanking loudly in the kitchen as Mina worked away. My roommate and I sat down stiffly at the edge of the couch, and faced our eldest host sister, who spoke perfect English. “Mama wants to talk to you both about Mina,” she says in an earnest tone. We nod sincerely, although unsure how the topic would unfold. “Mama needs Mina to help with the housework because me and Aya are not home anymore.” This was true, both our host sisters are married and do not live in the house anymore, although they come over every other day so we saw them often. She continues: “But Mina is slow!” Our host sister looks at her watch. “It is already nine o’clock, and you see, she is still working! Mama can do it herself, and she is much faster.” Our host mother receives the comment by nodding her head slowly. “Mama can do it herself. All this she can do herself,” our host sister insists. “Mina is…stupid, she is slow. You see her, right? How she is? But Mama keeps her because she knows Mina has no money, and she has children. Her country is very poor, it is not comfortable for her there. Bangladesh. You know this, right? This is why we keep Mina.”

As globalization reconfigures economic spaces in countries and cities, the household becomes a worksite for the differentiations of the labor market. Capitalist ideology, I argue, has always subsumed or, at the very least, has had great bearing on social relations within the household. The entrance of a migrant domestic worker does not so much reconfigure those relations, but rather brings them, uncomfortably, to the surface. Along the way, the reality of a woman-to-woman relationship within domestic work also brings up some prickly questions for those that see progress in this age of “modernization.” For example, Mary Romero, using the United States as her context, explores how domestic work reveals a contradiction of feminist progress that celebrates middle-class and upper-class women’s newfound mobility within the
workforce, while failing to acknowledge the fact that the burden of housework is passed down to another woman, often of color and of lower class. For Romero, domestic work is a racialized sexist division of labor, with race-privileged women passing on what they deem the most devalued work onto women of color (Romero, 1992, 128). *Mama can do it herself, and she is much faster.* It is difficult to critique a statement that, I know, is uttered so genuinely and purposefully. At the core of this statement though – and perhaps my host sisters’ frazzled dispositions should have given this away – is a deep anxiety and lack of confidence in one’s identity and social position. This is, as Ray and Qayum have argued, what compels middle- and middle-lower class families in India to engage in continuous acts of boundary creation, as a way to reaffirm their status (Ray & Qayum, 2009, 10).

How does money, while to some degree constructed and maintained at the state-level, understood by subjects? I argue that, not only do historical and contemporary discourses around money inform subjects how they should understand their relation to one another, but these discourses are ultimately *enacted* at a face-to-face level. By looking at incidences of exploitation at the subject level – wage theft, overworking, and abuse – I show how daily practices are also part of the construction of money as simultaneously an instrument of exploitation and a site of struggle.

Let us consider wage theft, one of the main forms of exploitation faced by workers, and a leading reason behind the high number of runaways. The vignettes of wage theft that I was presented with, however, are not clear cut; the “perpetrator” and the “victim” were not stable roles played by either side of the labor relation. Various factors related to class and economic opportunity might lead some employers to withhold wages from their workers. For example,
Mariana recalls working for a Syrian family who could not pay her because the parents were not able to find work:

This is a Syrian family. The mother and the husband they have four children, no have work. Then they take me, I work with the Syrian family for one month, no salary. I work too hard…I asked the Madam for my salary. She said “I will wait for my money from Syria to send here.” I said” Madam, in the Philippines, I don’t have food, please.” She said: “What I do, Mariana? You see your Sir don’t have work, me I don’t have work. You know Syria fighting.” I said: “It’s not my business there, my business is my family. The salary.”

The situation forced her to run away. What is interesting about this example is how exploitation is not about individual malice or mistake. Rather, exploitation even at the subject level is subject to political and economic forces outside the control of the subject. The fact that the Syrian parents do not work but still employ Mariana indicates an earlier point I made about the domestic worker as an object of consumption that symbolizes a comfortable, middle-class life even when one is deprived of economic opportunity and dislocated by war.

I heard stories about wage theft day after day. After a while, I became outwardly exasperated, mulling over and over in my head the question of why employers would hire domestic workers that they knew they could not pay consistently. My initial assumption was that employers were living beyond their means – for example, a Syrian family that did not have a source of income -- but even employers with “mansions” did not pay their workers’ salaries. So, more important than the somewhat weak response that employers cannot afford what they want, is the idea that domestic workers are not in fact regarded as workers, but rather as objects of
consumption that are there solely for presentation’s sake, and not in need of renumeration or decent treatment.

M: “I don’t like Jordan anymore (laughs). Too much difficult! Sometimes they have a lot of Madam is not good. I have work here not give salary. This is my experience here. And now, like today I go to work, you can get small amount, but they have argument with you, I argue for them to give salary.

C: Take so much time.

D: If they can’t pay your salary, why do they hire you?

M: What?

D: I just don’t understand. See, if I know I can’t afford something, then I won’t buy it--

C: Don’t take it. Don’t take the maid.

D: Yea! If you know you have to pay this much money every month, why do you hire a maid?

C: This is interesting. But all the people here like this. If the people pay the agency, it’s ok, they pay a lot of money to the agency. But the salary of the girl, inside home working, they do not pay. Like that. This is interesting. That’s why the girl become runaway. They pay a lot in the agency, then they will not pay the salary every month for the girl. This is interesting!

What is “the girl” to the employer? When we think about the state of capitalist production around the world, “the girl” turns out to be someone who is both real and unreal. She is someone who is simultaneously disavowed and celebrated. I find Melissa Wright’s description of a “disposable third world woman” to be particularly compelling in getting at the puzzle that Carina presents to us:
The disposable third world woman is, consequently, a composite personality built of different abstractions (third world woman, and disposability, for example), which, while not characterizing anyone in particular, form the pillar of a story intended to explain social circumstances and validate specific practices based on the idea of her in concrete settings...No one may be identical to the disposable third world woman, but through the detailing of this myth, we are meant to learn something about real women who work in real factories and who embody the tangible elements of disposability within their being (emphasis added, Wright, 2006, 4-5).

Here, Wright is getting at why the wage theft of domestic workers would be acceptable, normal, and perhaps even inevitable. The myth is essential for any kind of “surplus” to be created; employers only “get something” out of the work relationship if the domestic worker is not fully compensated, or not fully acknowledged. The notion of disposability also indicates that the domestic worker is ultimately seen as an object, not just for profit-making (as Wright argues), but also for consumption and class presentation. Sometimes, the productivity of the worker may or may not even be important to her treatment -- the point is that the employer purchased her and therefore can treat her however they desire. In an interview that I had with a Jordanian lawyer on this issue, he says that one of the main reasons why workers are mistreated is because of the “mentality of the employer”, who consider the worker as a “TV or a chair” because they had to pay high fees for her. Interviews with Jordanian employers done by Thoraya El-Rayyes reveal the same objectification: employers interviewed often referred to workers as “raw material”, and the verbs “bought her” and “returned her” are commonly used to describe hiring and firing (El-Rayyes, 2015, 12).
Exploitation does not just come in wage theft. Employers often overwork their domestics to the point of exhaustion, or they deprive them of basic hygiene products. For me, Maria’s fatigue represents clearly the bodily effects of the disposability myth. She says to me in a conversation: “sometimes I am so tired, sometimes when she [Madam] gets angry and I am tired, I go in the kitchen and boom...” Maria whips her hand across the air with force, as if to knock something off the table. She sits quietly for a moment then continues in a softer voice:

...because I’m tired. She is not the only one tired, I am tired because evening and morning I’m working. So she needs to understand me. She will be patient and I will be patient.

When my Madam is get angry I keep my mouth close. I am good when she is good. But if she is bad, I am still good, but only a little bit...I will sit, because I’m tired. I will go in my room and sit there. And laying there because I’m so tired. Especially if we have guests, that is the big problem. I don’t like it. This Ramadan, everyday, everyday, everyday, “the people will come”, “the people will come, to visit Sir”. Ok, I understand, but everyday, everyday? It makes me crazy.

The rhythm of “everyday, everyday, everyday” chugs away like a machine. At the time, she was delivering this to me on the edge of the couch, waving her hands around to show the guests coming in, opening her arms to me in exasperation when she rhetorically asked “but everyday, everyday?” When she finally uttered “it makes me crazy” she flipped her hands forward, shaking the tension of her body off, and sat back into the couch. The repeated physical wear of Maria’s body ultimately culminates into an erosion of her mind as well, her own sense of stability and calm.

