



**An Exploratory Study
of Psychoanalytic and Social Factors
in the Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers
by Female Employers in Lebanon**



Project funded by the European Union
هذا المشروع ممول من الاتحاد الأوروبي





An Exploratory Study of Psychoanalytic and Social Factors in the Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers by Female Employers in Lebanon

by
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Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation

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The establishment of a Multimedia Virtual Space for Human Rights is the key objective of a two-year project (2009-2010) that aims at strengthening mutual cooperation among civil society organizations for a better integration of human rights, democratization and good governance in national development plans.

An open coalition of NGOs has been drawn up for the management of the virtual space and the project includes, among other activities, researches on various human rights topics in Lebanon ranging from freedom of association to trafficking and racism. For more information on the project, please consult <http://www.humanrights-lb.org>

Apart from the 4 project partners, the NGOs taking part in the Human Rights in Lebanon Coalition to date are: Amel Association, Amnesty International Lebanon, Association Libanaise pour l'Education et la Formation (ALEF), Association Najdeh, INSAN Association, Lebanese Association for Civil Rights (LACR), Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), Lebanese Center for Civic Education (LCCE), and Support of Lebanese in Detention an Exile (SOLIDE).

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About KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation

Established in 2005 by a group of multi-disciplinary professionals and human rights activists, KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation is a Lebanese non-profit, non-political, non-confessional civil society organization committed to the achievement of gender-equality and non-discrimination, and the advancement of the human rights of women and children.

KAFA envisions a society where all its citizens live free of violence and exploitation and where they have equal access to opportunities and results and their human rights are respected, protected and enjoyed. KAFA believes that women's and children's rights are integral to this achievement and to building a free and fair society.

KAFA's mission is to work towards eradicating all forms of gender-based violence and exploitation of women and children through advocating for legal reform and change of policies and practices, influencing public opinion, and empowering women and children. Our focus areas are those of 1) Violence against Women 2) Child Sexual Abuse 3) Exploitation and Trafficking in Women 4) Socio-Legal Counseling.

KAFA combines in its work the various methods of lobbying, action-research, publication, training and awareness raising, and supporting the victims. Our work's guiding principles are those of the universality of human rights and the participation and inclusion of all target groups and marginalized people in our endeavors.

Preface

The brief of this qualitative exploratory study was to conduct targeted interviews with female employers of migrant domestic workers, psychiatrists, lawyers and institutional stakeholders in Lebanon. In conjunction with previous empirical and theoretical research on the topic of human rights violations against migrant domestic workers, the study provides an analysis of the conditions, circumstances of and possible explanations for such violations.

The aim of the study was to explore the possible psychological or psycho-social factors that may be involved in the violence and abuse of domestic workers by their female employers. The target of female employers was chosen because the madam of the house perpetrates most incidents of abuse. For example in the survey carried out by the author in 2005-6, which included interviews of 610 migrant domestic workers in Beirut, it was found that the female employer did most of the yelling (75%), name calling or verbal abuse (86%), and hitting (63%). In a replicated study in Cairo (780 domestic worker respondents), similar results were obtained, where the female employer was responsible for 73% of the yelling, 51% of the name calling (with 23 % “all family members” that included the madam) and 70% of the hitting (see Jureidini, 2010 on Beirut and Jureidini, 2009b on Cairo).

Methodology

The investigator conducted personal interviews with seven Lebanese women who were employers of migrant domestic workers. Interviews were also conducted with one psychiatrist and two psychotherapists who were known to have had female clients who had been abusive. Interviews were also conducted with two social workers and two lawyers who deal with migrant domestic workers who have been abused.²The names of all interviewees have been either left out or changed to maintain their anonymity. All interviews were in Beirut. For obvious reasons, it proved impossible to locate and interview specific employers who were known to be abusive or violent. This proved to be a methodological limitation.

The two psychotherapists and psychiatrist who were consulted proved to be the most instructive, particularly in illuminating unconscious processes that may be operating. This raised possible mental health issues that have hitherto not been addressed. In relation to this, while this project was specifically targeting female Lebanese employers, the research raised the issue of the mental health of the employees also, which was not within the scope of this project, but should be considered for possible future inquiry.

This report focuses more on hypotheses drawn from a select few psychoanalytical concepts in relation to female abusive behavior (see Doane and Hodges, 1992). The study was conducted with the view of simply offering some psychoanalytic insights that have not been previously addressed in order to suggest another dimension to understanding why abuse of domestic workers by their female employers occurs; and as a consequence, how to reform the system of employing migrant domestic workers in Lebanon in order to prevent abuse; how future awareness raising programs might be conducted; and how a better understanding of the psychological services may be offered to perpetrators of violent behavior and their victims.

² I regret not being able to interview the lawyers who had defended female employers charged with offenses against migrant domestic workers. This might be instructive in future studies.

Chapter I.

Introduction

One of the main purposes of this report is to address one part of the complex relationship that exists between the female employer and female migrant domestic worker in Lebanon. With increasing publicity regarding the 'slave-like' conditions of their employment as well as the structural legal arrangements, it is widely accepted that serious reform of the conditions under which migrant women work in Lebanon is required.

The issue of domestic work first came into feminist analysis in the 1970s (Anderson, 2000), and many studies have looked at paid domestic work in many different countries. The similarities of the evidence presented from so many countries suggests that the problems of this relationship are not so much a function of 'foreign' or 'migrant' labor in the domestic sphere, but perhaps more in the relationship of domestic work generally, whether performed by nationals or migrants in any country (see Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2004; Chang, 2000). Nonetheless, Lebanese families do have peculiarities such as a tight clan-based kinship structure and perhaps narcissistic characteristics, as evidenced by their conspicuous consumption, as well as the experiences of a long history of violent sectarian conflict and endemic political tension (such as the 1975-1990 civil war, the 2006 Israeli invasion and the current political impasse between the Hezbollah and Hariri factions). These ever-present tensions invariably result in uncertainty and perhaps neurotic concern to produce at least the social semblance of order, stability and success of the family and its offspring, which may in turn create intolerance towards anyone who is seen as disrupting these images (see Hage, 2002). It was not possible, however, to include these elements, or variables, in explaining the repression, exploitation and violence against migrant domestic workers. Rather, the focus is on a non-reductionist, but more universalistic understanding of particular psychological elements that may be involved in the abusive relationship between the female migrant domestic worker and her Lebanese female employer.

As noted in the Preface, it is clear that the main perpetrator of abuse of domestic workers is the 'madam' of the house, or the female employer. This relationship has not been as widely explored as other elements, such as the violence, sexual abuse and harassment by male members of the household. Thus, of particular importance for this report is the relationship with the abusive female employer in Lebanon.

How can we understand, not just that various forms of abuse are perpetrated (such as psychological, emotional, verbal and physical abuse), but why it is that some women abuse and others do not; or, alternatively, why some domestic workers are abused and others are not? As will be discussed, the objective in gaining insight into this question will assist in better informing advocates and government in developing more coherent policies to address the problem that is not only detrimental to the victims of abuse and the perpetrators, but also to the reputation of Lebanon itself, which has been tarnished internationally from regular reports by the United Nations and human rights organizations that accuse the nation and its government of turning a blind eye to the problem (see Human Rights Watch, 2010).

The Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center in Beirut is a key agency in dealing with the abuse (and trafficking) of migrant domestic workers in the country. Their primary focus is to provide protection, welfare and legal services to the victims of abuse. They do not, however, deal with the employers or inquire into the reasons for the abuse. In an interview with a social worker at the center it was revealed that when discussing cases, they do ask themselves as a committee why the abuse occurs, but have not specifically inquired into it.

Sometimes we feel that a lot of persons, men and women, now they are more aggressive. We don't know why they are aggressive. When we have a phone call from some Lebanese employer, for example, and she will be really tough and aggressive when she starts and when we close, she's crazy. But we never thought about why or that it's something really deeper with her problems, like she's divorcing, or something...

Sometimes we have a lady, for example, who has some psychiatric troubles... Sometimes we find answers for ourselves, but you forced me now to think about it. We never really refer to the relation between the female employer and the maid. (Social Worker, Caritas)

While there have been psychoanalytic studies of female violence, these have tended to focus upon violence related to sexual abuse, eating disorders, prenatal loss, postnatal depression and child abuse (see Perelberg & Raphael-Leff, 1997); others have included sexual and physical abuse of children (their own and others), infanticide, violence against themselves (self mutilation and anorexia nervosa,) as well as violence against others, principally against abusive husbands (see Motz, 2001). The latter studies, for example, have been drawn mainly from clinical case studies in forensic psychology of prosecuted female criminal offenders. None, however, have explored violent relationships

between female employers and domestic workers.

In addition, the issue of female employer violence and abuse has not been adequately addressed in specific studies on domestic workers, migrant or otherwise. Perhaps the first and most penetrating attempt to explain why such abuse occurs may be found in Brigit Anderson's (2000) study "Doing the Dirty Work".

Anderson compares the contemporary conditions of domestic workers to the reports of antebellum slavery in the United States, where:

[b]eatings, starvation and all manner of cruelties could be imposed by the mistress of the house ... The daily proximity and intimacy between the household slaves and their mistresses resulted in intense personal relations that might at anytime flare into violence. Indeed, there seems to have been a great tolerance of physical violence within the home, despite its construction as a haven of domesticity. (Anderson 2000, 131)

Violence of the slave mistress included knifing, whipping and beating to death. Far from a sense of 'sisterhood' or solidarity between mistress and slave (or maid and madam in the case of contemporary domestic workers), women were "divided into clean/dirty, moral/physical, virtuous/sexual, white/black. Mistress and slave, both women, are driven further apart" (Anderson, 2000: 132). Further, possible and actual sexual relations (including rape and sexual abuse) between the male masters of black slave women did not result in the protection of the victims, but resulted in feelings of jealousy on the part of the slave mistress who saw them as a threat. These emotions, coupled with feelings of guilt in having others care for and become closer to their children, have almost identical resonance with contemporary accounts of relationships between female employers and migrant domestic workers in Lebanon.

Chapter 2.

Common structural explanations

In researching issues concerning the abuse of migrant domestic workers over the years, a number of reasons for why this abuse occurs have been offered which may be summarized in the following ways. These are generally couched in structural terms and are an important context into which the more individualized pathological analysis needs to be subsumed.

First, the labor migration policy for domestic workers in Lebanon, based upon the sponsorship (*kafala*) system that also operates throughout the Gulf States, constitutes a structure under which domestic workers are effectively controlled by their employer/sponsor (*kafeel*), and which has been described as contributing to “slave-like” conditions. It has been argued that the legal structure of their presence is in itself a system of violence or at least a constant threat of violence, because they are denied their human rights, such as the right to freedom of movement, rights against humiliating, cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, the right to fair wages, decent work hours and conditions, recreation leave and the right to withdraw their labor. The *kafala* system binds the foreign worker to their local employer in a legal as well as financial dependency. It is impossible for them to arrange their own papers without assistance from their Lebanese sponsors and private employment agencies. Yet, the domestic worker is legally responsible for her regular status. If, for example, an employer does not renew the worker’s papers, or if the employee leaves the employer (“runs away”), the worker automatically becomes an “illegal alien” and is subject to arrest, imprisonment or detention and deportation (Jureidini, 2004). The domestic worker cannot leave the house or employ of the *kafeel* without his/her permission and thus without breaking the law. Thus, the Lebanese state is complicit in the conditions that deny domestic workers their rights under international conventions. The Lebanese state is further implicated in that the existence of contracts does not guarantee these rights, even when (as is common in Lebanon) the contract specifies that abusive behavior is unacceptable. Indeed, while considered mandatory by both the Lebanese government and some of the origin countries (such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines) contracts do not need to be adhered to because there are no formal remedies for contravening them under contract law – at least on the part of an employer. Contracts that are signed before leaving the country of origin are often replaced by contracts upon entering the destination country that are more favorable to the employer and private employment agency (see Jureidini, 2010).

Because of these structural conditions of constraint and the lowly status of Asian and African female migrant domestic workers, there is already a ritualized violence perpetrated against them that can be extended by personal individual abuse in the household.

