From Dusting to 'Deening': Domestic Workers in the South African Muslim Home

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Abstract

Domestic workers in South Africa continue to tread the blurry line between formal and informal work. Despite attempts to regulate remuneration and organise workers, around 863,000 domestic workers earn their livelihoods within homes across the country. Comprised predominantly of black, semi-skilled women, authors have argued that this often-invisible workforce is vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and an insurmountable workload. Literature, however, hardly acknowledges that many domestic workers can be credited with harmoniously running the home, fulfilling elements of the role of the employer, and ensuring the employer's children are cared for and supervised. Muslim female employers in particular teach and entrust their domestic workers to clean their home in line with Islamic principles and, more importantly, ensure their children are cared for and guided towards an Islamic path when left under the supervision of the domestic worker. The role of the mother in the home is emphasised in Islam, and thus, her helper must be an extension of that role, be it dusting with a 'paak' (clean) cloth or 'deening' (practicing tenets of an Islamic lifestyle). Building on previous qualitative research, this paper argues that domestic workers in South African Muslim homes must not only be 'good' cleaners – they must also understand, absorb, and display elements of Islam, both as cleaners and carers, in order to successfully fulfil their role as a trusted part of the Muslim home in South Africa. This paper also explores gendered bonds shared between employers and domestic workers, as mothers and wives, and how religion and remuneration influence this dynamic.

Introduction

As an integral element of the homes of many South Africans, domestic work continues to occupy a large sector of the informal economy, despite attempts to regulate the sector. Various definitions of domestic work/er have been put forth (Zungu, 2009: 16; ILO, 2023), yet the consensus indicates that a domestic worker is one who performs services in a private home in exchange for a wage. These services include cleaning, washing and ironing clothes, cooking, child-minding, and sometimes taking care of the elderly. These five components are common across the literature (Cock, 1981; Zungu, 2009; Ally, 2010), yet as domestic work occurs in private households, there may be other services such as gardening or taking care of pets that are expected of a domestic worker. As Statistics SA (2023) notes, around 863,000 domestic workers, who are predominantly low or semi-skilled black women (Business Tech, 2023), find their workplace in the private homes of employers every day. Due to the informal, private nature of domestic work, this number is difficult to accurately determine. The invisible nature of this work lends itself to isolation, and possible opportunities for exploitation, and violence, leaving many at the bottom rungs of society, without pathways for social mobility (Anwar and Brukwe, 2023).

With its roots in slavery and shaped by South Africa's history of apartheid, the legacy of inequality still reproduces this gendered, often exploitative, and invisible form of work. Jansen's (2019) work, *Like Family*, traces the history of domestic work from the critique of pop culture such as the Madam & Eve comic strip, to the historical accounts of women who became entrenched in slavery, then being known as 'chars,' and now to their categorisation as domestic workers. Everyday dehumanising practices of othering such as being told to use separate utensils and toilets continue (Jinnah, 2020: 216), with many still being expected to work long hours without seeing their own families. Often, this is contrasted with elements of domestic workers being said to be 'like family' due to the intimacy of the space of the home and proximity to the family. The complexity embedded in domestic work operates across racial, gendered, lingual, socio-political, and cultural vectors.

Thus, the critical, seminal work of Cock (1980, 1981, 2011) remains relevant to contemporary discussions on 'maids' and 'madams'. In line with Ally's (2010) work, *From Servants to Workers*, the development of domestic work in South Africa and the government's attempts to regulate this area of the service industry post the advent of democracy, have been highlighted. This includes protective laws such as the Labour Relations Act (LRA) in 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) in 2002, the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) in 2003, and various increments in the minimum wage since. Yet, domestic workers remain unprotected from occupational hazards, injuries, and diseases and their work continues to be largely unregulated. The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) seeks to provide training, mediation, and various counselling and legal services for domestic workers in the country, yet their membership hovers around only 30,000 (Grumiau, 2012). Based on Dawood's study (2012), the laws which aim to regulate or protect domestic workers are, however, deemed inaccessible by domestic workers and difficult to understand due to language barriers. Written contracts and UIF agreements are viewed with suspicion due to an untrustworthy government and domestic workers would rather receive cash payments. In addition, migrants who work as domestic workers are often undocumented and prefer not to share their documents with their employers. As the authors note, many women leave their hometowns and move to urban areas in order to find work as domestic workers in order to earn a living and send money home to their families (Tolla, 2013; Du Plessis, 2018). Zungu (2009) argues that this move disrupts the domestic workers' home life and family structure. In effect, there are around 863,000 mainly black women workers who find themselves in the informal economy, yet their value is diminished. Studies on domestic work in South Africa have evidenced that domestic work, due to its ties to colonialism, patriarchal culture, and links to unpaid domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and caring cannot escape its gendered categorisation as 'women's work' (Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, and Unterhalter, 1983; Fish, 2006). Thus, little monetary value is accorded to these tasks. For example, research shows that many domestic workers live below the poverty line in South Africa (Buthelezi, 2021), with

many domestic workers being the breadwinners in their families. They are not protected by health insurance and due to the absence of a written contract, can be dismissed at any time. This was particularly harmful during the Covid-19 pandemic, where scores of domestic workers were left without work or healthcare (Dawood and Seedat-Khan, 2022). In fact, Business Tech (2023) illustrates that almost 250,000 domestic workers lost their jobs during this time and are finding their way back to employment.