I eventually found that “going crazy” became a repeated motif for Maria whenever she tried to express getting close to her breaking point. This was a phrase Maria’s friend, Marivell,
repeated as well. Below, she describes feeling “crazy” after seeing the physically degraded bodies of other domestic workers:

You know when I coming to the Madam, I see the maid, four. And you know I look at the maid and think ‘oh my god, this Madam I think is not good.’ I see the maid, yellow the skin, the face, and the uniform is broken broken. And the color of the uniform is very old. Just only one uniform. After that, I talk to this four maid, I ask them everything. She said ‘you know, sometimes I wash uniform no sabun (soap), I brush tooth, no toothpaste, no shampoo, no sabun for the body.’ So why?! You know Madam is not good, not give the food for the maid! Just we cooking, she does not think what is the maid eating. In my mind, I am thinking I am crazy now. A crazy woman -- me! It’s very nice, this attitude, with the Madam.”

Accounts of wage theft, overworking, and deprivation of basic human necessities show us what is at stake when domestics are rendered disposable by the capitalist system and by their employers. Domestics seek to exist as workers and transform into objects of consumption on the one hand, and on the other, they are labor-commodities. There is no need to eat, to rest, or to wash. Notwithstanding the complexity of exploitation, as illustrated with Mariana’s experience with a Syrian family, the point remains that domestic workers are seen as objects of middle-class consumption and presentation that do not have human needs of their own.

The notion of disposability and the perception that domestic workers are objects of consumption can tell the story of egregious offences of wage theft, exploitation and abuse. I would argue further, however, that exploitation can mean something even more fundamental than the non-payment of wages – the wage itself is by definition exploitative. Alice Kessler-
Harris argues that the wage is not an objective exchange of value. It is a gendered construct of value and social position. Even a full wage is often unjust in the labor market and in life:

As it is conceived…the wage conveys a message of social and job-related expectations, appropriate roles, and social needs. It reflects the realities of the marketplace and demarcates the differences – real, imagined, resisted, and desired – between the sexes. To the individual who earns it, the wage is simultaneously an object of struggle and a source of personal satisfaction and achievement. It is a public statement about the self and tangible evidence of social value and approval bestowed on each of us by the world (Kessler-Harris, 2015, 4).

The paradox of “struggle” and “satisfaction” that Kessler-Harris presents captures how migrant earnings can be simultaneously so abundant yet so scarce at the same time. It also describes the contradictions workers feel about the payment of wages, and how wages can become a complicated site of struggle and entrapment. Consider Mia’s predicament with her employers:

Mia: If they will give what I want, I will stay. If they don’t, I’m sorry. We’re both sorry.

D: I think they really need you.

M: Yes. I know. Because they know me very well. Because they can trust me, every time they leave the house for morning, on the regular day, my Madam will go at 7:30, Sir will go before 9…so they go early, so I am alone in the house. It’s ok. Maybe this week or next week we are talking about this, so we close everything. I hope so, they will give what I want, I will stay. If they don’t give what I want, sorry. I can’t stay.

We can detect Mia’s unsettled emotions about this negotiation. There are a range of contradictory feelings she captures -- demanding a higher wage is necessary to keep working, but to do so successfully would mean that she would have to stay and work in a way that makes her
feel unsatisfactory. To demand a higher wage and fail would mean that she would be without work. Maria’s waged domestic work makes it difficult for her to argue the case that it is the wage itself that institutionalizes her exploitation. When Maria demands a higher wage, she is attempting to negotiate the value of her labor, because that gives her some urgently needed leverage. But, I would argue, she is resorting to wage negotiation, which she knows puts her in a bind.

**Obscuring Exploitation Through Intimacy and Affective Language**

There exists a contradiction between the value of the domestic worker’s labor and the value of her as a subject. The “work” of the factory workers in Mexico and China that Wright studied were ideologically constructed as menial and repetitive, requiring very little skills and intelligence. However, domestic work produces and requires a level of intimacy that factory work lacks, which makes the former seem more precious and more difficult to critically analyze. It is, after all, sited in a warm, glowing cloister -- we call it the home. Domestic workers take care of our children and elderly (Carina). They allow other women to have leisure time (Carina), they provide physical and emotional support (Mia) -- these services are understood to be necessary. Furthermore, employers are willing to pay high upfront costs for their workers’ permits and visas (under Jordan’s sponsorship migrant workers system), and they value trust and familiarity within the employment relationship. But just like factory workers, domestic workers as real people are considered disposable. What makes them “real” is considered worthless, even when that labor is the work of intimacy and care. Both Mia and Mariana feel the contradictions of intimacy and exploitation in their work:

**Mariana:** “You know, the Madam too much like me. Wherever I go work, the Madam too much like me. Because I am hardworking...but I tell her “Madam, you know my work, too much. Your children four and I am alone. I clean, I iron everything...” So the
time I talk to Madam, Madam won’t buy me a ticket. I say “Madam, buy me a ticket, I want to go.” She don’t want, she wants me to stay in the house. So what I do? I make runaway.”

Mariana’s employers simultaneously value her labor, while devaluing who she is outside of work, in the same way that states value the economic output of their citizens while disavowing their other needs and rights. But this is still not to say that the value placed on their labor is high. The employers’ desperation for someone else to do domestic work for them is not a gesture of reverence. As Mia says:

“For me, my Madam, sometimes she looks at you like your friend, sometimes when she gets mad, you are down (uses hand to indicate “low status”). But my Sir...he is...how can I say...he is good. He’s good...and the children, we are friends. So...maybe the other Arabs...maybe they...if you are a housemaid, you are still a housemaid. You can feel the treatment good, you can feel in the family that you are not different, you are belong to them. Sometimes, or most of them, if you are housemaid, you are still a housemaid.”

For the elite (including myself), the work we do enhances our status as people. This is not the case for Mia. Part of this has to do with racial and cultural stereotypes, and it also has to do with the fact that domestic work (waged, in this case) is seen as disposable itself, despite its necessity in maintaining the productive labor force. The way that these two realities of domestic work are reconciled is by “transferring” it, as Rhacel Parreñas argues, to a group of women that are considered worthy of it (Parreñas, 2015, 72). Indeed, Mia’s Madam toils away at a job with the United Nations, and Mia is the one to feel the burden of her Madam’s stress:
“If she has a lot of problems with the kids and work...you know the UN so many work, it’s so hard. It’s like helping other people...you know the UN. I know. So, when she came in the house, she get like this...I know. You know what I do? I go in my room and I wait.”

The way that I interpret Mia’s predicament is that live-in domestic work has a way of mystifying the family’s commodification of her personhood and also the labor relations that solidify inequality. The way she describes herself being treated as a friend sometimes, then as a housemaid sometimes, then as a friend (but still a housemaid), captures the slippages between domestic work as a labor of love and as devalued work.

Judith Rollins has written about the highly exploitive situations that black domestic workers experience in the U.S., mostly as a result of the personalism that goes into the work relationship. As she carefully analyzes the way employers switch between overt unkindness and calculated maternalism, Rollins shows how the accumulation of everyday, face-to-face encounters maintain racial and class hierarchies within society, while employing the language of friendship and personal connection. Most importantly, she is suspicious of any claims of “empathy” and “love” within the work relationship because they serve to conceal exploitation:

While the female employer typically creates a more intimate relationship with a domestic than her male counterpart does, this should not be interpreted as meaning she values the human worth of the domestic any more highly than does the more impersonal male employer. Her ideas about the domestic are not different; her style and her needs are (Rollins, 1985, 186).

Rollins argues that domestic work relationships are particularly exploitative precisely because they are also personal. The intimacy of these labor relationships results in not only economic but psychological exploitation in which “rituals of deference and maternalism” (157) are used to govern how the two women must deal with each other on an everyday basis. The
enactment of these rituals reinforces subordination and super-ordination and reconstruct the identities of each woman and their hierarchical ordering. It is worthwhile to ask whether love, as an emotion shared mutually and equally, can ever really be present in the relationship between domestic workers and employers since the two parties are positioned hierarchically in relation to each other. Domestics are put in a position where they are “asked to be inferior in [their] conditions, in [their] intelligence, [their] appearance and sometimes even [their] character” (194). As Rollins states: “the ideas, attitude, thoughts, and emotions of people must also be examined, understood, and “rearranged” if the objectifying and exploitation of humans by other humans is to cease” (6). Rollins research calls into question notions of agency in understanding the work lives of domestic workers.

