London School of Economics and Political Science

Domestic Workers as Political Subjects: Desire, Political Subjectivation and Everyday Lives of Islamabad's Domestic Workers

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Abstract

In mainstream discourses, there is virtually no conceptualisation of domestic workers or working-class women as political subjects. Moving beyond work/non-work binaries and challenging the equation of 'political subjects' with only those directly participating in collective, public mobilisations, this thesis conceptualises Islamabad's women domestic workers as a group of subaltern political subjects who are invisibilised as workers, as women, as citizens, as city residents, and as political subjects in the realms of scholarship, policy, and organised politics in Pakistan and beyond. In doing so, it underscores the need for a serious accounting of the political subjectivities of these subjects as these often escape political radars and are thus rendered invisible in scholarship as well as political practice.

Most of Islamabad's domestic workers are part-time/live-out workers, low-caste working-class women living in Islamabad's impoverished *bastis* (informal settlements) and working in the *kothis* (bungalows) of the city's elite. Using ethnographic methods, this thesis tracks the conceptual vocabularies used by these domestic workers to describe and critique their everyday experiences in the *kothi*, in the *basti* and in their familial/intimate lives, giving an account of how they understand, navigate, and resist the multiple, co-constitutive forms of class, caste/religious, and gender domination experienced by them in the everyday, including the everyday threat of forced eviction from the *bastis* they live in. An understanding of these subaltern political subjects, this thesis argues, requires recognising them as desiring subjects who not only think and act but also feel and want.

By documenting the critical vocabularies, practices, and political imaginaries of Pakistani domestic workers, an under-researched and multiply-marginalised group, this study contributes to the empirical and conceptual scholarship on the political subjectivities of subaltern groups in the global South. It revives a focus on Pakistan's subordinate classes, highlights the importance of studying the 'infra-political' under politically and socially repressive conditions, and demonstrates that these gendered subalterns are active producers of structural critique who have quite different subjectivities from their male counterparts. In doing so, it hopes to expand the field of vision and action of the Pakistani Left and help forge new, more expansive, and robust working-class solidarities.

Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgements go to my supervisor, Dr. Sumi Madhok, without whose efforts and support I would neither have begun or finished my PhD at the LSE Gender department. I am particularly grateful for Sumi's pastoral care and commitment to my safety and wellbeing during the fieldwork period. Thanks also to my advisor, Dr. Sadie Wearing, whose encouragement was vital in providing relief from the clouds of self-doubt that regularly engulfed me towards the end. A big thank you to the entire LSE Gender community: the staff, faculty, and my PhD fellows, each of whom were a unique and irreplaceable part of my wonderful experience at the department.

I also want to acknowledge those who made possible the possibility of the PhD: my brother-in-law, Neil, whose loving support and consistent engagement with my initial ideas helped motivate me to apply for the PhD; Dr. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, who remained in regular touch with me over many months in the process of preparing my PhD applications; and Dr. Karin Astrid Siegmann, whose friendship and generosity were an invaluable source of support both before and during the PhD.

Over the course of the PhD project, I have periodically returned to the question of what it means for this thesis to be 'mine' in a setting where my embeddedness in the field and even the research question itself emerged from collective organising experiences rather than as independent or individual creations of my mind. Even though 'data collection' was done by me individually, the very situations I was studying were often products of collective struggle, and years of organising work had gone into building the intimate and trusting relationships that I enjoyed with research subjects in the *bastis* that became my 'field sites'. Even though none of my AWP comrades expressed reservations about my use of organisational experiences, contacts, relationships, and knowledge as 'data' for this PhD, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the collective nature of the knowledge produced in/by this thesis. I also want to thank my AWP Islamabad comrades for enabling me to step away from organising work to finish the PhD and for continuing the invisible and often depleting everyday work of political organising in the meanwhile.

As I acknowledge in greater depth in the main body of the thesis, I am deeply grateful to each of my research interlocutors, and particularly to my primary interlocutors, for opening their hearts, their homes, and their lives to me; for entrusting me with their stories and their secrets; for their heartfelt affection and encouragement, and for showering me with countless hugs, kisses, and blessings over the years.

My PhD journey began in darkness, and it is ending in light. For this life-changing shift, I will be eternally grateful to my therapist, guide, and now friend, Ellis, whose interventions made possible what I had almost given up on: the possibility of feeling *alive*; of experiencing light and joy; of moving in anything but hollowing, repetitive circles; of growing, trusting, and loving. The sheer relief from decades of constant pain itself unleashed an energy that I continue to ride blissfully to this day. Without Ellis, I may never have discovered the divine or known gratitude in the ways I do now, each of which have transformed and enriched my life in indescribable ways.

I also feel lucky to have been one of the many people who passed through 10 Sienna House during my time in London, and particularly to have lived there together with Sidd and HJ with whom I shared many meals, chats, and woes, and who patiently tolerated my statue-like presence on the sofa during my writing spurts. Despite being brief, it was a deeply nourishing and enjoyable time, and I sense that our friendships will continue well into the future.

My family- like most- has been central to shaping the course of my life, including the PhD years. While there is much more to say than is possible here, I will take this opportunity to briefly express my gratitude to each of them: To my father, for being who he is and for learning to accept me for who I am; to my mother, for her unwavering support and fierce commitment to my well-being even when it meant enduring immense hardship for her; to Sadia, for her solid, consistent, and dependable presence in our lives; and most of all, to my sister, who refused to give up on me despite the difficulties in our relationship, and whose generosity, authenticity, resilience, and courage I have been awed by for as long as I can remember. Rumi, Bella, and Rafay- the youngest members of the family- have been the source of some of the most important lessons, inspiration, and joy featured in this period. It has been nothing short of a blessing to be able to participate in and marvel at their processes of becoming.

I reserve my deepest acknowledgements for my partner, Aasim, together with whom I continue to learn (and teach) what it means to love, to co-habit and co-create, to provide political leadership, to be(come) human, and to recognise the indispensability of each of these elements for the others. Our journey has been long, complex, and painful, both before and during this PhD period, and I cannot describe how deeply blissful it feels to see where we have arrived at the end of it. The strength of your personal and political commitments and your deep, unwavering love (particularly for the little ones) continue to inspire me just as much as they did when I first fell in love with you. Thank you for all the cooking, the care, the teasing, and simply for being here with me in the final stretch of the PhD.

And finally, to the not-yet: the tiny bundle of life, light, and joy that I hope to be blessed with soon after I finish the PhD. Located liminally between the PhD and motherhood journeys as I write, I hope to gather, distil, and cherish every bit of these past years, watching with curiosity and wonderment as life gives way to the next series of discoveries. I inhabit this orientation alongside a sharp awareness that the relentless Israeli genocide against Palestinians continues, and that violence, hate, and terror envelop more and more of the world. In the face of such unspeakable cruelty and dehumanisation, I am determined more than ever to harness the power of love and collective action in service of life and liberation.

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Glossary

baji	(literally) sister, but also used to refer to a (woman) employer in the realm of domestic service
basti	informal settlement
basti wala	someone who lives in a *basti*
char-dewari	the four walls of the home
dosti	friendship
insan	human
katchi abadi	informal settlement
kothi	bungalow/mansion
kothi wala	someone who lives in a *kothi*
majboori	compulsion

Chapter 1

Introduction: Domestic Workers as Political Subjects

Domestic workers in Pakistan are positioned in international human rights discourses and liberal-feminist discourses as passive victims to be 'empowered' by 'skills development' or 'poverty reduction' (Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019).[1] In these discourses, domestic workers are rarely conceptualised as *political* subjects- as active, self-conscious, agentic beings who possess the ability to think and act with integrity and exercise choice, possibly because they do not conform to liberal expectations of individualism, self-sufficiency, and 'unencumberedness' (Madhok, 2013b). These women continue to be invisibilised not only as workers, but also as citizens, city residents, women, and working-class subjects in the realms of state and Left discourse, scholarship, and political organising. The invisibility of domestic workers is only ever allowed to be disrupted in two ways: either through their appearance as victims of abuse, or through appearing as iconic subaltern subjects engaged in spectacular forms of resistance to overthrow the shackles of their oppression (Bayat, 2013).

This study challenges this binary representation as well as the equation of political subjects with only those directly participating in political action- a term that I use in this thesis to specifically refer to collective, public mobilisations serving as explicit expressions of resistance. This should not be taken to mean that this group of women is absent from public mobilisations,[2] nor does this study seek to undermine the importance of political action. Rather, it conceptualises domestic workers as a group of gendered subaltern political subjects who have lives and struggles both within and outside of political mobilisations which need to be explored. Specifically, it is interested in going *beyond* political action as the exclusive realm within which political subjects and subjectivities are constituted and explored, and in examining the specific historical, spatial, relational, ideational, and material contexts within which the political subjectivities of this group come into being.

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[1] See https://www.pakistangendernews.org/maids-to-be-made-skilled/ as an example of the hegemonic discourse on 'skills development' as a means of 'empowering' domestic workers.

[2] To the contrary, many women from Islamabad's Christian *katchi abadis* (informal settlements) in particular have participated in public demonstrations to resist forced eviction from their settlements in recent years. However, women rarely appear in the decision-making or leadership of these protests. The political culture of Islamabad's Muslim *katchi abadi*s is more gender-segregated and women from these settlements rarely participate in public gatherings or political demonstrations. Also, none of these mobilisations have taken up issues around domestic service, the primary occupation of employed women in both Muslim and Christian *katchi abadis*.

A refusal and/or failure to understand domestic workers as political subjects has important consequences. It maintains the problematic image of the 'oppressed Third World woman in need of saving' by benevolent interventions from states and development agencies, reinscribing neocolonial hierarchies and inequalities (Mohanty, 1991). On the ground, this 'omission' renders women in these communities unrepresented in and excluded from community level decision-making and power structures, as well as from political party units and trade unions from the local up to the national levels (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [FES], 2021, pp. 24–27). A failure/refusal to understand women as political subjects on the societal level is also reflected in the limited gains made by repeated legislative attempts to increase women's representation in formal political processes and structures (Fleschenberg & Bari, 2015; A. Khan & Naqvi, 2020). Furthermore, it is not just domestic workers' political subjectivities but also their labour as domestic workers that goes unrecognised as a result of their invisibilisation as political subjects.

Understanding the political subjectivities of domestic workers also enables insight into their political behaviour, which, in the case of subaltern groups and subordinate classes, often includes staying away from organised politics and particularly organised resistance (Scott, 1990). This rings true in the contemporary Pakistan context, where the participation of subordinate classes in the recent popular upsurge (dubbed as a 'revolution' by numerous commentators)[3] in support of the Pakistani cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan has been thin, despite a sharp increase in the cost of living and unemployment in the same period (S. A. Zaidi, 2020).[4] There is little scholarship on how Pakistan's subordinate classes- and working-class women in particular- make sense of the sharp inequalities they encounter in their everyday lives, how their struggles for everyday subsistence inform their political subjectivities. An understanding of these marginal political subjects and subjectivities through a focus on their everyday political praxis becomes important also for the Left to understand if/how its modes of organising wittingly or unwittingly utilise and reproduce particular forms of power (particularly class, caste, and gendered power), thereby inhibiting, invisibilising, and/or misrecognising potential or existing forms of transformative politics.

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[3] See for example Ibrahim (2022), Rizvi (2023), and Yusuf (2023).
[4] See also: "Surging Inflation Erodes People's Living Standards in Pakistan", *The Nation*, 21 October 2023.

1.1. Why domestic workers?[5]

There is growing global recognition of domestic service as a major and expanding form of precarious employment, symptomatic of changing relations of production and reproduction under neoliberal capitalism. Domestic service, as a form of commodified social-reproductive labour, forms the indispensable background condition for capitalism's existence (Fraser, 2016). Global capitalism has, in turn, restructured social reproduction in important ways.[6] Under capitalism, not only are there "many important types of work based on real need and of obvious social benefit that do not get done, but also the kind of work that is recognised as work always and everywhere destroys the sociality and environment that attracted it in the first place." (Dinerstein & Neary, 2002, p. 11). The consequences of this for the processes of social reproduction, the workers performing reproductive work (in the home or the workplace), and hence for social life itself, are far-reaching and yet under-studied (Rai et al., 2014).

Up until the 1970s, the belief that domestic service would reduce and eventually disappear as societies 'progressed' and modernised, was widespread (Sarti, 2014, p. 292). Contrary to this expectation, the domestic service sector has grown significantly over the past few decades (ILO, 2013, p. 24). Between 1995 and 2010, the number of domestic workers rose from 33.2 million to 52.6 million, an increase of more than 19 million (ibid.). Though there are presently no statistics on the rate of growth of the domestic service sector in Pakistan, it can be assumed that both the supply and the demand for domestic service has grown with the rising inequality in the country, as witnessed in Latin America and the Caribbean (ibid., p. 26).[7]

The Global Care Chains literature- a body of work that traces the transnational links between people involved in (paid and/or unpaid) care work- reveals the displacement of social-reproductive work from countries in the global North onto the global South, and within the global

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[5] This study uses and employs the term 'domestic worker' in the terms set out by the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) which states that: (a) the term 'domestic work' means work performed in or for a household or households; (b) the term 'domestic worker' means any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship; (c) a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker. This 2011 definition has been used in all subsequent ILO reports on domestic service to date.

[6] This study follows Elias and Rai (2019) in understanding social reproduction as "a concept that encapsulates all of those activities involved in the production of life-- biological reproduction, the work of caring for and maintaining households and intimate relationships, the reproduction of labour, and the reproduction of community itself." (Elias & Rai, 2019, p. 203). A detailed discussion of social reproduction and related concepts takes place in Chapter 2.

[7] Domestic service in Pakistan's deeply stratified and patronage-heavy society has a long history that precedes the contemporary conjuncture in which the global demand for domestic service has risen. See also footnote 10 below and Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion.

South, from richer to poorer families and regions (Yeates, 2012). While a number of studies exist on domestic workers who are transnational migrants to the North, less attention has been paid to domestic workers in the South, most of whom are internal migrants from villages and rural towns with painful histories of dispossession, marginality, and often violent exclusion and/or expulsion (Hasan, 2010). While there are many parallels between the working conditions and forms of exploitation to which domestic workers everywhere are subject, the kinds of physical and psychological abuse that domestic workers in the South experience- in Pakistan certainly, where stories of abuse and torture are regularly reported[8]- merit urgent attention.

Domestic service is a heavily feminised occupation, with women comprising 83% of the global domestic service workforce (ILO, 2013). Though the percentage of male domestic workers in Pakistan is high in international comparison,[9] men work mostly as full-time live-in workers (Shahnaz, 2017) whereas women constitute the bulk of part-time workers, charging one-sixth of the salary of a full-time male employee per activity per month (Collective for Social Science Research [CSSR], 2004, p. 14). This study focuses on women domestic workers not only because they comprise a significant majority of the domestic service workforce but also due to the striking lack of political and academic attention to the political subjectivities of women domestic workers in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Global South (Pozo, 2022).

1.2. Domestic service in Pakistan

Domestic service in Pakistan- understood in this study as an occupation as well as an institution[10]- is ubiquitous yet invisible. This invisibility is reflected in the dearth of Pakistan-based scholarship on domestic service.[11] Though Pakistan's labour force surveys do not consistently report data on

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[8] See Asrar (2021), M. S. Khan (2017), Qadir (2023), and Zakaria (2017).

[9] According to ILO (2013), Pakistan has the 8th highest number of (nationally-employed) male domestic workers in the world.

[10] The term 'institution' is used here to mean "a custom or practice that has existed for a long time and is accepted as an important part of a society" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/institution) As in much of South Asia, it has been customary for the Pakistani elite, both rural and urban, to employ an entourage of domestic servants to run their homes, maintain their workplaces, provide child- and elderly-care, and perform a wide range of services all of which are essential to the functioning of everyday life in elite, and increasingly also in urban middle-class contexts. Though the dynamics of domestic service in Pakistan are shifting, as detailed in Chapter 3, the institutional character of domestic service (in the sense defined above) sets it apart from other forms of employment that are not as culturally or historically embedded in the Pakistani social fabric.

[11] Academic publications on domestic service in Pakistan to date include: K. Butt and A. Khan, (2019), CSSR (2004), Malik et al., (2016), Shahid (2007, 2010, 2019), Shahid and Syed (2023), Dogar et al. (2022), I. Hussain (2008), Mahmood and Mushtaq (2023), Manzoor et al. (2016), J. Khan et al. (2021) and Zulfiqar (2019). Some of these publications are of questionable academic quality because they lack methodological and theoretical

domestic service,[12] the ILO (2021) estimates 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan today, mostly women and children.[13] Domestic service is the most widespread form of employment for working-class women in the cities, most of whom are low-caste[14] rural migrants and belong either to the Christian community (an oppressed religious minority in the Pakistani context) or to groups considered 'non-Muslim' due to their low-caste status (CSSR, 2004). In a context where the poorest 68% of the urban population in major cities has access only to 1% of market-provided housing (Malik & Wahid, 2014, p. 101), domestic workers live in impoverished squatter settlements called *katchi abadis*[15] or *bastis*[16] (the latter term used more commonly by the inhabitants themselves) which are subject to frequent and arbitrary demolition by the state (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021).

Domestic service is amongst the most poorly paid occupations in Pakistan (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016, p. 10). The informal,[17] precarious, flexible, and 'private' nature of the occupation compounds the exploitation faced by these workers as well as the difficulty of collecting reliable

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rigour and do not offer original or substantive contributions to knowledge on the subject. Of the newspaper articles and reports that have appeared on domestic service, Lubna Shahnaz's (2017) piece in Pakistan's English daily *Dawn* stands out for offering a comprehensive review of available data on domestic service, gleaned from the government's Labour Force Survey for 2014-2015 and has thus been cited on various occasions in this thesis.

[12] See Chapter 3, pp. 94-97, for a discussion of the institutional infrastructure of data collection on domestic service.

[13] The figures for Pakistan cited by the ILO 2021 report are the same as the numbers cited in their 2015 report, due to a lack of updated national-level data. The absolute number of domestic workers in Pakistan is likely to have increased significantly since data collection on domestic service was last carried out, given the sharp rise of inflation, unemployment, and inequality in this period.

[14] This study uses the term 'low-caste' to refer to kinship groups located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy in Punjab's rural social order (since this study is based in the Punjab region of Pakistan). These groups are associated with 'menial' occupations such as sweeping, sanitation, and service work as well as physically-threatening occupations such as mining and brick-kiln work, and experience little class or occupational mobility as a group. Caste is a complex category to work with in the Pakistani context for a number of reasons, not least because both state and society deny the existence of caste amongst Muslims. See Chapter 3 for further discussion.

[15] The formal term used for (urban) informal settlements in the Pakistan context is '*katchi abadi*': '*katchi*' meaning 'raw' or 'half-finished' and '*abadi*' meaning 'colony' or 'settlement'. Urban planners use the term *katchi abadi* more specifically to refer to "unauthorised settlements on government land" (Hasan, 2006, p. 454). Official documents further categorise Islamabad's *katchi abadis* into different legal categories (see pp. 22-26 of this chapter for details).

[16] The term '*basti*' (which translates to 'settlement') is a wider and more informal term than '*katchi abadi*', often used by residents themselves to refer to their settlements, irrespective of the latter's official/legal status. Following my interlocutors, I use the term '*basti*' to refer to Islamabad's informal settlements (irrespective of their official or legal status), except where there is a reason to use the more formal term '*katchi abadi*'.

[17] In recent years, the Pakistan government has introduced a spate of legislation in a bid to regulate domestic service, namely the Domestic Workers Employment Rights Bill 2015, the Punjab Domestic Workers' Act 2019, the Islamabad Domestic Workers Bill 2022, and the Sindh Home-Based Workers Bill 2022. However, there is no evidence to date that their implementation is underway (Asrar, 2023).

data on domestic service.[18] In addition to their invisibility as workers, domestic workers are also invisible in Pakistan's labour politics, which is itself a shrinking domain comprised mainly of (male) formal-sector workers and trade unions (with government-employed Lady Health Workers emerging as an important exception in recent years, see Hisam, 2017).[19] In contrast to the expansion and strengthening of domestic workers' organising globally over the last decade (Acciari, 2018; Geymonat et al., 2017), attempts to organise domestic workers in Pakistan are still nascent, with the first domestic workers' union in the country formed as recently as 2015, which has only 235 registered members to date.[20] The near absence of domestic workers' organising in the Pakistan context despite the exploitative conditions and wide prevalence of domestic service, makes an understanding of these workers' everyday lives and political subjectivities even more important.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

Before specifying my research questions, I summarise here the political commitments on which this thesis rests. As a Marxist political worker with a history of over two decades of political organising in/with the communities being researched, this study seeks to enrich/improve Left organisational practice; at the very least to engender recognition of the Left's implicitly male organisational models and to collectively (and creatively) come up with ways to transform these. Through this study, I ask: what changes when we centre women, alongside men, in our conception of the 'political subject', particularly the 'working-class political subject'? How does the Left's mode of politics change? How do the emphases in Left politics change, how do the practices and the vocabularies change? I ask these questions as a means to introspect into my own subjectivation and practice as a Left political worker (elaborated in Chapter 4) as well as to reflect more broadly on the relationship between Left organisers and working-class communities, hoping to find new pathways of co-creating emancipatory, life-serving politics.

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[18] These difficulties have been well-documented in the literature on domestic service. See Anderson (2000), Chen (2011), ILO (2013), Malik et al. (2016), Olayiwola (2019), Ray and Qayum (2009), Rojas-García & Toledo González (2018) and Triandafyllidou (2013).

[19] Only 2.32% of Pakistan's labour force is currently unionized (Khalil, 2018, p. 10). Government regulations do not require labour unions to maintain a gender-disaggregated record of union membership, resulting in scanty and unreliable data on women's union membership (ibid). The ILO (2012) estimates this number to be 2% of the total trade union membership, which, as stated above, is 2.32% of the workforce. See also the FES (2021) report, *Mapping Labour Unions in Pakistan*.

[20] See ILO (2015).

Despite (or perhaps because of) the proliferation in the number of 'critical' paradigms by the time that I became a political worker, I found myself struggling with internecine conflicts and rivalries in Left circles- both real and imagined, within and around me. Following from this experience, I seek to transcend binaries in both academic and organising realms and engage with (and across) political difference(s) without insisting on resolving or homogenising them, akin to Hutching's vision of a "pluralist feminist politics" (Hutchings, 2013, p. 26). In this thesis, I engage critically, openly, and vulnerably with Marxist, feminist, decolonial and poststructuralist scholarship and put into conversation concepts and frameworks across different and often competing theoretical traditions which share the claim/aspiration of being liberatory and yet disagree (sometimes bitterly) both on how to understand and change the world.

Following from the case for research and the political commitments outlined here, this thesis is *an exploration of the dynamic relationship between structural inequalities, domestic service, social reproduction, and formation of everyday political subjectivities*. As noted earlier, for live-out/part-time domestic workers, who constitute an increasing majority of the domestic service workforce, the occupation of domestic service involves traversing the starkly unequal spaces of the impoverished and vulnerable *bastis* (informal settlements) where they live and the secure and comfortable *kothis*[21] (bungalows) where they work. The central research question of this study thus asks: *How do domestic workers' everyday experiences of multiple structural inequalities in and across the sites of the* kothi*, the* basti*, and the* (basti) *home shape them as political subjects?*

Pursuing this central question, this study specifically seeks to: a) explore how part-time/live-out domestic workers navigate and describe their experiences of working in elite/middle-class *kothis* and returning to their impoverished *bastis* after work; b) track the conceptual vocabularies used by this group to describe and critique their world(s) and produce alternative imaginaries thereof; and c) record moments of 'affective dissonance' that arise in interlocutors' narratives and field encounters (Hemmings, 2012).[22] In pursuing these research objectives, I seek to explore how an understanding of the practices and subjectivities of domestic workers can shift the horizons and practices of Left politics without attaching preconditions to the form or content of their

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[21] The term '*kothi*' carries with it connotations of a large, spacious, comfortable, and (materially and legally) secure house/bungalow, and of its residents being economically well-off. '*Kothi wala*', another frequently recurring term in this thesis, means 'someone who lives in a *kothi*' and is also used more broadly by *basti* communities to refer to members of the elite and middle-classes.
[22] Following Hemmings (2012), I understand "affective dissonance" as an experience arising from "gaps between self-narration and social reality" (p. 154), and specifically as moments in the field which lead to shifts in subjectivation such that "the present reality is no longer judged to be adequate or acceptable" (ibid).

subjectivities or insisting on political action as a precondition for being considered a political subject.

Employing ethnography as its primary methodological framework, this study is embedded in a selected number of Islamabad's *bastis* which it understands as *epistemic sites* where knowledge is produced rather than as sites for 'data collection'. Using participant-observation, formal and informal interviews, and group discussions as its main methods (elaborated in Chapter 4), this study gives an account of how domestic workers understand, navigate, and resist the class, caste, and gender-based domination experienced by them in the everyday, and how these experiences shape them as political subjects. It understands domestic workers' narratives as employing *conceptual* vocabularies, registering not just their historical and political presence as subalterns but also their epistemic presence (Madhok, 2021), positioning them as producers of knowledge and critique.

By embracing ethnography, I open myself to the potential of having my worldview radically unsettled and also refuse the option to 'pick and choose' which elements of my interlocutors' social life I wish to study, committing instead to a repeated, consistent, long term and holistic engagement with (and responsibility towards) the life-worlds of my interlocutors (Shah, 2017). In referring to interlocutors through the course of the thesis, I refuse to confine them to a single, fixed identity of 'domestic worker', 'wife', 'woman', or '*basti* resident', moving instead between/with all these identities as these subjects themselves do as they move between different sites and contexts. Identifying the *kothi*, the *basti*, and interlocutors' homes (in the *basti*) as sites of political subjectivation, this study extends the exploration of political subjectivities and subjectivation beyond the public realm, thereby including their intimate experiences in the 'private' realm as a constitutive part of their subjectivation.

And finally, refusing the detached, 'God-like' mode of patriarchal knowledge production (Haraway, 1988), I use both the research process and outputs of this study as a means to understand my own subjectivation as a political worker, as a researcher, and as a woman alongside that of my interlocutors, being careful not to decentre my research subjects in the process of including my 'self' in the study (Finlay, 2002).

Having laid out my research questions and how I intend to explore them, I now introduce my research subjects and the material and spatial contexts where they live: namely, the *bastis*- informal settlements- of Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad.

1.4. Introducing Research Subjects

As stated earlier in this chapter, most of Islamabad's domestic workers are low-caste, working-class women, many of whom are rural migrants and belong either to the Christian community or to groups considered 'non-Muslim' due to their low-caste status. The primary interlocutors for this study were thirty-three adult women from six *bastis* (introduced after the research subjects) across the city of Islamabad. (Details of how research subjects were identified, approached, and recruited are presented in Chapter 4). All of these interlocutors were employed as part-time live-out domestic workers (with two exceptions, Maria and Roshni,[23] who were live-in workers) and usually worked in two or three *kothis* which they'd cover in succession, starting their first job in the morning and finishing the last one in the late afternoon. Many of these part-time workers were hired as cleaners but were often expected to do a range of tasks in addition to cleaning, such as laundry, ironing, and kitchen assistance as/when required by the employers. As suggested by the generic term '*kaam wali*' (which literally means 'female worker') that was commonly used by *kothi walas* to refer to part-time live-out domestic workers, fewer of them were hired with specific domains and duties such as cooking or care-giving, as these were often full-time live-in jobs. (Details of interlocutors' work routines and experiences are described in Chapter 5).

While most of my primary interlocutors were employed for the entire duration of the fieldwork period, their employment status and/or employer also changed in this period. Maria, for instance, was working as a full-time nanny for two small children when I first met her but stopped working when she got married. When Roshni's employers moved away from the city, she too returned to her hometown and sought out other forms of employment since. In any case, being 'employed' or not is a complex matter, particularly in cases where the workers have long-term personal relationships with the employers' family. So for instance, even though Roshni- who was a live-in maid at her employers' *kothi* and had been hired primarily as a caregiver for the employers' mother- returned to her natal home (some distance away from Islamabad) after the old lady passed away, Roshni is still in touch with her '*baji*'[24] and is expected to come to Islamabad whenever the latter visits.

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[23] All names that appear in this thesis (those of interlocutors, employers, and/or any other individuals) have been changed to ensure anonymity. Where needed, details (including the name) of spatial locations have also been changed or obscured for anonymisation purposes.

[24] '*Baji*'- which literally means 'sister' in Urdu- is the term used to refer to (women) employers in the realm of domestic service. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion on continuity and change in the social relations of domestic service over time in Pakistan.

My primary interlocutors spanned a wide range of ages and differed in marital status. Some- like Maria and Roshni (both of whom appear regularly in the thesis) were in their early thirties when the project commenced. Maria was married during the fieldwork period and is now a mother. Roshni has chosen to remain unmarried up until the point of writing. Many interlocutors were already married with children when I first met them, and ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties in age. Some were young mothers, others had older children, and yet others were already grandmothers. Many women's husbands were 'absent'— they were either dead, perpetually 'away', or they had left/abandoned their wife and children. Some interlocutors were adolescent women who had been working already for 7-8 years, having accompanied their mothers to the *kothis* since they were very young and eventually taking over the work of their mothers.

The thirty-three primary interlocutors for this study were an ethnically diverse group hailing from Punjabi, Saraiki, Kashmiri, Hazarawal, Pashtun, and Kohistani backgrounds. This ethnic diversity is both a reflection of migration patterns from the country's regional and economic peripheries towards the major urban centres (PES 2017-2018, p. 180) and a result of how I designed the sampling and recruitment process (see Chapter 4), as I was keen to explore the subjectivating impacts of ethnic-cultural differences on domestic workers' experiences.

This group of interlocutors was comprised of a fairly even number of Christian and Muslim women, enabling me to explore how caste/religion[25] inflects their experiences as domestic workers in the *kothis* as well as social relations within and across *basti* communities. My Christian interlocutors- residing in the H-9 and F-7 *bastis*- were a relatively homogenous social group in ethnic and class terms: all of them were Punjabi speakers, hailed from central or south Punjab regions, and lived in the larger *katchi abadis* of the city, albeit with important differences in their individual material circumstances and social security (in which the legal status of their *basti* played an important role).

In comparison, the Muslim women I worked with were a more heterogenous group in class, caste, and ethnic terms. One group of Muslim women was based in Farash Town, a low-income neighborhood on the city's outskirts with formal albeit ambiguous legal status (elaborated in the next section) with greater emphasis on *purdah.* (*Purdah* is understood here in terms of norms and practices of gender segregation as well as veiling practices; see Haque, 2008, p. 48). These

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[25] See fn. 127 for a discussion of the term 'caste/religion'.

women, while very much working-class, had greater material security (particularly in terms of housing) than those living in the *katchi abadis*.

A second group of Muslim women I worked with were from the small and very poor I-10/1 *basti* introduced earlier in this chapter, comprised primarily of Hindko- and Pashto-speaking Kohistani communities from the north-western parts of the country. The *basti* itself, despite having been in existence for over forty years, was formally 'illegal', materially precarious (with few concrete structures) and highly impoverished. These communities were particularly strict about *purdah*, and thus, for the women of this *basti*, entering paid/public employment or traversing public space autonomously was an indicator of their 'destitution', low social status and material impoverishment, and an option to be exercised only as a last resort.

A third group of Muslim women were the women of the G-11 *basti*, who hailed from different regions in central Punjab. These women belonged to 'low-caste' Muslim communities and had notably distinct identities, language, and cultural norms/practices from other Punjabi *biraderis*/kin-groups (both Muslim and Christian). The people of the G-11 *basti* lived in *jhuggi* (tent) settlements, without any permanent or concrete structures or physical boundaries between housing units. In this community, all women— girls, adolescents, married and unmarried women, and old women— were working or seeking work. Rules around *purdah* within the *basti* were relatively lax, with plenty of inter-mingling and co-habitation across genders and households. These women would often travel to work in groups, mostly with just a *dupatta* on the head, and go collectively into forested areas and distant/peripheral parts of the city in search of firewood, which meant being away from the *basti* for many hours without male presence or 'supervision'; something that would be unthinkable for Muslim (or even Christian) women from other communities in my research setting.

Having introduced the broad demographic characteristics of my primary interlocutors, I now give a more detailed introduction to the settlements they live in: Islamabad's *katchi abadis*, the underbelly of 'Islamabad, the Beautiful'.

1.5. Locating the Research: Islamabad 'the Beautiful' and its Underbelly, the *Katchi Abadis*

'Welcome to Islamabad, the Beautiful' reads a sign painted in large white letters on a gently sloping, carefully manicured green belt along one of the city's major six-lane highways. Jokingly known by Islamabad's car-owning middle-classes to be a 'five minutes' drive from Pakistan' (referring to Islamabad's proximity to the city of Rawalpindi), Islamabad is both celebrated and derided as the most 'un-Pakistani city' in the country for being orderly, clean, functional, and for its natural beauty (Harper, 2010). The quip about Islamabad being 'five minutes away from Pakistan' is a poignant symbol of the themes of purity and separation that prevail in the imaginations of the city's middle-class residents (ibid., p. 38)

Built in 1962, just 14 kilometres away from the city of Rawalpindi (which hosts the headquarters of the powerful Pakistan military), Islamabad was created as an alternative to the capital city at the time, Karachi, as the latter was deemed too congested and unfeasible to serve as the country's capital (Doxiadis, 1965, p. 5). Designed by Greek architect-planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis, Islamabad (which translates to 'the place where Islam lives') was envisioned as the "only truly Pakistani city" (Harper, 2010, p. 1), one that would be "created without any commitments to the past" (Doxiadis, 1965, p. 6). In practice, this meant erasing markers of the country's shared past with India, rather than attempting to create distance from its colonial past (Daechsel, 2015).

Since Islamabad was built from scratch, workers were required to build the city. These workers were largely brought in from Punjab's rural areas, including low-caste groups who would provide domestic and sanitation services to the new capital (Harper, 2010, p. 124). Contrary to Doxiadis's vision of initiating Islamabad's creation by "building for the builders" (Doxiadis, 1965, p. 17), these workers, as well as later waves of working-class migrants to the city, created *katchi abadis* (informal settlements) for themselves, since the city's provision of low-income housing was not just insufficient, it was also swiftly taken over by middle-class government employees, allotted by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) as compensation to owners of expropriated lands, or bought by elite and upper-middle-class groups who sought to take advantage of skyrocketing real estate prices during the 1980s (Harper, 2010, p. 130).

Later waves of working-class migrants to Islamabad consisted of various ethnic groups. One group was that of low-caste landless Punjabi and Saraiki migrants from villages in central and south Punjab leaving their home regions in search of livelihoods (Hasan, 2010). Another group was that of Pashtun migrants from the northwestern part of the country (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the

former-FATA regions) who were pushed out of their home regions due to state-sponsored 'Afghan jihad' in the 80s and then post-9/11, due to periodic (and ongoing) military operations by the Pakistan military as part of the 'War on Terror' (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021).

Commensurate with the ideals of 'separateness' and 'purity' that prevail in the imaginations of the city's elite and middle-class residents (Harper, 2010, p. 38), Islamabad is a distinct administrative entity called the Islamabad Capital Territory, which is at par with the provinces in administrative status. It has a separate quota for members of the National Assembly, its own budget, its own police, and its own institutions for health, education, and resource provision. The control centre of Islamabad, however, is not the parliament or the city's elected representatives, but rather the Capital Development Authority- more commonly known by its acronym, CDA.

The CDA was established in 1960, when Islamabad was little more than a map, as an administrative and judicial body with overarching powers to control the planning and development of the city (Hull, 2012). Matthew Hull's (2012) ethnography of the CDA gives a detailed account of how the CDA's elaborate production of documents- purportedly with the intent to create a modern, 'corruption-free' and legible system of urban planning and administration- served rather to create illegibility, facilitate false claims, and enable manipulation of records through a complex set of networks involving a variety of actors both within and outside the CDA bureaucracy.

Given the combination of the CDA's bureaucratic control and the elite/middle-class emphasis on 'separation' and 'purity' as the city's defining features (Harper, 2010), it should not come as a surprise that of all the administrative provinces/regions of the country, Islamabad has been the most reluctant to acknowledge the 'problem' of *katchi abadis*.[26] As already noted, *katchi abadis* have been a mainstay of Islamabad's landscape since the city's creation in the 1960s, housing the lowest-income groups (sanitation workers, domestic workers, manual labourers, as well as clerical workers employed in government offices) from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, and home to a relatively large working-class Christian population.[27] With the expansion of the city, particularly in recent decades, the number of *katchi abadis* has grown considerably and not

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[26] Unlike Islamabad, the provinces have established Katchi Abadi Authorities which, in Sindh and Punjab, have been moderately active in their efforts to recognise/regularise and upgrade a number of *katchi abadis* within their respective territories (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021, p. 1882). Islamabad, however, does not have a law or an equivalent 'authority' to deal with *katchi abadis*; all powers in this respect lie with individual high-level officials within the CDA. Formally, there is a weak, under-staffed, and impotent 'Katchi Abadi Cell' within the CDA's bureaucratic structure, which I know from my organising experience to be largely dysfunctional.

[27] A 2017 report by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) shows Christians to be over 5% of the urban population of Islamabad- higher than in any other administrative region of the country (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2017).

without the (albeit informal) involvement of CDA officials (Moatasim, 2023). As per its official stance in 2019- and in contravention to the federal government's National Housing Policy 2001- the CDA continues to only recognise 11 of at least 52 *katchi abadis* in the city (which it deems 'A-type' *katchi abadis*),[28] having set 1995 as its 'cut-off point' for the recognition of *katchi abadis* (Moatasim, 2023, p. 65). Despite the state's unsuccessful (and ongoing) attempt (initiated in 2001) to relocate five of the eleven recognised *katchi abadis* to the 'Model Urban Shelter Project' in Farash Town[29] (one of the field sites for this study, described in the next section), the CDA continues to prioritise relocation over regularisation or upgradation, so as to "eliminate security threats and shabby look (sic) to the capital".[30]

While the eleven 'recognised' *katchi abadis* do not face the constant threat of eviction (as do the 'illegal' ones which are categorized as 'C-type' *katchi abadis*) and many of them have finally been given electricity connections in recent years (Naqvi, 2022), they continue to face issues of overcrowding, selective demolitions of 'unauthorised' constructions, poor sewage and sanitation facilities, extortion of bribes by state officials, and dismal health and education facilities. The 'illegal' *katchi abadis*- which constitute the vast majority of Islamabad's informal settlements- are officially deemed 'encroachments' and perpetually vulnerable to forced, arbitrary demolition, despite a Supreme Court judgement in 2015 forbidding the CDA from demolishing *katchi abadis* without the court's permission (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021, p. 1872).[31] The 'illegal' *katchi abadis* do not have state-provided access to electricity, gas, water, sewage, sanitation, education, or health facilities since the city administration does not formally recognise their existence. Yet, as indicated earlier, all of the major *katchi abadis* in Islamabad were built, either directly or indirectly, with the knowledge and involvement of CDA officials (Moatasim, 2023, p. 3). Residents report paying off these officials on a regular basis, but without any formal record (Naqvi, 2022, p. 105).

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[28] Since the CDA does not recognise 'illegal' *katchi abadis*, there is no official data available on the number of *katchi abadis* in Islamabad. However, news reports from 2015 cite the total number of *katchi abadis* in Islamabad as 52 (S. I. Ahmed, 2015). This remains the latest available figure on the number of Islamabad's *katchi abadis* to date.

[29] Farash Town is a poorly-developed area on the outskirts of Islamabad which was slated out for the relocation of *katchi abadi* residents from five 'eligible' settlements- namely, I-9, I-10/4, I-11/1, I-11/4, and Muslim colony- in 2001 (Moatasim, 2023, pp. 43-46). At the time of relocation, Farash Town had no paved roads, no electricity, and no gas. To this day, it has not been provided with piped, potable water.

[30] http://www.cda.gov.pk/documents/publicnotices/475.pdf

[31] The Supreme Court judgement in this case, however, awarded protection from demolition only to *katchi abadis* that had built before 2015, irrespective of their legal status, and not to any subsequently emerging settlements. Moreover, the question of 'recognition' of *katchi abadis* is still a contentious one, since the CDA did not change its policy on recognising and/or regularising *katchi abadis* even after the 2015 Supreme Court judgement and continues to recognise only those *katchi abadis* that were built before 1995.

A number of Islamabad's *katchi abadis* are located in the city centre, built on narrow and low-lying strips of land along open drains and sewage lines, tucked into green belts, or (moving towards the outskirts of the city) along railway tracks or on other unoccupied plots of land. The crowded, irregular, and highly impoverished *katchi abadis* in the city centre are often separated by no more than a sliver of road or a stubby boundary wall from the spacious, orderly, and comfortable neighborhoods that constitute Islamabad's 'planned' sectors. This spatial proximity serves as a stark visual reminder of the deep inequalities between the lives of the city's privileged *kothi walas* (i.e. 'people of the *kothis*') and its working-class *basti walas* (i.e. 'people of the *bastis*').[32] While *kothi walas* frequently decry the 'rising crime' and 'immorality' in their neighborhoods (which they attribute directly to their proximity to the *bastis*) and use the state apparatus to register formal complaints against *basti walas* for 'antisocial' or 'criminal' behaviour (Moatasim, 2023, pp. 60-62), there is no corresponding record of the views and experiences of *basti walas* or investigation into the subjectivating impacts of this spatial proximity to material wealth and elite lifestyles on Islamabad's *basti* communities, a gap which this study aims to reduce.

Given that the demographic composition, histories, legal status, size, and locations of Islamabad's *bastis* vary considerably, my choice of field sites was a composite of various factors. One of these factors was my level of familiarity and prior experience with the *basti*. I chose sites where I had significant familiarity and recognition (as an AWP worker) as well as those where I had minimal or no engagement prior to the study. In the former instance, my familiarity enabled ease of access to participants and allowed me to build on existing relationships of trust and solidarity. In the latter instance (where I had little or no familiarity with the *basti* and its inhabitants), I had the opportunity to enter the field as an anonymous researcher with no prior history, the effects of which I was curious to explore and contrast with my experience in more familiar *bastis*.

Taking these considerations into account, fieldwork was conducted in six settlements spread across the city of Islamabad, as indicated in the previous section: the F-7/4 *basti*, the I-10/1 *basti*, the G-11/4 *basti*, the H-9 *basti*, Awami Basti, and Farash Town.[33] Three of these *bastis*- I-10, H-9,

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[32] The terms '*kothi wala*' and '*basti wala*' are common terms in interlocutors' vocabularies which are used to refer to class-differentiated 'types' of people, indicating the sharp stratifications of economic and social status that characterise social relations in the research setting.

[33] The grid-like names of many of these *bastis* (such as 'F-7', 'I-10', 'H-9', and 'G-11') are derived from the names of the city sector they are located in. However, many of the older and larger *bastis* also have parallel names, given to them by their residents (such as '100 quarter', residents' name for the F-6 *basti*; 'France Colony' for the F-7 *basti*, etc.). There are also spatial subdivisions within many of these *bastis* (particularly the larger ones), dubbed internally as 'colonies' with different names within the larger space of the *basti*.

and G-11- are 'C-type' *bastis*, i.e. marked by the CDA as 'illegal encroachments', and mostly located in the crevices of middle-class residential sectors on the peripheries of the city centre.[34] These 'C-type' *bastis* are poorer and more vulnerable to state violence (particularly to forced evictions) than the CDA-recognised 'A-type' *bastis* which have been granted legal status. The sizes of the three 'C-type' *basti*s chosen for this study vary considerably, with I-10 being the smallest (with 80-90 housing units) and H-9 the largest, with approximately 1,050-1,100 housing units (residents' figures).[35]

While the G-11 and I-10 *bastis* are tucked away in the crevices of formal residential sectors (in the green belt and along sewage lines of the G-11 and I-10 sectors respectively), Awami Basti (which translates to 'People's Basti'[36]) is a small and relatively recent settlement established in 2016 with roughly 15-20 housing units, located on the peripheries of a very dense, sprawling, low-income settlement known as Mehrabadi, which is itself the size of an entire residential sector. Mehrabadi's legal status is presently that of 'disputed territory' rather than that of a *katchi abadi*, since this land was leased to residents by private owners who are local 'chiefs' of the area but from whom the CDA claims to have acquired the land and now considers the settlement 'illegal' (Moatasim, 2023).[37] Mehrabadi was also the site to which many of the G-11 *basti* residents relocated after their *basti* was forcibly demolished in October 2021 (see Chapter 7 for details).

Like Mehrabadi, Farash Town is also not technically a *katchi abadi*. A low-income neighborhood located on Islamabad's eastern periphery, Farash Town is the CDA's flagship 'Model Urban Shelter Project', initiated in 2001 and to date the only resettlement scheme for Islamabad's *katchi abadi* residents- in which the CDA attempted (largely unsuccessfully) to resettle residents from five 'eligible' settlements- namely, I-9, I-10/4, I-11/1, I-11/4, and Muslim Colony (Yasmin, 2014, p. 19).

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[34] The H-9 *basti* is an exception here, as it is built on state land designated for offices of public-sector institutions, and not in a residential sector. The H-9 *basti* is presently the largest 'illegal' C-category Christian *basti* in the city.

[35] Since the state does not recognise the 'C- category' settlements except as 'encroachments', there are no official figures available for the number of residents in these *bastis*. Even the figures that are available, for the A-category 'recognised' *bastis*, are grossly inaccurate and outdated, see fn. 38 below).

[36] The Awami Basti got its name from the political affiliation of its founder, an AWP member, who bought a plot of land in the area, developed part of it as a farmhouse (for himself and family members), and used the remaining land to settle working-class families.

[37] Mehrabadi is home to a large number of ethnic, linguistic, class and caste groups, ranging from extremely poor scavenging communities who live in makeshift tents to those with low-paying but relatively secure forms of employment who live in built-up structures, have access to basic amenities, and pay rent. See also: https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/03/30/sector-g-12-capitals-no-go-area-for-cda-district-admin/?

At the time of relocation, Farash Town had no paved roads, no electricity, and no gas. To this day, it does not have piped, potable water.

I chose Farash Town as a field site because of the strength of my contacts there: I have worked with Farash Town residents, particularly with women there, as an AWP worker for many years prior to this study. I also chose this as a field site because it is home to domestic workers who are employed by middle-class and even lower-middle-class employers (mostly within Farash Town). I was curious as to how the subjectivities and experiences of these workers differ from those of domestic workers employed by rich employers in the city centre.

The only 'A-type' (i.e. legal, state-recognised) *basti* amongst my field sites was the F-7 *basti*, a predominantly Christian settlement (as is the H-9 *basti*), also known by residents as 'France Colony' due to its proximity to the French consulate in Islamabad's early days. It is amongst the oldest *katchi abadis* in the city and located in the heart of the F-7 sector, one of the city's most elite (and oldest) residential and commercial sectors. As with other 'A-type' *bastis*, the F-7 *basti* residents have been given official 'numbers' for their plots/homes along with usufruct rights (i.e. the right to occupy/use the land/property) but without proprietary rights (i.e. the right to buy or sell the land/property). The F-7 *basti* has state-sanctioned electricity, gas, and water connections and a significant presence of NGOs, religious and charity organisations who have helped to lay sewerage lines and set up schools and vocational centres in the *basti* over the years. I included the F-7 *basti* as a field site because of its relative security (in material as well as legal terms) which could serve as a point of comparison to the considerably more impoverished and precarious 'C-type' *bastis* and to settlements with ambiguous legal status. I also included the F-7 *basti* because of its location in the heart of the city centre, allowing me to explore the subjectivating impacts of spatial proximity to material wealth and elite lifestyles on the residents of this *basti*. Although the state's most recent (2019) figures put the number of housing units in the F-7 *basti* at 418 (and thus the number of residents at roughly 2000-2500), urban planners believe these numbers to be significantly lower than the actual number of residents.[38]

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[38] Scholars of housing policy suspect the CDA's figures related to the size/population of 'recognised' *katchi abadis* to be significantly under-estimated because providing accurate figures would compel the state to officially acknowledge and provide resources and housing rights to increased numbers of people living in these settlements (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021). At present, the CDA only recognises the numbers presented in its own survey from the year 2000 and insists that anyone who has come after this 'cut-off' point will not be accepted as a *katchi abadi* resident (and hence not be granted official access to electricity, water, gas, etc.).

1.6. Contributions of the Thesis

<u>Empirical contributions</u>

➢ *Contributions to scholarship on domestic workers and social reproduction*

Recent scholarship on domestic service is located in the frameworks of global care chains[39] transnationality and migration[40] and informality[41] and largely based in global North contexts. This study contributes to reducing the gap in scholarship in/from the global South (and from Pakistan in particular), exploring the multiple and contradictory ways in which dominant gender, class, and caste ideologies intersect in a context where domestic workers are internal- rather than transnational- migrants.

This study explores the dynamics of domestic service in a social context in which 'cultures of servitude' (Ray & Qayum, 2009) are normalised rather than an aberration from an 'egalitarian norm', as may be the case in the Global North. It is attentive to the particularities of domestic service (and those performing it) that arise from its historical connections to servitude,[42] and how the changing relations of domestic service in contemporary Pakistan are shaping the political subjectivities of those performing this labour, an under-researched theme in the literature on domestic service.

Like the domestic workers literature, much of the literature on social reproduction- particularly what has emerged in recent years as Social Reproduction Theory (SRT)- also focuses on the Global North, assumes formal/contractual wage-labour to be the norm, and reproduces the productive/reproductive binary (Mezzadri, 2019). Addressing the lack of attention in the SRT and domestic workers literature to political subjectivity, this study understands domestic workers as complex political subjects living multi-faceted lives and produces a study of the political subjectivities of those performing social-reproductive labour, both paid and unpaid, across multiple sites. It also brings into focus the prevalence of informal wage labour in the Global South

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[39] See Hochschild (2000/2015), Lutz (2002), Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck (2012), Nadasen (2017), Parreñas (2001), and Yeates (2004, 2009, 2012).

[40] See Bettio et al. (2006), Haile & Siegmann (2014), Lutz (2016), Parreñas (2001, 2014), an Rodríguez (2007).

[41] See Chen (2011), Gavanas (2013), Godin (2013), Rojas-García and Toledo González (2018), Triandafyllidou (2013), and Tsikata (2011).

[42] For an excellent compilation of detailed historical and historiographical investigations into forms and relations of servitude in India ranging from the early historical period to post-colonial India, see *'Servants' Pasts'* (2019) Vols. 1 & 2, by Sinha et al., (2019), and Sinha and Varma (2019). See also Sinha (2020).

and draws attention to domestic workers as one of the major groups performing informal labour in the global South (Mezzadri et al., 2022).

> *Contributions to Scholarship on Pakistan*

The academic literature on Pakistan is dominated by themes of Islam, the nation-state, and ethnic conflict, and in recent times, the agency of 'Muslim women', with a particular interest in the latter's participation in religious parties and organisations.[43] This thesis extracts the discussion on Pakistani women's agency from the religious/secular binary by refusing to position them as 'Muslim women' (which many of them are not in any case), and by demonstrating that domestic workers' particular deployments of religious discourse do not conform to the religious/secular binary, reclaiming the idea that political imaginations of subaltern working-class peoples in the 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan' can be articulated in non-religious terms.

Caste is virtually absent from scholarship on Pakistan despite the fact that it is critical to understanding the fabric of social inequality, class relations, and precarity, particularly in the Punjabi context.[44] In addition to supporting and extending the call to expand and deepen the scholarship on caste in Pakistan,[45] this study is attentive to how caste identities and practices intersect with class and gender in the experiences of Pakistani domestic workers, thereby contributing to the sparse scholarship in this area.

As noted earlier in this chapter, there is little scholarship on domestic service and domestic workers in Pakistan, and a particular dearth of embedded ethnographic work that documents the everyday lives and vocabularies of Pakistan's domestic workers. In addition to reducing this gap in the literature, this study revives a focus on Pakistan's subordinate classes, and in particular on the gender and caste dimensions of class formation, political subjectivity, and political action. Recent social-scientific scholarship on Pakistan has begun to document and analyse the changes taking place in Pakistan's social and economic structures, in particular the emergence of new

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[43] See Ahmad (2009), Bano (2019), Bano and Kalmbach (2012), Haq (2007), Iqtidar (2011), and Jamal (2013) for scholarship on Pakistani women's participation in Islamist parties and organisations.

[44] See early Punjabi village ethnographies by Ahmad (1970), Alavi (1972) and Eglar (1960), and contemporary scholarship by Martin (2016) and Khan Mohmand (2019) which picks up on these earlier themes. See also Gazdar (2007) and Gazdar and Mallah (2012) for a good introduction to the treatment- and denial- of caste in Pakistan. The theme of caste, its structuring role in Pakistani social relations, and its implications for those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy are discussed in Chapter 3.

[45] See W. H. Butt (2019), Channa (2015), Gazdar (2007), G. Hussain (2019, 2020), Patras (2023), Patras & Usman (2019), and Singha (2015) for examples of this scholarship.

'intermediate' classes, their social and political expressions and effects.[46] While this scholarship makes reference to the subordinate classes and their apparent 'consent' in reproducing and even deepening existing inequalities (Javed, 2018), there is little scholarship that focuses on the subordinate classes themselves and the material, social, and ideological shifts taking place amongst these classes, which forms one of the contributions of this study.

Conceptual contributions

By documenting the critical vocabularies, practices, and political imaginaries of Pakistani domestic workers, an under-researched and multiply marginalised group, this study contributes both to contemporary empirical and conceptual scholarship on the political subjectivities of subaltern groups in the global South.[47] It brings into view non-normative political subjects and provides an accounting of the political subjectivities of a highly marginal group that often misses political radars in both scholarship and organising. Moreover, it adds to urgently needed conceptual diversity through tracking the conceptual vocabularies deployed by marginal groups and produced outside the 'standard' conditions and regions from which intellectual production is generally understood to be taking place (Madhok, 2021).

Carrying forward the feminist struggle of challenging and transforming patriarchal knowledge production, this study contributes to gendering the literature on subaltern political subjectivation.[48] Highlighting and challenging the implicitly male political subject that informs even Left scholarship on political subjects and subjectivities within and beyond the Pakistan context, this study presents a view of Pakistan's domestic workers- otherwise considered peripheral or irrelevant to politics- as unambiguously *political* subjects who are active producers of structural critique, consciously navigating the opportunities and constraints that they encounter, and participating (selectively and within particular constraints) in acts of collective resistance both within and beyond the realm of organised politics. In doing so, this study

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[46] For examples of this scholarship, see Akhtar (2018, 2022), Amirali (2017, 2024), Jan (2017, 2020), Javed (2018), Mallick (2018, 2020), Maqsood (2014, 2017).
[47] For examples of this scholarship, see Bayat (2013, 2021), Chalcraft (2021b, 2021a), Doshi (2013), Edwards et al. (2024), Madhok (2018, 2022), Akhtar (2022), Kipfer and Mallick (2022), Mallick (2020a) and Persram (2011).
[48] See Bannerji (2000), Jan and Malik (2022), Madhok (2018), Spivak (1988), and Morris (2010).

challenges and expands the androcentric frame through which subaltern subjectivities are viewed in Pakistani-Marxist scholarship.[49]

And finally, taking into account the pervasive expectations from low-caste working-class Pakistani women to be selfless, diligent, persevering, patient and sacrificing without desires of their own, this thesis makes a case for understanding domestic workers as *desiring subjects*. In doing so, it brings together and puts into conversation otherwise disparate literatures on social reproduction, subalternity, political subjectivation, class, and desire, arguing that this engagement is necessary for the production of a *humanising* account of these otherwise dehumanised subjects, which requires understanding them as subjects who not only think and act but also *feel* and *want*.

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[49] For examples of this scholarship, see Akhtar (2011, 2018), Azeem (2020), Javed (2018), Mallick (2017, 2020), and Rahman (2012).

<u>Methodological contributions</u>

Researching political subjectivity and subjectivation has largely been a theoretical/abstract exercise, practiced in the domains of critical, poststructuralist, and feminist political theory, and located mostly in the Global North.[50] This study explicitly aims to *ground* the study of political subjectivity (and to gender it, as previously stated); it explores processes of becoming within the lived, everyday material and ideational contexts of my research subjects, and shifts the sites and subjects of these investigations to a group of gendered subalterns in the Global South and to the *bastis* where they live.

Learning from and building on the rich scholarship on feminist research practice, this study produces a reflexive, located, and contextual account of domestic workers' subjectivities and subjectivation.[51] In doing so, it remains attentive not just to the *contents* of interlocutors' narratives but also to the *multiple spatial and relational contexts* in which these narratives- and their respective emphases, silences, and surprises- are produced, enacting the commitment to generate theory that is firmly connected to the empirics that enable its construction (Charmaz, 2012).

And finally, I undertake this study with a keen awareness of my privilege in relation to my research subjects and the ease of replicating the colonial gaze in the process of producing an account of subaltern 'others' (Mohanty, 1988; Ram, 2018; Smith, 2021). Understanding the process of knowledge production as relational and intersubjective (Hemmings, 2012, p. 151), I produce an account of my own subjectivation alongside that of my interlocutors, acknowledging the "messiness, contradictions, and complexities of embedded, politically-motivated and personally-invested research" and embracing these as enriching, even necessary, for "generating social observations that resonate with the complexity of human experience" (O'Brien, 2009, p. 16).

1.7. Structure of the Thesis and Chapter Outlines

Following this chapter, in Chapter 2 of this thesis, *Theorising Without Parachutes: Subjectivation, Subalternity, and Desire*, I assemble a conceptual framework for researching the political

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[50] See Biehl et al., (2007), Brown (2015), Butler (1997), Foucault (1988), Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008), Howarth et al. (2000), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985).
[51] See Alcoff and Potter (1992), Chapkis (2010), Fernández et al. (2020), Gonzalez-Lopez (2006), Hemmings (2012), Madhok (2020), O'Brien (2010), and Smith (2021).

subjectivation of Islamabad's domestic workers. I begin by engaging with scholarship on political subjects, subjectivity, and subjectivation, clarifying how I understand and deploy these terms in this thesis. I then explore possibilities for conceptualising political subjectivation beyond the realm of political action by drawing on two sets of scholarship on the everyday: one is Marxist scholarship on class formation and resistance 'from below', for which I draw specifically on E.P. Thompson (1968/1972, 1978a, 1978b) and James Scott (1987, 1990) respectively. From there, I turn to social reproduction theory to theorise my interlocutors' location as informal, devalued, gendered workers engaged in social-reproductive labour across the sites of home and workplace. Next, I turn to Subaltern Studies to specify how and why I employ the term 'subaltern' in this thesis and discuss the implications their subaltern status has for researching their political subjectivities and subjectivation. Finding inadequate resources within the subaltern studies literature to theorise domestic workers as *gendered* subjects, I turn to feminist scholarship that is specifically engaged in gendering the study of subaltern political subjectivation. In the final section of the chapter, I make a case for understanding domestic workers as desiring subjects, drawing on a variety of literatures to theorise desire and underscoring its centrality to an understanding of domestic workers' political subjectivities.

Chapter 3, *Contextualising Domestic Service in Pakistan*, lays out the historical, social, and economic contexts in which this study is located. Extending the arguments made in Chapter 1 regarding the invisibility of domestic service in general, this chapter describes the particular invisibility of domestic service and the workers who perform it in the Pakistan context. It does so by detailing the colonial, class, caste, and gender dimensions of domestic service in Pakistan, historicising the occupation in the Pakistani/South Asian context, and arguing for greater scholarly attention to conceptualising and researching caste in the Pakistan context. The chapter goes on to demonstrate the invisibility of domestic service in accounts of Pakistan's political economy, discussing women's labour force participation and showing how the institutional infrastructure of data collection on women's work invisibilises women's labouring practices.

Building on the theoretical and contextual ground laid in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, Chapter 4, *Research Methodology*, discusses how the research for this study was carried out, describing the epistemological, methodological, and ethical choices made in the preparatory, fieldwork, and writing stages of the project. I begin by describing my 'context of discovery' (Swedberg, 2012), making visible how my organising experience informs various aspects of this research project (including the research questions, methodological choices, and field relationships). I then explain

my choice of ethnography as my primary methodological framework and follow this up by laying out how I operationalise the study of political subjectivation in my research setting. This is followed by a description of my research methods, linking my methodological choices to my positionality as a political organiser with the Awami Workers Party (AWP)[52] and as a person with considerable privilege in relation to my research subjects, reflecting on how my positionality informs the research process and creates particular possibilities and constraints. I then describe the impacts of the G-11 *basti* demolition on the research process and discuss methodological dilemmas and tensions that arose as a result, as well as the ways in which I attempted to resolve them. The final sections of this chapter discuss my concerns and practices regarding translation and representation in the context of researching this particular group of gendered subaltern subjects.

The four chapters that follow present the ethnographic material and analytical arguments of this thesis. Chapter 5, *In the Kothi: Workplace Narratives, Experiences and Strategies*, explores domestic workers' experiences in the workplace, their relations with employers, the strategies they employ to respond to indignities in the workplace and how these reflect and inform their political subjectivities and subjectivation. It begins by exploring '*majboori*' as the term used by domestic workers to explain why they entered domestic service, highlighting the complex interplay between agency and subjection in oppressive contexts. The chapter then brings out common themes in domestic workers' narratives about their workplace experiences and relations with employers, sharing paradigmatic instances of class- and status-based 'othering' that characterise domestic service relations in the research setting. It describes the differentiated and asymmetrical entitlements between employers and workers, showing these to be markers of compounded forms of inequality that also inform domestic workers' everyday lives outside the workplace. After describing their workplace experiences, the chapter focuses on how domestic workers respond to these experiences in different ways, sometimes challenging, at other times reinforcing structural asymmetries. The final section of the chapter explores the 'weapons of the

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[52] The Awami Workers Party, formed in 2012, is a Left political party in Pakistan and the product of a merger between various smaller Left groups and parties. In Islamabad, where I am based, the AWP has worked with *katchi abadi* dwellers for over a decade to resist forced evictions, secure housing rights, and support *katchi abadi* dwellers in obtaining access to public resources and civic amenities. Before the formation of the AWP, I was involved with organising work in the *bastis* under the platform of the People's Rights Movement, which merged with other Left organisations to form the AWP in 2012.

weak' (Scott, 1987) deployed by domestic workers in the workplace, including a discussion of their offstage strategies, to resist indignities in the workplace.

Chapter 6, *The Vocabularies of Those Who 'Cannot Speak': Invocations of 'Allah', 'Ghareeb', and 'Insan'* extends and deepens the exploration of domestic workers' subjectivities by focusing on the critical vocabularies they use to describe and critique their worlds and experiences within and beyond the site of the *kothi*. Employing E. P. Thompson's (1986) understanding of class as experience, the chapter explores how the persistent sense of 'us and them' in domestic workers' narratives is articulated through deployments of three particular terms: '*Allah*' (God), '*ghareeb*' (poor) and '*insan*' (human). Understanding religious discourse as a form of social capital deployed by these marginal subjects, the chapter explores how invocations of Allah serve as a form of social critique (of the dominant classes in particular), as a means of establishing group worth/identity, and as a mode of self-fashioning and meaning-making. The chapter then moves to exploring the apparently ambivalent (and concurrent) justifications for—and challenges to— class inequality articulated and enacted by domestic workers in 'offstage' performances (i.e. in the absence of their employers), arguing for maintaining the (albeit tenuous) distinction between *acceptance* and *internalisation* of inequality. The final sections of this chapter explore domestic workers' claims to being human— "*hum bhi insan hain*", "we are human too"— drawing out the specific meanings they attribute to the term '*insan*' (human) and elaborating on the ways that this phrase functions as a claim for recognition as dignified, labouring, and affective beings.