Nevertheless, the number of domestic workers continues to climb in line with the cost of living and the increasing demand for paid housework as more women enter the labour force (Business Tech, 2023). As more women and mothers enter or return to the workforce, childcare has become a central responsibility of the domestic worker (Du Plessis, 2018; Dugmore, 2019). Hein and Cassirer (2010; cited in Du Plessis, 2018) encapsulate this dynamic of job creation in the service industry by noting that when employment becomes more accessible for women, so do employment opportunities for childcare providers. Of course, debates around who cares for the domestic worker or nanny while she is caring for her employers' children, is a point of contention. Anwar and Brukwe (2023) note that many domestic workers and those who take on caregiving work endure such conditions because the alternative is unemployment and hunger.

More recent works have touched on the rise of black middle-class employers (Maqubela, 2016) and sister-madams (Bayane, 2019), shedding a novel light onto a subject that has historically been conceptualised mainly from the white employer-black domestic worker angle. Some insightful work has been done in the realm of shadow mothers (Dugmore, 2019) and the more recent arrival of domestic work on digital platforms in the gig economy (Sibiya and Du Toit, 2022). However, this study focuses on the childcare aspect of domestic work, paying particular attention to caring for children in Muslim homes, where the 'deen' (religion) is practiced and produced regularly. This seeks to build on Dawood's (2012) investigation, which found that the dominant religion of the home manifested itself through shared Islamic vocabulary, dressing, conversations around religion, and ultimately, in the way children were supervised or 'mothered.' Of course, one cannot discuss domestic work in South Africa without looking at the theoretical underpinnings of power, gender, and for the purpose of this study, the concept of mothering. It is within this framework of a power relationship between employer and employee, the gendered nature of domestic work, and expectations and perceptions around caregiving or motherhood that this study finds its place.

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Theoretical underpinning

The dynamic of power infiltrates the relationship between domestic workers and employers, despite notions of being 'like family'. It cannot be ignored that the domestic worker is being paid for her labour and caregiving responsibilities, and this will never hold the same power as the employer. While power is by no means static, it is evident that the employer may erect boundaries within the spaces of her home, children, food, and rules around her expectations of cleanliness. The performance of this power manifests through her interactions with her domestic worker. Yet, in a Foucauldian sense, power is rather a strategy, and the relational dynamic between people in everyday life (Simon, 2005). Of course, while the employer may have visibility over her employee, the domestic worker may also exercise her agency and choose to erect her own boundaries. This became clear in Dawood's (2012) study, where domestic workers, despite being 'one of the family,' chose to eat their lunches away from the gaze of their 'madams'. In taking on childcare or caregiving responsibilities, the domestic worker assumes a temporary element of control over her employer's children, while simultaneously being answerable to her employer for their well-being.

Thus, the supervision of children is supervised by the employer or mother, leading Manathunga (2012) to question the various ways power is strategized, performed, or withdrawn.

While personal relationships in caregiving are not uncommon, domestic work, especially when it involves childcare, brings various levels of complexity (Jinnah, 2020: 220). Dugmore (2019) conceptualises this dynamic as triangular: mother – domestic worker/ nanny – infant. The domestic worker/nanny often attempts to mimic the mother, essentially, becoming a 'shadow mother,' until her full supervision or visibility is required. This term is heavily linked to the shadowy presence of nannies during the apartheid era (2019: 45). Often, domestic workers are not trained for this role; rather, childcare is added to her work and it is assumed she will be a maternal influence on her employer's children, due to her visible gender. In this way, 'taking care of the kids is on par with cleaning the toilet,' (Parreñas, 2000: 572), in the sense that it is another manifestation of the gendered nature of domestic work by employees who are predominantly female. Nevertheless, theorists clarify that the presence of the domestic worker as a nanny has a profound effect on the development of the child (Matangi; Kashora; Mhlanga and Musiyiwa, 2013; Du Toit, 2013; Du Plessis, 2018). This pseudo-maternalistic relationship may have benefits for children who may receive additional attention and learning through play and for mothers who grapple with the guilt of having to work and not look after their own children. However, tensions may arise when the children become too physically or emotionally attached to their caregivers if they display behaviour that contrasts with that of the family or leave the job abruptly (Bosch and McLeod, 2015; Dugmore, 2019). These tensions may result in children bearing the brunt of the burden of this triangular relationship and feelings of resentment on the part of the domestic worker, who becomes emotionally invested in children who are not her own.