In non-Western contexts, research has also been performed that situate the “duty to family” as an important justifier for exploitation. Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, for example, show how emotions are woven into the culture of domestic servitude in Kolkata. Phrases such as “one of the family” to describe workers are used by employers to conceal from others and themselves the deep inequality that runs through the household (Ray and Qayum, 2010, 96). As Ray and Qayum argue, this phrase may not necessarily even be meant to subordinate the domestic worker. Instead, uttering “one of the family” helps the family maintain notions of family defined by idealized emotions such as love, generosity, respect, and mutuality (96). Loyalty constructs feelings of mutuality and equality between workers and employers where none structurally exist. In particular, ideas of loyalty are meant to challenge domestic workers’ transition from live-in to part-time or freelance work. Ray and Qayum show how employers’ anxieties about the “end of loyalty and trust” is emblematic of societal anxieties over economic restructuring in contemporary Kolkata: “employers and servants living in a culture of servitude
in the interstices of two social imaginaries, the feudal and the capitalist modern, find themselves in daily confrontation” (118). Class inequalities during the colonial period had created the sense that servants were indispensable to middle- and upper-class life. Nostalgic rememberings of the past claim that feelings of maternalism and loyalty were stronger back then because workers “preferred” the live-in arrangement. But, as Ray and Qayum argue, these admonishments of the “end of loyalty” are merely a way to sustain inequalities into the contemporary period. Ray and Qayum’s research shows is that there is a continuity of inequality within domestic work that has not been disrupted by more contractual relationships. Part-time domestic workers may indeed be more autonomous by default, but their positions within society are no different since they are challenged for not staying in their authorized place within the class structure if they decide to become part-time.

Interestingly, this observation problematizes some of the work that has been done on domestic workers in the Middle East. For example, Ray Jureidini (2009) argues that older forms of domestic work are less exploitative than newer forms because the newer forms are between non-Arab workers and Arab employers in middle- and upper- Lebanese households as Arab women became reluctant to work in households other than their own. This is contradicted by the author’s claim that the desire for a more “distant” worker is caused by “a greater ideological (or perhaps emotional) comfort for employers to draw on non-Arab foreigners who were unrelated to the tense and complex sectarian enmities that had developed” (Jureidini, 2009, 75). Jureidini shows how the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) heightened political tensions between different Arab populations in Lebanon as Egyptians departed, Palestinians and Lebanese women grew increasingly reluctance to work within other people’s homes, and Lebanese employers became unwilling to employ other Arabs (81). There was an influx of Asian workers into the domestic
labor sector after 1990, with recruitment agencies bringing in many Sri Lankans by the mid-1990s. By 2006, Filipina and Ethiopian women workers joined this group. Based on a series of oral interviews with middle- and upper-class Lebanese women employers, Jureidini argues that regional politics heightened feelings of Arab solidarity, but at the same time “emotional ties” of a “patron-client relationship” between Arab workers and Arab employees were replaced by a more commoditized and distance work relationship with Asian and African domestic workers (74).

One must remain skeptical of the so-called “emotional ties” that existed in the past and no longer exist in the present. Emotional ties in intimate spaces are still very much a part of the exploitation of contemporary domestic workers in the Middle East, as shown in my own fieldwork. One cannot argue that the relationship between employers and workers is exploitative because they no longer connect emotionally. There is also little evidence that Arab employers were more emotionally tied and dedicated to Arab domestic workers and therefore less exploitive of them.

Section 4: Using Money

Making Commensurable

For many people, my interlocutors included, money coerces a decision whether one likes it or not. To begin with, George Simmel’s seminal work *Philosophy of Money* provides useful theoretical insight into how incommensurable and unquantifiable objects can be exchanged and, indeed, quantified, by introducing the intrinsically valueless object and concept of money. Simmel’s insights lead one to perceive money as both an abstract, totalizing form of valuation, and as a concrete object that renders incommensurable objects exchangeable:
Money…its nothing but the pure form of exchangeability. It embodies that element or function of things, by virtue of which they are economic. It does not comprehend their totality, but it does comprehend the totality of money (Simmel, 2005, 138).

This totalizing valuation and commensurability, as predicted, affects how we understand (and value) other people and ourselves. While money does have a totalizing and ultimately debilitating effect, its unrelenting consistency can be a way for us to identify people’s choices that go against hegemonic instructions.

Carina, for example, often chooses between her own lifestyle in Jordan and her children’s welfare in Manila. In one of our first conversations, Carina spoke to me about how expensive it was to work on the outside compared to working on the inside:

“It’s better, it’s outside, But too many money yaani. But for me, you will pay house, you will pay everything. You will pay food, you will buy food, taxi, money too much. But inside, the Madam, bas a little bit money, you will not pay home, in Madam, for pay for eating, for food, like that. But only if you stay at home. For me, because I’m outside. I want -- I’m outside, right? But for me, it’s ok.”

Carina expresses an aspect of her work life that she will not compromise -- controlling her own time. In the eleven years that she has been in Jordan, she has worked on the outside for six years, paying the rent for her own flat, hiring her own taxi service when she needed to, and paying all the other expenses she mentioned above. Saving money is extremely important, there’s no question about that. But Carina is willing to give up several hundreds of dollars a month if it meant being able to handle her own time (for some reference, Carina charges 5 JD an hour to clean homes). As we saw earlier from the analysis on remittances, this is not the story that proponents of the remittance-to-development framework tell. Migrant workers, particularly
migrant mothers, are seen as sacrificial figures whose sole motivation for working is to provide for their children.

But Carina’s choice to live an “outside” lifestyle contradicts this image, but not in the sense that she is “choosing” herself over her children, which is an equally gendered reversal of the children > oneself rhetoric. We cannot interpret Carina’s decisions as actually valuations of one thing over the other – Simmel’s provocation that money’s ability to render everything commensurable is what compels us to think of Carina’s decision is an exchange. Can she not desire both courses of action? Perhaps she desires neither? Money, in a way, forces Carina into a choice, which scholars might see as female “independence”. But it is important to understand that Carina is not so much reversing the sacrificial mother image, but staging a higher-level intervention of the entire notion that she and her children are commensurable.

Things in life only become trade-offs when the language of money becomes a form of meaning-making by commodifying people, relationships, and experiences. The act of enumeration renders all aspects of life commensurable, tradeable, and replaceable with each other. Carina has only visited the Philippines three times since she arrived in Jordan 11 years ago, because the ticket prices are too expensive. When I asked her if she missed her husband, Carina laughed incredulously and said: “How can I miss him if we don’t have money?” The emotional pain of maintaining a transnational family is a palpable feeling for many migrant workers. But these choices are tethered to processes operating in the market and in state politics. If Carina does not miss her husband, it is because money prohibits her from feeling certain emotions (or perhaps, money puts her in a position where she prohibits herself from feeling certain things). Carina wants to be with her family and she wants to make money so that they can attend school. She cannot do both at the same time, as is the case for all transnational workers,
but this does not mean she cares about making money for her family more than she cares about being with her children. It is the presence of money as a language, as a system of valuation or meaning-making, that forces Carina to prioritize, to reduce, and to choose. Perhaps one believes that Carina truly prefers working abroad to being with her family – migration as a “women’s ticket out of culturally mandated domesticity” (Weeks, 2011, 12). Yes, there is of course the possibility that she does indeed unequivocally choose her own life experiences over being with her family, because we cannot assume that mothering and the family are a perfect haven of equality and pleasure. At the same time, we must pick apart the ways that money meaning-making makes it seem as if Carina’s choice are agentic and “independent” in nature, when really it compels us to make decisions that we do not settle with.

A world that uses money as an authoritative signifier of intrinsic worth means that our ways of expression are delimited. Transnational migrant domestics, who are also mothers, must find ways to engage with and parent their children from a distance, and often times this engagement is expressed through the language of money. Children might come to know their parents only as breadwinners, and not as someone who can provide psychological or emotional comfort, or even as people with their own intimate lives. In other words, for migrant works, love must be materialized, through the purchasing of goods. Mariana tells me about how she finds it difficult to go back home without money, because it means that her children will make demands of her:

“And then if I will go there, no money, what I do? My children demand, ‘Oh, why you come here no money?’ I don’t like.”

Mariana’s role as a breadwinner locks her into a position where her only source of leverage with her children is that she is the one who provides the household’s money. She appreciated that her
daughter saw her “sacrifice”, because it was through that sacrifice that Mariana understood herself to be a good mother. We can see this further with how she disciplines her son:

“I talk to the brother. I say “don’t do that, it’s not good, you don’t have a father, and I am very far. Please don’t do that to your sister, because your sister is the one to care you.” I talk good to my son, after that he is crying. He say “Ma, I’m sorry.” My son! I say “You know if I don’t send money, you don’t eat, no have food, no anything.” He say “sorry”. When he told to me “Ma, I want to buy”, I say “ok, no problem, I will buy. I will follow you what you want, but you follow me what I want.” Now, alhumdulillah, it is good now.”