Chapter 7, *Demolitions as Everyday: Forced Evictions, Collective Action, and Political Subjectivation in Islamabad's Bastis*, explores how the political subjectivities of Islamabad's domestic workers are shaped by the threat and/or experience of forced evictions from their *bastis* and by their participation in collective political action to resist these evictions. In doing so, it centres the inhabitants of the G-11 *basti*, one of the field sites for this study which was brutally demolished by the CDA during the fieldwork period. In tracking the subjectivating effects of the demolition on the G-11 *basti walas*, the chapter pays attention to their gendered claim-makings and practical strategies, to shifts in the community's internal social relations, and to this community's relationship to the Awami Workers Party (AWP) which supported them during the demolition. The chapter also explores the subjectivating effects of the G-11 *basti* demolition on residents of the H-9 *basti* which was also faced with a threat of eviction some months after the G-11 demolition. The final sections of this chapter explore the *basti walas*' participation in political

actions to resist impending and/or ongoing evictions, and discusses the meanings and motivations ascribed by interlocutors to their participation in these mobilisations.

The final analytical chapter (Chapter 8), *A Desire for 'Something Else'*, explores the intimate lives of domestic workers, focusing on their experiences in their homes, as wives and family members, understanding these experiences as integral to their political subjectivation. It explores interlocutors' ambivalent relationship to presenting and recognising themselves as desiring subjects, arguing that this ambivalence is rooted in the gendered unfreedoms of everyday life for these subjects. Building on the conceptualisation of desire (elaborated in Chapter 2) both as a *force* and an *orientation* towards the future, this chapter charts how different subjects navigate the terrain of desire, arguing that desire brings forth the most courageous, animated, as well as pained versions of my interlocutors' selves. Demonstrating the intimate links between rupture and desire in interlocutors' narratives, the chapter insists on the transformative potential of desire, particularly for gendered subalterns. It also argues that recognising domestic workers as desiring subjects is necessary in order to give an account—as per these subjects' own demand, "*hum bhi insan hain*"—of them as fully *human* political subjects.

The Conclusion summarises the findings of this study, reflects on their limitations and surprises, identifies where and how these findings contribute to existing knowledge on the subject, and discusses their implications for future research and political practice.

Chapter 2

Theorising 'without Parachutes': Subjectivation, Subalternity, and Desire

This thesis seeks to theorise, conceptualise, and describe how Islamabad's part-time/live-out domestic workers' everyday experiences of multiple structural inequalities in and across the sites of the *kothi*, the *basti*, and the home shape them as political subjects. It does so by exploring how this group of domestic workers navigate and narrate their everyday experiences, tracking the conceptual vocabularies used by them to describe and critique their world(s) and recording moments of 'affective dissonance'[53] occurring in the field. Using my interlocutors' everyday experiences and conceptual vocabularies as the starting point for engaging with 'theory' (Smith, 1990; Bannerji, 2020), I understand ethnographic concepts as themselves 'theoretical'.

As discussed at greater length in the Research Methodology chapter, I take a 'grounded theory' approach in this thesis, employing ethnography as my primary method and using 'grounded theory' to name my approach to analysis and theorising.[54] I began the 'theorising' process by first reading/listening deeply, carefully, reflexively, and in the initial instance, *only*, to my interlocutors' accounts and my accounts of them, remaining attentive to the patterns and contexts of the use of these vocabularies and to the range of meaning they may carry. It is through this process that many of the theoretical domains, dilemmas, and concerns discussed in this chapter emerged.

The non-Anglophone multi-lingual research setting of this project brings to the fore the theoretical and political import of translation (see Research Methodology chapter for details). In translating my interlocutors' vocabularies, which are particular *conceptual* formations that serve as the scaffolding for the elaboration of structural critique produced by these subjects, I am also engaged in a process of theorising. Accepting the constant struggle with inadequacy and self-doubt as part of the process of 'theorising without parachutes'[55] (Dinerstein, 2016), I endeavour to venture from engagement *with* theory towards *producing* theory, refusing the safety of

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[53] See fn. 22 for an explanation of the term.

[54] I use the term 'grounded theory' to refer to a methodological and epistemological choice to retain the commitment to close, careful observation and empirical data collection; to acknowledge and consciously enact the connections between the processes of data 'collection', description, and analysis; and to conduct research with the purpose of generating theory that is firmly connected to the empirics that enable its construction. See Charmaz (2012) for a detailed account of the trajectory of grounded theory since its inception in the 1960s.

[55] As articulated by Dinerstein (2016), "Theorising without parachutes means to engage with traditions and existing radical thought such as anarchism, Marxism, Feminism, but such that we are not protected by their established frameworks of analysis. […] 'Without parachutes' means uncertainty and ambivalence in the practice of theorising" (p. x)

locating myself within a single theoretical tradition or the ease of imposing a singular apriori 'theoretical framework' onto my subjects' accounts. Though the audience for my interlocutors' critiques is not a specifically academic one, their critiques have much to say to 'theory' in the academic realm, as I hope to show in this thesis. In this sense, I understand translation as theorisation, and this theorisation as necessary for anti-imperialist scholarly practice (Butler, 2020, p. 976).

Having described my approach to theory and theorising, this chapter proceeds to assemble a theoretical framework that enables an accounting of my interlocutors' political subjectivation in their particular material and social contexts while remaining alert to the complexity of their subaltern status. I follow this up by identifying and discussing the literatures that each provide parts of the required theoretical and conceptual apparatus, taking up, adapting, extending, and assembling these parts into an interconnected whole.

As discussed in the previous chapter, whether in the realm of scholarship, policy, or political practice, domestic workers are rarely seen as *political subjects*. To theorise this particular group of domestic workers as political subjects requires, in the first instance, an extension of 'the political' beyond the realm (and indeed, the demand) of political action (by which, as stated above, I mean collective, public mobilizations serving as explicit expressions of resistance). Moreover, an understanding of these women as political subjects requires an engagement with their *everyday* individual and collective experiences, practices, and expressions. The canvas of the 'everyday' in the case of these domestic workers includes not just workplace experiences but also the everyday possibility of forced eviction from the *basti* (see Chapter 7) and their everyday lives as women in the intimate sphere of the *basti* home (see Chapter 8).

Secondly, an accounting of the political subjectivities of this group requires attentiveness to their constitution as gendered subaltern subjects, who, despite their vast numbers and their indispensability to the reproduction of all facets of the city's everyday life, continue to be invisibilised (in both state and Left discourses) not only as workers, but also as citizens, city residents, women, and working-class subjects. Attending to this invisibilisation requires centering them as dignified workers (as already stated), but also centering them, alongside working-class men, as working-class political subjects. It requires seeing them as '*basti walas*'- the people of the *bastis*- just as much as, and also differently from, men in these *bastis* in a way that accounts for their lives, subjectivities and actions without flattening the complex

hierarchical social landscape in which these are embedded. Most importantly, it requires being attentive to their narratives, self-fashionings and claim-makings as workers, as women, as citizens, as city residents, and as human beings.

And finally, in order to understand what is considered ruptural or extraordinary by these subjects and what, in contrast, is considered 'everyday', as well as to understand this group of gendered subalterns as fully *human* political subjects- a demand made by these subjects themselves (see Chapter 6)- they must be seen as *desiring subjects*. Desiring is prohibited for these subjects on account of both their class and gender locations and intertwined with a denial of selfhood; conversely, as Chapter 8 demonstrates, their assertions of self are also often accompanied by expressions of desire. The humanisation of this group of subaltern political subjects therefore requires understanding them as both agentic *and* affective subjects.

In order to think about political subjectivation in the ways laid out above, I draw on and bring together a number of distinct yet related sets of scholarship, each of which provide essential parts of the theoretical apparatus required to address the central question and aims of this thesis. The first set of scholarship theorises political subjects, subjectivities, and subjectivation, enabling me to clarify how I understand and deploy these terms in this thesis. In order to specifically explore political subjectivation beyond the realm of political action, I draw next on two distinct sets of scholarship on the everyday: namely, scholarship on everyday politics, resistance, and class formation, followed by social reproduction theory, which I use to theorise my interlocutors' location as informal, devalued, gendered workers engaged in social-reproductive labour across the sites of home and workplace. While providing important resources for conceptualising the everyday politics and lives of domestic workers, these literatures do not sufficiently attend to the complexity of domestic workers' status as gendered subalterns, for which I turn to a third set of literatures: namely, Subaltern Studies and feminist scholarship that is specifically engaged in gendering the study of subaltern political subjectivation. The fourth and final set of literatures I draw on to assemble my theoretical framework pertains to desire, since the scholarship on subalternity and political subjectivation does not offer sufficient resources to conceptualise domestic workers as *desiring* subjects who- as per interlocutors' own conceptualisation of '*insan*' (the Urdu term for 'human')- not only think and act, but also *feel* and *want*.[56]

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[56] See Chapter 7 for an elaboration of interlocutors' use of the term '*insan*' and their claims/demands in this regard.

2.1. Political subjects, subjectivity, and subjectivation

The genealogy of the term 'subject' as it has come to be used in political theory and philosophy encapsulates the complexities that continue to animate much of the scholarship on political subjects and subjectivation. Etienne Balibar (1994) frames it as a paradox: "Why is it that the very name which allows modern philosophy to think […] the originary freedom of the human being—the name of 'subject'—is precisely the name which has historically meant suppression of freedom, or at least an intrinsic limitation of freedom, i.e. subjection?" (p.8). For on the one hand, as feminist theorists have comprehensively shown, the term 'subject' has been used in political philosophy in deeply patriarchal and dualistic terms to contrast the white, male 'knower-subject' with the lifeless, non-human, context-independent 'known-object' that can be understood, measured and verified by the 'knower' and the features of which are typically defined in opposition to the 'natural' cognitive, affective, and physical capacities of the subject.[57] On the other hand, the term 'subject' has been used in political theory, particularly in feminist and anticolonial scholarship, to call for an acknowledgement of oppressed/marginalised groups as 'authors of their own history', to whom a 'consciousness can be attributed' (Guha, 1983, p.4), and a recognition of their agency, knowledge, and experiences. The term 'subject' has also been used, notably in the work of Mahmood Mamdani and Etienne Balibar, to contrast the subjugated/governed racialised colonial subject with the autonomous, self-governing, rights-bearing 'citizen' of the liberal-democratic postcolonial state, drawing attention to the umbilical relationship between 'subject' and 'subjection'.[58]

While the study of subjectivity- or what was more commonly termed 'consciousness' in 20th century Marxist and feminist literature- has a long and complex genealogy, the term 'subjectivity' itself and its emergence as an area of academic inquiry has a much more recent and particular post-1960s historical context. The study of subjectivity is embedded in Global North academics' rejection of what came to be called 'economistic or reductive Marxism' in the wake of the global pushback against Communism at the time (Blackman et.al, 2008, p.2). The increased academic interest in subjectivity came in tandem with the rise of Cultural Studies, an academic field which

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[57] For feminist scholarship challenging the dominant subject/object and subjectivity/objectivity paradigms, see Alcoff and Potter (1992), Brennan (1997), Haraway (1988), Hartsock (1998, 2005), Keller (1985), Merchant (1982), Mohanty (1991), and Spivak (1987).
[58] Influential scholarship on the citizen-subject distinction includes the works of Hannah Arendt (1958), Etienne Balibar (1994, 2017), Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 2020), and Jacques Rancière (2004) among others.

traces its intellectual origins to Communist revolutionaries like Antonio Gramsci but has had a contentious relationship with Marxism (ibid.)

The literature on political subjectivity spans multiple disciplinary and theoretical contexts.[59] I draw on this literature to understand subjectivity as *embedded* in experience that takes place in particular material, historical, social, and political contexts, and in *dialectical* relationship with material conditions (McNally, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017; Banerjee, 2005). As Marx (1952) famously said, "Men (*sic*) make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." Following Marx, I understand subjectivity as *historical*, i.e. as fluid, changing, embedded in, and shaped- though not 'determined' by- a given historical context; as exhibiting both continuity and change, and involving both coercion and consent.[60]

Given that this is an ethnographic study, I find it useful to draw on anthropological understandings of subjectivity. According to Luhrmann (2005, p. 345):

> 'Subjectivity' is a term loosely used by anthropologists to refer to the shared inner life of the subject, to the way subjects feel, respond, experience. 'We think about subjectivities as actors' thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their sense of self and self-world relations' (citing Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 127)

Luhrmann goes on to emphasise the importance of emotions/feeling in understandings of subjectivity and characterises subjectivity specifically as "the *emotional* experience of a *political* subject, the subject caught up in a world of violence, state authority and pain, the subject's distress under the authority of another" (p. 346, emphases in original). Luhrmann's understanding of subjectivity as embodied, cognitive, and affective aligns well with the conceptualisation of political subjectivity and subjectivation I employ in this thesis.

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[59] Political subjectivity has been of interest to anthropology (Biehl et al., 2007; Das, 2008; Das & Das, 2007; Luhrmann, 2006; Scheper-Hughes, 1992), feminist theory (Butler, 1993, 1997; Mahmood, 2005; McNay, 1992; Sawicki, 1991), critical theory (Brown, 2015; Hall, 2004; Lazzarato, 1994), psychoanalysis and post-structuralism (Foucault, 1979, 1998; Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008; Howarth et al., 2000; Lacan, 2001; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), labour studies (Dinerstein & Neary, 2002; Dinerstein, 2014; Rikowski, 2002; Taylor, 2002), subaltern studies (Chakrabarty, 2008; Parry, 2012; Persram, 2011; T. Roy, 2002; Spivak, 1988), and Marxist theory (Fanon, 1952/1967; Gramsci, 1971/2001; Jameson, 1981; Modonesi, 2014).

[60] Marx's phrase quoted above also suggests the entanglement of subjectivity with agency. Sherry Ortner (2005) for instance, sees subjectivity "as the basis of "agency", a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon" (2005, p. 34). This is in turn tied to the discussion of the relationship between subjectivity and subjection, discussed later in this chapter.

The particular elements of political subjectivity that I explore in my research include the vocabularies, 'onstage' and 'offstage' practices (Scott, 1990),[61] claim-makings, and self-fashionings[62] of my interlocutors (see Chapters 5 to 8). I have chosen this particular arrangement of elements so as to address the 'action bias' in most conceptions of agency (Madhok, 2013a) while also catering to the wide range of spatial and relational contexts inhabited by these subjects. Interlocutors' dynamic and complex deployments of conceptual vocabularies such as *insan* (human), *ghareeb* (poor), *majboori* (compulsion) and *mohtaaji* (dependence) among others, discussed at length in later chapters, offer important insights into the processes of political subjectivation beyond the realm of political action for this group of subaltern subjects.

Implicit in the contemporary use of the concept of subjectivity is its association with the individual, viewing the individual as a discrete/independent and primary unit of analysis (Biehl et al., 2007, p. 6). In contrast to the earlier intertwinement of a Marxist critique of political economy with a theory of revolutionary *class* subjectivity, in recent years (with the influence of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought) there has been a deconstruction of the very idea of a unitary subject, or of a coherent self (Frank, 2006, p. 282). For poststructuralist thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze (1962/2006, 1966/1988), Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2013), Jacques Derrida (1972/1982, 1967/1979) and Michel Foucault (1969/2002, 1976/1998), the critique of the subject is embedded in their larger critique of (post)-Enlightenment thinking, their work showing how individuals are formed into apparently coherent subjects through discursive and institutional processes. (Callinicos et al., 2021, p. 14). This has brought into question whether the "very idea of class subjectivity, of economic antagonisms acting as the basis of collective political action, [was] always a mistake" (ibid. p. 20), a matter that continues to engender considerable disagreement and debate, particularly between Marxists and post-Marxists.[63]

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[61] The terms 'onstage' and 'offstage' are part of James Scott's conceptual framework for understanding relations of domination developed in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), referencing how the presence and absence (respectively) of the dominant influences the strategies and subjectivities of the subordinate. A detailed discussion of Scott's conceptual framework takes place later in the chapter, see p. 53.

[62] I follow Foucault (1988) in understanding 'self-fashioning' as a deployment of "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (p. 18) in ways that can 'push the limits that are imposed on us' and experiment on 'the possibility to go beyond them' (Aryal, 2020, p. 71).

[63] The term "post-Marxism" first appeared in Ernest Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's (1985) work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and is itself defined in diverse ways as 'poststructuralist Marxism' (Goldstein, 2005), a 'radical reworking of Marxism' (Oxford Reference, n.d.), and as a move from 'critical Marxism' to a 'critique of Marxism' (Arditi, 2007, p. 205). I follow Callinicos et. al. (2021) in using the term to refer to a body of literature that emerged in the 1980s "to pursue questions in part inherited from Marxism in a theoretical and political framework that is itself influenced by Marxism but seeks to go decisively beyond it" (p. 1). Critics such as

This thesis seeks to intervene in these debates about class subjectivity. Drawing on E. P. Thompson's conceptualisation of class as experience discussed later in this chapter (Thompson, 1968; 1978b), it demonstrates the centrality of class to the everyday lives and political subjectivation of Islamabad's domestic workers (see Chapters 5 to 8). It also argues, however, that class subjectivity is not always or exclusively expressed in class terms and understands interlocutors' dynamic use of religious discourse (particularly their invocations of Allah, or God, detailed in Chapter 6) as illustrative of their complex political subjectivation as agentic yet ambivalent classed and gendered subjects.

In this thesis, I understand political subjects and subjectivities as both collective and individual. I am unwilling to replicate the neoliberal emphasis on the atomised individual or to sacrifice the individual at the altar of the 'greater, collective good' particularly in the case of subaltern subjects, for whom, as later chapters show, the very inhabitation of an autonomous 'self' is denied and prohibited (Bannerji, 2000, p. 911). As expressed by Judith Butler (2001), I think we can speak of our 'fundamental sociality' while acknowledging that there is an 'irreducibility' to each of our beings (p. 25).

To underscore these connections, I follow scholars such as Sumi Madhok (2013), Clare Hemmings (2011) and Biehl et.al (2007) who are attentive to the dialectical relationship between 'self' and 'other', between subjectivity and the material contexts of its emergence. Rejecting conceptions of subjectivity that treat it as a form of 'essentialised interiority', various scholars agree on the fluid and reflexive character of subjectivity,[64] as well as its performed and/or performative nature (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1958).[65] Keen to steer clear of both biological and discursive determinisms, I follow Kleinman and Fitz-Henry (2007) in understanding subjectivity as "certainly

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Gregor McLennan (1996) observe that much of the post-Marxist literature focuses on Marxism's alleged 'reductionism', 'functionalism', 'essentialism', and 'universalism' than on the denial of particular historical materialist postulates, such as the systematically capitalist nature of the modern industrial order (p. 54). Despite their apparent tension and even antagonism, the lines between Marxist and post-Marxist strands of thought are not always straightforward, not least because few scholars (other than Laclau and Mouffe) self-identify as 'post-Marxist' (Callinicos et al., 2021, p. 18).

[64] See Madhok (2013b), Blackman et al. (2008), Biehl et. al. (2007), Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008), and Laclau & Mouffe (1985).

[65] I draw here on Ylivuori's (2022) argument for considering the synergies between the works of Erving Goffman and Judith Butler on the relationship between performance, subjectivity, and identity, rather than continuing to see the concepts of 'performance' and 'performativity' attributed to Goffman and Butler respectively as entirely different or opposed, as has hitherto been the case. The argument for combining the two approaches is that doing so enables an understanding of identity performances as both 'agency-providing' and 'normativity producing', which I find useful for an analysis of my interlocutors' performances and self-fashionings.

hav[ing] a biology, but also, and perhaps more critically, hav[ing] an equally influential history, cultural specificity, political location, and economic position" (p. 53).

Both Marxists and poststructuralists agree that the coming-to-be of subjects and subjectivities is fundamentally tied to processes of subjection- in the case of poststructuralists, to power/discourse, and in the case of Marxists, to historical-material conditions. Yet, as Biehl. et al. (2007) point out, "Subjectivity is not just the outcome of social control or the unconscious; it also provides the ground for subjects to think through their circumstances and to feel through their contradictions, and in so doing, to inwardly endure experiences that would otherwise be outwardly unbearable" (p. 14). This intervention is key to my argument, as it provides the grounds for exploring political subjectivities beyond explicit acts of resistance, through speech practices (such as the invocation of *insan*, *ghareeb*, and *Allah*, see Chapter 6) and a variety of self-fashionings described in later chapters.

The relationship between a subject's structural location, 'subject position', and subjectivity remains a significant disagreement between Marxist and post-Marxist scholars. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) in their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* present a theory of discourse that "breaks from the assumption of social groups as natural kinds with necessary forms of political representation, allowing for the possibility of arbitrary relations between political identities and social locations" (Boucher, 2021, p. 369). In other words, for Laclau and Mouffe, the identities of groups consist in their social *practices*, which in turn constitute their subject *positions*. Further, political subjects are no longer classes but social alliances, and politics is agonistic contestation, rather than redistribution or reconciliation (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 67).[66] Similarly, for members of the post-Marxist Essex School of Discourse Analysis, a body of scholarship which was founded on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, "political identities emerge from political practice(s), not structural location; and emerge through *processes* of identification" (Howarth, 2018, p. 384, emphasis in original). Political subjectivity, for Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008), is linked specifically to "the moment in which a social identity is disrupted and contested, thus enabling subjects to engage in acts of renewed identification" (p. 264).

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[66] Agonistic conceptions of politics- derived from the Greek work *agon*, meaning struggle- have been used by a number of contemporary political theorists (including Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Chantal Mouffe, David Owen, and Jacques Rancière) in response to theories of deliberative democracy, to emphasise the centrality of conflict and contestation to democratic politics. For Mouffe, agonism serves to defuse potential antagonisms by providing an outlet for political participation, thereby guarding against political extremism (Schaap, 2016, p. 13).

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and subsequent post-Marxist theorisations of subjectivity have come in from strong criticism from a number of Marxist scholars.[67] Uwe Becker (1989) observes that, for post-Marxists, political subjectivity is not connected to class position or structure but emerges from the "production of meaning"; class is just 'one element' and nothing can be predicted about its relevance [to political subjectivity]" (pp. 71-2). Becker (1989) finds Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of subjectivity- which echoes the post-Marxist position more broadly- to have "exchange[d] one extreme (economism and essentialism) for another (relativism and subjectivism)" (p. 72).

While I agree with Becker's criticism, I also agree with the need to distinguish between structural location and subjectivity, as post-Marxists tend to emphasise. However, I do not think this distinction is exclusively post-Marxist. As Akhtar (2008) reminds us: "Gramsci, Mao and others had insisted much earlier that there was an urgent need to consider matters of consciousness and political action *in their own right* rather than assuming in rather teleological fashion that material development would necessarily lead to corresponding forms of politics" (p. 10, emphasis mine). What I find troubling about the post-Marxist position is the decoupling and disconnection of subjectivity from structure and the conflation of an acknowledgement of class position or structural location with 'class reductionism' (see Howarth, 2018). As Laclau (1990) puts it: "It is the failure of structures to provide stable points from which to speak or act that opens the space for a more radical form of subjectivity in which agents or actors are literally 'compelled' to be free and identify with new possibilities" (pp. 60–64, cited in Howarth, 2018, p. 385). This framing in fact acknowledges structures, albeit by underscoring the 'lack' within them and emphasising "the void or undecidability at the heart of any social order" (Howarth, 2018, p. 384). While I recognise and appreciate the liberatory potential of undecidability and contingency in this conceptualisation (and in post-Marxist thought more generally), I find that its repeated and exclusive emphasis on these elements as the core features of (radical) political subjectivity prevents it from seeing that political subjects are embedded in real, historical, and material social relations and conditions which profoundly shape (without determining) the nature and forms of agency available to and deployed by them in different contexts. As a result, this conceptualisation of subjectivity is also inattentive to the need for conceptions of agency and subjectivation to shift to take into account

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[67] See Callinicos (1985), Foster and Wood (1997), Geras (1990), McLennan (1996), Palmer (1990), and Wood (1998).

manifestly oppressive contexts –mostly formerly colonised societies– that comprise 'most of the world' (Madhok, 2018).

To conclude this section, I undertake a brief discussion of the term 'subjectivation', understood here as the 'coming-to-be' of the subject and the process of acquiring a particular subjectivity. Like subjects and subjectivity, subjectivation has been widely theorised within contemporary political theory.[68] To understand subjectivation, I draw both on the work of postfoundational[69] theorist, Jacques Rancière (1992, 2015) and on the Gramscian scholar, Massimo Modonesi (2014), each of which bring forth distinct elements of subjectivation that I find useful for my study.

Before coming to Rancière's understanding of political subjectivation, I first discuss the conception of politics that underpins it. To describe Rancière's conception of politics, I find it useful to begin with his distinction between the 'police'- a reference to political order and its maintenance- and 'politics' which is about challenging 'the natural order of domination' whereby the poor 'interrupt' the political order that the rich have instituted (Rancière, 1995, p. 31, 56, cited in Brunila, 2022, p. 5). For Rancière (2015), "the essence of politics resides in the modes of dissensual subjectification that reveal the difference of a society to itself" (p. 42) and for whom "politics has no 'proper' place nor does it possess any 'natural' subjects" (p. 39). In his *Ten Theses on Politics*, Rancière describes political struggle as:

> […] an <u>opposition of logics</u> that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways…. There are two ways of counting the parts of the community: The first only counts empirical parts — actual groups defined by differences in birth, by different functions, locations, and interests that constitute the social body. The second counts 'in addition' <u>a part of the no-part</u>. We will call the first *police* and the second *politics*.
>
> (Rancière, 2001/2015, pp. 35-36, italics in original, underlines mine)

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[68] Influential works theorising subjectivation within contemporary political theory include the works of Gilles Deleuze (1988, 1990/2006), Michel Foucault (1983, 2005, 2008), Louis Althusser (1971), Jacques Lacan (1977), Alain Badiou (1982), and Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997).

[69] Postfoundational thought refers to a theoretical orientation that deconstructs foundationalism, i.e., a mode of theorizing which implies that "different social phenomena are grounded on principles that are undeniable and immune to revision, and which are placed outside and beyond the phenomena they seek to describe" (Marchart, 2007, p. 11, cited in Jong, 2023, p. 4). Postfoundational thought centres contingency, and in doing so distinguishes itself from *anti*-foundationalism because it simultaneously affirms the existence of foundations, emphasising their conditions of possibility, as well as the impossibility of closure or finality of the same. Examples of this scholarship include the works of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Butler et al., (2000), Howarth et al., (2000), Ernesto Laclau (1990, 2007), Chantal Mouffe (2002, 2005) and Alain Badiou (2007, 2009). For scholarship on postfoundationalism, see the work of Oliver Marchart (2007, 2011, 2018).

In the same vein, Rancière (1992) defines subjectivation (or 'subjectivisation' as he calls it) as "a process of disidentification or declassification" in response to the ruling order; "a crossing of identities [...] from a being to a nonbeing" (p. 61). For Rancière, the logic of subjectivation always entails an 'impossible identification' (ibid.) and "the place of a political subject is an interval or a gap: being together to the extent that we are *in between*- between names, identities, cultures." (p.62).

There are two interconnected aspects to Rancière's understanding of politics that I find appealing. The first concerns his conceptualisation of politics as 'an opposition of logics' or *dissensus* that "makes visible that which had no reason to be seen" and "places one world in another" (2001/2015, p. 38), implying that, rather than a perpetuation of the status quo, politics constitutes an 'addition' that challenges the existing social and political order by shifting the terms of political engagement itself. Here, Rancière makes it a point to insist that he is not referring to a conflict between well-defined interest groups or opinions, but rather, to those who are "part of the 'no-part'", those who have been refused the title of 'political subjects' by "assert[ing] that they belong to a 'domestic' space, to a space separated from public life" (ibid.) Herein lies the second aspect of this conceptualisation's appeal for me: the idea that politics is about making visible people who- like Islamabad's domestic workers- are not conventionally understood as forming 'part' of the political community, whose 'logics' and modes of being are devalued and excluded from the domain of the relevant and the valuable. In a connected vein, Rancière's conception of political subjectivation encourages taking into account multiple sites and mechanisms of political subjectivation- in this case, experiences ranging from domestic service and forced eviction to collective political action and sexual intimacy across the varied sites of the *kothi*, the *basti*, and the *basti* home- and underscores the centrality of being attentive to subaltern performances of 'rights they do not have' (Madhok, 2018, p. 65). Rancière's understanding of subjectivation also underscores the liminality and contingency of political identification and is clearly critical of the ruling order. However, it lacks grounding in an analysis of specific historical social relations and does not elaborate on the relationship between individual and collective subjectivation or how class plays into the subjectivation of those who 'have no part'.

To address these aspects of subjectivation, I draw on the work of Gramscian scholar Massimo Modonesi (2014) who theorises political subjectivation by threading together what he considers to be three core concepts in Gramsci's political thought: subalternity, antagonism and autonomy.

To provide a crude summary of how Modonesi employs these terms: 'subalternity' refers to the experience of subordination (both collective and individual), characterised by the exercise of 'power-over' (pp. 34, 136); 'antagonism' to the subjective processes corresponding to the practice and experience of insubordination, characterised by the exercise of 'power-against' (pp. 37, 136); and 'autonomy' to the condition of the subject that, "by emancipating, dictates its own norms of conduct," characterised by 'power-to'. (pp. 125, 136).[70] For Modonesi, each of these three elements of experience- subordination, insubordination, and emancipation- are always present in the process of subjectivation, though not in any pre-determined order, and confer upon it shape and specificity (pp. 6, 145-7). Here, Modonesi is drawing on E. P. Thompson's concept of 'experience', which Modonesi understands as "a middle term between 'being' and 'consciousness', between structure and process, as an 'experiment' that mediates between 'base' and 'superstructure' and refers to the subjective assimilation of material conditions." (p. 5). I draw further on E. P. Thompson's concepts of experience and class, and the intimate links between the two, in later sections of this chapter.

Of particular interest to me is Modonesi's conception of subalternity, which he describes as "an experience of subordination, expressed by the tension between acceptance/incorporation and the rejection/autonomisation of the relations of domination and materialised in a 'disposition to act as a class' that combines spontaneity and consciousness." (p. 34). The tension Modonesi describes between 'acceptance/incorporation' and 'rejection/autonomisation' of the relations of domination is also what I believe lies at the heart of the 'false consciousness' debate,[71] which I

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[70] Though an exhaustive discussion of each of these terms and their relationship is not possible here, it is worth noting Modonesi's argument that all three are homologous concepts, i.e. that they are located within a common analytical framework. What makes these concepts homologous is their common ground with respect to: a) "their concern with the problematic of the subject in history"; b) "the understanding of the nature of the subject from its position in the structure and its construction as a process of subjectivation"; c) "the intersection between spontaneity and consciousness as the 'red thread' of the processes of political subjectivation"; and d) their engagements with power. (pp. 135-6)

[71] 'False consciousness', despite being often dismissed as dogmatic and objectivist (Manders, 1980), is a concept that in my view continues to have significant implications for an understanding of subaltern political subjectivity. Though Marx himself did not use the phrase, the term 'false consciousness' is used to describe Marxist analyses of ideological/subjective 'conditioning' of people living within class society that lead them to reproduce (rather than resist/overthrow) the conditions of their exploitation (Eyerman, 1981). Though the word 'false' in this term has acquired multiple and varied meanings- defective, incomplete, partial, irrational, and impaired (by oppression) among others, its genealogical location within a Marxist theoretical framework understands alienation and exploitation- both central features of social relations and individual consciousness under capitalism- as foundational to the emergence of 'false consciousness' (Rosen, 1996). 'False consciousness' is often discussed in conjunction with the 'dominant ideology thesis' in Marxism, which understands the systematic production and (contested) hegemony of 'ruling ideas' as integral to the reproduction of capitalist social relations.

find relevant to understanding how and why hegemonic subjectivities are reproduced by subjects disadvantaged, exploited, and denigrated by the same. Indeed, this tension between 'acceptance/incorporation' and 'rejection/autonomisation' of relations of domination- and indeed the tension *within* this articulation, which I see expressed in the choice to retain two terms, separated with a hyphen, to describe each end of the spectrum- is one of the core theoretical dilemmas this thesis grapples with. These tensions are vividly illustrated in interlocutors' narratives of class distinction between *ameer log* (the rich) and *ghareeb log* (the poor) detailed in Chapters 5 and 6, and by their ambivalent and contradictory expressions and self-fashionings in relation to class anger and resentment (see Chapter 6).

In sum, I find Modonesi's conceptualisation of subjectivation useful for its grounding in historical and material contexts, its attentiveness to power (including but not limited to class) and to how a subject's engagements with power shift in the process of political subjectivation, and its explicit theorisation of political subjectivation in relation to both domination and resistance.

Having outlined how I understand and employ the concepts of political subjectivity and subjectivation in this thesis, I now turn specifically to the literatures that help me conceptualise political subjectivation beyond the realm of political action. For this purpose, I first turn to Marxist scholarship on everyday politics, resistance, and class formation, followed by social reproduction theory to theorise my interlocutors' everyday lives as domestic workers.

2.2. The 'Unspectacular' Everyday Politics of the Poor

> In the intellectual universe of conventional academic discourse, the poor live pre-politically. Their only hope of becoming 'political' is doing politics in the middle-class way – either through legislative action, organised demonstration, forming governments, sitting on committees. [...] *It is not that the poor are pre-political, the concepts of political science are not political enough to observe them*.
>
> (Kaviraj, 2004, p. 2, italics mine)

Extending the study of politics and the political beyond organised politics and collective mobilisations to the realm of the everyday has a long and complex history within Marxist scholarship.[72] Reflecting upon why 'ripe' objective conditions did not necessarily translate into

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[72] This scholarship includes, but is not limited to, the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971/2001), Henry Lefebvre (1959/2014), Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Michel de Certau (1980), E .P. Thompson (1972, 1978a, 1978b), Eric Hobsbawm (1962/1991, 1959/1965), James Scott (1987, 1990), and the Subaltern Studies school (both its Indian and Latin American variants). More recently, the 'everyday' in general and 'everyday politics' in

socialist revolution, Antonio Gramsci's (1971/2001) work sought to understand how class interests were subjectively articulated by people in the domains of everyday social and cultural practices. Indeed, it is Gramsci's use of the term 'subaltern' to refer to the subordinate classes that was later taken up in different ways by a range of scholars.[73] Henry Lefebvre's (1959/2014) three-volume text 'Critique of Everyday Life' written in the 1930s centred the everyday as the site for the reproduction of capitalist relations and for their transformation. Pushing back against elite-centred historiography, the British-Marxist intellectual tradition of 'history from below' from the 1960s extended not just what events/actions 'count' as history, but whose actions/lives were understood as 'making history'.[74] In a similar vein, Subaltern Studies emerged as a means to correct the elite bias in Indian historiography and reclaim space for the subordinate classes, castes, the ordinary, the vernacular, and the everyday in the historical archive.

However, even within these rich traditions of theorising 'from below', conceptions of the political have remained narrow. As Sudipta Kaviraj (2004) notes, "The emancipatory *interest* in Marxist politics also crept into an emancipatory *bias* in its historical optics: it saw only one class of acts as 'historical' or historically significant, salient, relegating all others to obscurity" (p.8, emphases in original). Analysing Ranajit Guha's argument in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983/1986) in which Guha- one of the founders of Subaltern Studies- critiques Hobsbawm's use of the term 'pre-political' to describe outlawed peasants- 'bandits'- in Europe (pp. 4-6), Kaviraj (2004) notes that Guha himself remains uncomfortable, almost apologetic, with regards to the "weak and fragmentary character [of defiance] in everyday life and in individual and small-group resistance" (Guha, 1983/1986, p. 12). For Guha, peasant practices of insurgency "come into their own in the most emphatic and comprehensive fashion when the masses set

particular have become increasingly popular concepts in the fields of political anthropology (Hull, 2012; Maqsood, 2019; Paller, 2019; Waseem, 2022), political theory (Gyapong, 2019; Kerkvliet, 2018; Kissas, 2022), human and political geography (Arampatzi, 2017; Mustafa et al., 2019), environmental studies (Li et al., 2023; Trogisch, 2021), urban studies (Phadke et al., 2011; Read, 2014), international relations (Autesserre, 2014; Beattie et al., 2019; Visoka, 2019) and international political economy (Arslan, 2022; Elias & Rai, 2019; Elias & Rethel, 2016; Kremers & Brassett, 2017).

[73] There has been considerable disagreement amongst scholars of Gramsci about how Gramsci employed the term 'subaltern', whether it was merely a euphemism for 'class' or if it was intended to be a distinct concept encapsulating political and cultural dimensions of class (see Modonesi, 2014, pp. 13-14).

[74] Scholars associated with the British-Marxist tradition of 'history from below' include Eric Hobsbawm (1959/1965, 1962/1991), E. P. Thompson (1963/1972, 1978a), and Rafael Samuel (1994), who were interested not just in working-class struggles and historical experience but in how these working-classes shape history (Davidson, 2019). This scholarship later expanded to include feminist work and studies of slavery and unfree labour, such as C.L.R James's *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938/1963), Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), and Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), among others.

about turning everything upside down" (ibid.). Thus, even while arguing for a more expansive view of politics, Guha continues to privilege collective, 'spectacular' forms of political action over the unspectacular, the mundane, and the everyday, confirming the conflation of emancipatory interest and emancipatory bias in historical optics critiqued by Kaviraj earlier.

Proposing a framework that can enable an expansive view of subaltern politics, Kaviraj (2004) suggests mapping the politics of subalternity through attentiveness to its 'three forms': "spectacular uprisings, the sudden contingent crowd, and the silent unrewarding politics of the everyday tactic" (p. 24).[75] In alignment with this suggestion, this thesis maps domestic workers' everyday navigations of class, caste, and gender relations in multiple sites (the *kothi*, the *basti*, and the home) alongside the 'spectacular' events of forced eviction of these *basti*s and the varied and contingent responses of different *basti walas* to these evictions.

Adding to conceptions of subaltern politics, Pakistani Marxist scholar Aasim Sajjad Akhtar (2008) draws on the work of Antonio Gramsci, particularly the latter's concept of 'common sense'[76], to theorise the politics of the subordinate classes in Pakistan. Akhtar (2008) describes 'the politics of common sense' as "acquiescence to the patronage-based rules of the game" and "based on the acceptance of oligarchic rule and an attempt to secure political and economic resources through direct or indirect access to the state." (p. 203). 'The politics of resistance' is, in turn, "a rejection of these patronage-based rules and the privileging of more expansive, horizontal solidarities." (ibid). Akhtar (2008) thus understands the 'politics of resistance' and the 'politics of common sense' as two ends of a broad spectrum that describes the politics of the subordinate classes.

Furthermore, Akhtar (2008) understands the political subjectivities of the subordinate classes as historically shaped, contingent on the material and subjective particularities of the conjuncture, and interdependent with the overall political climate shaped by the alignments of other classes (p. 204). From this perspective, the subordinate classes may well remain engaged in a 'politics of common sense' at the same time that a different (and more privileged) social group/class becomes radicalised, as seen in the case of various ethnic-national movements in Pakistan and

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[75] Kaviraj is drawing here on Michel de Certau's (1980) distinction between 'strategy' and 'tactic'. Strategy, for De Certau, is "the science of military movements beyond the field of vision of the enemy; tactics, that of movement within his field of vision" (p. 8). Strategy, for de Certau, requires a concept of one's own 'place' and that of the 'other', the latter of which is outside of/exterior to the former, but bounded, identifiable, and particular (p. 5). The weak therefore, usually have recourse only to 'tactics', not to 'strategy'.

[76] Akhtar (2008) understands Gramsci's use of the term 'common sense' to mean "the incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs common to any given society" (p. 15).

most recently in the popular realm around the figure of former prime minister Imran Khan. Akhtar reminds us that:

> The subordinate classes undertake political actions within a *given* structural matrix. They are not, therefore, *willingly* ceding to social and political exchanges that are cynical and oppressive. They are instead recognising the real constraints that they face, including the threat of naked coercion, and the possibility of losing what little they have.
> (Akhtar, 2018, pp. 156–157, emphases in original)

Akhtar's observations about the need for subordinate groups and classes to strategically navigate power-laden situations is the focus of James Scott's influential works, *Weapons of the Weak* (1987) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), both of which provide rich conceptual resources for researching the political subjectivities and practices of subordinate groups. In contrast to Guha, Scott's approach to the everyday is unapologetic and insistent: "To omit the experience of human agents from the analysis of class relations is to have theory swallow its own tail." (Scott, 1987, p. 43). For Scott, it is precisely in studying the banal, the unspectacular and the everyday that the realities of class consciousness and navigation of class relations can be understood (ibid., pp. 28-47).

I begin my discussion of Scott's conceptual framework with his concept of 'infra-politics', followed by the concepts of 'public and hidden transcripts'. Scott describes 'infra-politics' as:

> [...] a term denoting the (deliberate, tactical) invisibility of the resistance of subordinate groups and what (in the sense of 'infrastructure') makes open, visible political action possible, or rather, provides its cultural and structural underpinnings... Infra-politics *is* political life under conditions of tyranny/subordination; it is the building block for the more institutionalized political action that could not exist without it.
> (Scott, 1990, pp. 184, 201)

I find the concept of infra-politics to be useful for understanding the unspectacular, everyday politics of subaltern groups, particularly at a time when 'the politics of common sense' is hegemonic. It is noteworthy that the subordinate classes- both in rural and urban Pakistan and across the ethnic peripheries- remained distant from the recent uprisings around the figure of Imran Khan, despite the steep rise in prices of everyday food and fuel prices in the same period which sharply impacted the working-classes' ability to meet even bare subsistence

requirements.[77] Under these conditions, I find it even more important to have a deeper understanding of what is happening 'when nothing is happening'.[78] In the absence of such an understanding, one risks mistaking infra-politics for apathy, indifference, co-option, internalised oppression, political 'inaction', or 'false consciousness'.

Taking seriously the concept of infra-politics and the everyday practices and subjectivities that constitute it allows the Left to avoid privileging particular forms of (collective, public) political expression as the only way of being 'political'. This in turn allows for an inclusion of non-normative working-class subjects- women, young people, relatively less 'networked' men who are socially and politically marginal (and thus vulnerable) within their communities- into the fold of 'political subject' which they are otherwise excluded from, despite being instrumentally mobilised, 'allowed into', or spontaneously bursting into the realm of political action during moments of crisis. As stated in Chapter 1, an inclusion of these marginal political subjects and subjectivities through a focus on people's everyday political praxis becomes important also for the Left to understand if/how its modes of organising wittingly or unwittingly utilise and reproduce particular forms of power (particularly class, caste, and gendered power), thereby inhibiting, invisibilising, and/or misrecognising potential or existing forms of transformative politics.

My advocacy for infra-politics should not be misinterpreted as suggesting an *exclusive* emphasis on the everyday, as romanticising subaltern subjectivities (Abu-Lughod, 1990), or as a dismissal of the need for organised politics. Rather, I am advocating a dialectical view of the everyday and its relationship with a politics of structural transformation; a view capable of seeing other(ed) political subjects, their multiple, complex selves and their individual and collective responses to structural oppression as located somewhere on the spectrum between compliance and confrontation, or to use Akhtar's (2008) terms, somewhere between 'the politics of common sense' and 'the politics of resistance'.

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[77] "Surging Inflation Erodes People's Living Standards in Pakistan", *The Nation*, 21 October 2023.

[78] The popular uprisings in support of Imran Khan after he was deposed as Prime Minister through a parliamentary vote of no-confidence in April 2022 were followed by a renewed brutal state crackdown on all forms of political dissent; a crackdown that continues till the time of writing. It must be noted however, that large-scale public mobilisations have taken place in Pakistan's ethnic-peripheries- particularly in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan- in early 2024, despite the military's attempts to repress all forms of political dissent.

'Public' and 'Hidden' Transcripts

I turn now to James Scott's concepts of 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts, which refer to the discourses, practices, and performances of the subordinate in the presence and the absence of the dominant respectively (Scott, 1990, pp. 1-16). Scott describes the 'public transcript', which is performed by both dominant and subordinate 'onstage' (that is, in direct interaction with one another) as a "respectable performance", one that is closely aligned with how the dominant group would like things to appear, and likely to feature a 'masked' performance featuring deference, consent, and politeness from the subordinate, making it appear that "subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination" (p. 4). The 'hidden transcript', on the other hand, takes place 'offstage'- that is, beyond direction observation of powerholders- and "consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript" (pp. 4-5). Without declaring the public transcript as 'false' and the hidden transcript as 'true', Scott asserts that the public transcript tells a limited, "if not positively misleading" story about power relations (p.2). The hidden transcript, on the other hand, becomes a means to "move beyond apparent consent, and to grasp potential acts, intentions as yet blocked, and possible futures that a shift in the balance of power or a crisis may bring to view" (p. 16). Rather than treating the public and hidden transcripts as discrete, neatly separable realms, Scott describes the frontier between the two as 'a constant zone of struggle' (p. 14) and suggests that we try to understand "how the hidden transcript is formed, under what conditions it does or doesn't find public expression, and its relation to the public transcript" in order to judge the effects of domination on public discourse (p. 5).

The concept of public and hidden transcripts is central to Scott's arguments about resistance. Scott understands resistance as taking myriad forms, from overt defiance in the face of power (which he argues is the most desirable but rarely available/chosen option for the subordinate) to various 'disguised' forms of insubordination, such as feigning illness, ignorance, or incompetence (1987, p. 33), foot-dragging, gossip and rumour mongering, storytelling, and other cultural practices (1990, pp. 136-182). Scott's understanding of resistance is undergirded by the argument that "short of actual rebellion, powerless groups have a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances" (1990, xii.) and that their particular modes of (often disguised, covert, and spontaneous) resistance- both individual and collective- are in fact 'enabling modes of

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protest' that serve the interests of subordinate groups "rather than a reflection of the slender political talents of the working classes" (p. 151).

Scott's views resonate with various scholars who argue for moving away from binary conceptions of domination and resistance and remind us that resistance is not necessarily revolutionary or transformative.[79] Conceiving of subaltern resistance as the negotiation, rather than negation, of power, Uday Chandra writes:

> To resist in our narrower but arguably more robust sense of the term is, therefore, to minimally apprehend the conditions of one's subordination, to endure or withstand those conditions in everyday life, and to act with sufficient intention and purpose to negotiate power relations from below in order to rework them in a more favourable or emancipatory direction.
>
> <div align="right">(Chandra, 2015, p. 565)</div>

While largely in agreement with these perspectives on everyday resistance, I maintain, however, that my interest in everyday resistance and political subjectivities of my research subjects is to seek how an understanding of their practices and subjectivities can shift the horizons and practices of revolutionary politics without attaching preconditions to the form or content of their subjectivities or insisting on political action as a precondition for being considered a political subject. Also, following Lila Abu-Lughod, I intend to use my explorations of the everyday resistance of my interlocutors to not just insist on their dignity and dynamism, but also to understand what their resistance reveals about historically constituted (and changing) power relations in my research setting (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

I turn now to a critique of Scott's concepts of the public and hidden transcripts, which I draw on centrally in Chapters 5 and 6 to describe and make sense of domestic workers' subjectivities and strategies. I find that Scott does not adequately problematize the distinctiveness of the public and hidden transcripts or specify the nature of their relationship, particularly if and how these transcripts inform each other. My critique of these concepts consists of two inter-connected aspects that emerge from the ethnographies presented in later chapters: First, if the public transcript presents a 'limited, if not misleading' picture of power relations between the dominant and the subordinate (Scott, 1990, p.2) and if "power-laden situations are nearly always inauthentic" (Scott, 1987, p. 286), does the 'hidden transcript' then offer a necessarily different and more 'authentic' or 'accurate' understanding of the subjectivities of the subordinate? What

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[79] See Mahmood (2005), Kaviraj (2004), Akhtar (2018), Abu-Lughod (1990, 1999) and Chandra (2015).

if there are 'unexpected' (or from a Left/feminist perspective, disturbing) continuities between ideas, moral positions, and feelings expressed in the public and the hidden transcripts vis-à-vis the dominant, such as inequality being divinely ordained or the inherent superiority of some castes/kin/social groups over others? Are these continuities to be understood as 'false consciousness', internalised oppression, or conscious strategy? If, as Hemmings (2005) reminds us, "to be marginal in relation to the dominant is to inhabit ambivalence, not simply additive or oppositional multiplicity" (p. 558), could it be that (at least some of) these continuities between the two transcripts are not power-inflected 'distortions' (at least on the conscious level) but rather 'authentic' expressions of my interlocutors' *ambivalent* selves and subjectivities that may not align with my feminist hopes and aspirations?

My second critique of the concept of public and hidden transcripts is that it relies implicitly on a single-axis form of domination. Even though Scott recognises that the 'hidden transcript' is produced under *different* power constraints than the public transcript (rather than in a domain *free* of such constraints), the description of the 'hidden' transcript as one that is 'produced outside the direct view/influence of the dominant' indicates that the focus is on a single relationship or particular type of domination (in Scott's case, class domination). In the context of my work, the 'hidden' transcript with respect to domestic service relations emerged in the *basti* space, away from the observation or influence of employers as predicted by Scott. However, to rely solely on this 'hidden transcript' as *the* window into domestic workers' political subjectivities would be to ignore the fact that it is *only* with respect to class relations that the *basti* was a 'safe' space; when it came to gendered relations of domination (see Chapter 8), the *basti* was in fact the site for the 'public', rather than the 'hidden' transcript. Are there multiple 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts then, which are generated and performed distinctly in the spatial and relational contexts specific to particular forms of domination? How do these transcripts, and the subjects and the subjectivities they produce, interact with, and inform one another? I argue that the concept of 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts needs to be modified to reflect the specificity of its analytical and political import and to acknowledge the complexity of speaking to/about multiple forms of domination from a particular site/location. (I take up these questions again in my empirical-analytical chapters, particularly in Chapters 5 and 6).

To conclude this section, I turn to E.P. Thompson's conceptualisation of class formation (on whom both Massimo Modonesi and James Scott also draw) to explore the resources his conception offers for understanding political subjectivation of working-class subjects beyond the realm of political action.

E. P. Thompson on Class Formation

Rather than understanding class as a pre-existing structural fact that simply 'exists' or objectively 'is', E.P. Thompson (1968/1972) articulates class as 'something that *happens*', highlighting its processual, historical, and contingent nature:

> Class *happens* when some men [and, well, women], as a result of common *experiences* (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men [and women] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. (pp. 8-9, emphases mine).

Experience, for E.P. Thompson, is central to a Marxist understanding of class:

> […] Nor is it [the epistemological refusal of experience] pardonable in a Marxist, since experience is a necessary middle term between social being and social consciousness: it is experience (often class experience) which gives a coloration to culture, to values, and to thought; it is by means of experience that the mode of production exerts a determining pressure upon other activities, and it is by practice that production is sustained. (Thompson, 1978b, p. 98)

Underscoring the links between class and experience, E.P. Thompson writes:

> Classes arise because men and women, in determinate productive relations, identify their antagonistic interests, and come to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways: thus *the process of class formation is a process of self-making, although under conditions which are given.* (Thompson, 1978b, pp. 106–107, emphasis mine)

Thompson's conception of class formation offers rich and important resources for conceptualising political subjects and subjectivation both within and beyond political action.[80] His attentiveness to

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[80] E. P. Thompson's emphasis on experience, on process, and on the human subjects that constitute social relations and systems is articulated most eloquently and poignantly in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), which he interestingly describes as a 'polemical political intervention and not an academic exercise' (see his 'Notes' at the bottom of the main text). I understand Thompson's forcefulness in this text to be a response to what had become the dominance of structural (or what Thompson refers to as 'theoretical') Althusserian Marxism at the time. At the same time, Thompson fiercely rejects the depiction of his work as 'culturalism' (see Postscript of *The Poverty of Theory*). I am aware that I am writing this thesis at a very different historical juncture, where not only has structural Marxism and indeed Marxism itself been relegated to the margins of the academy, but also features the dominance of theoretical perspectives that emphasise process, contingency, and

collective experience (of class in particular), the modes of expression of this experience, and its integral connections with the social practices that reproduce (and/or challenge) class structures resonate deeply with the central quest of this study to understand how multiple structural inequalities are experienced, narrated, and navigated both individually and collectively by Islamabad's domestic workers (see Chapters 5 and 6 in particular). Therefore, I draw centrally on Thompson's conceptualisation of class (formation) as a process of individual and collective self-making which I explore through a careful documenting of their vocabularies, 'onstage' and 'offstage' practices, claim-makings, and self-fashionings. I also draw here on Thompson's conception of *class consciousness*, which he describes as "the way in which these experiences [of class distinction] are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms" (Thompson, 1968/1972, p. 9) to theorise the sharp, clear, and recurring distinction between *ameer log* (rich people) and *ghareeb log* (poor people) that runs centrally through domestic workers' narratives presented in later chapters. Additionally, as detailed in Chapter 6, interlocutors' deployments of religious discourse (which should not be conflated with the performance of piety) provides rich and complex insights into the class consciousness of this group, challenging binary conceptions of political subjects and political agency as either 'religious' or 'secular'.

Having identified some of the conceptual resources required to 'see' subaltern politics beyond the realm of political action and theorise the political subjectivation of subaltern subjects, I now turn to Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) to theorise my interlocutors' everyday lives as domestic workers.

2.3. Social Reproduction Theory and Domestic Workers' Everyday Lives

There is a long and rich tradition of scholarship on social reproduction[81] since the 1970s.[82] What has recently emerged as 'Social Reproduction Theory' (SRT) is an attempt to use social

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indeterminacy and thus could be seen as consistent with some of Thompson's theoretical positions. What clearly distinguishes Thompson's views from those of post-Marxists invested in process and contingency is Thompson's investment in the concept of class.

[81] I follow Elias and Rai's (2019) definition of the term 'social reproduction', laid out earlier in fn.6.

[82] Some of the important early works on social reproduction include Bourdieu (1977), Dalla Costa and James (1975), Federici (2004), Fortunati (1995), James (1975), Laslett and Brenner (1989), and Mies (1986). Contemporary literature on social reproduction spans a number of disciplinary fields such as political economy (Arat-Koc, 2006; Bakker & Gill, 2003, 2019; Bhattacharya, 2017b; Elias & Rai, 2015, 2019; Fraser, 2016; Rioux, 2015), human geography (Katz, 2001, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2003; Pred, 1981; Winders & Smith, 2019), and feminist political theory (Arruzza, 2016; Dinerstein, 2014, 2016; Federici, 2018; Ferguson, 2016; McNally, 2017; Mezzadri, 2019; Mojab, 2015; Taylor, 2002; Weeks, 2011). Recurring themes in contemporary SRT literature

reproduction as a theory to (re)centre human *labour*- rather than waged *work*- in understandings of capitalism and demonstrate that the reproduction of life and labour power is connected yet distinct from the circuits of capital and value-generation (Bhattacharya, 2017). SRT seeks to move Marxist theory away from a dichotomous conceptualisation of 'production' and 'reproduction' as separate forms and sites of labour,[83] and to transcend the debates between (economic) 'exploitation' and (social) 'oppression' (Jaffe & Arruzza, 2020).

Though the Marxist-feminist literature on social reproduction itself can be traced back to the 1970s,[84] the theorising of social reproduction in feminist literature more generally has changed over time and place, moving from a "separate but unequal spheres" imaginary (within a largely feminist global political economy framework) towards one (within which SRT is located, though not always comfortably) that collapses the distinctions between work and life, production and reproduction, private and public, and is now located in different disciplinary frameworks (Winders & Smith, 2019). The latter imaginary mirrors many of the contours of my research context in which reproductive labour is performed both as waged 'work' and unwaged social-reproductive labour by the same person in different spaces; a context which breaks down any neat divisions between work and home, productive and reproductive, public and private. Like SRT, this study is embedded in a neoliberal world context which is re-shaping of the contours of social reproduction globally in ways that are starkly different from the organisation of capitalist social relations in the 1970s.

While acknowledging and challenging the 'class-and-gender' focus in Marxist Feminist scholarship, SRT seeks to re-centre class as a revolutionary concept and the working-classes as a revolutionary subject (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 18) by enabling a "unified ontology from which to understand the integration and layering of social identities within the capitalist mode of production" (Ferguson et al., 2016, p. 33). In contrast to intersectionality frameworks, an SRT framework (re)centres dialectical thinking as a way to focus on "processes, inter-relations, and

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include the changing conditions of social reproduction under neoliberalism, informal and unpaid labour (including domestic labour) and the intersections of class, race, gender and other social vectors.

[83] Despite (or perhaps because of) SRT's claim to transcend productive-reproductive binaries, it has also been criticised by Marxist-feminist scholars for in fact reproducing this binary (Cammack, 2020; Federici, 2019; Mezzadri, 2019; O'Laughlin, 2022; Quick, 2023).

[84] The works of Silvia Federici (1975), Maria Mies (1986), Maria Dalla Costa & Selma James (1975), Leopoldina Fortunati (1981/1995), and Angela Davis (1982) are considered seminal works of the early Marxist-feminist social reproduction literature. This literature focused on theorising the dependency of capitalist production on unwaged social-reproductive work done mostly by women and revealing the gendered nature of class oppression.

the "coming-to-be" of the subject; one in which "the parts and the whole are all bound up in a single life-process"; one which sees gender, class, caste, race, and other forms of exploitation-oppression as co-constitutive rather than discrete and intersecting (McNally, 2017, pp. 103–105).

In its attempt to offer a more expansive view of the 'economy', SRT explicitly "theorises the relationship between the market and extra-market relations rather than gesturing towards their distinction" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 14) . Learning from the problematic history within 'Western Marxism'[85] of generalizing from the experiences of a particular group of people (primarily white male wage workers) and ignoring race, imperialism, and gender, SRT seeks to reopen space for theorising the social world as a totality while being empirically particular, and historically and temporally located (Sears, 2019). In doing so, SRT returns us to "the complex unity of the multi-faceted but internally connected processes by which life is reproduced" (McNally, 2017, p. 109)

However, as Federici (2019) reminds us, simply adopting a social reproduction perspective does not imply a radical stance or even a necessarily Marxist-feminist one; the concept was first used by bourgeois economists trying to understand how systems reproduce themselves (p. 55).[86] Federici believes that the 1970s social reproduction literature was radical not because it focused on social reproduction, but because it revealed hitherto hidden aspects of the workings of capitalism and hence enabled forms of resistance to capitalist domination (in the realm of theory as well as collective action, such as the Wages for Housework campaign), which Federici believes is neither the outcome or the intention of much of the contemporary SRT literature (ibid.) Other criticisms and limitations of SRT include its focus on the Global North, its assumption of formal/contractual wage-labour to be the norm, and its inadvertent reproduction of the productive/reproductive binary by assuming that reproductive work means 'care work', rather

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[85] The term 'Western Marxism' began circulating after Perry Anderson's book *Considerations on Western Marxism* (1976), which he used to distinguish 'classical Marxism' (the works of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and others) from the work of later Marxist scholars based in the West (who he dubbed 'Western Marxists'), seeking to contrast the former's active connections to revolutionary political practice with the 'defeatist', academy-based character of the latter. Anderson's use of the term is contested and was also revisited by Anderson himself (see Callinicos, 1984). I understand and use the term 'Western Marxism' to refer to a brand of Marxist thought tied to the Frankfurt school which assumed a universalisation of the commodity form, centred themes of culture, ideology, and the production of hegemony, moved away from a focus on materiality and grounded social contexts, and based its theorising exclusively on Global North contexts. By this definition, not all Marxist scholars based in the West (and from this period) fall under this category, Antonio Gramsci being a notable case in point, who was attentive to questions of imperialism, political organisation, and the complexities of political subjectivation arising from particular historical experiences and social contexts.

[86] Quick (2023) argues that SRT's understanding of (and distinction between) the concepts of household labour and wage labour, paid and unpaid labour, and its equation of 'household labour' with 'unpaid labour' in fact contradicts Marxist theory.

than a reproduction of *productive* relations *along with* the reproduction of life (Mezzadri, 2019; Mezzadri et al., 2022).[87]

In the context of this study, I find particularly useful Elias and Rai's (2019) conceptualisation of social reproduction *as* the everyday through a 'space, time, violence' (STV) framework. This framework brings attention to each of these three aspects of everyday life for gendered subjects: namely, its location in fluid and relational social space(s), the particular temporalities it possesses, and the structural and individual violence that is both provoked and resisted by these subjects in the everyday (Elias & Rai, 2019, p. 207). The STV framework is useful for my thesis on each of these accounts. Firstly, in relation to space, my research features the '*kothi*'- employers' homes-both as a workplace for domestic workers and as a site for (both commodified and non-commodified) social reproduction, resonating with Elias and Rai's contention that "the household is not, and never has been, a closed space separate from capitalist production but exists as a site in which work, labour, and social reproduction co-constitute the everyday" (p. 209). In doing so, the STV framework challenges the public/private binary that remains prevalent in political economy frameworks; a critique also applicable to understandings of political subjectivation (England, 2003, p. 612). In relation to 'time', the STV framework enables an exploration of domestic workers' complex relationship to public space and the intimate connections between work, time (and timings), space and social location (particularly class and gender) that shape the everyday lives of my research subjects. In relation to violence, this framework enables attention to multiple forms of tangible and intangible, structural, and individual violence, and to the ways in which these are navigated and/or resisted by my research subjects. In explicitly acknowledging violence as part of the 'everyday', the STV framework supports my contention that an understanding of domestic workers as political subjects is particularly important because their everyday lives are embedded in relations of complex structural violence and these experiences and subjectivities remain invisible in public and political discourse.

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[87] The distinction between 'productive' and 'reproductive' labour and/or spheres has been the subject of much debate amongst feminist theorists for the last few decades. SRT was considered distinctive precisely because it claimed to build on Lise Vogel's important work, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Vogel, 1983) which theorised the relation between productive and reproductive labour as an *internal* relation rather than as 'separate spheres' (Bhattacharya, 2021). However, the theorisation and deployment of these terms remains different and contested even within SRT (see Mezzadri, 2019). In the course of these debates, 'affective labour' has also emerged as an influential concept in feminist theory. For an introduction to the concept of affective labour and the debate it has generated, see Negri and Hardt (2000), and Oksala (2016) and Schultz (2006) for critical engagements with Hardt and Negri's conceptualisation.

I also find attractive SRT's attempts to transform binary understandings of exploitation and oppression and its emphasis on dialectical thinking to theorise social oppression, as discussed earlier in this section. SRT's focus on "processes, inter-relations, and the 'coming-to-be' of the subject; in which "the parts and the whole are all bound up in a single life-process" makes it different and more useful for my purposes than an intersectionality framework, which organises the world into discrete 'vectors' or 'axes' which then 'intersect' (McNally, 2017, p. 99). Furthermore, I find SRT's theorisation of oppressions useful because it allows for holistic and non-binary ways of understanding my interlocutors' multiply marginal status (by virtue of their class, caste, and gender) and as subjects who are both 'economically' exploited and 'socially' oppressed.[88] My political commitment and aspiration to co-hold the universal and the particular, the individual and the collective, the structural and the processual is deeply aligned with this thread within SRT (Bhattacharya, 2017).[89]

This thesis contributes to the SRT literature by bringing into focus the prevalence of informal wage labour in the Global South (Mezzadri et al., 2022) and drawing attention to domestic workers as one of the major groups performing informal labour. It also contributes an empirical study on Pakistani domestic workers, a starkly under-researched group in the scholarship on Pakistan as well as in the SRT and domestic service scholarship. In alignment with Bhattacharya's (2017) views about the importance of "going beyond the workplace to the spaces where workers live, sleep, play" (p. 91), this thesis contributes an ethnographic account of the everyday lives and subjectivities of those performing social-reproductive labour (both waged and non-waged, within and outside the home) which understands them not merely as 'domestic workers' or as 'women' or 'minorities' but as complex *political* subjects living multi-faceted lives which involve labour but also, crucially, *desire*.

In sum, I draw on SRT as part of my larger argument for the need to *ground* and *gender* the study of subaltern political subjectivation. Specifically, I use SRT to ground the theorisation of subaltern politics and political subjectivation in the everyday realities of the gendered working-class subjects I am writing about, for whom social-reproductive labour (both in its waged and

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[88] Understanding the 'economic' and the 'social' as dialectically and mutually constitutive (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 70-71), I extend Mezzadri's (2019) argument about the need to understand all reproductive labour as value-generating to understand the extraction of surplus value ('exploitation') as predicated on and intertwined with the relegation of particular social groups as socially marginal ('oppression').
[89] See in particular the contributions by David McNally, Cinzia Arruzza, and Tithi Bhattacharya in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression.* London: Pluto Press, 2017.

unwaged forms) is central to everyday life. None of the other bodies of scholarship discussed in this chapter are attentive to the centrality of social-reproductive labour (which is deeply marked by class, caste, racial, and gendered hierarchies) in the everyday lives of this vast group of (gendered) political subjects. It is precisely because SRT does *not* currently inform much of the scholarship on political subjectivation (and vice versa) that I find it useful and productive to bring them together.