Motherhood is an essential aspect of the Muslim female identity (Dawood, 2012). As ordained in Islamic texts, 'Jannah' (heaven) lies under the feet of the mother. Along similar lines, the mother's duty to her children is such that they have certain rights over her, such as being fed, kept healthy, and educated. In turn, respect for parents, particularly the mother over the father, is emphasised (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016). Thus, it is imperative that the caregiver is awarded similar respect and is an extension of the mother's role when supervising the children. Religion indeed influences the environment of the domestic worker, especially within the home. As an integral marker and performance of the employer's identity, the domestic worker is expected to assimilate or absorb certain everyday Islamic practices or routines in the home, as well as its imposition on her body, such as dressing modestly or eating Halaal food. Through the Durkheimian lens, religion allows one to separate the sacred and the profane, much like the private and more public areas of the home (Dawood, 2012; Hidayat, 2017). These norms, values, and cultural practices are learned over time through socialisation and religious texts and reinforce the notion of identity. While not all Muslims are homogenous in their religiosity or dressing, for example, there is a consensus on which direction to pray and when Ramadaan takes place. Thus, for the domestic worker, certain religious times, areas, and aspects of Halaal and haram or 'paak' and 'napaak' must be understood. These rules of religion may prove to be a point of understanding or contention between the domestic worker and the employer, thus discussing these, especially expectations around caring for Muslim children, is key to ensuring these values are perpetuated when the children are left in the care of the domestic worker.

Minding the Muslim home

Domestic workers who are employed in homes with a dominant religion, for example, a Muslim household, must assimilate to certain religious and cultural intricacies of everyday life in the home (Bonnin and Dawood, 2013). For example, cleanliness is of utmost importance in the Muslim home and is attached to Godliness and the presence of angels in the home. In line with this, there are areas or belongings in the home which are 'paak' (pure), such as the praying area and the Qur'aan, and 'napaak' (impure), such as the toilet and bathroom. Only Halaal (Islamically permissible) food and drink may be allowed or consumed in the home, while haram (forbidden) products such as those containing alcohol, pork, or any items deemed not Halaal, may not enter the home. Various aspects of modesty, such as dressing, one's language and tone, as well as the separation between men and women who are not married to each other, must be observed. According to findings from Dawood's (2012)

study, these boundaries between more private and more accessible parts of the home and its inhabitants determine the way the domestic workers navigate, clean, and ultimately understand their 'place' in such a space. Furthermore, as a woman within the Muslim home, it often becomes a domestic worker's responsibility to cook meals, care for her employer's children, and ensure that the home maintains its Islamic tenets of the 'deen' in the absence of her employer. Practically, this includes dressing modestly, ensuring she does not consume haram food in the home, and that she ensures cleaning materials are kept separate, such as those for the toilet and those for the bedroom or kitchen. Previous studies note that the Islamic ethos of the home has a profound effect on the personal space of the domestic worker (Bonnin and Dawood, 2013), such as her adoption of Islamic greetings and songs, the wearing of a scarf and inaccessibility to sacred prayer mats or texts. These have to be explained to the domestic worker upon employment, but in many cases, previous experience working in a Muslim home, especially caring for children, is preferable.

Caring for children

One of the key responsibilities of many domestic workers in South Africa is childcare. The literature points to debates around being 'paid to care,' transnational mothering, and the dynamics of being domestic nannies, pseudo-, or shadow mothers, which all seek to uncover this element of domestic work (Parreñas, 2014; Dugmore, 2019). They posit that 'childcare has become an undeniable necessity for working mothers' (Du Plessis, 2018: 9). Various options for childcare exist, including relative care (leaving the child in the care of relatives such as grandparents); non-relative care (leaving the child in the care of the neighbour or domestic worker); home-based care (the child is cared for in their own home); or centre-based care (the child is cared for away from home, in a daycare or educational centre) (Du Plessis, 2018: 11). It is not uncommon to find a combination of these types, such as relative home-based childcare, or non-relative centre-based childcare. Overall, research indicates that parents prefer home-based care due to the familiar environment for the child, in which they will receive more attention from the carer (as opposed to at a daycare centre, where the carer's attention is divided), and where there is less exposure to illnesses. Further, childcare centres are expensive, and times are inflexible. By adding on or emphasising childcare as one of the responsibilities of the domestic worker, the parent ensures the child remains in a familiar environment with a person who the family trusts, and who fulfils the role of a cleaner and carer, all at a lower cost. Thus, the traditional linear structure of the employer-domestic worker relationship becomes triangular in nature.