Without the ability to parent up close, Mariana has to reason with her son by playing up her role as the breadwinner. She understands that she cannot be there for her children emotionally -- she has told me that whenever her daughter calls her crying about a personal problem, Mariana feels helpless and tells her to go talk to her grandparents. But sometimes she is able to successfully parent her children by employing the language of money -- peace in the house (“what I want”) in exchange for stuff (“what you want”). Mariana’s transnational parenting experience challenges romanticized understandings of motherhood and mothering that have ignored the need to communicate, teach, and show love through money logic. For Mariana, she perhaps employed this strategically and deliberately, but the example still goes to show how money, as a placeholder for “something valuable”, will always be there for when we do not have the means to communicate in other ways.

Consumption and the Trap of Money: How Acts of Freedom are Imbedded in the Logic of Money

The previous section has discussed that ways in which commodification and money talk forces migrant mothers to materialize their love through the action of consumption. Here, I
would like to expand on this notion of consumption, and argue further that it is not just something we do to communicate with the people we care about. Consumption, I find, is an intrinsic part of the worker’s experience. It is what ultimately gives labor its purpose for the individual – more work gives us more consumption, to a point. It is also true that states compel subjects to consume, using primarily two storylines to justify it. First is the argument that more consumption will make one happier, more comfortable. Second is the argument that consuming – i.e. buying goods, a home, a car, etc. – is an investment in the economy and helps it grow. Both of these storylines are very much relevant for the domestic workers that I spoke to.

Let us harken back to the earlier discussion on neoliberal economic policies and their espousal of remittances as a funding source for development. Inspired by Hernandez and Coutin idea of a “remitting subject”, I argued that migrant earnings can be rightfully claimed by states through the use of citizenship discourse and the construction of migrants as products of a profit-generating company. But, as Hernandez and Coutin also argue, states also “nationalize” remittances through the notion of investment. As they state:

According to this [investment] notion, nations invest in workers through the educational systems, by providing food and shelter, and by enabling families to flourish. Having “invested” in the worker, they therefore have a right to expect some return (Hernandez & Coutin, 2006, 187).

Workers, therefore, exist in transactional relationship with the state. This notion continues to be supported by the classic, neoliberal, “pro-growth” economic theories that say more consumption by workers leads to greater growth in the economy (think, for example, of the argument that the Republican Party in the United States make when they argue to cut taxes). This ideological position is also strongly held by the international financial institutions.
Consumption, therefore, is constructed to be morally good action that should be the duty and pleasure of any responsible citizen. Plentiful consumption – not work – is what would make women like Carina, Mariana, and Mia, “national heroes” in the eyes of the Philippine government. It is also a large reason why these women have shared stories of migrating abroad as a way to “learn”, to experience something new, to pursue a kind of upwards-moving career. Mia, for example, speaks fondly of one day moving to Hong Kong, because of its flourishing Filipina population, kinder employers, and more “developed” city environment. Rita, the youngest at 23, tells me about how lucky she is to have foreigners as employers. Last year, she was able to travel to Valencia in Spain, where she partook in the family’s vacation by the beach. Carina, too, mentions that she is well-versed in different cultures because Manila is a vacation hot-spot for people of all different nationalities. Indeed, this kind of “culturally-aware” knowledge is not only a signifier of class (via social capital), but also a “quality” of Filipina domestics that recruitment agencies market to give Filipinas a competitive edge over other nationalities (Polanco, 2015).

There were even ways that the women built up their cosmopolitan credentials without having to spend any money, which is part of the reason why working in an urban setting can be rewarding. On shopping trips at the mall, Carina and Mariana took me into every single shop there was to see, trying on different shoes and sunglasses without ever buying anything. Whenever I indicated that I liked something, Carina would enthusiastically tell me to “buy it, buy it!” even if the product was obviously overpriced and frivolous. During other hang-outs around Second Circle and Rainbow Street, I watched how often domestic workers took pictures with impressive public installments (such as a giant FIFA soccer ball display or Ramadan decorations). Once, I was asked to pose in front of a red sports car parked on the side of the street.
so Rita could snap a picture. Perusing my Facebook, I see that the workers I have become Facebook friends with upload these kinds of photos daily, with geotags to inform their audiences where the photos were taken, and for what occasion. Like many people’s engagement with Facebook or social media, the purpose is to simply make the statement that “this is what I got to do today, this is what I got to see”.

However, it is important to remember that relationships and experiences can be strongly defined by the act of consumption, as Mariana’s and Carina’s relationships with their children show. This can bring a feeling of freedom, but also a feeling of being trapped, or having no other choice. Meaning-making is drawn from the same language and logic deployed by the market and the state, which can mean that how we “struggle” and “resist” and “love” is not fully agentic in nature. For example, when Carina tells me about her daughter, she expresses worry over the fact that her daughter wants to work instead of go to school: “She wants working. I told her no. Not now. Because she take the money. Haram. If she take money she will not study. Because I’m like that before.”

It is important to highlight the domestic workers’ role as global consumers, as well as global workers. For one, it helps to show how consumption is an important productive tool for states to nationalize remittances and is therefore a necessary part of being a migrant worker and citizen. Consumption ideology tells us that our ability to buy is a reflection of our commitment to our families, our nation and ourselves. Second, it shows that the effect of this ideology is a commitment to pursuing an everyday cosmopolitan lifestyle. Migrant domestics may see themselves as traveling for work as much as traveling to learn and enjoy, which can be dangerous if the latter demystifies the exploitation of the former too much. Finally, this discussion of consumption helps to nuance the traditional argument about migrant labor that says
it is only extracted coercively and can always be resisted mentally. As other scholars have shown (Freeman, 2006; Buroway, 2010; Parreñas, 2015), capitalist production is one that functions through coercion as well as consent.

Conclusion: Lessons about Choice

In this chapter, I selected money as a preliminary object to analysis to under how capitalism has reconfigured labor, social, and state-subject relations. I began this essay with a discussion about the remittances discourse, and how it is purported by international financial institutions and governments using flexible framings of scarcity and surplus. I quickly moved onto the implications of this discourse on the bodies of Filipina domestic workers, who have been targeted for re-packaging and inscription – in ways that make them suitable and desirable in the global market of service labor. I then continue by presenting some findings from Jordan, particularly about how employers and workers interacted given the politics of money and the wage, as well as the insights about racialized and sexualized bodies gleaned from the section before). I ended this chapter with a discussion about using money, particularly the limits of money as a means of communication, expression, and personal fulfillment.

The main insights from this chapter are that people’s money practices, and in particular, transnational migrants’ money practices, have fundamentally reconfigured the way we understand how social relations are mediated, in both exploitative and “loving” ways. On the one hand, waged domestic labor in a transnational context has enabled new forms of exploitation at the subject level (i.e. withholding wages to “make up for” expensive recruitment costs) and also by states (i.e. mandating that migrants must send remittances back to their families). But the wage, or in more general terms, money, is also integral to how migrant domestics create new
opportunities for themselves -- whether it is negotiating better working conditions, sustaining long-distance relationships, or deriving pleasure through consumption.

In other words, when we find ourselves ready to make claims about the “choice” and “agency” that migrant domestic workers have (indeed, that any of us have), we must proceed with caution. The last section of this chapter has shown that money’s way of totalizing valuation, and its total appropriation by capitalist institutions indicates that what we often consider to be empowering or freedom-granting are an illusion. This is the point where I venture into my last chapter, where I discuss the politics of interventions intended to “give choice” and “empower.”
Chapter Four:
A Case Study of UNIFEM’s “Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia” and the Politics of Depoliticization

The experiences of low-wage migrant women are governed not only by state institutions and capitalist ideology, but also by the landscape of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations bestowed with the responsibility of promoting and strengthening respect for universal human rights. This chapter critically analyzes the strategies of governance undertaken by so-called “non-state” organizations, in particular, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (now part of UN Women). First, this chapter analyzes how these strategies are enmeshed in existing discourses of gender, class, nationality, and race – in other words, how these strategies to promote the idea of universal and equal human value are enabled and produced by a neoliberal, state-centric ideology that is at its core irreconcilable with true equality, democracy and justice. This chapter analyzes a fourteen-year project, targeted a migrant women workers, undertaken by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Jordan. I argue that the major changes UNIFEM pursued in Jordan – changes that were reported as “successes” – do not actually empower migrant domestics in how to handle abusive work conditions nor does it seek to intervene on any of the structural issues that contribute to the exploitation of migrant domestics in the first place. Like other scholars before me, I argue that this is due to UNIFEM’s state-centric model of implementation, which allows the state to extend its powers through “non-state” interventions, such as this UNIFEM project.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion on how these non-state interventions undertaken by international organizations can be detrimental to the political progress of these causes. Pulling on existing literature which argues that IGO organizations such as the UN and the
EU perpetuate a hegemonic form of neoliberal governmentality rather than meaningful, radical political change, I show how Jordan’s collaboration with UNIFEM also very much reflect this trend. These projects commenced in the name of “promoting human rights” have, at the very least, maintained ideologies which condone exploitation and oppression, and at the very most, worsened the material conditions of migrant domestic workers. The second half of this chapter analyzes the discursive effects of a particular public awareness campaign initiated by UNIFEM and the Jordanian Ministry of Labor. Through my analysis, I argue that the campaign clearly exemplifies how conventional forms of human rights promotion serve only to legitimize oppressive ideologies. In particular, the campaign is more interested in the “correction of patriarchy” – by relying on notions of respectability, propriety, and class – rather than its dismantling. Furthermore, the campaign “privatizes” moral obligations by depicting worker exploitation as something that originates from the employer’s individual behaviors or innate personality. This focus on the “private relationship” between domestic workers and their employers ignores structural causes of exploitation and inequality, and also further legitimates the figure of an “independent and egoistical individual” central to neoliberal ideology (Ong, 2007, 2).