Second, it is commonly argued that Lebanese women are themselves abused. So, as second-class citizens in a highly patriarchal culture, abuse is passed down the hierarchical social order based upon a combination of gender, status and ethnicity. Despite the general principle that women have complete authority over the domestic sphere, and although there are technical variations between religious sects, the married Lebanese woman remains essentially under the law of coverture where “she is not allowed to choose her domicile, or leave it when she chooses, and her husband effectively owns both her person and her services... a married woman does not have a separate legal existence from her husband” (Shehadeh, 2004: 85). With unequal rights in divorce and inheritance, under the Personal Status Codes, husbands are permitted “to subjugate their wives through the laws of consortium, cohabitation and conjugal rights” (ibid).

Thus, it is suggested, when the Lebanese woman is facing ‘problems’ from her family and by her husband in particular, she ‘takes it out’ on the maid who has little or no power to respond or defend herself. The maid is vulnerable as she resides at the bottom of the status hierarchy. This was graphically depicted in one of a celebrated series of caricatures by a Jordanian artist, commissioned by UNIFEM in Amman, where the cartoon depicts a battered housewife saying to her lazy-looking husband: “Listen... I will only tolerate your beating and insults in one case only – get me an Asian maid to take it all out on her... then beat me as much as you want” (see Appendix A).

Although this explanation makes sense, it is curious that in the survey of migrant domestic workers in 2005-6 by the author, there was no significant correlation between abuse of the domestic worker (yelling, calling names and hitting) and abuse of the female employer by her husband. When asked if the husband hits his wife, only eight per cent of those who were yelled at said “yes”. Similarly, ten per cent of those who were called names; and 12 per cent of those who were hit, said the husband called his wife names or hit his wife. Unfortunately, the study did not inquire into

other types of problems in the husband-wife relationship (see later discussion). If the husband and wife are discreet, the domestic worker may not know the extent of tension, conflict or dissatisfaction in the marriage that may not be visibly or physically violent; nor might she see a possible connection between that tension and consequent abuse of herself.

Third, it is often argued that migrant domestic workers are abused because they have no recourse to the law; that employers are beyond prosecution. In other words, female employers are more abusive because there is no one to stop them. Because Lebanese labor law does not cover domestic work, there are no sanctions against the breach of the contracts; and because there is a racist attitude towards migrant domestic workers, there are no actions taken against Lebanese nationals for what may be considered as criminal violations – neither from law enforcement agencies, nor informally from family members, friends or neighbors (see Jureidini, 2003). In this sense, there is a conspiracy of silence. Although there have been two landmark prosecutions in the past year, it is clear that Lebanese authorities are reluctant to pursue cases that are less than extremely severe, and where legal representation for the domestic worker is not strongly advocated (see Human Rights Watch, 2010). In one of these cases, the family of the accused approached the defense lawyer and attempted to bribe him into changing the charge. It was unacceptable, they insisted, to have a migrant worker win a case against a Lebanese employer (personal communication).

Fourth, there is considerable social pressure supporting abusive or punitive actions against the domestic worker which is encouraged by family, friends and neighbors, as well as private employment agents who advise employers on how to treat workers (i.e. harshly). This generalized pressure reinforces the notion that it is important to treat domestic workers harshly in order to train them to be subservient, obedient and therefore efficient, without room for resistance.

Fifth, it is suggested that there are not enough advocates within the country who work to protect the interests of migrant domestic workers. It is said that the embassies and consulates of the various nationalities (Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bangladesh and others) are seen as key actors in the perpetuation of abusive relations because they do not act in the interests of domestic workers. Rather, they often do not have the resources or the political influence to take preventive or legal action to stop incidences of abuse. Further, there is not enough cooperation between the foreign missions and the Lebanese government (e.g. Ministry of Labor and General Security) to ensure better conditions of work. The interest of origin countries, it is argued, is to ensure the perpetuation of migration flows to Lebanon (and to other countries) for their countries' economic benefit (primarily through remittances). Thus, confrontation with the government of the host country may be seen as threatening the business of exporting labor.

Sixth, the migrant worker herself is sometimes seen as to blame for the abuse meted against her. In some cases, it is argued, the particular culture of migrant domestic workers has an impact upon the relationship, suggesting, for example that Sri Lankans, Nepalese and Bangladeshi women tend not to respond to abusive treatment. They are afraid to defend themselves, particularly if they are not well educated, from a rural background and are used to being in a subservient social position back home. While they may be terrified in the beginning, they come to accept the treatment as normal. Filipinas, on the other hand, will stand up to the madam if abused. The veracity of such arguments is difficult to assess and requires more in depth study and analysis. It does not explain the abuse, but perhaps to some extent the persistence of abuse if a worker is unwilling or unable to defend herself. The danger here, of course, that it is tantamount to blaming the victim for the abuse against her.

Seventh, a very common response suggests that abuse occurs because the employer and the maid are in close proximity in the house and have to spend considerable amount of time together. Thus, it is 'natural' that tensions arise. While this suggestion also is commonsense, it is rather superficial and requires a deeper knowledge and understanding about what actually takes place during those frequent encounters. In other words, it is true that it is the female employer who spends the most time with the domestic worker, and this may partly explain why women more often perpetrate abuse than men. It does not by itself explain why the abuse or violence takes place. This report is an attempt to develop a more in depth understanding of this process.

Eighth, both Lebanese and non-Lebanese have commonly argued that: "Lebanese are racist." Generalizing, it is argued that foreign domestic workers, because they come from Asian and African countries, are not seen as equal to Lebanese. The Arabic term *el abed* (meaning both 'black' and 'slave'), still exists and the label is often used to classify domestic workers in Lebanon. This observation, previously noted, has widespread acceptance in Lebanon (see Jureidini and Moukarbel, 2004). On the one hand, there is a sense that when some Lebanese 'confess' to such racist attitudes, it is not out of a sense of shame, but almost pride, for it serves to confirm a sense of superiority. Related to this is the view that the domestic worker does not belong to the same moral circle or community. This may be because she is from a different religion, or is racially different or otherwise stereotyped as ignorant, sinful, dirty, uncivilized, uncontrollable, and so on. Constructions of the "other" allow employers to construct the idea that "she is not one of us" and therefore are not required to treat her as they would treat one of their own.

On the other hand, one NGO officer interviewed for this project in Lebanon explained that she herself had been

rather prejudiced initially, but when she actually traveled to Sri Lanka she discovered that they were “beautiful, respectful and clean (better than us)” and her attitude towards them changed. As will be mentioned below, there are no historical connections between Lebanon and the origin countries of migrant domestic workers and so there is an enormous lack of knowledge and understanding of their origins, language, culture and experiences. Migrant domestic workers are thus labeled as “the other”: more as productive domestic appliances rather than as women with the same needs, desires and rights as anyone else.

All of the above explanations are important in understanding the culture of abuse. They essentially explain the structural conditions for the abuse, but they do not explain why abuse is perpetrated. More importantly, they do not explain why some employers abuse and others do not. Given the clear opportunity, why is it that some female employers are verbally, emotionally and physically abusive, while others are not?

In this report, a more psychoanalytical dimension is focused upon to suggest possible underlying or unconscious elements, which need to be taken into consideration when addressing the issue of abuse against domestic worker, in addition to the factors mentioned above. In other words, we need to account for individual behavior within the context of political, legal and socio-structural explanations for abuse.

For example, in an interview with a Lebanese psychiatrist, it was pointed out that there is a substantial amount of pathology within Lebanese society that is not being recognized adequately. He noted that, “I’ve seen a lot of women being violent to their domestic workers, but initially because they have psychological issues... There is bipolar, there is psychotic.” It was also suggested by the psychiatrist that the incidence of psychological and mental disorder in Lebanon is quite high, for if one includes bipolar, psychosis, anxiety and depression, it would be around 10-15 percent of the population. “So you can have a lot of women who already have psychological issues and one of the manifestations can be against their domestic worker because she is defenseless, so it is easy to be violent against her.”

Perhaps fundamental to this is a Hobbesian assumption that, without properly enforced regulations and control, the base elements of human behavior will prevail.

Here in Lebanon, as in other Arab countries, the maid is treated as a slave. She is considered as their property. They do not consider that she has feelings; that she had a previous life before; that she may have problems as a migrant in a new country; that she needs enough rest; that she needs to have a proper holiday. They are treated like a working machine – and this is a kind of violence. (psychoanalyst, personal interview)

These practices are a form of psychosocial violence, that may also include the unwillingness of the employer to provide enough or good quality food (feeding only leftovers), not giving the domestic worker regular fresh fruits and vegetables, putting a lock on the refrigerator, locking them in the house when the family is absent, forbidding them to speak with others, physical punishment and so on. How is this explained from a psychological perspective?

There is a tyrannical element in the psyche. In every human being there is a tyrant and so many things come from the child. For example, if you may be sadistic or masochistic if you have been molested or abused in some way. All this anger stays somewhere and it must be directed somewhere. So the easiest way is that you are able to contract to get someone here and you are the only one who knows what you are doing. They have no recourse, to the law, or legal representation – no-one to advocate for them over these issues. The maid is an easy target. (psychoanalyst, personal interview)

Here it is important to note the acknowledgement of the interplay between individual abuse and the social status of the maid, as well as the legal privilege of the employer who, until now has been immune from prosecution.

It is suggested that if we understand the psycho-social dimensions better, we will be better able to address corrective actions, particularly awareness-raising campaigns, which can more specifically target those who are abusers, rather than campaigns that assume that all employers are abusive. It is important to note, however, that the focus on psycho-social factors in this study are not dismissive of the structural social and personal vulnerabilities of both the domestic workers and the female employers themselves as listed above. They are all important in developing a more comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon that is profoundly unique in the world of work and occupational relations.

Chapter 3.

Psycho-social factors in the explanation of abuse

Psychoanalysis and Childhood

When Maria³ was undergoing therapy, she expressed surprise to the therapist that maids had run away from her house. She could not understand it. She argued that she was generous and respectful, but was frequently let down by them. When the therapist pointed out to her that she was far too demanding in the work she required of them, it came as a shock to her. However, according to the therapist, the realization enabled her to reflect on her own upbringing and why she was like that, “she woke up to her own suffering”. In addition to having a demanding and fussy mother, she was sent to a convent at the age of four years for her education. The separation was traumatic and she developed not only a perfectionist personality, but also harbored residual anger from the trauma of having been separated from her mother at such an early age.

In psychoanalysis⁴ the role of the mother is critical in the development of the child. Two of the best-known analysts in this field are Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott. The idea of a “good mother” and “bad mother”, developed by Klein, were not moral categories attributed to mothers, but the perception of the baby in relation to having his/her needs met and how he/she could develop without a debilitating trauma in the realization that, while we are not one with our mothers, we are also highly dependent. The withholding of food (breast), closeness and affection becomes a profound realization of separation and desolation.

It is our first experience of something like death; a recognition of the non-existence of something, of an overwhelming loss, both in ourselves and in others it seems. And this experience brings with it an awareness of love (in the form of desire), and a recognition of dependence (in the form of need, at the same moment as, and inextricably bound up with, feelings and uncontrollable sensations of pain and threatened destruction within and without...and this is because he loves and desires, and such love may bring pain and devastation.” (Klein, 1967: 8-9)

The “good mother” for Klein is a mother who is understanding and attentive. When the child is angry she gives him a hug and feeds him when he needs it. A “bad mother” makes the baby wait for his/her needs, does not understand why the baby is crying or his/her pain, and is at a loss as to what to do. As Klein explained, in the first year of life there is a schizoid-paranoid condition of the child in the sense that she is interacting sometimes with the good mother and sometimes with a bad mother (from the perspective of the child). So by the end of the first year of life the child perceives the mother in conflicting ways and goes into a depressive phase. The child comes out of this depression with a sense of unity of the mother, recognizing she is a separate entity. So, if the “bad mother” element was predominant, it is very difficult for the child to have confidence and there will be resentment or even hatred towards her. Thus, the first year of life is very critical in establishing confidence and a sense of empathy or compassion for others as distinct from the self.

So if a mother was oppressive, aggressive, indifferent or not understanding of the child’s needs and emotions; or if there was too much loving care given to the extent that the child is not given enough of his/her own space – the child will feel omnipotent and angry and this will flow on to adulthood. This anger towards the mother also will be transferred to other relationships.

Winnicott (see Young, 1994) made famous the concept of the “good-enough mother” whose role is to gradually allow her baby to develop a sense of control in the child’s transition from a sense of oneness with the mother to an autonomous individual: “The good-enough mother...starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant’s needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with her failure” (Winnicott, 1953).