An overarching theme of these studies indicates that domestic workers sacrifice mothering their own children in order to earn a living looking after the children of others. For example, Le Roux (1999, in Momsen, 2003), finds that many children of domestic workers are looked after by grandparents in rural towns, or the children live in their own corrugated shacks. Parreñas (2000; 2014) is pivotal in her argument that migrant workers face even greater divides, across oceans, resulting in the breakdown of family structure and a rise in child-headed households. Nevertheless, in this economy, women are 'forced' to work and therefore those who are within the informal economy are often compelled to endure these consequences. Taylor (2011) explains that this is a form of exploitation in which 'privileged parents pay socially marginalised women to perform intensive mothering labour in their stead.' Du Plessis (2018: 19) echoes this sentiment, saying that the 'cross-class dyad' characterises this relationship, where the 'employer can afford to pay for childcare, while the domestic worker is supporting herself by providing it.' Thus, these class, language, race, and experiential differences between domestic workers and employers influence the understanding of what quality childcare means (Du Plessis, 2018: 16). In this relationship then, communication, expectation, and a level of trust are key to ensure the values around caregiving are understood. While there is a dearth of data on this subject, authors emphasise the role of the domestic worker in childcare, particularly during the early phases of childhood development (Du Plessis, 2018). It is important to note here that it is within this time frame that children develop a foundational understanding of religion and daily routines which involve religious practices. For example, young Muslim children learn short prayers and etiquettes of eating (such as praying before eating and eating with the right hand), greeting, and going to the toilet (known as istinja). Another aspect of development involves learning through play; thus, domestic workers must

find a way to balance their time between childcare and housework (Du Plessis, 2018). Recently, in an effort by a Gauteng-based group, Muslimahs Making a Difference, a Muslimah Nanny training programme has been launched, which teaches domestic helpers and nannies: Learning Quraan through play, sewing, baking, cooking, child and infant massage, adult massage, household management, grocery shopping, beauty therapy, IT skills, financial management, therapeutic art, play therapy, driving and au pair training (Muslimahs Making a Difference Online, 2022). Their website underscores the importance of caring for children, saying that 'A Muslim Nanny is needed in every home, ensuring that your kids are taken care of in an Islamic Environment...being a Muslimah nanny is an honour. The greatest of mankind (Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him) was raised by a foster mother, and she has the potential to be this to your child too.'

Remuneration

Domestic workers are notoriously exploited and underpaid. Zungu's findings show that many domestic workers were only paid around R 750 a month in 2009. With more emphasis on domestic work wages and increases in the minimum wage, by 2022, the average full-time domestic worker was earning R 3,000 a month. Recently, the average salary for a domestic worker has risen to R 4,000 since the minimum wage revision in 2023 (1Life, 2022). While these may appear to augur well for domestic workers, 1Life considers costs such as food, transport, healthcare, utilities, and communication and argues that a living wage needs to be around R 6,000 to R 7,000 in order to afford the necessities in South Africa. The non-existence of written contracts, unwillingness to organise and suspicions around Unemployment Insurance Funds (UIF), allow for the further exploitation of domestic workers who work full-time yet cannot afford basic necessities. Whether a domestic worker is 'live-in' (where the domestic worker lives on the employer's property) or 'live-out' (where the domestic worker travels to work and back to her home each day) also influences the costs and expenses of both the domestic worker and the employer. However, this does not protect the domestic worker from workplace hazards or unfair dismissals. As is evident, over 250,000 domestic workers lost their jobs due to Covid-19 (Dawood and Seedat-Khan, 2022; Business Tech, 2023), with little or no recourse.

In order to allow the domestic worker to choose the employers and hours they work, various online domestic worker agencies have emerged in the South African market, which includes Rent-a-maid, Marvellous Maids, and so on. The arrival of domestic work in the gig economy has indeed offered a new way of securing clients and domestic workers (Hunt and Samman, 2020; Sibiya and Du Toit, 2022). As the effects of technological advancements infiltrate various parts of life (Ravenelle, 2019), companies such as these match clients with domestic workers who have been through background checks. The rate of pay and hours is stipulated as well. Du Toit (2013: 105) notes that this triangular dynamic between the agency, client, and domestic worker allows for some respite from the exploitation, awkwardness, and pseudo-materialism that comes with traditional domestic work. However, this model is not successful for those seeking childcare, trustworthiness, and long-term domestic help. In fact, Hunt and Samman (2020) argue that this model perpetuates the precarity of domestic working conditions. While the data-free apps may allow domestic workers higher wages, flexibility, and a choice in selecting which 'gigs' to take on, these tasks are heavily monitored, akin to scientific management (Sibiya and Du Toit, 2022). Further, domestic workers still face transportation costs, safety, and security hazards as well as abusive

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clients in these homes. Most importantly, their status as 'independent contractors' leaves them with no legal or social protection such as maternity cover, UIF, or union membership. Essentially, the status of the domestic worker remains undervalued and largely unprotected.