In bringing together the SRT scholarship with that of political subjectivation, this thesis also extends and challenges SRT frameworks by insisting on the theorisation of domestic workers (and 'workers' in general) as political subjects, with lives beyond 'work' and the 'workplace'. It does this by exploring the political subjectivities (an under-studied theme in the SRT literature) generated by the everyday movement between (in this case, starkly unequal) realms of 'work' in the *kothi* and 'social reproduction' in the *bastis* where domestic workers live.[90] This thesis also unsettles the binary (though not the distinction) between 'work' and 'social reproduction' (see footnote 90) through demonstrating the continuity of, and overlaps between, social-reproductive labour across the sites of the *kothi* and the *basti* in domestic workers' lives (see Chapter 5). At the same time, domestic workers' narratives about *kaam* ('work') in Chapter 5 also make clear distinctions between the experience of working for others- that is, doing *'kothiyon ka kaam'* (working in the *kothis*, for *kothi walas*)- from performing social-reproductive labour in one's own home, referred to by interlocutors as *'apna kaam'* (working for oneself) or as *'ghar ka kaam'* (labour performed in one's own household). As argued in Chapter 5, these complex everyday subjectivities both unsettle binary conceptualisations of work and social reproduction while also providing grounds for maintaining their distinction.

Moreover, if social reproduction is understood to encompass all forms of labour that (re)generate life and community, this thesis stretches the SRT framework to include political struggle and organisation as a form of social reproduction. Chapter 7 provides the grounds for this argument, showing *basti* women (who are also domestic workers) as actively engaged in resisting forced

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[90] I have chosen to retain the distinction- while challenging the binary- between 'work' and 'social reproduction'. I use the term 'work' to refer specifically to 'wage-labour' and 'social reproduction' to refer to the 'reproduction of life' as articulated by Elias and Rai (2019) cited earlier in this chapter, which can include both waged- and non-waged forms of labour. In this regard, I also find useful Quick's (2023) observation that a combination of both unwaged household labour and wage labour is necessary for the reproduction of most working-class households, which enables a conceptualisation of 'work' and 'social reproduction' as overlapping and interconnected, yet also distinct. (p. 458)

eviction from their *bastis*, rebuilding community in the post-eviction phase, and participating in organized political activity both within and beyond the *basti*.

Having unpacked the conceptual apparatus provided by SRT, identified its alignments as well as its limitations with regards to my research and described the contributions this thesis makes to the SRT literature, I now turn to Subaltern Studies to unpack how and why I use the term 'subaltern' in this thesis and to draw on the conceptual apparatus it offers to understand the political subjectivation of marginal groups.

2.4. Subaltern Studies and Political Subjectivation

Much has been written about the term 'subaltern', its origin in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, its uptake by Subaltern Studies (in India and in Latin America) and the latter's impact on radical/critical scholarship.[91] Initially defined by Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of Subaltern Studies, as "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha, 1988, p. 35, cited in Ganguly, 2015, p. 4), the concept of the subaltern has been taken up in a variety of ways both within and outside Subaltern Studies as it travelled across the postcolonial world. Despite the declaration of the 'end' of Subaltern Studies by its own founders (Chatterjee, 2012), the issues it raised continue to be taken up in contemporary scholarship, evidenced not least by the proliferation of the use of the term 'subaltern' itself (Ganguly, 2015).

The term 'subaltern' has a 'symbiotic yet uneasy' relationship with class in classical Marxist thought (ibid, p. 7). I have chosen to use the term 'subaltern' nevertheless, because I find it useful in foregrounding the absence of my research subjects from Left political discourse and their invisibility in multiple registers in the Pakistan context and beyond. I do not use the term 'subaltern' as a replacement for class or materialist analysis (as alleged by Chibber, 2006), or to effect an analytical disconnect with capitalist structures and processes (Sarkar, 2000, p. 305). Along with scholars such as Arnold (1984), Chandra (2015), Modonesi (2014), and Roy (2015), all of whom are sympathetic to class analysis, I find the term useful in stretching class to include the co-constitution of the 'economic' and the 'non-economic' (see also Bhattacharya, 2017a). For Modonesi (2014), the term 'subaltern' works "as a synonym of oppressed or dominated [and]

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[91] For a useful discussion of contemporary developments in the themes taken up by Subaltern Studies, see Ganguly, D. (ed.). (2015). The Subaltern after Subaltern Studies. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* (Vol. 38, Issue 1). Taylor & Francis.

avoids the economic or ideologizing connotations of the notion of the exploited while it amplifies and pluralizes the notion of the working, labour, or proletarian class by including other popular forms and modalities." (p.9)

Amongst the various uses of the term 'subaltern', I find the greatest conceptual and empirical resonance with Spivak's conceptualisation of the subaltern, which has "the women of the urban sub-proletariat and of unorganised peasant labour" at its centre (Spivak, 1985, cited in Green, 2002, p. 18). For Spivak, 'subaltern' is not merely a synonym for 'non-elite' or 'oppressed' groups; for her, the lack of political organisation and representation is central to the identification of a group as subaltern (ibid.). In this sense, the group of women that are the focus of this study are indeed subaltern: they either remain 'outside' and hence 'unrepresented' in collective political action, organisation, and discourse, or, when they do appear, they appear only as bodies rather than as actors, which again renders them 'unrepresented' but through an active invisibilisation rather than implicit, structural exclusion. In describing them as 'outside' political action and discourse, however, I do not mean to imply that they are 'outside' modes of governmentality or bureaucratic rationality as argued earlier by Chatterjee (2006) in his distinction between 'civil' and 'political' society, a position that he later revisited (see Chatterjee, 2012). To the contrary, the everyday lives of these subjects are marked by the perpetual uncertainty incurred by their official status as "illegal encroachers", paving the way for everyday extortion of bribes by low-ranking state officials as well as wholesale evictions when these are ordered by 'higher-ups' in the state bureaucracy.

The relationship between elite and subaltern domains is one of the long-standing debates within Subaltern Studies, deliberating to what extent and in what ways subaltern consciousness/subjectivity is influenced by dominant ideas, norms, and practices. As Chandra (2015) observes, the initial scholarship of the Subaltern Studies group was keen to emphasise the relative autonomy of subaltern domains and resistance (p. 563), possibly to align with the purpose of 'reclaiming' the subaltern and its agency that was the initial impetus of Subaltern Studies. Subsequent scholars, however, critiqued what they saw to be the excessive reification of subaltern autonomy and resistance (see Roy, 2015; Modonesi, 2014).

For Kalpana Ram (2015), one of the primary features of Subaltern Studies is its "[orientation of] epistemic confidence: There is a confidence that there are not only meanings and experiences outside dominant discourses, but that it is also possible to come to understand them

better." (Ram, 2015, p. 127). For Spivak (1988), however, the explicit assertion that 'the subaltern speaks', is politically suspect (even though she is simultaneously reluctant to give up entirely on the emancipatory role of the teacher/intellectual, see Spivak, 2010). This is because of Spivak's critique of attempts that seek to recover an 'authentic' subaltern subject whose speech is rendered accessible and transparent in an apparently unmediated manner (Raghavan, 2023, p. 12), a critique I discuss shortly below.

Though Subaltern Studies began as a historiographical project, my interest is in not recuperating the subaltern from the archives, but rather, in avoiding *political miscommunication* with them in the present such that an emancipatory, life-serving politics can be co-created, serving Left organisers as well as those we organise.[92] By political miscommunication, I mean a misattribution of ideas, motivations and meanings to the actions (or absence thereof) of the subaltern and also *by* them. This concern with political miscommunication accompanies my disaffection with the concept and strategy of inclusivity as the basis of a Left democratizing practice (which is articulated in Left organisational cultures as 'a commitment to unite all oppressed groups' rather than in the now largely co-opted language of 'inclusivity'). Based on my organizing experience with/in the Pakistani Left, I find that the Left's approach to 'inclusivity' is premised on an abstract notion of 'openness to all' and focusses on the removal of explicit barriers to entry without reviewing the ways in which Left modes and methods of political organising may implicitly exclude or constrain the participation of certain groups. In my experience, this approach has not only been largely unsuccessful in mobilising and attracting working-class women (and other marginal groups) but also failed to understand these subjects on their own terms, resulting in what I describe above as political miscommunication. I read Spivak's provocation in '*Can the Subaltern Speak*' as an invitation to think more closely about the structurally-inflected frames of reference,

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[92] I am dissatisfied with the terms 'organiser' and 'organised' even as I use them. The term 'organiser' creates the impression that 'organisers' have a pre-determined organisational model with fixed structures and categories, making 'organising' a mechanical process of fitting 'target populations' into those models—all of which appears in both tone and content to replicate predatory modes of being and action. This conception also makes the 'organised' out to be static, passive objects of Left organisational strategy rather than subjects, premised on the naïve assumption that people from marginal groups would merely accede to being 'ordered' (or ordered around) by Left organisers even if they had no interest or willingness to do so. If anything, my experience as an organiser with these communities shows a regular refusal of the 'organised' to accede to our requests as Left parties/organisers. I deliberately use the term 'request' rather than 'demand' here, to indicate that Left organisations such as the AWP or those before them have not positioned themselves as traditional 'patrons' unlike other political parties who act as brokers between *basti* communities and state institutions and use this role as leverage to extract votes and/or bodies for occasions when the party needs to demonstrate a public 'show of strength'. Attempts to do politics 'differently', in this case outside the 'patron-client' paradigm has complex results, as explored in Chapter 7.

interpretation, and performance that undergird political (especially cross-class) communication, including communication between Left parties and their working-class constituents (a theme explored in Chapter 7).

While I acknowledge the seriousness of the issues raised by Spivak's critique for attempts to represent or recover subaltern voices, I find it important to integrate this critique into my research and political praxis rather than avoid 'speaking for' or 'about' subaltern 'others' altogether (Alcoff, 1995). Exploring the possibility suggested by Ram (2015) above—namely, that it is possible to come to understand better meanings and experiences outside dominant discourses, I find it fruitful to be attentive to how subaltern speech practices shift in intra- and cross-class communication. At the same time, I do not wish to over-emphasise the distinction between elite and subaltern audiences; I find that subaltern groups can (and do) become interested in communicating across audiences if the possibilities present themselves, depending on what those audiences and possibilities are and what these people/groups seek to gain from such communication or relationship (see also Roy, 2015 who makes a similar argument). My thinking about matters of audience and communication have been animated by questions about why my interlocutors shared what they did with me, how these patterns shifted over time, space and occasion and the embeddedness of these patterns in *relationship* which carries with it structural baggage as well as relational fluidity.

In relation to the discussion of the relationship between elite and subaltern domains, I confess that I entered this project with the implicit view that the relations and conditions of domestic service, the starkness of the inequality between the *kothi* and the *basti*, the moral, material, and ideational differences in the life-worlds of each setting, and corresponding experiences of indignity and inequality would be determining of the political subjectivities of the women I was researching. This is in essence a variation of the assumption warned against by Scott (1990) that "people are entirely consumed by their 'oppressors' and can't think or talk about anything else." (p. 111). In this regard, E.P. Thompson (1978), who, in qualifying what he meant by the 'cultural hegemony' of the English gentry in 18th-century England, wrote:

> [Hegemony] does not entail any acceptance by the poor of the gentry's paternalism *upon the gentry's own terms or in their approved self-image*… Whatever this hegemony may have been, it did not envelop the lives of the poor and it did not prevent them from defending their own modes of work and leisure, and forming their own rituals, their own satisfactions and view of life.
>
> (Thompson, 1978a, p. 163, emphasis mine)

While Scott's and Thompson's arguments in this regard seem convincing, the relationship between elite and subaltern domains, particularly in the realm of subjectivation, remains a complex matter. Are subaltern subjects—indeed, *all* subjects within a particular set of historical conditions—not subjected to and shaped by the ideologies that constitute 'culture', understanding 'culture' in its literal sense as that which we are both immersed in and constituted by? If so, where, when and how is the purported 'autonomy' of the subaltern subject defended or encroached? Following poststructuralist scepticism in this regard, is it possible even to speak of an autonomous subject that has not been prefigured by discourse (Butler, 1997; Thiem, 2008)? The complexities raised by these questions carries over into definitions of subalternity itself, as discussed in Section 2.1 of this chapter. I return to these complexities in later empirical/analytical chapters (see Chapter 6 in particular).

Having identified important conceptual resources required to study the everyday domination and resistance of/by marginal groups, critiqued and stretched them in light of my research context, and unpacked some of the complexities associated with the conceptualisations of subjectivation discussed so far in this chapter, I now move to a discussion of one of the major blind-spots in the literatures discussed so far: gender.

2.5. Recognition as Gendered Subalterns

Despite decades of feminist struggle both within and outside the academy, gender remains one of the major lacunae in the theorising of political subjects and subjectivities. Feminist scholars continue to remind us that engendering collective agency in most contexts doesn't happen as a 'matter of course'; interventions are necessary for it to become visible (Agarwal, 1994; Kannabiran et al., 1989; Madhok, 2021). Even in Left theory and practice, gender remains an occasional topic of 'special interest' but of no general theoretical import (Bannerji, 2000).

With the exception of a rich and growing strand of Pakistani feminist scholarship that explicitly intervenes to insert women as political subjects into the literature on Pakistani state and society,[93] the scholarship on Pakistan is based on an implicitly male conception of the political subject, an 'oversight' that has only recently begun to be acknowledged (though not yet substantively

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[93] For examples of feminist scholarship that centres women and gender in its analysis of Pakistani state, society, and social movements, see N. Hussain et al. (1997), Jamal (2002, 2013), A. Khan (2007), Mumtaz & Mumtaz (2012), Mumtaz and Shaheed (1986), Saigol (2003, 2013), and Shaheed (2010).

addressed) by a handful of progressive male academics (see Akhtar, 2018, p. 5). Similarly, Subaltern Studies- particularly its Indian variant- has been criticised for largely failing to take gender into account.[94]

Finding inadequate resources within the subaltern studies literature to theorise domestic workers as gendered subjects, I turn to feminist scholarship to theorise my interlocutors as *gendered subalterns*. I begin by discussing the gendered implications of the 'action bias' in most conceptions of agency, using Madhok's (2013) framework to bring into view alternative ways of understanding gendered subjects and subjectivation in manifestly oppressive contexts. I then take up Madhok's (2021) work on 'vernacular rights cultures', using it to conceptualise my interlocutors' narratives and claim-makings as conceptual vocabularies, arguing that contemporary feminist debates along the secular/religious binary are inadequate in understanding how these vocabularies are deployed by these subjects and advancing the argument that vernacular concepts/claims are not 'Western derivatives', taking interlocutors' use of the term '*insan*'- human- as a case in point.

To unpack the 'action bias' prevalent in most conceptions of agency, I draw on Madhok's (2013a) work on reformatting the concept of agency in order to account for agency (and agents) in manifestly oppressive contexts, the failure of which has resulted in misdescriptions of women's agency in these contexts (p. 104). As Madhok points out: "Most conceptualisations of agency rest on unreconstructed models of universalist, ahistorical, acontextual liberal humanist agency which are almost always conceptualised in oppositional terms – as challenging/resisting existing power relations and articulating universalized models of emancipatory politics" (p. 105). Additionally, she argues, very particular forms of agency are *expected* from marginal subjects (ibid.)

Arguing that these modifications to our thinking about agency requires us to "shift the 'background conditions' under which agency and agents are typically thought of/about" and "introduce changes to the practice and site of agency itself" (p. 106), Madhok suggests that we move beyond 'free action', choice, and 'open' resistance as markers of agency in order to take into account the difficulty of committing particular kinds of action for marginal subjects under oppressive conditions. Instead, Madhok suggests shifting the practice and site of agency "from action to speech practices, and focusing on how persons articulate a sense of their selves and reflexive considerations in their speech practices" (p. 107). The self-conscious operations, or 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988) of these subjects bring focus to the 'technologies of

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[94] See Bannerji (2000), Navarro-Tejero (2004), O'Hanlon (1988), Spivak (1988), and Viswesaran (1996).

power' that my interlocutors are subject to and bring out the links between subjectivation and subjection. At the same time, this 'self-conscious self-making' results in very different outcomes, meanings, and experiences (Madhok, 2013a, p. 110), as can be seen most vividly in interlocutors' ambivalent orientations towards fashioning themselves as desiring subjects (see Chapter 8).

Moving from the realm of free action to speech practices and self-fashioning, however, brings with it its own set of complications. For Madhok, the question of speech has at least two different dimensions of difficulty, the first concerning the very *act* of speaking: "Speech practices as we know are not only highly gendered but also classed and raced, and therefore questions exploring the nature of 'fields of power' within which speech occurs or is absent are extremely important" (Madhok, 2013a, p. 115). My critique of Scott's concept of 'hidden transcripts' (outlined earlier in this chapter and taken up again in Chapters 5 and 6) is premised on a similar argument. Moreover, as seen in Chapter 5, the myriad of non-verbal strategies used by domestic workers in their interactions with employers (which include a deliberate withholding of speech as a form of resistance) not only reveal much about the 'fields of power within which speech occurs or is absent' but also unsettle assumptions regarding speech acts and practices as being necessarily the most effective, clear, or preferable mode of communication for subordinate groups particularly in their direct interactions with the dominant.

The second complication pertaining to the shift from free action towards speech practices highlighted by Madhok (2013a) is concerned with Spivak's provocations regarding the elite representation of subaltern speech, discussed earlier in the chapter. In light of these complexities, Madhok is keen to move away from interpreting speech in terms of action and resistance and instead reads marginal subjects' creative self-fashioning practices as "some of the ways in which persons make sense of new ideas and ways of being that they encounter" (p.116). However, she also notes that "this displacement of the chief site of agency from free acts to speech practices and ethical reflection neither precludes the importance of committing actions, nor implies that speech practices can be performed more freely" (ibid).

Centring speech practices and self-fashioning in how I operationalise the exploration of my interlocutors' political subjectivities, I understand my interlocutors to be deploying conceptual vocabularies rooted in what Madhok (2021) calls 'vernacular rights cultures', which are 'active sites of subaltern politics' that are 'non-elite, particular and unprivileged sites of rights articulation and politics' (p.2). Madhok argues that this is necessary in order to register not just the political

and historical presence of subaltern groups, but also their *epistemic* presence, which deploys specific political imaginaries and conceptual vocabularies of claim-making and world-making (pp. 2-3). Tracking the conceptual vocabularies used by marginal groups to describe and critique their worlds also attends to "the urgent problem of the lack of conceptual diversity by facilitating the production of conceptual work from and in different geographical and 'nonstandard' background contexts and conditions, that is, contexts outside those of which concepts are standardly produced, described, and visualised" (p.3).

In my research context, I find tracking the conceptual and critical vocabularies and 'vernacular rights cultures' of my interlocutors all the more necessary because of the misdescription of their political subjectivities in the polarized debates within Pakistani feminist scholarship along 'secular' vs. 'religious' lines (A. Khan & Kirmani, 2018).[95] Much of this scholarship takes urban middle-class women as its subject, maintains a narrow focus on religious practices and subjectivities, and over-represents the role of religion and piety in women's subjectivation at the expense of attentiveness to the complexity and diversity of their actions, speech practices, and self-fashionings and to the historical, material, and social contexts within which these are embedded (Mojab & Zia, 2019; Zia, 2018). Moreover, the 'religious' versus 'secular' frame—reproduced in my view by all parties to the debate—continues to see people and their subjectivities in binary terms as *either* religious *or* secular,[96] which, as I show in later chapters, would be a misdescription of my interlocutors' subjectivities.

Chapter 6 in particular argues that interlocutors' deployments of religious discourse (which should not be confused with the performance of piety) offer important insights into their political subjectivities and subjectivation, and that these deployments function at three levels: One, as a form of social critique of the dominant; second, as a means of establishing group identity/worth; and third, at the level of the self, as a mode of self-fashioning and meaning making. I argue that in each case, interlocutors' deployments of religious discourse are a rejection of class (and other forms of) subservience, challenge class domination, and re-interpret/reframe the everyday

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[95] While internal disagreements on matters of religion and secularism are not new to the feminist movement, the recent debates have been generated in light of post-9/11 scholarship on Pakistani women's participation in Islamist parties and organisations; see Jamal (2005, 2013), Iqtidar (2011), Bano (2019), Bano and Kalmbach (2012), Haq (2007), and Ahmad (2009), and Zia (2018) for a scathing critique of this literature. There is also a growing literature that looks at the interconnections between Muslim/religious subjectivities and contested relationships with modernity amongst Pakistan's urban middle-classes, see Maqsood (2014, 2017).

[96] I include here Iqtidar's (2011) distinction between 'secularism' as a state/political *project* and 'secularization' as a social *process*, as it maintains the religious/secular binary even as it challenges the conflation of secularism with secularization and Eurocentric conceptions of modernity.

indignities that subordinate groups experience. Highlighting the politicised nature of these deployments is not intended to de-emphasize the 'religiosity' of my interlocutors; rather the intention is to understand these deployments on/in their own terms. At the same time, I also argue that class/structural critique is not expressed by interlocutors solely through deployments of religious discourse, but also through a variety of other vocabularies such as *insan* (human), *shehri* (citizen), and *ameer/ghareeb* (rich/poor).

A focus on my interlocutors' conceptual vocabularies also reveals the fallacy of the assumption that all universalist claims and conceptions are necessarily colonial hangovers or derivatives of hegemonic Western universalisms (Roy, 2015). Decolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2015; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) and Sylvia Wynter (2003) have rightly been critical of the colonial deployment of the concept of 'the human', arguing that its invention was rooted in dichotomous thinking, and that the concept was crucial to the functioning of the 'colonial matrix of power', "a particular local and self-promoting concept that understood itself as universal" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 155).[97] The 'human' then became the self-referential term for the white man of European modernity, defined in opposition to race/religion and sex (ibid., p. 159). Indeed, one of Mignolo's core arguments in this regard is that Man/Human is "merely the universalization of a regional vocabulary and a regional concept of unilinear time to name a certain species of organism for which every existing language and civilisation has its own name, concept, and storytelling." (ibid., p. 171) This project takes up Mignolo's call to 'refuse a privileging of Greek and Latin sources' by focusing on low-caste, working-class Pakistani women's deployments of the term '*insan*', the Urdu term for 'human' (see Chapter 6). I argue, however, that contrary to Mignolo's scepticism of universals, these women's conceptions of '*insan*' serve as a reminder of the efficacy, power, and possibility of "universals that, in aiming at the totality", do *not* in fact "become totalitarian" (ibid., p. 165).

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[97] For Wynter (2003), different historical periods in the post-Renaissance era feature different 'genres' of 'the Man/human', which Wynter names 'Man 1' and 'Man 2' respectively. 'Man 1' is the rational, secular (though still hybridly-religious) 'homo-politicus': the political subject, who is a subject of the state rather than of the Church. 'Man 1' (homo-politicus) emerged in opposition to the pre-Renaissance hegemony of the Church and replaced theocentric conceptions of the 'supernatural' as the basis for domination with rational-scientific explanations for the 'natural' inferiority of slaves and colonized peoples of Africa and Asia (pp. 262-287). 'Man 2' emerged as the result of subsequent struggles between 'old' landed elites and 'new' non-landed, mercantile capitalist elites, resulting in the shift from 'homo-politicus' (Man 1) to 'homo-economicus' (Man 2), the hard-working, enterprising, breadwinning Man who acts 'rationally' and 'optimally' in his 'self-interest' (pp. 320-21).

Having drawn on Madhok (2013a, 2020) to address the 'action bias' in conceptions of agency and to theorise my interlocutors as gendered subalterns, I turn- in the last section of this chapter- to making a case for understanding domestic workers as *desiring subjects*. As low-caste, working-class women, domestic workers are expected to be selfless, diligent, persevering, patient and sacrificing, not *desiring* subjects. This prohibition on desiring, I argue, is tied up with the denial of selfhood and subject status itself, as demonstrated by anticolonial scholarship (Fanon, 1952/1967, 1963; Stoler, 1995). Moreover, conceptualising these subjects as desiring subjects enables an exploration of affective dissonance in interlocutors' narratives and field encounters which are not adequately theorised by concepts of agency. Thus, in the following and final section of this chapter, I argue that an understanding of these gendered subaltern subjects as fully *human* political subjects—in line with my interlocutors' claims/demand to be seen as human (see Chapter 6)—requires understanding domestic workers as desiring subjects who not only think and act but also *feel* and *want*.

2.6. Domestic Workers as Desiring Subjects

I first came upon desire as a central analytical category in the process of tracking my interlocutors' narratives and self-fashionings. My interest in desire emerged unexpectedly and intensely during fieldwork and 'stuck' with me since, reminiscent of the ways that affect itself works (S. Ahmed, 2010, p. 29). I first noticed desire in the verbal content of interlocutors' stories about their workplace experiences and then even more powerfully in their accounts of their intimate lives, particularly in their repeated (and often contradicted) self-fashionings as 'selfless', 'self-sacrificing' wives and mothers (see Chapter 8). Analytically, desire became a thread connecting 'moments' (Lefebvre, 1959/2014; see subsequent paragraphs for an elaboration)- particularly moments of 'affective dissonance' in which "the gaps between self-narration and social reality" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154) became clearly- and often painfully- evident both to me and to interlocutors themselves.

I find a focus on desire to be particularly important for researching a social context which legally criminalises *all* consensual sexual relations outside marriage and where a woman's social status and 'respectability' is linked above all else to sexual modesty (Maqsood, 2021; Raheja & Gold, 1994). Akin to Fanon's (1952/1967) descriptions of the psychic injuries of the colonised subject, this social context prohibits low-caste working-class women in particular

from being/becoming desiring subjects.[98] Even though the gendered aspects of the prohibition on desire are centred around sexual desire, they also extend well beyond it to desire and desiring *in general*, encroaching on virtually all matters of my interlocutors' selves as women and co-constituted with class, caste, and ethnicity. This extension of the concept beyond the realm of the sexual is supported by Goodchild's (1996) view that "desire is a de-territorialised concept in that it does not derive its entire meaning from the territory in which it is first located, in this case, sexual relations. Desire is a 'sexuality' which extends beyond gender relations, because it can relate entirely heterogeneous terms and territories, a multiplicity of sexes." (p.44)

Drawing on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre (1959/2014), I conceptualise desire as a thread connecting 'moments' in my interlocutors' self-fashionings in which they temporarily become 'someone else'; moments in which something shifts in their usual range of comportments, where their self-fashionings appear strange, new, unfamiliar (often to their own selves too, as was sometimes expressed during or after these encounters), and unusually *animated*. I understand Lefebvre's concept of 'moment' as a theorisation of how possibility emerges in/from the everyday, changing from a distant possibility into an immanent one, serving as a temporary disruption to the staleness and inevitability of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1959/2014, pp. 524–525). Lefebvre himself articulates 'moment' as:

> [...] the attempt to achieve the total realisation of a possibility. Possibility offers itself; and it reveals itself. It is determined and consequently it is limited and partial. Therefore to wish to live it as a totality is to exhaust it as well as to fulfil it. The Moment wants to be freely total; it exhausts itself in the act of being lived.

> (Lefebvre, 1959/2014, p. 518)

Moments, for Lefebvre, signify presence, aliveness, and connectedness in contrast to the 'deadness' engendered by alienation (Merrifield, 2006, p. 64). Even though the 'moment' is inevitably fleeting/temporary and thus incurs disappointment, it is significant enough to create an intensity that is remembered (Law, 2015, p. 204). It is prompted by a decision to choose to open up/explore a particular possibility, despite risk of failure and/or disappointment. Indeed, "only passion formed in and by the risks of 'the moment' makes possible what was previously impossible about everyday life" (ibid., p. 205). In this sense, Lefebvre's theory of moments ties

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[98] See Ann Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995) for a discussion of the prohibition on desiring for white women in the colonies (pp. 183-4) which exhibits some interesting parallels with this observation.

well with the movement towards the 'not-yet' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 20; Dinerstein, 2015, pp. 1–27)— or what I call 'something else' (as I discuss shortly)— which characterises my interlocutors as desiring subjects.

Conceptually, I find agency to be a limiting framework within which to articulate this movement towards 'something else'. While acknowledging the rich contributions of feminist scholarship to the theorisation of (gendered) agency,[99] I find that most conceptualisations of agency confine their field of vision to the boundaries of *existing* potentials and constraints within which people become, act, and choose, serving ends that are *in sight*.[100] I argue that desire *stretches* both agency *and* the realm of the possible, orienting subjects towards the future, moving everyone and everything towards 'something else'.

Desire, in this thesis, is conceived of in numerous ways, each of which bring forth a distinct aspect of the political subjectivities and subjectivation of my interlocutors. First, I conceive of desire as an *orientation towards the future* (Dean, 2012), even if the production of desire lies in the past and is co-constituted by the 'self' and social forces outside oneself (Deleuze, quoted in Goodchild, 1996, p.21). This orientation towards the future may or may not be *hopeful* or forward-looking; indeed, in various instances that will appear in chapters to follow, an overt negation, rejection, and suppression of desire can be seen; including a negation of oneself as a desiring subject, bringing into view the futility and the dangers of desiring rather than assuming it to be pleasurable, joyful, or satisfying (Pile, 2019). It is both in the expression and the suppression of desire that my interlocutors' selves come into view (Thiem, 2008, p. 46); a process accompanied by a range of affects and affective states, notably grief, anger, anxiety, disappointment, and cynicism. Desire sometimes appears as longing, driven by lack (as posited by a Lacanian framework); at other times as imagination and fantasy; at yet others, as revenge. Indeed,

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[99] See Brown (1995), Kapur, (2002, 2018), Madhok et al. (2013), Mahmood (2005), McNay (2000), Raghavan (2023), Spivak (1988) and Stringer (2014).

[100] Despite their differences, various relational, substantive, and procedural accounts of gendered agency- and gendered autonomy in particular- recognise the effects that past or continued oppressive socialisation may have on an agent's autonomy in the present, and how these may shape an agent's thinking about the future. (Stoljar, 2022; Walsh, 2023). However, these debates remain largely concerned with the realms of 'freedom' and 'choice' (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013), and whether or not agency should be a 'normative' concept, rather than provincializing assumptions about the feminist subject (Hutchings, 2013, p. 25). Moreover, debates on agency are mostly confined to the realm of cognition (Gregg & Siegworth, 2010) and are not sufficiently concerned with the realm of possibility, the unknown, the imagined, or the 'not-yet'; features that make affect theory more attractive for my conceptual framework than the feminist debates around agency.

conceptions of and longings for justice find expression in my interlocutors' frequent and semantically complex invocations of Allah/God (see Chapter 6).

Second, I conceive of desire, like affect, as a *force* (Gregg & Siegworth, 2010, p.2); one which changes form and direction based on the pathways available to it, but does not disappear even when blocked, ignored, or wished away (Thiem, 2008, pp. 43-46). I understand desire as a force that creates vitality and insists on materialisation; in other words, it insists on translation into material, enacted, and embodied forms. In doing so, it compels *movement*, a central feature both of Freudian understandings of desire (Gorton, 2008, p. 18) and contemporary theorisations of affect (see Gregg & Siegworth, 2010). This movement occurs potentially in any and all realms, from the intimate and the individual to the collective and the structural, and between states and bodies (Massumi, 2002, pp. 4–5). This movement enables- sometimes even *compels*- risk-taking, materialising in a range of choices and actions, shifting the field in and around my interlocutors. I argue that a focus on desire brings into view subaltern political subjects that are at their most alive, most dynamic, and most courageous; subjects that are not content with 'bare existence' and 'thingness' as they are conditioned and coerced into being (Fanon, 1967). As Fanon writes:

> As soon as I desire, I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world- that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions.
>
> (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 218)

I make a case here for extending Fanon's analysis of the colonised Black Antillean subject to domestic workers in present-day Pakistan, both of whom have been relegated to the realm of the 'natural', denied subject status, and (as Chapter 8 will show) share remarkable similarities in their subjectivation despite their different regional, temporal, and cultural contexts. I also argue that, despite their vulnerability, these desiring subjects do not merely conform to 'adaptive preferences' (Walsh, 2023); that these are subjects who take risks out of choice rather than desperation, who allow themselves to yearn, strive, long for another world, a different future, a becoming, a movement towards 'something else' even if not yet a 'not-yet' (Dinerstein, 2015).

I find that the concept of 'not-yet'- inspired by the work of Ernst Bloch and used by a variety of scholars and disciplines to articulate their vision of an emancipatory future (see Dinerstein, 2015, Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Bhattacharya et.al., 2017)- implies (at least in a literal sense) a degree

of clarity of vision, identification/articulation of a 'destination', a desired state or condition. For this reason, I find that the concept of 'not-yet' does not adequately represent the confusion, ambivalence, anxiety, bitterness, and even hopelessness that I observed in interlocutors' individual encounters with desire (see Chapter 8), nor does it serve as an accurate descriptor of the visions articulated by *basti walas* during collective mobilisations (see Chapter 7) which continue to centre on the fear/threat of loss; a defensive orientation to save/protect what exists rather than a hopeful orientation aimed towards nurturing or growth. 'Something else' more aptly signifies the nascent, raw, elementary nature of this orientation; one that is characterised by a refusal to be resigned to what 'is' but without necessarily having a clear idea of what is sought or hoped for.

I see various points of resonance between the conceptualisations of desire I draw on and those of affect theory: namely, the latter's attentiveness to movement/becoming, to the unexpected, to the transformative potential of affect, and the theorisation of affect itself as force and as potential (Gregg & Siegworth, 2010). However, I have chosen to name interlocutors' animation as 'desire' rather than 'affect' because the former possesses a specificity that does not map directly onto the broader terrain of affect (which could include a number of different affects apart from those associated with what I term 'desire'). I also share with Hemmings (2005) her rejection of "the fascination with affect as outside social meaning", and together with her consider affect valuable "precisely to the extent that it is *not* autonomous [of social meaning, conditioning, or structures]." (Hemmings, 2005, p. 565). Thus, while I share with affect theory an interest in transformation and becoming, this interest lies specifically in exploring if and how desire/affect can be channelled into an expanded, prefigurative, revolutionary politics[101]- not just ideas *about* politics, but a politics that can be practiced, lived, experimented and played with, and that can- no, *must*- be useful and (re)generative for the everyday struggles of those who suffer the most at the hands of the status quo, located far from the realm of abstruse theorising where much academic theory is produced and circulates.

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[101] I find useful here Ana Cecilia Dinerstein's (2015) carefully crafted, expansive and de-polarizing concept of 'autonomy' as "the art of organising hope; a collective pursuit towards the realisation of what does not yet exist and the concrete anticipation of such unrealised reality in the present." (p.13, 25). For Dinerstein, autonomy is 'a tool for the process of prefiguration' which is "not 'against' the state or 'outside' the state but internal to the social relation of capital" (p. 19).

Understanding desire then, is crucial for an understanding of my interlocutors' political subjectivities and also their actual and possible orientations towards politics, within and beyond collective mobilisations. As subaltern political subjects who are either absent from political mobilisations—or, when present, appear only as bodies—it is essential to engage carefully and deeply with their political subjectivities and with their views on, and orientation towards, political action (which I do in Chapter 7). Moreover, this thesis is itself a desiring project. It is driven by a desire to know *if there can be*—coupled with a desire *to bring into being*—a politics that goes beyond collective resistance to actual or anticipated *loss*; a politics that becomes a means to *regenerate* desire, to replenish the *will to desire* for these subjects, for myself, and for the world we live in.

Conclusion

This chapter assembles a theoretical framework suited to theorising the political subjectivation of Islamabad's domestic workers by exploring how to conceptualise and visualise the subaltern politics of gendered subjects beyond the realm of political action. In a context marked by an absence of domestic workers organising and the largely episodic, instrumental mobilisation of working-class women within patriarchal modes of institutionalized politics, it argues alongside rich bodies of Marxist and feminist scholarship for the need to go beyond the realm of political action into that of the everyday in order to bring into view non-normative political subjects who rarely appear in the realm of organised politics. In doing so, it extends each of these literatures both empirically and conceptually, contributing to the scholarship on the political subjectivities of subaltern groups in the global South. It also insists on the importance of gendering the study of political subjects and subjectivation and on the importance of producing historically-located, gendered accounts of political subjectivation in 'non-standard' background conditions and contexts. This does the important work of bringing into view marginal subjects who otherwise miss political radars in organising and scholarship, with the aim that political subjectivities and gendered modes of subjectivation become integral parts of how we conceptualise the political.

True to the tradition of inter-disciplinary feminist research, this chapter brings together a variety of scholarly literatures- social reproduction theory, subaltern studies, and a variety of feminist, Marxist and anticolonial scholarship located across different disciplinary and theoretical/ideological traditions. In doing so, it not only builds a robust theoretical framework

suited to the particularities of my research project, it also puts these otherwise disparate literatures and perspectives into conversation, discusses their points of synergy and divergence, and draws on each of them for their particular strengths as well as to address the limitations of other frameworks and traditions.

In conceptualising the subaltern politics of gendered subjects beyond the realm of political action, I have been careful not to reproduce the binary of situating political subjects and subjectivities as either 'inside' or 'outside' political action, maintaining that what is crucial is ensuring that my conceptualisation of political subjects and subjectivation is sensitive to the oppressive contexts that my interlocutors inhabit and that it does not *require* participation in political action as a prerequisite for being considered a political subject or understand political action as the exclusive site for the exploration of political subjectivities. In theorising political subjectivities and subjectivation, I emphasise the importance of taking into account the historical and material contexts within which political subjects are located while recognising subjectivation as a contingent process.

Moving beyond work/non-work binaries prevalent in the literatures on social reproduction and domestic service, this chapter argues for understanding the subjectivities of those performing social-reproductive labour (both waged and unwaged, within and outside the home) in a manner that does not compartmentalize their identities and experiences as 'domestic workers', as 'women', or as 'minorities' but rather understands them as complex political subjects living multi-faceted lives. And finally, the chapter argues that the lives of domestic workers involve labour but also, crucially, *desire*. Understanding them as desiring subjects is necessary in order to give a fuller account of their political subjectivities, in accordance with the demand—"*hum bhi insan hain*", "we are human too"—made by these subjects themselves in subsequent chapters. The humanisation of these subaltern political subjects, I argue, requires understanding them as desiring subjects who not only think and act but also *feel* and *want*.

Having laid out the conceptual and theoretical framework that underpins the study of political subjects, subjectivities, and subjectivation in the case of Islamabad's domestic workers, the next chapter describes the historical, social, and structural contexts in which this subjectivation is taking place, locating the institution of domestic service and the demographic groups who constitute its workforce in the broader context of Pakistan's political economy.

Chapter 3

Contextualising Domestic Service in Pakistan

3.1. The Story of Tayyaba

As with most 'events' reported in the media in contemporary times, the uproar that followed the 'discovery' of 10-year-old Tayyaba's abuse in late December 2016 at the hands of her employers— none other than a serving sessions court judge and his wife—was forgotten just as quickly as it emerged. Media images of the assaulted child-maid, with deep scars on the side of her face and burn marks on her body, circulated widely on Pakistan's social media, drawing the attention of the Chief Justice of Pakistan. The Chief Justice ordered the Islamabad High Court to ignore the sudden 'agreement' reached between the girls' parents and the employers just five days after Tayyaba was recovered from her employers' residence, and to continue to investigate the case as "no 'agreements' can be reached in matters concerning fundamental human rights."[102] The accused couple was eventually convicted in April 2018 of 'neglecting an injured child' and acquitted of all major charges, including that of assault. In fact, the Supreme Court intervened on 10 January 2020 to set aside the Islamabad High Court's decision to extend the couple's jail-term from one to three years.[103]

Stories such as Tayyaba's are not uncommon in the Pakistani press.[104] Neither is the withdrawal of charges by Tayyaba's family, one of tens of thousands of poor, low-caste[105] families residing in rural Punjab, whose circumstances compel them to send their children to work as domestic servants for elite/middle-class 'patrons' in Pakistan's cities. Notable for their lack of exceptionalism, the stories of abuse faced by Pakistan's domestic workers bring to light some of the salient features of

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[102] https://www.dawn.com/news/1480629

[103] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44397432

[104] A number of cases of torture and abuse of child domestic workers have been reported recently in the Pakistani press. The links below are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to serve as evidence of the prevalence of the phenomenon.
https://dailytimes.com.pk/312494/minor-maid-subjected-to-torture-in-rawalpindi/
https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2017/abuse-of-domestic-workers-a-norm-in-capital
https://www.dawn.com/news/1322012

[105] As introduced in Chapter 1, this thesis uses the term 'low-caste' to refer to kinship groups located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy in Punjab's rural social order (since this study is based in the Punjab region). These groups are associated with 'menial' occupations such as sweeping, sanitation, and service work as well as physically-threatening occupations such as mining and brick-kiln work, and experience little class or occupational mobility as a group. Caste is a complex category to work with in the Pakistani context for a number of reasons, not least because both state and society deny the existence of caste amongst Muslims. See section 3.4 of this chapter for a detailed discussion of caste in Pakistan.

everyday life in Pakistan's major cities: overcrowding, growing class disparity (both within and across urban centres), increasing competition for jobs, resources, access to basic civic amenities, and intensifying interpersonal and collective violence, particularly against women and children.[106]

Incidents such as Tayyaba's- despite gaining local and international attention[107]- have done little to dent the invisibility of domestic service and domestic workers in Pakistan's social fabric. While there are brief, sporadic spurts of moral outrage when 'cases' like Tayyaba are 'discovered', there have been few attempts to draw attention to the *structural conditions* which perpetuate the indignity and exploitation that marks domestic service in Pakistan. This is the task of the present chapter.

The invisibility and exploitation associated with domestic service as an occupation are, in some respects, universal. This universality is evident in feminist analyses of how capitalist-patriarchy is transforming the meaning, relations, and conditions of work and social reproduction everywhere, even if the concrete manifestations of these transformations vary across different contexts.[108] In particular, the complexities generated by the 'private' nature of domestic service,[109] and the related difficulties of regulating employment relations and conditions in this realm have been well-documented in the literature on domestic service.[110]

The particularities of domestic service in a global South context, however, go well beyond issues of legal recognition and the employer-employee relationship (Acciari, 2018; Hepburn, 2019; Olayiwola, 2019). Similar to the West African context described by Olayiwola (2019), the difficulty of employing 'rights-based' or legal approaches to improving the conditions of domestic service in Pakistan is compounded by a severely limited state interest in and capacity for regulation or welfare, in addition to informality, flexibility, and enmeshment of domestic service relations within cultural relations of class and caste patronage, rural/urban divides, and kin-based networks that provide mechanisms of addressing vulnerability and supporting internal migration processes

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[106] For an overview of statistics of violence against women in recent years, see: https://www.dw.com/en/violence-against-women-on-the-rise-in-pakistan/a-50550672. A report describing rising rates of sexual and physical abuse of children, can be found here: https://www.dawn.com/news/1473645

[107] The BBC prepared a documentary on Tayyaba's case, which can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsvHgU3kalQ

[108] See Arat-Koc (2006), Bakker and Gill (2003, 2019), Elias and Rai (2015, 2019), Fraser (2016), Rioux (2015), (Bhattacharya, 2017), Mezzadri et al., (2022), and Federici (2019).

[109] See Anderson (2000, 2007), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007), Kousha (1994), and Ray and Qayum (2009).

[110] See Anderson (2015), Chen (2011), and Triandafyllidou (2013), and for a comprehensive survey of the literature on domestic service, see Sarti (2014).

(pp. 175-182). While there are numerous studies based in the global South documenting the complex social relations and structural conditions within which domestic service is imbricated,[111] there are very few studies from Pakistan that undertake a multi-axial investigation into domestic service. This study, and this chapter in particular, aims to reduce this gap.

The present chapter extends the arguments made in Chapter 1 regarding the invisibility of domestic service by identifying *the particular invisibility of those who do this work* in the Pakistani context due to the multiple, integrated layers of social identity and oppressions they embody (Ferguson et al., 2016; Glenn, 1992). The chapter begins by historicising the occupation of domestic service in the South Asian context, arguing that the 'present' of domestic service shows both continuity and change in relation to its 'past'. This section discusses how the contemporary 'hybrid model' of domestic service in Pakistan's cities combines caste/*biraderi*[112] relations and market principles in a way that heightens the vulnerability and 'disposability' of domestic workers (Zulfiqar, 2019).

The second section of the chapter traces the social and structural dimensions of domestic service in present-day Pakistan, focusing on its class, caste, and gender dynamics. Domestic workers, as stated earlier, are a group with particular demographic characteristics: they are extremely poor rural migrants belonging to low-caste communities, and the occupation is staffed increasingly by women and children. Drawing out the links between caste and domestic service, this section asserts that despite its fervent denial by the 'Islamic Republic' and the majority of its inhabitants, caste certainly exists in Pakistan. This section also highlights that low-caste groups are often mired in relationships of bonded labour,[113] which do not cease with migration to urban areas but take on different forms (Upadhyaya, 2004).

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[111] Latin America, where as much as 30% of the population is associated with domestic service either as a worker or an employer (Blofield & Jokela, 2018, p. 531), has seen a sharp increase in literature on the subject (see Acciari, 2018; Blofield & Jokela, 2018; Pinho, 2015; Wade, 2013). In the South Asian context, there is a burgeoning literature on domestic service in India (see Chopra, 2006; Jain & Mishra, 2018; Ray & Qayum, 2009; Sinha, 2020; Sinha et al., 2019; Sinha & Varma, 2019).

[112] *Biraderi* is a term that literally means 'fraternity' but is used more loosely to refer to 'kinship groups' in Pakistani Punjab. In some cases, it is also used interchangeably with other terms such as '*qaum*', which translates literally to 'nation', 'tribe' or 'sect'. The relationship of each of these terms to 'caste' in the Pakistani context is discussed later in this chapter (see page 92).

[113] Bonded labour, understood here as "a coercive and oppressive labour arrangement disguised by seemingly legitimate and 'voluntary' transactions between individuals" (CSSR, 2004, p. 1) is technically illegal in Pakistan, and yet persists in occupations such as brick-kiln work, agricultural labour, domestic service, begging, mining, and carpet-weaving, all of which are staffed by the poorest and most vulnerable social groups, particularly low-caste groups (ibid., p. 44).

The third and final section of this chapter locates the occupation of domestic service in the larger context of women's labouring practices in the country with a focus on the institutional infrastructure of data collection on women's work that serves to under-represent and invisibilise both the nature and extent of women's labour.

3.2. Historicising Domestic Service in the Indian subcontinent

What is today known as 'domestic service' in the Indian subcontinent has a past that goes back as early as the Vedic period (i.e. c.1500- c.500 BCE) and the terms for 'servant' span extremely diverse linguistic and epistemological contexts (Sinha et al., 2019). The plethora of terms for 'servant' in subcontinental history[114] shows that domestic servants have been far from a monolithic social group or category of worker/slave; they performed a range of domestic, sexual, and emotional work in a variety of relationships. (ibid, p. 4). Sinha, Varma, and Jha (2019) argue that though servitude may have first become visible to historians and historiographers through the specific literatures that accompanied the establishment of slavery in the Delhi sultanate in the 13th century, the practices of "men and women selling themselves, or (more commonly) being sold by others, was known and practiced in the Subcontinent at least since the post-Vedic times" (p. 67).

The persistence of servitude in the Indian subcontinent should not take away from the fundamental transformations that its 'cultures of servitude' have undergone in various historical epochs. Much of this history has been embedded in a (changing) caste-based social order (discussed in later sections) which delineated occupations and social hierarchy based on caste/kinship. The distinctiveness of domestic service in the colonial period lies partly in introducing a household setting (the colonial, European household) which did not employ the language or norms of kinship and caste (even though it was influenced by them), leading to the growth of a relatively contractual culture of servitude, particularly in European households, over that period (Sinha et al., 2019, p. 74).

It is worth noting that during the colonial era, domestic service was neither a feminine occupation nor was it considered menial work to be performed by 'low-castes', as it has become over the last century (Sinha, 2020). Qayum and Ray (2003) argue that as many as three-fourths of Calcutta's

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[114] A glossary of the terms used for 'servant' in pre-modern and early-modern times, spanning multiple languages, has been put together by Sinha, Varma and Jha (2019) in their *Introduction* to 'Servant's Pasts, Vol. 1', pp. 48-55.

Brahmins in the 19th century were domestic servants and that "in the past, servants could be upper or lower caste, according to the nature of the task" (p. 526). Also part of the colonial 'Indian system' of domestic service (which was adopted as the generally accepted system in British colonies in East Africa) was the acceptance that "each servant [will] perform the duties of his office and none other",[115] evidence of the relative 'dignity' accorded to the occupation through an elaborate and careful distribution of tasks/roles corresponding to varying degrees of status within the domain of domestic service.

The culture of domestic service in post-colonial Pakistan has shifted in many ways since the colonial period, becoming less exclusive, poorly-paid, flexible, temporary, degraded, and feminised. While the rural land-owning elite continues to operate within the framework of caste/*biraderi* and kinship relations [albeit infusing it with modern market principles which heighten the workers' exploitation; see Zulfiqar (2019)], the 'modern' urban elite is now moving towards hiring Filipina maids as a status symbol (A. Shahid, 2019). While older sections of the urban elite (whether 'feudal' or 'modern')[116] continue to live in palatial houses and hire an entourage of domestic workers, the generational differences observed by Ray and Qayum (2009) in the Indian city of Calcutta are also applicable to the Pakistani context, where the new and young elite are increasingly occupying smaller (albeit posh) apartment buildings rather than mansions, some of whom harbour liberal-progressive ideals while continuing to create and maintain class and caste distinctions between themselves and their employees. Urban employers of domestic service include not just landed families with rural ties residing in the cities, but also a wide range of business, professional and middle-classes without direct economic or kinship ties to the village, as well as "the small shopkeeper who has a sweeper come in to clean his home" (CSSR, 2004, p. 11). Indeed, domestic service today is much more widespread and integrated into the urban social fabric than in rural settings where it is the preserve of the wealthiest households in the village (ibid. p. 10). Yet, there is very little research documenting the experiences, conditions, nature, or scale of domestic service in urban settings, an issue taken up in the following section of this chapter.

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[115] This was stated in the 1930 edition of The Handbook of Tanganyika, a colonial document used to familiarize European newcomers to life in the colonies (Pariser, 2015, p. 112).

[116] There is a debate in Pakistani-Marxist scholarship around whether Pakistan has 'emerged from feudalism' and 'entered capitalism' (see Akhtar, 2018; Rahman, 2012; S. A. Zaidi, 2015). This question has implications for whether contemporary domestic service in Pakistan is to be understood as a 'feudal hangover', a 'modern' form of servitude, or merely a form of 'employment'.

3.3. Who are Pakistan's domestic workers? Class, Caste, and Gender Dynamics of Domestic Service in Pakistan

While the scholarship on domestic service in Pakistan is sparse but growing,[117] the data available on the scale and conditions of domestic service in Pakistan remains extremely limited and unreliable, and estimates fluctuate wildly. Only as recently as 2008/9 did Pakistan's Labour Force Survey (LFS) include domestic service as an occupation. However, apart from this particular LFS survey in 2008-9, no LFS survey has reported data specifically on the occupation of domestic service. This is despite the fact that domestic service is the most widespread form of employment for urban working-class women, particularly rural migrants (CSSR, 2004) and accounts for 2.1% of all paid workers in the country (Shahnaz, 2017). Available data suggests that women domestic workers earn less than half of the female average in the country and with average monthly incomes of PKR 5000 (approximately £26) in 2014/5, are amongst the lowest-paid workers nationwide (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016; Shahnaz, 2017).

A large majority (78%) of Pakistan's domestic workers are concentrated in the Punjab province, Pakistan's most populated, agriculturally productive, and economically 'developed' administrative region (Shahnaz, 2017). Though no firm figures are available, the majority of these workers appear to be rural migrants,[118] primarily from within the Punjab province.[119] De-peasantisation[120] and rapid urbanisation are amongst the starkest transformations taking place in Punjab's political economy, and also across Pakistan, South Asia and the global South (Araghi, 1995; Breman, 1985, 1994). Deepening capitalist penetration, particularly after the Green Revolution in the 1960s, has dispossessed large swathes of the rural population from access to land and livelihood and cast them away as 'surplus populations' (Habibi & Juliawan, 2018) in favour of capital- technology- and energy-intensive production (Hasan, 2010; Niazi, 2004; Rouse, 1988). Those rendered 'surplus' by

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[117] See fn. 11.

[118] A break-up of the migrant status of live-in domestic workers by their region/province of origin in the year 2014-15 shows that 50% of live-in workers were migrants, of which 50% were from Punjab, 37% were from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, followed by a 10% share of migrants from Sindh (Shahnaz, 2017). However, these patterns cannot be generalised because live-in workers comprise only 21% of domestic service providers (author's calculations from figures presented by Shahnaz, 2017) and no data is presently available on the ethnicity, region of origin, or migrant status of live-out/part-time domestic workers.

[119] Data on internal migration within and across Pakistan's provinces shows that 80% of rural-urban migrants in Punjab move within the province, as do the vast majority of rural-urban migrants in the other provinces (Mahmud et al., 2010, p. 601).

[120] Following Araghi (1995), I use the term 'de-peasantisation' as a concept that "expresses the experience of the Third World peasantries between 1945 and 1990, when an increasing number of people who were involved in agriculture with direct access to the production of their means of subsistence became rapidly and massively concentrated in urban locations." (p. 5)

these changes in the mode of production are those with small landholdings (Hamid, 2010) as well as those without land, the latter group comprising more than half of the rural population (Niazi, 2004). These 'surplus' populations are increasingly turning to the cities in search of livelihood, as well as to seek freedom from stringent caste hierarchies and to find/create educational opportunities for their children (Hasan, 2010, pp. 38–39). While earlier migration patterns show that one or more male members of the family would move to the city in search of work, in recent years the share of female migrants in rural to urban migration has increased (particularly in Punjab), along with higher rates of family migration to cities (Hamid, 2010, pp. 4–12). This is despite higher rates of unemployment in the urban areas compared to the rural (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2017, p. 147).

Upon arrival in the cities, where the poorest 68% of the urban population has access to a mere 1% of market-provided housing (Malik & Wahid, 2014, p. 101), these dispossessed 'surplus' populations find themselves with no legal or formal housing options. They turn to *katchi abadis*-informal/unauthorised squatter settlements, usually on government land- patronised by land-grabbing middlemen and state functionaries in violation of formal laws and regulations (Akhtar, 2018). As per the rules of the invisible but well-oiled informal housing market, squatters pay these patrons for the land upon which they incrementally construct their dwellings as well as for the use of basic amenities like electricity, water and/or gas if/where access to these resources is possible. (ibid.) Despite the state's pledges (dating back to 1973) to recognise, regularise and improve the conditions of *katchi abadis*, the vast majority of these settlements have no security of tenure and are therefore subject to forced demolitions whenever the state decides to allocate the land for another (usually 'development'-related) purpose (see Hasan, 2006, p. 455).

Domestic service in Pakistan is, on the one hand, an entirely informal, undocumented form of employment, with no contracts, labour laws or regulations such as working hours, minimum wage, or the right of organisation applicable to the workers (Malik et. al., 2016).[121] Though there are no studies tracking changes in the scale and nature of domestic service over time in Pakistan, it can be assumed that both the supply and the demand for domestic service has grown with the rising inequality in the country (ILO, 2013). Milkman et. al.'s (1998) assertion that income inequality is a significant predictor of the demand for domestic service in general (and in particular of the proportion of the female labour force employed in domestic service) is corroborated by data on

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[121] See fn. 17 for an account of the recent legislation on domestic service and its implementation (or lack thereof).

the regional distribution of domestic service in Pakistan, which is heavily skewed towards the richer provinces with higher levels of inequality.[122] The trend of long-term/generational associations of rural/migrant families living with and working for urban elite families also seems to be decreasing, evidenced by the high proportion of part-time domestic workers in the present-day workforce (Shahnaz, 2017). Domestic service is becoming an increasingly flexible, market-driven occupation with little security or predictability, and yet subject to 'extra-economic forms of coercion' such as caste-ism and the associated links of low-caste status with 'impurity' and 'foreignness', which further compound the class exploitation faced by these workers (Zulfiqar, 2019).

Notwithstanding the important changes taking place in the structural dynamics of domestic service in contemporary Pakistan, the continued use of familial terms - such as the term '*baji*', the Urdu word for 'sister', to refer to (women) employers[123]- is an indicator that domestic service continues to be a deeply personalised, patronage-based relationship and illustrates the complex intertwining of intimacy, reciprocity, and hierarchy in this structurally unequal and exploitative relationship. Lila Abu-Lughod (1999) argues in her study of the Bedouins that 'patron-client relations are like family relations' (p. 83) and that expressing non-kin relations in kin-based terms 'emphasises the responsibility of the powerful' and reframes unequal relations as relations 'not of domination and subordination but of protection and dependency' (p. 85). While the 'public transcript' (Scott, 1990) of contemporary domestic service relations in Pakistan certainly attempts to downplay the elements of inequality and subordination through the use of kin-based terms of address, domestic workers' narratives presented in subsequent chapters present a different and more complex picture. In some instances, interlocutors appreciated being referred to and treated 'like one of the family' by their employers, particularly where these relationships and experiences were characterised by dignity, respect, mutual aid, and affection (see also Sengupta & Sen, 2016). In most cases, however, the euphemisation of their subordinate status (through the use of kin-based terms) came in for heavy criticism from domestic workers, who saw it as a form of hypocrisy rather than of horizontality, responsibility, or affection. (See Chapter 5 for further discussion).

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[122] 78% of Pakistan's domestic workers hail from (and live/work in) the Punjab province, followed by Sindh (14%), Khyber-Pakhtunkwa (5%) and less than 1% in Balochistan (Shahnaz, 2017).
[123] *Bajis*- or women employers- usually play the role of 'primary' employer who is in charge of communicating with domestic workers (both men and women) and of 'managing' the domestic service relationship on behalf of the household. This continues to be the case even with *bajis* who themselves are engaged in paid employment and thus absent from the *kothi* for part or much of the working day.

In a similar vein, while many members of the Anglicised elite/middle-classes have replaced their use of the term 'servant' with 'domestic worker' or 'domestic helper', the local terms in Urdu that are still most commonly used for the generic category of 'domestic worker' are *'naukar' or 'naukarani'* (male/female servant), *'mulazim'* (servant/employee), and *'kaam wali'* (literally, 'female worker'), all of which carry demeaning connotations or an association with servitude. As Sinha, Varma and Jha (2019) remind us, this 'sanitisation of language' (particularly amongst the South Asian elite) has not necessarily led to a change in service conditions; rather, it is an expression of 'masterly guilt' and a reluctance to 'interrogate the familiar' in our accounts of history (Sinha et. al. 2019, p. 45).

Gender Division of Labour in Domestic Service in Pakistan

'Domestic service' is a deceptively broad term in the Pakistani context. It includes a variety of tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, sweeping, laundry, looking after elderly people or young children, housekeeping, guarding the house, driving, and gardening, among others. Different workers are hired for different tasks: caste, gender, and/or age are often the primary determinants in this division of labour. Contrary to local and global assumptions that all domestic service is performed by women due to its association with being 'feminine labour',[124] the Pakistani/South Asian context reveals a variety of tasks within the realm of domestic service that have traditionally been considered 'men's work': the roles of *maali* (gardener), driver, *khansama* (cook), *naukar* (male servant) and guard have been considered 'male' roles (at least since the colonial period) whereas care-work, nursing, laundry, dusting, serving, and housekeeping have been considered 'feminine' tasks. Moreover, there is a plethora of specific terms designating the particular 'type' of service being performed- such as *jamadar* (sweeper), *khansama* (cook), *dhobi* (washerman), *maali* (gardener), amongst many more[125]- which denote not just the work that the worker will do but also the space(s) they will occupy (or not) within the employer's home (Chopra, 2006, pp. 160–161). These terms continue to carry caste distinctions as well as gendered and occupational ones,

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[124] These assumptions have been challenged by recent historical scholarship on domestic service, see pp. 88-90 below.

[125] Some of these terms, such as *naukar, naukarani, chakar, chhokra, ayah, chela, kaneez,* and *mulazim* are terms that date back to the early-colonial period and persist in contemporary Urdu and various indigenous languages in Pakistan, even if their usage and the meanings associated with them today are different in certain respects from their earlier usage/meaning.

with important implications for the economic and cultural value accorded to different workers within the realm of domestic service.[126]

The gender division of labour described above is not as fixed as it may appear; for instance, women are often hired to cook, and the cleaner will often be a Christian man. The caste/religion[127] element here is significant, as Muslim men will generally consider it degrading to perform cleaning work (Chaudhry, 2016, p. 105). The patterns observed by the ILO (2013) report in the case of India also appear applicable in the Pakistani context, which states that "there is a clear distinction between the types of domestic tasks carried out by each gender: most female domestic workers are employed as housemaids or servants, while men dominate in subcategories such as gardeners, gatekeepers and in the residual category of "other" occupations (which includes, for example, butlers and chauffeurs)" (ILO, 2013, p. 14). Evidence suggests that men are over-represented in the higher-paying jobs in domestic service – particularly live-in jobs (Shahnaz, 2017) and those in which the employers are foreigners or diplomats (Amirali, forthcoming). Hence, while domestic service has historically been an occupation shared by both men and women in the Pakistani context, these patterns are changing, as described below.

Feminisation of domestic service in Pakistan

Domestic service has been assumed to be a 'feminine' occupation, both in popular imagination and in much of the scholarship on domestic work (Sarti, 2014). However, scholars such as Kilkey (2010), Moya (2007), Ray (2000), and Sarti (2014) demonstrate the historicity and variation of these patterns with time and geographical/national context. In many countries of Africa and Asia, domestic labour has not historically been an exclusively feminine occupation. On the contrary,

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[126] See Sinha (2020, pp. 10-24) for a discussion on the hierarchies between different categories of 'servant' in the Indian subcontinent. Sinha argues that the *chakar* category of servants is the one that meant 'domestic servant' and was considered to be 'menial labour', unlike those in the *naukar* category who were scribes, record-keepers, and other such occupations that were considered dignified and respectable. Within the category of *chakar*, distinctions based on rank and wage also existed, with occupational status, caste, and gender being the defining features of the hierarchy (p.24).

[127] I am choosing not to separate 'caste' and 'religion' as sources of oppression in the case of Christian domestic workers in particular, as well as the Pakistani-Christian community generally. Various studies on the Pakistani-Christian community have linked the secondary status of this community to its Dalit origins and documented the association of the term 'Christian' with being low-caste, 'impure', and identified as 'Punjabi sweepers', particularly in Pakistan's urban areas (Grit, 2019; O'Brien, 2012; Streefland, 1979; Vemmelund, 1973). However, the literature on the subject remains divided between those who use the language of 'religious discrimination' to explain the plight of Pakistani Christians and those who understand it as a form of caste oppression (see Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020). I am in agreement with Devji's (2018) view that- in the case of Pakistani Christians in particular- what is presented as 'religious discrimination' is in fact caste discrimination.

domestic service was considered an almost exclusively male domain in the colonies, with colonial administrators clearly expressing their preference for the 'Indian system of domestic service', which was heavily male (Pariser, 2015).[128] Even as recently as 1971, male domestic workers heavily outnumbered female domestic workers in India (Ray, 2000, p. 694). In Zambia, two-thirds of domestic servants till the 1980s were men, and even today many African countries have a high percentage of male domestic workers (Kilkey, 2010, p. 132). In western Europe, domestic service started to become feminised only between the 18th and 19th-20th centuries, and male domestic servants continued to be hired by the aristocracy (ibid.).