3 All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of respondents and persons referred to during interviews.

4 The author is not a psychoanalyst and cannot hope to do justice to a psychoanalytic approach to this issue. The purpose of this exploration is merely to raise this perspective as a base from which further study may be developed with the view to eliminating or at least reducing the widespread abuse of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Key to this process is shifting the locus of comfort from the mother herself toward a symbolic replacement, what Winnicott calls a “transitional object”—toys, stuffed animals, or pieces of fabric that become symbolic stand-ins for the mother. According to object relations theory, the process of growth is not a complete weaning from transitional objects, but a process of finding “age appropriate” transitional objects. For adults this can mean a love of art, music or science—anything on which one can project a sense of meaning. (Brennan-Smith, 2009: 19)

Transitional objects have been identified as toys, blankets and so forth; but they may also be language, music, and the like (Young, 1994). As the theory suggests, transitional objects also need to be “age appropriate” and while reference is made to adult cultural objects and practices, it has also been suggested that adolescents, in breaking away from their parents, seek gratification in partners (girlfriends and boyfriends) as transitional objects that can be “used and discarded as maturationally needed” (White, 2001: 93).

Using Winnicott’s analysis, Young goes so far as to locate transitional objects in all stages of life:

[H]aving abandoned the blanket, doll or teddy, one can still attach similar significance to other objects with a less addictive intensity... The advertising industry is predicated on getting in touch with this area of need and comfort and can succeed brilliantly with jeans, body oils, perfumes, bath oils and creams, shampoos and conditioners... [and]... only makes sense if seen in the light of providing transitional satisfactions. (Young, 1994, Chapter 8: 6)

Young goes on to point out that some critics of Winnicott suggest that he is merely describing fetishism “where the object is perversely substituted for the appropriate one” and argues that this is not what Winnicott was referring to (ibid). It is not entirely clear, whether the migrant domestic worker in the context of Lebanese culture is more a fetish than a transitional object. This is for further discussion. However, it is well known and acknowledged that having a maid in Lebanon is at least partly a status symbol. If you do not have one, you are considered to be poor, either economically or culturally. Thus in some instances the housemaid is like one more acquisition among many. And maids in Lebanon, as elsewhere, are often a major topic of conversation between women – of comparison or of complaint, of pride or of derision. Just as the status differentiations of other commodities (such as a car, furniture, house, clothing, etc) so there is also a status hierarchy of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, where, for example, Filipinas are the most revered and most expensive (see Jureidini, 2003). This is not to say that a Lebanese woman who does all the housework herself is looked down upon, but she would have to be a full-time housewife in order to maintain the house in the pristine condition required.

It may be suggested that we can explore the possibility that the migrant domestic worker serves the role of a transitional object in the Lebanese family.⁵ The maid acts as a substitute for many activities that the housewife/mother/wife is expected to perform, without whom the female employer would be obliged to do herself. Since the domestic worker undertakes many of the household duties of a mother, there may be transference of the employer’s relationship with her mother:

The maid is a mother because she does these things. She does not have the power of the mother but she has the duties of the mother. So, in relation to the “mother” the employer can offer gratitude or resentment (psychoanalyst).

The maid is a transitional object that allows the housewife to move from her role as the actual cleaner to one of independence – which allows her to spend more (quality) time with her children, her husband, friends, to have a career, paid employment, etc. If and when the domestic worker is absent, she must revert to a housecleaner herself. From the perspective of the domestic worker, although she performs motherly and wifely duties, she is dispensable and can be replaced (just as a doll or toy that can be used as an object of affection or derision).

In another case of a woman in therapy, the patient was faced with a not uncommon dilemma where her baby fell and hurt herself. Crying, she ran past her mother to the comforting arms of the domestic worker. Mortified, the madam soon sent her back to the Philippines and procured another domestic worker. On the one hand, the privilege of having someone take care of the children’s needs is a significant relief of parental obligations. On the other hand, however, if the care-taker becomes the children’s object of gratitude and love, the birth mother may have feelings of guilt and resentment towards the maid (or nanny) and put a stop to it to regain her sense of motherhood. The dispensability of maids and the control employers exert over and their ability to replace maids in this context is an important condition.

An employer who has a poor or antagonistic relationship with her maid, most likely had a similar relationship with

5 In a previous paper, I canvassed the possibility that a son within the family who has sexual relations with the maid may be acting out his oedipal phase as the maid is substituted for the mother (see Jureidini, 2006).

her mother. Importantly, however, unless she has achieved some enlightenment concerning her relationship with her mother, principally through a therapeutic process, it is unlikely she will be aware of this connection. To suggest to such a person that she is projecting her mother onto the maid is something that is difficult for the individual to understand immediately, except perhaps in a therapeutic environment. Similarly, as one psychoanalyst suggested:

If the maid is beautiful and young, there will be an Oedipal problem. She will be an object of desire. She will be jealous and thus harsh with her. Therefore, she will want a maid who is ugly, so not to be attractive to her husband. Thus the husband is not neutral in this situation. We know that whenever we meet someone, there is a transfer.

“Transference” is the unconscious act of transferring our emotions onto another person, typically someone close, but also anyone generally. When a circumstance arises, which may be something that is said or anything at all that sparks an unconscious reminder of a past feeling or emotional state from childhood, that past emotion will be transferred to the other person with whom we are interacting.

The following is part of an interview where the respondent is talking about her sister⁶:

RJ: She has children?

M: Four. But now they are all old. They're all abroad. She has a very, very difficult husband, four kinds of food for every lunch and dinner. And my sister is extremely tense in her life, and she tends to get all her anger out all on her maid.

RJ: Why is she tense?

M: She has couples problems; problems in the marriage. She should have been divorced by now; they should have been divorced twenty years ago but they're still running. So the house basically looks like, you know the film *The War of the Roses*, when this couple that wanted to divorce, they don't divorce and they end up killing each other? The house looks like this. The house is already hell, all by itself. And in this house my sister is suffering all the time, and she takes out all her suffering and throws it on the maid.

RJ: Before we talk about the details, let's just go back to your sister's childhood, what was different about it compared to yours?

M: I think that her childhood was even more horrible, because she's the elder one.

RJ: She's the eldest of the 5 girls?

M: Yes. So she was really taking care of the house and us, because my mother was doing the cooking and so on. The problem comes from the fact that we're a very big family, and we always had our cousins coming - a big family with a small income and very high standards by my mother, and trying to fulfill these standards. She had a very, very tough childhood, where she was working a lot at home, doing all the cleaning and everything. And most probably my mother was throwing everything on her that made her mad.

RJ: So she had that burden probably from an early age?

M: Very early. Because even the neighbors once told me that she was seven years old and she was ironing. She had a very difficult childhood, and a very difficult marriage, four difficult children and she didn't get a maid to help her until she had four. Nobody before.

RJ: Were you aware if your mother disciplined her more harshly than the others?

M: I am very young, she is 19 years older than I am. I was three years old when she got married. But that's what she always says, that my mother was very tough with her when she was young.

RJ: Had she had maids run away?

M: Certainly, and this has made her even more bitter with them. She has had four maids run away. And two have actually complained, and I think this is very possible, that my brother-in-law actually makes advances. And that could be true, because my sister's maids are always very ugly, the ugliest she can find.

⁶ Methodologically, it is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to directly address the issue of abusive behavior with an employer. If she is abusive, she will be unlikely agree to an interview in the first instance. However, respondents who are not abusive are often comfortable with speaking about others who they know are abusive or oppressive with domestic workers – even about members of their own families.

When I asked her she said, 'he will not look at them'.

RJ: And he did before?

M: She tried to get Filipinos, and they were nice looking and so on. She actually said that she now has to get them dumb and ugly. She says she chooses them on the pictures like this so he doesn't even approach them.

RJ: Does that work?

M: I have no idea. But they are so dumb, actually, that he ends up hating them, yes. They're dumb, they're slow, they're nothing you want and then she gets (*sic*) on her nerves with them. It's a very vicious circle. She had a beautiful African one who was very strong and so on, but I really think that he does, because at some point she got very depressed. She was so depressed that my sister again sent her home. And when I asked her 'why did you send her?' she said 'forget the details, I just sent her'. And she has two other boys who are young men now. I think that one of them is always imitating his father, so if he saw his father doing it he will probably think the same thing, at least the elder one. So she has a very difficult situation at home, with all the anger that she has in herself and that she takes it (*sic*) back on them.

If you have a husband who is going to try and make advances on every maid that you bring, it's tough. It's a tough situation to live with. And you have to hire someone dumb so he doesn't look at her, knowing you have to deal with her being dumb everyday. It's not fun.

In this narrative, the woman's mother was very demanding of her as the first child who had to grow up early and take responsibility for major chores of the household as well as her younger siblings. We find the origins of the obsessive housewife, who finally cannot cope with her four children and employs migrant domestic workers. But her problems and unhappiness are meted out on the maids. They are transitional objects, who are a substitute for her, to give meaning to the housewifely duties that she had been doing, but which she no longer fulfils, and also, because she is profoundly unhappy with the poor relations with her husband, she can both take refuge from the work that the maid does and also use her as the object of her obsessions and her anger. Not only do the maids run away, but she also has to cope with their sexual attractiveness to her husband and perhaps one of her sons. All of which are a threat to her. And in managing all this she has to be discriminating to find someone who does not take her place, nor is the object of desire for other members of the household.

The above raises an important psychological insight. In Lebanon (as well as in Egypt) labor law does not cover domestic workers. They are explicitly excluded from the labor law because in both these countries the relationship is seen by the State as a personal relationship, rather than a formal employer-employee relationship, regardless of whether there is a formal contract between them. Thus, it is interesting to note that, psychologically, the live-in domestic worker is a part of the employing family, whether she is accepted and treated as such, or not. As Rollins (1985) points out, as a long standing tradition, domestic workers are not seen or treated as in a normal employment relationship.

What makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitative than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it unique: the personal relationship between employer and employee...[allowing]...for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in other occupations...[It] enhances the employer's self-satisfaction by having the presence of an inferior... validating the employer's lifestyle, ideology and social world. (Rollins, 1985: 156)

In economics, the household is not seen as a sphere of productive activity. Thus, the housewife has often been characterized as someone who does not "work" (meaning does not have paid employment outside the home). In Lebanon, as in other Arab countries, even paid domestic work is not considered as a form of production and excluded from labour law and is viewed both economically and legally as a personal and emotional relationship, rather than an arm's-length professional employment relationship. Further, the separation of the household from the sphere of "work" is absent for the live-in domestic worker.

The live-in maid is not an employee [in the normal sense]. She does not come in the morning and leave at night. She has a low salary and she does not have social security. She is part of the house and so she can create so many feelings and emotions of the house – feelings such as hate, vanity, attachment, envy, jealousy, and so on. But most of the time, when the relationship between the woman and her employee is bad, it means that the relationship between the woman and her mother was bad – and she ignores it. So she will put on the maid all the negative feelings she cannot express to her mother, or even those she cannot imagine she even has. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

In this sense, there is a need to consider that as a result of the behavior of the contemporary employer, which is transferring her deep experiences from childhood in relation to her mother, that these parent-child circumstances

have and are being transmitted, or passed down, through generations of time. The question therefore arises whether there is something in the culture itself that reproduces these negative feelings and relationships. This question was answered with a question:

How many [Lebanese] women or families do you know who will be very happy when a girl is born? Is it the same reaction as when a boy is born? So, when a girl is born, there is sadness. When a boy is born, there is celebration, joy. This is a Mediterranean view. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

This of course does not mean that the mother will not love her daughter afterwards. The problem will be that “you will be the mother that you had (or the father that you had)”. If there is something that a child hated in their parents, they will still reproduce it in their own parenting.

For many Lebanese, the children that they have produced are treated like their property and so is the maid. There are so many children who are beaten and who have been molested, so why would the maid be treated differently and protected? She is a part of the pattern. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

While there may be considerable abuse of children as suggested above, the contrary is also present. For example, children in Lebanon are also known to be highly revered and loved – perhaps overly so, particularly with sons. When the child is the object of adulation, obsessive over-protection may result in excessive demands upon and surveillance of domestic workers in whose care children are often placed.

For some parents, having children is considered to be a large sacrifice in their lives. They must deprive themselves in order to send their children to a private school so that they can be successful and able to care for them when they have grown old. To ensure this, parents are very strict, expecting their children to be at the top of their class.