Methodology

Following a phenomenological design, the qualitative nature of the study sought rich, in-depth data about the expectations and experiences of Muslim mothers and their domestic workers. Phenomenology considers the everyday, intricate experiences of a population and their perceptions. Thus, this study on the whole related to 'the Big Q' (Braun and Clark, 2023: 5–6) which is a flexible, reflexive qualitative approach, which allowed participants to reflect on their own interactions and behaviour. In gaining access to the participants, a non-probability snowball sampling method was employed to identify participants, who then referred the researcher to others who fit the criteria, which included being a mother or having to care for children; employing a helper who cares for the children and; maintaining the tenets of Islam while raising Muslim children. After identifying participants, two online focus groups were conducted, with 4 participants in the first group and 3 in the second. This was done after working hours and online due to the location of participants (KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng), to cater to prayer times, and to children's bedtimes. The demographics of participants are illustrated in Table 1 below. All ethical considerations were upheld, including pseudonyms being allocated to each participant. The hour-long focus groups gathered insightful data, which was recorded and then transcribed. Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2023) six-step method for thematic analysis was adopted to allow themes to emerge from this data-driven, inductive study. This involved: 1) becoming familiar with the data through reading and re-reading the data; 2) identifying initial codes and categorising data into piles; 3) seeking potential themes through assigning codes to the data; 4) reviewing these themes and their relevance to the research questions; 5) assigning names to themes and defining and refining the specifics of each theme, and; 6) writing up the research report with a final analysis, including quotes from participants and linking this back to the literature and research questions. While there is no standard thematic analysis, this tool, or 'recipe' as the authors call it, ensures the data analysis is theoretically and methodologically sound and that the themes which emerge are meaningful, relate to the theoretical framework, and are relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clark, 2006: 78–80). Based on the thematic data analysis, three key themes emerged: childcare versus cleaning, remuneration beyond the rand, and intricacies of interaction.

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Name (pseudonyms)	Marital Status	Occupation	Nr of children of employer	Age of child/ren	Nr of domestic workers	Living arrangements of domestic worker	Nr of children of domestic worker
Saira	Married	HR Director	1	6	1	Live-out, becoming live-in	2
Farhana	Married	Director of a retail company	4	8; 9; 15; 18	3	Live-in	3
Zahra	Married	Chartered Accountant	3	1; 9; 11	2	Live-out	1
Shenaaz	Married	Media and Communications	3	8; 13	1	Live-in	2
Rumana	Married	Academic	3	5; 9; 12	2	Live-in	3
Imaan	Married	Business Owner	2	3; 8; 14	1	Live-out	2
Ayesha	Married	Consultant/ studying	2	5; 9	1	Live-out	2

Findings and discussion

Childcare versus cleaning

Most of the participants interviewed agreed that when recruiting a domestic worker who will take on childcare duties, their priority is 'chemistry' or compassion for their children, rather than the standards of cleanliness of the home. Further to this, it was seen as helpful if the domestic worker had children of her own, such that she could share her maternal role in the home:

> My main concern is that they treat my children as they would treat their own. They need to be my right hand. And while they (the children) are small, my maids need to come with me to functions or events (Farhana, employer of 3 domestic workers).

For some of the participants who lived far away from their parents or extended families, domestic workers represented a support system and were often referred to as the 'second mother' in the home. This is compounded by the fact that some of the domestic workers were older than the participants. In the case of one participant, Rumana, the domestic worker had already been working in the home for over 30 years when Rumana married and moved into the family home. Thus, it was she who needed to assimilate herself with her in-laws and the domestic worker. Through language, domestic workers were referred to as 'Aunty' and referred to with the respect carried with the authority of being a second mother in the home. However, as Zahra notes, as her children became older, they did tend to talk back to her helper. In effect, the differences between the mother and caregiver became more apparent through the language and attitude of the children. In addition, participants admitted that they were clear that housework was the secondary responsibility of the domestic worker. In some cases, where the home was large and there were many children to care for, multiple domestic workers were employed in order to share the load of cleaning and caregiving (see Table 1). Most of the children of domestic workers stayed with grandparents in their rural homes. One of the domestic worker's children stayed with her, in the employer's home and had been brought up as a Muslim on the insistence of his mother. In this case, the domestic worker's son and the employer's children grew up together. While domestic workers paid interest to Islam, none of them were Muslims. All participants and their domestic workers presented the 'cross-class dyad'. Du Plessis (2018) observes that race (participants were Indian women, while the domestic workers were black women); class (employer–employee); culture (Indian–African); and experience (lived experiences as women of colour, mothers, religion) are all visible lines of difference between domestic workers and employees. Thus, it is necessary to explore the expectations, tensions, or bonds that domestic workers and their employers navigate on a daily basis.