However, highlighting the historical specificity of the feminisation of domestic service is not intended to negate the fact that domestic service has indeed become feminised- worldwide- over the last century, particularly as the economic security and social status associated with it have declined over time. In India, like in Pakistan, the occupation is now taken up mainly by women and children, a significant shift when compared to its male-centred colonial past. The Indian census shows that in 1971, male domestic workers outnumbered women by a figure of 424,399 workers. In contrast, a decade later the numbers of male and female domestic workers were fairly even, with women even slightly outnumbering men (Ray, 2000, p. 693).

Ray (2000) takes this pattern to be reflective of the trend towards increasing female labour employment as well as deteriorating economic circumstances. In a subsequent study, Ray and Qayum (2009) identify a number of other factors contributing towards the changing 'culture of servitude' in India, of which the feminisation of domestic service is but one aspect. These changes include the shift from (primarily male) long-term live-in servants to (primarily female) part-time/live-out servants, change in the spatial dynamics of the city (from mansions to flats), changes in the class composition of the elite, changing family structures, and generational differences between employers (ibid., pp. 65-91).

In Pakistan, the lack of scholarship on domestic service makes it difficult to draw comparisons and trace patterns conclusively. However, the data that is available shows similar trends: the 2008/9

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[128] Sinha (2020) makes an important argument regarding the potentially misleading picture that emerges from relying solely on European *textual* sources which depict domestic service as a heavily male realm through the colonial period. He argues that when *visual* sources are considered alongside the written texts, we see a much greater presence of women both as domestic servants as well as domestic-service providers, in homes as well as in streets, markets, and fields. In particular, the invisibility of the (male) servant's wife, who worked alongside him but whose work was subsumed under the man's work in the records, is a stark reminder of the long history of the devaluation of women's labour, and their domestic labour in particular. (pp. 14-22).

Labour Force Survey shows that men slightly outnumbered women in the occupation of domestic service.[129] By 2015- seven years after the 2008/9 LFS report- the ILO estimated 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan, "many of whom are women and children, though no firm figures are available".[130] According to the Punjab Commission on Status of Women (PCSW), as many as 29.1 per cent of women aged 15 to 64 were unpaid domestic workers in rural and urban areas of the Punjab in 2019.[131]

Corroborating the shift observed by Ray and Qayum (2009) from male live-in workers to female part-time workers, Shahnaz's (2017) analysis of the Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2014-15 reveals that in Pakistan, part-time domestic workers (predominantly women) outnumber live-in workers by 3.6:1. Within the category of live-in workers, 73% are men and 27% women (ibid.). A closer look at the statistics of part-time domestic workers shows that 84% of these workers are women with no formal education, and 55% of them work in cities, earning a meagre PKR 5000 (GBP £26) a month despite working in multiple households (ibid).

As this section has shown, domestic service in Pakistan is undergoing 'feminisation' both in the sense of an increase in the numbers and proportion of women associated with the occupation and in the sense of its devaluation in social and economic terms. These patterns appear consistent with the global- as well as South Asian- trend of the feminisation and precarisation of domestic service in recent years.[132]

While the gender composition of the domestic-service workforce may be undergoing important changes, what is common to those who take up the occupation of domestic service is class and caste; domestic workers continue to be from poor, low-caste, landless communities with little or no education and few avenues into other forms of employment.[133] Among these 'attributes', the

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[129] The 2008/9 LFS puts the total number of domestic workers in Pakistan (in 2008/9) at 284,700, of which women accounted for 133,600 workers and the men for 151,100 workers.

[130] See ILO (2015)

[131] https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/26/29-1pc-women-unpaid-domestic-workers-in-punjab-report/ (Last accessed 26-03-2024)

[132] It is important, however, not to understand the trend towards feminisation of domestic service as linear or continuous. Sarti's (2006) work suggests that in recent decades, there has been a turn towards 're-masculinization' of domestic service in various Western European countries. Indeed, studies on the 'migrant handyman' phenomenon show a rise in the demand for male migrant labour to perform traditionally 'male' domestic tasks so as to enable white early-career professionals to meet the changing expectations of them as 'good fathers' (Perrons et. al., 2010).

[133] Since there is little or no data or scholarship in the Pakistani context on patterns of employment in domestic service, and even less on caste in domestic service, it is possible that social groups not 'traditionally' associated with domestic service may be entering the occupation, particularly with elite employers. This caveat is

feature of caste is, I argue, one of the foundational structuring aspects creating social inequality and extreme vulnerability for these populations, pushing them into precarious and exploitative occupations and forms of bonded labour (discussed further in subsequent sections). Yet, caste remains invisible in public policy and academic discourse in Pakistan, as I discuss in the following section.

3.4. Caste in Pakistan: Invisible but Everywhere

The centrality of caste to the organisation of domestic service has been extensively documented in Indian literature.[134] However, there is very little Pakistani scholarship on the links between caste and domestic service, not least because the very existence of caste is denied in Pakistani discourse even as it is instinctively acknowledged to be fundamental to everyday social, economic, cultural and political life.[135] The entrenched Muslim-majoritarian refusal to acknowledge caste as a Pakistani/Muslim phenomenon projects 'caste' and 'the caste system' as a Hindu/Indian problem, since caste distinction is apparently incommensurate with the teachings of Islam and hence 'does not exist' in Pakistan.[136] The denial of caste in mainstream Pakistani discourse is reflected in its absence from academic and policy conversations, as well as from the population census and large-scale socio-economic surveys conducted from 1947 onwards (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012, p. 317). Though the Scheduled Castes Ordinance of 1957 identifies 40 communities as 'scheduled castes' in the Pakistani Constitution, all of them are 'non-Muslim' (and the majority Hindu), reinforcing the idea that 'caste' is a 'Hindu' phenomenon and does not exist amongst Muslim communities.[137] Moreover, the debates around what exactly constitutes 'caste' and what differentiates it from

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important but unfortunately impossible to substantiate or explore in the absence of large-scale data collection on domestic service.

[134] See Chopra (2006), Moosvi (2003), Raghuram (2001), Sinha et al., (2019); and Sinha and Varma (2019).

[135] See Gazdar (2007) and Gazdar and Mallah (2012) for a good introduction to the treatment- and denial- of caste in Pakistan. Virtually all contemporary scholarship on caste in Pakistan laments the lack of social and academic acknowledgement of caste in wider Pakistani social science scholarship. In addition to the works cited at the start of this footnote, see Channa (2015), Grit (2019), G. Hussain (2020), and Singha (2015).

[136] For a useful discussion of theological and anthropological discussions on whether 'caste' exists in Pakistan, see Channa (2015, pp. 36-58). Moreover, though the Qur'an does not recognise/articulate the category of 'caste', it does recognise 'class' as a category of social stratification (Ansari, 2009). Ansari (2009) argues that "for all practical purposes it [caste] operates as a category in the Islamic juristic/ legal corpus and interpretative tradition as it has evolved in India." (p. 9)

[137] The term 'scheduled castes' appears in the national census as a category used in the enumeration of 'religious minorities' and brackets 'scheduled castes' with Hindus for the purpose of election to reserved seats (see https://pakistanconstitutionlaw.com/p-l-d-1993-sc-439/).

other anthropological/cultural categories such as '*biraderi*' or kinship group, have prevailed in the scholarly debates on the subject, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

The denial of caste, however, flies in the face of Pakistan's social realities. Though the 'caste system' in Pakistan is not a replica of what it looks like in India, and (like in India) has undergone significant transformations with the changing social, economic and political conditions in which it is embedded (Channa, 2015; Jodhka & Shah, 2010), the historical roots and premises of caste distinction in present-day India and Pakistan significantly- and to some extent, inevitably- overlap.[138]

In much of Pakistani scholarly and popular/cultural discourse, the cultural terms '*biraderi*' (literally meaning 'fraternity') and '*qaum*' (sometimes spelt as '*qoum*'; literally 'nation', 'tribe' or 'sect') have been conceptualised as 'kinship groups' rather than 'caste' because the latter continues to be defined strictly in terms of religious notions of ritual purity and pollution which are not present in Islamic texts.[139] Even then, the 'kinship group' features are much closer to caste than are acknowledged in much of the research (Channa, 2015). A third term associated with kinship/caste in the Pakistani context is *zaat*, a term that refers to ancestry/lineage, implying that caste is a feature linked to one's 'lineage', race or bloodline, which remains unchanged with occupational status (Satti, 1990).[140] Though authors have debated the contextual nature of the usage and meanings of the terms *biraderi*, *qaum*, and *zaat* in different social contexts,[141] the present study follows Channa (2015) in using the term 'caste' as the equivalent of 'kinship group' rather than with any particular variant or sub-category of kinship groups.

Despite the invisibilisation of caste as an analytical category, its importance in configuring social, political, and economic life in contemporary Pakistan is profound. Marriage, business, and politics are all understood to be mediated through kinship group ties (Gazdar, 2007, p. 87). Indeed, Gazdar & Mallah's (2012) examination of rural housing and the Five Marla Scheme "suggests that the status hierarchy between agricultural and non-agricultural castes implicates the very organisational props of the institution of private property in rural Pakistani Punjab" (pp. 332-2).

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[138] For examples of scholarship that make cross-border comparisons on the Pakistani and Indian institutions of caste, see Ansari (2009), G. Hussain (2019a), Javid and Martin (2020), Kamran and Purewal (2015), Purewal and Kalra (2019), and Singha (2015).

[139] Supra fn. 136.

[140] https://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/08/opinion/l-pakistan-certainly-has-a-caste-system-224690.html

[141] See Channa (2015), for a useful discussion of the deployment of these terms in the anthropological scholarship on rural social organisation in Pakistan (pp. 36-55).

These findings echo those of Harriss-White and Gooptu (2001) who argue that caste still shapes ideologies of work and status, stratifies pay and occupation, and also forms "the basis from which urban, occupation-based trade associations have evolved" (p. 99).

A number of studies in the literature on domestic service emphasise the intersectionality that characterises the exploitation faced by domestic workers globally.[142] The coming-together of gender, caste/religion, and class in the occupation of domestic service plays a fundamental role in defining the texture and dynamics of domestic service in Pakistan. Before exploring these links, it is necessary to take a look at how caste has been theorised in Pakistani and South Asian scholarship, since these theorisations have significant implications for the visibility- or lack thereof- of caste, not just in academic writing, but in the legal and policy realms as well as the wider cultural and political realms in the Pakistan context.

'Book view' and 'field view' approaches to caste

The academic scholarship on caste in the Pakistani context is sparse, particularly in comparison to the vast Indian scholarship on the subject.[143] Yet, despite its expansive and long history (or perhaps because of it), the literature on caste continues to reveal significant differences amongst South Asian scholars on how to theorise/understand caste.[144] Jodhka (1998) categorises this theorising broadly into 'book view' and 'field view' approaches, using the term 'book view' to refer to "the writings of Indologists and Orientalists during the colonial period, constructed from Hindu scriptures and the historical record" (Jodhka, 1998, p. 311). While the 'book view' approach continued into the post-Independence period, it began to be replaced with the 'field view'—i.e. field-based approaches, which were assumed to be more 'scientific' and 'holistic' than the book view. However, this scholarship too has had important limitations and biases (not least the social and economic privilege that scholars carried with them into the 'field'), and reflects the influence

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[142] See the works of Anderson (2000), Glenn (1992), Haile and Siegmann (2014), Pinho (2015), Raghuram (2001), Ray and Qayum (2009), Wade (2013), and Zulfiqar (2019).

[143] Because it is impossible to exhaustively cite all the important scholarship on caste in India in a single footnote, I restrict the following list of scholars and scholarly works to those that appear to have been particularly influential in shaping theorisations of caste over the years. B. R. Ambedkar's (1968) book '*The Annihilation of Caste*' continues to be one of the most influential texts informing *dalit*/anti-caste politics in India. Other important early works include Hutton (1946), Dumont (1980), Srinivas (1962), Kothari (1970), Quigley (1993), Ghurye (1969), Bayly (2001), Dirks (2001), Gupta (2000), and Chakravarti (2003).

[144] For an introduction and overview of historical and contemporary approaches to theorising caste in India, see Fuller (1996), Guha (2016), Gupta (1992, 2004), Jodhka (2012, 2015), Quigley (1993), Sharma (2002), and Srinivas (1962, 1996). Reproduced from *Oxford Bibliographies*, see full citation here: (2011). Caste. *obo* in Sociology. doi: 10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0006

of the ideologies of 'modernisation' and 'development' that were gaining ascendancy at the time (Jodhka, 1998).

Contemporary 'book view' understandings of caste (which continue to be prominent) tend to be 'definitions' with clear-cut theoretical criteria that tend to view caste as a relatively rigid institution with undisputed hierarchies and rooted in religious concepts.[145] Going by the 'book view' criteria of caste, neither India nor Pakistan could be said to have a 'proper' caste system (Channa, 2015, p. 50).[146] The 'field view' of caste is less sharply-defined and more attentive to empirics; i.e. to the myriad of ways in which caste exists *in practice,* and consequently finds caste to be more fluid in its local, lived manifestations than the 'book view' of caste would enable us to see. The 'field view' scholars argue that caste is primarily a social rather than religious institution, and that while the hierarchy, endogamy, and religious notions of pollution/purity continue to be part of the institution of caste, these hierarchies are not uncontested, and practices such as endogamy and the local deployment of notions of pollution/purity are context-dependent rather than a given.[147] Both 'book view' and 'field view' approaches to caste can be seen in the literature on caste in Pakistan, to which we now turn.

Literature on caste in Pakistan

There appears to be a limited revival of interest in the subject of caste in contemporary Pakistani scholarship- or scholarship on Pakistan, rather. Early post-Partition anthropological scholarship on caste[148] retained the colonial framework which stratified Pakistani villages into two main 'castes' - the *zamindars* or landowners, and the artisan and service castes referred to jointly as the *kammis* – each of which were subdivided further into distinctly named patrilineal descent-based groups (Channa, 2015, p. 36).

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[145] Influential 'book view' scholars from the post-Independence period who attempted to provide 'definitions' of caste through an identification of its 'key features' include Hutton (1946), Ghurye (1969), and Dumont (1980).

[146] An example of a 'book view' definition of caste would be the following one offered by Ansari (2009, p. 9): "The caste system is premised on three essential features: (a) the principle of hierarchy in accordance with the elaborate rules of purity-pollution as registered and legitimised in the canonical religious texts; (b) endogamy; and (c) hereditary occupational specialisation." However, it should be noted that rather than using this definition to dismiss the presence of caste in non-Hindu communities, Ansari (2009) argues that these three features can be seen to apply (to varying degrees) to the Muslim community too, both in India and in Pakistan.

[147] See Berreman (1979), Dirks (2001), Jaiswal (1997), Lindt (2013), Quigley (1993b, 1993a), and Srinivas (1962).

[148] See Barth (1960), Eglar (1960), Marriott (1960), and Smith (1952).

This early post-Partition literature was followed by two seminal works on rural social organisation in the 1970s- one by Alavi (1972) and the other by Ahmad (1970). Alavi (1972) proposed that *biraderis* (patrilineal endogamous groups) were stratified primarily by economic resources and political power and not by "caste-oriented behaviour, namely that of ritual pollution and associated purificatory rights" (p. 26). Similarly, Ahmad (1970) argued that the *quoms* he was studying[149] did not subscribe to a fixed hierarchy, were not strictly endogamous, and did not employ notions of purity and pollution; all of which led him to believe that caste [understood by him using Hutton's (1946) criteria, one of the scholars who took a 'book view' approach to caste] was not a useful analytical tool for examining social organisation in rural Punjab (p. 107). Instead, Ahmad (1970) argued that village social structure can best be described in terms of class, by "subdividing the villagers in terms of their position in the organisation of production" (p. 124). This early scholarship, however, was soon forgotten and with it the questions of class and caste and social stratification in rural life. It is only since the turn of the century, and primarily over the last decade, that Pakistani scholarship has picked up the theme of caste again.

Contemporary scholarship on caste in Pakistan explores a number of themes, both new and old. The relationship between class, politics, and kinship group is being explored (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012; Khan Mohmand, 2019; Martin, 2009, 2016; Mohmand & Gazdar, 2007), breaking from the earlier tendency to see these either as autonomous categories or focusing exclusively on the economic dimensions of class. Recent studies have also picked up on an earlier strand of scholarship which looks at the relationship between caste and 'menial' occupations such as sanitation work (see Beall, 2006; W. H. Butt, 2019; Streefland, 1979) and extends it to the domain of domestic service (see Zulfiqar, 2019). Residential and occupational caste-based segregation continue to be important themes (see Chaudhry, 2016; Hasan, 2019; Singha, 2015). Amongst the 'non-traditional' themes emerging in contemporary literature are the political invisibility of caste (see G. Hussain, 2019, 2020; Javid & Martin, 2020); caste identity, consciousness, and resistance, particularly with reference to the Pakistani Christian community (see Singha, 2015; Grit, 2019); the 'religious minority' discourse as a displacement and evasion of caste identity (see Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020; Grit, 2019; Kamran & Purewal, 2015; Singha, 2015); and caste-based digital divides (see Abdullah, 2015).

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[149] Ahmad's fieldwork was based in the village of Jalpana, district Sargodha, in central Punjab.

While contemporary scholarship almost universally acknowledges the silencing of caste as a sociological category in Pakistan (with far-reaching implications for formal/legal, policy, and academic realms), a much smaller segment provides theoretical refutations or alternatives to the traditional 'book view' of caste which effectively dismisses the presence of caste in (Muslim) Pakistan.[150] Amongst the few contemporary scholars offering theoretical interventions on the question of whether caste is a relevant or accurate concept to describe and understand the Pakistani context is Channa (2015), who advocates strongly for a reinterpretation of the anthropological construct of *biraderi* (kinship group) to bring it closer to caste, arguing that post-partition literature has downplayed the fundamental influence of caste-based social order in pre-partition India, home to Hindus and Muslims alike.[151] Channa (2015) argues that particularly in contemporary South Asia, with the ethnicisation of caste,[152] the loosening of the links between caste and hereditary occupation, and the myriad of changes taking place due to neoliberal penetration, large-scale migration, and political and cultural shifts, the 'field view' approach enables us to both retain caste as a category of analysis- which is important because descent-based hierarchical stratification, where one's rank is determined by one's "historical association with noble occupational groups or lineages" (p. 53) continues to exist in both Indian and Pakistani contexts- while accounting for the shifts in even 'primary' markers of caste and caste relations. Channa's claims are corroborated by those of Jan (2017), whose research on processes of capital accumulation, class formation and agrarian change in rural Punjab leads him to suggest that "in order to understand the evolution and current composition of the [rural capitalist commercial] class, its diverse origins in distinct status groups need to be identified." (p. ii)

Having argued for a continued and closer engagement with caste as a sociological and analytical category, the section that follows draws out the links between caste and domestic service, revealing that domestic service continues to embody elements of 'bondedness', particularly in the

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[150] For examples of scholars who have attempted to renew or re-theorise caste in the Pakistani context, see Gazdar (2007), Gazdar & Mallah (2012), Channa (2015), and Javid and Martin (2020).

[151] Religious conversions by Hindu Dalits to Islam and Christianity are well documented in the literature on caste (Lal, 2023); an ongoing phenomenon which serves as a reminder of the sociological fluidity and interconnections between different religious groups in the South Asian social context.

[152] By the 'ethnicization of caste' is meant a process accompanying the dissolution of traditional/hereditary divisions of labour whereby "instead of being interdependent, vertical entities, castes become identical groups competing against each other" (Channa, 2015, p. 53), becoming more horizontal and equal in terms of status, but retaining economic, social, political and cultural power hierarchies by dominant castes due to factors such as numerical strength, economic and political status, land ownership, and modern education (ibid., p.54).

case of low-caste rural communities, despite the shift towards a capitalist economy which is presumably premised on 'free labour'.

Caste, bonded labour, and domestic service

The low status associated with domestic service in the Pakistani context has much to do with its historical association with low-caste groups in virtually all parts of the country.[153] The 'low' castes are, in anthropological terms, the 'service castes' who are collectively known as *kammis*, literally meaning those who are 'less' or 'lower' than the higher-status 'cultivator castes'.[154] The 'service castes' comprise both Muslim and non-Muslim groups, which Gazdar and Mallah (2012) further divide into 'backward' and 'menial' (also referred to as 'scheduled') castes (using classificatory schemes employed in present-day Indian Punjab where caste is officially recognised) to make visible the differing degrees of caste-based disadvantage faced by different 'non-cultivator' caste groups (p. 318).[155] The 'low-caste' groups associated with the occupation of domestic service in rural Punjab are primarily the 'scheduled' castes- *mussalli* and *chuhra* (ibid.). Less is known about the caste background of urban domestic workers, which may include men and women of 'backward' castes [such as *mirasi* (minstrel), *nai* (barber), *lohar* (ironsmith), *kumhar* (potter), *tarkhan* (carpenter), *macchi* (water-carrier), *teli* (oil-presser), and *faqir* (beggar)] in addition to the 'menial' castes who have been traditionally associated with the occupation.

The weakening of the association between occupation and caste in recent decades (Channa, 2015, p. 49) makes the study of caste in urban settings even more urgent, since the social and economic trajectories of low-caste groups can no longer be traced straightforwardly through occupation or through the 'family name' which serves as a caste-identifier, given that many low-caste rural migrants change their family/caste name upon arrival in the city, using the relative anonymity provided by the city to move beyond the stigma attached to low-caste identity (de Silva, 2018).

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[153] See Gazdar (2007) for a discussion of caste in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan which are not agricultural communities.

[154] Though the structuring role of caste in pre-colonial rural social organisation is undeniable, the economic and social hierarchy between 'cultivator castes' and 'non-cultivator castes' (inscribed in legal terms as 'agricultural and non-agricultural tribes') was first formalised in the colonial period through the Punjab Land Alienation Act in 1900. The *kammis* (service castes) and menial workers were hence legally classified as 'non-agricultural' castes, with far-reaching implications for these groups. (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012, pp. 315-316)

[155] For a more detailed description of the occupational distribution and status hierarchy associated with different caste groups in Punjab, see Table 1 (Caste Distribution of Muslim population of Punjab in 1931), in Gazdar & Mallah, 2012, p. 318.

As pointed out earlier, both caste and domestic service are heavily under-studied themes in Pakistani social science literature. Hence, this section uses the (less than) handful of studies that shed some light on contemporary social realities pertaining to these themes. Amongst these studies is that by Gazdar and Mallah (2012) which examines the interplay between class, caste, and housing in rural Punjab. This study found that domestic service in rural Punjab is performed almost exclusively by the 'scheduled' castes, i.e. the *chuhra* Christian or *mussalli* castes who work as *dera* servants (*dera* being the built-up space attached to the residence of the landowner).[156] At the time of Gazdar and Mallah's fieldwork in 2010, these domestic workers (primarily men) were being paid between three and four thousand rupees (USD$ 35-50) per month, and their family members were expected to work in the household for no extra remuneration (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012, pp. 328-9). No member of the workers' family was allowed to work for a different employer, effectively tying them to the land-owning family for generations on end (ibid.). Debt bondage is an integral part of the story: the afore-mentioned study reveals that *dera* servants often inherit debts from earlier generations and family members and have to request the landlord-employer for additional loans (known as *peshgi*) to make ends meet in the present (ibid.). Those who abscond are often tracked down through the landlord's vast networks and the workers' family members are taken hostage (p. 329). As reported by Gazdar and Mallah (2012), even the few workers who managed to eventually pay off their debts and secure their freedom found it extremely difficult to find a place to live due to their stigmatisation and poverty (p. 329).

Though bonded labour-referred to also as 'forced labour' and 'debt bondage' in the literature-has been outlawed through a series of policy and legal actions dating back to the 1960s, the conditions of domestic service in rural Punjab described above (along with a number of studies on bonded labour in Pakistan)[157] show that the phenomenon certainly persists. Breman (2010) uses the term 'neo-bondage' for this phenomenon as he observes it in rural India; "neo because the relationship between bosses and workers is less personalised, of shorter duration, more contractual, and monetized" (p. 48). As will be shown below, similar dynamics exist in labour arrangements in Pakistan's rural areas.

Studies of bonded labour in domestic service- though few - serve as clear evidence of the prevalence of caste-based exploitation in the occupation. The CSSR (2004) study- the only study

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[156] The '*dera*' is used for a variety of purposes, including entertaining guests, stockpiling grain, an animal shed or a store-room.
[157] See Ercelawn and Nauman (2001), A. Khan (2007), N. Malik (2016), Martin (2009), Upadhyaya (2004), and S. A. Zaidi (2001).

to date which attempts to comprehensively investigate and describe the structural and institutional dynamics of domestic service in Pakistan- makes three important observations in this regard, which are worth reproducing in full:

> First, there is bondedness in the domestic service sector, as identified among workers in rural settings whose employers are landlords, and among workers in urban settings whose employers remain landlords in the rural areas. This bondedness is directly related to agricultural bondedness, since the original debt was usually incurred when the workers were *haris* [landless peasants].
>
> Second, the majority of domestic workers come from castes that traditionally engage in agricultural work, brick-kiln work, begging, or casual labour (i.e. low-income sectors, in which bonded labour is often found).
>
> Third, the vulnerability to coercion and harassment is particularly high in the domestic service sector because of the workers' extreme dependence on their employers and the fact that they work within a private setting, far from the scrutiny of even neighbours. Boys and girls both work long hours, and girls, in particular, are susceptible to sexual violence from a young age.
>
> (CSSR, 2004, p. 20)

As shown in the above-quoted report, domestic service in the urban centres- though less exploitative than in rural settings- continues to be a largely caste-based occupation (CSSR, 2004, p. 12). This corroborates Channa's (2015) argument that market liberalisation and migration in Pakistan have led to an amended system of caste rather than its disintegration, and that "features that set the caste system apart from that of a class, such as lack of group mobility, still persist" (p. 50). This lack of group mobility can be seen in the continued concentration of low-caste groups in 'menial' occupations such as domestic service, sex work, begging, and manual labour (CSSR, 2004). Despite having moved to the city in search of alternate livelihoods, many of these migrants-men in particular- are forced to return to their patrons to seek loans which impersonal urban employers of domestic service are unlikely to give, and asking for which may cost the domestic worker their job (ibid, p. 17).

The intersections between gender, caste and domestic service and the everyday violence they engender are perhaps reflected most powerfully in the above-cited report by the expressions of gratitude from some domestic workers for the absence of violence, coercion, or sexual or physical abuse in their employment relations (CSSR, 2004, p. 20). The CSSR report reveals not only that sexual harassment of domestic workers is rampant (p. 17), but also that this harassment is compounded by the perception that low-caste women (such as those belonging to the *mussalli*

caste) are 'not quite' Muslim (p. 11). The fact that low-caste migrant women working as part-time domestic workers charge about one-sixth the salary of a full-time male servant per activity per month (p. 14) is testament to the compounded, co-constitutive character of oppression.

Zulfiqar's (2019) study on domestic workers' experiences in an urban gated community in Lahore (Pakistan's largest city in the Punjab region) finds that the disruption of 'asymmetrical reciprocal relations and kinship bonds' upon migration to urban centres is combined with urban employers' 'pre-capitalist paternalism' and 'modern market forces' to create a hybrid model of domestic service which in fact intensifies the exploitation faced by these migrant workers. Zulfiqar's (2019) findings resonate with Breman's (2010) descriptions of 'neo-bondage', in which "the elements of patronage that offered a modicum of protection and security to bonded clients in the past have disappeared while the transition to a capitalist mode of production accelerated." (p. 48). Pakistan-based scholarship in this domain continues to be sparse, particularly with regard to extending the study of caste from the rural setting in which it has 'traditionally' been studied to the urban domain. This forms one of the contributions of the present study.

Having argued for the need to employ caste as a conceptual category in social science scholarship in Pakistan and described the demographic, social, and economic context within which Pakistan's ubiquitous yet invisible domestic workers are embedded, the remaining sections of this chapter explore domestic service in Pakistan in the context of women's (under-represented) contributions to productive and reproductive processes in the country. Beginning with a description of the present moment in Pakistan's political economy and how it is being understood by scholars, the following sections argue that contemporary scholarship on Pakistan's political economy must be gendered and feminist (in addition to being Marxist) if it is to adequately understand the changes taking place in the social order and offer significant interventions.

3.5. Domestic Service in Pakistan's Political Economy

Pakistan is in the throes of a prolonged crisis in its political economy (McCartney & Zaidi, 2019). Successive governments have returned to the IMF despite insisting in their electoral campaigns that they would 'break the yoke of slavery of the IMF'.[158] In February 2020, two years after the previous PTI-led government came into power, inflation had reached 14.5%, higher than it had

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[158] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-49450145

been for over a decade.[159] Food inflation exceeded 25%, health and education gains (particularly for women and girls) were lost, and 22 million people became unemployed (S. A. Zaidi, 2020). The situation worsened after the removal of the PTI government in 2022, with Pakistan's annual inflation rate climbing to 31.4% in September 2023, and a further rise in the cost of living.[160] Amidst persistent economic difficulties, 65-80% of Pakistanis continue to earn their living through manual labour (Durr-e-Nayab, 2011). The 'elite' (the top 1% of the Pakistani economic classes) remains remarkably stable, despite changes in the class composition and structures of other classes (notably the middle-classes) over time (Armytage, 2019).

In Pakistan, the share of the informal economy has steadily increased over the years, from 39% in 1975 to 73% in recent years (ILO, 2012). This growing informalisation is not particular to Pakistan; indeed, this is the pattern exhibited by most 'developing' countries under neoliberalism (Heintz & Pollin, 2003). With the reduction of labour's bargaining power, wages are no longer rising in line with value-generation, resulting in more members of a family engaging in waged labour to sustain themselves (D. Khan, 2019). As a result, more women are engaging in paid employment for the first time and a majority of them find paid employment in the informal sector (Heintz & Pollin 2003, p. 78). The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (2019) claimed that 74% of the labour force in Punjab is engaged in the informal sector, of which domestic workers are the biggest chunk and 50% are women.[161]

The global neoliberal shift towards centring women's 'economic empowerment' and 'gender equality' in development discourse has also made its presence felt in Pakistan through a number of IFI-funded micro-credit and entrepreneurship programs in recent decades. An investigation of one such program by Adrienne Roberts and Mir Ghazal Zulfiqar reveals its deeply masculinist, classist, and individualistic logic, effectively serving to reproduce, naturalise, and deepen social relations of inequality and exploitation (Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019). The program actively promotes a 'trickle-down' logic of women's empowerment, whereby elite women (the targets of the program) were encouraged to see the hiring of domestic workers and informal daily-wage labourers as a means of 'empowering' the latter, allowing them to exploit cheap labour with additional zeal and moral righteousness (pp. 425-430).

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[159] As a point of comparison, the inflation rate was 9% the previous fiscal year, which was the highest inflation rate in the five years preceding it (S. A. Zaidi, 2019).

[160] "Surging Inflation Erodes People's Living Standards in Pakistan", *The Nation*, 21 October 2023.

[161] https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/26/29-1pc-women-unpaid-domestic-workers-in-punjab-report/

Despite the afore-mentioned developments, gendered and particularly, feminist and political[162] analyses of Pakistan's political economy remain few and marginal (Hamid, 2010; A. Khan, 2007; Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019).[163] While the low participation rate of women in the labour force[164] could be offered as a possible explanation for the paucity of gendered analyses of macroeconomic data in mainstream policy research, this does not hold when one considers that women's labour force participation rate has in fact risen at a greater rate than that of men since 1980 (Shahid, 2007, p. 170). The invisibilisation of women's labour in economic data and analysis, discussed in the following section, has less to do with the 'quantum' of women's labour and more to do with how 'labour' is measured and valued.

It is to locating the occupation of domestic service in women's labouring practices that we now turn. The next section describes patterns of women's participation in the labour force, drawing out its class and caste dimensions. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which domestic service in particular, and women's work in general, continues to be under-represented and invisibilised in macro-economic data.

Women's Labour Force Participation in Pakistan

The liberal assumption that women's employment is necessary for their 'empowerment' continues to dominate the popular imaginary in international development discourse, 'trickling down' into mainstream Pakistani scholarship.[165] In contrast to depictions of secluded 'Muslim women' whose mobility and participation in public life is restricted by 'religious norms', studies of women's work and employment show that more complex intersections are at work. Women's labouring practices are shaped not only by intersections of gender and religious affiliation, but also by generation, their position in class and caste hierarchies, and ethnicity and rural/urban

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[162] By 'political' here I mean analyses that explicitly name, critically examine, and challenge the structures and practices of power and exploitation that underlie merely descriptive, technical accounts of the 'political economy' in mainstream accounts.

[163] The continued marginality of feminist theory in Pakistan's political economy scholarship is illustrated by the widely-acclaimed book, '*New Perspectives on Pakistan's Political Economy*' (McCartney & Zaidi, 2019), which features contributions from some of Pakistan's most eminent progressive social scientists. This book has only one chapter that offers a gendered perspective and the remaining contributions barely make mention of gender, giving the impression that it is not relevant to their analysis.

[164] The most recent national estimate for Pakistan's female labour force participation rate is 24.5% (from the year 2021). (See: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.NE.ZS?locations=PK. Last accessed 26-03-2024). Pakistan ranks 170th out of 180 countries on this indicator, see https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS/rankings.

[165] A. Khan (2007), Roberts and Zulfiqar (2019), and Siegmann and Majid (2014) also identify and respond to this assumption.

location, among others (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016).

Women's labour force participation[166] in Pakistan doubled between 1992 and 2014, and yet remains one of the lowest in the world (Amir et.al., 2018). These rising statistics are largely due to the increase in rural women's employment rates which rose from 16% in 1992 to 32.9 % in 2014, and primarily in highly flexible, low-paid agricultural labour[167] as compared to the minimal increase from 7% to 11% in urban women's employment in the same period.[168] Though some vaunt the rise in female labour force participation as indicative of 'progress' and 'modernisation' (Pasha, 2018, p. 142), Rao et al. (2019) remind us that women's work in agriculture in most South Asian settings is more likely to be due to a 'distress sale of labour' than empowered agency (see also Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001, p. 97).

Though differences between rural and urban women's employment are significant, it is also noteworthy that women at the top- and bottom-end of the income distribution participate in relatively greater numbers in the labour force than those in the middle stratum (A. Khan, 2007, p. 6). Indeed, the largest segment of women in the labour force are poor women, who work as 'contributing family workers' in agriculture, as domestic workers, or as home-based workers (ibid.). As Grünenfelder and Siegmann (2016) put it, "[for poor women] harsh economic conditions weigh more heavily in their decision to participate in the labour force than status-enhancing seclusion" (p. 7). Most of this work is done by Christian, Hindu, and lower-caste Muslim women, highlighting the intersectional nature of women's exploitation with other social factors, such as caste and religion.

Women's labour force participation rates are seen to increase with age, peaking at the age bracket between 40 and 44 years and declining thereafter (PBS, 2015, p. 20). More than half of all urban and rural men and about 70% of women who participated in the 2013 Labour Skills

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[166] It should be noted that labour force participation rates are calculated using available data on both formal and informal employment. This is important for the present discussion for two reasons. One, that Pakistan's economy is largely informal; official figures state the size of the informal economy to be 71.4% of the total (PBS, 2019, p. 6). Two, the recognition that even though the majority of both men and women are engaged in informal and hence precarious labour, the particular conditions which women have to navigate render them more vulnerable than men in the informal sector (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016, p. 11), as is corroborated by the data presented in this section.

[167] The feminisation of agricultural labour in Pakistan has increased over time: from 65% in 2001-2 to 74% in 2013-14). The process of feminisation of agriculture is now well-documented worldwide as well as in South Asia. See Rao et. al. (2019) and Center of Gender and Policy Studies (2018) for Pakistan-specific scholarship in this regard.

[168] In part the difference between the rural and urban participation rates can be explained by the low percentage of women residing in urban areas nationally (18%) (Zaidi et. al., 2016, p. 57).

survey agreed that married women who want to work outside the home should be allowed to do so, with 66.5% of men agreeing that if a wife works outside the home, the husband should help with the housework (Amir et. al., 2018, p. 6). Yet, 83% of women claimed housework as the reason they found it difficult to seek employment outside the home, which explains why 61% of all employed urban women and 45% of employed rural women took up home-based employment even when entering the realm of paid work (ibid.).

The educational levels of the majority of Pakistani women are also an important factor explaining their concentration in low-paying jobs. In 2014, about one-third of all urban women surveyed in the Labour Force Survey had no formal education, and only 10% had post-secondary schooling. It is unsurprising therefore, that the working-class majority of women who are rural migrants seeking employment out of economic necessity end up in the occupation of domestic service given that the option of agricultural labour is no longer an option once they move to the city. It is notable, however, that almost 40 percent of those with college or university degrees are women, and yet women form only 2% of the workforce in high-level occupations like senior officials, managers, and legislators (Pasha, 2018, p. 143).

For those women who do enter the workforce, the gender pay-gap is astonishingly high, even as it varies by occupation. The ILO's Global Wage Report 2018/2019 reports that Pakistan has the highest overall hourly average gender pay gap of the 73 countries it studies. The gender pay gap for Pakistan was identified to be 34%, which is more than double the global average.[169] Moreover, the report finds that women account for almost 90% of the bottom 1% of wage earners in Pakistan (ILO, 2018, p. 49). The LFS 2017-18 shows that men employed in 'elementary occupations' (a category which includes domestic cleaners and helpers) earned PKR 14,206 whereas women earned PKR 6,587 on a monthly basis. The average remuneration of female professionals and technicians- 30% of the female workforce- is less than 70% of their male counterparts (Pasha, 2018, p. 145).

The patterns of women's labour force participation described above corroborate the argument made at the outset of this chapter that the feminisation of the occupation of domestic service and the effects that this has on female domestic workers is intimately tied to the status and invisibility of women's work in general. Important as it is to analyse women's labour force participation for understanding the status and conditions of women's employment, women's

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[169] https://www.ilo.org/islamabad/info/public/pr/WCMS_651658/lang--en/index.htm

work- both waged and unwaged- is only partially visible through labour force statistics, as shown in the next section.

The institutional infrastructure of data collection on women's work

Feminist (and even non-feminist) economists everywhere have long argued that women's work is systematically under-reported and invisibilised in macro-economic statistics.[170] In Pakistan, this is due to methodological as well as conceptual/ideological and definitional issues (Shahid, 2007). Methodological reasons include the seclusion of women from surveyors/data-collectors, which leads to their exclusion from participation in national-level surveys (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016). Ideological reasons include male participants reporting women's activities as falling within the realm of the household, even when they don't (Rao et. al, 2019; Nazir & Siegmann, forthcoming). A recent study conducted by Nazir and Siegmann (forthcoming) in the city of Karachi found systematic 'respondent' and 'enumerator' biases in the conduct of labour force surveys, definitional problems, and intersections between ethnicity, class and social norms which lead to differences in the reporting of labour patterns.[171]

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics[172]- the primary government agency responsible for all forms of social and economic data collection and dissemination[173]- does provide gender-disaggregated data in some of its most comprehensive surveys.[174] However, the Agricultural and the Industry

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[170] See Afzal (1987), Bakker (2007), Benería (1995), Hoskyns & Rai (2007), A. Khan (2007), Mies (1986, 2007), Pasha (2018), Rao et al. (2019), Siegmann & Majid (2014), Waring (1989), and Y. Zaidi et al. (2016).

[171] One of the major definitional issues identified by Nazir and Siegmann (forthcoming)
 is the LFS's emphasis on a person's 'main activity' which leads to under-reporting of women's work due to norms that associate women primarily with reproductive labour even when women are also undertaking paid work.

[172] The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) is a merger of what were previously four separate administrative entities: namely the Federal Bureau of Statistics, the Agriculture Census Organisation, the Population Census Organisation, and the Technical Wing of the Statistics Division. (http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/about-us, accessed on 13-03-2020). The PBS is 'assisted' by the provincial bureaus of statistics, but the latter are considered to be 'too weak' to contribute to data collection (Elahi, 2007).

[173] Though the PBS is the primary agency responsible for data generation and dissemination, a variety of donors and development agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Oxfam-Novib, and a number of UN bodies provide 'technical and financial assistance' to the PBS as well as to other government agencies that are involved with data analysis and publication of research based on the statistics made available by the PBS, in addition to advising the government on matters relating to the production of statistics. Government bodies such as the National Commission on the Status of Women (along with its provincial counterparts) play an advisory role to the government on matters of gender-disaggregated and gender-related data, in addition to commissioning gender-focused research (https://www.ncsw.gov.pk/about-us/functions, accessed on 13-03-2020).

[174] The Labour Force Survey (LFS), the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey and the Household Integrated Economic Survey (HIES) contain gender disaggregated data. However the LFS does

Census as well as the Business Register, are not gender-disaggregated (Zaidi et. al, 2016, p. 169). Moreover, the PBS surveys (with one exception)[175] do not collect data on reproductive work, i.e. on "activities supporting the biological and social reproduction of the labour force" (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016, p. 3).

As stated earlier, official definitions of work and employment invisibilise the full scope of women's work, particularly due to the distinctions between 'productive' and 'reproductive' labour (Hoskyns & Rai, 2007). Indeed, the 'iceberg model' of the economy (Mies, 2007, pp. 270-1), a term used by Mies to describe mainstream economic models, brings out the fact that what is called 'the economy' in formal terms is merely 'the tip of the iceberg'. The entire range of human labour that is involved in subsistence work and which reproduces the very means of existence of the 'economy' is entirely invisibilised in formal descriptions of the economy, in addition to being 'super-exploited' because this labour is not even compensated with a wage (Collard & Dempsey, 2020; Mies, 1986, p. 48).

True to capitalist logic, 'economic activity', according to the Pakistan Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (PBS, 2010), includes only 'productive' activities, which are defined as "economic activities falling within the 'production boundary' of the System of National Accounts (SNA)" (PBS, 2010, p. 1). The 'production boundary' of the SNA in turn defines production as "all production actually destined for the market" (UN, 2010, p. 7) from which "domestic and personal services produced and consumed by members of the same household are omitted" (p. 6). In other words, 'productive labour' is that which is 'value-generating'; i.e. that which is or can be directly linked to the production of (monetary) surplus value.

Similarly, definitions of 'employment' in national statistics continue to include only 'productive' labour. While earlier definitions of employment were restricted to formal, contract-based wage labour, they have been augmented in recent years by the inclusion of those who qualify as 'self-employed' or 'own-account workers', 'contributing' (i.e. unpaid) family workers, domestic

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not collect district level data-- and though the PSLM does so every two years, it does not provide sufficient data for a substantive gendered analysis of labour at the district level. (Zaidi et. al., 2016, p. 169)

[175] The exception here is the Time Use Survey 2007, conducted only once so far (in 2007) by the PBS on the national level, the only survey to document both 'economic' and 'non-economic' activities of men and women. In addition to the category of 'SNA activities', which consists of "employment for establishments, primary production activities not for establishments, like crop farming, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry, processing and storage, mining and quarrying; secondary activities like construction, manufacturing, and activities like trade, business and services", the Time Use Survey 2007 uses the categories of extended-SNA to include care work and household/community maintenance, and non-SNA for self-maintenance. (Zaidi et al., 2016, p. 90)

workers (those performing household labour in an employment relationship), and home-based workers (Grünenfelder & Siegmann, 2016).

However, despite the inclusion of informal labour into its definition of employment, labour force statistics and macro-economic data continue to heavily under-estimate and under-represent women's contributions to 'productive' value and economic growth (Pasha, 2018, p. 144). Zaidi et al. (2016) estimate home-based workers' contribution to be around PKR 400 billion or 3.8% of Pakistan's GDP and women working as 'contributing' (i.e. unpaid) family workers to be producing PKR 411 billion; figures that are not visible in official statistics. As noted by Rao et.al. (2019), there is a blurring of the boundary between productive and reproductive work in many parts of South Asia, and "many tasks and activities which would be considered to be part of the productive economy – for contributing directly to national income, for example – are not classified as work by communities, families and women" (p. 56).

Even though domestic work is recognised as an employment category in Pakistan's Minimum Wages Act of 1961 and was explicitly included in the definition of 'employment' by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 1991, the only Labour Force Survey (LFS) to document and report statistics on domestic service is the one conducted in 2008-9.[176] Thus, estimates of the number of domestic workers in the country still vary wildly. The 2008/9 LFS put the figure of domestic workers (in 2008/9) at 284,700; on the other hand, in 2015- seven years later- the ILO estimated that "though no firm figures are available, at least 8.5 million domestic workers in Pakistan, many of whom are women and often children" (ILO, 2015). The same figure continues to be cited in ILO's reports and press releases till the time of writing due to lack of updated national-level data (see ILO, 2021, 2023).

Despite the systematic erasure and under-representation of women's labour in macro-level statistics, time-use studies show that women work more than men (Saqib & Arif, 2012). Grünenfelder and Siegmann's (2016) analysis of the 2007 Time Use Survey revealed that, on average, Pakistani women and girls aged 10 years and above work a daily total of 6 hours and 25 minutes, in contrast to 5 hours and 53 minutes for men and boys of the same age range (p. 5). The bulk of women's work, however, is reproductive (81 percent), in contrast to 9 percent for men

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[176] Though the numbers of domestic workers for years prior to and after 2008-9 can in principle be calculated by researchers with access to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data sets (rather than just PBS survey reports), this has not been done to date in my knowledge by anyone other than Shahnaz (2017) for the year 2014-2015.

(ibid.) Grünenfelder and Siegmann (2016) observe that "while these averages hide vast differences between persons employed, unemployed, and out of the labour force, and between those residing in urban and rural locations […], it appears that women – whether they are employed or not – are more time poor than men, since social norms oblige them to provide care work and housework, irrespective of their employment status" (p. 5). The majority of employed women, therefore, end up with heavier workloads and not "empowerment".[177]

Conclusion

This chapter sketches the structural conditions of domestic service in Pakistan, with a focus on Pakistani Punjab. It argues that the invisibility of domestic service in Pakistani social and economic life is intimately tied to the invisibility of those doing this work, namely *working-class women* who are invisibilised as 'workers' even when they enter paid employment; *low-caste communities* embedded in a society in which caste is ubiquitous but vociferously denied; and *rural migrants* who move to the cities in search of livelihoods and live in 'invisible' *katchi abadis* (informal settlements) that are frequently subject to forced demolitions because the state refuses to recognise them. Treated by capital, state, and society as 'cast(e)-aways', disposable, 'surplus' populations and saddled with cultural and economic pressures to enter occupations marked by bonded-labour relations, these communities move from rural Punjabi towns and villages to the cities in search of alternate means of livelihood, where domestic service presents itself as one of the better options (CSSR, 2004, p. 44). In line with recent scholarship on the social composition of India's unorganised labour (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001), the demographic composition of Pakistan's domestic workers reveals gender and caste (in addition to class) to be significant factors structuring the conditions and relations of domestic service. It follows from this that these workers are likely to inhabit quite different subjectivities from those of the organised, formal sector workers who come from starkly different socio-economic backgrounds, sharpening the need to explore the political subjectivities of domestic workers as this project sets out to do.

This chapter began by historicising the occupation of domestic service in the South Asian context, arguing that the 'present' of domestic service shows both continuity and change in relation to its 'past'. In Pakistan, the persistence of bonded-ness associated with domestic service in rural areas,

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[177] Employed women on average carry a heavier time burden than those women not participating in the labour force, namely, an average of 9 hours and 21 minutes as compared to 5 hours and 50 minutes (Saqib & Arif, 2012).

and the 'hybrid model' (Zulfiqar, 2019) combining caste/biraderi relations and market principles in the urban areas, speaks to the complexity of contemporary 'cultures of servitude' in Pakistan.

Tracing the links between caste and domestic service, the chapter asserts that caste certainly exists in Pakistan, despite its fervent denial by the 'Islamic Republic' and the majority of its inhabitants. While caste identity has been shown to be a potential site for political organising amongst the labouring poor in India (Harriss-White & Gooptu, 2001), in the case of Pakistan where "caste has been eliminated from the country's communal lexicon" (Javid & Martin, 2020, p. 148), it appears unlikely that caste identity will emerge as a site of resistance for those facing caste oppression. Indeed, recent studies by Grit (2019) and Singha (2015) reveal the unease felt by much of the Pakistani-Christian community in associating or engaging with the language of caste. The present study seeks to augment the findings of these studies with an understanding of how caste is embodied, experienced, and articulated by women domestic workers, who I suspect may have a different experience of (and relationship to) caste and caste identity due to their particular social locations and workplace experiences in comparison with men in these communities.

Despite the fact that the entire political economy, 'productive' labour, and market processes are dependent on social reproduction for their survival, this chapter in its final sections showed how domestic labour- in both its waged and unwaged forms- is under-estimated, under-valued and invisibilised in Pakistan's national statistics; and that this is true of much of women's labour, which is largely informal and precarious. Flagging structural changes taking place in the mode and relations of production in Pakistan, including (but not limited to) de-peasantisation, informalisation, and urbanisation, this chapter contributes to reducing the dearth of Marxist-feminist accounts in contemporary scholarship on domestic service and on Pakistan's political economy more broadly.

Having given a detailed account in this chapter of the historical, social, and material contexts within which Pakistani domestic workers and the occupation of domestic service are embedded, the next chapter, *Research Methodology*, turns to a description of the research process itself.

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

Throw away abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map, and compass. Feel your way without blinders. To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked- not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat.

(Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 173)

Having laid out in previous chapters the research aims, conceptual framework, and theoretical orientation of this thesis and located the study in its material, social, and historical context, this chapter describes *how* this study was carried out, making visible the epistemological and methodological choices made over the course of the study and the messy and contingent nature of the research process. Aligning form with content, this chapter describes the research process by making visible the 'how' of each stage of the project, the particular methodological and ethical dilemmas they each brought forth, and the choices made at each stage of the project, each of which collectively shaped the research process and its outcomes.

While feminist scholars have long challenged the idea of 'value-neutral' research and ethnographers have consistently pointed to the complexity of researcher subjectivity in the process of researching 'others', there is much less discussion of the extent to which academic research often serves as a platform for seeking meaning and understanding circumstances in our personal lives or how researchers themselves are transformed through the research process (O'Brien, 2010, pp. 478-9). Here, I am inspired by scholars such as O' Brien (2009, 2010), González-López (2006, 2010) and Chapkis (2010) who find the messiness, contradictions, and complexities of embedded, politically motivated, and personally invested research to be enriching, even necessary, for "generating social observations that resonate with the complexity of human experience" (O'Brien, 2009, p. 16). For these scholars, "how we reflect on and make sense of this process of self-transformation is as much a part of our methodological reflexivity, or should be, as all the other questions we grapple with in the research process" (O'Brien, 2010, p. 479). Following these scholars, I have integrated my reflections on this process of self-transformation into the contents of this thesis wherever possible and appropriate, being careful not to de-centre my interlocutors in the process.[178]

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[178] Caught between accepting and resisting academic conventions (particularly those pertaining to the form, style, and contents of a PhD thesis), I eventually moved much of this material from the 'cutting floor' of my

This chapter consists of three major sections, defined by stage of research. In the first section, *Conception and Preparation*, I describe the 'context of discovery' (Swedberg, 2012) of the research through an exploration of my subjectivation as a political worker, showing how this process links me with my research questions, sites, and subjects. Next, I discuss my choice of ethnography as the primary methodological framework for this study, and the reasons for combining ethnography with elements of a grounded theory approach for the analysis phase (the latter of which is discussed in Section Three of this chapter). This is followed by a discussion of how I operationalise the study of political subjectivation in my research setting.

The second section, *In the Field*, discusses the fieldwork stage of the project. It describes my field sites, subjects, and methods and shows how these methods are appropriate for researching gendered subalterns. Aware of my positionality as a privileged researcher with 'familiar-outsider' status (an inversion of Patricia Hill Collins' [1986] term 'outsider-within', see page 127), I use this section to discuss what consent and reciprocity looked like in the field and the strategies I employed in light of various ethical dilemmas that arose during fieldwork. The final part of this section describes the impacts of the G-11 *basti* demolition on the research process and discusses methodological tensions and dilemmas that arose as a result, as well as the ways in which I attempted to resolve them.

In the third and final section, *Analysis and Writing Up*, I describe my analytical and translation practices and discuss my decision-making regarding which interlocutors appear in the thesis, how and when they appear, and how to 'do justice' to their voices on the page, exploring these dilemmas in relation to debates on the politics of representation.

4.1. Section One: Conception and Preparation

4.1.1. *My 'Context of Discovery': Researching my Subjectivation as a Political Worker*

I am a class- and caste- privileged, English-educated Pakistani-Muslim cis-gendered woman in my late 30s, born into a progressive middle-class family and raised in Islamabad. Both my parents were politically conscientious people, with whom I grew up attending anti-war demonstrations

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thesis to the space of a dedicated journal article (under publication at the time of writing) where I could honour my process of self-transformation and develop the insights that emerged from it.

and 'civil society'[179] protests in the city. By the early 2000s (around the age of seventeen), I had developed autonomous political networks, and I joined a small group of Left organisers in Islamabad who were involved with working-class groups and movements across the country. Political organising opened my otherwise constricted middle-class existence to a world inhabited by farmers and peasants, *katchi abadi* dwellers, informal workers, blue- and white-collared workers, trade unionists, housewives, students, lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers, journalists, and others. Over time, my identity as a Marxist political worker became central to my sense of self—indeed, it became my primary source of belonging and the only aspect of life and self that appeared meaningful. Organising became 'life'; and I became a 'political worker'.

The expectations of me as a 'political worker'- a term that had become an anomaly (outside the small Left circles of which I was a part) by the time I came to embody it- were different within and outside the Organisation.[180] The values and practices that were expected internally (of and by core members in the Organisation, of which I felt privileged to have become one in a relatively short period) were distinct from the expectations of how/who to be 'on the ground' while working with communities. On the ground, I was expected to be an articulate, confident, engaging, and impassioned public speaker, to be familiar with local and national issues, well versed in Marxist vocabulary and capable of demonstrating proper ideological training when needed (particularly if/when speaking to other Left audiences) but also cautioned against using excessive jargon with 'lay' audiences. On the 'inside', however, the expectations- always implicit- were much more personal and stringent. For reasons that may be just as 'personal' as they are 'political',[181] I perceived the Organisation's expectations of me to include de-classing myself, shunning individual autonomy, and striving in a variety of ways towards the embodiment of the 'ideal type' of Marxist political worker who has no life outside the *tanzeem* (Organisation), no desires other than the Revolution; one who shuns material comfort and bourgeois privileges, sacrifices their career and their family, and lives only to serve the Organisation, the Revolution and the People. The story that

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[179] I use the term 'civil society' here because this is how these protests were described both in the media and by the participants themselves. 'Civil society' in this context is a reference to Islamabad's *parhay-likhay* (educated) upper middle-classes who periodically gather in one of their usual protest spots in the city centre (usually with no more than a few dozen participants) around issues of 'human rights', 'peace', and other liberal-secular causes.

[180] I capitalize certain words (only) in this section- such as Organisation, Revolution, and Leader- to illustrate the singularity and centrality that these phenomena occupied in my lifeworld at the time and the strength of their influence on my subjectivation as a political worker.

[181] My practice at that time inverted the feminist phrase, "the personal is political"; for me, the 'political' became 'personal', in the sense that I recognised no personal life, meaning, or relationships outside of the Organisation.

the individual is of no value except for what they do to serve the collective is one that I imbibed readily and quickly; recognising myself in the self-effacing, sacrificing, stoic figures of my mother and grandmother, who had toiled all their lives for the well-being of others in the family and did not allow anyone else to see, share, or support them in their difficulties. Now in the political realm, I was following the example presented by my Leader[182]: a Lone Ranger who toiled for the Revolution, day and night, like a machine. He was unstoppable, untiring, undefatigable, impenetrable; the picture of consistency, commitment, sacrifice, and devotion to the Revolution, with no human 'weaknesses' like the need for food, rest, love, or connection. Fun, socialising, and self-care were implicitly bourgeois and indulgent; romance and intimacy were outright dangerous. Time and again, I rejected all sexual/ romantic advances from men (even from men I liked), afraid that intimate relationships with men would taint my image as a pure, committed, and thus necessarily asexual political worker who has no class, no gender, no sexuality, and no obvious social markers that could potentially alienate me from the People, divert my energies away from the Revolution, or create a conflict of interest with the needs of the Organisation. As I saw it, becoming invested in anything other than the Organisation would constitute a deep, unforgivable betrayal.

For most of these years of political work, women were peripheral to my world and my interests. This was manifested in the low numbers of women in the movements and organisations I worked with, and also in the presumed audience of our political message (which was implicitly male). I found myself feeling agitated, caged, and frustrated in moments when I would be 'packed off' to the "women's quarters" during political visits to people's homes (particularly during our travels to small towns and villages), while my male companions would engage in 'political' conversation with the 'public' (i.e. men). I felt angry at being ripped away from my comrades and my purpose, resentful towards these women who I shared nothing with, who seemed to live a life I couldn't connect with or understand. We had no shared context, no shared language. I felt agitated and ashamed in their presence, feeling their gaze of bewilderment and amusement to be a judgement upon my inadequate and inappropriate femininity, my failure to belong. I judged them to be passive, docile creatures, who were happy in their enslavement, and who had no desire or ability to connect with the program of radical change that I was bringing. I found the space of the traditional home stifling, and wondered how women could spend hour after hour, day after day,

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[182] This 'Leader' was the de-facto head of the organisation I joined when I first stepped into organising work. The organisation itself was an informal, unstructured entity, with no more than a handful of members but a great deal of outreach and influence relative to its size.

generation after generation, within the confines of these walls; isolated and trapped, stuck with household tasks, spending their lives serving the men of the family (in addition to guests like myself). And yet they seemed to do this with a smile; with me, they were pleasant, they were curious, sometimes they were bold and raucous, pressing me for details about my personal and familial life, which I found intrusive and threatening. I would often feel like an animal in a zoo, the way women and children would gather around me when I walked into the *sehan* (courtyard) of these dwellings, home to multiple families, multiple brothers with multiple wives with multiple children, along with goats, chickens, rabbits, and others, all co-existing in the same space within the *char-dewari* (the four walls of the home). The bewilderment was mutual, and for me often morphed into discomfort, frustration, and the desire to escape. My political training, however, dictated that time spent with them was to be politely tolerated (lest a Marxist give the impression of being stuck-up and classist!), but often, there was nothing I could do or tell myself in those moments to make it feel like anything other than a waste of time.

In the process of becoming this 'political worker', I also refused my identity as a woman. I defied woman-ness through shabby and careless dressing, adopting a gruff personal demeanour, and making a variety of life choices that were unconventional for my class and wider social context. Pakistani social norms dictate that a woman's place- unless material compulsion necessitates otherwise- is firmly within the *char-dewari,* the four walls of the home. I did the opposite. Through single-minded relentless organising work, I became a public figure over the years, known for my slogans, for my ability to rouse people with my speeches and recognised by *basti walas* for being a consistent presence in their communities. I became someone who had overcome the 'chains' of womanhood (which I had perceived as a 'lack' or a 'defect' rather than a 'difference' with its own integrity); someone who had apparently proved that she did not need to do 'what women do'; who could be as effective, as powerful, as any man; someone who men could take seriously; who could participate fully and equally in the male world of politics, and thereby show women that if they so choose, they can do this too. While I know my intentions were not destructive or violent, some of the actions that stemmed from these deeply embedded patriarchal tropes led to slow but steady decay and hollowing out of my most intimate relationships, including the one with my self. Termites had eaten me from the inside; only the shell remained, and I found myself utterly alone in dealing with it.

Some years preceding my entry into this PhD programme, my consistently eroding self-awareness had dimmed but not died. Despite being locked inside the fortress of my own defences, I was

dimly aware of the hollowness of my being, of having become a machine, blind to anything that didn't fit within my version of reality, insistent on forcing particular outcomes, unable to feel, and unwilling to change. "I have never known someone more resistant to change than you," my mother had started to say. The irony of this observation- given that I professed to be working for revolution- was not lost on me, even then.

As I began to experience 'the gaps between self-narration and social reality'- what Hemmings (2012) terms 'affective dissonance'- I began to find myself slowly disillusioned with the models of success I had imbibed. In this time, I began to be drawn to women (still only in organising contexts). Initially, this interest was spurred by my time spent with women in the Okara peasants' struggle, who had formed a *'thapa* force[183]' armed with thick wooden logs to counter police and paramilitary attacks on their villages during the movement, and by the sporadic but growing participation of women in *katchi abadi* struggles against forced evictions. These developments stood in sharp contrast to the hitherto male-only domain of political action that I had witnessed until then and made me wonder if I had missed something very basic in my political practice. These objective changes converged over time with a gradual recognition of my own deep-rooted patriarchal and classist values and practices. Eventually, I began to unravel.

It took me many years to open to my identity as a woman (a process that is ongoing), to feminism, and to women in the communities I organised. Only then did I start to discover a sense of personal and political community with women; to push (with others) to make gender a central part of our political project; to attempt to understand who 'they' (i.e. women) are; and in the process, to understand who I am also. I arrived at a place where I began to acknowledge the value in *being* and *beings,* without requiring the performance of a specific kind of *doing-* namely political action- as necessary for their recognition.

This arrival serves as the point of departure for my PhD project.

4.1.2. Choosing Ethnography and Grounded Theory

Given this project's context of discovery, my methodological thinking began with a clear desire to refrain from imposing my own political and theoretical outlook on the research design and process, particularly on my field encounters with research subjects. I thus found ethnography to

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[183] '*Thapa'* is the Punjabi word for a thick wooden log used in the process of washing clothes in rural settings.

be best suited to this project, given its character as a necessarily holistic and thus inherently 'democratic' process which does not allow a researcher the option to pick and choose which elements of their interlocutors' social life they wish to study, irrespective of one's particular thematic focus or interest (Shah, 2017, p. 47). I also found the project's aim of researching the everyday lives and political subjectivities of domestic workers to be well aligned with ethnography due to the latter's commitment to close, careful observation and consistent, intimate engagement with research subjects in their everyday contexts and settings. For similar reasons, ethnography has been used by scholars of political subjectivation across a number of disciplines.[184]

There is a wealth of scholarship on ethnography, and its various 'types' are accompanied by particular ontological and epistemological assumptions and intentions for what they hope to contribute through their research. I am drawn to Carpenter and Mojab's (2008) Marxist-feminist approach to ethnography (also called 'institutional ethnography', following the work of Dorothy Smith) which "centre[s] the ordering of social relations and the dialectical relationship between social relations, consciousness, and material practices" (p. 6). Following Carpenter and Mojab (2008), I deploy ethnography as a materially-grounded, social and systemic— rather than individualized or exclusively interpersonal— methodological framework to understand the emergence of individual and collective subjectivities, remaining attentive to historically-constituted power and privilege in the research setting and to the material practices that (re)constitute the social institutions that people are embedded in, constrained by and acting on/in, opening room for viewing people as agents with transformative potential rather than mere victims constrained by structural forces outside of their control (Kinsman, G., quoted in Bhandar & Ziadah, 2020, p. 130). Resonating with an inductive/grounded theory approach (discussed below), institutional ethnography insists that "inquiry must always begin with individuals and their actual experiences and practice" (Carpenter & Mojab, 2008) rather than a theory or concept (Given, 2008), and that researchers must begin with the 'everyday' and with a question that they care about (Carpenter & Mojab, 2008). Institutional ethnography sees individual actions and work as *social*, i.e. "how [these actions] are coordinated with the actions or work of others" (Given, 2008, para. 5); a relational ontology which I resonate with.[185]

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[184] For examples of scholarship on political subjectivity and subjectivation which uses ethnographic methods, see Biehl et al., (2007), Dinerstein and Neary (2002), Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008), Howarth et al., (2000), and Madhok (2013b).

[185] It is important to clarify that in drawing on institutional ethnography, I specifically take up its epistemological and ontological framework rather than adopting all of its concepts and methods wholesale.