They are very harsh on them [their children] – punishment, beating, shouting, sequestering [keeping them in their room until their work is finished and they have explained all the work that they have done]. It is not that everybody is like that, but we receive so many that need psychological counseling because of it. Physical abuse is frequent. In some religions it is considered acceptable and that it is the father’s right. This is something that we cannot do anything about, other than to point out that it will result in your child not being strong, or confident or successful. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

Thus, the individual must reflect upon his/her own parenting and question what is happening, acknowledging that they did not like what had happened to them as children, and make an effort to change the behavior. Typically this may be achieved through education that facilitates such self-reflection or through therapy.

Self-loathing, paranoia and gender identity

Following from the above is the image of the Lebanese woman of herself. As has been pointed out by many feminists, the lack of power, discrimination and victimization has a tendency to result in self-loathing and self-blaming. As a psychoanalyst noted regarding the circumstances of Lebanese:

Often the maid is hated as much as the woman hates herself. Many women hate themselves as women. They do not want to be women. They prefer to be men. They prefer to be powerful. So, however much they hate themselves, to the same extent they hate the maid who is in front of them. Sometimes it may be their daughter that they hate, in the same way. Some simply do not like the family role that they have to play, so they hate the family around them. This is a condition of the patriarchal family structure throughout the Middle East... She hates her [the maid] because she is doing the dirty work, because it is an obligation and it is a part of hating her own gender. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

Further, the projection of this self-hatred may take the form of paranoia to which the domestic worker is subjected. An employer may be constantly suspicious that the maid is playing with her by doing things specifically to bother and frustrate her and perhaps also to undermine her authority and sense of control over the house. Whenever anything goes wrong, when something is missing, or something is in the wrong place, the maid is blamed for doing it deliberately to antagonize her.

One explanation for hostile emotions is evident... that the people feeling them are disconnected and dissatisfied with their lot or their conditions. Whether it is some necessary of life or some pleasure they cannot obtain, they have a sense of loss... An unfulfilled desire within us can, if intense enough, create a similar sense of loss and pain [as if having been attacked] and so rouse aggression in exactly the same way as an attack. (Melanie Klein, 1967: 6)

It has been argued that feminist influences from the 1970s to the 1990s have contributed to the devaluation

of the role of the housewife in Lebanon. Calls for greater workforce participation, justified on the grounds of “modernity, financial need and economic empowerment towards emancipation”, did not lead to particularly high rates of employment, “but did manage to denigrate the role of the housewife and the domestic element...[and] relegated housework to a non-essential part of motherhood’s role, especially for social classes able to afford a maid” (Zaatari, 2006: 42-43). Indeed, although between 1960 and 1975, the rate of workforce participation of Lebanese women increased by 50 percent, by 2004, still only around 23 percent of the workforce was female (15-64 years of age) (Central Administration of Statistics, 2004). In a study by this author in Lebanon in 2005–06, only 29 percent of the female employers of migrant domestic workers were in the workforce (N=514 households) (Jureidini, 2009).

Thus, while difficult to consider during the years of the civil war (1975-1990), from the 1990s onward, the identity of the Lebanese woman in the house in a sense has been threatened. This is not to say that the role and authority of women over the domestic sphere has been eroded within the family and the domestic division of labour. Rather, it is suggested that the social standing of the “housewife” has undergone some devaluation.

Traditionally, even educated and professionally trained women were not expected to undertake paid work outside the home in lifetime careers, particularly with the onset of marriage and children. Women who stay at home, therefore, have little to do and are “uncomfortable and insecure about their position” (psychoanalyst, personal interview), particularly if their husbands travel a lot or work abroad (see Khalaf, 2009).

It has been suggested that Lebanese women who stay at home are not completely sure of the validity of their status as housewives. This may also be exacerbated when their husbands are absent. However, as described by one psychoanalyst:

Even if the husband is here, the status of a housewife is not the same anymore. Even if she has a husband at home, and the other one doesn’t have a husband at home. The maid is working; she’s keeping herself busy. The housewife is not keeping herself busy. She has another woman, another female at home who has status, a real one who has a job. So, in the new Lebanese society the housemaid has a status when the housewife is losing it and I think this is the situation that’s creating a lot of frustration. Simply put, the maid knows what she’s doing; she knows what she wants from life; she knows what she is and what she wants from it. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

In one case in which a Lebanese housewife sought the assistance of a psychoanalyst precisely because she was becoming violent with her maid, it became clear during therapy that she had an (unconscious) issue with the fact that the domestic worker had a clearly defined job, whereas the housewife did not. In a historical moment where the role of housewife has become unclear as well as devalued, the patient’s violent urges towards the domestic worker were relieved (stopped) when she obtained a job herself. As one psychotherapist explained, “It is difficult to explain to a rich woman that she is jealous because her maid has a job and she doesn’t. But that is in fact the case”. Indeed, the issue of extended daily interaction within the home has some meaning here. As another psychoanalyst put it:

The worst employer is the one who is not employed outside the home. When she is working, she has a life. So she will not be in the house constantly watching what is being done. It is good for her that while she is at work, she is replaced and she can earn money, she can have her friends and go out. In addition, she knows more deeply what it is to work and to be paid and thus can more easily empathize with the maid. She is not like the woman who receives everything without having to work for it.

Historically speaking, however, it is further argued that even when married women do have outside employment, they are still uncomfortable. The working mother and wife is something that is historically new. And precisely because they have a live-in domestic worker who takes care of the housework and the children, their traditional identity role is under challenge. And this creates a sense of crisis, whether conscious or unconscious.

Even the women who have a job today are not completely comfortable. It’s new. It’s a new thing that the woman is working. When they come home at night, who is the one caring for the children? The housemaid. Who is the one who knows what we have in the fridge? So, who is the housewife? As the status of working women is new, so the status of [the] housewife is changing. In my opinion it is that change of status of women in general, whether they work or they don’t work. Work, they are not used to that yet. And they are losing their sense of identity as mothers and as housewives because they work. In Europe they are used to that. There they are comfortable with the idea that they can be a good mom, a good housewife, and a worker. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

The emotional dissonance of these blurred and increasingly uncomfortable relations can develop into hostility. With the loss of identity and of the satisfaction in fulfilling the role of a housewife and mother, which is unwittingly transferred to the domestic worker, resentment and abusive behavior may result. As Anderson (2000) has observed, many domestic workers have the sense that their employers are jealous of them although the reason for this is not made explicit. In the survey of migrant domestic workers by the author in 2005-6, respondents were asked the

reasons why they suffered abuse by their female employers. A number (though not many) did say because they were “jealous” (see tables 1-3). As suggested in the psychological analysis above, there is tension when the employer does not want to do the housework, but at the same time does not want anyone else to do it. “One can see that, for those female employers for whom ‘home making’ is very bound up with their gender identity, this would result in precisely the kind of jealousy described by the workers” (Anderson, 2000: 143). It is clear that such jealousy is an unconscious emotion and is often “covered” by other forms of behavior that may be abusive.

In the case of slave-owning women, “[t]here was tension also between their managerial role and their ignorance of how to actually do the housework, and a failure to acknowledge the expertise of slaves or even acknowledge their labour as work” (Anderson, 2000: 132). This has resonance with domestic workers in Lebanon where the madam of the house may be thanked by guests for a meal or congratulated on the tidiness or cleanliness of her house, to which she graciously accepts, all parties knowing full well, that the domestic worker was in fact responsible for the work itself, or at least most of it.

The madam is the manager, the overseer, the architect, the designer and the director of the home. Just as a man may contract to pay to have a house built, but do nothing else, the building of the house will be attributed to him. The language used will be that he built the house. It is the employer who usurps propriety or ownership of the products and services of the employees’ labor. The woman in charge wants to provide a certain image of the home, of herself, her children, her husband, and the domestic worker must assist in making this image come true.

To give you an example, if a person, an employer, that is a bit obsessive, without being pathologically obsessive; the amount of work that she’s going to give to the employee may be three or four times more than another woman. This is because she wants to have the house clean, the dust has to be clean at each minute and each hour and things like that. It is an example, but it becomes very much oppressing for the worker ... These come from personalities, traits of personalities, of characters that are not necessarily very dramatic. (Psychiatrist)

Obsessive-compulsive: cleanliness and order

It is argued that many Lebanese women are obsessive-compulsive about the cleanliness and tidiness of their houses. The vast majority of these women do not present pathologically, in the sense that they require treatment for a clinical disorder. They live their everyday lives in this condition and the behavior is strongly reinforced by family, neighbors and friends as a fundamental part of the culture – “the social weight of the clean house”. In the following quotation from one of our respondents, the extent of pressure and influence of family, friends and neighbors are made quite clear:

And you always have this social view of your house. They get in and it has to be shining clean all the time. In the West it’s much easier, because you can get into someone’s house and it’s not very clean, it’s not very well packed, things are not very well stored and you don’t mind, and people don’t actually start criticizing you. In Lebanon, they do. Your house has to be impeccable all the time because of the neighbors - the social weight of the clean house.

So I have some brief childhood souvenirs, like me being like Cinderella. Cleaning, cleaning, cleaning all the time, and washing the dishes, and cleaning the fish, and at some point when my mother gets ill I have to do the clothes washing, and we’re not talking about putting them in a washing machine – it was by hand on (sic) the big thing.

You don’t know my mother. She never said that she didn’t want to do the housework. You have to guess that. You realize this later on, much later on. She doesn’t do it because she doesn’t have time, because she has daughters who are responsible for doing it. She always talked about my aunt who had daughters, who went to university and have very good degrees, but a very clean house all the time. She was very disciplined; her daughters are very disciplined, and they all work in the house as a teamwork and they finish the whole thing in an hour and a half. While ours, however, would take us five hours because me and my mother gossip, and my sisters gossip, while cleaning the house. It’s a question of dedication and teaching you how to do things properly. In this part it was a big failure in my education, and by the time I realized this it was too late to start working on it myself. That is, getting discipline to do the housework. Then I took the easy solution, which was to hire the housekeeper. (Interview Lebanese employer)

Among other traits, the obsessive compulsive behavior is characterized by a “preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and mental and interpersonal control...with details, rules, lists, order and organization...is over-conscientious, scrupulous and inflexible about matters of morality, ethics or values...[and]...is reluctant to delegate

tasks or to work with others unless they submit to exactly his or her way of doing things” (Dombeck, 2005).

With such obsessions over the condition of the house, the maid is typically woken up early in the morning when cleaning begins, a routine repeated every day. The rigid and disciplined set of procedures for the cleaning and preparing of the day’s meals are implemented in a very demanding way. This is whether there is a domestic worker employed or not. It is a compulsion. As it is very demanding on the maid, the very nature of the compulsion is a kind of violence in itself, particularly because the maid is unlikely to get any rest. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear that an employer does not like to see the domestic worker resting (see Tables 1 and 2). And in a sense, the madam cannot do anything about it, because if it is not done, she will feel compelled to do it herself. This, according to the psychotherapist, is related to the psychological structure of the obsessive Lebanese woman. In the following rather long interview extract, the respondent begins to reflect upon the origins of obsessive standards of cleanliness and order in the Lebanese household and the social demands that reinforce these standards:

Z: Maybe it’s true; maybe that’s where the roots go back. My mother had this obsession that we should be making a career; we women should become financially independent. And to become financially independent, you have to study and to work because you should not rely on your husband. Because she was relying on my father and she didn’t like it, so she was making sure that we would not get there. So we were forced to study.

My brother, the elder one, was killed at the age of 37 in Tripoli during fights just on the streets. He was passing by. And the other was 13 years old when he was killed. He died from being shot in a hunting accident. So between my mother’s mourning for my [2 older] brothers, and my mother who hates domestic work even more than you can imagine, so she doesn’t want to do it because she hates it, and we are forced to do it. And when she remembers that the neighbor’s house is cleaner, that’s when you have to work so hard to make it comparable.

[Then], suddenly she forgets that we are supposed to study. And that’s when you have [to] start finding the right combination between working at home, before going back to school or after coming back from school, finding the right time to do that, finishing your work at home, and then studying. You have to do that so quickly so that you still have time to study, because she doesn’t like to do it and she doesn’t want to do it ...