The participants preferred domestic workers who understood how a Muslim home should be run. Thus, it was preferable to hire someone who had worked for a Muslim family before and had been trained in cleanliness and Halaal food. For Ayesha, training the helper around 'paak' and 'napaak' involved many iterations of labelling items or areas until the domestic worker understood. All participants stayed home for a few days to train their helpers and for those with more than one helper, the more experienced one trained the new recruit. However, some tensions emerged when the older domestic worker felt snubbed by her employer when an additional one was employed. In Zahra's case, this led to the initial domestic worker leaving work multiple times and then finally, in December 2022, via text message with no further explanation. In effect, the children she had cared for, for the last nine years, had to deal with an abrupt and painful loss of a second mother and the employer stated she was 'heartsore' because she treated her domestic worker like a part of her family. In fact, the domestic worker had become so entrenched in their family, that she cooked Indian meals regularly for the family. In Zahra's words: 'When she left, my world fell apart'. Authors (Parreñas, 2014; Bosch and McLeod, 2015; Jansen, 2019) highlight the heavy emotional load of being a second mother, but also the pain endured when this bond is severed.

For Saira, Shenaaz, and Rumana, the ability of the domestic worker to engage with their children and ensure the Islamic ethos and elements of the 'deen' of the home were upheld in their absence was of utmost importance:

She is very interested in his homework. She will teach him Zulu and he will teach her Arabic. She likes to watch him do his homework and will listen while he goes over his sabak (reading the Qur'aan) (Saira, employer of 1 domestic worker).

My helper knows when it is time for prayer. She will make sure my sons get ready to pray or shower early on Friday to make it to the mosque on time. In Ramadaan she makes sure she sets the table for the breaking of the fast and asks if she can taste anything for me to ensure the food tastes nice. She will also remind them to read and little things like if they sneeze, she will say Alhumdulilah. Over the years she's also learnt the words like if you give them something, she'll tell them, 'say Jazaakallah'. Or you like, you know if they come and say, 'You know we did our speech today and we did really well,' then she'll say 'Masha-Allah'. So, it's the small things like I know that even if I'm not here, she would remind them to do these things and read their duas.

Rumana: our helper is a live-in…and I have a very health-conscious brother-in-law, so she makes his sehri (pre-dawn) meals. My home is quite patriarchal, so she helps take on some of the preparation with me (Shenaaz, employer of 1 domestic worker).

Within these relationships, between mother–domestic worker/nanny–child, lies a level of trust. This has been honed over many years of understanding and the employer's acknowledgement of dependence on the domestic worker. The primary role of caregiving, along with trust to supervise the children, however, may create room for lower standards of cleanliness. For example, Saira explained that while she was working full-time in the office, she did not have the time or energy to ensure her home was being cleaned the way she would ideally like – rather, she was more focused on having her child properly cared for. It was only when she began to work remotely from home that she realised that many areas of the home had been overlooked. In agreement, Zahra admitted that she had 'let her helper get away with a lot,' meaning that she had overlooked certain chores that were not completed, as her key concern had been the well-being of her child. For both these working mothers, working from home effectively increased the visibility of the domestic worker and the fact that certain chores, specifically cleaning, had been overlooked.

In line with the power relations discussed by Foucault (Simon, 2005), the lack of visibility or boundaries then affected the standards of work of the domestic worker. Yet, it was sufficient to see that the child was looked after. During the Covid-19 lockdown, however, Shenaaz mentioned that she felt like she 'cramped' her worker's 'style', as they were sharing the same space every day. When such boundaries are diminished due to external conditions like this, renegotiation of boundaries may cause uneasiness and feelings of being out of place within the home, even for the employer.

In some cases, such a reliance on the domestic worker around childcare, cooking, and cleaning led to the domestic worker 'running the home', having no boundaries, and becoming defensive when critiqued about her work:

You have to correct them in a good tone or in a constructive way, else they get defensive…or you never know…take it out in different ways (Zahra, employer of 2 domestic workers).