I follow Alpa Shah (2017) in understanding participant observation, perhaps the 'core' methodological feature that distinguishes ethnography from other forms of qualitative research, as not merely 'method' but *praxis*, "a form of knowledge production through being and action" and "a process by which theory is dialectically produced and realised in action" (p. 45). Shah goes further to deem participant observation as a 'potentially revolutionary praxis' because of its holistic, consistent, and long-term engagement (and hence investment in and responsibility towards) the life-worlds of one's interlocutors. Ethnography's potential to 'unsettle my fundamental assumptions about the world' (ibid.) was a powerful draw in deciding on ethnography as my primary methodological framework.

In this project, I have chosen to combine ethnography with a 'grounded theory' approach. Though grounded theory has moved in a number of directions since its inception in the 1960s, I use the term to refer to a methodological and epistemological commitment to close, careful observation and empirical data collection; to acknowledge and consciously enact the connections between the processes of data 'collection', description, and analysis; and to conduct research with the purpose of generating theory that is firmly connected to the empirics that enable its construction (Charmaz, 2012). In particular, I use grounded theory to name my approach to analysis, which is discussed in Section Three of this chapter.

Though there is no guarantee that employing a materially grounded, historical, and relational-systemic ontological framework will help me avoid the pitfalls of methodological individualism, it is my aspiration in this thesis to tell a story that considers and co-holds the whole in the telling of its parts. The epistemological, ontological, and methodological choices made in this thesis reflect my desire to co-hold the particular with the universal, the individual with the systemic, while acknowledging the difficulties, ambiguities, and uncertainties that this brings. I believe it is both possible and politically necessary- even if intensely difficult- to transcend the present binaries between the particular and the universal (Hemmings, 2012; Zerilli, 2002). Having grown up in the era of the 'end of history' and the equation of the universal with tyranny and totalitarianism, this transcendence is central to my imagination of what constitutes a liberatory worldview in the present moment; a worldview that allows each of us to *be* (and be accepted) as we are now, in our particularities; and simultaneously allows us to *become* through surrender to the universal- a universal that is *not* premised on the exclusion and destruction of particularity or "untainted by

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For instance, institutional ethnography's focus on textual mediation and analysis (see Bisaillon, 2012; D. E. Smith, 1996) does not correspond to my research aims and context.

what is particular, concrete, and individual" (Butler, 2000, pp. 23-24, in Moreiras, 2002, p. 114), but rather enables a *transformation* of the particular; trusting it to shepherd us into yet another, as yet unknown, way of being.

Alice Walker intends something similar, I think, when she writes:

> What is always needed in the appreciation of art, or life, is the larger perspective. Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before, the straining to encompass in one's glance at the varied world the common thread, the unifying theme through immense diversity.
>
> (Walker, 1984, p. 5, quoted in Hill Collins, 2000, p. 270)

4.1.3. Researching the Political Subjectivation of Islamabad's Domestic Workers

As stated in Chapter 1, researching political subjectivity and subjectivation has largely been a theoretical/abstract exercise, located mostly in the Global North.[186] This study explicitly aims to *ground* the study of political subjectivity and to *gender* it, shifting the sites and subjects of these investigations to a group of gendered subalterns in the Global South and to the *bastis* where they live. As noted in Chapter 2, researching political subjectivity and subjectivation in this context requires a detachment from expectations of individualism, self-sufficiency, and 'unencumberedness' that underlie liberal conceptions of agency (Madhok, 2013b, p. 4), as well as moving beyond the 'action bias' that undergirds these conceptions (ibid.). In the paragraphs that follow, I lay out how I operationalise the study of political subjectivation in my research setting, leaving details of the methods used in this process to later sections of the chapter.

This study understands the *basti*- highly impoverished, informal, and permanently insecure settlements where the vast majority of part-time domestic workers live and to where they return after working in their employers' secure and comfortable *kothis*- not merely as a site for 'data collection' but rather as an *epistemic site*, a site of knowledge production. The *basti* is also a site of community; a thick, complex web of social relations and institutions within which my

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[186] For a non-exhaustive list of examples of this scholarship, see Biehl et al. (2007), Brown (2015), Butler (1997), Foucault (1988), Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008); Howarth et al. (2000), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). For examples of feminist scholarship on political subjectivation from the Global South, please see Madhok (2013, 2021), Mahmood (2005), Spivak (1988), and Morris (2010), among others.

interlocutors' lives are embedded. This site is key to understanding the political subjectivation of my interlocutors for a number of reasons: First, it enables access to 'hidden transcripts' vis-à-vis interlocutors' experiences of domestic service (Scott, 1990). Second, it enables me to understand how community practices, discourses, and norms function to shape the lives and subjectivities of my interlocutors. Third, it enables access to interlocutors' homes and private lives, which I understand to be an important constituent of their political subjectivities.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the *basti* is also a site of forced evictions and violent demolitions owing to the 'illegal' status of the majority of these settlements. In this context, researching domestic workers' political subjectivation requires exploring their participation in collective political mobilisations on the issue of forced evictions from the *bastis* they live in. I engage in this exploration by tracking the individual and collective responses of the G-11/4 *basti* residents to the brutal demolition of their *basti* by the Islamabad city administration during the fieldwork for this project.

Building on my understanding of political subjectivation outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I operationalise the exploration of political subjectivation in my research setting through a careful documenting of the vocabularies, 'onstage' and 'offstage' practices, political imaginaries, and self-fashionings of my interlocutors.[187] I ask: What terms do interlocutors use to describe and critique their world(s) and alternative imaginaries thereof? What kinds of conceptions of self and the world do these vocabularies enable? What are the strategies they adopt to respond to indignities across the different sites that comprise their everyday? What do their self-fashionings tell us about their political subjectivities? I have chosen to work with this particular arrangement of elements-vocabularies, practices, political imaginaries, and self-fashionings- to cater to the wide range of contexts inhabited by these subjects and the complex intertwining of (and tensions between) agency and subjection in each of these different contexts.

Further, I research the political subjectivation of Islamabad's domestic workers through a focus on their daily movement between the *bastis* where they live and the *kothis* where they work. I ask: How does this everyday movement between starkly different material, moral, and social worlds shape their sense of self and other(s), their relationships and imaginaries? How do they experience the return to the *basti* after this encounter with wealth, comfort, and security? How do domestic workers describe and assess their employers' lifeworlds? What do their workplace

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[187] For an elaboration of how I understand these terms, see Chapter 2.

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experiences look like? Could the *basti*- poor and precarious as it may be- serve as a site of solidarity, and offer respite from some of the oppressions and sharp, unfettered inequalities that mark the workplace setting? Are the solidarities engendered in the *basti* fractured along gender, caste, religious and/or ethnic lines? Could the *kothi* in some cases serve as temporary refuge from material, social, or emotional difficulties these subjects face on the personal and community levels in the *basti*? For these explorations, I meticulously document the everyday experiences of my research subjects in the *kothi*, the *basti*, and the home using formal and informal interviews (conducted in appropriately safe locations within and/or outside the *basti*), through participant observation in the *bastis*, and in rare cases, through observations in the workplace. (Guidelines for the latter are discussed in Section Two of this chapter).

Finally, I explore political subjectivation through documenting moments of 'affective dissonance' in field encounters and interlocutors' narratives. Following Hemmings (2012), I understand 'affective dissonance' as an experience of "gaps between self-narration and social reality" which leads to shifts in subjectivation such that "the present reality is no longer judged to be adequate or acceptable." (p. 154). Following Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008) who link political subjectivity specifically "to the moment in which a social identity is disrupted and contested, thus enabling subjects to engage in acts of renewed identification" (p. 264), I am aware that such moments are of critical importance to this study and that it is my challenge as a researcher to be attentive, receptive, and reflexive, not only in these moments themselves but also while creating a written record of them afterwards.

4.2. Section Two: In the Field

Having described the conception and preparation phase of the research process, I turn to a discussion of the fieldwork phase of the research. Having introduced my research sites and subjects in Chapter 1, here I explain how I went about identifying and recruiting research participants and discuss my research methods. I follow this up with reflections on my field relationships and the unexpected complexities that arose during fieldwork, particularly as a result of the demolition of the G-11 *basti*, one of the field sites for this study.

4.2.1. Identifying and Recruiting Research Participants

The fieldwork for this project was integrated with my political-organising work with the Awami Workers Party (AWP) in Islamabad's *bastis*. Potential research participants were initially identified through my organising contacts with *basti* residents across the city, with whom I enjoyed relations

of familiarity and trust. I was aware that a number of people in these communities- particularly those with whom I was already familiar- would continue to identify me as an AWP worker and not as an anonymous researcher. I was also aware that people's prior relationship with me as an AWP worker would influence their expectations of 'deliverables' from me (even as a researcher) and that they were likely to see their participation in the study as a gesture of reciprocity towards the AWP.[188] While acknowledging the effects of my AWP identity on *basti walas*' expectations and responses to being invited to participate in the study, I am nevertheless confident that the invitation to participate was not perceived as an obligation to do so. I say this not only because some of those I approached chose not to participate but also due to my prior history of working with these communities, in which people have often declined requests to participate in activities that I and/or other AWP members invite them to. This history of refusal assures me that people in these communities are not beholden or indebted to me individually or to the AWP, and hence that those who chose to participate in the study did so voluntarily.

As a general rule, I chose to approach domestic workers through my *basti* contacts (or through other means like my 'taxi service' described in the methods section of this chapter) rather than through employers or social networks. I did this to ensure that research participants felt safe expressing themselves to me (particularly about their employment experiences) and were assured that participation in the study would not affect their employment relations. To further allay any concerns about potential backlash from employers or effects on their employment as a result of participating in the study, I assured these individuals (in addition to clearly stating my moral and professional obligation to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of their data) that I would make no attempt to identify, locate or contact their employers, or seek any personal details of their employers that could enable me or anyone else to do so.

My decision to work with particular interlocutors was premised on their ability and willingness to provide voluntary, informed consent—a matter I was particularly sensitive about given the marginal status (both within and outside their communities) of the subjects I wished to work with. Where gatekeepers were involved (this includes husbands and in rare instances, employers, as discussed in following paragraphs), I ensured- where necessary and appropriate- that gatekeepers were on board as a means of safeguarding interlocutors against potential retribution from the

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[188] The complexity and 'stickiness' of patronage relations and their intertwinement with reciprocity in the Pakistani social context are a recurrent theme in this thesis. For further discussion, see pp. 129-130 in this chapter and Chapter 7 in particular.

former. I was also keen to ensure that gatekeepers do not exert pressure on (potential) interlocutors to participate. In most cases, the women I wanted to approach were unlikely to be able to maintain regular contact with me without the knowledge and/or 'permission' of their husbands and risked backlash in case they were seen as having bypassed patriarchal authority. In these cases, once their husbands had 'approved' of their participation in the study, I reiterated to participants that they are in no way compelled or obliged to participate in the study merely because their husband has assented to our contact, and to let them know that they could opt out of the study at any point without having to give an explanation. In all instances where I was not convinced that an interlocutor's decision to participate was fully consensual, voluntary, or that their participation would not result in any kind of backlash or harm to them, I did not include them in the research.

In the initial phase of the study, I was keen to include the *kothi* as a major field site so as to be able to directly observe domestic workers and domestic service relations in the workplace.[189] Thus, I chose to include in my sampling methods a group of interlocutors who would be accessed through their employers. I was aware that in such cases, employers would serve as gatekeepers and that this could create feelings of pressure or obligation for the worker to participate in the study, in addition to these interlocutors feeling constricted in what and how much they can share with me (particularly about their employers). I attempted to mitigate these effects and concerns by choosing to approach only a handful of employers who I knew personally, with whom I had high levels of trust, and from whom I could seek explicit reassurance that there would be no fallouts for the worker should they choose not to participate in the study and that they would respect the privacy and confidentiality of the research process. In each case, I made sure to periodically reiterate to the workers approached in this manner (both of whom happened to be live-in workers) that their participation was entirely voluntary and that choosing not to participate would have no adverse effects on their employment or on their relations with the employers. As it turned out, these 'exceptions' ended up being amongst the richest, most intimate, and enduring research

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[189] My initial interest in the *kothi* as a major field site reflected the study's initial focus on domestic service relations and experiences, understanding these to be central to domestic workers' subjectivities and subjectivation. As fieldwork progressed, and particularly in the aftermath of the G-11 *basti* demolition, it became apparent to me that my interlocutors' experiences as domestic workers in the *kothis*, while significant aspects of their everyday lives, were not the exclusive or even central focus of interlocutors' narratives. As the distinction between researching domestic service relations and domestic workers' subjectivities became clearer during fieldwork, subtle but significant changes occurred in the overall direction of the study, resulting in shifts in my methodological thinking including a reduction in the emphasis on the *kothi* as a field site.

relationships I formed during fieldwork, despite the project's gradual shift away from the *kothi* as a major field site.

Despite, and indeed because, many *basti walas* cannot read and write and because of their tense and complex relationship to formal/written documents, I obtained consent verbally but also gave a written information and consent form to interlocutors to keep in case they wished to report a complaint in the future about the research or my conduct as a researcher. I did this to engender trust, deliberately keeping the documentation a unilateral process in which *they* were the ones in exclusive possession of a formal document, not me. Aware that requesting consent is not a one-off 'act' (particularly in the case of ethnography which requires repeated long-term engagement) and that consent must be carefully and consistently renewed throughout the research process, especially where sharp inequalities mark the relationship between researcher and researched (Sixtensson, 2021), I would periodically check in with interlocutors at the start of a research encounter (especially if we were using a different method or in a different setting from the usual) to confirm that they are happy and willing to continue.

4.2.2. Research Methods

'Fieldwork' was mainly a process of participating in my primary interlocutors' lives in the *bastis* where they live, and, in the case of live-in workers, in the employers' homes (usually separately from the employers, or in their absence). In addition to spending time with primary interlocutors, I made many new connections with people in the *bastis* over the course of my visits, which greatly enriched my knowledge of these communities, their social composition, and power dynamics. Fieldwork also included observations of, and interactions with, domestic workers in public spaces such as streets, marketplaces, and public transport vehicles, walking with interlocutors to and from work (or giving them a ride home after work using my 'taxi service') and planned leisure trips to parks, markets, and recreational sites. Early in the fieldwork period, I started an informal 'taxi service' with my old Suzuki FX car (which was regularly mistaken for a taxi in any case because of its model), offering (free) rides to women domestic workers seeking transport to and/or from work, using the journey as an opportunity to meet and interact with potential interlocutors.

I was aware that my presence in the research setting, particularly in the *bastis*, would change the setting itself, but rather than considering this to be a problem that I needed to (or could) 'rectify' (Boellstorff et al., 2012), I rigorously recorded what unfolded in the field through detailed note-taking, in addition to consulting interlocutors about any unsettling impacts my presence may be

having for them and finding ways to mitigate these. In the case of live-in workers, I made sure to time my visits such that the employers were absent, and, when they were present, I was keenly aware to not initiate any conversation or action that may reveal anything about the research encounters or cause friction between worker and employer.

The 'data' generated during fieldwork consists of extensive field notes, 23 extensive recorded interviews with primary interlocutors, and three focus group discussions over the course of one and a half years (between early-2021 and mid-2022). Much of this data came from repeated visits to the *bastis* where my interlocutors lived and involved engaging with *basti* life both as a 'participant observer' and an 'observant participant', the latter in my capacity as political organiser (Seim, 2021).[190] As discussed earlier in the chapter, I understand participant observation (and observant participation) as a process of holistic, consistent, and long-term engagement with (and hence investment in and responsibility towards) the lifeworlds of my interlocutors (Shah, 2017). Though I did not live in the *bastis*, I made daily trips to one or more field sites (described in the following subsection) and was regularly in touch (over the phone) with primary interlocutors both to coordinate my visits and to simply 'check in' between visits. Some months into fieldwork, the 'inherently democratic' and 'potentially unsettling' nature of the ethnographic process (Shah, 2017) revealed the (primarily classed) assumptions built into my initial research design and over time shifted the project closer to the epistemological standpoint of my interlocutors. Specifically, it was participant observation and embedded, regular, and intimate engagement with these communities and interlocutors that shifted me away from the assumption that my interlocutors' experiences of domestic service would be the single most formative element shaping their political subjectivities.

Apart from ethnographic fieldwork and rigorous note-taking, I conducted formal semi-structured interviews as well as informal/unstructured interviews. Following Madden (2020), I had anticipated that much of my 'data' would emerge initially from unstructured, informal and unrecorded conversations, and that as the research relationship grows in trust and familiarity, I would undertake recorded semi-structured interviews. However, in some instances, particularly

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[190] While it is generally acknowledged that ethnography involves a combination of the researcher both participating in and observing social life in the research setting, the role/position of 'participant observer' implies greater emphasis on observation and is closer to a 'fly on the wall' approach, whereas the 'observant participant' embeds themselves as an actor in the field, minimizing the distance between themselves and their subjects. For a discussion of these terms, the approaches they signify, and their pros and cons, see Seim (2021).

where I lacked prior familiarity with an interlocutor, recorded semi-structured interviews turned out to be useful icebreakers, opening up avenues for candid and detailed exchanges between myself and the interviewee, and setting the stage for future interactions of a more intimate nature. My intention was for these interviews to unfold as dialogues, i.e. "talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object; [as] a humanising speech, one that challenges and resists domination" (Hooks, 1989, p. 131). I was also aware that there is a risk of emotional distress to interviewees, given that they are highly marginal subjects whose everyday experiences of multiple, compounded oppressions- both within and beyond the realm of domestic service- go largely unacknowledged in mainstream discourses as well as in these subjects' interpersonal relationships.[191] Thus, I was vigilant about ensuring that the interviewee did not feel obliged to enter terrain they'd rather stay away from whilst respectfully and carefully 'probing' on matters of interest to me.

Semi-structured audio-recorded group discussions were held in Farash Town, Awami Basti, and the (relocated) G-11 *basti*. The group sizes and duration of each discussion varied, but each of these discussions was notable for generating a distinct- and significantly animated- subjectivity in the participants when compared with the demeanour of the same individuals in private or one-on-one research encounters, reiterating the importance of taking into account spatial and social contexts while researching subjectivation. The analytical chapters dwell further on this observation, drawing out the distinctive features of political subjectivation in these (and other) collective settings during fieldwork.

The fieldwork for this study took place at the height of the Covid pandemic (early 2021 to mid-2022). The main impacts of Covid on the research were the pandemic's effects on my interlocutors' livelihoods: Many *basti walas*, both men and women, suddenly found themselves out of work indefinitely, or their work routines radically changed to comply with stringent health and safety protocols (which the vast majority of *basti walas* found unnecessary and annoying). The collective sentiment in the *bastis* was that Covid was not a 'real' disease; many referred to it

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[191] As described in detail in the empirical-analytical chapters, domestic workers are often considered 'lesser' beings by *kothi walas*, and a number of social practices consistently reinforce these workers' subordinate status relative to the employing family. These practices include rules which govern how and where domestic workers will sit in the presence of employers. Spatial segregation and complex norms govern the 'appropriateness' of a worker's presence or absence in a particular time/space, particularly in interior or 'private' sections of the employer's home. (Grover et al., 2018; Ray & Qayum, 2009)

as a "rich people's disease", others thought it was a 'Western conspiracy'.[192] In *basti* discourse, Covid became yet another symbol of the fundamental distinction between rich and poor, which is explored in Chapter 6.

In these circumstances, I had to navigate and balance a number of considerations while doing fieldwork. I needed to be careful not to jeopardise my own, my family's or my interlocutors' health and safety while taking into account that most *basti walas* would not be following Covid protocols, particularly in their own homes and *basti* spaces where Covid protocols could not be not 'enforced' (unlike public spaces and workplaces, where 'enforcement' was marginally more effective). I balanced these considerations by maximizing time spent in open spaces during *basti* visits, following Covid protocols myself (to the extent that this was unilaterally possible) and checking beforehand if there had been a Covid outbreak in the locality I was planning to visit (in which case I rescheduled the visit).

Given my positionality as a local and a '*kothi wali*'[193]- someone 'of/from the *kothi* world'- in a context where it is common for *kothi walas* to hire domestic workers, I had abundant access to employers of domestic workers and to their views about the domestic service relationship. Over the course of fieldwork, I was in fact inundated with employers' (largely unsolicited) animated views about the domestic service relationship. In informal social gatherings, employers often responded to hearing about my research topic by immediately attempting to distinguish themselves from the 'typical' employer, going through great pains to detail all they had done to support and contribute to the wellbeing and social mobility of the domestic workers they employ. Many employers shared stories about their complex histories with domestic workers and expressed great curiosity about the 'findings' of my study, particularly regarding how workers perceived and evaluated employers.

I recorded employers' perspectives and stories in my field notes but, after giving it some thought, chose not to pursue employers' accounts as a line of inquiry or include this material in the written output of the thesis. This deliberation served as a useful reminder- and indeed, clarification- of the distinction between researching *domestic service relations* and *domestic workers'*

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[192] *Basti walas'* dismissal of Covid may also be related to the fact that the fatalities from Covid were relatively low in Islamabad's *bastis* compared to the city's middle-class neighbourhoods. In Pakistan generally, Covid infection and mortality rates remained relatively low in international comparison. See: https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/pakistan

[193] See footnotes 21 and 32 for context on how this term is used, by whom, and what it emotes.

subjectivities (while acknowledging their interconnections) and enabled me to retain my focus on the latter (see also footnote 189 above). Thus, in what appears in this thesis, I draw on employers' accounts only in a handful of cases where these accounts serve to contextualise specific incidents described by an interlocutor. [194]

The only exception in this regard is my account of my relationship with M, the domestic worker who worked part-time in the *kothi* where I lived with my family members over the course of fieldwork. In this time, I had numerous and frequent interactions with M, mostly inside and occasionally outside the *kothi,* of which I kept a meticulous record in my field notes (and of which M was aware). In these notes, I wrote extensively about M's relationship with me (as employer-researcher), with my sister (who was her 'primary employer') and with each of the other family members living in the house, in addition to recording my observations of M at work. M was well aware of my research and exhibited little interest in the study, except towards the end of her employment period when she expressed a desire to be formally interviewed (which I complied with). Given what I perceived to be her ambivalence vis-à-vis participating in the study, I have excluded all materials shared by her with me about her life and person from this study. However, I do use my observations of her in the *kothi* and my reflections on this relationship (which was in many ways starkly different from my relationship with other interlocutors) to gain insight into domestic workers' onstage strategies as well as the possibilities and constraints of cross-class communication within the domestic service relationship.

4.2.3. Power, Ethics, and Reciprocity in the Field

Despite the familiarity and trust that permeated my relationships in the *bastis* due to years of prior organising work in these communities, I am under no illusion that my interactions with interlocutors were free of power or relations of domination. Far from sharing my interlocutors' working-class or low-caste status, I occupy the class status of their employers. I understand my position in these communities to be an inversion of Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) 'outsider-within'

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[194] Having said this, it is important to note that employers' accounts presented a view of domestic workers' self-fashionings and practices that were often quite different from those presented by my interlocutors to me. (The discrepancy was particularly evident in the cases where I knew both employer and worker). Employers accounts, when juxtaposed with interlocutors' accounts, thus served to highlight the disjunct between employers and workers subjectivities and perceptions of the domestic service relationship. Additionally, employers' accounts of the domestic service relationship were highly revealing of employers' own subjectivities, which were very interesting but beyond the scope of this study to investigate further.

status that Black women occupy in academia; the latter occupy a position of marginality in relation to the academic realm in which they are 'outsiders', whereas I am an 'outsider' with a great deal of privilege in relation to my research subjects.

Being a *kothi wala* from the same cultural milieu as my interlocutors was a key aspect shaping what, how, and how much interlocutors chose to share with me. There are clear instances (described in subsequent chapters) of interlocutors minimizing, downplaying, and probably even concealing what they think and feel (particularly about *kothi walas*) in order to avoid upsetting or offending me. However, my positionality as a *kothi wala* (and by extension as a potential patron/employer) did not serve only or always to inhibit interlocutors from speaking their 'truth'. Some of the encounters described in later chapters point to the satisfaction interlocutors experienced by 'saying it like it is' to a *kothi wala's* (i.e., my) face, something they were not ordinarily able to do.

Even though I am not 'white' or 'Western' in narrow identitarian terms, I find Mohanty's (1988) critique of colonial discourses within Western feminism in the now-classic *Under Western Eyes* to be just as applicable to scholars such as myself, who are privileged subjects located in the Global South and acculturated as faithful colonial subjects. Just as it is vital to veer away from homogenising, decontextualised, and preconceived categories and descriptors of 'third world women', so it is important to do the same with respect to '*basti walas'*, 'domestic workers' and 'poor women', terms that carry with them a variety of tropes which are at best simplifications, and at worst, caricatures, of the lives and realities of my research subjects. I have attempted to do this through regular reflexive practice and through explicit and regular requests to interlocutors to correct, interrupt, and challenge my interpretations of their lives.

In the process of reflecting on my positionality in relation to my research subjects, I turned to neighboring feminist discourses- Dalit feminism in particular- to inform both my research and political practice. Even though they emerge from a different national and political context, I believe that Dalit feminist claims that caste-privileged Indian feminists have silenced the conversation on caste (Arya & Rathore, 2020) need to be taken seriously also in the Pakistani context where caste has been silenced in public discourse.[195] Dalit feminism helped me remain cognizant of how not

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[195] While there are no direct parallels to these debates (particularly around caste in relation to the feminist movement) in the Pakistani context, there are similar tensions and differences between feminist perspectives from the ethnic-peripheries of Pakistan and those from/in the Centre (see Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). For a

to normalise my own privileged experience in theorising gender and caste by reminding me of a common mistake made by researchers from privileged groups: namely, the mistake of interpreting gender as a 'shared' oppression with women of other groups, and attributing caste, class or ethnicity as an 'added layer' of oppression that is associated only with women of 'other' groups (Rege, 2019, p. 134).

My privileged positionality also has a bearing on how I understand and represent my research subjects and their subjectivities in this thesis; a process I describe in Part Three of this chapter. I take seriously Spivak's (1988) critique of scholarly attempts to recover an 'authentic' subaltern subject whose speech is rendered accessible and transparent (by the privileged scholar) in an apparently unmediated manner (Raghavan, 2023, p. 12). At the same time, in an era in which 'identity politics' and the subjects of representation, recognition, and 'who can speak for whom' are matters of charged debate and conflict, I find Linda Alcoff's (1995) contributions on the politics of representation to be nuanced and useful. Pushing back on the essentialist approach of reducing a person's speech to their social location, Alcoff suggests that, "To say that location *bears* on meaning and truth is not the same as saying that location *determines* meaning and truth." (Alcoff, 1995, p. 106). I agree with Alcoff that both the charge of 'speaking for others' as illegitimate purely on identitarian grounds, as well as the retreat from the charge by choosing not to speak at all for/about less privileged 'others', are equally problematic. As Alcoff (1995) puts it, "The declaration that I 'speak only for myself' has the sole effect of allowing me to avoid responsibility and accountability for my effects on others; it cannot literally erase those effects." (p.108) Rather than escape these complexities, I attempt to integrate them into my methodological decision-making, particularly decisions related to translation and representation of research subjects in the written text of the thesis.

This research was conducted in a context where patronage (or patron-client) relations are a culturally-sanctioned and deeply embedded form of relationship that mediates interaction and exchange between the privileged and the marginalised across class and status lines (Akhtar, 2011; Javed, 2018; Lyon, 2002). I thus expected my class, social status, and in some sites, recognition as a political worker, to engender expectations of material and financial support, especially in times of *khushi-ghammi* (mournings and celebrations, like weddings, funerals, religious festivals, etc.) when it is considered a patron's duty to provide material/financial support. Requests made to me

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discussion of caste and its salience (or lack thereof) in the politics of subaltern groups in the Pakistani context, see Chapter 3.

by interlocutors included requests for money (usually framed as a 'loan') and/or *sifarish* (an Urdu term which refers to using personal contacts to get favours from those in positions of authority) to facilitate their or their families' access to state institutions and potential employers. While I had to turn down most of such requests due to lack of capacity as well as a deep discomfort with occupying the position of 'patron', I did engage in a frequent (albeit selective) use of my privileges to meet a variety of interlocutors' needs in return for their generosity in sharing their lives and selves with me. This included writing applications of various kinds, finding contacts in- and making repeated trips to- government offices (such as hospitals, prisons, banks, schools, NADRA, the CDA headquarters) both with and without the interlocutor(s) themselves, and providing material and/or financial assistance.

I was initially apprehensive about offering financial remuneration for interviews for fear that this would instrumentalize the research relationship, engender expectations of regular material/ financial assistance and disincentivize interlocutors from interacting with me when they weren't paid for their time. I was also wary of engendering competition within the *basti*, should the news spread that I was offering money in return for people's participation in interviews. Despite these apprehensions, I went ahead with the decision to compensate interviewees for their time with PKR 2000 per interview, which for people in these communities was a welcome amount. Despite my fears to the contrary, this money was received largely as a token of gratitude rather than as a transactional 'payment' and did not engender (or exacerbate, rather) expectations of regular material or financial compensation.

Despite my best attempts at engaging ethically and responsibly with individual interlocutors and the *basti* communities at large, I have remained unsettled and conflicted about the instrumentality of relationships that one forms with research subjects during fieldwork. On the one hand, I recognise that, despite my deep moral discomfort in accepting this, relationships with respondents are ultimately instrumental relationships (Ellis, 1995) because they serve as a means to the final research 'product' and are the reason I sought these particular individuals out. My scepticism of academic endeavours (which reared its head with unexpected intensity during the demolition of the G-11 *basti*, as will be discussed shortly) tells me that it is my instrumental need for these relationships to not *appear* or *feel* instrumental for either me or my interlocutors, for then they would lose their potential for intimacy and hence for 'rich data'. On the other hand, I know that I share relationships of genuine care and affection with many of the women I have met

and known in these communities (both before and during this project) and I am beginning to trust myself to recognise the support, comfort, and even joy these women have derived from our relationship. One way of easing my discomfort about the instrumentality of research relationships was to remain in touch with a number of interlocutors after leaving the 'field'. This enabled not just continuity in these relationships but also an organic integration of their views, needs, and interests into the process of writing up.

4.2.4. The 'Researcher' versus the 'Political Worker'

Aware that feminist research is premised on the need to be willing to risk one's comfort and safety (Hemmings, 2012; Dinerstein, 2016), I embarked on this PhD project anticipating that discomfort and even turbulence would be part of the journey. This anticipation did not prepare me, however, for the emotional turmoil that I experienced as a result of the sharp internal tensions that arose between my overlapping identities of 'researcher' and the 'political worker' during the demolition of the G-11 *basti*, an event that changed the course of my fieldwork.[196]

My first encounter with the G-11 *basti* and its people began with the eviction itself, and with the AWP's efforts to stop the evictions. As an active member of the AWP team involved with these efforts, I maintained a regular (physical) presence at the *basti* during the week-long demolition period. My time at the *basti* was spent observing the unfolding of events, devising strategies in consultation with the *basti walas*, Ms. T, and other AWP team members, negotiating with the CDA crew, contacting journalists and lawyers, and attempting to find a *sifarish* (contacts) in the CDA. In the evenings, once the bulldozers had left for the night, I would gather the *basti walas* for a collective consultation on what to do next, reiterating AWP's role as supporter and ally who sought to act *with* them, rather than as saviour or patron who would or could decide their future course of action *for* them. In this period, I also made multiple trips to the CDA Headquarters in an attempt to meet with CDA's higher officials and request them to intervene. All of mine and AWP's attempts to stop the operation proved unsuccessful and led to significant emotional impacts on me, causing me to question the point of being a political worker if we were always going to be 'ineffective'.

In light of my discomfort with asking the *basti walas'* consent for participation in my research project under such difficult circumstances, coupled with my internal struggle to distinguish the

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[196] Chapter 7 gives a detailed account of the demolition of the G-11 *basti* and its subjectivating impacts on the G-11 *basti walas*.

researcher from a scavenger (which became particularly acute in that period), I chose to mention my dual identity as a researcher (in addition to an AWP worker) to the *basti walas* on a handful of occasions within the first week of our acquaintanceship, while the demolitions were ongoing. I then waited six to eight weeks- once the *basti walas* had relocated and settled somewhat- to fully introduce myself as a researcher and the subject of my research, and to seek their consent to be interviewed and to write about their experiences (of the demolition and beyond) for my thesis. The vast majority of the *basti walas* I spoke to said yes, and while nobody said 'no', I took the absence of a clear 'yes' to be a 'no' and have since excluded any materials pertaining specifically to those individuals.

The demolition of the G-11 *basti* proved to be the beginning of a long (and continuing) relationship between the AWP, the people of this *basti* (especially the women), and myself. In what follows, I use some of the exchanges between the 'researcher' and the 'political worker' within me (as recorded in my fieldnotes) that emerged during the initial period of the demolition to illustrate the impacts of this tension on the research process. I go on to describe and reflect on the strategies I employed to deal with this tension.

I begin with the following field note, written approximately two weeks after the demolition of the G-11 *basti*:

> During these past weeks [since the G-11 operation] one of the most jarring aspects has been my relationship to being a researcher. The researcher inside me has been asking me to record things, take pictures, make videos, to audio-record snippets of conversation, to preserve this somehow in its 'raw' form, transform these events into a 'usable' form (for my PhD that is). This researcher is simultaneously revolted by the instrumentality of her thinking. *Amidst this chaos, this destruction, I am wanting to scavenge on the remains of this* basti *to feed my thesis? Jesus fucking christ.* The anxiety in me has been building, knowing that I have deadlines to meet, and that there is no way I can, or want to, disconnect myself from the political work I am doing. Yet, I know I need distance if I am to be able to write. There has been- and is- a great desire to integrate the researcher and the political worker. But it feels impossible. At least right now.
>
> (Field notes, 09-11-2021)

One of the binaries visible in this field note is the assumption that the researcher is a scavenger- s/he 'takes', 'collects'- and in the process, 'records'- events as 'data' with the intention of using them for their professional self-advancement. This is juxtaposed elsewhere in my fieldnotes with the 'political worker' who (implicitly) comes with the intention to 'give' rather than 'take' (even

though in these field notes, it is clear that the political worker is themselves tormented, contradicted, and miserable).[197] Hence, the same acts- of photographing, interviewing, video-making- became ethical, even *necessary*- for the political worker, but extractive for the researcher.

Elaborating on the binaries between the 'political worker' and the 'researcher', I wrote:

> The researcher is distant; the political worker is intimate, enmeshed.
> The researcher is an 'observer'; the political worker is an 'actor'.
> The researcher follows; the political worker leads.
> The researcher records for accuracy and preservation of 'data'; the political worker records to generate ammunition for use in battles over 'truth'.
> The researcher instrumentalizes misery; the political worker works (even if unsuccessfully) to mitigate, visibilise, communalize, and eventually eliminate misery.

(Fieldnotes, 10-12-2021)

If I look closely at my lived experience in this period, I know the researcher and the political worker to not be as dichotomous or separable as they appear in these notes. Possibly reacting to positivist ideals of social science research which are premised on a dispassionate separation between researcher and researched (Burawoy, 1998), I vilified the 'researcher' even while doing research. For instance, 'data-gathering' was happening during the demolition even as I was adamant about setting aside the researcher-hat during this time. The field note below illustrates this:

> I found myself talking to the [G-11] *basti* women about their jobs as domestic workers, how much they are paid, their experiences with *kothi walas*. But I simply was unable- unwilling, rather- to go beyond what was alive and organically present, which was primarily the fact of eviction.
> (Field notes, 09-11-2021)

These notes belie my internal tension in that period: '*I found myself talking*...about domestic service' as if I was 'being a researcher' *despite* myself. At the end of the note, I bring myself back to 'the fact of eviction', as if the ethical thing to do in that moment is to restrict myself to this 'fact', and inadvertently to my identity as a political worker who is there because of the eviction. And yet, even when I was finding it unethical to 'be a researcher' in those moments, I was 'gathering data'. Possibly to avoid the wrath of the political worker, I was gathering data in this

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[197] I explore in detail the positionalities of 'researcher' and 'political worker', the tensions between them, the evolution of their relationship over the course of research, and the learnings that emerge from this process for both political organising and academic research in a journal article currently under publication.

period *without using a device to record it*; I was recording events in my memory and later in my field notes. Here, the researcher angrily interrupted me:

> *But isn't memory also a kind of record?*
> *Doesn't it form the basis for your field notes, which <u>are</u> your formal record?*
> *Why do you assume that this implicit, sly, almost devious kind of record-keeping is somehow more 'ethical' than using a device to record?*
> *Doesn't recording simply <u>feel</u> more instrumental when a recording device or instrument is involved?*
> *Besides, isn't your body/mind an 'instrument' you take into the 'field' whenever and wherever you go?*

<div align="right">(Field notes, 12-11-2021)</div>

While audio-recording felt unethical and instrumental during the G-11 demolition, at other moments during fieldwork, I wondered whether *not* audio-recording was a disservice to my interlocutors, because in relying solely on my memory, I would be recording *my* version of what they said. Furthermore, since my project demands particular attention to interlocutors' vocabularies, I knew that audio-recordings would be immensely useful (and indeed they have been). However, the trade-off between having access to their exact words after the research encounter and the fear of changing the very dynamics of the conversation- making it less safe, more tangibly instrumental, and less intimate by bringing in the audio recorder- was a dilemma I struggled to navigate at many points during fieldwork.

Expectedly, I made different choices about whether to audio-record (or not) at different moments during fieldwork. In retrospect, I think that with greater reflexivity, courage, and risk-taking, I could have created methodological pathways out of this dilemma ('to record or not to record') by choosing to discuss it with interlocutors themselves, particularly those with whom I enjoyed a more intimate relationship. This would have enabled me to better serve both the project and my interlocutors.

Throughout fieldwork, but particularly during the G-11 *basti* demolition period, I turned to reflexive note-taking, meticulously recording my emotional responses in my field notes, making them part of my 'data'. Doing so served both as a cathartic exercise and as an analytical resource that enriched this study's findings, making it more 'objective' (Harding, 1995) by making visible my subjective lens and the web of interpretations and experiences that were informing the processes of data collection, description, and analysis. I share below one of the instances from the demolition period in which reflexive writing had a direct bearing on the research process.

In the weeks following the G-11 demolition, the political worker in me remained disturbed by what she perceived to be indifference, self-absorption, and lack of concern of interlocutors from other *bastis* to the demolition. The resulting feelings of disappointment reduced my desire and willingness to engage with these interlocutors and I found myself avoiding interactions with them. Disturbed by the degree to which the G-11 demolition had affected my field relationships (in addition to my personal relationships), the researcher in me took to reflexive writing to make sense of these interlocutors' apparent 'indifference' to the demolition and to make sense of my own experience, emotions, and needs, and how the latter may be shaping the former. Through this process I came to understand that what was being expressed by these interlocutors was neither silence nor indifference, but rather, a plethora of other needs and concerns, some of them intimately connected to housing security and the future of their own *bastis*.[198] I also came to understand that what I had initially described as their 'lack of concern' for other *basti walas* was a description stemming from my own unmet need for care: I had experienced their apparent indifference to the demolition as a lack of concern/care *for me*, given how deeply enmeshed I was with the events of the demolition and in need of receiving (rather than only and always giving) care and empathy.[199] These realisations resulted in important and fruitful shifts in my research relationships over time and helped establish boundaries between myself and my interlocutors which, contrary to my fears of resulting in distance or estrangement, made these relationships more secure and sustainable (Lombard, 2022).

4.3.   Section Three: Analysis and Writing Up

Analysis and writing were distinct yet intertwined processes (and phases) in the final stages of research. I use the term 'analysis' to refer to the process of organising and making sense of interlocutors' narratives (and the field data more broadly) and 'writing' to the process of representing these materials and my interpretations of them on the page. The intertwinement between analysis, interpretation, and writing was most acute in the process of translation, to which I devote considerable attention later in this section.

Following the epistemological and ontological premises of institutional ethnography and grounded theory, I used my interlocutors' everyday experiences and conceptual vocabularies as

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[198] This is explored further in Chapter 7.
[199] Like other researchers who 'study down', it took me some time- and a particular turn of events- to recognise that it is not just research subjects or 'others' who are in need of care (Farsakoglu & Djampour, 2021; González-López, 2010).

the starting point not just for analysis but also for engaging with theory, as noted in Chapter 2 (Smith, 1990; Bannerji, 2020). After reading/listening deeply, carefully, reflexively, and in the initial instance, *only*, to my interlocutors' accounts and my accounts of them, I used inductive coding to track interlocutors' expressions and vocabularies, checking directly with interlocutors when needed to clarify the accuracy of my interpretation. Through careful and repeated engagement with interlocutors' narratives and the field data, I identified and organised the themes that emerged as salient across their narratives, remaining attentive to differences in social location amongst the interlocutors so as not to inadvertently dismiss the outliers and become majoritarian in an attempt to find patterns and common strands in the narratives. These themes became the infrastructure of the analytical chapters, and this analytical process, combined with the project's context of discovery described earlier in this chapter, gave rise to the theoretical arguments made in this thesis. Throughout this process, I have attempted to heed Saba Mahmood's poignant (and eloquent) suggestion that "our analytical explorations should not be reduced to the requirements of political judgment . . . It is not that the two modalities of engagement— the political and the analytical— should remain deaf to each other, only that they should not be collapsed into each other" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 196). Having described how I undertook the work of analysis, I now turn to a discussion of my translation practices, given their centrality to the processes of both analysis and representation.

4.3.1. Translation practices

As noted in Chapter 2, my entire PhD project is an attempt at translation in the broadest sense— translating the narratives and self-fashionings of a group of highly marginal subjects across class, linguistic, cultural, regional, and professional contexts, from the position of a class- and caste-privileged local researcher. Over the course of the project, I have continued to think about why I am engaging in this 'translation'; who it will impact, and how, and what the theoretical and political implications are for using/deploying particular translations over others. Having begun the discussion of the theoretical, methodological, and political import of translation in Chapter 2, in this section, I turn to a discussion of how these considerations inform my translation practices in the thesis.

Rather than understanding translation as a self-evident, mechanical, or straightforward process of simply finding the right/closest words in another language, I understand translation as a process that begins with *making sense* of what one encounters and then rendering it legible and

accessible (initially to oneself and later to wider audiences outside of the contexts that are being translated) through written and/or verbal naming and narrativization, a process which may or may not involve switching languages. The 'sense making' that comprises this first step of translation is an interpretive exercise, with fundamental implications for how an act or event is understood and described as 'data'; the 'data' upon which all later analysis and theorisation rests. Hence, I understand translation as not merely a literal exercise but an interpretive, contextual, and reflexive one, since class and other forms of structural difference also create differences in how speech is understood (or, misunderstood).[200]

In my research context, translation-as-interpretation involved working with verbal as well as facial expressions, since things are rarely said or done directly or 'upfront', particularly across power and privilege lines (see also Sixtensson, 2021).[201] This also brought forth the complex relationship between literal and conceptual translation.[202] Translation-as-interpretation thus required a very clear and rigorous reflexive practice and sharp attentiveness to power and context in the research setting, whereas translation-as-representation required an acute awareness of the linguistic/cultural contexts into which these materials were being translated (in this case, academic English), including an anticipation of how a particular translation may be (mis)understood.

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[200] Tracking misunderstandings is a complex matter, because they must be flagged (verbally or in some other form) in order to be registered as misunderstandings. Following James Scott who understands subordinate groups to have, in most circumstances, "a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances" (1990, xii), I expect the subordinate to be more likely than the dominant to conceal the fact that they've been misunderstood, unless they are likely to be more impacted by *not* bringing it up.

[201] This is evidenced by the presence of particular words in the Urdu language that name this cultural tendency to not say/name things directly. The word '*takkaluf*' is one example, a reference to the propriety expected in one's conduct with guests/hosts in hospitality situations, where both parties put on an appearance of abundance/fulfillment, concealing their actual condition and/or experience of the situation.

[202] There were many times when the literal/abstract meaning of a word would be quite different from its particular/contextual meaning. One example of such a term is '*bacche*', a term which literally means 'child' or 'children'. The term was used by some employers to refer to members of their live-in house staff, often comprised of adult male workers accompanied by their families. A literal interpretation of '*bacche*' in this case provides a window into the infantilization and familialization (i.e. inclusion as 'one of the family') that domestic workers are subject to. In this case, the literal and contextual meanings are at odds but also clearly *linked,* suggesting that both literal/abstract and particular/context-specific meanings must be taken into account in the process of translation.

4.3.2. Doing 'Justice' to Interlocutors' Voices

In this section, I describe and reflect on how research subjects are represented in the written output of the thesis and the dilemmas and decisions involved in attempting to 'do justice' to interlocutors' voices in it. This included making difficult choices about *which* interlocutors appear in the thesis, *how much* each of them appear, and *how* (much) I introduce/describe/write them into the text, each of which are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

I was initially insistent on having all interlocutors appear in the text (even if unevenly/unequally), seeing this as necessary to 'doing justice', given that each of them had contributed to the thesis and thus deserved to appear in the thesis. Aware that this would not be possible, I nevertheless tried to maximize the number of interlocutors who appear in the thesis, without compromising the effectiveness of the text and chapter arguments.

I was also aware that some interlocutors had shared their stories with an explicit desire to be seen/heard, whereas others had done me a favour by talking to me. This also influenced my decision about which interlocutors appear in the thesis and how/how much they appear. In the final output, there are still a number of interlocutors who do not appear in the thesis or appear little in comparison with the length of time I spent with them, which I have mourned. I have used as consolation the fact that those who do appear often speak as a 'we' (literally) and are in fact speaking for other interlocutors even when speaking as individuals.

The needs and concerns of interlocutors regarding anonymity varied greatly. Many interlocutors did not ask to be anonymized and some even insisted that I put their stories (with their identity) out into the world. On the other hand, there were some interlocutors who had a keen desire to be included in the (written) thesis but were fearful of being recognised by their employers in the text. These diverse imperatives led me to explore anonymization more deeply, both in its purpose and techniques, and discover the complexities of the anonymizing process, described below.

Given my primary responsibility to ensure that interlocutors come to no harm as a result of my research, I anonymized the personal details of all interlocutors who appear in the thesis, irrespective of whether they requested anonymity or not. (The only exceptions are in cases where interlocutors specifically requested to be named, in which case I honoured that request without disclosing which interlocutors this applies to.) The process of anonymizing individuals and their data involved obscuring particular details, changing others (like names for instance but many

other identifiers also), and leaving some details out entirely. The process of anonymizing particularly 'sensitive' materials felt like a covert intelligence operation in which I was combining my own knowledge and assessment of the particular individuals and contexts in question to anticipate what details may lead to recognition of the interlocutor (and thus would need to be changed or obscured) alongside soliciting and incorporating the concerned interlocutor's requests and suggestions about what to include/exclude.

How to achieve anonymity in the text in a way that successfully conceals an interlocutor's identity (specifically from those who would/could recognise them in the text) and thus serves the interlocutors' needs for safety without fundamentally changing the story was significantly more complicated than I had anticipated. In cases where I was unsure whether I would be able to successfully and completely anonymize particular data identified as 'sensitive' by an interlocutor, I excluded those materials from the thesis. My dilemma regarding the extent to which 'full' anonymization is even possible, without becoming 'fabrication', persists.

"If informed consent is agreeing to be 'done to'," writes Bell (2014), "in ethnographic research this happens not in the fieldwork situation hardly as much as in the process of writing up" (p. 516). Even though my interlocutors had consented to the use of their narratives for the research when I was seeking consent for fieldwork, they had not consented to *how* their narratives would be used (as this was not yet a possibility in the fieldwork phase). In the writing-up phase, I chose to renew consent with interlocutors whose narratives appear prominently in the text, approaching them for this purpose once I knew better how I intended to represent and use their narratives in the text. In deciding about which field materials to use in the text and how to use them, I thought closely about the potential impacts- particularly any potential for harm- caused by their use to my subjects.

With regards to my dilemmas regarding which aspects of interlocutors' lives and selves are represented in the text, which I call my 'dilemma of authority', I made these decisions by following them (as individuals and as group members), tracking their vocabularies, their points of emphasis, their usage of particular terms and phrases, and their silences. This discernment involved letting go of personal and political attachments to what 'should' be important to those I study. [See also Mahmood (2005) cited earlier in this section]. At the same time, I came to understand that the idea that I would simply do what my interlocutors wanted me to do, think, or say in every instance was not just a romantic and impractical notion, it was also

incommensurate with my academic and personal purpose in undertaking this project. I now believe that my responsibility as a researcher is not to please my interlocutors, but rather, to ensure that no harm comes to them; remaining at the same time particularly attentive to the heightened possibilities of misunderstandings and uncritical (even if unintentional) misuses by me of the power I carry in relation to these very marginal subjects. Thus, I engaged with my 'dilemma of authority' by sharing power with my interlocutors about how they appear in the dissertation: I followed them in discerning the themes, content, and materials that appear on the page, and they followed me in making organisational choices about how to (re)present the materials.

What appears in this thesis, particularly in the empirical-analytical chapters that follow, are *my* stories *about* my interlocutors, based on *their* stories of themselves, as told to me at particular times in particular places. I do not claim to be telling 'their' stories as if I were them. Through the act of writing, I am attempting to speak *about* them, and also to speak *with* them; remaining careful to not conflate my identity with theirs, while maintaining a clear sense of alignment with their epistemic location. As I see it, alignment with my research subjects does not mean presenting them as perfect, seamlessly coherent beings or as valiant 'heroes' singularly fighting their oppressions. They too, are flawed and contradicted beings—as human beings are- and so it would be a disservice to their humanity (and to meaningful research) if I were to present them otherwise. I am aware that this attempt is fraught with complexity and replete with moments of failure. And thus continues my struggle to practice and visibilise reflexivity consistently, appropriately, and ethically.

Some of the accounts that I cite in the following chapters are individual accounts, conveyed to me in private or one-on-one settings, whereas others are accounts from group discussions. The notable difference between the two, as noted earlier in this chapter, is in tone rather than content. With regards to the individual accounts I use/cite in these chapters, it is important to note that many of these accounts are (in many cases, literally) speaking for a collective, even while narrating individual stories. Even when the accounts do not literally refer to a 'we', the ones that appear are paradigmatic accounts (unless stated otherwise). Accounts that are exceptional are cited for what they illustrate *as* exceptions. And finally, while each of the field excerpts cited in these chapters present some parts/aspects of my subjects, it is critically important to not essentialise those subjectivities as representing the 'whole' of my subjects- not least because the same subjects inhabit/display very different subjectivities and selves at different times and places. In

describing/representing interlocutors' accounts, I do my best to visibilise the contextual particularities within which their individual accounts and collective narratives are embedded.

Having given a detailed account of the research process and each of its stages, it is to domestic workers' stories and voices that we finally turn.

Chapter 5

In the *Kothi*: Workplace Narratives, Experiences, and Strategies

> My friend and I used to say to each other that right from childhood, we've already entered the *susraal* (the conjugal family). From childhood right up until the time we are married, our time is spent serving in the *kothis*. Then we are married off and we go to the 'real' *susraal*, and spend the rest of our lives there… The idea that one could live one's *own* life, at least until one is married; the idea that one could have gone to school, had fun with friends, *enjoyed* one's life? But no. When I think of these things, I feel incredibly sad. Why couldn't God have written something into our fate— some schooling, something that would enable us to survive without being dependent on these people? But no; we have been destined to serve them, to wait on them day and night, and then on top of that, to listen to their nagging, to put up with their taunts… what life do the *ghareeb* (poor) have?

> (Maria,[203] Lahore, 11-03-2022)

This chapter explores domestic workers' narratives about their experiences of working in their employers' *kothis* (bungalows), using these narratives to gain insight into domestic workers' political subjectivities. These narratives emanate from the diverse social locations, employment histories and work arrangements of my research subjects described in the previous chapter. It must be noted at the outset that these narratives are 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1990), that is, they are 'offstage' accounts (of both 'onstage' and 'offstage' practices) shared by domestic workers in spaces outside the *kothi* or in the absence of employers.[204] By 'offstage' is meant- to use James Scott's (1990) typology- acts, narratives, and/or events taking place out of direct view of the dominant, which, for this and following chapters, refers specifically to employers of domestic workers and to *kothi walas* more broadly.[205] The offstage sites where these narratives unfold are mostly interlocutors' homes in the *bastis*, which served as spaces for individual research

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[203] As stated earlier, interlocutors' and (where they appear, employers') names and all personal and contextual details that could enable their identification have either been withheld, obscured, or changed. In cases where disclosing the specific location of a particular conversation/interview could be problematic, I have kept the interview location deliberately vague.

[204] Refer to Chapter 2 for a discussion of these terms.

[205] As noted in Chapter 2, one of the limitations of the concept of the hidden transcript is that it relies on a single-axis conceptualisation of oppression, whereas my interlocutors are subject to multiple co-constituted oppressions of class, gender, and caste. While the *basti*- both 'public' and 'private' spaces within it- provides relatively safe space(s) for the articulation of class critique, the same sites (especially the space of the *basti* home) are also sites of gendered power and hence should not be understood as sites where gendered elements of the hidden transcript can be freely or easily expressed. It is important therefore to qualify that the term 'hidden transcript' as used in this and following chapters refers specifically to interlocutors' critique of class relations in the realm of domestic service, unless specified otherwise.

encounters and for group discussions, each of which generated distinct subjectivities as noted in the previous chapter. In cases where interlocutors were full-time live-in workers residing in employers' homes, these 'hidden transcripts' were shared in the absence of employers and/or during private 'leisure trips' to public parks or recreational sites.

This chapter begins by describing the coercive material and discursive contexts that frame interlocutors' entry into domestic service. It proceeds to bring together recurring themes in interlocutors' narratives about their work experiences in order to describe the salient features of the domestic service relationship and explore the thoughts, feelings, and desires that arise from these experiences. The final sections of the chapter respectively describe offstage and onstage strategies employed by domestic workers to respond to indignities in the workplace.

5.1. Domestic Service as '*majboori*'

My conversations with interlocutors often began with a discussion about why/how they entered domestic service. The response was always, '*majboori*', a term used both in Urdu and Punjabi to broadly mean 'compulsion', succinctly conveying the coercive underpinnings of their 'voluntary' entry into domestic service. While subjects were referring primarily to material or economic compulsions in their use of the term, a wider exploration (which takes place in following paragraphs) shows that particular social/cultural obligations and pressures are also described as '*majboori*'. In contrast to *majboori*, the term '*zabardasti*' which also translates literally to compulsion but means more specifically to 'force an action unilaterally upon another', was a word mostly used by subjects with reference to their interactions with (or requests of) employers, usually to refer to what is *not* possible in those interactions or when taking decisions or actions that their families were not in agreement with.

While *majboori*- as compulsion- may be understood literally to mean an *absence* of options or a foreclosed outcome, Asma's use of the term, shared below, shows that *majboori* arises when other *viable* options are not available: "We're not able to find a good evening option. We're doing [this job] out of *majboori*." This phrase comes as Asma shares that her husband was currently working two jobs, one in the morning as a sanitation worker for a private bus company, and the second, from afternoon onwards, as a domestic worker in a *kothi* in Islamabad's G-6/3 sector. He returns sometimes at 8pm, at other times even 10 or 11pm, depending on his employers' wishes and schedules. Sometimes he is paid for working overtime, sometimes he is

not. "But it's our *majboori*, so we do it," Asma says. "*Mehnat karte hain tho khatay hain.*" *If we earn, we eat*. *Majboori* then appears to be a *choice*- to begin or continue working a particular job for instance- within circumstances that one wishes were different and would *not* have chosen. For domestic workers, these circumstances are conveyed through the phrase used by Asma at the end of the previous quote: "*If we earn, we eat.*"

The term '*majboori*' was also used by interlocutors to refer to things beyond one's control, like accidents, ill health, and old age, to name a few. For some interlocutors, unforeseen events/circumstances (such as an accident or sudden death of an earning male member, or an external shock like coronavirus or floods, or otherwise unexplained events like *jaado-tona*- a term in my interlocutors' vocabulary to refer to a spell cast by someone- usually a jealous relative- to destroy their family's fortunes)[206] compelled them to go out and seek work in the *kothi*s. For others, like the G-11 *basti walas*, their family's and/or community's circumstances are such right from the start that it is assumed that women and girls will need to do paid work for the family to survive. Many of my interlocutors began working in the *kothi*s from childhood, some accompanying their mothers to work in the *kothis* and eventually taking over their tasks, others being sent by their families to completely new/unfamiliar homes as part-time or live-in domestic workers. Despite the variation across my interlocutors' economic conditions, economic security for all of them was always precarious and elusive- something that could be (and often was) shaken by an unforeseen event. This meant that in my interlocutor's lives, *majboori* could- and would- arise at any time.

However, as the following comment from Shakeela illustrates, *majboori*- difficult and compelling as it is- retains elements of 'choice'. Describing how her son's illness suddenly thrust them into debt, she said: "I started working of my own volition/choice ['*apni marzi se*'], nobody compelled me to do this ['*kisi ne mujhe majboor nahin kiya*']." It must be borne in mind however, that given the compelling circumstances that give rise to *majboori* for my interlocutors, even if choice is exercised in the process of navigating *majboori*, it often doesn't *feel like* a choice. Take Maria's following quote, for instance, which illustrates that it is precisely when *majboori* is presented as a choice that Maria finds it unbearable. Speaking to me about a recent visit to her home (a village

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[206] References to the supernatural (such as to witchcraft, magic, and spirit possession) were present in many interlocutors' narratives, as is common (particularly but not exclusively) in anthropological studies of South Asian rural societies (see M. Ahmed, 2019; Desai, 2008; Marsden, 2009; Raheja & Gold, 1994). However, a comprehensive exploration of the belief systems and practices underlying these references and their relationship to interlocutors' subjectivities is beyond the scope of this study.

in one of Punjab's central districts), Maria recounted how everyone in the family was preparing to attend a wedding the evening that she had to leave for Islamabad, to return to work:

> As I was watching them get ready, something was happening inside my heart… All of my cousins were insisting: 'Stay, stay! Just tell your employers that you're not coming today.' I didn't know how to tell them that I cannot say this to them.

> (Maria, Islamabad, 30-09-2021)

Maria tells me how sad she had been at not being able to attend the wedding function, and how she feels she has missed out on so much of her childhood in order to earn for the family. Adding to her pain were the taunts she received from male relatives about her decision to take up work in Islamabad, who framed it as 'her choice':

> [When I went home this time] My brothers said to me, 'Oh, so you don't feel like going? Don't go then.' But it doesn't matter whether I want to or not, they don't understand, I *have* to go…. When I started working here, Raheel [Maria's fiancé] said to me, 'What do you care, you're in Islamabad having a good time, living your own life, enjoying yourself… You're there because you *want* to be there [*Tum tho apnay shauq se jati ho*].' What can one say…? [Maria's voice trails off]

> (Maria, Islamabad, 30-09-2021)

I understand Maria's pain here as emanating not from helplessness in the face of *majboori* (though that too did come about for some interlocutors in instances described later in the chapter), but rather, it is the fact of being misunderstood- and, from the fiancé's side, of being taunted (even if playfully) about the nature and motivations of Maria's choice to take up the job in Islamabad.

Contrary then to the idea that 'choice' implies an unencumbered individual who is 'free' to make decisions (see Madhok, 2013b), *majboori* compels these subjects to make *particular* choices- like entering domestic service- which may come at great costs to their physical and subjective self, and which they appear to 'choose' only as a last resort. The opening quote of this chapter from Maria, followed by Zarina's words below, indicates the particularly demeaning status of domestic service and suggests that Zarina and many others would never have become domestic workers had other forms of employment been available or accessible to them, or if economic circumstances hadn't compelled them to seek work:

> This work [domestic service], and particularly *for a woman* to work in other people's homes, is very difficult, but *majbooriyaan* [compulsions] make one do everything… Sure, a woman has the right to support her husband by earning—it's not that it's a bad thing [for a woman to earn], but domestic service is particularly difficult because

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it affects your *izzat* (honour/dignity). Even though my family doesn't know [that I work in people's homes], everyone in the colony knows that *I* am the person who comes to clean [XYZ's] house. So obviously, it does affect one's *izzat*…

<p style="text-align:center">(Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021, emphases hers)</p>

Zarina's comments speak to a central aspect of domestic service in the Pakistan (and wider South Asian) context: its status as a demeaning form of employment and the ensuing struggles for dignity by domestic workers. As the above comment reveals, Zarina finds it demeaning that the community knows her to be a domestic worker and she has had to conceal the fact of being a domestic worker from her family and relatives, both for her own dignity and in order to continue working (as some male relatives may object to it as a matter of 'honour', should they find out). This is the case not just for Zarina but for many of my Farash Town interlocutors (except those who are considered to have 'no other option', such as widows or single mothers whose husbands and other male family members are absent). Most of these women lie to their families (sometimes even to their children) and say they are going to the '*sillayi* (stitching) centre' to teach other women how to stitch, or to take stitching/tailoring courses themselves, or perform other forms of work (like repairing sewing machines), indicating that other forms of employment (as long as they were deemed appropriately gender-segregated) are still acceptable to their families.

As explained to me by my Farash Town interlocutors—who, as introduced in Chapter 1, are poor Muslim women, mostly relocated *katchi abadi* residents, from different ethnic backgrounds— domestic service in their community is frowned upon (and hence particularly difficult for them to navigate) primarily because it is within a private sphere with the potential of other male presences. Indeed, one of the indignities of domestic service (for *women* workers specifically) is precisely the possibility of male presence(s) in the *kothi,* which not only gives rise to domestic workers' concerns for their own safety (from sexual predation/violence) but crucially, puts the sexual piety of the domestic worker into question. It is this 'sexual potential' of domestic service— and crucially, the social perception of it as such—that lies at the core of many interlocutors' anxieties about their identity as domestic workers, irrespective of how safe the *kothi's* environment is for them and even if there are no men at all in the *kothi* for the period they are at work. This serves as a reminder of the centrality and interconnectedness of space, time, and violence (discussed in Chapter 2) in configuring the 'everyday' of gendered subjects (Elias & Rai, 2019). Thus, it is due to its socially demeaning, potentially 'promiscuous', and economically exploitative nature that domestic service is seen as universally undesirable by research subjects

across multiple sites and communities. However, Zarina and other Farash Town interlocutors' emphasis on *izzat* (honour/dignity) and concerns about their families finding out that they perform domestic service is also a reflection of the relatively stricter gender norms that apply to them (corresponding to a higher social status) in comparison with their Christian and *mussalli* (low-caste Muslim) counterparts.

Though everyday material needs form the crux of the domestic workers' compulsions to seek work, some interlocutors also described '*safed-poshi*'- or white-collar/middle-class respectability- as being a type of *majboori*. For working-class communities based in Islamabad, who are away from (but usually in regular contact with) their village-based relatives, there is a social obligation to appear 'economically secure' and maintain an image of relative prosperity amongst wider family and community networks in their hometowns. This is for instance, what compelled Sana and her husband Daniyal to take out a hefty loan in order to buy a plot of land (in the village), and to sheepishly ask me for a loan in its aftermath as they were struggling to manage their various expenditures. As Daniyal put it, "It was our *majboori* to take out that loan. The *qabeela* (tribe/community) says, after all this time living in Islamabad, what do you have to show for yourselves?" (Daniyal, Awami Basti, 09-09-2021)

Safed-poshi in this case also demands that one *provide* for one's relatives in the village, and the pressure to do so becomes particularly acute at occasions such as weddings, funerals, and other events of cultural significance. As Zarina puts it (after describing the various misfortunes that compelled her to seek work, and the growing pressure of returning people's loans):

> […] And then *safed-poshi*, you know how it is. It's my *jeth's* [brother-in-law's] daughter's wedding soon. He asked me, 'What will you give my daughter at her wedding?' I replied, 'Whatever you ask for.' He said, 'You two [i.e. Zarina and her husband] should give two gifts, since both of you are earning [doing *mazdoori*].' I said in my heart, only Allah knows how we are making ends meet.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021)

Chronic indebtedness was a consistent and central feature of domestic workers' narratives. Instability in income (resulting from a delayed salary payment or from unforeseen expenses incurred due to illness, accidents, family feuds, police bribes, guests, theft, or some kind of *khushi-*

ghammi[207]), coupled with meagre savings meant that loans were needed on a regular basis to keep the household functioning (including loans for debt servicing itself). Indeed, the *majboori* of paying off loans was cited by interlocutors as one of the primary reasons for being in domestic service. In most cases, the entire family was working to pay off these loans, with some (particularly younger) family members' entire salaries going straight from the employers into debt servicing.