**NGO-isation and Depoliticizing Political Change**

In 2001, a memorandum of understanding between UNIFEM and the Jordan Ministry of Labor was signed, symbolizing the beginning of a fourteen-year project addressing the rights of migrant women workers in Jordan. The title of the project is “The UNIFEM Asia Pacific and Arab States Regional Programme on Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia” and its implementation was divided into three phases between 2001 and 2015. The program is said to a “response to the feminization of migration flows in Asia” and it “seeks to empower women migrant workers by
strengthening policies and institutional and social environments in favour of women migrant workers – especially female domestic workers – to claim their rights and entitlements” (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2006). A total of nine countries located in “Asia” took part in the program: Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia Lao, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong SAR, and Jordan.

An observation worth noting is that Jordan is the only state involved in the program that would warrant its full title to include “Arab states.” But since no other Arab states participate, the title of the program often only appears in a shortened form, “Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Asia” (EWMWA), and Jordan is designated as a country located in “Western Asia”. This small incongruity eludes to a very significant point that a large collection of critical literature on international organizations has pointed out, namely that these so-called “non-state” interventions are almost completely contingent upon the willingness of states to participate and to fund. The dearth of public information on EWMWA makes it difficult to verify the exact details of political infighting and negotiations that went on to acquire the funds and interest necessary to keep such a large-scale project running for fourteen years. But critically analyzing the title of the program, its self-proclaimed scope and goals, and questioning why certain countries (like Jordan) and not other countries (like the UAE, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, who all have much greater populations of migrant women workers) participated, demonstrates how “non-state” interventions can never operate independently of relationships to the nation-state and its various supportive ideologies.

**Main Implementation Mechanisms and Funding**

Like all other UN programs, EWMWA’s grand strategy is the implementation of one or more existing UN conventions that are deemed relevant to the target population of the program.
In the case of EWMWA, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and “various other non-CEDAW mechanisms” -- high-level dialogues, call to actions, and topical forums – make up the framework for “promoting and protecting the rights of women and migrants” (UNIFEM, 2006). “Multi-stakeholder policy dialogue” are used mainly to facilitate discussion at the regional level between “countries of origin and employment”. Examples include collaborations between UNIFEM and the ASEAN Task Force on Migration, an Expert Group Meeting on Gender and Migration organized by the Secretariat of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) in Geneva, and a High-level Regional Governmental Forum held in Amman and co-organized by Jordan’s Ministry of Labor and the UN Development for Women – Arab States Office.

At the national level, UNIFEM works directly with national governments to implement policy changes. In 2005, UNIFEM assisted the Thai government in preparing a draft amendment to existing labor contracts for migrants workers in Thailand. Between 2001 and 2004, UNIFEM aided Indonesia and Nepal in the passing of “gender-sensitive national legislation promoting and protecting the rights of women migrant workers” and facilitated “government consensus” on the need for legislation that protects women emigrant workers in Cambodia and Lao. UNIFEM has also worked to implement multiple media and public awareness campaigns in Cambodia, Indonesia, Jordan and Nepal (through national institutions), mainstreamed “gender concerns” within national development plans, and launched pilot projects on “gender-sensitive rights-based pre-departure training programs” in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Nepal.

Organizations such as UNIFEM have a way of depoliticizing the urgent issues and needs expressed by migrant domestics themselves. I find it useful here to reference Islah Jad’s
excellent description of “NGO-ization,” a process of depoliticization that she discusses in relation to the Arab women’s movement:

NGO-ization…the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into “projects” in isolation from the general context in which they are implemented and without taking into consideration economic, social and political factors affecting these projects…It also denotes a shift in women’s activism from voluntarism to dependence on foreign aid; a shift in the personnel dealing with women’s empower from grassroots rural and refugee cadres to middle class urban elites of professional” (Jad, 2004, 12).

Jads here essentially describes three important characteristics of NGO-ization that are clearly identifiable in the EWMWA and UNIFEM: 1) delinking issues of collective action from their structural context, 2) setting up a system of dependency on foreign aid, and 3) overpowering grassroots experiences with the voices of middle class urban elites. It is through the accumulative process of NGO-ization that the workings of “neoliberal governmentality” are able to continue quietly like “capillaries,” as Foucault calls it. Liberal democratic politicians can taut the flag of human rights, equality, and democracy as loudly and emphatically as they would like – but as long as political, economic, and social change remains tethered to the nation-state and market ideology, packaged into “projects” designed by the powers-that-be, and labeled into pools of money designated for different groups based on a state-approved criteria of “need,” there is little hope that these interventions will empower those people whose experiences or goals are in direct contradiction to the state’s.

Governmentality is a powerful concept introduced by Micheal Foucault to describe a pervasive form of power “applied by states to reinforce themselves” (Hasso, 2009, 70). Neoliberal governmentality, then, is governmentality whose content and articulation is neoliberal
ideology. For example, Aihwa Ong sees neoliberal governmentality as resulting “from the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics (Ong, 2007, 4). One of the effects of neoliberal governmentality worth pinning down and investigating further is the relationship between state and nonstate actors (i.e. civil society and transnational organizations). This effect that I am interested in is described by Frances Hasso as the establishment of “a continuity between the head of state and the individuals governed.” She continues:

from the governmentality perspective, the idea that there is a ‘boundary between the state and society is….an effect of power’ that serves to reinforce the state and mystify the range of cruits and mutual dependencies that exist between formally state and nonstate apparatuses (Hasso, 2009, 70).

The UN and other international organizations are not technically nonstate actors since their membership is composed of governments. Despite this technically, however, international organizations have attempted to push forward the image that they function as a supranational organization, a global entity that is independent of “political” interests. Thus, in a national context, the false boundary exists between the state and civil society; in a global context, the false boundary lies between states and “supra-“ national organizations, creating the impression that there are entities with lie “beyond” or “outside” of the state structure, as the supra- prefix connotates. EWMWA’s involvement in Jordan is exemplary of this false “supra-boundary”, reflecting the kind of transnational neoliberal governmentality that scholars such as James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta have captured in their work (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). The neoliberal discourses and material strategies used by EWMWA to implement their projects have, as I mentioned, depoliticized the issues of migrant workers by shrouding their legitimate
concerns and grievances with the feel-good, “domesticated” language of liberal democracy and human rights. This has a consequence of stunting their political fight and weakening their moral claims.

**Stifling Grassroots Efforts**

Delving into the weeds of EWMWA in Jordan, we see how specific material relations between nonstate actors, elites, and governments emerge in the form of piecemeal projects, grants, and initiatives. For example, a telegram made available through Wikileaks shows that in 2004, the U.S. contributed $654,000 over two-years for the UNIFEM program in Jordan (U.S. Embassy in Jordan, 2004). Specifically, the funds were “directed to build the capacity of the newly created NGO called “Friends of Women Workers: Advocacy for Migrants.” During my fieldwork in Jordan this past summer, I did not hear a word about this enigmatic NGO. A search on the Internet reveals that it does not have a website, and its name appears in only one research publication since 2004 (Frantz 2008). The only name linked to the organization is Jordanian professional Aida Abu-Ras, who was working as a consultant for UNIFEM during the time. The work of Abu-Ras and “Friends of Women Workers” is mentioned only on the U.S. Embassy website and Tipheroes.org, a website run by the U.S. Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report. According to these two webpages, “Friends of Women Workers” launched a text message and email campaign in 2008 targeted at Jordanian employers “instructing them on the appropriate treatment of their workers” (“Aida Abu Ras,” 2009).