This is echoed by Dugmore (2019: 51) who asserts that mothers carry the guilt of having to work away from their children, while at the same time wondering if criticising the nanny may result in the nanny rebelling via ill-treatment of the child. In most cases, as with the participants, employers would choose to overlook low cleaning standards, rather than risk the mistreatment of their children. In this way, power is strategically exercised or not, depending on the employer's priorities and possible repercussions.

Remuneration beyond the rand

Islamically, one is ordered to 'pay their worker before their sweat dries' (Sahih, 16: 8), meaning paying them quickly and with a fair wage. Payment is thus an integral part of the domestic worker and employer relationship which is also guided by Islam. The participants in this study paid their workers between R 3,700 and R 5,000 a month, which was in line with the recent increases to the minimum wage. Most of the participants did not have a written contract with their domestic workers. Only one paid her (employer's) and

her domestic worker's (employee's) portions of UIF, so that her domestic worker would receive her full salary. While some participants admitted that they would prefer a written contract, domestic workers viewed this suspiciously as an official commitment from which they could not break free. Further to this, Shenaaz mentioned that her domestic worker was already collecting another grant, saying that:

> a lot of the workers as well receive social grants from within the government for other, child grants or some sort of other grant as well. And by registering for UIF, once they're over the threshold, their grants stop and I think this is what comes into an issue where I know one of my workers, they refused to be on UIF because they would be then over the threshold for pay then (Shenaaz, employer of 1 domestic worker).

In addition, two participants who employed domestic workers from Lesotho pointed out that UIF did not apply to migrant workers who, in turn, preferred to receive cash, which effectively protected their invisibility from the government.

Upon further probing, it was found that remuneration for domestic work extended to loans, food, gifts, and housing. In Farhana's case, each of her live-in domestic workers is paid R 4,000. She covers their transport, groceries, food, and communication costs and often loans her domestic workers money to build their homes in rural areas:

> Sometimes, she borrows 10k, 20k from me if she wants to add to her house. She pays back now and then, but mostly it is written off. She is always owing me something (Farhana, employer of 3 domestic workers).

Saira shares similar experiences, where her domestic worker takes loans from her to refurbish or tile her home, but these loans are never paid back, so they are written off at the end of each year. Many of the participants paid for their domestic workers' children's school fees or accessories, Christmas or birthday presents, as well as providing paid leave and groceries over the December holidays. In Imaan's case, she regularly buys food for her helper and her children when they go grocery shopping because 'they must eat what we eat'. While this may be a marker of the gratitude or generosity of the employer, King (2012) reminds us that these gifts may serve to placate the employer's religious or charitable inclinations and temper her feelings around the low living wage. These gifts or loans have been observed by Jinnah (2020: 220) as well but were found to be 'laced with veiled notions of racism and stereotypes.' It cannot be ignored that one of the pillars of Islam is charity and Muslims as a community are often socialised to feed and clothe those who are in need.

> "Islamically, one is ordered to 'pay their worker before their sweat dries' (Sahih, 16: 8), meaning paying them quickly and with a fair wage. Payment is thus an integral part of the domestic worker and employer relationship which is also guided by Islam."

Intricacies of interaction

Archer (2011), King (2012), and Tolla (2013) emphasise that food is often a marker of the relationship between the employer and the domestic worker. As established earlier, food can be used as a tool of 'otherness,' or as a shared experience between domestic workers and employers. Besides the intricacies around Halaal and haram, the quality of food and the shared experience of partaking in the meal indicates much about boundaries between employer and domestic worker. Participants agreed that their mothers, grandmothers, or mothers-in-law did engage in practices such as keeping separate utensils for the domestic worker, giving the domestic worker expired food, or not allowing her to eat at the dining table with the family. In Saira's case, she mentioned that watching her grandmother's relationship with her domestic worker evolve over time from being one embedded with these practices of otherness to a rather close, live-in, caregiving relationship exemplified the shift

in rigid traditional boundaries between employer and domestic worker towards a shared experience of being women. However, there was a distinct difference in opinion that still existed between older and younger Muslim employers. Farhana's mother-in-law often complained about her 'spoiling her helper' with good food, and money, or allowing her to sit at the table to share in the Jummah meal. 'I always have to defend my helper...or cover up for her,' she says. Shenaaz elaborates, saying:

> My helper is more like my family so like if we go out and buy something she is included; weekly groceries, she'll give me her list and I'll buy whatever she needs. And if I know she's sending food every two months I would make sure that I also buy groceries for her to send home. My mother-in-law says that I'm spoiling her and this has come up so many times. Like even at home, because we eat quite early as well, my helper usually gets food before we eat so that she can also have time to like sit and enjoy her supper, and my mother-in-law found this to be the most disturbing thing ever that she was like I'm spoiling and she's going to take advantage and you know, and this is how problems start. I said, my helper has been with me for ten years now, she's literally raised my kids. If I need to go somewhere, I know I can leave my kids, she'll see to lunch if they needed to be. And I don't feel it as spoiling because she's part of the family, she lives with us so why not? So yeah, the older people do still have this notion that if you're doing too much or even if you're giving them fresh food it's an issue, it's a very big problem (Shenaaz, employer of 1 domestic worker).