Maria, who had left her family/home in her village for a live-in job as a domestic worker in Islamabad, recounts with bitterness:

> First, we took out a loan for my elder sister's wedding, then for my elder brother's, then for the younger ones; each time it took months of working day and night to pay it back. Every time I go home, Ammi says, 'We owe money to the milkman, the shopkeeper, to XYZ'. I've been born just to pay off everyone's loans, it seems.
>
> <div align="right">(Maria, Islamabad, 25-06-2021)</div>

Indebtedness was also a source of shame. In addition to its presence in interlocutors' narratives, this was illustrated by the fact that they almost never asked me for 'money'; it was always a 'loan' they asked for, that too very sheepishly, always in private, and with a vigorous reassurance that they'd pay it back (even when it was evident that this would be very unlikely). For Shakeela, being indebted was a considerable source of everyday tension/anxiety: "Being indebted makes me very anxious. I keep worrying that [the lender] will show up at my door." For Zara, who had taken a substantial loan of PKR 350,000 from her employers for the construction of her home in the H-9 *basti*, the loan had effectively become a form of bondage as she had agreed to give up her salary for the entire period until the loan was repaid (which meant 50 months, or more than four years of working without payment). But, Zara added, what's worse is the added element of being ingratiated to the lender, which she described in Urdu as "*kisi k ehsaan tallay dab jana*", that is, "being buried/stuck under someone's *ehsaan* ('favour' or 'largesse')." "The only thing that I pray for," says Zara, "is for God to save me from *mohtaaji* [dependence], to keep me able, active, and on my feet." (Zara, Islamabad, 22-09-2021) The implication in Zara's words is that "earning one's keep" enables a dignified existence, even if within relations of subservience, so that at least the asymmetry is not absolute. This too was paradigmatic: virtually all of my interlocutors expressed considerable pride at being dignified, labouring beings, emphasising that they were not

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[207] *Khushi-ghammi* is a term used in the Pakistani/South Asian context to refer to occasions that mark celebrations (*khushi*) and mournings (*ghammi*), like weddings, funerals, childbirth, etc. These are expected to be collective/communal affairs, which creates a significant economic burden for poor households.

'dependents' (*mohtaaj*), or recipients of rich people's largesse ('*ehsaan*') or charity ('*khairaat*'), or mere consumers of their husband's or other family members' earnings. Rather, they presented themselves as active participants, contributors, and providers for their families, which seemed central to their sense of dignity and empowerment (Rota, 2022, p. 69).

For Roshni, who chose to enter full-time domestic service to support her ailing single mother and the rest of her siblings, being a domestic worker enabled her to remain independent of her brothers: "I don't ask my brothers [for help with expenses]. So that they can't say, 'She's surviving on our scraps'. In that kind of situation, you become subservient [*ghulami karni parti hy*]." Similarly, Mumtaz Bibi, a single woman in her early 50s, proudly presented herself as someone who 'gives' rather than 'takes' from her daughter's family (with whom she has lived since her husband abandoned her many years ago): "I'm not a burden (*boj*) on them. I eat what I earn. If anything, I give *to* them, rather than take *from* them. There's nothing worse in this world than *mohtaaji* (dependence)."

As illustrated by the above excerpts, being economically autonomous and free from debt were central to interlocutors' inhabitations of personal autonomy, freedom, and dignity and formed a recurring theme in their narratives.[208] Moreover, it is clear from interlocutors' narratives that indebtedness has material, economic, social, and subjective dimensions and implications. In this sense, *mohtaaji* can also be understood as not mere dependence (which is a structural relationship that persists despite interlocutors' efforts), but more specifically as helplessness (i.e. inability to act) in the face of dependence.

Various interlocutors used the term '*majboori*' also to describe the obligations that family members—particularly from/to one's immediate family, i.e. parents, spouses, children, and siblings—have in relation to one another. The use of the term came up in my conversation with Zara about whether she felt supported by her neighbours and others in the *basti*, to which Zara responded, glowing with appreciation for the people of her *basti*:

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[208] To specify how I use the term 'autonomy' in relation to my interlocutors' lives and aspirations in this chapter and subsequent chapters, I draw on Kathleen Millar's (2018) concept of 'relational autonomy', developed in her work on Brazilian waste workers living in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. Millar's work shows that these workers' aspirations for a self-authored life emphasise social *connections* rather than self-reliance (see also Rota, 2022, pp. 76-77) and understands their desire for social mobility as "tightly woven into other desires-for sociality, intimacy, and relations of care" (Millar, 2018, p. 90). For Millar, 'relational autonomy' can also be conceived "as an art of living through uncertainty, as that which enables a shared existence in delicate times." (Millar, 2018, p. 91).

> Not just our neighbours- the entire colony came to see us in the hospital [after her son's accident]. At such times, siblings are by your side because they *have* to be [*un ki majboori hy*], but if your neighbours and community members are with you, that's because of your own goodness towards them or their kindness towards you.
>
> (Zara, H-9 *basti*, 08-08-2021, emphasis hers)

Zara's comments imply that neighbours or *basti walas*' support is optional or voluntary, whereas for family members, it is an obligation. Naseem, from the same *basti*, describes something similar, as she discusses how one of her neighbours does many things to support her, including inviting her kids into their home, feeding them when they don't have food, checking in on Naseem when she's ill, and asking her if she needs anything. Naseem says:

> I tell them no, [I don't need anything], thank you very much. I don't want to be indebted to them. After all, they're not a brother or a sister who *have* to ask after me. They're just neighbours, who can choose to do so [i.e. ask after me], or not to do so.
>
> (Naseem, H-9 *basti*, 04-10-2021, emphasis hers)

This discussion of *majboori* and its navigation by domestic workers offers a clear illustration of the intertwining of agency and subjection in oppressive contexts (Madhok, 2013a). It shows that domestic service is simultaneously a 'choice' and a 'compulsion', and that domestic workers 'choose' to enter domestic service in a state of *majboori*; that is, under circumstances of material and social hardship that compel them to make this choice. As noted earlier in the chapter, this is contrary to the idea that 'choice' implies an unencumbered individual who is 'free' to make decisions (Madhok, 2013b). Rather, *majboori* compels marginal subjects to make *particular* choices (such as entering domestic service), which one 'chooses' out of necessity and which may come at great costs to one's physical and subjective self. At the same time, interlocutors' narratives show that alongside the 'mute compulsion' (Mau, 2023) of everyday economic survival, and particularly the acute pressure to repay loans that compels these subjects to take up this line of work, domestic service also serves as a means of resisting *mohtaaji*- dependence- both on patrons as well as on other (particularly male) family members, making it an important source of self-respect, pride, and dignity for many domestic workers (Rota, 2022, p. 76).[209]

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[209] Carolina Rota's (2022) ethnographic work on domestic workers' everyday experiences of work in Mumbai argues for the performance of domestic service to be seen as "a transformative empowering process that expands women's space for choice and allows them to see (citing Cornwall, 2007, p. 43) 'beyond the horizons that currently define their view of what is possible.'" (Rota, 2022, p.79). In my work, I find that while being in paid employment was often described by women domestic workers as a source of pride and dignity,

Having explored the condition of *majboori* which frames my subjects' entry into domestic service, I now turn to domestic workers' navigation of *majboori* within the sphere of domestic service, which puts them in relation with their employers and takes them inside the *kothi*.

5.2. Inside the *Kothi*

This section describes interlocutors' workplace experiences, which, as noted at the outset of the chapter, differed depending on their particular jobs (part-time/full-time work as well as the tasks they were hired for) as well as on the orientations of individual employers, who, as interlocutors would frequently point out, are 'not all the same, just as the five fingers of one's hand are not the same'. Nevertheless, a number of common strands emerged from domestic workers' narratives about their workplace experiences and are described below.

An overwhelming majority of both part-time and full-time workers reported being overworked. Being over-worked took various forms: more work than was fair or possible within a given number of working hours, being asked to stay after-hours (or in the case of live-in workers, to remain in the main section of the house and not retire to the 'servants' quarters'[210] and being given tasks that they had not been hired to do. Domestic workers from the G-11 *basti* reported being admonished for using hot water for their tasks, being told to sit on the floor (rather than a chair), and being ordered around, shouted at, and sometimes being issued threats by employers. '*Chutti nahin detay*' — 'they don't give us time off' — was a common complaint from interlocutors (whose only day off would normally be Sunday), and many reported having their salaries deducted if they took a day off without their employers' prior approval. "The piles of dirty dishes that we return to on Monday morning make me want to give up the one holiday we have [on Sunday] as well," Parveen adds wryly.

'*Shakk karna*', or suspecting domestic workers of stealing, cheating, or cutting corners was a

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interlocutors did not describe their experiences as 'transformative' or 'empowering', nor does my understanding of their workplace experiences show these to be 'expanding the horizons of what is possible'. If anything, it was experiences *outside* the domain of the *kothi* and the realm of 'work'- occasions such as group discussions in the *bastis* or public protests (see Chapters 6 and 7)- that seemed to serve as avenues for 'expanding the horizons of what is possible'. While I argue that the experience of domestic service *does* have deep and complex effects on workers' political subjectivation and is in this sense 'transformative', I understand mine to be a significantly different claim from that being made by Rota (2022).

[210] "Servants' quarters" is a term with colonial origins used to refer to those sections of a private house or building designed to serve as residential accommodation for live-in domestic staff. These are usually small, cramped rooms constructed on the back-outer periphery of the house and are separate from the latter's main/front sections. Many elite and middle-class houses in Pakistan today continue to have "servants' quarters" as part of their architectural design.

commonly reported feature of the employment relationship. Even though this suspicion was often unspoken, for Roshni, as for many interlocutors, this resulted in a perpetual anxiety to ensure that one has 'one's bases covered' at all times. Roshni, who was in charge of dispensing and tracking the *kothi's* daily maintenance expenditures, said:

> I'd keep track of every rupee just in case anyone asks [where/how the money was spent]. How would we return that money [if we had to]? Besides, it's not just about returning money, it is so that if ever anyone asks [for an account of the money], one doesn't end up feeling embarrassed.
>
> (Roshni, Islamabad, 06-04-2022)

One of the most common and core grievances that interlocutors brought up were about the employers' stinginess (*kanjoosi*). For part-time task-based work, domestic workers would be paid anywhere between PKR 2000 to PKR 4000 depending on the locality per task per month (for working between 2-3 hours a day, six days a week), which amounts to an average of GBP 8.51 per month. Full-time/live-out work was paid anywhere between PKR 10,000- 15,000 (£28- £42), and for live-in workers, roughly PKR 20,000 (£56). In response to workers' requests for a raise in salary, employers were quoted as saying, "It's beyond our means," "Everything is so expensive now", or "When we get a raise, we'll give you one too." Many of my interlocutors, including Farah (quoted below), found these explanations to be both disingenuous and hypocritical:

> When we ask our employers to raise our salaries from 2000 rupees [per task per month] to 2500, they say, [here Farah mimics her employers in a mocking tone] '*mehngayi boht hy*'..." *Things have become too expensive.* And we've seen with our own eyes what happens inside those walls: they're entertaining guests, cutting cakes, roasting meat, making the finest dishes… For those things, there's no *mehngayi* [inflation], but when it comes to raising our salaries by 500 rupees, all of a sudden, *mehngayi* starts soaring…
>
> (Farah, G-11 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

In addition to exceptionally incendiary utterances from employers (some of which are described in following paragraphs), what was evident from interlocutors' descriptions of their work experiences was the everyday lack of care/compassion on the part of most employers, who, the workers felt, were only interested in getting work out of them, or '*sirf kaam se matlab hy*', as they put it. Gulzar Bibi of the I-10/1 *basti* put it bluntly:

When they need us, they'll be sugary sweet and call us '*tee*' ('daughter' in Punjabi). If we miss a day of work, they call us 'Pathani' [a derogatory reference to Gulzar Bibi's Pashtun ethnicity]. And when they don't need us, they won't even open the door!

(Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

Another common feature of my interlocutors' experiences at work was the absence of contribution to household tasks by *kothi walas* themselves. 'Only one in a hundred will ever lift a finger themselves,' says Razziya of the Awami Basti. Interlocutors described that while they worked, the *kothi walas* would either be in their separate rooms, or on the sofa in front of the TV, with a remote control or a mobile phone in hand, with little conversation or interaction with each other. Commenting on what she perceives to be the poverty of *kothi wala's* lives, Farah describes her employers' routines thus:

They'll come home, eat, then go straight to their separate rooms and get on their phones. Life isn't just a phone. I don't know if it's money or something else, but these people have made the phone their lives. They've forgotten the meaning of relationships.

(Farah, G-11 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

Contrasting this with the environment in her own home (in a *jhuggi*/tent), Farah continues:

We are very different from them. We ask after each other, we understand each other, we look out for each other [*hamdardi kartay hain*]. We chit-chat, we hum tunes, we fight… Our hearts are alive [*humara dil abaad rehta hy*].[211]

(Farah, G-11 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

Many domestic workers commented on the fact that the domestic labour performed in the *kothis* would be followed by the imperative of doing the same (or similar) labour in their own homes. While discussing the depletion that comes with this 'double duty' during the Awami Basti group discussion, Hira chanted, "Panadol, *zindabad*!" (Hurray for Panadol!), sending her fellow participants into peals of resonant laughter. Asma of the F-7 *basti* spoke about the deeply gendered division of household labour, even in families (like her own) where men are also employed as domestic workers:

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[211] Farah's critique of *kothi walas*' lifestyles and relationships and her attempts to distinguish these from what 'her people' do is a consistent theme running through many interlocutors' narratives. This is explored at length in Chapter 6.

> Men are only responsible for working outside the home [*bahir ka kaam*]. Women have to do much more, as they have responsibilities both inside and outside the home. Yet men think they do more. [Asma smiles wryly].[212]
>
> <div align="right">(Asma, F-7 basti, 07-07-2021)</div>

It is also notable that domestic workers in the more built-up and 'secure' settlements like Farash Town (most of whom were living as individuated households with small, nuclear families squeezed into cramped living spaces) had to single-handedly do most of the social reproductive labour at home after returning from work in the *kothis*. These women thus struggled more with the 'double duty' of social-reproductive labour than those living in the poorer *bastis* like G-11 where the organization of social life (and of social reproduction) was more communal and shared by more individuals across gender, family, and generational lines.

While many domestic workers commented on the depletion engendered by having to do social-reproductive labour in the *kothis* and then also in their own homes, also notable was their emphasis on the differences between how they experienced each of the two. One main difference pointed to by interlocutors was the matter of control: "There [in the *kothi*], work happens according to their will [*unki marzi se*]; here [at home], we work according to our will [*apni marzi se*]" (Sameera, G-11 group discussion, 06-02-2022). Zarina from Farash Town pointed to the retribution associated with getting things 'wrong' when working for employers, and the absence thereof when working in one's own home. The following comment from Roshni echoes the psychological pressures and fear of reprimand associated with performing domestic labour in the *kothi*:

> In someone else's home, you're always cautious about not breaking this, not touching that, about moving or misplacing something. In one's own home, if the sweeping didn't get done today, it'll get done tomorrow; one doesn't bother as much. But in someone else's home, it has to be done every single day, no matter what. Because I don't want the *maalik* [employer] showing up and saying, 'you're dirty, you've messed up our home.'
>
> <div align="right">(Roshni, Islamabad, 7 April 2022)</div>

Roshni's comment reveals a constant anxiety of being judged, the need for her as a domestic worker to remain alert at all times, and the pressure to 'perform' one's duties according to the

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[212] Asma's observations are echoed by recent scholarship on working-class families in Islamabad's *bastis* where both husband and wife are employed in domestic service (see Amirali, forthcoming). In such households, the gender division of labour has remained almost entirely unchanged, with the woman being solely in charge of the vast majority of household tasks within the 'private' sphere.

employers' standards and their will. This stands in sharp contrast to the relaxed and flexible nature of social-reproductive work in her own home, which she notes "will get done, if not today, then the next day," indicating that the latter can be adapted to one's own preferences and capacities, even if it remains something that will eventually have to be done.

A number of interlocutors expressed yet another important difference between the alienated nature of the work in the *kothis* and the unalienated labour interlocutors do at home. Mumtaz Bibi's comments clearly express the affective differences between labouring across the two sites:

> I do this work [domestic labour at home] happily. My daughter says to me, 'No, Ammi, don't do it', but I do it anyway. It brings me pleasure to do something for my children. All day I work in an other's home [*paraye ghar mein*] where I cook what they want, I do what they want. So when my own kids ask me to cook something for them, when *they* tell me what *they* want, I like it. I enjoy being able to fulfill their wishes.

(Mumtaz Bibi, Awami Basti, 16-09-2021)

Thus, while the continuity and depletion associated with social-reproductive work across the sites of home and workplace must be noted, the important differences in the (alienated/non-alienated) nature and the subjective experiences of social-reproductive labour across these sites are also important to register. The nuances in these narratives support the argument (made in Chapter 2) to dismantle the binary but maintain the distinction between 'work' and 'social reproduction' (Elias & Rai, 2019).

Asymmetrical entitlements

One of the striking aspects of research subjects' descriptions of their work experiences was how arbitrary their terms of employment were: from working hours, holidays, wages, overtime pay (or lack thereof), and the nature/type of tasks they would be asked to do; once the initial terms were agreed upon, everything was '*unn ki marzi*', or 'up to the employer's wishes' (including whether to abide by the terms agreed upon at the start), as already indicated in interlocutors' narratives about the differences between domestic domestic labour in the kothis and at home, cited in the previous section. '*Unn ki marzi*' includes, as in Maria's case, employers having the right to grant workers 'permission' to access/keep a mobile phone (which Maria was denied and which led to intense conflict between her and her *'baji'*) as well as a license to interrogate domestic workers about their personal lives and communication. However, even Maria, one of the most astute,

unrelentingly critical, and fiery women I encountered over the course of this project, in the following moment (while describing a previous and exceptionally good employment experience), seems to have accepted the asymmetrical nature of the domestic service relationship:

> The first right (*haq*) over me is theirs [the employers'], that first I do what they say, and then they do what I say. However they were with me, I can't forget my place (*haisiyat*). Sure, they didn't think in those terms, but that reality was always present within me… Even if they didn't treat me with respect, I wouldn't be able to do anything about it, I knew [then] that we are here because of our *majboori*, because we *have* to be here… It was their benevolence that they gave me so much care and respect, and that my time there was spent as if it were my own home.

> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

It is also noteworthy that in Maria's recollections of this particular employment experience, she spoke with great fondness about her camaraderie with her *baji* at the time, who, together with Maria, spent most of her waking hours in the kitchen and with whom Maria developed a deep friendship and attachment. However, even within this fondly remembered (even celebrated) experience, Maria's words above are reminders of the entrenched structural inequality that underpins domestic service and indeed of the social fabric within which these relations are embedded.

For Zarina, too, unilateralism and exclusive entitlements (which accrue only to the employer) are simply 'part of the package' of domestic service:

> When you work for someone and they're paying you for it, then you can't do things according to your own will [*apni marzi se kaam to nahin hota na*], it's got to be according to *their* will. You can't say that I've got kids at home, or whatever else. Once you agree to work for someone, then it's according to *their* wishes that everything happens.

> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021, emphases hers)

What strikes me about Zarina's comment is her reiteration of the employers' *right* (no matter how unjust) to unilaterally command the worker's time and labour simply because the worker is being paid. I do not read Zarina's reiteration in binary terms, as either an affirmation or a rejection of this assumption; rather, I see it as working to visibilise the skewed nature of the relationship. For Zarina herself, I believe it forms one of the aspects of her work that she must accept if she is to continue working, and thus serves as a 'reminder to self' in addition to being an explanation/description of her world to me. The same was described in a variety of tones, ranging

from resignation to rage, by all of my interlocutors and appears to be a core assumption that underpins the domestic service relationship in the Pakistani context. Following from this assumption, the expectation of domestic workers to constantly be 'at the service' of their employers is one of the main reasons why the vast majority of interlocutors stated a preference for live-out or part-time work rather than live-in work, despite the latter being better paid. I reproduce below an excerpt from my interview with Mumtaz Bibi, who at the time of this interview had left her live-in job (which *majboori* compelled her to return to later) and taken up part-time work at a different *kothi*:

> Now I go to work in the morning and leave there around 3pm, so that I'm home by this time (4:30pm). And here I am, relaxed, sitting amongst my loved ones, without any worries. It is only tomorrow morning that I'll have to return to work… But there [during live-in work], I'd be up till 11pm, sometimes till midnight. If they had guests, I'd be on my feet till midnight, cooking for them, serving the food, collecting everything when they're done, washing, drying, and then putting away the dishes; finally I'd make my way to my room. Then at 6am the next morning, they'd ring the bell for me to come down… I'd hurriedly make a *roti* for my little Hira, and leave it wrapped up for her to eat when she woke… Oh, Alia madam, those days were awful!

(Mumtaz Bibi, Awami Basti, 25-08-2021)

Mumtaz Bibi's description of her everyday life as a full-time live-in worker- and indeed the relief that comes with being 'released' from living permanently in the employer's *kothi*- resonates with the accounts of many other interlocutors. Speaking to the perception (amongst employers rather than workers) that full-time work comes with significant benefits, of higher pay and 'free' accommodation for instance, Zara suggests that the costs of live-in work far outweigh the benefits:

> The benefits one receives (from live-in work) come with a lot of constraints, and those constraints are immense… it means you have to be *hazir* (present), on-call, twenty-four hours a day. If guests show up, or whatever the case may be, you're always expected to be *hazir*. These families are such that even if they want a glass of water, they'll call for you or ring the bell, and ask you to serve it to them in their room… If we have chosen to leave there now, it is precisely because of these things, because it's incredibly difficult to live with such things… Like, 'Why is your child hanging around near the gate?' I mean, he's a child, how long can I tie him up for? It felt like being in a prison, those 6-7 months…It's only once we left that place and came here [to the *basti*] that we got a taste of what it means to be *azad* [free]…

(Zara, H-9 *basti*, 08-08-2021)

The above excerpt forms part of Zara's narration to me about one particularly unpleasant employment experience (which, Zara was keen to point out to me, was only *one* amongst other

experiences, some of which she recounted with much fondness). Zara's experience of live-in service spans well over a decade, and her experience of living in the 'servants' quarters' even longer, as it was there- in the servants' quarters of one of the Naval Complex *kothis* that she grew up. This is where she began working as a child alongside her mother, where her marriage was arranged, and where she began her married life. That Zara is left with the sense of 'finally tasting *azadi* (freedom)' only after leaving the environment that she spent most of her life in (and that too, after moving to an 'illegal' and thus perpetually insecure *basti*), reflects how oppressive this environment is, and how quickly the soothing effects of 'good' employment experiences are undone by the 'bad' ones.

As illustrated at various points in this chapter, my interlocutors' sense of being a distinct 'other' in relation to *kothi walas* was engendered not merely under conditions of an unpleasant employment relationship. The perpetual, existential sense of being not just different but smaller, lesser than *kothi walas* permeates their lives on the everyday level. Take Gulzar Bibi's comments on her response when her employers would ask her to sit with them and eat:

> On the occasions that they would ask me to come and eat with them, I'd feel ashamed; I would come home and eat. However meager, I like to come and eat in my own home. Do the *ghareeb* (poor) like to eat with the *ameer* (rich)? [She laughs] No, we feel even more ashamed. Ashamed of our clothing, of how we look...
>
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

For Gulzar Bibi, eating together with employers was a distinctly uncomfortable prospect, despite the relatively meagre meal she would get to eat in her own home. That sitting with/across from employers would bring up shame for Gulzar Bibi suggests that a performance of apparent 'equality'- such as sharing a meal together- only serves to emphasise (for her) the *in*equality between herself and her employers.

Roshni, too, chose to eat separately from her employers. Even though Roshni spent most hours of the day and night with Ammi Jaan— the old lady whom Roshni had been hired as a caregiver for— and in whose room she slept, in whose bathroom she bathed, and with whom she shared a deep sense of camaraderie—the one thing that Roshni wouldn't do with Ammi Jaan (or indeed with any of the other *kothi walas*), was eat:

> I'd eat in the kitchen, even if it meant I had to wait to eat until all the *larkay* [literally 'boys' but referring to the adult male house staff] had left the kitchen to go in. No matter how much someone 'lifts you up' [*koi ap ko kitna bhi kyun na utha le*],

somewhere inside this feeling nags at you… that I am a *mulazim* [servant], it doesn't feel right…. This thought remains stuck here [she points to her head]. Maybe it doesn't happen to others, but it's definitely there for me…

(Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

Roshni's utterance, "I am a *mulazim* [servant]", though spoken dispassionately and without emphasis or hesitation, is loaded with connotation. It serves as yet another stark reminder of her 'place' in that house; a reminder which, as she says, 'remains stuck here' (in her mind) despite the deep affection and respect she enjoys in her relationship with her employers and with Ammi Jaan in particular. The reason perhaps that she chooses to eat separately from her employers, lies in the part of the sentence that Roshni began, but did not complete: "It doesn't feel right…" As for Gulzar Bibi, for whom the false sense of equality engendered by eating together brings shame rather than dignity or pleasure, perhaps for Roshni too, it 'doesn't feel right' to pretend- through the act of eating together with them- as if she were an equal, when she isn't.

For Roshni, 'knowing your place' was a central and recurring theme in her descriptions of life in the *kothi*.[213] Over the course of our exchanges, she also used the phrase: '*Mujhe apni auqaat patta hy ke kya hy*'—an extremely poignant choice of words in local vernacular, which translates to: "I know my place, and I know what it is." The term '*auqaat*' is used to denote 'status' and is used mostly in instances of 'power-over' when someone is being 'put in their place' or reminded of their subordinate social status in a particular setting. In this case, where Roshni is using it to describe herself, it can be understood as an act of self-deprecation, of 'cutting herself down to size' or 'bringing herself back to reality', which as she describes in the quote that follows, is in fact 'necessary'; and that *not* doing so, is 'foolish'. The following comment from Roshni comes as a response to my question about whether she would ever consider living somewhere other than her hometown:

How can I move elsewhere [out of my hometown]… I know what my *auqaat* is. To venture beyond that is futile. Something that isn't in your reach, that hasn't been made for you, and you start desiring it… that is foolish. It would simply be putting yourself through torture.

(Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

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[213] For similar accounts by domestic workers in other national and/or cultural contexts, see Ray and Qayum (2009), Anderson (2000), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007), and Raghuram (2001).

Roshni's response is heavy with meaning about what it means for her- and other similarly marginal subjects- to desire; to desire that which is desirable, which is by definition something that is inaccessible, out of reach, even illegitimate, because 'it hasn't been made for you'. It indicates the complexity of desiring for subjects like herself and shows her attempts to stay away from such desires as a means of self-preservation in the face of a reality that cannot be changed or ignored. For Roshni, one's desires and dreams must have a grounding in one's realities (a theme taken up again in Chapter 8):

> Those things [that rich people have] cannot be for me. Those who are rich have been rich from the start. It is generational. The ones who come [next] continue the lineage [*silsila*]. Without this they are nothing; an individual, in isolation, cannot do anything. It *should be possible*, but one needs to calibrate one's desires such that they match with what is possible for oneself.
>
> (Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022, emphasis mine)

5.3. "Wo hum se nafrat karte hain" ("They Hate Us")

"*Wo hum se nafrat karte hain*" literally means: They Hate Us. '*Nafrat karna*' (literally, 'to hate') was a term used by domestic workers to describe employers' othering practices. The frequency and regularity with which I encountered these phrases in domestic workers' narratives took me by surprise, having never heard them before in the context of domestic service. This confirmed for me the skewed nature of the 'public transcript' (within which these phrases never appeared), and also served as a stark reminder of my positionality as a member of the employer classes.

Amongst the range of practices that constitute '*nafrat karna*', the practice that evoked the most intense response from interlocutors was employers' practice of separating eating utensils— plates, cups, glasses— used by the workers from their own. The practice of separating utensils signals an association of 'impurity' or 'uncleanliness' with domestic workers' bodies (Anderson, 2000, pp. 140-142) and is associated in the South Asian context with caste pollution and untouchability (Raghuram, 2001; Sinha & Varma, 2019; Jhodka & Shah, 2010). In the Pakistani context, it is assumed that only 'non-Muslim' communities are subject to notions of ritual 'pollution' and practices of untouchability. However, field data shows that both Muslim and Christian domestic workers are subject to this practice, and, conversely, that in the case of 'good' employers, no such segregation takes place irrespective of the workers' religious affiliation or caste identity. Indeed, it is Iqra, a Muslim domestic worker who said to me that "95 of 100 employers separate their utensils from those used by their workers." (Lahore, 11-03-2022)

During the Awami Basti group discussion, Basheera recalls an instance in which the practice of separating utensils was central, and which prompted her to leave the job immediately. She describes having gone to a *kothi* in F-10 together with her daughter-in-law, Parveen, where they had begun working just three days earlier. There had been no place for Parveen to sit while she was working in the kitchen, and she [Parveen] was tired, so she asked Basheera to get her a glass of water. Basheera conveyed to the employer that Parveen wanted some water, to which the employer replied: "Oh, sorry, we don't have utensils for you people." Addressing an attentive audience of co-workers, Basheera recounts:

> Oh I was so furious! 'You'll wear the clothes we wash; you'll eat the food we cook; you'll eat in the utensils we clean, all with these same hands... I've just made a *sabzi* [vegetable dish], are you sure you want to eat it? What do you think you're made of? Go take the clothes out of the machine yourself. Parveen, put down the broom, we're leaving. Give me my three days' worth of pay, we're not working for you any longer. Do you think you're better than us? Just because you've put a few bricks together and built this house means you've become a bigshot, eh?' The two of us had a proper spat. She said she'll call the police. I told her, go ahead missy, I'd like to see you handle that...
>
> (Basheera, Awami Basti, 22-04-2022)

Moments later, Basheera repeats (in Punjabi), with incredulity in her voice: 'The woman says, we don't have "*you people's*" utensils.' The group listens intently and hums disapprovingly in response. *Tsk tsk tsk*, says one. '*Itni nafrat karday ne*,' says someone from the back. *Such hatefulness*.

While the practice of separating utensils elicited amongst the most evocative outbursts of anger from my interlocutors, the 'othering' that domestic workers experience in the *kothi*s takes many forms, as the following quote from Maria illustrates:

> There are those who say: 'Don't sit on the sofa, the sofa's getting dirty,' or, 'Leave your shoes outside, the floor's getting dirty', or 'Don't sit on the bed, the bed's getting dirty, sit on the floor'... I despise people who discriminate like that.
>
> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

"They hate our kids too," Sameera says to me, as we sit amidst a crowd of children in the G-11 *basti*. "They won't let [our] kids through the door. They say, leave your kids at home—and if you love them so much, stay home with them!" (Sameera, G-11 group discussion, Mehrabadi, 06-02-2022) For Maria, the practice of separating utensils, in addition to being hateful, is also illogical.

"The same people who cook your food for you, the same hands that feed you, are the ones you are shunning as 'dirty'… How does that make any sense?" (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

Amongst employers' practices that were described as 'hateful' were the twin practices of being stingy/not sharing their resources and the forms of sharing that employers *did* indulge in. Workers reported that most employers would give them nothing on top of their salary, refuse to raise salaries (despite having served the employer for multiple years), and only share discarded items (mostly clothing, but also including food items) that would otherwise be thrown away as 'waste'.

As described by one of the participants of the G-11 *basti* group discussion:

> They'll only share food which is *jhoota* (partially-eaten/contaminated). That too, they'll dump it into a plastic bag- not even into a container- and hand it to us, saying 'Give it to your kids, or eat it yourself.' What can be more hateful than that?

> (G-11 group discussion, Mehrabadi, 06-02-2022)

Amongst the practices and attitudes that domestic workers found irksome and 'hateful' was some employers' openly expressed disapproval of domestic workers fashioning themselves in ways that reduce or collapse the distinctions between themselves and their 'servants'. Zara describes one of her most difficult employment experiences as one in which she was a live-in worker in a *kothi* in Islamabad's Naval Complex, where the '*baji*' would regularly appear unannounced in the servants' quarters to 'check' what was being cooked that day:

> She [the employer] would inquire: 'So, what's being cooked today?' How are you able to cook fresh food every day?' 'Why do your kids know how to use a fork and knife?' [Zara turns to me] I mean, if they do, they do, right? That's just how I brought them up… And after all, I *work*, I *earn*… Even those who are the poorest of the poor will cook something or the other at the end of the day!

> (Zara, H-9 *basti*, 08-08-2021, emphasis hers)

The suspicion and disapproval from the *baji* that Zara describes is a theme that was reported particularly by young *basti* women who have grown up in the city and whose clothing and mannerisms do not make their appearance out to be significantly- or let's say, *sufficiently*- different or distinguishable from *kothi* women. Bushra and Farah, two sisters, both of whom are domestic workers and were born and raised in the G-11 *basti*, also had similar stories to tell. When I asked them (during one of my visits to their *basti*) whether the food they eat at home is different from

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what is cooked in the *kothis* they work in, Farah gave me a reply that stayed with me for a long time:

> Our foods are basically the same… Theirs may be slightly tastier and with more *masalas* (spices) than ours; ours will be a little thinner, but basically it's the same. They put salt, so do we; they put pepper, so do we; roti, rice, it's all the same things…
>
> [A moment later, Farah adds]: People often ask us what we eat. We're not cows that eat grass. We also eat what you eat, if you've ever bothered looking… I've thought many times in my heart, that I'd like to ask them sometime: What do *you* eat? Have any of *you* ever given *us* an interview?
>
> <div align="right">(Farah, G-11 basti, 11-05-2022)</div>

Sitting opposite Farah as these phrases were delivered, I felt I had been cut open. The sharpness of her words, even though directed strategically at 'people' and not necessarily me, sliced cleanly through my fanciful self-perceptions of class exceptionalism and shame came spurting out like blood from a vein that had just been punctured. At the same time, I was delighted that the person in front of me—like so many I had met in the field— was anything but the picture of 'docile, passive victims' they are condescendingly made out to be in many 'benevolent' discourses (Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019).

I understand Farah's response to be a thinly-disguised act of defiance, reversing the questions I had asked her and directing them back to me, and through her choice of pronouns retaining ambiguity about the extent to which I was being personally addressed. Indeed, Farah's choices of the questions/themes to 'reverse' make it as close to a direct rebuttal as was possible without being hostile or disrespectful. Farah's conduct belies a degree of safety but also a need for caution in how she navigates her relationship with me, which I understand as reflective of the strategic nature of domestic workers' communication with their employers and wider dynamics of cross-class communication.

5.4. Offstage Strategies

Building on Farah's defiant act, the remainder of this chapter begins the exploration of the offstage and onstage strategies employed by domestic workers to navigate and resist the indignities that mark their workplace experiences (a task continued by the next chapter). This section begins by exploring interlocutors' offstage strategies, one of which is an emphasis on their mutual—even if asymmetrical and unequal—interdependence with *kothi walas*, rather than one of *mohtaaji* (dependence). As Razziya put it: "They want work, we want money. It's a bargain." Asma expressed

it as: "They can't survive without us, we can't survive without them." A phrase used by a number of interlocutors was '*Ap k liye banday bohot, humaray liye kaam bohot*'; that is, 'For you, workers abound; for us, jobs abound.' This phrase is crisp in its tone (without being confrontational or offensive) and sets up an equality in *relationship* (even if not in status), conveying an inhabitation of agency and dignity in how its users orient towards their work and employers.

The strategy of emphasising interdependence, however, was not always an available, successful, or even desirable strategy. For instance, in the Awami Basti group discussion, Razziya was keen to emphasise equality and interdependence between *basti walas* and *kothi walas*. This was met with vigorous disagreement from Basheera, who responded to Razziya with anger in her tone:

> They make you work like a dog all month and then say, [mimicking *kothi walas*] 'Oh, where did my nail polish go?', 'Where did my lipstick go?' And still, we go back and knock on their doors. We do it because we can't survive without them.
>
> (Basheera, Awami Basti, 22-04-2022)

Basheera's words and mimicry of *kothi walas* are clear illustrations of her anger at the indignities she (and others like her) endure as domestic workers. She makes clear that it is only material dependence that draws her back to the *kothi*; that *majboori*, necessity, and coercion (and not consent, choice or reciprocity) are what lie at the heart of the domestic service relationship.

"*Aik hi mitti mein jana hy*" —"We all return to the same earth"— was another phrase frequently invoked when interlocutors were describing *kothi walas*' arrogance or various othering practices they had encountered in the workplace. This phrase, often used in conjunction with references to God or religion (see following chapter), would be used to suggest that ultimately, everyone would become 'one' through death. This phrase was not just loaded with meaning, it was also used in versatile ways, as described below.

A moment during the Awami Basti group discussion offers one example. Basheera had just finished describing the incident (described earlier in this chapter) in which an employer had refused her water, saying she didn't have utensils for 'you people', i.e. 'servants'. The group was together voicing their disapproval, at which point Razziya said: "*When we die, we're all going to the same place. They recite the Kalma, so do we*." In this instance, the discursive equality offered by being 'kalma-reciting Muslims' enabled a 'levelling', a lowering of *kothi walas* from their assumed superiority into the ground, into the *same* ground into which they, the poor, the 'untouchables', will also be lowered. 'Death as the great leveller' became a form of justice, a punishment meted

out to the rich for their pomp and arrogance. Gulzar Bibi too refers to the same theme in a separate research encounter, but adds that even in death, the rich and the poor are different:

> Yes, we will all go into the same earth; but there's a difference. They put [their dead] in a coffin, we put them into the earth. But, even in their coffins they will not be able to escape God's wrath. God hates those who hate (other) humans.
>
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

Gulzar Bibi's commentary, heavy with ideas about justice and a desire for revenge, illustrates how class difference permeates even the social rituals of death and also that the rich are constantly trying to evade justice. For her, as for many interlocutors, justice is- or will be- divine even if not social. In a similar vein but different tone, Bushra poked fun at *kothi walas'* distaste of mud/dirt, adding to her sister Farah's commentary about 'returning to the same earth':

> [Farah]: You [*kothi walas*] may be sleeping under fans and ACs [air conditioners], but the end point is under the ground. Where will be the AC or the fan there? There, everyone will be one.
>
> [Bushra interjects with]: And, over there, you'll get *mitti* (mud/dirt) on your clothes too! [Everyone laughs]. Here people say, 'Oh no, hurry, get that child away from there, they'll get *dirt* on their clothes!' Well, there, your clothes *will* get dirty.
>
> (Bushra & Farah, G-11 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

In addition to the joyous laughter generated by the opportunity to make fun of *kothi walas* (that too, to their face), Bushra's intervention makes visible her experiences as a domestic worker, in which she witnesses and participates in *kothi walas*' revulsions to 'dirt' while her own everyday life is spent in a home built of, and on, 'dirt'/mud in a patch of land adjacent to the triple-storey concrete *kothis* where she works. Bushra's playful interjection accentuates the small, everyday forms of oppression and othering experienced by her and others like her- but holds a promise for triumph at the end.

Naseem, who is Christian, used the phrase '*aik hi mitti me jana hy*' to speak back to, and even collapse, the socially ordained 'naturalness' of caste, religious identity, and social status:

> For Allah, we are all one. Allah did not make Christian or Muslim, *Jatt* [labouring castes] or *Zimmedar* [land-owning castes]. Allah created us all as one; we've come to the same place, and we will return to the same place.
>
> (Naseem, H-9 *basti*, 13-11-2021)

It is interesting to note that while Razziya referred to the (Muslim) '*kalma*' as being the 'uniting factor' between rich and poor, Naseem's comment, spoken from the marginal social location of a poor Christian woman, articulated the link as 'we are Allah's creations', as opposed to 'we are all *kalma*-reciting Muslims', which, of course, she is not. Naseem, as well as many other Christian interlocutors, used the Muslim term 'Allah' in their conversations with me (and in their public interactions generally) instead of '*Khudawand*', the term for God used within the Pakistani-Christian community. This not only indicates the depth of religion- and caste-based oppression in Pakistani society but also illustrates how structural oppression can mould the linguistic choices of oppressed groups, serving as a reminder that the "fields of power within which speech occurs or is absent are extremely important" (Madhok, 2013a, p. 115).[214]

5.5. Onstage strategies

Having described some of the discursive strategies employed by domestic workers offstage to respond to indignities in the workplace, the final section of this chapter focuses on the onstage strategies deployed by them within the space of the *kothi* and in direct interaction with their employers. These accounts, while not directly observed or 'empirically verifiable',[215] provide insights into the thoughts, feelings, intentions, hopes, and desires that interlocutors associate with the events and practices they describe, which cannot be gauged directly from their actions but only from the explanations they give for their behaviour (Scott, 1987, p. 290). I understand these narratives- and the incidents and the practices they describe- as reflections of and responses to the 'systematic frustration of reciprocal action' (Scott, 1990, p. 37) in domestic workers' everyday experiences in the *kothi*, a result of their inability to respond directly and 'in kind' to experiences of indignity in most instances. Given that domestic workers are less constrained in thought than in action (Scott, 1987, p. 331), particularly in their direct interactions with employers in the space of the *kothi*, domestic workers' accounts of their onstage strategies provide valuable insights into

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[214] Christian interlocutors' use of religious discourse is discussed further in Chapter 6. The effects of oppression on moulding the linguistic choices and vocabularies of oppressed groups are also illustrated by the vocabularies used by my interlocutors to express themselves as desiring subjects, see Chapter 8.

[215] The only case in which I had the opportunity to directly observe onstage strategies was with M, who was employed as a part-time domestic worker in the *kothi* where I lived with my family during fieldwork (see Chapter 4 for details). M's strategies included repeated expressions of hardship/complaints (which served as indirect requests for material assistance), grumbling, pilfering, and strategic uses of 'not knowing' or 'misunderstanding'. As noted by Scott (1990, p.87), the subordinate have an interest in concealing such strategies from the dominant, which explains why these strategies did not make their way into interlocutors' narratives.

their resistant practices as well as their ideological insubordination even when they continue to appear overtly compliant.

I begin this discussion by exploring instances where domestic workers chose to leave a particular job- or threatened to leave- in response to an experience of indignity in the workplace. In most instances of this nature, leaving the job was usually a response to particularly egregious incidents of indignity/disrespect and often featured underlying grievances regarding unsatisfactory working conditions or pay, leaving 'little to lose' by ending the relationship. Threatening to leave (rather than actually leaving) was an effective strategy in cases where the employment relationship was an old/continuing one, as these are relationships in which familiarity, trust, and physical/emotional security come to acquire a premium (especially where care-giving is involved), making employers relatively more vulnerable to workers' threats of leaving the job. Similarly, refusing to return to a former employer (despite the latter's 'requests') was an expression of being particularly dissatisfied with their prior experience/relationship, as workers would normally accede to such a request from former employers so as to maintain relations of goodwill and 'pragmatic intimacy' (Sengupta & Sen, 2016) with former, current, and/or potential patrons.[216]

Defying stereotypes of (particularly women) domestic workers as docile, passive, or submissive subjects (Ray, 2000; Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019), interlocutors were actually quite fond of narrating instances of speaking back to their employers. When shared in group discussions, stories of rebuttal, refusal, and open confrontation with employers were met with much animation, laughter, and banter amongst participants (as seen in the glimpses of the Awami Basti group discussion shared earlier). Below I describe another such incident (albeit from a one-on-one interview), notable for its bluntness, in which Shaheera directly confronts her employer for not letting her sit while she works in the kitchen:

> S: I said to her, listen, madam, what would you do if someone were to treat you like this? Don't you at all think about what you're doing when you are so cruel to poor people?

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[216] I find useful Sengupta and Sen's (2016) concept of 'pragmatic intimacy' in describing domestic workers' orientations towards their employers and the employment relationship. The concept of 'pragmatic intimacy' connotes the paradox of a relationship that is "at once dominating and mutual, distant and intimate, exploitative and caring" (p.150). It illustrates "the contradiction between claims to intimacy, on the one hand, and, on the other, a vast social gulf expressed not only in the disparity of material conditions of life, but distance in language, experience, and culture" (p. 152). It also demonstrates domestic workers' attempts to "pragmatically negotiate the intimacy enforced in the domestic service" and to construct relationships of reciprocity and mutuality with their employers so as to "minimise conflict, ensure their own safety, facilitate a flow of benefits, and achieve a measure of dignity" (Sengupta & Sen, 2016, p.177).

Me: You really said that?

S: Yes, I said that.

Me: So what did she say?

S: She said, 'Are you here to lecture me?' I said, 'No I'm not here to lecture you, I'm here to create some *tenderness* in your heart, to let you know that the poor are *human*, not animals. It says in the Bible that "Those who are forgiving will be forgiven, those who have mercy will be treated with mercy, those who are kind will be treated with kindness." And you, madam, have none of these!' I said it exactly like this, standing in front of her. I said to her, if you want to give me my pay, go ahead, but even if you don't, I won't leave here without speaking the truth.

(Shaheera, F-7/4 *basti*, 10-08-2021, emphases in original)

Shaheera's openly defiant self-fashioning in the above narrative illustrates how important and powerful 'speaking truth to power' is, particularly for the subordinate who so rarely find themselves in such positions. This is most poignantly illustrated by her phrase: *I said it exactly like this, standing in front of her*, as if to reaffirm that this description was 'real'. In addition to the contents of her story, Shaheera's tone as she narrated the incident was one of determination and triumph, infused with pride at having confronted the employer directly and openly, without hesitation or fear, and for making the choice to be morally upright and courageous; a choice all the more 'heroic' for her willingness to forego her salary in the process. This was consistent with Shaheera's self-fashioning throughout the interview in which she consistently highlighted the importance of living an ethical and purposeful life.[217] Shaheera's deployment of religious discourse in this confrontation- and in her self-fashioning more broadly- is an important aspect of her strategy and is analysed in Chapter 6.

A less confrontational but still openly defiant response is exemplified by Sana's overt refusal to repeatedly wash her hands at work during the Covid period. Recounting the incident in the Awami Basti group discussion, Sana stood before an energised audience of peers and mimicked the employer:

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[217] Shaheera was a single woman living alone in rented accommodation in the F-7 *basti*, which was unusual for adult women to do. Her husband had died some time ago of excessive drug use, and her two children were married and living separately. In addition to being a domestic worker (who had moved between full-time and part-time jobs of various kinds), the aspect of her identity she was most keen to display was that of a preacher.

The *baji* kept saying all the time, 'Wash your hands', 'Wash your hands', 'We'll get Corona'. [The group sniggered]. I listened to her a few times, but then I told her straight up: 'Look, Baji, I'm afraid I can't do that.' [Laughter broke out in the group].

(Sana, Awami Basti, 22-04-2022)

Noteworthy here is the combination of the defiant content of Sana's story, her clearly mocking and irreverent deployment of mimicry (see Bhabha, 1994/2004 on the uses of mimicry in colonial contexts), and the gleeful laughter from the group in response, all of which serve as powerful rejoinders to the 'public transcript' in which domestic workers are expected to be polite, compliant subjects, and to which they also often conform. However, as Sana's narrative indicates, conforming to these expectations does not preclude direct expressions of defiance or refusal; what the above incident does make clear is that even in instances where defiance or refusal is directly expressed, the onstage expression will (in most cases) remain constrained within boundaries that have been carefully calibrated by the domestic worker beforehand.

Onstage defiance and/or disaffection was often expressed non-verbally. Refusing food and water for instance usually served as a clear and powerful expression of anger and/or hurt, with the potential to affect the employers' reputation/status by putting them in a bad light for failing to 'take care' of those who serve them. Breaking things (in covert as well as overt fashion) was also an effective strategy used by some interlocutors to convey their displeasure. Maria described 'accidentally' breaking glasses while washing them when she was particularly angry with her *baji*, and revelling in the *baji's* helplessness and frustration that would follow. Complementing the problematisation of the 'compliance or confrontation' binary (Kaviraj, 2004; Chandra, 2015), this act serves as an instance in which maintaining ambiguity regarding one's actions and/or intentions- such that the action cannot be read straightforwardly as resistance or defiance- is actually deliberate, preferred, and in fact necessary, for the strategy to be successful. Breaking things covertly, therefore, was a very different act from doing so overtly, the latter indicating a much higher level of tension and conflict. For instance, when Maria smashed her phone into pieces with a brick in the middle of the living room floor (while the employers were in the next room), she had no intention to hide or disguise her pain and anger from her employers. In fact, she did this to *ensure* that her employers took notice, and for her *baji* to feel guilty for driving her to this point.[218]

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[218] Maria's phone had been a major source of conflict in her relationship with her *baji*. Initially forbidden from having a phone by her brothers, and then by her fiancé- each of whom had finally relented- Maria had excitedly gone ahead and bought a phone with her savings, only to be forbidden by her *baji* from having one.

Sheila from the F-7 *basti*, who at one point worked both as a sanitation worker for the CDA and as a part-time domestic worker, used a variety of disruptive actions as a means to make her displeasure known. She describes one such instance in which there would be bags of trash outside a particular *kothi* every morning, indicating an expectation that these bags would be collected by a sanitation worker (i.e. her) and deposited in the designated containers at the end of the street. Irked by the presence of these trash-filled bags on the street (which Sheila reasserted were *not* her job to collect), she started throwing these bags over the boundary wall back into the *kothi walas*' lawn in protest. This action soon caught the attention of the *kothi walas* who, upon hearing Sheila's explanation, admonished their house staff for 'negligence' and put an end to the practice.

As the above instances show, domestic workers did choose, with varying degrees of openness and confrontation, to 'speak back' to employers (and to *kothi walas* more generally) in a variety of ways, challenging simplistic (mis)interpretations of Spivak's (1988) provocation that the subaltern 'cannot speak'. However, in some cases, expressing one's disaffection was more difficult. Interestingly, this was more pronounced in 'good' employment relationships in which domestic workers were more likely to hide experiences of indignity from their employers so as not to appear 'ungrateful', 'overly demanding', or cause 'inconvenience' to their employers (since sharing an incident of this nature would be assumed to be a 'complaint' which would in turn engender an expectation for the employer/patron to intervene).

Given the diversity and complexity of situations and needs that domestic workers navigate in the everyday, it is not surprising that they were highly strategic in their communication with their employers, particularly in decisions about what, to whom, when, and how much to disclose. For instance, my experiences with M, the domestic worker who worked in my home, made clear to me that she was keen to keep her 'onstage' and 'offstage' lives, personalities, and self-fashionings separate, and the latter (i.e. her 'offstage' life) inaccessible to me. I took as evidence M's reluctance for me to meet her family or visit her home, unlike other interlocutors who were keen for me to visit their homes, but with whom I was not in an employment relationship. Notably, M's onstage reluctance was never expressed as refusal or unwillingness, but rather disguised as a (different) 'circumstantial' problem every time there was a plan for me to visit her home. It was only when I found myself (entirely by chance) in a situation in which I was able to observe M in her

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After numerous unsuccessful attempts at negotiating mutually acceptable terms of its use, Maria broke the phone in spectacular fashion in the centre of the employers' living-room floor.

neighbourhood (without her knowing that I was present or observing), that I was struck by how different her demeanour was in her 'real'/offstage life (in which she was loud, vocal, animated, and saucy; very unlike the quiet, somber M in the *kothi*). I was also struck by how deftly she had engineered her earlier narrative to me (which I came to know through this same turn of events to be plainly untrue), the purpose of which had been to ensure that I do not visit her home. As I understood it, keeping her onstage and offstage lives separate (and the latter inaccessible to her employer) was necessary in order to ensure that M's onstage narratives and self-fashionings were not contradicted by her offstage realities.

Discerning when, to whom, and how much to disclose to employers was a particularly complicated matter when it came to issues considered 'sensitive' or 'private'. In the excerpt below, Roshni speaks about her discomfort with the sexual overtures from a male co-worker, and the dilemmas associated with disclosing this to her employers:

> If something were to happen, they would say it was consensual. That's why it was necessary to disclose this to the head of the household (*ghar ka barra*) before anything happened. Still, I was really apprehensive that they'd say 'he [the male worker] wouldn't do something like this, he's been around for so long, whereas she [referring to herself] has just come in and is making trouble'... But Imran Bhai [the eldest son] stood by me; I knew he would support me.

> (Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

In this excerpt, Roshni can be seen doing a complex set of calculations while devising her strategy for this situation. In deciding whether and how to disclose the matter to the employers, she is taking into consideration social/cultural expectations of 'good/moral conduct' expected from her as a 'chaste' woman, but also aware that in bringing the matter up, 'seniority differences' and hierarchies amongst domestic (co)-workers would also come into play and possibly work against her. Eventually, she tapped into her relationship with Imran Bhai from whom she expected to find support and who was also socially 'authorised'—by virtue of being close to 'head of the household' status—to take the matter up with the rest of the family and with the co-worker in question.

Naseem, a single Christian woman with four daughters, describes an incident in which the '*sahab*'- the 'master' of the *kothi*- tried to convince her to convert to Islam. Despite being highly offended by the *sahab's* overture, she responded mildly, saying that her husband wouldn't allow it, even though she did not, for all practical purposes, have a husband. (Her husband has been absent for

almost a decade now). In this situation, a strategic use of fabrication enabled Naseem to reject the *sahab's* overture without having to say a direct 'no', which would likely have been construed as confrontational and risked engendering backlash from the employers, which was something Naseem could not afford. 'Strategic disclosure' then appears to function as a strategy for interlocutors to ensure their safety/interests while protecting their employment and safeguarding against employer backlash.

And finally, silence was an extremely complex and versatile strategy used by domestic workers to respond to indignities in the workplace. As gleaned from interlocutors' narratives, silence was deployed in various ways, including: a) as an act of disengagement, expressing frustration with the employer's inability and/or unwillingness to listen and engage meaningfully; b) as an expression of disappointment, in which disclosure was seen as futile and/or useless[219]; c) as a way of humouring the employer, particularly in cases where it was assumed that the employer is incapable of understanding[220]; and d) as a way of maintaining one's dignity.[221]

Contrary to my assumption that silence most often meant a passive acceptance or 'swallowing' of anger (phrased in Urdu as "*ghussa pi jati hun*"; literally, "I swallow my anger"), in many workplace narratives, silence appeared to be a form of *forced* restraint, restrained *anger*, or even an *active* expression of anger. One of the G-11 *basti* women for instance cited fear of retribution as her reason for remaining silent in the face of indignities at work: "We stay quiet because we're afraid they'll accuse us [of stealing/crime]", which indicates that her silence is coerced rather than passive. For Gulzar Bibi, silence was a way for her to restrain her anger at the insensitivity of *kothi walas* to the discrepancies between their world and hers:

> They buy clothes worth thousands of rupees for themselves and their kids, and then come home and show me gleefully, 'Look, *khala*, look what we got for Eid!' I just keep quiet and leave the room. (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

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[219] An example of this is when Naseem describes to me her reasons for not having told her *baji* about her status as a single mother supporting four daughters, despite having worked in that *kothi* for more than seven years. "She's not going to do anything to help me anyway," Naseem said to me. "So why bother telling her?"
[220] Iqra recalled such an incident in which she went to work for a woman who was a notoriously difficult employer. Iqra couldn't bear it beyond fifteen days, at which point she said: 'Aunty, I can't continue working for you any longer.' The employer replied, surprised: 'Why, *beta* [child]? I've never been hard on you or anything.' Iqra told her, "No, no, Aunty, it's nothing like that! It's just that, well, something's come up, so I have to go." Maria, Raheel, and I laughed as we listened to Iqra tell the story.
[221] Such as when Roshni says, recounting an experience of accompanying her *baji* to a dinner-party: "I didn't tell my *baji* that the hosts had moved me from one room to the next to the next, and finally just shoved me away into this hole." In this instance, the choice to *not* disclose the details of her experience was a way for Roshni to maintain self-respect.

Zarina uses silence as a form of disruption to the usual pleasant/chatty demeanour she otherwise maintains in everyday interactions with her employer: "When I get angry, I won't say 'no' [to my employer]; I just won't say *anything at all*. I keep working but I stop speaking, interacting, or responding." Zarina also described this strategy as effective, as it usually resulted in a prompt recognition of her disaffection by the employer. And finally, silence was described by interlocutors as a rebuff and as a dismissal of employers' rants. "In one ear, out the other," as one of the participants in the Farash Town group discussion put it; and others agreed.

Conclusion

This chapter gives an account of domestic workers' experiences in the workplace and the strategies they employ in their direct interactions with employers in the space of the *kothi*. Contextualising their entry into domestic service, the chapter explores interlocutors' deployments of the term '*majboori*'- compulsion- as what informs their entry into domestic service. While the imperative to meet basic economic and material needs form the crux of what constitutes *majboori* for my interlocutors, familial obligations, cultural expectations, and pressures of *safed-poshi* (keeping up middle-class appearances) are also powerful factors propelling them into the realm of domestic service, even as a number of gendered norms work to discourage women's entry into the public sphere and paid employment. At the same time, interlocutors describe the navigation of *majboori* as retaining elements of choice, albeit under circumstances that are *not* chosen (and are far from what they would have chosen, had there been a choice). *Majboori* then serves as a clear illustration of the intertwining of agency and coercion in subaltern political subjectivation (Madhok, 2013a).

Interlocutors' workplace narratives describe the everyday 'othering' they experience in the *kothi*s, making visible the deeply asymmetrical nature of the domestic service relationship and highlighting the unilateral, exclusive entitlements that accrue to *kothi walas* within both 'good' and 'bad' employment relationships and experiences. It makes visible the complexities and difficulties associated with interlocutors' inhabitation of their subordinate status as domestic workers, which are reflected in their narratives about the importance of 'knowing one's place' and in their experiences of the discomfort, pain, and humiliation that come with being 'out of place', or not 'having a place' at all. The resulting sense of 'us and them' that is engendered by these experiences is deeply resonant with what E. P. Thompson describes as 'class formation' (Thompson, 1968, 1978b), a theme taken up by the next chapter.

Finally, this chapter describes the range of strategies that domestic workers employ in the space of the *kothi* to respond to indignities they experience at the workplace, supporting conceptualisations of subaltern resistance as the negotiation, rather than negation, of power (Chandra, 2015). While these strategies lie on a broad spectrum between (apparent) compliance and confrontation, an analysis of these strategies (based on interlocutors' own narratives about them) indicates that domestic workers are often engaged in acts of ideological *insubordination* even while appearing (in the realm of behaviour/action) to be overtly compliant, as argued by Scott (1990). Moreover, while open confrontations with employers are relatively rare, it would be a mistake to think that interlocutors are always wary of—or trying to avoid/repress—direct confrontations with employers, as evidenced by instances shared in this chapter as well as following ones. By highlighting the complex and versatile use of non-verbal strategies, particularly the use of silence, this chapter supports the call to extend conceptualisations of agency beyond 'free action' and even 'speech acts' (Madhok, 2013a, 2013b) and deepens the discussions initiated in Chapter 2 about political miscommunication, audience, and legibility by/of subaltern subjects in cross-class communication (see pages 65-66).

While this chapter focuses largely on interlocutors' experiences inside the *kothis* where they work, it is clear that many of these experiences- as well as the strategies used to respond to them- overlap and connect with their lives and experiences outside the *kothi*. It is to these domains— the domains of the *basti* and the *basti* home, and the subjectivities they bring into view, that we turn in subsequent chapters. By sharing domestic workers' narratives about their workplace experiences and strategies, this chapter lays the foundations for a detailed analysis of the clear and ever-present distinction between domestic workers and employers, *ameer log* (the rich) and *ghareeb log* (the poor) that permeates domestic workers' narratives. This forms the task of the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Vocabularies of Those Who 'Cannot Speak':
Invocations of *Allah*, *Ghareeb*, and *Insan*

> Class *happens* when some men [*and women*], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other [wo]men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.
>
> <div align="right">(Thompson, 1968/1972, pp. 8-9, italics mine)</div>

As shown in the previous chapter, interlocutors' narratives are structured by a clear and ever-present distinction between 'us and them'; that is, between domestic workers and employers, between *ameer log* ('the rich') and *ghareeb log* ('the poor'). The ways in which interlocutors narrativised the distinction between '*ameer log*' and '*ghareeb log*' resonates deeply with E.P. Thompson's now-classic conceptualisation of class, cited above. Drawing on this understanding of class, I seek to show that domestic workers narratives are not merely individual responses but structural critiques reflective of interlocutors' collective experiences and political subjectivities as classed and gendered subjects. Closely tracking the vocabularies used by interlocutors to describe, critique, and express themselves in these narratives, this chapter focuses on three core themes that animate interlocutors' narratives. The first is the frequent distinction between '*ameer log*' and '*ghareeb log*' as already mentioned; a distinction which is clearly and frequently articulated in interlocutors' offstage narratives and self-fashionings. The second is interlocutors' invocations of 'Allah', i.e. God, (and of religious discourse more broadly) which stand out for the frequency, versatility, and complexity of their use, including, but not limited to, their elaboration of class critique. The third is the invocation of '*insan*'- the 'human'- which accompanies particularly charged moments of claim-making in interlocutors' narratives (and understandably then, appears less frequently than invocations of *Allah* or *ghareeb*). This chapter describes how each of these vocabularies are deployed (and in what contexts) and explores the insights offered by these deployments into interlocutors' political subjectivities.

6.1. '*Ameer log, Ghareeb log*' (Rich People, Poor People)

The identity of '*ghareeb*'- 'the poor'- was invoked most frequently when interlocutors were speaking about their expectations of (and disappointments with) employers or when they perceived there to be a double standard between the norms and entitlements that apply to them

and to *kothi walas*. Notable amongst the ways that interlocutors articulated the distinction between *ameer log* ('the rich') and *ghareeb log* ('the poor') was the strategy of self-fashioning through reversal: *they* are dirty; *they* are ignorant; *they* are diseased, etc. In other words, interlocutors could be seen reversing the associations/attributes that are otherwise ascribed to them either directly by employers or through dominant social codes and values. Take Farah's words below:

> Despite not being educated (*unparh*), life has taught me a lot. The uneducated (*unparh*) too can see many things. In fact, it is the educated (*parhay-likhay*) who are ignorant (*jahil*). They don't understand how the world works.
>
> (Farah, G-11/4 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

Farah's comment is embedded in a linguistic context in which *'unparh'* (uneducated) and *'jahil'* (ignorant) are two words that are often coupled together into a singular and commonly-used term of disparagement: *'unparh-jahil'*. Farah's speech act uncoupled the two and reversed the association of 'ignorance' so as to direct it towards the educated themselves. Maria's words below are similarly scathing:

> Most of them hate us so much that we start to hate them. It's as if, God forbid, we are diseased or filthy or they've witnessed us doing something despicable, although it's *them* who have all kinds of illnesses. Actually, it's *us* who need to stay away from them. So when they separate utensils, I am happy, I say it's good that they're doing this... If they are being hateful, we will be one hundred times more hateful towards them.
>
> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

Spoken at a point in time when she has recently quit domestic service, Maria makes clear the reversal: *they* are the ones who are dirty, and it is *their* hate for us that makes us hateful towards them. In this quote, there is also an avowal of retaliation, delivered with a forcefulness that Maria had not expressed during her employment, even in 'offstage' settings.[222] Maria's sudden (and to me, surprising) shift in self-fashioning illustrates how exiting a coercive (spatial and/or relational) context can affect the self-fashioning and subjectivities of the oppressed, and in doing so, reconfirms the centrality of coercive contexts to subaltern political subjectivation (Madhok, 2018).

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[222] Maria had earlier been fairly uninhibited in expressing anger, sadness, disappointment, even contempt with regards to her *baji* (with whom Maria had an intensely difficult relationship, particularly towards the end of the employment period), but rarely did a desire for revenge or spite characterise her expressions as forcefully as it did now.