My father could not always afford to have someone come at home. Besides, he did not always understand the meaning. Why should he get someone to work at home when he has four daughters - and a wife? He did, the poor guy! At some points he did get us someone for the big clean. And I used to have a very lazy sister. She hated domestic work and she would make it very clear, she’s not going to do it, she’s not going to clean. Another one was very disciplined, so we would actually share the housecleaning, both of us. The problems came when they both left, and we had a very big house - 250 sq. meters. I had to handle the whole thing all by myself - and to do my studies. So, I know how to clean the house. I know it and I can do it by heart, because I did it for so many years. It was always something that was given to me, as my burden. I didn’t like it.

And she [mother] always, always, always told us something: work, get your own salary, give half of it to housekeeping, and enjoy life. This is how much she hated it.

It’s a social thing, it’s extremely important. Last year I went with my sister and her friend to a woman’s house. When they walked out of the house they were saying that when she cleaned between the tiles on the marble floor, she cleaned it with a toothbrush! This was their very positive comment about the woman that she is so clean that she cleans between the tiles of her house with a toothbrush. This is how important it is, and this is the social impact. It’s some sort of your status as a good mother, or a good mother at home, to have a very clean house and very clean children. It’s proper. You can come at anytime, it’s still impeccable.

I know that in my building for instance, nobody else has a housekeeper, but I can tell you that their houses are impeccable. In Lebanon houses have to be impeccable.

We had one of the neighbors whose house was very dirty, and you should hear the gossip around her. ‘She’s too dirty.’ So they don’t send their kids there, you never know if the food is clean. It’s a sign of lacking in your housework. For instance, I have three kids. They walk around the house all day long, and even though we clean the house everyday, it’s so windy and it’s very dusty. So if they have very dusty feet and if somebody gets into to the house and they see them, they say ‘Please, look at the girls feet, they’re black!’ And I keep complaining, ‘what? The poor woman cleans it all day long. What do you want me to do?’

Even if they are at my place and someone comes, they will criticize you, directly. Or you can see it in their

eyes. My husband never sees it because he doesn't know this 'conversation without talking', where they think about it for so long that you actually hear it. When I tell him 'you know what she did?' my husband always says 'no', and he always says that it's just me thinking in conspiracy. When I talk to my sister, she understands, he doesn't. So it's something very Lebanese, Lebanese social standards. (Interview Lebanese employer)

Obsessive-compulsive behavior arises from the way the adult has been treated during childhood by her mother or father. In the case of Maria, a patient in therapy:

She was raised by a mother who was very fussy, demanding and always punishing her. Her mothering was not based upon love and tolerance in an ordinary way. The mother's focus was on discipline and what she (and her daughter) had to do. It was always about duty, rather than pleasure. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

The kind of mothering is clearly critical in passing on of these cultural and psychological elements that create these obsessively obligatory detailed household activities. Women who were raised with strict parents, particularly when parents (perhaps mothers in particular) were unable to accept their daughters having pleasure (insisting they stay clean, changing their clothes if they get dirty: "don't jump on the table, it is not clean", "don't spoil yourself") create a psychological structure that is difficult to live with. As adult women, they are more likely to be demanding, severe and strict not only on themselves, but also on others around them. In another interview, the respondent spoke of the obsessive cleanliness of her 38 year-old sister who carries a bottle of alcohol with her wherever she goes. Even in five star hotels she makes sure to sanitize the toilet and washbasin before she will use them. The respondent exclaimed, "Cleaning is good, but not like this!"

Importantly, there are also migrant domestic workers who can also be just as fastidious in their housework (i.e. they are themselves obsessive-compulsive). It is likely that they are well received in the employing family, which may partly account for the longevity of their stay in Lebanon, as there are many cases of migrant women staying for as long as 15-25 years of service.

The tension between employer and employee regarding the intensity of work required may be seen as bound up in the obsessive cleanliness and orderliness required of the Lebanese madam. When things go wrong – a plate or an expensive vase is broken, something spilled or there is evidence of dust, etc. – the intolerance and lack of understanding and flexibility of an obsessive compulsive individual can flare into rage, abuse and perhaps physical violence. In a recent case related during an interview, a young Filipina domestic worker (20 years of age) knocked over an ashtray in the salon. The madam immediately rushed to her and began beating her with her hand and fist and finally bit her hard on her arm. There are numerous such cases, some far more brutal and extreme than this. How can we explain such extreme reactions?

Klein argued that if we observe the reactions of a small baby whose needs are not met and who subsequently comes to realize her aloneness in the world, there is a powerful aggressive response:

...a baby does not recognize anyone's existence but his own...and he expects all his wants to be fulfilled... But what happens when if these expectations and wants are not fulfilled? In a certain degree the baby becomes aware of his dependence; he discovers that he cannot supply all his own wants – and he cries and screams. He becomes aggressive. He automatically explodes, as it were, with hate and aggressive craving. If he feels emptiness and loneliness, an automotive reaction sets in, which may soon become uncontrollable and overwhelming, an aggressive rage which brings pain and explosive, burning, suffocating, choking bodily sensations; and these in turn cause further feelings of lack, pain and apprehension...And when he is tortured with desire or anger, with uncontrollable, suffocating screaming, and painful, burning evacuations, the whole of his world is one of suffering; it is scalded, torn and racked too. (Klein, 1967: 8)

This extraordinary and insightful description suggests that the regression of an obsessive compulsive adult is like an infant who is not getting her way and can result in what all human beings are inherently capable of, namely to revert into a demanding tyrannical child's tantrum as in the biting case described above. The domestic worker, who becomes the object of the rage, is in a servile and thus vulnerable position to absorb this regressive turmoil.

It maybe argued, therefore, that instead of ignoring the reasons why, or simply labeling the madam as being racist, inherently violent, or criminal (all of which may be true), it is also important to seek the origins of such intolerance. Although we cannot generalize from a few cases, we can gain some insight from them. These are, after all, individual acts of abuse, but they occur within the context of a political, legal and social structure that almost condones unfettered emotional and physical outbursts, as long as it remains within the private confines of the home, but which, ironically is the "public" workplace of the maid.

Pathological States

While it may be argued that the attitudes, behavior, and the psychological state of the female employer mostly do not reach the point of medical or psychiatric diagnosis and classification warranting clinical treatment. As noted in the Introduction, the therapeutic professions in Lebanon consider that there is a high incidence within the population of psychological disorders. The manifestations of psychological disorders are also more likely to be within the household or family than outside, since in the public sphere, self control is far more required than in the home. Anger, for example, is more typically misdirected towards the family and more specifically against those who are living with the person, including the domestic worker.

I have seen a bipolar woman a few years back who was very violent. Sometimes she would, (sic) the iron, use the hot iron and burned the face of the domestic worker. Or she would use cigarettes – put the burning cigarette very close to the domestic worker. She was very violent, but she was bipolar, unstable. She was completely unstable. And as you would expect, she had many domestic workers, but they would leave. And one of the workers she had jumped. She committed suicide by jumping from the sixth floor. (Psychiatrist, personal interview)

When asked if this woman was violent with others as well as the domestic workers, the psychiatrist explained that the patient was “also violent with her husband, but I think she will have been less violent with the neighbor, or with a friend. The violence with her husband? Well, he could at least defend himself.”

Although it was somewhat schematic, one psychoanalyst went as far as to locate certain types of violent or abusive behavior with certain types of pathological states. For example, “If in their development they are more in their oral stage fixated, it means they will be aggressive orally only.” In other words, female employers will more likely to be only verbally abusive. However, “If they are in their anal stage fixation, it means an obsessional personality and therefore more into sado-masochism and they can exercise physical abuse, not only verbal abuse.” Finally,

If they are a hysterical type (that is they have not resolved their Oedipal complex) they will consider that any woman can be a rival. Because the rivalry that she has with her mother, or with her sisters towards the father will be reactivated, because there is a woman who can take their place with the husband who is representative of the father. They can transfer this rivalry to any woman towards the man who represents the father, i.e. husband. So the maid can be like the mother that we hated at this time. They will show great suspicion regarding what is going on between the husband and the maid. It is not necessarily sexual. It is psychological only. That is why she will always bring into the conversation something against the maid – to prevent the possibility of any emotional attachment or feeling or kindness that the husband may have towards the maid. What they cannot do about the mother in relation to the father, they will do to the maid about the husband. The woman who has solved the Oedipal problem does not have this problem. (It should be solved between 6-8 years of age.) If she has a good relationship with her mother and if she imitates the femininity of the mother, she will get the tenderness of the father but not the desire of the father. So with a father who loves his daughter and does not have any desire for the daughter, then he will facilitate the solution of the Oedipus complex. It needs a strong couple who are happy most of the time. If the father and mother are happy together and let the daughter know she is loved, but not the center of their life, they will prepare her for her future. So when she has solved the Oedipal complex, she will not be jealous of anyone, or sadistic, or aggressive. She will have the right emotional balance. It does not mean that she does not get angry. If the maid breaks a precious vase, she will not say, “Bravo, you did it”. That would not be human. (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

It is important to note here, that if Lebanese women suffer from such disorders, or imbalance, so may many migrant domestic workers. With the many thousands of women entering Lebanon from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Senegal, among others, it is likely that a certain proportion will also have psychological disorders. And they will as likely project their issues within the dynamics of the relationships within the households they live and work. This is an area that also requires further research and analytical exploration. However, the position of the domestic worker in terms of power relations within the household is not the same as the employer. Therefore, the incidence of abuse by the domestic worker against the employer or other members of her family will be exceptional. We can anticipate that it does happen, but also that the particular manifestations of this aggression will likely take different forms.

These possibilities cannot be explored here. They do, however, need to be addressed, because while there are no systematic procedures in Lebanon that screen the suitability of Lebanese to employ migrant domestic workers, so also there are no procedures to determine to what extent the migrants themselves have psychological issues. But in addition to possible pre-existing psychological problems of domestic workers, their work conditions may also cause psychological problems. The incidence of suicides, for example, is only one extreme that has not been fully explored. More everyday issues such as the effects of isolation, lack of social contact and the development of relationships outside their place of work may trigger abnormal psychological and possibly physical responses such as depression

and illness. The following conversation during an interview with a female Lebanese employer offers some insights that need further exploration.

J: And there was something that killed me when Tiri was here. I could feel how lonely she was and there was nothing I could do. This is what I thought was very difficult in their work, they work for long hours but then they are very lonely. And I know this because when Tiri was here, Tiri used to get migraines and stomach problems if she gets very tense, if she gets very anxious. So when my sister's Filipino went to the Philippines she got ill, and I realized that she was, in a way, very close to them and then I start realizing that this is her family.

RJ: Her social life.

J: Yes, that she's losing. And then when my mother's Sri Lankan maid also left, Tiri was very ill for two days, and that's when I realized that I couldn't do anything to help her because around me there were other Filipinos, but people have this obsession about not letting maids talk to each other. My sister, the shameful one, if when we go with my maid to her house, she asks her to stay at the door and do not talk to her maid. There's no interaction between the two. I think that this is just horrible. I mean give me a break, just let her talk to someone.

..... **Dependency and Aggression**

Another point... is the degree of *dependence* of the human organism on its surroundings [which we do not realize until there is some form of disruptive trauma such as an earthquake]. Then we may realize with reluctance and often deep resentment that we are dependent on the forces of nature or on other people to a terrifying extent. Dependence is felt to be dangerous because it involves the possibility of privation. (Klein, 1967: 7)

It is a fundamental feature of life that humans are highly dependent beings from the moment of birth. Psychoanalysis highlights this in the explanation of how we may be traumatized by the realization of this dependency and the reactions that may result from the realization, unless we develop a healthy sense of empathy and compromise in our relations with others.

Our dependence on others is manifestly a condition of our life in all its aspects: self-preservative, sexual or pleasure-seeking. And this means that some degree of sharing, some degree of waiting, of giving up something for others, is necessary in life. Though this brings a gain in collective security, it can mean a loss of individual security as well. So these dependent relationships in themselves tend to rouse resistance and aggressive emotions. (Klein, 1967: 8)

Lebanese families, as well as businesses, restaurants and hotels, have become increasingly dependent upon migrant workers from Asia and Africa to undertake the so-called 3D's – dirty, dangerous and demeaning tasks. Having a migrant domestic worker is seen now as essential to not only relieve the family and the female head of the household from domestic chores and caring for children, but also for the psychological and emotional health of the family, particularly marriage relations. Indeed, it may be estimated that one in four Lebanese households today employ a migrant domestic worker. Having a domestic worker means that the wife is not burdened by this responsibility and can therefore direct her energies and attention more towards her husband and children and to have a more robust social life with family, friends and professional associates.