Imaan agreed, saying:

> They're looking after my children, so like, whatever we have, they can have the same thing. They even cook for my kids. My helpers, both of them, if I'm at work, they will make sure that my kids eat. So, my kids are like fully taken care of so I feel like it's my duty to also look after them and take care of them and they are entitled to eat when we are eating. But I do have that issue of my mother-in-law also telling me I'm spoiling them. But they are our support systems so for me, I do the same that I would do like for other family members, I treat them the same (Imaan, employer of 1 domestic worker).

This 'spoiling' of the domestic worker speaks to precarity around going too far beyond a working relationship and the employer seemingly giving away her power. Thus, the employer's supervision of her domestic worker or nanny is judged by older generations in her family, who prefer to maintain the rigid boundaries of race and class such that the power dynamic is kept professional. Ironically, it is expected that the domestic worker looks after the children as if they were her own. Interestingly, despite sharing the same food or being invited to eat at the same dining table, domestic workers of the participants erected boundaries around their private time and chose whether or not to accept these offers. Their domestic workers preferred to enjoy their meals in their rooms, away from the surveillance of their employers. Thus, domestic workers exert their agency in various ways and are not passive recipients of power. At times, domestic workers made decisions for the home such as whether to buy or bake items and in the case of Farhana, who was stuck in Dubai for two weeks, managed to run the home, see to the children's meals, homework, and prayer times effectively. During the Covid-19 lockdown, live-in domestic workers of the participants stayed on their employer's property, with some not being able to see their families for a year due to travel restrictions.

Thus, while many workers felt they were subjected to stay at home, many live-in domestic workers were subjected to staying at work (Dawood and Seedat-Khan, 2022) and in the case of domestic workers working in Muslim homes, had to conform to halaal food and Ramadaan beyond their usual working hours. Shenaaz's domestic worker, for example, tried to fast but found it difficult. Yet, they did discuss stories from the Bible and particularly Prophet Musa (Moses, peace be upon him). For participants like Saira, who employed live-out domestic workers, she ensured that her domestic workers received their regular salaries, as well as protective masks, vitamins, and the Covid-19 vaccine. It is evident that the relationship between employer and domestic worker/nanny is multifaceted and relational, rather than a linear one.

Some of the peripheral findings of this study indicate that over and above the triangular relationship

between mother–domestic worker/nanny–child, is the element of the husband in the home. Touching on this briefly, Farhana mentioned that while she is close to her domestic worker, they squabble a lot. She mentioned that her husband often intervenes, lightens the mood, and is a 'buffer' in their relationship. The man is also put forth at times as the one who pays the domestic worker in some cases, so as to quell any awkwardness around payment between madam and maid when loans and salary increases are negotiated. This requires further exploration. In addition, Saira lamented the confusion her domestic worker experiences when she or her husband gives her differing requests. In this case, the domestic worker does not know whom to take instruction from. After discussing this, Saira ensured her domestic work would confirm instructions with her, rather than her husband. This was an unanticipated finding, which could be interrogated further in an additional study.

Overall, for those who employed their domestic workers full-time, the study finds that during time spent together in the home, employer and domestic worker commiserate with each other about certain shared experiences of being female, such as raising responsible teenage daughters or discussing fate and Godliness through the commonalities between Islam and Christianity. Elements such as safety as women in South Africa, the rising costs of living, as well as sickness or childcare concerns arose as points within this relationship between employer and domestic worker upon which they could find common ground. Of course, these boundaries around intimate subjects are erected and diminished within the home, when in the presence of others, or when there is a conflict of interest.

Conclusion

Domestic work continues to comprise a large part of the South African informal economy, despite attempts to regulate this unique form of work. While working behind closed doors sees many low-skilled black women face the brunt of oppression, it is equally important to explore the significance of the domestic worker in the home, particularly one who is depended on for her maternal role in supervising children and running the home smoothly. This is particularly important for working Muslim women in South Africa, who seek to entrust their domestic workers with the role of maintaining the 'deen' in the home and ensuring their children continue with their Islamic obligations during her absence. Along these lines, the negotiation between childcare and cleaning takes place, remuneration extends beyond the boundaries of the rand, and power is exercised across everyday interactions. Nevertheless, cleaning and caring still fall under the gendered realms of women's work and supervision, especially when underscored by notions of religion, racial undertones, and cultural understandings of womanhood.

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