One of the attributes of *ghareeb log* which interlocutors emphasised as a distinguishing feature was magnanimity, contrasting it with the pettiness of *ameer log*. One such instance is reflected in Sana's comments during the Awami Basti group discussion, at a point when the group was talking about *kothi walas*' excesses and how to respond: "If we wanted to harm them [*kothi walas*], we would steal their money, take their jewellery. We *choose* not to. It's only Allah we are afraid of." (Sana seems to expand as she says this, becoming louder and pointing upwards). Sana's emphasis that she/they *can* bring harm (to *kothi walas*) but *choose* not to reflects her self-fashioning in this moment as magnanimous and agentic. Her second phrase, delivered loudly and aggressively, serves to reaffirm that it is not fear of *kothi walas* or their punishments that informs her choice; it is only Allah she fears.[223]

A recurring theme in my interlocutors' commentaries about 'us and them' is encapsulated by the widespread perception amongst *basti walas* of coronavirus as a 'rich people's disease'. The relatively low prevalence of coronavirus amongst *basti walas* (even during peak periods when lockdown was in force) added further to this perception.

Many subjects shared stories of the coronavirus period as an incredibly difficult period for them. Many of my interlocutors, their family members, and other *basti walas* (who are mostly casual/daily-wage, contract-based and informal workers) were laid off or suspended from work without any notice or compensation. A number of interlocutors reported *kothi walas* panicking during the pandemic, locking their doors, refusing entry to domestic workers, firing them (in many cases without any notice, forewarning, or compensation), or- on the flip-side- refusing to allow even live-out workers to leave the *kothi* during the coronavirus. During lockdown, Naseem's meetings with her seventeen-year-old daughter (who was a live-in worker in one of Islamabad's *kothis*) would require her to stand outside the gate of the *kothi* and her daughter to go to the roof and talk to each other from there. As described by Gulzar Bibi:

> When Corona came, they'd say *bibi* (woman), don't come inside our house, stay outside. They threw us out of jobs. We would go wearing masks, and they still wouldn't let us into their homes. For four entire months, we had no work. We were ruined, all us *basti walas*, having to take up loan after loan to survive.
>
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

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[223] The emboldening effect that the invocation of Allah has on Sana here was a recurring feature in my field observations and is discussed in later sections of this chapter.

Many interlocutors described the experience of wearing masks as suffocating and irritating, particularly while they worked. In the Awami Basti group discussion, Basheera shared how she would carry the mask in her hand whenever she went out (as wearing masks in public had been declared mandatory by the government), but didn't put it on, even when she went to the hospital. Once when she went to see a doctor and he asked her to put on her mask, she said to the doctor, 'If I suffocate and die because of this mask, it'll be all your fault!' Basheera's story was met with grins and laughter in the group.

Other than finding masks suffocating, some interlocutors claimed that masks 'smell bad', others thought them to be 'unhygienic'. I found Asma's explanation for why masks should not be mandatory to be intriguing:

> When one wears a mask, the sweat gathers all in one place and goes into the mouth, along with germs and all… So what's the point then of protecting yourself from Corona if it means you're just ingesting your own germs instead?

<div align="right">(Asma, F-7/4 basti, 07-07-2021)</div>

Asma echoes the views of other interlocutors who believe that it is such practices—*ameer log's* practices—that are unclean, reversing the perception of the *ghareeb* as 'dirty' and 'bearers of disease', including the coronavirus. Moreover, not only did interlocutors find Covid protection measures to be uncomfortable, imposed, and unnecessary, they also found them to be futile in the face of 'God's will'. Speaking back to *kothi walas*' hyper-vigilance in relation to Covid, Razziya said to the other Awami Basti women: "When one's time has come, death will surely come. So why, then, be scared to die?" The rhetorical question was met with murmurs of approval from the group.

It appears then that the coronavirus- and the response to it- became yet another means of distinguishing different classes of people and was seen also as a wry form of justice, as expressed by Bushra and Farah's mother:

> So many 'big' and important people [*barray log*] have had corona; and here [in the *basti*] we didn't even get wind that there's something called corona… See, Allah is there, above us, his wrath is undiscriminating.

<div align="right">(Bushra & Farah's mother, G-11 basti, 11-05-2020)</div>

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I understand these words as an expression of triumph, of justice being meted out, and of the strength and resilience of *ghareeb log* who did not fall prey to the coronavirus that had clearly destabilised and affected the rich and powerful. It is interesting that Bushra and Farah's mother uses the word 'undiscriminating' (for Allah's wrath), having just described coronavirus as 'a rich people's disease' that *does* discriminate between rich and poor. I understand the implication to be that Allah has been 'undiscriminating' by levelling scores between the *ameer* and the *ghareeb*; a form of payback to the rich for their excesses.

The coronavirus period only exacerbated what was otherwise an already prevalent perception amongst interlocutors about *kothi walas*' propensity to fall ill more frequently than *basti walas* or *ghareeb log*. For Maria, the explanation for why the poor are healthier than the rich lies in their respective lifestyles:

> The AC (air conditioner) is a disease. It completely jams up the body. Sweat neither appears, nor does it dry. Village folk labour all day, and the sweat cleanses them from inside, after which they come and sleep under a fan. That's why they don't fall ill easily and stay healthy... Whereas these people... when summers come, their ACs go on; when winters come, their heaters go on. They remain oblivious to summer and to winter. It is us who have to bear both the heat and the cold.

> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

In this quote, Maria is not only speaking back to power by calling *ameer log* 'oblivious' to the seasons—and in that sense, 'weak' because they are unable to bear the weather extremities that the *ghareeb* do- she is also pointing to the strength and resilience of the *ghareeb*. Gulzar Bibi says this in as many words:

> We are very strong in our hearts [*hum dil me boht mazboot hain*], that is why Allah has made us *ghareeb* (poor). God willing, in the afterlife we will be rich and they will be poor like us. We have faith in Allah. Those who have seen *ghareebi* (poverty) in this life, Allah will reward them in the afterlife.

> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

For Gulzar Bibi then, justice is imminent and inevitable—if not in this life, then in the afterlife. She speaks of the inner strength of 'her people'- the *ghareeb*- who have been chosen by God to be poor because they have the strength to endure it. She voices the fantasy of reversing positions in the afterlife, in which the rich will be poor (and suffer) and the poor will be rich. Women like Gulzar Bibi- a widow, and an active, long-standing political leader of her *basti*- as well as many others

who appear on these pages have an imagination of- and a (sometimes burning) desire for- revenge and for social justice, often expressed in terms of the divine. Gulzar Bibi continues:

> Look inside the *kothi* and you'll see: If the husband doesn't give the woman one day's household expenses, just watch the fireworks… This is not *izzat* [respectability/honour]. *Izzat* is that you make do with dry *roti* [bread], that you thank Allah for it.
>
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

For Gulzar Bibi then, *izzat*- honour- lies in one's ability to endure hardship, which she chastises *kothi walas* as lacking. Rasoola's words below bring forth another aspect of this 'inner strength': "We are *ghareeb log*; we endure their [*kothi walas'*] threats, then pull ourselves right back up and get on with work" (Rasoola, G-11/4 *basti*, 06-02-2022). Here, Rasoola describes the resilience of *ghareeb log*; their ability to hold themselves in the face of everyday abuses of structural power. This suggests, however, that 'resilience' also involves a kind of 'numbing' or dissociation in addition to repression of one's feelings, particularly anger (as discussed later in this chapter).

In contrast to self-affirming ways of invoking the identity of *ghareeb log*, sometimes the term was invoked as a 'reality-check' on my research subjects' desires, by their own selves. One such instance came to pass during my afternoon with Roshni in the courtyard of Faisal Masjid (one of Islamabad's popular tourist destinations) where we spent hours sitting in a spot of shade on the white marble floor, speaking of matters that she said she had rarely spoken of with anyone before. When her employers moved abroad, Roshni had moved back to her hometown to attend to her ailing mother. Ammi Jaan too had died some years back. I asked Roshni to imagine how her life would be after her mother passed away and she no longer had the imperative of structuring her life around her mother's needs:

> Sometimes I think I'll get married [after my mother passes]. Then I wonder what kind of person he'll be, whether I'll be able to get along with him or not… Sometimes I think I'll go to [my employer] and serve her… Sometimes I think I'd like a home of my own, somewhere in the city, close to the road. It's possible to get one in the village but if you're alone there, and far away, you could just die and nobody would know… But here [in the city] even a small house is well out of my reach. *Ghareeb hun, tho bus, jo meray naseeb me hua:* I am poor, so whatever fate has in store for me…
>
> (Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

Roshni's resignation- better described as deflation- towards the end of that quote, is notable, as is its coincidence with her use of the term *ghareeb* to describe herself.[224] In a similar vein, *ghareebi*, as a term signifying the condition (of being poor) rather than an identity (*as* poor), felt less energetic and dynamic than '*ghareeb*' in the way it was taken up by interlocutors. For instance, Zarina used it as she was explaining to me why she chose not to take on additional jobs:

> When you become poor [*jab ghareebi ho jaye*], you start to think, I'll just work as much as I can… But then I thought, nah, forget it. I've worked all of my life and still gotten nowhere.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021)

While Zarina's despondency in the above comment is noticeable, Farah expresses something similar but with a crispness conveying that she was not under any illusions about the possibilities of social mobility for the *ghareeb*: "To this day, have you ever seen the *ghareeb* moving up? You haven't, have you?" I shook my head. Farah's mother added:

> [As someone who is *ghareeb*] Whatever you do, however you do it; you can work from morning till night… and yet, at the end of it, what will you get? Just one *roti* [bread]; whether you earn it the 'right' way or the 'wrong' way, that's all you'll get.
>
> (Bushra & Farah's mother, G-11 *basti*, 11-05-2022)

This comment by Bushra and Farah's mother points to the limits of what the *ghareeb* can hope to achieve and also to the futility of moralising when it comes to how the *ghareeb* earn their living. If, at the end of the day, all the *ghareeb* can hope for is a piece of bread, then does it matter whether they beg, borrow or steal? And yet, it appears that it *does* matter, at least to some interlocutors in some contexts, as many of them took pains to fashion themselves- not only in their onstage performances but also often times in private, offstage settings- as honest, hard-working, dignified beings, *working, labouring,* to survive and to provide for themselves and their families in honourable ways.

6.2. Invoking Allah

A consistent feature of interlocutors' vocabularies was their regular, repeated, persistent invocation of *Allah* (the Muslim term for God) and references to religious injunctions, concepts,

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[224] Unlike *ghareeb* (poor), *ghareebi* (poverty) was invoked as a condition (rather than an identity) and usually with reference to interlocutors' own lives and selves rather than in juxtaposition to *kothi walas*.

practices, and identities in their speech. Contrary to the view that invocations of religion signify "privatised docility with a potential for dissonance" (Mojab & Zia, 2019, p. 262), I argue that religious discourse serves as an important conceptual and literal resource for interlocutors' critiques of class and other forms of power. At the level of the self, religious discourse appears to be one of the core conceptual vocabularies deployed by my interlocutors to establish their place (and that of others) in the world, to evaluate, ascribe, describe, and claim worth in moral and social terms, as individuals and as collectives. I do not, however, wish to imply that structural critique is expressed exclusively through the deployment of religious discourse. Indeed, interlocutors' invocations of the *shehri* ('citizen'), Pakistaniat ('being Pakistani'), *insan* (the 'human'), and *ghareeb* ('poor') are evidence that there are various secular—or more accurately, areligious—ontological and epistemological frameworks that co-exist along with the religious in my interlocutors' modes of speech, claim-making, and self-fashioning.

I understand my interlocutors' frequent and varied use of religious discourse as connected to the emergence of religiosity/piety as a unique form of social capital in the Pakistan context (Maqsood, 2017). It is also often the *only* form of social capital that is accessible to the low-caste, working-class communities under study. While the accessibility of this form of social capital is unequally distributed both within and across this particular demographic (and notably, in the case of Islamabad's working-classes, between Muslim and Christian communities), it nevertheless permeates the speech of all interlocutors, even as it is used in different ways and to somewhat different ends. Thus, while Christian interlocutors were also frequent users of religious idiom, they were more cautious and restrained in their use of religious discourse. This was particularly the case in the presence of Muslims and in their use of terms specific to the Christian community, such as the term '*Khudawand*', the Christian term for God. The rationale for using the word 'Allah' rather than '*Khudawand*' in public was explained in very clear terms to me by a Christian interlocutor, Naseem: "Oh, this [the use of the word 'Allah'] is just for you people. So that we don't offend you." Naseem's explanation makes explicit and visible the extreme caution exercised by working-class Christians in their interactions with the Muslim majority, indicative of the ever-present threat of (often violent) backlash on flimsy religious pretexts that has marked the lived experience of Christian and other religious minorities in Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2016; Grit, 2019). This does not mean, however, that Christian interlocutors were not avid users of religious discourse. Indeed, amongst my interlocutors some of the most fervent users of religious discourse were Christian, and the use of religious discourse- embedded as it is in cultural/linguistic patterns

of speech in the Pakistani social context- was as common and frequent in their speech as in the speech of Muslim interlocutors.

In what follows, I explore the deployment of religious discourse at three levels or modes which may occur simultaneously but are analytically discrete: One, as a form of social critique of the dominant; second, as a means of establishing group identity/worth; and third, at the level of the self, as a mode of self-fashioning and meaning making. I argue that in each case, interlocutors' deployment of religious discourse is a rejection of class (and other forms of) subservience, challenges class domination, and re-interprets/reframes the everyday indignities that subordinate groups experience. It is worth noting here that this use of religious discourse as a strategic resource to 'speak truth to power' is embedded in a political and cultural context in which religious discourse forms the bedrock of legitimising the status quo (Akhtar, 2018). This reinforces the need to situate my interlocutors' deployments very carefully in the sites in which they are articulated, namely in the *bastis* where they live, or (as in the case of live-in workers) in the absence of employers or in safe spaces outside of employers' homes.

In presenting domestic workers' narratives and self-fashionings in this chapter, I seek to challenge the presumed equation between religiosity/piety and submissiveness/passivity, an assumption embedded firmly in Pakistani liberal discourse and a continuing debate in feminist scholarship on Pakistan and Islam, as stated in Chapter 2.[225] Tracking the complex and strategic use of my interlocutors' invocations of religion in various settings, I argue that far from being a passive 'reproduction' of internalised dominant discourses, my interlocutors use these invocations agentically towards non-religious and secular ends, and employ them as resources to buttress everyday enactments of evasion, assertion, denial, refusal, and rebuttal. In some cases, such as that of Shaheera (who, as introduced in the previous chapter, prides herself on being a preacher in addition to being a domestic worker), religious idiom provides her the vocabulary and the confidence to speak back to one of her (now-former) employers, as recounted in the previous chapter. The energy, forcefulness, even exuberance in Shaheera's tone as she recounts this encounter would be difficult to imagine had she not deployed religious discourse as her arsenal.

A less directly confrontational example is Rani's exchange with a (Muslim) *kothi wala* who accused Rani's daughter-in-law (also a domestic worker) of stealing from their *kothi* while at work. Rani, a

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[225] For scholarship that engages with these themes particularly in the Pakistani/South Asian context, see Iqtidar (2011), Zia (2018), Barlas (2013), Jeffery & Qureshi (2022), and Kirmani (2009, 2011), among others.

Christian, describes her daughter-in-law as being highly distressed and turning to the church community in her *basti*: "Please, pray for me. Only my *Khuda* (God) can save me. May He put mercy in their [employer's] hearts." The next day, Rani approached the *kothi walas* to resolve the issue. This initially led to an escalation of the conflict, with the man of the house- known in the neighborhood as 'Haji sahb'[226]- brandishing a gun at Rani, hurling threats and abuse at her as she stood in the driveway of his *kothi*. Some days later, the missing items were found within the *kothi* itself, and the *baji* insisted that her husband apologise to Rani. Rani recounts triumphantly:

> I told Haji sahb, don't ask me for forgiveness, ask your God for forgiveness. I am a mere mortal, how can I forgive you? Ask Him for forgiveness, it's up to Him to forgive you.
>
> (Rani, F-7/4 *basti*, 10-09-2021)

Rani's response offers a way of responding that doesn't forgive Haji sahb or absolve him of guilt, but neither is it an outright rejection of the *kothi walas'* gesture; it is *evasive*. The latter is important in maintaining the relationship (and hence her family's livelihood) whereas the former is a small but meaningful moral victory in the face of the indignities that Rani and her family had to endure. Indeed, the triumph in Rani's tone as she recounts this story is proof of its meaning for her.

6.2.1. *"Hum bhi Musalman hain"* ("We are Muslim, too")

For Muslim interlocutors, claiming to be 'pious Muslims' and challenging *kothi walas'* claims to the same (i.e. to piety/Muslimness) were frequently occurring speech acts, serving as a common means to articulate a critique of their employers and the dominant classes at large. Gulzar Bibi recounts an incident in which she suddenly fell ill and her sons rushed to her employers' *kothi* nearby to request that the employers lend their car to take Gulzar Bibi to the hospital, even offering to pay for the petrol. The *baji* refused, saying the car was not available, even though there were multiple cars standing in their driveway. "Even if we had asked an *angrez* (foreigner) in that condition, he would have taken us— and then these people call themselves Muslims?" snorts Gulzar Bibi. She continues:

> *Kothi walas* are happy when the [CDA] operation happens. They think, why have these people made their *katcha* [makeshift/mud] homes here? They don't think, these people are Muslims too. It's as if we were born just to serve them.

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[226] 'Haji' is a reference to someone who has performed the Hajj, the Holy Pilgrimage to Mecca. The Hajj is enshrined as one of the 'pillars' of Islam, and those who perform it are accorded significant social capital.

Invoking Muslim identity in this instance is a call for inclusion- "we are Muslim too"- occurring in a context where (for working-class communities in particular) formal entitlements as citizens or workers are either ineffective or non-existent.[227] Gulzar Bibi's comment below is illustrative of this:

> Go to *kafir* (infidel) countries; there, whether you are a *kafir* or a Muslim, you are valued. In Pakistan, Muslims have no value. You'll be on the street, writhing, dying, and there will be nobody to pick you up.
>
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022)

Gulzar Bibi's critiques of Pakistani state and society's claims to 'Muslimness', juxtaposed with praise for '*kafir* (infidel) countries' for their universal 'humanism' (irrespective of religious affiliation), implies that for Gulzar Bibi, Pakistan not only lacks the core 'Muslim' values of fraternity, compassion, and social justice, it also behaves *contrary* to these values in the ways that the poor are left to suffer. It comes as no surprise then that interlocutors frequently criticised *kothi walas* for being religiously 'lax' or 'irreligious' most often in contexts where they were describing indignities endured at the workplace, as seen in Gulzar Bibi's commentary below:

> In the *kothis*, you can't even tell that it's the month of Ramzan. They [*kothi walas*] are constantly asking you to make tea, make eggs, make *parathas* (flatbread). *Roza* [fasting], *namaaz* [prayer], *quraan khawani* [recitation of the Quran]— you'll find all this in <u>our</u> *bastis*.
> (Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 *basti*, 20-04-2022, emphasis hers)

Here, Gulzar Bibi is not only expressing annoyance at the inconsiderate behaviour of her employers (by asking her to constantly prepare food while she is fasting) but also highlighting the absence of religious observance in the *kothis*, emphasising how it is *basti walas* who are 'true' Muslims, and *bastis* the sites where 'true' Muslim practice can be observed. *Kothi walas* also came in for critique for performing religious rituals/practices 'only in appearance' rather than 'in spirit':

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[227] Amongst the Christian community, who cannot access the claim for inclusion into the category of 'Muslim', the claim is: '*kya hum Pakistani nahin?*' 'Are we not Pakistani?'. This claim to 'Pakistaniat'- especially when made by Christians- is often combined with frequent references to Islamic injunctions (commonly claimed by Muslims in inter-faith contexts) proclaiming Islam as 'benevolent' and 'protective' of religious minorities— another example of the constant appeasement of Muslim sensibilities that (particularly working-class) Christians feel obliged to perform. This is also an illustration of the culture of fear (of religious violence/backlash) that permeates the lives of working-class Christians in Pakistan.

> They'll have us do all the preparation and cook fresh food every day, but they'll only ever give us leftovers from the day before... *And then they call themselves 'Muslims'?* Fasting, prayer, recitation of the Quran, they do it all. All so that they can *call* themselves 'Muslim'.
>
> (Farah, G-11/4 *basti*, 11-05-2022, emphasis hers).

These quotes reflect the widely held belief amongst interlocutors that performing religiosity doesn't make you a 'true' or good Muslim, and that the indignity and inequality reproduced by *kothi walas* is firmly against the spirit of egalitarianism and justice that 'being Muslim' (or at least a 'true' or 'good' Muslim) entails. It is also noteworthy that while religious references were frequent and commonplace in interlocutors' speech, religious *practice* was relatively rare (notwithstanding Gulzar Bibi's assertion to the contrary above).[228] The only times I observed interlocutors (either Muslim or Christian) perform religious rituals or practices was during their participation in a public religious or cultural ceremony; never in our private/individual encounters. While this absence of ritual performances may have to do with my interlocutors' perceptivity regarding my own a-religiosity (which they may have criticised behind my back), I do not believe this to be the only contributing factor. In fact, my interlocutors acknowledged (and sometimes lamented) the economic and/or physical constraints to their fulfilment of ritual obligations (such as praying at the prescribed times, fasting, and performing *Hajj*, the annual pilgrimage); however, there was no sense of being any 'less' Muslim because of this. Moreover, my own a-religiosity did not appear to inhibit my interlocutors' frequent invocations of Allah and their multi-faceted deployments of religious discourse, so I am inclined to believe that my observations in this regard reflect their lack of emphasis on religious rituals and formalism in the everyday, rather than a performance orchestrated for my sake.

From the discussion so far, it appears that interlocutors clearly felt entitled to call the *kothi walas*' religiosity/piety into question in a way that the latter's *class* status was not as frequently or directly critiqued. I observed a similar pattern in response to my questions to interlocutors (both in individual and group settings) if they had ever felt resentful towards their employers for being rich. The answer was almost universally an immediate, resounding, and unusually assertive 'no'. This negation/denial was usually followed by an expression of gratitude to Allah for all that they did have (which 'Allah had given them', they'd make it a point to add) and occasional remarks about

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[228] As noted in Chapter 4, there are significant cultural differences between different ethnic groups living in Islamabad's *bastis*, including their orientations towards religion. The Pashtun and Kohistani communities- to which Gulzar Bibi belongs- are considerably more ardent observers of religious rituals and practices than the Punjabi or Saraiki working-class communities.

how '*hassad*' (resentment/jealousy) is not a 'good thing' and that one should be grateful (to Allah), no matter what the circumstances. Furthermore, instances in which I chose to probe interlocutors' claims of gratitude for, and acceptance of, one's 'fate' (particularly an acceptance of poverty as their 'fate') were illustrative for what they revealed. In one of these instances, I was sitting with Sana and her husband Daniyal on their *charpayi* in the courtyard of their home in Awami Basti. The mood was light, and we had chatted about various topics already- village life, party politics, *basti* dynamics, gender, and my personal history. During this exchange, I asked Sana if she had ever felt resentful of her employers. Sana responded immediately: "No, I've never felt that way towards them. Whether one is *ameer* or *ghareeb*, it is Allah who creates us all." Beyond the usual curiosity that was aroused in me whenever I received a swift, unequivocal 'no' in response to this question, it is the following explanatory comment added on by Daniyal that struck me:

> Let's suppose you live in a *mahal* (palace), and we live here. Now if we were to look at your palace and think 'oh how nice' and leave this place, where would we go? We wouldn't be living in <u>your</u> *mahal* now would we— Would *you* let us live there? [Daniyal says incredulously, looking straight at me] This is just an example... The point is that *this* is our *ghareeb-khana* (home; specifically, a poor person's home). This is where we will stay. Whatever Allah gives us, we take, and keep going.

> (Daniyal, Awami Basti, 09-09-2021, emphases his)

Daniyal's comment can be understood as a pointed critique of class inequality and the deep-rooted nature of class distinctions that permeates and undergirds even 'pleasant' cross-class relationships such as ours. Offered as a response to my question about resenting the rich, his comments can be paraphrased thus: 'Class (subordination/inequality) is real; it is independent of one's desires and interpersonal relationships. If we are not realistic, we will lose even the little that we have. We have no option but to take what we can get and keep going.' Following Daniyal's logic, resentment, then, appears to be dangerous/destabilising to the continuation of life as it is, in which a daily engagement with and (at least outward) 'acceptance' of class inequality and its accompanying indignities is necessary for one's material survival. Extending this logic, one can assume that the emergence of class anger/resentment (certainly if/when expressed individually and publicly) threatens the stability of interlocutors' relationships with their employers and they risk losing what they currently derive from them: an income and a patron.

However, as the narratives presented in this chapter and across the thesis show, these daily cross-class interactions regularly give rise to situations and experiences that do *not* lend themselves

easily to acceptance; and even when there is acceptance, it certainly is not 'passive'. If anything, these materials show that multiple co-constituted inequalities are being constantly, actively, and strategically navigated and negotiated by my interlocutors in the everyday. The 'hidden transcript' and its offstage performances make even more apparent that domestic workers (and *basti walas* more broadly) have *not* accepted class inequality and *kothi walas'* domination as an immutable fact that they are at peace with. Many narratives cited in this chapter are replete with dreams, imaginaries, and fantasies of revenge, of reversal, of justice, of open challenge to the dominant, and of being victorious at the end (as observed also by Scott, 1990). It is important then to distinguish an *acceptance* of class inequality as a *social fact* from an *internalisation* of class inequality as ideologically or morally good or true or just, a distinction that is both important and tenuous, as suggested by Modonesi's conceptualisation of subalternity (Modonesi, 2014, p. 34; see also Chapter 2).

However, this subtle yet core distinction between an acceptance of class inequality as a reality that one must live with and an acceptance of class inequality as how things *should* be, sometimes appeared blurred. One such instance occurred during the Awami Basti group discussion, when I asked the group whether they resented *kothi walas* for being rich. The question initially generated giggles, with the back-benchers exchanging grins, glances, and whispers with one another, while those sitting further up began addressing me in unison with 'No, no, never'. I reproduce parts of the subsequent conversation below:

> 'We are happy [that *kothi walas* are comfortable]. May Allah give to them and to the *ghareeb*,' said one.
> 'For those (*kothi walas*) who have helped us, we've only ever showered them with blessings,' said another.
> 'It's only if we take the initiative that they (*kothi walas*) will give us something. If we serve you well, you will be pleased with us, and take us under your wing,' said a third.
> 'I've never been jealous/resentful ("*hassad kaddi ni keeta*"). Whatever's written in one's fate is in one's fate,' said a fourth.
> 'One must be grateful to Allah, no matter what,' said a fifth.
> '*Allah denay wala hy*. Allah is the Provider,' said a sixth.
>
> [I decided to press on with deliberately child-like curiosity]:
> 'But, if Allah is benevolent and loves his Creation so much, why did He make some people rich and others poor?' I asked.
> 'I don't know, ask Him!' blurted out Zubeida [the old woman] in response.
> Amongst the rest of the women, there was a sudden, uncomfortable silence.
> Eventually, someone said: 'This is necessary for the world to function (*ye duniya ka nizam chalanay k liye zaroori hy*).'

'Allah Himself has made this system of big and small ('*wadday chottay da nizam*'). If there wasn't such a system, they [the rich/powerful] would be of no use to us, and we would be of no use to them,' said a second.

'Allah has given to them, and connected our sustenance (*rizq*) to them, so we go there to work,' said a third. 'It is through them that we receive what He gives us.'

(Awami Basti group discussion, 22-04-2022)

Each of the various explanations offered by the Awami Basti women are noteworthy (as is the old woman's instinctive reply and the silence that followed) and on the surface, appear to blur the distinction between the acceptance of inequality and its internalisation. However, upon closer analysis, each of the explanations provide, in different ways, *functional* justifications for class inequality. Paraphrasing from the above excerpt, these explanations appear to be: 'It is needed to make the system function'; 'It generates the inter-dependence needed for social functioning'; 'It is through the rich that we receive what is ours'. None of these explanations suggest a moral/ideological alignment with, or acceptance of, class inequality as the way things *should* be.

My interlocutors' use of religious discourse to both justify *and* challenge class inequality in different moments also demands analysis. The first aspect worth nothing is that it is only in response to a direct question (from me) about resentment towards employers that the answer was an unequivocal, vociferous no. When the question was not asked directly and when interlocutors arrived at the theme of their own volition (or in response to a different question), there were plenty of open expressions of class anger and resentment. A number of factors could explain this pattern, and specifically, the uniform, vociferous 'no' to direct questions about class resentment:

One obvious factor is my positionality as a *kothi wala* in front of whom they would be reluctant to openly admit feeling resentful towards me and/or members of my class, so as to avoid any unwanted impacts that could affect my ally-ship with them and their community. This response is also commensurate with their self-fashioning in the public transcript as 'good' working-class subjects who are diligent, loyal, and trustworthy (for their employers), and as 'good' religious subjects who are perpetually grateful to, and accepting of, what God has willed for them.

A second factor has to do, I think, with their own imperatives for wanting to appear (not just to me, but also to themselves) as 'morally upright' and 'good' gendered subjects who are supposed to be patient and forbearing at all times. Such self-fashioning involves dissociating oneself from rebellious, disruptive, or otherwise 'discouraged' thoughts or sentiments such as *hassad*

(resentment/jealousy) or *laalach* (greed). Indeed, much of the field material shows interlocutors' repeated efforts to emphasise their honesty, reliability, flexibility, and diligence as workers, in addition to presenting themselves as 'proper/respectable women' (by not doing '*dosti*', i.e. 'friendships', maintaining 'modesty' in dress/behaviour, and remaining appropriately secluded from men, among others) and, not least, as pious subjects who are God-fearing, grateful, patient, faithful, loyal, and submissive subjects. While many of these self-fashionings took place in onstage settings and form part of the 'public transcripts' in (multiple) coercive contexts, my intimate and progressively deeper engagement with particular interlocutors led me to believe that the moral compass they use to navigate the world is not entirely distinct or always contradictory to the values/qualities and discourses emphasised in the public transcript.

I also see the legitimisation of class inequality by the Awami Basti women as a self-fashioning strategy (very much in the Foucauldian sense; see Foucault, 1988) to create/maintain a sense of belonging and purpose, of having a place in the world, of being valuable, needed, necessary, ordained— by carrying out God's mission, participating in a divine order- and fundamentally as a means of establishing self-respect and living with dignity while inhabiting their subordinate position in a highly stratified, unequal, and unjust social order. It is a means, as Daniyal's comments cited earlier make explicit, to reconcile oneself to one's existing (even if unsatisfactory) situation, to accept rather than resist one's condition in the everyday—the latter of which would not just be incredibly painful and make everyday life unsustainable but would also change (or rather, improve) little in individual or structural terms for these subjects. However, as argued earlier, this does not mean that these subjects are homogenously or consistently 'submissive' or have surrendered/resigned themselves to their 'fate' in any absolute way.

Upon closer tracking of how, when, and to what ends religious discourse is deployed, it becomes apparent that using religious discourse as the vocabulary for systemic critique was accompanied by its use as a means of arriving at acceptance of inequality—making it tolerable, rather than palatable in the everyday. The same interlocutors, at different points in their narratives and lives, in different social and spatial contexts, moved from being resigned and even justifying inequality to becoming politically and emotionally charged, determined to challenge the classes and the systems they otherwise serve on a daily basis. That this has not taken the form of a mass, sustained movement is one thing, and I do not wish to overstate the existence of a revolutionary/radical political consciousness amongst my subjects. Yet, neither do I wish to understate these moments

of expression—of desire, of anger, of hope, and of self-recognition as human—as being 'outside' of, or 'irrelevant to' their political subjectivities. Indeed, it was a matter of minutes before the same women in the same room (during the Awami Basti discussion) who were justifying class inequality as 'necessary' and 'divinely ordained', moved on to scathing critiques of their employers and began speaking of "going on strike", "holding protests", "burning tyres", even speaking gleefully of "breaking the most expensive glass items in the *kothis*; those they can't easily replace", with all of this charged commentary being cheered on by other women in the room. This instance provides a vivid illustration of 'affective dissonance'—moments in which the earlier/existing reality is no longer deemed acceptable, and their politicising effects (Hemmings, 2012).

6.2.2. 'Allah Denay Wala Hy' ('Allah is the Provider')

One of the most frequent invocations of Allah took the form of the phrase "*Allah denay wala hy*"— "Allah is the Provider". I understand the implication here to be two-fold: One is the hope/faith/trust that Allah *will* provide for them, that there will be better days. The second is an emphasis on what is *not* explicitly said- which is: *Allah* is the Provider, not you *ameer log*. It is in contexts where interlocutors described their experiences of class subservience and the indignities endured by them (as domestic workers serving the rich) that this phrase was most used, as if de-emphasising their reliance on (and the power of) the rich. Indeed, the attributes of Allah most cited by interlocutors were precisely those which *kothi walas* were described as lacking: Allah is generous, *kothi walas* are not; Allah is kind, merciful, and just, *kothi walas* are not; Allah is responsive, *kothi walas* are not; Allah can be trusted, *kothi walas* cannot; Allah is compassionate, *kothi walas* are not; Allah is the Provider, *kothi walas* are not; Allah is the Maalik (owner); *kothi walas* are not. It is only Allah who we turn to for help; it is only Allah on whom we are dependent. I am reminded here of Basheera's comment:

> These *kothi walas* earn a few bucks and start deluding that they are *maalik* (owner). The *Maalik* is up there, no mortal can ever be *maalik*.[229]

> (Basheera, Awami Basti, 22-04-2022)

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[229] Basheera's comment is particularly interesting because *maalik* is a frequently used term for employers, particularly (but not only) in the context of domestic service. That many domestic workers refer to their employers as '*maalik*' is another reminder that domestic service continues to be heavily personalised rather than having become a contractual, alienated form of employment. As one of the Awami Basti women cited says during the group discussion, domestic workers/servants must work hard to please their employers; a mere completion of tasks is not enough. Without earning the favour of the employer, there can be no hope of cultivating 'pragmatic intimacy' that can provide social and economic security and support in times of need. (see Rota, 2022; Sengupta & Sen, 2016)

The emphasis on these attributes of the divine must be understood in conjunction with the everyday reality that in practice, much of this looks different. *Kothi walas* <u>are</u> *maaliks* (owners); and workers do turn (out of necessity, of course) to *kothi walas* for help; they *are* dependent on *kothi walas* for their daily, material sustenance. While Sengupta and Sen's (2016) astute analysis of domestic service relations shows that domestic workers' strategy in the face of this material dependence is to maintain relations of 'pragmatic intimacy' with their employers *in their direct/onstage interactions* with the latter, my work shows that deployments of religious discourse serve as important *offstage* strategies to respond to the same conditions. I argue that the 'divine' in interlocutors' narratives is constructed in response to these structural asymmetries and indignities, in order to de-legitimate/downgrade the relevance, importance, and power of the dominant. Take Gulzar Bibi, for instance, who explicitly said that even when *kothi walas* give, it is because Allah first puts *rehem* (mercy) in their hearts. I asked her: "Why does Allah not put *rehem* in more *kothi walas*' hearts then?" Gulzar Bibi replied without hesitation:

> It is because *kothi walas* live in sin; they are possessed by the Devil, who will never let them give [to the poor]. If *kothi walas* were to pray, to reach for God, He would chase the Devil out of their hearts.
>
> <div align="right">(Gulzar Bibi, I-10/1 basti, 20-04-2022).</div>

I found Gulzar Bibi's explanation- and the seamlessness with which she offered it—to be fascinating and instructive. It illustrates the depth of Gulzar Bibi's belief in the divine, the seamlessness of divine logic (for her) as well as the complex and strategic interplay between agency and surrender that imbues her references to the divine. Here too, as at other times, invocations of God's omni-potency is used as a means to deny agency and recognition to *kothi walas* (or at least de-emphasise their relevance)—such as when Rasoola describes (during one of my G-11 *basti* visits) her uterine operation as having been made possible 'by the grace of Allah', dismissing the fact that her employer had given her PKR 50,000 for the procedure- a significant amount of money without which the operation would not have been possible.[230]

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[230] Many *basti* women- especially those I knew less intimately- chose to not mention acts of generosity from employers to me, which I understand as a strategy to maintain their self-fashioning as one who is in need and who is not being helped/supported by another patron. It is this pattern that helped me make sense of why those interlocutors who *did* volunteer information about the generosity of employers often began by saying ""*jo sach baat hay wo kehni chahye*", i.e. "Why should I lie, one should say what is true." The implication here is that one would *not* always say what is true, and indeed, there were various instances shared by interlocutors where they duped employers- especially 'nice' employers who are more gullible (or trusting, however one chooses to put it)- into providing material or other assistance that the latter would probably not have been willing to do if the interlocutor had been completely honest or truthful with them.

It is interesting to note that the connotations of terms like '*maalik*' (owner) and '*denay wala*' (provider) shift when we move from the discursive terrain of the *kothi* to that of the *basti* home. Most (non-elite) women in the Pakistan social context are explicitly told before marriage that their husbands are their '*majjazi khuda*'— literally meaning 'akin to God', making him effectively, God on Earth.[231] The husband effectively becomes the *maalik* (owner) of 'his' wife, with complete cultural and social authority to do as he pleases with his wife in body or spirit, making it very difficult for married women to resist/critique/challenge male privilege, except in the patriarchal terms that govern the relationship itself.[232] The husband also becomes (or rather, is expected to become) the '*khilaanay-kamaanay wala*' or 'the bread-earner', the closest approximation to the 'provider' status accorded to the divine (irrespective of the fact that in practice, it was often women whose earnings were the more dependable source of income for the household). Thus, while *kothi walas* could be more openly criticised in the *basti* for appropriating 'divine' status/attributes, interlocutors' pushback against the unbridled cultural authority available to their husbands/patriarchs (also constituted in religio-cultural terms) was significantly more muted, fragmented, and surreptitious, indicating that I was hearing/witnessing the 'public transcript' when it comes to gender relations, as anticipated at the outset of this chapter. While women interlocutors could make use of religious discourse to articulate a (class) critique of *kothi walas* in *basti* spaces, a similar (direct) critique of *gendered* hierarchy, subordination, and exploitation was not articulated by these subjects nearly as frequently or using the same vocabulary. Compounding the lack of space/safety for interlocutors to speak about patriarchal oppression 'onstage'- in this case, within *basti* sites- is the fact that the language of gendered hierarchy is often constituted in religio-cultural terms, i.e. through cultural norms that derive their legitimacy from religious discourse (see for example Haque, 2008).

As we have seen thus far, the frequent invocations of Allah and religion by my interlocutors reflect an agentic, strategic use of religious discourse to particular ends. Their relationship with Allah itself- as reflected in their speech- is testament to its active, reciprocal nature. The relationship with Allah is not unilateral or one of unconditional subservience; interlocutors clearly stated that

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[231] A fascinating illustration of the stark discrepancy in gendered entitlements and the terms in which they are claimed and/or challenged by both sides in a marital relationship is provided by an argument between Maria and Raheel on the subject, see Chapter 8.

[232] Legal entitlements of a husband to this effect have been a source of public debate in recent years, with progressive legislation criminalising domestic violence being challenged and overturned by the Islamic Shariat courts and the Islamic Ideology Council on the grounds that the law is 'un-Islamic'. While there is still some legal ambiguity about a woman's status and 'rights' after marriage, it is limited in its practical and discursive effects to urban middle-class domains.

they had expectations of Allah, they registered their complaints and disappointment with Him, spoke back to Him when these expectations were not met, sometimes made demands of Him, insisting that He intervene (and sometimes even reminding Him of His 'responsibilities' in this regard). While invocations of fate were sometimes used as pacifiers (to the self and others), at other times fate was invoked to release oneself from the pressure to conform to the rules and dictates of dominant classes.

Based on the materials presented thus far, religiosity/piety appears to be a claim/domain to which the poor have relatively equal access in a heavily unequal social order, providing a level playing field in which the poor *themselves* were in possession of the means to accord/deny legitimacy to others because God/religion belonged to them as much as to anyone else, unlike land, social status, or other forms of capital or resources. As previously explored, interlocutors sought recourse with the divine when social justice appeared impossible. The core concern with social justice in interlocutors' invocations of the divine is evidenced by their emphasis on egalitarianism and social justice as the core tenets of religion/piety; indeed, this was the widely held standard on which the piety of self and others (especially *kothi walas*) was judged, rather than on performative/formalistic standards. *Basti walas*' perceptions of coronavirus as a 'rich people's disease' (described earlier in the chapter) and their interpretation of the pandemic as a divinely ordained form of class justice are illustrative in this regard.

 At the interpersonal level, religious idiom was used by interlocutors to various ends, such as to express approval/disapproval of (other) individuals and/or events and establish or accord respectability. Zarina, for instance, had been criticizing her husband's inability to find a job but then praised him as "a devout Muslim, who prays five times a day," absolving her husband of *moral* culpability and qualifying her anger and disappointment with him for not living up to his role as earner/provider. Religious discourse was also used at the interpersonal level as a means of self-defence in instances where interlocutors faced social opprobrium or blame. Sometimes this was achieved by denying one's own agency (and hence culpability), invoking fate or 'God's will' instead. Maria's response to her mother-in-law, who had been on her case just weeks into her marriage for not having become pregnant yet, had been: "You are equating yourself with God ['*aap Rabb ki shareek ban rahi hain*.'] How is this my fault, isn't it God's will?"[233] (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022).

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[233] In the Pakistani cultural context, '*shirk*' (i.e., to ascribe divine qualities/attributes to oneself) is a charged allegation and using it in this instance (by referring to her mother-in-law as '*shareek*') worked effectively (even if temporarily) to shut her mother-in-law up.

At other times, religious discourse was invoked to accord legitimacy to one's actions especially when the action would not otherwise find social approval. Akmal of the G-11/4 *basti* does this when he insists to me that he did the right thing by marrying off his disabled son at the age of 14 because, according to him, it is ordained by Shariah (Islamic law) to marry off one's children as soon as they hit puberty. Akmal was also keen to emphasise that the *mussallis* (one of the two major caste groups in the G-11 *basti*, see Chapter 7) had 'weak' religious credentials, evidenced in his view by their disregard for gender segregation and their 'loose morals'. Akmal's commentary on *mussallis*' 'lax religiosity' is paradigmatic of the use of religiosity/piety as a source of social status/capital in competition with peer groups and communities.

On the level of the self, Allah was regularly invoked by interlocutors in moments of despair, confusion, crisis, anger, and/or longing; sometimes indicating resignation, and at other times, hope. Most commonly, these invocations- in particular the phrase, "*shukkar hy Rabb da*" ("Thank the Lord") denoted perseverance/determination in the face of adversity, something Gulzar Bibi was keen to point out is an attribute only of the poor and not of the rich (see her quote cited earlier in the chapter). Allah was invoked as a presence and a witness in times of emotional distress, alienation, and loneliness, particularly when interlocutors spoke of events or relational dynamics that occur in 'private' spatial/relational domains (such as the *kothi*, the home, and the marital relationship) and which cannot in everyday contexts be spoken of or challenged openly or publicly (without great cost to oneself, that is). For Zarina, it is Allah she invokes as witness when describing the difficulties of navigating the pressures of *safed-poshi* (middle-class appearances) to 'save face' in the extended family; for Maria, when her husband refuses to believe her when she refutes his allegations of sabotaging pregnancy, she takes solace in Allah's presence as witness to her *niyyat* (intentions). Examples of such invocations- particularly in situations of distress, despair, and helplessness- abound.

Invoking Allah to indicate helplessness also occurred in contexts where interlocutors were engaged in fashioning themselves as in need of help/patronage. Naseem was one such interlocutor, whose speech I found notable for being exceptionally full of references to Allah for most of the time that I knew her. (The frequency began to flag towards the end). In one instance, Naseem had just recounted how her employer had not bothered responding to her request for a loan, and went on to add: "Well, Allah is there, above; He does whatever is to be done. Just pray for me *baji* that Allah… Help me with my troubles. I will forever shower you with blessings" (Naseem, H-9 *basti*, 04-10-2021). It took me a few moments to understand that Naseem's appeal

had subtly been re-directed from Allah to me, mid-sentence. This encounter makes explicit an aspect of the otherwise implicit messaging in domestic workers' cross-class communication: namely, that appealing to Allah for help is an indirect way of seeking rich people's help by making their precarity/neediness known in ways that also preserve their dignity.

6.3. "*Hum bhi insan hain*"- "We are Human, Too"

The claim "*hum bhi insan hain*" literally means "We are human, too"; a clear indication that domestic workers are not otherwise considered human. Most often the phrase was used in offstage addresses to *kothi walas* though the phrase was also used, albeit more rarely and cautiously, with reference to incidents and relationships in the home/familial context (see Chapter 8). Though invoked less frequently than religious discourse (possibly because it does not carry similar social capital or symbolic power), this section describes how interlocutors invoked *insan*- the 'human'- to articulate a desire for and/or entitlements to inclusion, visibility, and recognition, both as *labouring* beings and as *affective* beings with the capacity to affect and be affected (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Crucially, the use of this term claims an entitlement to dignity, to be treated respectfully, and to be recognised as autonomous beings with lives, needs, and desires of their own.[234]

As discussed in Chapter 2, decolonial scholars such as Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Walter Mignolo (2015; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) have rightly been critical of the universalist, post-Enlightenment concept of 'the human', arguing that it is rooted in dichotomous thinking and crucial to the functioning of the 'colonial matrix of power' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 155). Pushing back against the "privileging [of] Greek and Latin sources" in conceptualisations of 'the human', Mignolo & Walsh (2018) cite the term/concept of '*insan*' as an example of the 'multiplicity of cosmologies' embedded in non-Western languages (p. 165). While it is true that the Urdu/Persian/Arabic languages have their own vocabularies- *insan*, *bashar*, *admi*, and other terms- to describe their particular conception of 'the human', I argue that these globally 'non-hegemonic' non-Western conceptions are no less exclusionary or oppressive in their own contexts. If anything, my interlocutors' phrase: "*hum bhi insan hain*; We are human, too" is itself indicative of the exclusionary nature of who is considered 'human' and who isn't in the Pakistani

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[234] As stated in earlier chapters, I follow Millar (2018) in understanding autonomy as a relational concept, in which subjects' aspirations for a self-authored life emphasise social *connections* rather than self-reliance and is "tightly woven into other desires-for sociality, intimacy, and relations of care" (Millar, 2018, p. 90).

context. The exclusionary/oppressive nature of the human/non-human distinction in their case is not merely a reference to the de-humanisation that my interlocutors experience as domestic workers serving elite households; it also refers to a deeper gendered exclusion embedded in everyday social relations which is reflected in the Urdu language itself: The terms '*bashar*', '*admi*', and '*insan*' are often used interchangeably for Man/Human, with the interchangeability of 'Man' and 'Human' being the most obvious illustration of the gendered exclusions embedded in these concepts. Whereas the terms '*admi*' and '*bashar*' explicitly refer to male bodies in the Urdu language, '*insan*' is implicitly male. (See Chapter 8 for a vivid illustration).

The term '*insan*' frequently came up in interlocutors' narratives when describing their de-humanisation and objectification as domestic workers, as Parveen does in the following quote:

> They earn well over three lacs (PKR 300,000) [monthly], yet they claim that paying us PKR 2,500 is too much for them. It makes me angry; they don't think that this person is human too (*ye bhi koi insan hy*) who has come to fulfill needs of their own. After all, we are human too (*akhir hum bhi insan hain*); we come to clean your home, and we clean our own homes too, *we* know what it's like [to live like this]… And then, to put up with those [employers] who are constantly standing over you and nagging at you while you work… Those types really drive me up the wall.
>
> (Parveen, Awami Basti, 22-04-2022, emphases hers)

Parveen's words make visible the instrumentality of the domestic service relationship and the stark difference in standards that apply to them and to *kothi walas*. Workers like herself are only visible as servants, whose purpose/existence is to serve [the employers], rather than as dignified workers who have needs, interests, and lives of their own. Parveen highlights the invisibility and irrelevance of the harsh everyday realities of domestic workers' lives to their employers: "*We* know what it's like to live like this" implies that *they* do not know/care. The indignity of constantly being ordered around, monitored, and surveilled while at work only adds to the de-humanisation that accompanies her objectification as a worker.

De-humanisation as an experience of 'being without feeling'; or rather, in which one is *presumed* to 'not have feelings', is illustrated by the following statement from Nazia, in which she is describing how she feels when employers give her *jhoota* (half-eaten) food and discarded items as 'gifts':

> *Hum bhi insan hain* (We are human, too); we also have a heart/feelings. When they give us [these things], *rona bhi aata hy aur ghussa bhi* (I feel like crying and I feel angry at the same time).
>
> (Nazia, G-11/4 *basti*, 06-02-2022)

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In additions to making the connection between de-humanisation and being considered devoid of feeling, Nazia's words also make visible the simultaneity of contradictory emotional responses that arise for her and other domestic workers in such moments. In practice—that is, in what appears in the public transcript—domestic workers not only accept such 'gifts', they must do so with the appropriate/expected gestures of gratitude. The obligation to appear grateful in moments that are experienced internally as demeaning gives rise to what Nazia names as 'feeling like crying' (which I paraphrase as 'wretchedness') and 'feeling angry'; the wretchedness emerging from a self-recognition/reminder of Nazia's material impoverishment and dependence on *kothi walas* (and directed inwards), and the anger stemming from the degrading actions of the 'other' (and directed outwards). Various practices of segregation/othering described in the previous chapter are experienced as similarly demeaning, and not as ordained, acceptable, or as value-neutral differences as the public transcript may seem to suggest.

For Sheila, an interlocutor from the F-7 *basti*, being human was about being compassionate. She made this connection while describing how her employer would sit her down at the dining table and talk about her life at length and cry, and how Sheila would also tear up in the process. "I told Baji, when you cry, I too… *mein vi insan aan*. I am human, too. Being affected by pain is part of being human." Here, it is not clear whether Sheila is tearing up because she is identifying with the employer's story, or if that identification has brought up pain of her own, or both. In either case, Sheila's words (and her embodied response to the employer's sadness) are another instance of the 'human' being invoked in relation to affect and being affected. Sheila's description of this relationship is also one of the rare instances in which interlocutors described emotional intimacy with employers, despite (or perhaps because of) often being providers of emotional support to their *bajis*- particularly those with unhappy or abusive marital relations (who are usually constrained by patriarchal norms from seeking legal or emotional support from peer/social networks). It is notable that Sheila's softness towards her employer is an exception, despite domestic workers' often intimate knowledge of the patriarchal abuse and gendered violence endured by their *bajis*, indicating that solidarities do not develop merely because of witnessing or awareness of violence. This lack of intimacy/affectedness of many interlocutors in relation to their employers is also notable in the context of employers' narratives about their workers being 'one of the family' (Ray & Qayum, 2009); a trope which is dismembered by the mere fact of my interlocutors' lack of affection for (and affectedness by) their employers, in addition to succinct verbal critiques of the hypocrisy that underlies this trope.

For Maria, being human implies a level of commensurability (if not equality) between herself and her superiors. This is illustrated by one of Maria's spats with her *baji* (described below) that took place the evening after the employers and their two small children, along with Maria, had returned back (to the employers' home in Islamabad) very late in the night, having made a nine-hour car journey back from the *baji's* hometown. Maria was exhausted, having had to care for both children throughout the journey and also afterwards, in addition to packing and unpacking the family's belongings and cooking for them upon arrival in the middle of the night. The next day, soon after her *baji* returned from work, the two of them got into an argument, as had become a regular feature in that period:

> [Maria's *baji*]: 'I leave at 7am, I return home at 7pm, *kya mein insan nahin hun*? Am I not human?'
>
> [Maria]: '*Kya mein insan nahin hun?* Am I not human, who works from 7am till 3am in the night? You at least got some sleep after we got back—what about me? Actually, you know what, you're right. It's only you people who are human; how can I be human? If I were human, I would be affected [by the exhaustion]; but since I'm not, what difference would it make to me?"
>
> (Maria, Islamabad, 16-08-2021)

As expressed so powerfully by Maria, to be human is to be affected, and to be considered capable of being affected. Maria invokes the human here to produce a scathing, sarcastic rejoinder to her *baji*, who is pleading her own case for being considered human. Maria's rejoinder is intended to hurt and provoke (which it did, according to Maria's later descriptions of the *baji's* angry response). Here and below, Maria also strategically draws on progressive ideals of equality and social justice that she knows the employers subscribe to as part of their self-fashioning (particularly in their relations with me). Pushing back against the *baji's* decision to disallow her from possessing a phone, Maria invokes the 'human' to claim equality in the standards being applied to her and to her *baji* as workers. Maria narrates this exchange thus:

> I said [to *baji*]: 'You go to the office every day, do you just leave aside all your work and just talk on the phone all day? Just like you have a job, I too have a job, don't I?' She said to me: 'You're competing with me.' I told her, 'No, I'm not competing, I'm just talking.' [Maria turns to me] An *insan* (person/human) who works a job shouldn't need to have this explained to them, because they know that just like I have to work, others have to work too, irrespective of whether it is a *barri* (big/prestigious) job or a *choti* (small/ordinary) one. My job is far from '*choti*' (small/insignificant); it is a very long and *barri* (important) duty…
>
> (Maria, Islamabad, 16-08-2021)

Maria's manoeuvres in this relatively brief exchange are multiple, complex, and sharp. She can be seen invoking the human to establish equality between herself and her *baji* as workers, and to claim an entitlement to the same standards and expectations that apply to her *baji* as a worker. The *baji's* response is telling: She accuses Maria of 'competing' with her— *"Meray sath muqabla kar rahi ho? Are you competing with me?"*— which Maria *is* doing but denies. By equating her status as a worker with that of her employer's, Maria made their entitlements comparable, which in turn made the *baji's* decision to disallow Maria a phone appear unjust, discriminatory, and illegitimate. After deriding the *baji* for 'needing to have these things explained to her' despite her 'high' status, Maria challenges her own devaluation as a domestic worker by affirming domestic service as a '*barri duty*' (a big/important job); a term otherwise used only with reference to the dominant. Maria's claim that she is 'not competing' and 'only talking' with her *baji* is an act of a strategic self-fashioning as a 'good', i.e. non-confrontational 'subordinate', prefiguring and deterring against potential allegations of 'inappropriate behaviour'.

My observations of the relationship between Maria and her *baji* (both of whom I had independent relationships with) made evident that de-humanisation often becomes mutual and is reciprocated by both dominant and subordinate, coloniser and colonised as shown by Fanon (1963). Maria's accounts of her employer (to me) made evident that Maria did not see the latter as capable of feeling or of understanding—at the same time that Maria was fully aware of her *baji's* emotional vulnerabilities and would use them (in moments of anger/desperation) to mock her (behind her back) and also goad her (in direct encounters) into actions that the latter would later regret. The irony here is that Maria's biggest source of pain in that relationship was her *baji's* lack of empathy and compassion for her, which Maria herself had very little of for her employer.

It is clear from the above exchange and previous instances cited in this chapter that the invocation of the human by my interlocutors is connected fundamentally to dignity and catalysed by recollections/experiences of *in*dignity. Such experiences occur in my interlocutors lives not only as domestic workers, but also as *katchi abadi* dwellers faced with violent, arbitrary evictions, and as women/wives in the 'private' domain of their home/family lives as explored in subsequent chapters. While it is impossible to know how frequently such moments arise- moments of anger, of rage, of a desire to react/respond in kind to experiences and perpetrators of indignity- what can be said with certainty is that anger does emerge, by my interlocutors' own (sometimes contradictory) admissions, and often despite themselves. Interlocutors' narratives amply

illustrate the significant effort and struggle required to contain, repress and/or redirect the anger that emerges within, certainly to contain it from spilling over 'onstage' (Scott, 1990, pp. 37-41).

Finally, these narratives underscore the need for *recognition* that underlies interlocutors' invocations of '*insan*'. As observed by Fanon about the Black Antillean subject:

> The Martinicans... want to be recognised in their quest for manhood. They want to make an appearance. […] Each one of them is an isolated, sterile, salient atom with sharply defined rotes of passage; each one of them *is*. Each one of them wants to *be*, to *emerge*…The former slave wants to *make* himself recognised, not simply 'be recognised' without conflict, by the White Master.
>
> <div align="center">(Fanon, 1952/1967, pp. 212-3, 217, emphases in original)</div>

This quote aptly describes what I see/hear in many of the narratives that appear in this chapter: a desire to go beyond what is, to *become*, to matter, to be valued and recognised, and for interlocutors like Maria, to *make oneself recognised* rather than just 'be recognised' without conflict. These deeply vulnerable and often heavily concealed/protected aspects of my interlocutors' selves- which I am honoured to have been given access to and which I approach with a deep sense of tenderness and responsibility- are carefully explored further in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

Operationalising the theorisation of subaltern political subjectivation developed in Chapter 2, this chapter explores interlocutors' invocations of *ghareeb* (poor), *Allah* (God), and *insan* (the human), exploring how, when, and to what ends these conceptual vocabularies are deployed and the implications of these deployments for my understanding of their political subjectivities. It illustrates that these vocabularies are distinct from one another in the social/symbolic capital and meanings they carry and are therefore used differently by interlocutors to speak about and challenge different forms of domination. Common to each of these vocabularies is their deployment as a means to critique the dominant classes and emphasise/reframe class distinction in their own terms, serving as a vehicle for expressing discontent with the everyday injustices, inequalities, and indignities they experience, especially in class terms.

While mostly 'offstage' (and occasionally 'onstage') invocations of Allah and *insan* serve as means of openly expressing class anger, defiance, and of challenging the dominant, other more subtle and less confrontational invocations of these vocabularies seek to defang the effects of

subordination by de-emphasising the role, effects, and hence power of *kothi walas*. In demonstrating the range of strategies deployed by subaltern subjects through the versatile use of these conceptual vocabularies, this chapter expands the range of 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1987), adding to the arsenal displayed by these subjects in the previous chapter.

The deployments of these vocabularies further corroborate E. P. Thompson's (1986, 1978) conceptualisation of class as experience, illustrating the ways in which domestic workers' everyday lives within and beyond the *kothi* form the basis of class identity, in which they come "to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways" (Thompson, 1987b, p. 106) and the ways in which the experience of class distinction "gives a coloration to culture, to values, and to thought" (Thompson, 1987b, p. 98). At the same time, this chapter extends Thompson's concept of 'class consciousness' by showing that class identity, anger, and critique are often expressed in non-class terms and emphasises the ways in which experiences of class distinction "are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms" (Thompson, 1968/1972, p. 9).

This is most notable with respect to interlocutors' complex, frequent, and multi-dimensional deployments of religious discourse, which, as argued in Chapter 2, do not conform to a religious/secular binary or centre around the performance of piety, as much of the Pakistan-based scholarship on women's agency appears to suggest. Rather than functioning as a *substitute for* class critique, I argue that deployments of religious discourse serve as a *form of* class critique. I understand the frequent use of religious idiom to critique employers as explained by the fact that religious critique offers relative social safety, cultural acceptability, and greater potency compared to class critique, as it is rooted in a historical context in which religious discourse is the Achilles' heel of Pakistan's dominant classes. Moreover, religious discourse/critique is the only form of social capital available to the low-caste working-class *basti* communities to which domestic workers belong. These deployments are aided by the conceptual space provided by religious discourse where (at least in principle) everyone is equal as a believer, whereas there is no such presumption of equality in the language of class.

Exploring the tension (discussed in Chapter 2) between 'acceptance/incorporation' and 'rejection/autonomisation' of the relations of domination in subaltern political subjectivation (Modonesi, 2014, p.34), this chapter investigates the apparently contradictory use of religious discourse to justify as well as challenge class inequality, arguing for a distinction between

interlocutors' acceptance of 'things as they are'- which is needed for their material survival- and an acceptance of 'things as they should be', the latter of which is absent from interlocutors' justifications for class inequality.

The chapter notes the relative silences around critiques of gendered power in the deployment of interlocutors' conceptual vocabularies and the constraints imposed by the site of the *basti* to the expression of gendered disaffection. In doing so, it critiques the single-axis understanding of domination that underlies James Scott's (1990) concepts of public and hidden transcripts (which appears to be concerned exclusively with class domination rather than understanding domination as intersectional or co-constitutive) and demonstrates the complexity of speaking to/about multiple forms of domination from a particular site/location. While continuing to take up the concepts of public and hidden transcripts and consider them valuable to understanding relations of domination and subaltern political subjectivity, this chapter makes clear the need to be attentive to the complex and co-constitutive nature of domination (for gendered subaltern subjects in particular). It also raises questions about whether there are in fact multiple 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts corresponding to different 'types' of domination (such as class, caste, gender) and how these transcripts, and the subjects and the subjectivities they produce, interact with, and inform one another.

From the 'hidden transcripts' shared in this chapter, it appears to me that the everyday itself contains possibilities for a rupture in the perceptions, acceptability, and hence continuity of the exploitative relationships that constitute the social order. To clarify, the potential that I see is not in the 'objective conditions' of my interlocutors' lives. Rather, it is in the available sites and mechanisms available to these subjects to make sense of, share, and process their experiences (embedded within these 'objective conditions') differently that I see potential for the emergence of alternative/radical political subjectivities and actions. This claim is supported not only by my field observations of group discussions and of *basti* women's participation in AWP protests (see Chapter 7) but also by studies of various cultural festivals that serve as sites/moments for the expression of class anger (Scott, 1990, pp. 185-7). Without getting into the debate about whether such avenues serve to maintain rather than overthrow systems of domination (see Scott, 1990, pp. 185-7; Guha, 1986, p. 36), the point I wish to make is that these alternative sites- which are collective/communal sites- give expression to otherwise 'inexpressible' or unexpressed claims, demands, and slogans.

Finally, the chapter takes up interlocutors' deployments of the term '*insan*'- the human- and shows how the term was invoked to articulate a desire for and/or entitlements to inclusion, visibility, and recognition, both as dignified *labouring* beings and as *affective* beings with the capacity to affect and be affected. In doing so, interlocutors' deployments of '*insan*' extend affect theorists conceptions of the 'human' (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), challenge decolonial scepticism of universals (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) by showing these deployments to be important to subaltern claim-making, and call into question decolonial romanticism associated with 'non Western conceptions' by making visible- and also challenging- the deep class and gendered exclusions embedded in the use of the term '*insan*' in my interlocutors' everyday social contexts.

The next chapter shifts the exploration of domestic workers' political subjectivation to starkly different terrain: *basti* demolitions, forced evictions, and collective action. It tracks how both the everyday threat of forced eviction- and its violent materialisation- shape the political subjectivities of Islamabad's *basti walas* and explores the subjectivating impacts of organised collective action in the wake of these evictions.

Chapter 7

Demolitions as 'Everyday': Forced Evictions, Collective Action, and Political Subjectivation in Islamabad's *Katchi Abadis*

> We have built these *kothis* [mansions] with our hands, from their massive infrastructure down to the finest detail. What do they [the owners] have by way of a claim? Just stamped pieces of paper. And yet, everything is theirs. Has the thought ever crossed their minds that those who build others' homes may not have homes of their own? Let alone having a home; we aren't even allowed to set up a *jhuggi* [tent] for ourselves in this city.
>
> (Akmal, G-11/4 *basti*, 25-11-2021)

On Wednesday, 27 October 2021, the Capital Development Authority (CDA)—the bureaucratic behemoth which runs the affairs of the capital city, Islamabad—began an operation to demolish the G-11/4 *basti*,[235] having arrived unannounced at the settlement two days earlier and issued verbal orders to those present that the *basti walas* must "vacate the state's land immediately".[236] At the time of demolition, this settlement was tucked into a green belt in the heart of Islamabad's (now posh) residential G-11/4 sector and surrounded by *kothis* and apartment buildings. The G-11/4 *basti* comprised of approximately 105-110 *jhuggis*: tent-like, makeshift homes made with wooden poles, pieces of old carpet, discarded panaflex sheets, sticks, and various scrap materials. The residents lived without any civic amenities whatsoever, with the exception of a tap installed for them by a sympathetic *kothi wala*. The men of the *basti* were- no, they *are*- construction workers. The women are domestic workers in the *kothis* of the G-11/4 sector. The *basti* may have been demolished but the *basti walas*- the people of the *basti*- still exist.[237]

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[235] The terms '*katchi abadi*' and '*basti*' and their deployments in this thesis have been discussed in Chapter 1 (see footnotes 15 and 16). However, my use of the term '*basti*' rather than '*katchi abadi*' to refer to the G-11/4 settlement requires additional qualification. While the prefix '*katchi*' implies that something is 'impermanent', 'raw', 'unfinished' and/or 'insecure', the current socio-legal assumptions undergirding the use of the term '*katchi abadi*' connote concrete, 'built-up settlements of immovable/permanent dwellings which are '*katchi*'- i.e. impermanent, unfinished, and insecure- only in the legal sense, since residents do not bear legal title to the land they live on. In contrast, the G-11/4 *basti* is an impermanent squatter settlement comprised of *jhuggis*: movable, impermanent, tent-like constructions, usually made with mud or wood (in this case, the latter). It is in fact the demolition of the G-11/4 *basti* that revealed these assumptions and prompted the AWP legal team to distinguish the G-11/4 *basti* from the rest of Islamabad's '*katchi abadis*' in the process of seeking legal redressal, even though the *basti* residents themselves would often refer to their settlement as a *katchi abadi*.