This dependency, however, under certain circumstances can elicit unconscious resentment. In times of crisis, as Klein notes, the realization of dependency can result in fear and panic. During the invasion of Lebanon by Israeli forces in July 2006, many thousands of migrant domestic workers were evacuated (see Jureidini, 2009a). While some employers took pity on their employees having to face the danger and facilitated their exodus, there were reports of others locking them in their homes alone while the families fled to their mountain retreats. Many domestic workers also decided to remain or refused to leave when offered the option because they did not want to lose their livelihoods or because they felt a genuine sense of loyalty towards their employers and their families. Some employers begged them to remain and offered them double, triple or four times their salaries to keep them.

It may be argued that because of this dependency, surely it would make sense that employers take good care of the domestic workers in order that they provide good service and remain? The evidence in so many cases suggests that this is not the case and it is precisely the structure of the arrangements and contractual obligations of the *kafala* system that keeps migrant domestic workers from absconding from those employers who abuse and exploit them in so many different ways, including through threats, coercion, withholding of passports, not allowing them out of the house on their own, locking them inside the house when the family is absent, and so on.

In one case of a patient under therapy, the psychoanalyst discovers that a major trauma in her childhood was when the patient as a little girl was left with her grandparents without being told why. The parents simply disappeared which created in the child a fear of abandonment and excessive dependency where mother became everything. This unconscious fear of abandonment in a condition of dependency will be transferred onto the maid. She was afraid: "afraid to depend, to love, to be given to (not only to give, but to be given to)." She was obsessive about remaining in control of her life and her environment, which included the migrant domestic worker with whom she was violent and had further violent impulses.

The dependency. If you dig more she's afraid that somebody might drop her all of a sudden. And she has issues of violent impulse towards her housemaid... that make her suffer a great deal, I mean she cries over that, and it's part of why she comes to therapy.

In her case the issue is to realize she had a child, and she was pregnant with the second child - the moments where she was weak, in her pregnancy, tired. The older child was again wetting the diaper at night. That was the moment where she was aggressive and hateful toward the housemaid. When we dig deeper (me and her) she realized that she could not stand the idea to depend on her. And one day she broke down in tears and told me "I'm so afraid she might leave me". So, this is a particular issue. It's not sociological anymore. It is completely psychological; about this person who has an issue of being abandoned. And she'd rather start hating the person and considering her life without her, saying, "I don't need her, she's horrible; that she's done this, she's done that," rather than say, "I depend on her".

Embedded in this is the idea that in psychoanalysis, hatred may be seen as what we do not want to see of ourselves in the other. To deny her dread of abandonment by the maid (which had been done to her by her mother) she attacks her for it in a way that she was unable to do as a little girl against her mother. As the psychoanalyst explained,

It's quite unfortunate that these women don't realize that it's excellent that the child can be attached to another woman. It's much more comforting to the child, than to think that their mom is everything in the world.

RJ: It's an interesting point. Is that how you would counsel them?

Definitely! That's the role of the school, that's the role of the grandmother, that's the role of the aunt, that's the role of the father also.

Anxiety in children comes a lot from the fact that a child who is attached to his nanny is going to be less anxious probably than a child who only has his mom. It's quite easy to say, "Listen, I'm going out but you have the nanny at home who's taking care of you. It's ok." The child calms down. It doesn't mean he is going to love the nanny more; it's impossible. But it's comforting to him.

RJ: And they're not seeing that.

The mother is not seeing that.

On the other hand, the consciousness of dependency can be openly acknowledged in a positive and balanced way as is expressed in an interview with another employer.

P: I had Pina for three years. I loved Pina, you know. At the end I considered her as my young sister, my little sister. I was taking care of her... I got very attached to her because I see how much these people, how much my housekeepers help me to actually continually achieving my career, and I feel that I actually owe them much more than their salary - much, much more than their salary. Because if they weren't here, I won't be there. It's very simple. If I don't have them, I won't be able to continue my career the way I am.

Psychologically and emotionally, dependency can elicit resentment and aggression, rather than rational calculations to retain those on whom one depends. The woman at home sees the domestic worker taking care of her baby (which is at least partly what she is employed for). Thus, "she looks like a mother and she is depended upon to care for the most precious thing you have, your baby, your house, well, your baby is enough. So, immediately it becomes a trigger of the memory of the dependency towards the early mother - a memory completely forgotten. And that is where the trouble begins." (Psychoanalyst, personal interview)

Further, in a culture that emphasizes individuality and independence, as some of the interviewees experienced, tensions can arise when the ability to rely on others is threatened. However, it is inherent to the social condition that there is mutual dependency, perhaps particularly in marriage and employment relations, each party being dependent upon the other and each providing services and support to the other in different ways. Thus, in the case of the maid, her domestic work is deemed to be indispensable. She, in turn, is highly dependent upon her employer for treating

her well and most importantly for paying her in order that she can support her family in her home country. It is possible, of course, that the domestic worker herself comes to realize how dependent her employer is upon her and she may be able to manipulate that dependency to gain advantages. However, as has been frequently pointed out, the supply of women from poor countries across the globe to undertake domestic work is large and this makes individual domestic workers dispensable, for they can be replaced relatively easily (see Bales, 1999).

Some of the possible dynamics of this dependency and feeling of indispensability are shown in the following story:

S: I made the big mistake. You know, because for three years M lived with us all the time and when she is with us she feels indispensable - and she is indispensable. At the end, I begged her to stay and to renew her contract. I told her I would wait. She didn't want to she wanted to go back to the Philippines. So I prepared the papers, and I waited five months for M to give me her answer. At the end I couldn't wait anymore, and when she said 'no' I made the papers for a new one. I made the arrangements for her to come and to stay with M for a month, so that M will train her. And that wasn't good. It was a very bad idea actually because the moment she came, M realized different things. She first realized that she's not indispensable and she became a bit bitter when she wasn't before. And then she started gossiping about us...

The maid as stress alleviation

There are many Lebanese women who are critical of the way in which migrant domestic workers are treated in their country. Some go as far as to reject the very idea of employing one, at least not on a full-time, live-in basis. As many Lebanese have lived abroad, or who have families abroad with whom they can compare living circumstances, it has been argued that they are more likely to be tolerant and to treat domestic workers more decently. For they believe it is more Western, civilized and democratic to treat people equally and with respect, with regard to gender relations as well as employment relations. In one interview with a Lebanese female employer, she explained that she had lived in California for some nine years, having her three children and pursuing her career as a medical doctor. She did not have a maid because:

I did not want a slave in my house. I wanted to be free in my house. I wanted the intimacy and did not want to share everything, the intimacy of the house. It is like an aggression to have someone always watching you.

The restrictions imposed on the house and interpersonal relations by having a migrant domestic worker living in the household are an important consideration in family dynamics. Here the sensitivities between the public and private space can become confusing (see Moors, et al., 2009). The interviewee noted that she was unable to walk around her house naked and resented it. Thus she resented the intrusion into her and her family's privacy, even though it was she who decided to have a live-in maid. The domestic worker may be a part of the family, but she cannot be that intimate. Nonetheless, our respondent did deliberately leave the U.S. and returned to Lebanon after she had her third child specifically because she wanted a live-in maid to help her with the cleaning and cooking and childcare. She noted that she had become exhausted and angry having to work the second shift when she returned from the hospital where she was employed. She had been "taking it out" on her children and her husband. With a domestic worker she can now have a life where she can entertain and have guests for dinner most evenings to play music, read poetry and thus live a comfortable and rewarding life. So, in this case, being relieved from the drudgery of housework eliminated the projection of anger towards her husband and children. Instead of resentment and abuse of the domestic worker, she is actually grateful to her for the quality of life that she enables: "For me the maid is a blessing". The saying "there but for the good grace of God go I" suggests that she sees the maid doing the work that she would have to do if it were not for her god-given privilege.

However, if we are to accept the psychoanalytic theory, the above respondent is going to be respectful and decent towards her migrant domestic worker, not only because she is grateful for the relief it gives her, but because she had had a respectful and understanding mother and/or she has resolved whatever childhood problems she may have experienced.

The practice of distinction

We have seen on the one hand the psychological idea of projection and transference, that the female employer unconsciously sees her mother and also herself in the manifestation of the maid. At the same time, and perhaps because of this, she is often concerned to distance herself from the maid by ensuring distinguishing differences between them. The everyday practice of class and status distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) has been well documented

in studies of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon (Jureidini & Moukarbel, 2004). As the migrant domestic worker lives in the household, most if not all her needs have to be catered for by her employers. However, soap, shampoo, sanitary products, clothes, bedding and food are most often of inferior quality, price and brands to distinguish the lower status of the maid in the household. It would be difficult for the madam to buy the domestic worker the same brands of goods that she uses.

... the contemporary employer of a migrant domestic worker must assert herself over her worker to maintain her superiority, but more than that, she must assert her difference. Like the slave mistress, she needs to show to herself and others that she is a woman, but a different type of woman from the dirty woman who does the dirty work. The dirty worker/slave provides the labour through which the employer/mistress demonstrates her skill. (Anderson, 2000: 143)

One of the main dynamics operating in this relationship is deference behavior, where the inferiority of the maid is constantly reinforced by the ways in which the worker and employer address one another. For example, while the employer uses the first name of the employee (or even changes her name), the employee cannot reciprocate, but refers to her employer as “madam” (and the husband of her employer as “sir” or “mister”). More than the personal distinctions, however, is the complicity that even architects and builders of apartments in reconstructing the symbolism of inferiority in facilities for live-in domestic help. It may be observed that the rooms built for the maid (which exist in most Lebanese apartments, even if only one-bedroom) are significantly smaller than any other room in the house, including the bathrooms. Even the quality of the tap and shower fittings are not the same as those for the family. All serve to distinguish, to discriminate, and assert the inferiority of the domestic worker. This assertion of difference symbolizes the assertion of power over the domestic worker that spills over to the differentiation in treatment and is a structural creation of vulnerability to abuse.

In addition to this, however, the withholding of the passports, excessive hours of work, lack of rest and recreation and time off, the delay or withholding of wages, prohibition against leaving the house alone or being locked in – are also forms of violence or “psychological torture”, as one psychoanalyst put it (personal communication).

In an interview with a Lebanese female employer, she told of her sister’s abhorrent behavior:

She can punish them for all sorts for things. We get only a glimpse of what she does. First, I don’t think that they are allowed to eat from the food that is made the same day. They are obliged to eat the food that was made yesterday. I have absolutely no idea why, particularly when they actually cook the f...ing thing and they smell it all the time!

And she always thinks that they are always bad. How do you say it - someone who you talk to, but who is always trying to hurt you, no matter what they do for her? And then sometimes when she gets into so many problems, but they come from this culture where they forgive so quickly. I always laugh about it. I tell my husband that they all end up having this complex, like if you take a hostage. The hostage ends up being in love with the torturer. They all end up like this. But maybe just because they see how difficult her life is... they forgive her. And she pays them their salaries three months later. She doesn’t give them one salary every month. She keeps with her always three salaries just in case they run away. She has developed techniques over the years. She always tells them that she will call their husbands and tell them how bad they are.

Again, here we see that the practices that maintain and reproduce the subjugated social and legal status of the domestic worker, just as experienced by their Lebanese madams in accordance with their own gender status, are manifested in aggressive forms that are tantamount to abuse and psychological violence.

Patriarchal expectations

The notion that the psychology of abuse of domestic workers is not gender neutral is important. Even though the madam is the main perpetrator of abuse, it is acknowledged that it is a part of the total dynamics of the household and family. It is suggested, therefore, that a husband need not be physically violent towards his wife in order for the madam to be violent or abusive towards the maid. Rather, just a sense of unhappiness and a lack of fulfillment in her life can precipitate abuse, whether towards her children or the maid.

It is commonly argued that husbands in Lebanon have power over their wives who cannot do anything about it. Women do not have the same rights as men, in divorce, in family finances, inheritance, custody of children, and so on. As one interviewee noted, these patriarchal and patrimonial structures are quite medieval, even though many Lebanese consider themselves Westernized. So when a wife has problems with power relations in her own family - from her father, from her husband, from her brother (see Joseph, 1993) - “it is very normal to take it out on a

person who is defenseless. Whatever the frustrations of the woman, whether she is sexually frustrated or whether her husband is not providing enough for her and the family, or he is not generous, these frustrations will be taken out on the maid because she is accessible” (Psychoanalyst, personal interview).