According to Abu-Ras, the two millions emails that were sent “were developed especially for [Friends of Women Workers] and UNIFEM by a famous cartoonist in Jordan…[Friends of Women Workers] were sending those cartoons carrying messages about human rights of migrant workers” (Morse, 2009). These cartoons are the cartoons of the UNIFEM awareness campaign
that I analyze in the second half of the paper. One questions why UNIFEM’s idea of supporting civil society is the creation of new, unknown organization headed by one of UNIFEM’s own consultant, rather than building off the existing, voluntary work carried out by local organizations. In the Final Evaluation Report of Phase II of EWMWA, the evaluators state:

the [EWMWA] Programme did not fully and strategically engage with key organizations, such as CARTIAS and the Jordanian Women’s Union, which have been providing welfare, legal, and social support services to foreign domestic workers and could have provided useful feedback and input at key stages of implementation to help formulate and adjust strategies and activities (Sciortino & Saini, 2009).

Importantly, the Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU) is a women’s organization generally comprised of members with “a leftist or pan-Arab persuasion, tending toward a more political, if not always feminist, analysis of women’s problems in Jordan and therefore less interested in traditional forms of charitable social work” (Brand, 1998, 164-175). Again, although specific details of political infighting cannot be confirmed, the exclusion of more controversial organizations (like JWU) in favor of new or royally-linked organizations (like Friends of Women Workers and the National Center for Human Rights), allude to the asymmetric politics of the EWMWA program.

This discussion aligns with Jad’s observation that international organizations are not interested in supporting the volunteer-based work of existing organizations, networks, or activism. Instead, rather create new titles and NGOs because they are seen as more substantial “evidence” of progress. It is also a way to isolate the issue of migrant rights from their political and economic context. Equally important and related is the trend toward excluding grassroots level voices from the conversation and relying exclusively on elite individuals or government
officials to represent the interests of migrant domestics. Abu-Ras, for example, was not only affiliated with UNIFEM, but also a Swiss development agency and later, the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), a “royal NGO” headed by Princess Basma. Another example of the exclusive presence of elite voices is the “High-level Regional Governmental Forum on Women Migrant Workers, Human Trafficking and Labor Reform” co-organized by the Jordanian Ministry of Labor and UNIFEM in March 2007. Labor ministers from four other Arab countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and the UAE) attended the forum and “publicly committed to introduce a Special Unified Working Contract for migrant domestic workers.” This “Unified Working Contract” was drafted and presented by Jordan’s Ministry of Labor, and was lauded as a model for the other governments in the region. State efforts to “include” migrant voices were also entirely ineffective. For example, in 2008, a Directorate of Migrant Domestic Workers was set up to give migrant domestics a channel to voice complaints and grievances. The Directorate’s project was a total failure; the Phase II Final Evaluation Report found that “at the time of conducting this evaluation (May 2009) a multi-lingual telephone hotline for foreign workers established by the Directorate had received no calls although it had been established since around August 2008” (emphasis added, Sciortino & Saini, 2009, 47).

The “Perfect Student” and the Pretension of Progress

Clearly, 2007 and 2008 saw some significant “advances” in Jordan’s work on migrant workers’ rights. Importantly, several other important events were also taking place that would seem to contradict Jordan’s sudden spurt of goodwill. In January 2008, the Philippines Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) announced a total restriction on the deployment of Filipina workers to Jordan on the basis of “rising cases of abuse” (Jaymalin, 2008). Labor Secretary Marianito Roque stated that the Philippines would not lift the ban “until the
government of Jordan could ensure the welfare of Filipino workers.” As a result of this ban and a “failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking of person.” the 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report published by the Department of State in June of that year reflected Jordan’s demotion from Tier 2 (which it had held since it first appeared in the report in 2004) to Tier 2 Watch List, designated for countries “whose governments do not fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance (U.S. Department of State, 2008, 152). These signs of admonishment coincide perfectly with Jordan’s own ramping up, highlighting Jordan’s need to maintain its reputation as a “perfect student” of Western liberal democracies if it wishes to maintain its constant stream of foreign aid, a major source of its income. While some of this aid is bilateral, increasingly, transnational organizations such as the UNDP, UN Women, and UNICEF are favored because they help contribute to the idea of a “global civil society”, rather than the traditional client-patron relationship that was popular before the 1980s. But, as Hasso states, transnational governmentality “discursively construct…states as separate from international government systems, although these domains operate in mutually constitute relations…” (Hasso, 2009, 71).

The 2008 Philippine ban and TIP Report demotion was enough to pressure the Jordanian government into more “dramatic” action, and these action (all legalistic) were conducted in collaboration with EWMWA (UNIFEM, 2006). In July 2008, Section 3 of the Jordanian Labor Law was amended to read “agricultural and domestic workers, cooks and gardeners, as well as assimilated persons are covered under by-laws to be issued for this purpose.” (Public servants and municipal employees are still excluded from any kind of labor protection). In August the

following year, Jordan promptly issued Regulation No. 90, a regulation that set specific conditions, rights, and obligations for domestic workers and employees. What this regulation essentially does is provide separate labor regulations for domestic workers outside the jurisdiction of the standard labor law.\textsuperscript{21} Despite this fact that domestic workers, agricultural workers, and other similar occupations are still not treated equally under the labor law, UNIFEM reports the 2008 amendment as an unequivocal success of EWMWA program. A 2010 poster on the program includes this amendment as the first bullet under the “Milestones” section, where it reads: “Jordanian labour law amended to include protections for domestic workers, and domestic work is now recognized as work” (UNIFEM, 2010). In a 2008 UNIFEM document summarizing policy and program work on international migration done by the organization, the new legal changes are reported as such:

“UNIFEM assisted the Jordanian government to amend its labour laws to recognize domestic labour as work and incorporate the protection for migrant domestic workers into the new law” (UNIFEM, 2006). The Final Evaluation Report of Phase II reports that “the Programme played an important role in bringing about significant policy changes, namely the approval in August 2008 of new by-laws extending current labor rights to foreign domestic workers (Sciortino & Saini 2009)”.

The combination of public awareness campaigns and changes in the labor law have led many researchers to uphold Jordan as exemplary of good practice and commitment on the part of the state to address the issue of migrant worker’s rights. This optimism is hinged on the fact that Jordan is the only country in the Arab region that recognizes domestic workers in the labor law, entitling them to minimum wages, defined working hours, right to days off, and medical care.

However, relying on these kinds of legalistic, incremental changes can have detrimental effects on the long-term battle for meaningful justice and democracy among migrant workers in Jordan and around the world. On the one hand, these legalistic changes and one-time public awareness campaigns have – materially – done very little to change the working conditions for domestic workers because the implementation of these norms and measures has been inadequate. An excellent resource that highlights the utter ineffectiveness of Regulation No. 90 is a 120-page Human Rights Watch report published in 2011 that represents tens of stories from domestic workers about abuse, exploitation, and maltreatment (Wilcke, 2011).

At a discursive level, however, the argument that any kind of legal recognition is good recognition can be short-sighted and intellectually debilitating. As many critical scholars have argued, there is substantial limits to the law, and recognition is not the same as true equality or democracy. Furthermore, UNIFEM is misrepresenting the 2008 amendment and subsequent Regulation No. 90 as an incidence of inclusion; indeed, the language I quoted above uses words and phases such as “include”, “recognize”, “incorporate”, “extending current labor rights” to describe the amendment. In reality, the amendment utilizes a logic of exception, deliberating keeping domestic workers separate from the standard labor law in order to preserve their marginalization and giving the state more flexibility with how to address their labor rights.

The picture presented in this thesis is incomplete, since the EWMWA program has not yet published a final evaluation report summarizing the findings of the entire fourteen-year program. What begins to emerge from this analysis of EWMWA activities in Jordan and how it represents its “successes” as a human rights program ultimately speaks to how the problems migrant domestic work is politically maneuvered around, while maintaining its rhetorical commitment to human rights. This section also shows how government use different projects, be it community
development or the rights of migrant domestic workers, to strengthen neoliberal governmentality and continue to blur the line between state and society. The ultimate effect of this work has been a depoliticization of domestic workers’ rights, muting out genuine calls for collective action and transnational activism.

**Continued Focus on Development Discourse**

A particularly illuminating kind of document produced by UNIFEM on this project are what I refer to as the “donor documents.” Contrary to meeting notes, proposals, or annual reports, donor documents are often concise (the length of a brochure) and every page is filled with colorful and immaculately produced photographs or infographics. The information presented is easy to comprehend, and numbers are usually presented without any additional statements about caveats in the methodology. Donor documents are, above all else, simplistic – intentionally leaving out complex or contradictory information under the pretense that it is “irrelevant” to understanding the problem. Take for example the following section from a UN Women infographic on migrant domestic workers published in September 2016:
This excerpt is the opening section of the infographic, presenting a definition of “migrant” that emphasizes the economic contribution of migrants to their economics. While the definition makes a point to emphasize the contribution that migrant domestics make to their home countries, it does not elaborate on the contribution that migrant domestics make to the host country. Another example of this kind of PR-material that showcases the ideological perspective towards migrant domestics is a 2010 UNIFEM produced a two-page poster on the EWMWA project. The title page featured a dramatic, eye-capturing photograph of Indonesian domestic workers at a protest in Hong Kong. The opening segment of the document dedicates four short bullet points on “The Context” of female migration in Asia. Notably, poverty is featured in the first three bullet points. This concentration of poverty talk perpetuates the notion that poor women only are the ones that migrate abroad for work. The identification of poverty as the most important context-related takeaway also sets the stage for the solution: more migration (of poor people) and more economic development.
These materials position domestics as workers who are merely in this host country to reap its economic benefits. It rotates the moral compass to depict the host country as the “provider” and the domestic as the beneficiary. Like other IGOs, UN Women is committed to arguing that labor migration is a solution to poverty and economic inequality undertaken by the enterprising individual. It obscures the structural failures of the economic system that pushed certain women into migrant domestic work in the first place, and takes for granted the conditions of poverty or economic insecurity that some of these women might have left (many conditions that were created by colonial administration). Furthermore, by advocating for migration in developing countries, UN Women is crossing out other options of economic development that might empower certain national markets but are not in line with a neoliberal agenda, such as developing local infrastructure, nationalizing certain industries, or supporting community-level service providers.

**Political Satire or Normalizing Abuse? Discursive Effects of the Abu-Mahjoob Cartoons**

In 2007, UNIFEM partnered with the Jordanian Ministry of Labor to produce a series of cartoons depicting the working conditions of migrant domestics in Jordan. Earlier in this chapter, these cartoons made an appearance. Specifically, a “famous cartoonist in Jordan” had developed for “Friends of Women Workers” and UNIFEM cartoons to be sent to employers’ emails raising their awareness on the issues that migrant domestics face. This e-mail campaign, as I mentioned, was conducted in 2008, just a year after UNIFEM’s cartoon campaign with the Ministry of Labor.

The famous cartoonist that Abu-Ras speaks of is Emad Hajjaj, who is widely known for his caricature “Abu-Mahjoob.” Hajjaj’s company, the company that produced the cartoon
campaign, is also known as Abu-Mahjoob Creative Productions, and the logo can be seen in the bottom center of posters. Created in 1993, Abu-Mahjoob “represents the typical Jordanian man and his everyday political, social, and cultural concerns” (Al-Momani, Badarneh, Migdadi, 2016, 510). According to Hajjaj: “Abu Mahjoob is the average citizen, who suffers from economic hardships and is bothered by [negative] social norms” (Al-Khoshman, 2014). He can be a father, a corrupt employee, or an abusive employer. The traditional Jordanian kufiyah and the modern pinstripe suit Abu Mahjoob wears are “another contradiction” prevalent within Jordanian society.

The choice of Abu-Mahjoob is a significant one. On the one hand, the Abu-Mahjoob cartoons are some of the most politically transgressive forms of print media available in Jordan. In 1999, Hajjaj portrayed King Abdullah II in a cartoon just months after he took office. It was the first time that the king had been depicted in a cartoon, and Hajjaj’s work certainly set a precedent on how far an artist might be able to go without being jailed (it is a criminal offence to insult the king and the royal family). But despite this radical political transgressive, Abu-Mahjoob is still the quintessential “citizen,” as Hajjaj himself states. While Abu-Mahjoob is offensive, satirical, and frank, he is not necessarily a radical character himself – and his sensibilities still exist comfortably within the moral universe that Jordanians are accustomed to. He is, above all else, a beloved figure, someone who is familiar. Any admonishment of his behavior would only be in good humor. Much of this has to do with the fact that political cartoons are often used as a “safety-valve” or smokescreen” by the cartoonist to butt heads with certain social rules without overtly committing to a political project (Al-Momani, Badarneh, & Migdadi, 2016, 510).

At the discursive level, this campaign relies on specific representations of class and gender to advance its message. This message, based on the consistent narrative that these
cartoons tell, hammers home conventional liberal democratic ideals such as respect, tolerance, responsibility, and obligation. The problem with this specific moral economy, however, is that these exchanges of respect, tolerance, responsibility, and obligation are done so within a “web of unequal relationships”.

This last section of the chapter will look at how the cartoons’ representation of “the problem” has a number of debilitating discursive effects, despite the fact that the “message” is one of respecting human rights. Firstly, the cartoons depiction of the “perpetrators” are classed and gendered – in particular, the perpetrator-employers are seedy, low-class men who are inclined towards violence. The women employers (i.e. the wife of the husband) is depicted as a gentle and oblivious bystander, duped by her husband. However, these depictions are not only outright misrepresentations of the complexities and realities of dynamics in the households who employ workers, but they also advance an agenda of respectability politics and ultimately re-legitimize patriarchy.

Secondly, the cartoons “privatize” exploitation by representing them as a problem of individual bad behaviors and choices. The notion that exploitation is a result of innate qualities borne out of people’s personalities, their upbringing, or their “culture” treats exploitation/abuse as something independent of the economy, the nation-state, and ideology. This focus on the independent, free-thinking, rational individual is a cornerstone of neoliberal ideology, and it is the basic assumption that underlies neoliberal governmentalities and their respective projects. I bring up the example of the “Unified Work Contract” that EWMWA and UNIFEM relentlessly pushed for and promoted in Jordan and elsewhere to show how the “privatizing” exploitation view is institutionalized.
**Give us a Better Patriarchy**

As I discussed in my previous chapter, domestic workers deal mostly or exclusively with women in the family. Despite the fact that the domestic workers service the entire family, Jordanian women are more effected by their presence in multiple ways. On the one hand, the introduction of the domestic worker frees up the women of the household and enables them to disavow domestic work. Part of this could be a result of a real economic need (if she is a working woman or the burden of household work is large), but it could also be a desire for women to advance their own status by avoiding domestic labor. On the other hand, women employers are still “responsible” for matters of the household, so she ultimately becomes responsible for the productivity and performance of the domestic work. These tensions take place under the watchful eye of male head of households, who might chastise both the wife or the worker for failing to perform up to par.

These cartoons are an excellent example of how migrant domestics can be “acknowledged” without disrupting the hegemonic patriarchal ideal that set up the circumstances of her abuse in the first place. For example, in Figure 2, the husband is the one that is “gifting” a domestic worker to his wife.
The innocent expression of the wife, her mild smile and wide eyes are starkly different from the conniving and seedy figure of the husband. At a surface-level, representing the man as the “perpetrator” might seem like a feminist move. However, this depiction ignores the fact that it is Jordanian women who gain and lose the most, materially, from the domestic worker, for all the reasons described above. The male head of household is privileged to not be effected by the domestic worker, because he is not the one who would have performed the domestic labor in the first place.

Similarly, in Figure 3, the husband is seen as the one deriving the most pleasure from having a domestic worker – he gets told off by his boss, the policeman, his wife, everyone but the worker.
This notion that it is the husband who hires the working, who “needs” the worker, and who derives value from her, again, skews the dynamics of the household in order to depict the husband as the unequivocal perpetrator of violence. Throughout my fieldwork, “Madam” was always the one that workers’ interacted with the most (and thus, had the most conflict with). UNIFEM renders invisible the existing conditions of inequality that exist men and women – namely, that without the domestic worker, Jordanian women would be the ones performing domestic labor. While the husband’s interest in the domestic worker might be that he is able to present himself as higher-class, this is even more true for Jordanian women, who have time,
money, class identity, and her identity as a woman tethered to the domestic worker. Furthermore, the representation of the man in the cartoon, Abu-Mahjoob, as the seedy, violent, abuser emphasizes merely this notion of a “failure of patriarchy” rather than an abolishment of patriarchy. His insensitivity, “low-class” sensibilities, and ignorance are rendered as superficial failings of his personality – in other words, the message depicted by these cartoons is not that Abu-Mahjoob should not be an employer, or a guardian, of some sort, but rather than his attitude needs to be corrected.

**Privatizing Abuse**

As I briefly mentioned earlier, UNIFEM’s main “success” in Jordan was the introduction of a standardized work contract. Not only was the UN representing this as a major milestone in realizing migrant domestics’ rights, but scholars were also claiming that a standardized work contract would enforce the terms of employment more consistently, and should “serve as a good practice model for countries of destination. On the one hand, it is not actually clear if a standardized work contract was what was called for by migrant domestics themselves, since they knew that most of the abusive treatment they received from employers, if they did, was against the law to begin with, regardless of whether there was a work contract. On the other hand, strengthening the institution of a work contract “privatizes” the abuse and regulates it to the single relationship between employers and workers, and conflicts would end up ultimately a private matter. For example, Solidarity Center reports that a Ministry of Labor official state: “For domestic workers, noting has changed – because it is a private thing between employer and employee in the home. They are in a certain relationshi My personal perspective is that because I brought [the domestic worker], I should have some control.” These kinds of attitude reflect the conclusions about disposability I made in Chapter 3. The added element is that of the “privacy”
of the home, where employers are allowed to do as they like because the worker is the employer’s property, so to speak.