It can be argued that the patriarchal structure and culture in Lebanon is the overarching context in which the abuse of domestic workers occurs. The employment of domestic workers, the obsession with cleanliness and order in the home, having all meals ready on time, the children cared for and educated, being available for her husband and her children on demand – all are the responsibility of the Lebanese wife. These tasks are seen as ultimately for their husbands, rather than for themselves. Thus, it is not only a married woman’s legal status that ties her to her husband, but also customary notions of having to serve her husband and care for his needs before hers. The burden of these responsibilities, managed by the Lebanese wife and mother and shared with the migrant domestic worker, is bound to create tensions around getting everything perfect.

In this sense, men are the “silent” recipients of these services in the household, but who may complain forcefully if their expectations (or the expectations of their mothers) are not seen as adequate. Such criticism can bring into question the keenly sought after reputation of the Lebanese woman as a “good wife” and a “good mother”.

Chapter 4.

Worker explanations of aggression and abuse

In the survey of 610 migrant domestic workers conducted in Lebanon by the author in 2005-6, respondents were asked why they thought their (female) employer had abused them (yelling, name-calling, and physical violence).

The following (unpublished) data (Tables 1-3) show the responses by domestic workers to each of the three main forms of abuse perpetrated by the female employer of the household. The figures include a number of those who were freelancers who answered according to the treatment of their previous (live-in) employers. The question was open-ended and the interviewers classified them into the categories shown.

Tables 1 and 2 clearly show the main reason stated as having made some “mistake” in their work that precipitated yelling and verbal abuse. The second most commonly state reason also had to do with some displeasure of the quality or speed of their work. Also significant was the observation that the employer “was in a bad mood” suggesting some form of emotional or psychological disturbance.

The categories show that some reasons identified by respondents as coming from something they either did or did not do (e.g. made a mistake, did not understand the language, stayed out of the house too long, broke something, did not answer when called, ate without permission, or complained about something). Alternatively, some answers were more directed towards the attitude of the employer (e.g. did not like how she was working, wanted her to work faster, in a bad mood, bad tempered, jealous, did not like to see her resting, drunk, or just “crazy”).

It is interesting to note that hatred may be heightened when the domestic worker asks for things. In reference to the “nouveau riche”, one psychoanalyst observed:

Shampoo. I've heard stuff like “Can you imagine? She's asked me twice already this month for conditioner.” Dig a bit more. This is a woman who, if it wasn't for luck as you say, and God, would be in the same situation, could not afford to buy two bottles of conditioner per month. So for her, it's intolerable to see that thanks to God she's not there. Because I don't see in the issue if someone would come and ask you for soap or food or clothes. She needs that and she's going to get that, but the employer takes the position: “Can you imagine she's asking us?”

Table 1. Q:Why does/did she yell at you?

	Number	%
Maid made some mistake	41	22.7
Employer did not like how she was working	24	13.3
Wanted maid to work faster	21	11.6
Employer was in a bad mood	12	6.7
Maid did not understand employer's language	10	5.6
Don't know why	10	5.6
Employer bad tempered	7	3.9
Due to misunderstanding	7	3.9
Employer was jealous of the maid	6	3.3
Maid stayed outside house too long	6	3.3
Maid broke something	5	2.8
Employer did not like to see maid resting	5	2.8
Maid did not answer when called	4	2.2
Maid asked for her salary	4	2.2
Employer "is crazy"	3	1.7
Maid asked for regular time off	3	1.7
Maid did not want to clean house of relatives	2	1.1
Employer was drunk	2	1.1
Maid complained about workload	2	1.1
Maid talked to friend from balcony	2	1.1
Problems between husband and wife	1	0.6
Maid woke up late	1	0.6
Maid disciplined the child	1	0.6
Maid asked to leave job	1	0.6
Total	180	100.1

Table 2. Q:Why does/did she call you names?

	Number	%
Maid made some mistake	27	27.6
Wanted maid to work faster	13	13.3
Employer did not like how she was working	11	11.2
Employer was in a bad mood	10	10.2
Employer was jealous of the maid	7	7.1
Maid stayed outside house too long	4	4.1
Don't know why	4	4.1
Maid did not understand employer's language	3	3.1
Maid did not answer when called	3	3.1
Maid broke something	3	3.1
Maid did not want to clean house of relatives	2	2.0
Employer was drunk	2	2.0
Employer "is crazy"	2	2.0
Maid talked to friend from balcony	2	2.0
Due to misunderstanding	2	2.0
Maid asked to leave job	1	1.0
Maid ate without permission	1	1.0
Employer did not like to see maid resting	1	1.0
Total	98	99.9

Table 3. Q:Why does/did she hit you?

	Number	%
Wanted maid to work faster	5	14.7
Employer "is crazy"	4	11.8
Employer did not like how she was working	3	8.8
Maid made some mistake	3	8.8
Employer was jealous of the maid	3	8.8
Maid disciplined the child	3	8.8
Employer thought maid stole something	3	8.8
Maid did not understand employer's language	2	5.9
Maid asked to leave job	2	5.9
Don't know why	2	5.9
Maid did not want to clean house of relatives	1	2.9
Employer was drunk	1	2.9
Employer was in a bad mood	1	2.9
Maid asked for her salary	1	2.9
Total	34	99.8

According to Caritas, they will sometimes ask the employee who has sought refuge, "What did you do that the madam beat you?" Similar to the more general answers in the above tables, they receive responses like:

"Yes I forget to give the baby his milk" or, "it was 2.30pm and the school bus have to drop the small baby and I forget to go down and bring him", or, "I wash the clothes in my hand and I should put them in the machine." Those are usually mistakes related to how to clean and how to take care of the house.

Sometimes when the team discusses a case and we have asked why, for example, all the Lebanese employers become a little bit nervous and they cannot, for example, accept this migrant who came from another country to help her? Why cannot she accept that she needs time to learn, or she's human and she can make mistakes? Sometimes we have, for example, this lady who has some psychiatric troubles... Sometimes we find answers for ourselves, but you forced me now to think about it. We never really refer to the relation between the female employer and the maid. (Social Worker, Caritas)

Although they do not normally meet with employers, when a case is not deemed particularly serious they may counsel the employer and attempt reconciliation.

Sometimes we call the employer and the employer will come and she will tell you 'I really want this maid to return to my house. I like her way in dealing with my baby. I like her and how she works with me, but at that time I was really upset because what she broke was a present from my mom and I couldn't [stop] myself from slapping her.' Sometimes they will say 'I slap my baby. It's something I can also do to the maid if she did something wrong.' So maybe both of them will cry and the maid will tell Caritas 'I want to return with my employer.' We will tell the employer 'later on, if you face a problem, if there's miscommunication between you and the maid, please call us, because we can facilitate. We have translator, we can make a social follow-up.'

But if you have for example a migrant who's been raped by her employer, we will not call the employer and tell him come. So that's why we said that those migrants who've been forced, for example, into prostitution or who have been raped or they didn't pay her (for example we have one case of a maid who has not been paid for nine years. *Nine years!*) So, those cases cannot be treated in the social and the legal way like the others... (Social Worker, Caritas)

It is interesting that none of the women in the survey, nor those brought up by Caritas mentioned that there are regular times in a woman's life when she may get more stressed such as with premenstrual tension (PMS), in the midst of menopause, which is a prolonged and difficult period for a woman, or after delivery, some mothers have post-partum depression. Perhaps some of these, particularly menstruation, are issues that are difficult to raise with strangers, but further inquiry into these kinds of circumstances in relation to

the violence and abuse of domestic workers by their female employers needs to be conducted.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to reveal some of the complex psychoanalytic mechanisms operating within the relationship dynamics between female Lebanese employers and migrant domestic workers. While it is important to understand the possible psychological reasons why particular individuals abuse or are violent, the reasons proffered can only be evaluated within an environment that is culturally, politically, legally and social supportive; a broader environment that serves to reproduce a patriarchal system that discriminates against Lebanese women and which in turn undermines the rights of foreign domestic workers in the household under the *kafala* system. The employment of live-in domestic workers in Lebanon (and possibly most parts of the world) in many respects defies the legacy of the Industrial Revolution that ushered in the formal separation between the household and the sphere of work. The sacred nature of the private sphere is where we are allowed to express all forms of emotions in a far more intense manner than in the public sphere. Where we may be irrational, rather than rational and be relatively free from the public gaze and its formal rules and regulations – what Goffman (1969) called “backstage” in the drama of social life; where individuals project their deep psychological issues onto others, transferring their obsessions and guilt, jealousy and hatred, as well as love and compassion, onto other members of the household. It is this rather secretive and non-regulated realm that the migrant domestic worker has to contend with, and with little conception as to what she has gotten herself into. Yes, there are rules and regulations of behavior in the household, but their violations are dealt with customarily and within the privacy of the family. This applies to abuse and violence between family members as well as against domestic workers. Thus, the concept of “domestic violence” must include not only the traditional most common form of violence of the husband against his wife and children, but also that which is perpetrated against domestic employees.

In correcting, by prevention and punishment, transgressions against migrant domestic workers, it is incumbent upon those seeking reform to take a holistic approach that takes into account the politico-legal and cultural conditions that allow the personal psychology of violence and abuse to be manifest. Without a therapeutic understanding of the psychology of this phenomenon in conjunction with the socio-structural and gender parameters, it is unlikely that serious reform in bringing about behavioral change will be possible. This means taking more time, energy and intelligence in understanding and dealing with the psychology of Lebanese women employers who are abusive in one form or another.

But how do we translate the psychological causes of abuse into changing behavior if it is so deep and unconscious? In the first instance, it would seem that the messages that go out to abusive women must also be subtle and address the unconscious, rather than the conscious.

From this study, we can see that the live-in migrant domestic cannot escape being drawn into the psychological dynamics of the family and is subjected to the various types of problems that members of the family unconsciously project onto her as well as others. It may be suggested that when there is more than one domestic worker, they will be less likely to be singled out for abuse and will be able to confer with and support each other. This, is only a hypothesis, however, that needs to be tested by future research, for it may also be that workers themselves do not get along well and merely add further complications to the psychological dynamics of the household.

Perhaps the most obvious way to resolve the dilemma of abuse is to have the employee come once a day or per week, but not living-in. She will thereby be able to have more control over her life. That is the more usual system in Europe and the West. If there is a problem in her treatment, she can always leave. For this to happen, however, the entire *kafala* system in Lebanon would have to be reformed, including the requirement of the employer to pay a large sum of money to private employment agencies to bring them into the country – the primary reason given for the draconian practices restricting their freedom of movement.

This of course will bring resistance from a number of quarters, including the domestic workers themselves who are not able to pay their passage to the receiving country, as well as from employment agents who would stand to lose a great deal of income, which these transactions generate. It is perhaps here that much more attention needs to be given, for it is these agents who, because of the conditions and exploitation of these migrants, may be involved in trafficking.

It is also clear that there are women in Lebanon who are serial offenders against migrant domestic

workers. While there is some evidence that General Security have recently placed bans against some women employing domestic workers (interview with lawyer from Caritas), there would still seem to be no impediment for an employer to go to different agencies whenever she loses one. Or when a domestic worker does run away (or even commits suicide) it is usually the domestic worker who is blamed. She was not a good person, she did not work properly, could not be trusted, she stole money, she was emotionally or psychologically unstable, etc. However, if she goes to the same agency twice or three times, the suspicion should be raised that possible abuse is occurring and that the employer needs psychological counseling in order to understand the basis for her behavior. Of course the opposite may be true, namely that the employer is very liberal and that the worker wants to earn more money elsewhere, but it needs to be determined through an inquiry.

In the innovative awareness-raising campaigns mounted by Human Rights Watch (May 2008) and the Caritas Lebanon Migration Center in Lebanon (May 2010), attempts were made specifically to induce a sense of mutual identity between female employers and domestic workers. The posters in both campaigns appealed to employers to recognize domestic workers both as women and as human beings, like them. However, as the discussion in this report indicates, female employers go to substantial lengths precisely in order to distinguish themselves from domestic workers in order to distance themselves and indeed to maintain workers' inferior status. Photographs that show starkly different physical features with a caption saying: "They are just like us" may not be so convincing, particularly if the immediate observation meets with the response, "no, they do not look like us at all". Those who do or are capable of identifying with workers are most likely to be progressive and empathetic, so it will be more like preaching to the converted, rather than addressing those who are capable of and practice abuse. This is given more weight if we consider how the whole history of Lebanon has been one of foreign influence (the Turks, the French, and the Americans). As one respondent noted: "I have observed in relations [to] an unspoken conversation, which is 'who do you hate most? Do you hate the Israeli or do you hate Hezbollah? Or do you hate the Saudis, represented by Hariri?' It is all about foreigners. Which do you hate most?" Thus, the hatred is not about Africans or Asians, but rather the hatred is against any kind of foreigner. And in this sense, the Asians and Africans are seen as disposable and there is no need to think about them any further. For example, it is a very rare occurrence to have a Lebanese travel to Sri Lanka to get a better understanding of their origins and culture.⁷ Just as rare are Lebanese employers who even inquire or read about their employees' countries of origin. Why is it that there is no curiosity about those who look after the children, families and households?

It would seem that many Lebanese employers of migrant domestic workers are largely in denial of the humanity of migrant domestic workers and prefer to treat them more or less as household appliances, rather than equal or indeed as women and mothers like themselves. Deference, belittling, discrimination, and perhaps xenophobia are more predominant. At the same time, as this study suggests, there is much in the way of personal problems that female Lebanese employers unconsciously project or transfer onto their maids as part of the psychology of family dynamics which creates a very complex web of emotional baggage and which could only be touched upon here. It is strongly suggested that it is these myriad aspects to the dynamics operating that need to be addressed along with the social and legal reforms that are currently being considered.

⁷ Many years ago, the Lebanese advocate and Catholic priest Father Salim not only visited Sri Lanka, but learned Sinhalese and established a radio program broadcasting in Sinhalese and one in Tagalog broadcast by Sister Amelia.

Recommendations

1. The Lebanese government needs to seek alternatives to the *kafala*/sponsorship system of labor migration, which permits migrant domestic workers to withdraw their labor, to change employers freely, and to live independently outside the house of their employers. As many commentators have acknowledged, this system of sponsorship, particularly for domestic work, creates a structure of power and control that is conducive to corruption and abuse.

From the time of the French Revolution it has been insisted that a person must have a right to withdraw their labor and seek employment elsewhere. The current *kafala* system criminalizes this right, because an employee becomes an illegal resident if she/he leaves the employ of the *kafeel* (sponsor) and is subject to arrest, detention and deportation. As a matter of procedure, whenever a migrant domestic worker absconds from her employer and is apprehended, the reasons for her leaving should be requested and documented. If accusations of abuse against the employer are made, a fair inquiry must be conducted before the domestic worker is charged with any offense, including visa violations.

Although a recent reform allows a migrant worker to be employed by someone else in Lebanon without leaving the country, this arrangement still requires the consent of the *kafeel*. This provision therefore does not cater to the circumstances in which a migrant domestic worker leaves a hostile sponsor because she is being abused, but wishes to stay and continue working under decent conditions.

Allowing migrant domestic workers to legally reside in Lebanon and be employed as freelance workers will reduce or eliminate the psychological and emotional intensity of living-in and getting caught up in the psychodynamics of the family. This does not mean that live-in arrangements cannot be made as long as domestic workers are treated according to the minimum standards of decent work as stipulated by international labor norms.

2. It is imperative that domestic work be included under the coverage of Lebanese labor law that recognizes and formalizes the employer-employee relationship as a labor relationship, instead of the “personal” relationship as it is currently referred to.
3. The Ministry of Labor should establish a proper licensing, regulation and monitoring mechanism applicable to private employment agencies and employers. In the first instance, the licensing of agencies must require a “good-character” screening program that includes passing examinations on local and international migration and labor law, ethics and proper business practice. Employers should also undergo a screening process by the Ministry of Labor when applying to recruit a new migrant domestic worker. The black listing of agencies and employers should be part of the monitoring mechanism.
4. The Ministry of Labor should maintain a blacklist file (or suspect list) of agents and employers of domestic workers who have been accused of violations. Monitoring should include an exit survey to ascertain if migrant domestic workers leaving the country claim to have been abused during their employment in Lebanon. In this way, a suspect list of abusive employers and agencies may be drawn up as part of evidence, particularly in relation to past or pending criminal complaints against an employer or agent, including the crime of trafficking.
5. The Ministry of Labor should ensure that recruitment agents be required to warn employers about the consequences of abusive behavior against migrant domestic workers.
6. The Ministry of Labor should be required to make periodic checks on the welfare of domestic

workers.

7. The Ministry of Labor and agencies should be held responsible for the placement of a domestic worker in a known abusive household. If it can be shown that a domestic worker was placed into a household with a history or record of abuse, the criminal charge of trafficking should be brought against all parties.
8. In cases of employer abuse of domestic workers, some mechanism of referring the employer for psychological assessment should be considered mandatory. This should be part of the screening and monitoring procedures as well as the function of the courts when cases reach the level of criminal charges. Thus, perhaps future abuse may be prevented and at the same time help resolve whatever psychological problems employers may have.

Human rights and welfare organizations and government instrumentalities are mostly concerned with addressing the victims of abuse and exploitation but not assessing the concrete reasons behind employer abuse. In serious cases of abuse, where conciliation is deemed improbable or inappropriate, the employers and the reasons for their behavior have been either accepted or ignored - neither of which is acceptable. Psychological counseling of abusers is recommended, whether criminal charges are raised against them or not.

9. Programs to change attitudes and the culture of abuse should be targeted, rather than generalized awareness-raising campaigns. They should address the specific psychological and social issues that have been raised in this exploratory report, such as: obsessive expectations of cleanliness, expectations of the role of the Lebanese housewife as well as those who have paid work outside the home (double shift issues), dependency issues including fears of abandonment, the husband being absent, jealousy (motherhood issues, sexuality issues) and childhood issues that may offer insight into transference and abusive behavior.

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Appendix A

Slogan: "Reflection"

Wife: "Listen... I will only tolerate your beating and insults in one case only – Get me an Asian maid to take it all out on her... then beat me as much as you want."



Glossary

Anal Fixation May be caused by too much and or too little punishment during toilet-training. Personality is stingy, with a compulsive seeking of order and tidiness. The person is generally stubborn and perfectionist.

Bipolar disorder Cycles of mania and depression; commonly called “manic-depression”.

Compulsion Repetitive ritualistic behavior such as hand washing or ordering or a mental act such as praying or repeating words silently that aims to prevent or reduce distress or prevent some dreaded event or situation. The person feels driven to perform such actions in response to an obsession or according to rules that must be applied rigidly, even though the behaviors are recognized to be excessive or unreasonable.

Depression Various syndromes with excessive anxiety, phobias, or fear

Electra complex A term that some critics have used to express the feminine counterpart to the male Oedipus complex.

Empathy The ability to recognize and understand another’s feelings.

Gender role Attitudes, patterns of behavior, and personality attributes defined by the culture in which the person lives as stereotypically “masculine” or “feminine” social roles.

Hysteria An earlier term for an illness in which there are physical symptoms, such as paralysis, but no organic or physiological basis for the problem.

Masochism A disorder in which a person obtains pleasure by receiving pain.

Object relations The emotional bonds between one person and another, as contrasted with interest in and love for the self; usually described in terms of capacity for loving and reacting appropriately to others. Melanie Klein is generally credited with founding the British object-relations school.

Obsession Recurrent and persistent thought, impulse, or image experienced as intrusive and distressing. Recognized as being excessive and unreasonable even though it is the product of one’s mind. This thought, impulse, or image cannot be expunged by logic or reasoning.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Psychodynamic theories hold that personality disorders reflect deficiencies in ego and superego development and are related to poor mother-child relationships that are characterized by unresponsiveness, over-protectiveness, or early separation. An anxiety disorder characterized by recurrent, persistent obsessions or compulsions. Obsessions are the intrusive ideas, thoughts, or images that are experienced as senseless or repugnant. Compulsions are repetitive and seemingly purposeful behavior, which the individual generally recognizes as senseless and from which the individual does not derive pleasure although it may provide a release from tension.

Oedipal stage Overlapping some with the phallic stage, this phase (ages 4 to 6) represents a time of inevitable conflict between the child and parents. The child must desexualize the relationship to both parents in order to retain affectionate kinship with both of them. The process is accomplished by the internalization of the images of both parents, thereby giving more definite shape to the child’s personality. With this internalization largely completed, the regulation of self-esteem and moral behavior comes from within.

Oedipus complex Attachment of the child to the parent of the opposite sex, accompanied by envious and aggressive feelings toward the parent of the same sex. These feelings are largely repressed (i.e., made unconscious) because of the fear of displeasure or punishment by the parent of the same sex. In its original use, the term applied only to the boy or man.

Oral fixation The earliest of the stages of infantile psychosexual development, lasting from birth to 12 months or longer. Usually subdivided into two stages: the oral erotic, relating to the pleasurable experience of sucking; and the oral sadistic, associated with aggressive biting. Both oral eroticism and sadism continue into adult life in disguised and sublimated forms, such as the character traits of demandingness or pessimism. Oral conflict, as a general and pervasive influence, might underlie the psychological determinants of addictive disorders, depression, and some functional psychotic disorders.

Paranoid Of less than delusional proportions, involving suspiciousness or the belief that one is being harassed, persecuted, or unfairly treated.

Projection A defense mechanism, operating unconsciously, in which what is emotionally unacceptable in the self, an impulse,

attitude, or behavior is unconsciously rejected and attributed (projected) to others.

Projective identification A term introduced by Melanie Klein to refer to the unconscious process of projection of one or more parts of the self or of the internal object into another person (such as the mother). What is projected may be an intolerable, painful, or dangerous part of the self or object (the bad object). It may also be a valued aspect of the self or object (the good object) that is projected into the other person for safekeeping. The other person is changed by the projection and is dealt with as though he or she is in fact characterized by the aspects of the self that have been projected.

Psychosis An abnormal personality disturbance characterized by loss or distortion of reality testing and the inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Regression Partial or symbolic return to earlier patterns of reacting or thinking. Manifested in a wide variety of circumstances such as normal sleep, play, physical illness, and in many mental disorders.

Role a) In social psychology, a set of behavioral expectations set forth by a particular society and fulfilled by its members. b) In Kelly's theory, a process or behavior that a person plays based on his or her understanding of the behavior and constructs of other people.

Role confusion In Erikson's theory, an inability to conceive of oneself as a productive member in one's society.

Sadism A disorder in which a person obtains pleasure by inflicting pain.

Separation anxiety disorder A disorder with onset before the age of 18 consisting of inappropriate anxiety concerning separation from home or from persons to whom the child is attached. Among the symptoms that may be seen are unrealistic concern about harm befalling or loss of major attachment figures; refusal to go to school (school phobia) in order to stay at home and maintain contact with this figure; refusal to go to sleep unless close to this person; clinging; nightmares about the theme of separation; and development of physical symptoms or mood changes (apathy, depression) when separation occurs or is anticipated.

Separation-individuation Psychological awareness of one's separateness, described as a phase in the mother-child relationship that follows the symbiotic stage. In the separation-individuation stage, the child begins to perceive himself or herself as distinct from the mother and develops a sense of individual identity and an image of the self as object. Mahler described four sub-phases of the process: differentiation, practicing, rapprochement (i.e., active approach toward the mother, replacing the relative obliviousness to her that prevailed during the practicing period), and separation-individuation proper (i.e., awareness of discrete identity, separateness, and individuality).

Transference The unconscious assignment to others of feelings and attitudes that were originally associated with important figures (parents, siblings, etc.) in one's early life. The transference relationship follows the pattern of its prototype. The psychiatrist utilizes this phenomenon as a therapeutic tool to help the patient understand emotional problems and their origins. In the patient-physician relationship, the transference may be negative (hostile) or positive (affectionate). See also counter-transference.

Transitional object An object, other than the mother, selected by an infant between 4 and 18 months of age for self-soothing and anxiety-reduction. Examples are a "security blanket" or a toy that helps the infant go to sleep. The transitional object provides an opportunity to master external objects and promotes the differentiation of self from outer world.

Trust versus mistrust Erikson's psychosocial stage, corresponding to Freud's oral stage, in which infants face the task of trusting the world.

Unconscious process Processes of which a person is unaware because they have been repressed or never permitted to become conscious; or drives or cues of which we are unaware because they are unlabeled or repressed.

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<http://www.abess.com/glossary.html>

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