Once we understand that abuse is treated as a private matter, the structural factors that resulted in any violence and exploitation are ignored. Consider Figure 4 below where the domestic worker is beat behind closed doors:

Solutions are posed as originating from the individuals themselves, either the employer or the domestic worker. This distracts from the calls for political collection action, and meaningful structural change. Ideologically, posing the problem and solution as originating from individuals is linked to this notion of individual, and collective or state, responsibility. Rather than giving
workers collective bargaining rights, or the ability to unionize, it removes violence and abuse from its political and economic context, instead choosing to keep it in the home.

Furthermore, “private relationships” lead to a system of absolute dependency, and this dependency is institutionalized in the contract. The contract does not empower migrant domestic, it makes them more dependent, financially and otherwise, on the employer. For example,

![Figure 5: "Wrong Number" (Abu-Mahjoob Creative Productions, 2007).](image)

employers are responsible for covering all costs of permits, but also basic living necessities like food, medical needs, and phone calls home, as the cartoon in Figure 5 shows.

Of course, this relationship of dependency is set up by the 2009 Domestic Workers’ Regulation that accompanied the standardized work contract. In the regulation is states that employers must
supply “all necessities” for their workers as stipulated in Section 4 Part D. Thus, the worker is at once a worker (who needs a wage) and also a member of the family (who needs basic necessities). The employer is at once an employer (who provides a wage) but also charged as a caretaker of the worker (who provides basic necessities). While the intention of these provisions is to ensure that workers get enough sleep, the effect is a further perpetuation of the relationship of dependency. Employers are bestowed the role of guardian – they decide what workers eat, when they sleep, what they wear, etc. In fact, there have been observations by other researchers that domestic workers are infantilized and treated like one of the employers’ children, subordinating the worker from worker (and thus equal) to child. The moral compass shifts in favor of the employer who “takes care” of their domestic workers, and thus workers are expected to “listen” to their employers as if they were their guardian. In a UNIFEM-issued booklet that is meant to instruct employers and workers how to abide by the contract, the instructions explicitly espouse this kind of guardian-child behavior. For example, under “Duties of the Worker”, the very first bullet point listed is: “refrain from leaving the house without the approval of the employer.” The second is: “respect the privacy of the employer’s house”, and the third is: “be honest and loyal.”

As Ong argues, all NGO interventions must work within a “knotted tapestry of situated power and ethics” (Ong, 2007, 198). In that way, whatever moral claims NGOs and IGOs articulate are done so without questioning existing structures, like the nation-state and the market. The UNIFEM and Abu-Mahjoob campaign is a particular non-state intervention that is intended to “translate” universal values into “local language” through the use of famous national caricature. But does the Abu-Mahjoob satire necessarily seek to empower migrant domestics’ or highlight their lived experiences? In short, no, because the cartoons represent migrant domestics
through the eyes of the employer, and by extension, through the eyes of the state. This misplaced use of satire – rather than critiquing the status quo – actually normalizes egregious incidences of abuse through its humor. The voices of the migrant women are left silent. At worst, the domestics’ mistreatment is a literary device used to help employers momentarily repent their wrongdoings, or laugh them off with the sympathetic, familiar figure of Abu-Mahjoob. While the employers (and the state) might have a cathartic experience, however, the same cannot be said for the workers. In line with this notion of ethical realignment, the Abu-Mahjoob cartoons visually represent an ideological project by the UN and the Jordanian state which wishes to disempower workers and regulate migrant workers’ rights to the private home. It is no coincidence that this cartoon campaign happens in 2007, the same year that the standardized work contract was instituted in Jordan and introduced to other government in the region.

Conclusion

Working off of existing literature that conceptualizes international organizations, such as the UN, as forms of neoliberal governmentalities, I argue similarly the work of EWMWA in Jordan is has depoliticized migrant domestic issues in Jordan, while at the same time, paying lip-service to the language of human rights. I began this chapter with an overview of the NGO-isation of women’s issues in the Arab world, and found that several components of EWMWA work in similar ways. Mainly, EWMWA delinks the urgency for collective action from its political and structural context, it sets up a system of dependency on foreign aid, and it overpowers the efforts of grassroots organizations. An important reason why Jordan is particularly susceptible to this kind of co-option is because of its position as a diplomatic and political friend of the Western world. As such, it has economic and political incentive to welcome projects such as EWMWA, as a form of statecraft. In the last section of this chapter, I
analyzed a series of posters drawn by the famous Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj. I found that the cartoons, through its depictions of violence in the home *only*, and depictions of violence between a male employer and female domestic worker *only*, simplified the issues facing migrant domestics in the Jordan. Besides simplification, the cartoons *problematized* migrant domestics (and their employers) in a way that “privatized abuse” (i.e. the violence that migrant domestics faced were attributed to individual employers, and not to structural failings). As such, EWMWA was able to push forward their solution of a unified work contract in Jordan – a private solution to a private problem. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates how states and international organizations approach subjects (“beneficiaries”) through a neoliberal framework. Namely, they perceive the problems of their beneficiaries to have originated from the individual choices that the person made, and not a result of discourse or historical and colonial inequalities.
Conclusion:

Ceaseless Migrations

I conclude my thesis by asking again the question I posited in the introduction: what is given up, forgotten, or concealed in the act of inclusion? In four chapters, I have attempt to trace out the incoherences of ideology, the contradictions in discourse, the loose-fitting pieces of policy and institutions, and the ambivalent emotions and desires that migrant domestics experience as they traverse these multiple, tumultuous terrains. This thesis began with the intention of intervening on the use of agency as a theoretical concept, particularly in ways that I felt were too closely focused on the subject-level doings of migrant domestics, while overlooking significant structural constraints that would have complicated the narrative of a fully agentic, fully rational, and fully coherent migrant subject. When I ventured into my first chapter, an overview and analysis of the regional and international labor migration patterns since the explosion of capital in the Middle East after 1973, I was confronted with a confluence of state policies and ambitions that revealed just has constructed and fragile the boundaries between the “national inside” and “foreign outside” were. Both Jordan and the Philippines were exciting and rich examples to consider precisely because their migration histories deeply complicated any notions of national belonging and and inclusion purported by the state.

When analyzing migrant encounters with the state in my second chapter, I found that these contradictions at the discursive and institutional level were met with ambivalence, as well as clarity on the migrant domestics’ part. What I mean by this is that migrant domestics often “followed” state procedures, navigated state institutions, listened to state instruction -- all the while looking beyond discursive claims of inclusion and protection. Ironically, by abiding by the “dull compulsions of economic relations” – which, in a sense, is simply pursuing material well-
being in a capitalist society – migrant domestic workers become aware of how limited normative inclusion is – being legal, being a citizen, being inside the home.

The story becomes complicated, however, when we consider the role of money and how it dictates desire, identity, and social relationships. Transnational migrants oftentimes do find themselves relying on consumption, or monetary exchange, to express connection with their families back home and to justify working as much as they do. But these practices are met with ambivalences. Fighting for a higher wage or remedying family tension with gift and allowances – these are decisions that force on to make exchanges between the incommensurable. What’s more, the battle over money is also a battle over the worth of one’s labor and one’s body. Such battles are often lost, and this defeat is felt through exploitation, through physical abuse, through objectification, through racialization and gendering, and numerous other forms of labor management. Most distressingly, sometimes the solutions to these immediate violences might still have to remain tethered to normative ideologies.

The difficulty of liberation grows when resource-rich institutions such as the UN implemented projects that might stifle genuine collective and grassroots mobilization. Relying on the apparatus’ of the state, projects such as EWMWA only serve to bring people back into the fold of control, discipline, and regulation. A neoliberal subjectivity is assumed – whereby people’s situations and dilemmas are considered an outcome of their ignorance or their poor choices, and thus the transnational governmentality mantra is to provide correctives to those choices (on the terms of those in power).

Multiple times throughout the writing of this thesis, I have been mentally paralyzed by the stories and events before me. An argument fashioned around critiquing inclusion (because most of the time it doesn’t exist!) often came out to be an exhausting one to make. I
often could not help but feel like I was beating a dead horse, or talking in circles, or contradicting myself, or going nowhere. A hundred pages later, I have somewhat learned to sit comfortably with these feelings. I realized, of course, that the circularity comes from the fact that structure, borders, identity, and subjectivity are interdependent – tethered to each other in an infinite number of ways that reify themselves at every turn. What is migration if not a ceaseless meandering between these connections?
Bibliography


**Legislation**