[236] This exchange was recorded on video by one of the *basti walas*. See: https://twitter.com/alia_amirali/status/1453687140152451076

[237] With the intention of maintaining connection with the realities I am writing about, I prefer to use local terms wherever it is possible to do so without interrupting the flow for myself or my readers. I will henceforth refer to the G-11/4 *basti* community interchangeably as the 'G-11/4 *walas*', the 'G-11 *walas*', or simply as the '*basti walas*' where it is obvious that I am referring to the people of G-11/4 *basti*. Moreover, it should be noted that G-11/4 is a formal residential sub-sector of Islamabad within which the G-11/4 *basti* is not officially recognised. Since this thesis is concerned with the G-11/4 *basti* and its people rather than with the sector, all

As noted at the outset of this study, part-time domestic workers work in their employers' *kothis* but themselves live in *bastis* or *katchi abadis* (as they are more formally called), informal residential settlements on state land where the residents do not bear legal title to the land and often live in highly impoverished conditions. Apart from a handful of exceptions, Islamabad's *katchi abadis* are classified as illegal 'encroachments' by the CDA. Their status as 'encroachments' opens the *katchi abadis* to a constant threat of demolition and forced eviction. While not the first of its kind, one such demolition took place six months into my fieldwork- that of the G-11/4 *basti* (which I henceforth refer to as the 'G-11 *basti*'). Prior to this demolition, I had also been a close witness to the spectacularly violent demolition of the I-11 *katchi abadi* in 2015, one of Islamabad's oldest and largest *katchi abadis*, with which I had worked closely as an AWP worker for some years prior to its demolition.[238]

This chapter explores how the political subjectivities of Islamabad's domestic workers are shaped by their experiences of forced eviction and *basti* demolitions, and how these subjectivities both shape and are shaped by their participation in collective political action on the issue of forced evictions. It begins by exploring the range of material and subjective effects, affects, and meanings associated with the demolition of the G-11 *basti* for its inhabitants, with a focus on their gendered claim-makings and practical strategies. Understanding the demolition as a prism through which their concepts of entitlement, belonging, community, and class are refracted, it explores how the demolition impacted these *basti walas'* perceptions of and relationships with *kothi walas*, how they articulated their entitlements in the wake of the demolitions, and how the demolition impacted the community's internal social relations.

As stated in Chapter 1, I understand the G-11 *basti walas*, particularly the women of this community, as political subjects who are otherwise marginal, exploited, and unequal—'surplus' even—and who are either absent from or appear only as bodies (rather than actors) in mainstream political mobilisations and discourses. In light of their subaltern status, this chapter engages carefully and deeply with these subjects' views on and experiences of political action in the aftermath of the G-11 *basti* demolition. After describing the demolition itself, the chapter proceeds to explore two instances of collective mobilisation, one spontaneous and the other planned, by the G-11 *basti walas* together with the AWP in the wake of the demolition. To guide

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references to 'the G-11/4 community' or 'G-11/4 *walas*' should be understood to mean the people of the G-11/4 *basti*, unless otherwise stated.

[238] https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/560005-state-turns-tyrant-katchi-abadi-islamabad. See also: https://tribune.com.pk/article/28848/the-end-of-afghan-*basti*-it-was-all-that-they-had

this exploration, the chapter asks: Did the event of demolition and the G-11 *basti walas*' subsequent participation in collective protests shift something in their imagination of themselves as political subjects? What were the motivations of other *basti walas* motivations for joining these protests and what meanings did they ascribe to their participation? How do Islamabad's *basti walas*- the women in particular- understand their relationship with the AWP, an 'ally' organisation comprised of people of *kothi wala* class backgrounds? How do patriarchal and class/patronage-based considerations and compulsions shape *basti* women's choices to participate in the AWP's activities? Do social norms and prohibitions in relation to women's participation in public and political life "constrain in advance the kinds of objects that can and do appear within the horizon of desire" for my interlocutors? (Butler, 2000, p. 149, cited in Thiem, 2008, p. 44).

7.1. The G-11 *basti* demolition

Unlike my history of prior relationship with I-11 *basti* residents, my contact with the G-11 *basti* began with the demolition itself. I was approached (in the capacity of an AWP worker) one day before the start of the operation by Ms. T- a teacher and mentor to the G-11 *basti* children who had become a trusted ally of the G-11 *basti walas* over the years[239]- for support if the CDA followed through on its threat of demolition (which it did). When the CDA arrived at the *basti* with police and bulldozers the next day, an AWP team arrived at the site shortly thereafter and maintained a presence at the site for the week-long period of the demolition. In addition to maintaining a physical presence at the site during this period, the AWP team (myself included) was involved in (off-site) lobbying efforts, running social media campaigns, and seeking legal advice to assess the feasibility of attempting a legal intervention, all with the aim to stop- or at least pause- the operation.

The G-11 *basti* was much more than just a conglomerate of housing units inhabited by anonymous individuals; it was/is a community with a complex social composition, a unique history, and particular social relations that continued to inform their individual and collective decisions even after the *basti's* demolition. Some of the G-11 *basti walas* were related through blood/kinship ties,

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[239] Hailing from an affluent background herself, Ms. T set up an open-air/mobile school in the G-11 *basti* in 2014 where she taught and mentored the *basti* children daily and continued to do so even after the *basti's* demolition. In addition to the deeply intimate relationships she developed with the *basti's* children over the years, she maintained close, trusting relationships with each of the G-11 families and intensified her involvement with the community in the post-demolition phase.

others were linked through caste affiliation; yet others were connected only through their experience of living together in the *basti* and through the shared class realities that had brought them together in the first place. The *basti* had a number of kin-based segments within it, distinguished by area/district of origin within the central Punjab region. The largest segments were those from Khushab, Sargodha, and Sialkot, with fewer families from Layyah, Faisalabad, and Chiniot. Most of the *basti walas* were (themselves or descendants of) former brick-kiln workers and construction workers who moved to Islamabad from their villages in search of livelihood; some more recently, others up to two generations earlier. The *basti* was home to two major caste groups: '*Oudh Rajpoot*' and '*Mussalli*' (also known as 'Muslim Sheikh').[240] Having moved numerous times from one patch of land to another over the course of their childhood, the now-adult members of these communities settled on a thickly vegetated green belt in the G-11/4 sector in the year 2005, slowly attracting more residents over time.[241]

The G-11/4 sector was significantly less populated (and less posh) when the *basti* was first established. Over time, the *basti* found itself in the heart of a residential neighborhood, surrounded by paved roads and formally mapped streets lined with *kothis* and apartment buildings. Meanwhile, the *basti* itself continued to be tucked discreetly into the vegetation that naturally populated the green belt. Despite being demolished by the CDA a number of times in the interim, the *basti* would be rebuilt every time at the same site (and hence 'remained') until its apparently 'final' demolition in the operation described below.

When the CDA enforcement crew arrived with bulldozers on the first day of the operation, *basti* residents tried to negotiate directly with the CDA crew to give them a few days to find an alternate location. The crew refused to negotiate with the residents, saying they had strict orders to get the job done and that they had already forewarned the *basti* residents.[242] Ms. T was already at the site when the CDA arrived. When the residents' attempts to negotiate failed, she told the CDA crew that their actions were illegal and must stop.[243] An AWP team arrived at the *basti* in this time and

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[240] One of the leaders of the *mussalli* community in the G-11 *basti* introduced his caste name in a community meeting as "Muslim Sheikh, or you could say, *mussalli*", clarifying that they use the terms interchangeably. I also read this phrasing as his intention not to 'hide' the fact that they are *mussallis*, a term that is often used in derogatory fashion in common parlance.

[241] Group interviews with G-11 *basti* residents, on 25-11-2021 and 04-12-2021 (both in AWP lawyers' office in G-10), and on 10 January 2022 at the resettled site opposite Street 21, F-11/2, Islamabad.

[242] Group discussion between G-11 residents and AWP legal team in the AWP lawyers' office, G-10/1, Islamabad, 25-11-2021.

[243] Ms. T based her claim on the fact that the CDA had not produced a written order or given formal/written notice to the *basti* residents. She also told the CDA crew that they were acting in violation of the 2015

entered into a heated argument with the CDA crew. Despite repeated requests from Ms. T and the AWP team, the CDA crew refused to produce a written order, reveal the name or details of the officer(s) who had issued the order, or pause the operation.

When the AWP team engaged the CDA crew in argument, the *basti walas* initially gathered around the engaged parties. After some time passed without any resolution, they began dismantling their homes and gathering their belongings. Some hours later, the bulldozer began its work, but demolished only a handful of structures by the end of the day. Upon departing the scene, the CDA crew leader (familiar to the *basti* residents by face but known to them only as 'the CDA *wala*', i.e. 'the CDA guy') announced that the site must be cleared out by morning, failing which the remaining homes would be demolished and the remains taken away (so that they cannot rebuild, anywhere).[244] That night, the *basti walas* put their *jhuggis* back up, made their fires and their dinner, and went to sleep.

The next day, the CDA came again, in greater numbers, and began bulldozing whichever structures were standing and accessible from the main road. People went about dismantling their homes, removing their belongings, and piling them up in heaps on the side of the road, apparently in preparation to transport them elsewhere. As night fell and the CDA left, they put their *jhuggis* back up, lit up their fires, prepared dinner and went about their nightly routine.

This cat and mouse play between the CDA and the *basti walas* continued for three to four days. During the day, people would take down their shelters and go about gathering and sorting their belongings, pretending to be making preparations to leave. Children frolicked around the demolition site, the boys climbing onto bulldozers, regularly invoking the ire of the CDA crew. Little girls played with their broken dolls in the midst of the rubble, older ones were concerned about where to take their pet rabbits. As night fell, the CDA would leave, and *basti walas* would go about setting up for the night. When the weekend came around, one of the families in the *basti* checked with their 'insider' (a relative) in the CDA to confirm that the operation would pause over the weekend, which it did.[245]

Supreme Court judgement which had placed a moratorium on all *katchi abadi* evictions without resettlement (Conversation with Ms. T., 27-10-2021). These claims had no impact on the CDA crew.

[244] CDA crew members can be heard speaking in the video tagged in the following tweet: https://twitter.com/alia_amirali/status/1453687140152451076

[245] While I was initially surprised to discover that the *basti walas* had 'insiders' in the CDA, it soon became clear that these are simply contacts by virtue of being relatives, not powerful 'insiders'. While these insiders are sometimes able to provide otherwise inaccessible information (such as when the enforcement crew is expected to be on holiday or when a particular *afsar* (officer) is in his office or not)- to the extent that the

When the CDA crew returned the following week, they became more impatient and aggressive with every successive day. They started arriving in greater numbers, tearing down people's partially-standing shelters with their hands, kicking at the *basti walas*' belongings, using the bulldozer to dig holes in the ground where their homes had stood, so that they would not be able to rebuild in the same spots. The CDA crew was accompanied every time by a (usually male-only) police contingent, the purpose of which was to ensure that the operation is conducted 'smoothly'—i.e. *"kisi ki jaan-o-maal ka nuqsaan na ho"*, "without loss of life or damage to property"— according to the policeman I spoke with at the site, who appeared oblivious to the irony that the *basti walas'* homes were being not just damaged but *demolished* under his watch. When asked by me if he thought this action was unjust, the policeman shrugged: "We're just doing our job. If you love these people so much, go convince those who ordered the operation to retract the order." As the policeman's response makes clear, compliance with orders 'from above' is what matters most (particularly for those situated at the lower rungs of the bureaucracy), rather than notions of 'justice' (Hull, 2012).

Some days into the operation, the *basti walas* also began to get tired, having to dismantle and then reassemble their *jhuggis* every day, the latter of which took an average of 2.5 to 3 hours every evening. The men, mostly daily-wage construction workers, were having to clock up absences from work every day since the operation began, for fear that the CDA and police would do something untoward while they were at work. Ms. T told me privately that the men were getting increasingly frustrated with the women for not agreeing to leave.[246] All along it had been the women who had insisted on staying, who had been the most mobilised segment resisting the eviction. As repression increased with each day, the men began to give way. They tried to convince the womenfolk to relocate. The women were adamant on staying, only changing their mind when they were certain that they had no choice but to leave.[247]

Unlike the men who had to take absences from work, the women continued to go to work in the *kothis* even during the operation. "*Chutti kon deta hy?*"— "Who gives time off work?"— was a common refrain I heard from the *basti* women both during and after the demolition. During the operation, when they would hear news (at work) that the CDA had arrived, they would finish up their immediate task and quickly return to the *basti*, informing their employers that they had to

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information is available to them- they are powerless to stop or change the orders themselves. Neither can they afford not to comply with the orders.

[246] Conversation with Ms. T at the G-11/4 *basti* site, 29-10-2021.

[247] Consultation/community meeting between AWP and G-11/4 *basti walas* at the *basti* site, 28-10-2021.

leave early because the CDA had come to evict them. Some *kothi walas* were sympathetic when they heard, others indifferent, but none tried to intervene, with the exception of Mr. S, a *kothi wala* who tried lobbying his political contacts to have the operation stopped and later used his real estate networks to help find the *basti walas* a place to relocate. (Mr. S was the one who had installed the sole water tap in the *basti*). Saba, who worked for an old lady in one of the nearby *kothis*, told me that her employer was very concerned to know about the demolition; she would cook for Saba's entire family (of seven) and bring food over to them at the *basti* every evening during the operation, and promised Saba a bundle of warm clothes and shoes in a few days' time.[248] The three ladies—Sadia's 'friends' from the nearby flats (who were normally daily visitors to Sadia's corner of the *basti*)—also came by from time to time to check in on Sadia, and offer food and the space/facilities of their apartments to Sadia's family and relatives, an offer which Sadia occasionally took up.[249]

However, such relations of care and support with surrounding *kothi walas* were exceptions rather than the rule. In a group conversation with the G-11 women at the *basti* site three days into the operation, when I asked if their employers were aware of the ongoing demolition, Asiya said to me: "*Kothi walas don't care. They say, if the basti is being demolished, what can we do about it?*" The woman next to her (whose name I do not know) added: "*They just want their work done. And it has got to be done exactly to their liking, every time.*" After the *basti* was demolished, Zaitoon asked her employers for a raise, as she was now having to pay for transport to and from work. The employers refused.[250] However, Zubeida (also from the same *basti*) did not seem disappointed in her employers for not intervening. "*Well, what could they have done? Nobody can do anything in front of the CDA.*"[251]

Throughout the operation, I recall noticing and admiring the apparent calm and resolve in the *basti* women's demeanour, which was accompanied by plenty of anger and indignation. It was as if they were used to these happenings and they'd see this one through as well, but not without giving the CDA a piece of their mind (which they would do regularly, the older women in particular, swearing obscenities at the CDA crew for harassing the poor and vulnerable). I felt these women knew what they were doing, and this generated both confusion and hopefulness in me: confusion

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[248] Field notes from visit to original G-11/4 *basti* site, 22-11-2021.
[249] ibid.
[250] Group interview with G-11/4 *basti* residents in AWP lawyers' office, 04-12-2021.
[251] Visit to relocated *basti* site in Mehrabadi, opposite Street 21, F-11/2, 26-11-2021.

with regards to deciding how interventionist the AWP needed to be at this juncture, and hopefulness that these women would be able to lead us all out of this mess.

My field notes describe a scene from 29 October, three days into the operation:

> It was around dusk. A *basti* woman was carrying a *charpayi* out of one of the *kothis* across the street and bringing it back to the *basti*. Behind her came another one, and then a third. It felt victorious to see this; to see that they had outwitted the CDA, to know that they had a strategy in place already, to witness them come back and reclaim their space even as they were being violently evicted from it. The resilience: taking down their shelters during the day, then putting them back up at night. Storing stuff away—in their employers' homes no less—during the day, retrieving their belongings at night. They knew so much more than we (the 'organisers') did about what to do in that situation.
>
> (Field notes, 07-11-2021)

Despite my hopes, the *basti* did fall, eight days into the operation. While the majority of the *basti walas* relocated to different locations in the Mehrabadi area, a handful of families- mostly women-headed households (using their status as widows and/or single women to demand exceptional treatment)- chose to remain (in dispersed but proximate locations) at the original site. Apparently, some of them were 'allowed' to remain temporarily because they had 'connections' in the CDA and police,[252] while others simply refused to leave or returned to the site a month later. One of those who remained was Zameera, a widowed woman in her 50s, and a full-time live-out domestic worker in a *kothi* close to the *basti* site. In a conversation with me at the AWP lawyers' office a month after the demolition, she said:

> The CDA *walas* come every day. [When they come] I tell them to give me one lakh rupees so that I can hand that asshole [the loan-shark] his money and be done with it… And if they can't do that, they should fuck off and leave me be so I can earn that myself. I am not leaving this place, you can do what you like. I am not leaving.[253]
>
> (Zameera, AWP lawyers' office, G-10/1, 04-12-2021)

Sadia and her family were also still at the original site till the time of writing. As with Zameera, the CDA had come a number of times to pick up her *jhuggi*, but Sadia told them off every time. Sadia shared this with me when I made a trip to the *basti* site a few days after one of CDA's numerous attempts to evict her. As I approached the *basti*, Sadia came up to me, beaming, telling me that

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[252] Conversations with Ms. T, 12-11-2021 and 04-01-2022.

[253] Gauging from Zameera and Sadia's modes of self-fashioning and self-expression, swearing publicly appears to be a preserve of elderly and single/widowed women in the *basti*. However, it is important to note that even adult/elderly women's inhabitations of propriety vary significantly both within the *basti* and across *bastis*.

she had been 'badtameez' (rude/ill-mannered/disrespectful) with the CDA crew when they came earlier that morning. Initially lamenting that she would often have to hold back from being *badtameez* with the CDA crew because she has stuff lying around that they could take away or damage, she proudly reported having laid into them that morning because there had been a stillbirth in one of the *jhuggis* the night before, which Sadia (and others, including Ms. T) attributed to the CDA operation. "They left without saying a word," she said smugly. Sadia's next phrase (reproduced below) stayed with me until many days later for its defiance and resolve: "*We know we have to go, but we're not leaving like this*. Next time the CDA comes, I'll be properly *badtameez* [rude] with them" (Sadia, G-11 *basti*, 17-11-2021, emphasis mine).

7.2. The Reconfiguration of Community

Even though most G-11/4 *basti walas* relocated to Mehrabadi after the CDA operation, they- particularly the women- retained their connection with the original site. Most of the women continued to work at the same *kothis* where they worked before the operation, and so they would continue to encounter the site every day. Men would also continue coming to the G-11 *markaz* (commercial centre) to wash cars, sell wares, or wait in their usual spot by the roadside for daily-wage/casual work. Many of the G-11/4 *walas-* both men and women- would stop by at the site on their way to or from work, exchanging news with those who remain at the site, sometimes snoozing in the afternoon winter sun before heading back to Mehrabadi. Community gatherings called by Ms. T for distribution of relief goods and AWP meetings with the G-11/4 *walas* continued to happen at the original *basti* site as well, which Ms. T, in consultation with the *basti walas*, decided is the most convenient location to gather everyone even after the *basti's* demolition*.

Many of the adult women said they missed the convenience of living at the original site: work was close, the G-11 *markaz* was close so one could pop over to the shops whenever needed, and it wasn't as cold there (the surrounding flats and *kothis* protected them from the wind, unlike at the relocated site, which is a wide expanse of uninhabited land, allowing the wind to rip through their *jhuggis*). The *basti walas* felt secure at the original site, unlike in Mehrabadi where initially many of the families refused to go because they considered it a place that is drug- and crime- infested and unsafe for women. However, when the CDA's relentless operation made it unfeasible to continue at the original site, the *basti walas* reluctantly moved to Mehrabadi, as that was the only feasible option in terms of affordability and location/proximity to their livelihoods.

Though a large majority of the G-11/4 *basti walas* who moved to the Mehrabadi area had initially expressed a desire to relocate together, the community splintered into five to six different clusters immediately after the demolition. The two largest clusters (called St. 18 and St. 21 respectively)[254] were in close proximity to each other, while the remaining ones were within one or two kilometres' radius at most. While the splinters do not map neatly onto lines of caste or home region/district, it appears that some fault lines within the community did widen with the demolition. Akmal, who now lives at the St. 21 site, shared with me during a gathering at the original *basti* site that he thinks the *mussallis* are too loud, and that their concept of *purdah* is rather lax.

> Ever since we've moved to Mehrabadi, they [the *mussallis*] have been having visitors from all over Mehrabadi come into their settlement. They pass right through as if there's no such thing as *sharram hayya* (honour) … we (Oudh) are people who will go somewhere only if there is a reason to do so; otherwise we keep to ourselves and mind our own business. We are not ones to go around disturbing others or spoiling anyone's *purdah* (modesty/seclusion).
>
> (Akmal, relocated G-11 *basti*, 22-11-2021)

Apart from one other time when I was reminded (in a slightly disparaging tone) by an Oudh woman that 'they' (i.e. the *mussallis*) had failed to follow through on their promise of showing up to meetings with the AWP lawyer, I did not find caste identity to be a regularly occurring theme in *basti walas'* conversations with me or in their daily affairs. When I asked Sameera (who had also moved to the St. 21 site) about whether caste identity had played a role in how/where the *basti walas* had chosen to resettle, Sameera suggested that space was a greater issue than caste. At the present location where Sameera and approximately 20 other households had settled, the landlord had apparently told them that no more space was available in this particular plot.[255] Pointing to another patch of land adjacent to hers, she said that that one was available, and she had told other G-11 *walas* to come check it out. While Sameera said she would like for everyone to live together again, she added, *"We [Oudh] have never fought with anyone all these years. They [mussallis] fight amongst themselves a lot."*

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[254] These clusters are named after the street numbers of the planned F-11/2 sector across the road from them, since the street numbers are the easiest ways to identify/locate them. The settlements themselves are located in sector G-12, on open empty patches of land that have been left undeveloped because of the sector's 'disputed' status.

[255] Visit to relocated site at St. 21, F-11/2 on 09-01-2022.

It seems then that while 'othering' along caste lines may have intensified within the G-11 community after the *basti's* demolition, this reconfigured but not dissolve the concept of community amongst them. Regular field visits to the original and relocated sites showed that the G-11 *walas* – women in particular- continue to maintain contact with one another (mainly through their regular visits to the original site as described earlier in this section), exchange news of each other's well-being and support one another in times of need. It stood out for me that one of the first things that women at the St. 21 cluster shared with me during one of my field visits to their *basti* was news of the CDA having attacked the *jhuggis* of those still living at the original site (with whom they do not share kin or caste affiliation). Some of the women from the St. 21 settlement went over to the original site after the CDA's attack to help them rebuild their *jhuggis*. However, when one of the households living at the original site expressed a desire to move to the St. 21 settlement, it was not met with approval from the St. 21 cluster residents who claimed that those persons were 'troublemakers' and life was more peaceful without them.[256]

The above details illustrate the complex ways in which community was reconfigured in the post-demolition phase. The St. 21 *walas'* rejection of particular individuals/households cannot be understood simply as a function of caste, as the St. 21 settlement is itself primarily but not exclusively Oudh and apparently the *mussalli* households in the St. 21 cluster were also not keen on having those individuals move into their settlement.[257] For Ms. T, who was intimately engaged with and assisting all 'clusters', the *basti walas'* choices of where to settle and who to settle with were significantly informed by 'how well they get along', rather than purely or even primarily along caste or regional lines.[258] However, some weeks into the relocation phase, there was an increasingly shared realisation- across clusters and across gender, caste, and regional lines- that living together in one *basti* offered them all the collective benefit of social and material security, especially with regards to caring for children, the elderly, and other vulnerable family members, and also with respect to remaining safe from theft and other forms of crime.

7.3. The Double-Edged Sword of Visibility and Invisibility

As noted in earlier chapters, the *katchi abadi*s and their residents are simultaneously visible and invisible in discourses of power, both within the state and civil society. In fact, they reap the worst

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[256] Field notes, 07-01-2022.
[257] Conversation with Ms. T, 10-01-2022.
[258] In-person meeting with Ms. T, F-7 *markaz*, 18-01-2022.

of both visibility and invisibility. The invisibility of the G-11/4 *katchi abadi* and its residents is exemplified by an exchange between me and the office staff of the CDA's Director Planning, which took place in the CDA Headquarters on the second day of the operation.[259] Below is an excerpt of the exchange:

> 'It's an emergency', I said to the Director's Personal Assistant (P.A.). 3-4 other staff members were also present in the P.A.'s room.
> 'What's the emergency?' asked the P.A.
> 'The CDA is bulldozing people's homes!' I said.
> 'Oh! Where?'
> 'In G-11/4. Their homes aren't even concrete structures; they are *jhuggis*. These people had nothing to begin with; and now the little they have is also being taken away from them.'
> 'Oh,' said the PA, with a sigh of relief. 'I thought you meant they were bulldozing homes.'
> 'I did mean that, yes. These *are* people's homes.'
> 'I meant, I thought you were talking about something happening in one of the sectors.'
> 'This *is* happening in one of the sectors,' I repeated.
> An uneasy silence ensued.
>
> <div align="right">(Field notes, 9-11-2021)</div>

To paraphrase the P.A.'s views: *Jhuggis* are not homes. *Basti walas* are not people. The G-11/4 *basti* is not part of the G-11/4 sector. The *basti* and its residents are invisible in bureaucratic as well as hegemonic middle-class civil society discourses pertaining to 'citizens'. Moreover, the G-11 *basti* 'doesn't count' even as a *katchi abadi*, as the CDA Director who had ordered the demolitions told me on the phone some hours after the above-quoted conversation with his staff. He did not bother explaining how or why the G-11 *basti* 'doesn't count' as a *katchi abadi* despite being commensurate with the legal definition of a *katchi abadi*,[260] or why this settlement is not in CDA's 'list', nor did he acknowledge (even after I pointed out to him) that the CDA's list of *katchi abadis* has not been updated since 1995, which is CDA's cut-off date for the recognition of *katchi abadis* in Islamabad.[261]

During the demolition of the I-11 *katchi abadi* in 2015, the discourse of '*Islamabad ke shehri*' (citizens of Islamabad) was invoked to explicitly exclude the claims of *katchi abadi* dwellers to their

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[259] As an AWP worker engaged with the effort to resist the G-11/4 *basti* demolition, I made several trips to the CDA headquarters during the first few days of the operation to lobby the CDA's higher officials to stop the operation. I ceased these attempts after my exchange with the CDA Director, described shortly hereafter in the main text.

[260] http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/385.html

[261] Public notice issued by the CDA's Katchi Abadi Cell on 26-07-2019. It can be viewed here.

right to housing (S. S. Malik, 2017). In fact, the pretext for the demolition was that '*Islamabad ke shehri*' were being deprived of their hard-earned plots by '*qabza groups*' (land grabbers) comprised of 'outsiders' (i.e. people from 'other' ethnic groups and regions) who use poverty as a cover for their 'malicious designs' (Hashmi, 2015). Contrary to popular myths about the 'real motivations' of *katchi abadi* dwellers being to grab land, neither the I-11 or the G-11 *basti walas* claimed ownership of the land they settled on. The only 'right' claimed by the G-11 *basti walas* was to be allowed to use empty/unused plots of land to settle on temporarily, until the land needs to be utilised for some other purpose.[262]

With *katchi abadi* dwellers being one of the most caricatured social groups in 'common sense' discourses circulating within state and civil society discourses, I should not have been taken aback when a senior staff member of the Human Rights Cell at the Islamabad High Court- with whom we (members of the AWP's legal team) were meeting to discuss the filing of a petition seeking redressal for the G-11 operation affectees no less—referred to the former I-11 *basti* residents as 'Afghans', 'terrorists', 'thieves' and 'bandits' and to the G-11 *basti* residents as 'people who move around anyway' and 'who may have returned to their villages because that's where they belong'. Imran, a G-11 *basti* resident, described the words of the CDA *walas* who were demolishing his *basti* as being similar in content:

> The CDA told us, just leave this place. Go back. If you've come from Sargodha, go back to Sargodha... But we are also Pakistani *shehri* (citizens) after all. Our kids are also from here; we're not foreigners, are we? When the Prime Minister announced the housing scheme for the poor, we went to NADRA and registered ourselves there, we paid 250 rupees for it. But that's just a dream now. Three years have passed since then. Not only did we not get anything [from the state], they've demolished our *jhuggis* now also.
>
> (Imran, AWP lawyers' office, 04-12-2021)

In the above quote, Imran is making a clear and simple claim: to be considered a 'citizen'; one who has an entitlement to live in the city of Islamabad like any other citizen. As with Akmal, also a G-11 *basti* resident cited earlier in the chapter, Imran is not claiming the right to own or even reside permanently on any particular piece of land. He is simply claiming the right to *live* in the city- even if it is in a *jhuggi* that he will make for himself in highly impoverished conditions, without access

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[262] Conversation with Akmal, G-11/4 *basti* resident, AWP lawyer's office, 25-11-2021.

even to basic services or expecting any form of facilitation from the state. Zameera, also a G-11/4 *basti* resident, echoes these views in the following quote:

> I brought my daughters with me to this city when they were very little. I worked in people's *kothis*, washed dishes, swept floors, *cleaned people's bathrooms* (emphasis hers), that is how I raised my daughters. The least Imran Khan or one of these *badshahs* (kings/rulers) could do is to let us put up our own *jhuggis* to live in. But we aren't even entitled to that?

> (Interview with Zameera, AWP lawyers' office, 04-12-2021)

The discussion so far makes clear that most of Islamabad's *basti walas* may formally be Pakistani citizens (where 'citizenship' is evidenced by the possession of a Computerized National Identity Card, or CNIC), but they are not '*Islamabad k shehri*' or 'citizens/residents of Islamabad' in the discursive or technical sense.[263] Due to bureaucratic procedures governing how 'proof of residence' is established, most *katchi abadi* residents struggle to have their current/temporary address (which is printed on the back of the CNIC) reflect their residence in Islamabad. This in turn confirms their status as 'non-locals' and strips them of the right to claim housing, schooling, and all basic forms of service provision in the city, and not least, makes them ineligible for job opportunities restricted to those who qualify as 'locals'.[264] Up until 2012 when the preparation of electoral rolls became digitised (Bokhari & M. Khan, 2012), one of the few instances in which *katchi abadi* dwellers became visible to the state was when national elections rolled around, at which point major political parties would use their connections in the bureaucracy to get *katchi abadi* dwellers' votes transferred into their constituencies while leaving the residency status on their CNICs unchanged. However, as the case of the demolished I-11 *katchi abadi* confirms, the fact that the I-11 *basti* residents were registered voters in Islamabad (and even listed as 'I-11 *basti* residents' in the electoral rolls) since as far back as 1985 was not sufficient evidence that they 'belong' to the city.[265]

The impacts of the invisibility of *katchi abadis* and their residents is compounded by the particular conditions under which they become visible. As described earlier, the G-11/4 *basti* had remained

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[263] It is interesting to note that the Urdu term for citizen is '*shehri*', which is derived from the word '*shehr*' (city) and literally means 'city-dweller'. These etymological connections reflect the social reality that the 'rights-bearing citizen' is in practice a reference only to a privileged class of 'city dwellers' who get to claim 'local' status, whereas the city's working-classes remain marked as non-local 'rural migrants', irrespective of their historical relationships with the city and their indispensability to its everyday functioning.

[264] This is illustrated by the CDA job advertisement issued in November 2021 which required applicants to prove that they are 'locals' of Islamabad. These jobs were a much sought-after form of employment for many of my interlocutors, most of whom failed to meet the requirements because of their non-resident status.

[265] https://tribune.com.pk/article/28848/the-end-of-afghan-basti-it-was-all-that-they-had

in respectful co-existence with its natural and human environment, tucked away inside a green belt in the G-11/4 sector. While the *basti*'s presence was contained and discreet, it was never concealed from the *kothi walas* in the area. Indeed, the domestic workers servicing the G-11/4 sub-sector were mostly the residents of this *basti*, a fact that was known to the employers. While there appears to have been a tacit acceptance of the *basti*'s existence on the part of the *kothi walas* generally (and in a few cases as mentioned previously, relationships of care and support for the *basti walas* by the latter), the *kothi walas*' acceptance was also tenuous, in some cases reluctant and even bitter. This is true for *kothi walas* across the city, who periodically complain to the CDA and/or the police to remove these 'eyesores' from the neighborhood, complaining about the *basti walas*' lack of hygiene and 'unlawful activity' (see also Moatasim, 2023). As examples of 'responsive and participatory governance', the CDA takes swift notice of such complaints, particularly since the launch of the 'Prime Minister's Online Citizens Portal' in 2013 which 'citizens' can use to lodge complaints to the city administration in all major urban centres of the country.[266] This portal has made some *katchi abadis*- particularly the smaller ones tucked away in empty plots, along sewage lines, and in green belts of residential sectors- suddenly and unevenly 'visible' to the administration. The CDA's previous operation to demolish the G-11 *basti* in 2019 was ordered in response to a complaint made on the Citizens Portal about the *basti* and its residents.[267] On 30 September 2021, the CDA demolished animal shelters in the I-10/1 *basti* on the complaint of a neighbouring *kothi wala*.[268] The CDA's Environment Wing took up the complaint, issuing a written order stating that *basti* residents were indulging in 'unlawful activity' by keeping cows and buffaloes (which is one of the main sources of livelihood for the I-10 *basti* residents, as they sell fresh milk to the nearby *kothis*).

According to Omar, an I-10/1 *basti* resident:

> The online portal works in favour of the *kothi walas* and *ameer log* [rich people]; we can't even access the portal because we're not literate. They [*kothi walas*] use the portal to complain about us with the smallest things. This portal has made life hell for us.
>
> (Omar, I-10/1 *basti*, 02-12-2021)

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[266] See: https://citizenportal.gov.pk/
[267] https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/working-for-the-wealthy-islamabads-poor-struggle-to-live/
[268] This was confirmed by a CDA official who I spoke with after the I-10 *basti* residents had received notices from his office ordering them to remove the shelters.

As space/land in the city's residential sectors becomes more scarce, expensive, and densely populated, the visibility of these *basti*s- if/when 'seen' by the city administration and/or *kothi walas*- increasingly poses a threat to the *basti*s' existence.[269] As Akmal, one of the G-11/4 residents, said in a discussion with me and the AWP lawyer:

> We used to live in that patch around the corner of this road, in G-10/1. They told us we had to leave, they said they needed the land, so we left. Since then, we've moved numerous times, but that plot is still as it was when we left it. Earlier, when we had to move, at least we could find some place to move to in the same vicinity; now these *ameer log* [rich people] haven't left any space.
>
> (Akmal, G-11/4 *basti* resident, AWP lawyers office, 25-11-2021)

The visibility- and subsequently heightened vulnerability- of *katchi abadi*s is not only a consequence of online platforms like the Citizens Portal. Even prior to the Citizens' Portal, CDA would periodically conduct operations to demolish 'illegal constructions' both in the recognised and 'illegal' *katchi abadis*, as I know through my organising work. Whether acting on written complaints lodged by *kothi walas*, or on the pretext of following court orders, or using its magisterial powers to enforce compliance with the city's master plan, the CDA continues to launch 'anti-encroachment drives' from time to time to 'reclaim state land', even as they auction it off (often before 'reclaiming' it) to private real estate developers and housing authorities (Akhtar & Rashid, 2021).[270]

As stated earlier, the CDA had in the past conducted a number of operations to demolish the G-11 *basti*— from the G-11 site as well as from other sites where this community had settled previously. However, in the past, the status quo had been an explicit (even if informal) agreement between the CDA crew and *basti* residents that the *basti* would be demolished, pictures of the 'cleared' area taken to satisfy the bosses, and then the *basti walas* would quietly return, in graded fashion, to the same site and resettle there with the CDA ground staff and junior officials turning

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[269] According to zameen.com, one of Pakistan's major online real estate portals, land prices for residential plots in Islamabad presently range from PKR 1 lakh (100,000) to 40.5 lakh for 5 *marla* plots (i.e. 125 square yards, the smallest formal plot size available) and between PKR 3.5 lakh and PKR 85 lakh for 10 *marla* plots (250 square yards). This is well out of reach for the average domestic worker's household (Javed, 2024), where average monthly expenditures regularly exceed the household's monthly income (Faisal & Zuberi, 2023). See also the section on '*majboori*' in Chapter 5.

[270] This happened in the case of the I-11 *katchi abadi*, for which the land was auctioned off while residents were still living there and had been there for more than a decade before the CDA unilaterally decided to hand over the land to a housing authority.

a blind eye to the resettlement in return for bribes.[271] This status quo, though not ideal, was acceptable to the *basti walas;* at least there was a sense of security that they would be able to return to the site.[272] For me this explained the calm that some of the *basti* residents exhibited when the operation began. However, as the operation proceeded, the *basti walas* began to sense that something was different this time. The CDA had never come like this before, for so many days in a row, and with such ferocity. Till the time of writing, many of the G-11 *walas* continue to wonder: Is it final this time?

The G-11 *basti* was not the only one that faced the threat of demolition during the fieldwork period. Two months after the G-11 demolition, it came to the AWP's notice that the H-9 *katchi abadi*—one of the largest but 'illegal' (and hence formally 'invisible') Christian *katchi abadis* in the city—had been slated for eviction to make way for the construction of the '10th Avenue', yet another multi-lane highway proposed to further 'develop' Islamabad's road infrastructure. As per the views of a CDA town planner, who pulled out a map of Islamabad's 'master plan' in his office as evidence that the *basti walas* are "illegally occupying the right of way of the 10th Avenue," the 10th Avenue clearly has 'rights' that *basti walas* don't.[273] In the section that follows, I explore the responses of the H-9 *basti walas* to the threat of eviction (which did not materialise at the time), which exhibit parallels as well as contrasts with the experiences and subjectivities of the G-11 *basti* residents.

7.4. Actual versus Imminent Evictions: The Case of the H-9 *basti*

In contrast to the G-11 *basti* demolition, in which the AWP was informed about the demolition by *basti walas* themselves, the initial news of CDA's plans to evict/demolish the H-9 *basti* was 'discovered' by the AWP through one of its members who came across the CDA's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report regarding the 10th Avenue project. This report clearly stated that the H-9 *basti* is located in the 'right of way' of the 10th Avenue project, that it was an 'illegal encroachment', and that it would be 'removed'- without resettlement- to clear the way for the road project (Zeeruk International Pvt. Ltd., 2021, pp. 30, 72, 83–84). This report and its contents,

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[271] This information was corroborated by many G-11/4 *basti walas* in numerous instances recorded in fieldnotes over the course of fieldwork. See also the work of Hull (2010, 2012), Moatasim (2023), and Naqvi (2022) on institutionalised informality within Islamabad's state institutions and processes, within which bribes are a common feature.

[272] Group discussion with G-11/4 *basti walas* at the original *basti* site, 21-11-2021.

[273] Interview with a CDA town planner at the CDA Headquarters, Islamabad, 11-01-2022. The interviewee's name has been withheld in line with their request for anonymity.

shared by AWP members in a series of public corner meetings in the H-9 *basti*, initially engendered alarm amongst *basti walas*, many of whom expressed their willingness to follow a collective plan of action to resist. As the news spread in the *basti*, some *basti* leaders began dismissing the threat as 'fake' and declared it to be an 'outsiders agenda' aimed at 'serving their own interests'. These leaders soon became hostile to the AWP's efforts to mobilise H-9 residents around the issue, disrupting corner meetings in the *basti* and warning the residents against participating in these meetings.[274]

An interesting moment came to pass during one of these *basti* meetings, in which an AWP representative began speaking about the experience of the (former) I-11 *basti*. At this point, a group of men in the back started shouting, "Do not compare them with us!" One of these men (a local leader from the *basti*) went on to make a speech in which he referred to the I-11 *basti* as '*Afghanon ki basti*' (i.e. a *basti* of Afghans rather than Pakistanis), fully reproducing the (false) state propaganda that the I-11 *basti walas* were 'criminals', 'terrorists' and 'Afghans'. In contrast to the I-11 'Afghans', he asserted, "There is no one more Pakistani than 'us' (i.e. Christians/H-9 residents)." The *basti* leader continued:

> We know how to fight. If you strike us, we will strike you back. If there is no space for us here [on this land], there is no space for us anywhere in Pakistan. Just try and evict us from here, and you'll see. Do you think we are '*ghair mulki*' (foreigners)?

> (Field notes, 20-03-2022)

The H-9 leader's discourse here clearly resonates with the G-11 *basti walas*' claims to 'Pakistaniat'-'being Pakistani'- and similarly rejects the label of being 'foreigners' or 'outsiders'. Explanations for the H-9 *basti* leaders' hostility towards the AWP are more complex. I understand the H-9 leaders' hostility to be an expression of mistrust (rooted in painful histories of violent marginalisation and exclusion) and fear of being politically marginalised in their own *basti*; that too, by privileged Muslim outsiders who they considered to be their political 'competitors'. I also

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[274] Field notes from H-9 *basti* visit, 20-03-2022. The rationale presented by these leaders for opposing AWP's intervention was that if there had been an actual threat to the *basti*, the CDA would have given the *basti walas* formal notice. This rationale persisted in their narratives despite the AWP's attempts to explain that its concerns stemmed from the history of Islamabad's *basti* evictions (which have rarely, if ever, been accompanied by written notices, and which I am confident that the *basti walas* are well aware of themselves) and the clear wordings used in the EIA report explicitly stating that the CDA had no liability to engage with the H-9 *basti* community in the process of 'removing the encroachment' (Zeeruk International Pvt. Ltd., 2021 p.72). Why they continued to insist on this particular rationale despite historical, documentary, and experiential evidence to the contrary, is analysed in following paragraphs.

understand the *basti walas'* reluctance to publicly 'take sides' with the AWP as a reflection of their desire not to ruffle feathers internally (which would be much more costly for them than upsetting or rejecting the AWP). However, I also sensed a deeper ambivalence (distinct from mistrust or hostility that were more pronounced in the leaders' reactions) amongst H-9 residents in relation to the threat of eviction itself. Being presented with visual as well as textual evidence of the project design and the CDA's intentions to evict the *basti* sometimes elicited disbelief and a reluctance to accept this information (and by extension, the possibility of eviction) as true or real. As some *basti walas* themselves said, 'We'll believe it when the bulldozers show up'. I understand this ambivalence/reluctance as signalling a deep sense of powerlessness in these subjects- and the news of possible eviction as a frightening reminder to them of this powerlessness- leading them to deny/dismiss the possibility of eviction even (or perhaps particularly) when it had become 'real'/imminent.

As with the case of the G-11 *basti*, the H-9 *basti walas'* responses in this situation were notably gendered. Women in the *basti* had been amongst the most receptive and vocal participants in the initial round of AWP meetings, when the news of the 10th Avenue project had just begun to circulate. Their numbers and their levels of participation dwindled (as did those of the men) when tensions emerged between the *basti* leaders and the AWP. A number of women, however, approached me and other AWP members privately after these meetings, some of them visibly upset about the *basti* leaders' aggressive and disruptive behaviour, telling us not to be 'disheartened' and pleading with us to continue working for the *basti*. During these meetings themselves, when tensions arose, they responded both to the *basti* leaders' (especially when the latter invoked religion) and also clapped for the speeches of AWP representatives (unlike the *basti* men, who were more guarded and circumspect). Despite being discouraged from further mobilisation on the 10th Avenue issue (particularly in the *basti* itself), a number of women (and some men) from the *basti* chose to attend CDA's public hearing on the 10th Avenue project some weeks later, which many of them described later (also to fellow *basti walas*) as an 'eye opener', having finally heard CDA's eviction plans "from the horse's mouth itself."[275]

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[275] Protest actions by the AWP and the H-9 *basti walas* at (and after) this public hearing resulted in the formation of a committee within the CDA to look into the matter, which put off the evictions but not the project itself. Till the time of writing, the construction of the highway has continued apace, no plans have been announced for either evicting, relocating, and/or compensating the H-9 *basti* residents. The committee constituted by the CDA to 'resolve the issue' has long since ceased to function.

One of my individual encounters with Naseem (from the H-9 *basti*) about the G-11 *basti* demolition is also revealing of *basti walas*' subjectivities (as well as my own) in the context of forced evictions. (Naseem was one of my primary interlocutors from the H-9 *basti*, with whom I had worked prior to the news of the 10th Avenue project). I had just finished telling Naseem about the G-11 evictions in some detail, when she asked: "*Tho, baji, colony ka masla hull ho gya*?" "So, has the colony's problem been solved?" She was talking about the H-9 *basti* (where she lives), asking if it had been regularised yet. (I checked with her if this is what she meant, in part because I was incredulous that she had changed the subject so suddenly). In that moment, I found her question jarring and judged it to be illogical and irrelevant. I thought to myself: *I've just been telling her that hundreds of basti walas' lives and homes have been destroyed, and she has not a word to say in response? Not even a word in support or sympathy for these people who are just like her?*

In retrospect, I understand that her question *was* her response. She had responded by connecting the G-11 incident to her own vulnerability, wanting to know or gauge if such things could transpire in the H-9 *basti* where she lives. It later made sense to me that she went on to ask if she should sell her H-9 house and buy a place near Taramari Chowk, where she had heard that one can buy a home with a registry, proper papers, and all. In retrospect, I also understand her question to be illustrating her disconnect from, and perhaps disbelief in, collective action- that is, in autonomous collective action on the part of *basti* residents themselves, as a means to make change. Naseem's suggestion that I, an outsider to the H-9 *basti*, could know without her or other residents' knowledge that "H-9's issues had been resolved", assumes that the residents themselves have no part in the solution. This assumption is by no means unusual or unique to Naseem; rather, it is an illustration of the 'politics of common sense' in which solutions (to H-9's issues and all others) come 'from above'. Naseem's initial question now appeared to me also as an expression of powerlessness in the face of the coercive state apparatus and the whims and interests of the upper classes.

7.5. The Meanings of Political Action

Prior to their encounter with the AWP, the G-11 *basti walas* were both disconnected from and sceptical of organised politics. The women in particular said they had never participated in organised political activity (except for voting, in some cases) or worked together with a political

party before.[276] A similar orientation could be found across my field sites and Islamabad's *bastis* more broadly, albeit with some differences in the older, state-recognised *bastis* which have larger concentrations of Islamabad-registered voters and where major political parties show up just before the national elections, albeit just once every four years.[277]

In this section, I use two instances of collective public mobilisation that took place after the G-11/4 demolitions to explore how *basti walas* generally and primary interlocutors in particular, related to these mobilisations. The first mobilisation discussed here is an impromptu rally that took place at the site of the G-11/4 *basti* on 2 November 2021, six days into the operation and the day before the *basti* finally fell. The second is a planned public protest called by the AWP on 7 November 2021 at Aabpara Chowk (one of the city's main commercial centres) against price hikes and their impact on the city's working poor, and to call attention to the *katchi abadi* demolitions happening alongside.

The Last Hoorah

> I had just left the *basti* and was walking into my university office in an attempt to sit down and write amidst the chaos when the news came in. They had arrested all of the party members who were there at the time, except for one who had escaped. By the time I arrived at the scene, they had been released, and the *basti walas* were all gathered around them, extremely charged, doing *naara-baazi* [sloganeering], celebrating their victory at having retrieved all our people. Yes, there was now an 'us', it was remarkable to see.
>
> (Field notes, G-11 *basti*, 09-11-2021)

By the time I joined the fray, the crowd had decided to march around the block, shouting slogans of "*azadi*" (freedom!), "*chatt humara haq hy*" (housing is our right!), "*ghar banana dehshatgardi nahin, ghar giraana dehshatgardi hy!*" (Building homes is not terrorism, Demolishing homes is terrorism!), "*jab tak jannta tang rahay gi, jang rahay gi*" (Until people's suffering continues, the struggle will continue!). As this energetic, spontaneous rally

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[276] Field notes from conversation with G-11 *basti* women during a *basti* visit, 01-10-2022.

[277] In the larger and more established *bastis*, a number of local (male) leaders act as brokers between political parties and *basti* voters during national elections or when political parties need to mobilise numbers for a 'show of strength'. These relationships are largely instrumental, sporadic, transactional, and distant and there is little expectation from *basti walas* (particularly those who do not constitute an electoral constituency) that any of these parties will come to their assistance when they are in trouble with the CDA. In *basti* discourse, the major political parties are jokingly called '*mosammi parinday*'- 'seasonal butterflies/insects'- who appear only during 'election season' and then disappear for four years.

of *basti walas*- mostly women, children, and youth- moved through the streets of G-11/4, some *kothi walas* came out to see what's going on, while others peered through their windows. Yet others may have been listening inside their homes- women in particular, for whom it would not be culturally appropriate to come out into the street or even onto their balcony when there is an impromptu public gathering or activity.

It struck me how gendered this impromptu rally had been. None of the men with 'head of household' status were there. This could have been because the men of these communities are generally weary of confrontation with power, given their relatively heightened vulnerability compared with women of their communities.[278] The men could also have been away from the *basti* site at the time, either at work or investigating relocation options. Or, perhaps, they were sceptical of the AWP, given their mistrust of political parties in general (which is something the women shared also).[279] Joining the rally at its tail, I was struck by the gendered contrast between the 'respectable' *kothi wali* on the one hand who was performing feminine 'modesty' by remaining hidden behind '*chador* and *char-dewari*' (i.e. 'behind the veil and the four walls of the home') and on the other hand was the irreverent, loud, aggressive *basti* woman occupying public space, open to the public gaze and swearing loudly, frequently, and fearlessly.[280] As my field note entry describes:

> The women in particular were extremely charged. Zameera was waving her fist in the air, swearing at the CDA and police (who had left the scene): '*Teri maa ki kuss!*' [you cunt!]. I soon learned that it was the *basti* women who had surrounded the cars in which the party workers were being held, demanding for them to be released. '*Saaday banday wapas kar, kanjar deya puttara!*' they shouted. '*Ye saadi maddad wastay aye ne, teri majjal kewaain hoi k unna te hath daalo?*' [Give our people back, you sons of a whore! They came to our help, how dare you lay a hand on them?]
>
> (Field notes, G-11 *basti*, 09-11-2021)

When I learned that it was the *basti* women who had secured the release of my comrades, I was deeply moved and excited. The *basti* women's ownership of AWP workers as 'their people', their

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[278] Interview with former G-11 resident Nur Bano at the relocated *basti* site opposite St. 21, F-11/2, Islamabad, 10-01-2022.

[279] Conversations with G-11 *walas* at the relocated site in Mehrabadi, in front of St. 21, F-11/2, on 09-01-2022 and 16-01-2022.

[280] However, as noted in Chapter 4, norms of feminine modesty and seclusion are inflected not just by class but also by ethnicity, caste, and religious identity. Indeed, Gulzar Bibi's reference to norms of feminine modesty and the sanctity of the *chador* and *char-dewari* in her speech at AWP's 7 November rally (discussed shortly in the main text) are testament to differences in gender relations and ideology across ethno-cultural lines.

conviction that they would not tolerate the police messing about with 'their people', and their clarity of thought and action—they had surrounded the cars in which AWP workers were being held and demanded their release—all this shifted something for me. It felt to me in that moment, that this is exactly what political struggle strives to achieve: a shift in identification, an expansion of the 'us', of the collective and of what is common; and organic, courageous, self-organised action which moves beyond 'othering', sees itself as part of a whole, and acts in the service of the whole.

Something appeared to have shifted for the *basti walas* too. They had raised slogans they had never raised or heard before.[281] They had marched through the streets of the G-11/4 sector for the first time, laying claim to their existence, to their right to exist in the city-space. They marched for the first time since the *basti* had been established (at that particular site, that is), past the gates and under the windows of the *kothis* lining the streets. They had marched once before, when they were being evicted in 2005 from the space opposite the G-11 *markaz*. However, this was the first time they were joined by a political party or indeed any organisational entity.[282]

The euphoria persisted even after the rally returned to the *basti* (though some young men were keen to continue the protest and take it onto the main road, but the suggestion did not find traction amongst the larger group, including AWP organisers). Speeches followed. Stories of the 'encounter' with the CDA were recounted gleefully and at length in the *basti* that evening, featuring characters from the AWP such as 'Jimmy the hero' (the student who had outrun the police) and the '*ainak wala larka*' (the boy with glasses) whose mouth started bleeding after a policeman punched him in the face.

I continued to ponder this sudden convergence between 'us' (AWP organisers) and 'them' (the *basti walas*), just six days into our acquaintanceship. The words the *basti* women had used: "*sadday banday wapas kar*"—give us back *our people*—was (and continues to be) received by me as a gift, a small victory in the face of the powerlessness I/we had experienced in earlier days. I understand the emergence of a shared identity— a 'we', rather than as allied but separate entities (as we had been both before and after this encounter)—to be linked to a shared-risk context. This was an encounter in which the AWP workers were physically threatened in the process of countering the CDA, and the *basti walas*- women and children in particular- had witnessed the scene of the AWP workers being rounded up which may also played have a role in generating this

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[281] Conversations with G-11 *basti* residents after the aforementioned rally.
[282] Interview with Sameera, G-11 resident, at the relocated *basti* site opposite St. 21, F-11/2, 10-01-2022.

new, temporary, but I believe nevertheless significant convergence between the *basti walas* and the AWP.

The 7 November protest

Some weeks before the G-11 demolition, the AWP had announced its intentions to organise a protest rally in response to the government's decision to sharply increase food and petrol prices. In consultation with the G-11 *basti walas*, the theme of the protest expanded to include the G-11 demolition, and the protest was scheduled for 7 November. During the mobilisations for this rally, I made a number of visits to all of the *basti*s (and more) that are the field sites for this study. Around 250 *basti* residents (half of them women) from different *katchi abadis* turned up to the rally, which was a sizeable number by the AWP's standards. *Basti* residents were joined by party workers (largely from middle-class backgrounds) and students, pushing the numbers close to 600. The rally passed through and around the outskirts of the marketplace, drawing the attention of a large number of bystanders due to its charged slogans, its unusually diverse social composition, and the fact that it was led by a woman (me). By the AWP's standards, it was a successful rally in terms of turnout and impact, including press coverage the next day.

More than a dozen G-11/4 *basti walas*—mostly women and young men— joined the 7 November rally, including Ms. T with four or five of her students who had been insisting for days beforehand that they wanted to participate[283] and came bearing placards reproducing some of the AWP slogans they had raised at the 2 November protest in their locality, such as "Housing is Our Right" and "Building Homes is not Terrorism, Bulldozing Homes is Terrorism". Their numbers were greater than I had expected, given that the CDA's operation had only just ended and the *basti walas* were still busy with relocation issues. Men's participation remained relatively low, possibly due to fear of being arrested, (a threat that is less acute for women for cultural reasons).

In follow-up conversations with the G-11 *walas* after the protest, I learned that this was their first collective, purposeful participation in a planned public mobilisation organised by a political party. It was also the first time that their issues as a community had been taken up at an organised protest which was attended by a large number of other *basti walas* and middle-class folks who expressed solidarity with their cause. The rally participants and a thick crowd of bystanders listened to me introduce the G-11 *basti* and narrate the events of the demolition. There was

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[283] Phone conversation with Ms. T, 06-11-2021.

cheering from the crowd as I invited one of the young men from G-11 *basti* to come forward and speak at the mike. The young man eventually made his way to the front after some coaxing from his companions and spoke hesitatingly. "Imran Khan, *humein insaaf chahiye*," he said repeatedly into the mike. *We want justice.*

Ms. T told me that on their way back from the rally, the G-11 *walas*—the children in particular— were bouncing up and down in the vehicle, repeating the slogans being chanted in the rally, and super excited. A few of the G-11 residents had made videos of the rally and showed them to those who had not attended. One of the *basti*'s young men found videos of the protest on AWP's Facebook page (which he tracked down despite not being formally literate). The videos were then shared with other smartphone users in the *basti* and with their wider networks online. When Ms. T went to teach children the next day, they were still bubbling with excitement about the rally, eager to recount everything they had seen and heard (including the new slogans they had encountered, which they had already rehearsed enough times to commit to memory), and to ask when the next rally would be?[284]

The excitement was not restricted just to the children or the G-11 *walas*. "*Maza aya!* It was fun!" was a common response I received from *basti walas*- especially women- about the rally afterwards. Given how rare it is to see young single women from working-class backgrounds participate in public protests, I was particularly intrigued by the group of young women from Farash Town who were amongst the most eager and energetic participants both in the (pre-event) mobilisation meeting in Farash Town and then at the rally itself. At the rally, they participated vociferously in the sloganeering and came bearing creative props that they had made especially for the protest. The slogans we raised together decried soaring prices of everyday items, named the hypocrisy of the country's rulers, invoked citizens' rights to housing, education, and basic services, and called for unity and togetherness amongst all shades of the oppressed. One of the most popular slogans was "*azadi*" (freedom)- articulated (through a long series of verses) as economic, social, and political freedom, invoking a variety of identities (workers, *katchi abadi* dwellers, women, youth, religious minorities, and oppressed nations) to unite in the struggle to end capitalist-patriarchal exploitation. Though the slogans centred on economic justice, they also articulated a vision of gender justice- notably by the irreverent act of claiming *azadi* (freedom) as (also) women's freedom. ('*Azad aurat*' translates literally to 'free/liberated woman' and translates

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[284] Phone correspondence with Ms. T, 09-11-2021.

socially to 'loose woman'). That the slogans were led by a woman appeared to shift the space into one that enabled a form of expression that is almost never allowed in other spaces. The space to be angry, to shout, to speak truth to power, to be irreverent, and to do it together with other women, in the presence of men, without being admonished or intimidated, but rather being *celebrated*, was a novel experience for many of the women present. These mobilisations became unique spaces for catharsis, for enjoyment, for recognition, for fun, and for togetherness, for both 'organisers' and 'organised'.

As my adrenaline levels slowly reduced after the rally, that evening was the first since the G-11 demolition that I had experienced calm and something akin to peace. The silence (and silencing) integral to the violence of the G-11 demolitions had finally been broken. As I note in my field notes after the rally:

> The animation on their faces, the strength of the slogans they raised, our collective participation in the act of insisting upon the recognition, the visibility, the public acknowledgment, and collective holding of what was done to them... I trust, I hope, that this experience will seed future bonds of love, and create a ray of hope in the midst of what is otherwise a very bleak reality.
>
> (Field notes, 09-11-2021)

I use the final sections of this chapter to reflect on how norms of patronage inflect *basti walas'* relations with the AWP, despite the latter's attempts to 'do politics differently'. In this regard, I share below my exchanges with Hira, an interlocutor from the Awami Basti, who had attempted to mobilise other *basti walas* (from her own *basti* and surrounding *jhuggi* settlements) for the 7 November protest, but was disappointed with the turnout from her *basti*:

> Right when it was time to leave, people changed their mind. At 3:00pm when I went to gather them so we could leave, some started saying 'what's the point of going, what are we going to get out it'? Others said, 'there will be police', 'we'll get beaten up', 'it could turn violent'... I was a bit disappointed to hear them say these things... I told them that I'll bring back a video from the protest to show you what it's really like.
>
> (Hira, voice note, 10-11-2021)

The above quote cites some of the common perceptions about the utility (or lack thereof) of political action that exist not just amongst *basti walas* but pervades the 'common sense' of most people. Major political parties- especially those in government- pay people cash, offer food, and/or use a variety of subtle to overtly coercive measures to ensure numbers at their

events, including rallies.[285] It is in this environment that a few hundred *basti walas* chose to come to the AWP protest without receiving any material 'benefits' for doing so.[286] The possibility of state repression is also not to be discounted as a deterrent, particularly for working-class/lower-caste men. The question then is not why the others did not come, but rather why those who came chose to do so.

In Hira's description of her attempts to mobilise the *basti* folks in her area, I was intrigued by the rationales she had presented to the *basti walas* for why they should come:

> Look, all this is for your benefit... If inflation is a problem, its everyone's problem, not just for me or for the Party. We are all affected, so let's all go... And it won't just be *hum log* (us) there, *parhay likhay log* [educated people] will also be there... There's plenty of *ameer log* [rich people] associated with our Party who are *achhay log* [good people]. It's not like it's just us *ghareeb* [poor people] who are there, we are not the only ones they mobilise. You should come check it out!
>
> (Hira, voice note, 10-11-2021)

I understand Hira's words above as a reflection of how she herself relates to the AWP's politics, an (one) articulation of why she was choosing to join the protest. When I hear Hira say 'they (rich/AWP folks) are good people', I understand her to mean that they are 'good' *because* they are rich *and yet* they don't get poor people to do what they themselves are unwilling to do, as is the norm. And when Hira says, 'It's not just people like us- i.e. poor people- who will be at the protest,' I think this signifies for Hira the egalitarian ethos of the Party; that it's not either the poor or the rich who will be there, it will be both, together. The fact that the Party creates spaces where people across class divides march together, chant together, in a shared space with a shared purpose, appears important to Hira's ownership of the Party.

I also found Hira's invitation to other *basti walas* to 'check out' the protest and the AWP ('*zarra check kejiye ga*') intriguing. Usually a phrase like this would be used by a salesperson trying to interest a potential customer, and would rarely be used in mainstream political/mobilisational discourses or by an upper/middle-class political organiser like myself. There is also a suggestiveness of difference here; that what Hira is inviting the *basti walas* into is something new,

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[285] https://www.dawn.com/news/1686723/the-hidden-economy-of-political-rallies
[286] That the *basti walas'* transportation costs were borne by the AWP does not count as an 'incentive' in my view; it is merely an attempt to remove people's disincentives to participate, should they wish to do so in the first place. Indeed, Hira's experience of mobilising fellow *basti walas'* described in the chapter attests to the fact that there was no compulsion for anyone to participate.

different, atypical. I understand it as an invitation to explore new terrain, imbued with a promise of novelty and entertainment. This resonates with the feedback around fun and enjoyment I received from numerous rally participants which was echoed by Hira too, who made a video of the sloganeering and showed it to her kids who watched it on repeat and insisted they want to come along next time.

> You [AWP] stood by us at a time when everything was shut down [during lockdown] and expensive. My grandmother used to say that if someone even offers you a glass of water in difficult times, you should never forget their *ehsaan* (generosity). You [AWP] gave us rations in that time. I communicated this to everyone, and told them that it'll be good for them to come [to the rally]. In coming days, we [the *basti walas*] may need something, like medicines or other such things. So if you participate [I told them], it'll be in your own interest. But, everyone has their own way of thinking

(Hira, voice note, 10-11-2021)

Here, I hear Hira arguing for the long-term utility of joining the protest for the *basti walas*, and I would add, for herself. I see her vouching for the party's track record (to other *basti walas* who are not familiar with the AWP) in providing material assistance to *basti walas* in times of need. Notably, she does this while locating herself firmly in her shared identity with the *basti walas,* as one of the '*ghareeb log*' (poor people) who she refers to numerous times (across the various quotes from her cited in this chapter) as '*hum log*' ('us') and '*humaray jaisay log*' ('people like us'). I also read Hira's articulation as a highly 'rational' argument drawing on hegemonic, normalised principles of exchange and reciprocity in an asymmetrical patronage relationship: *If you (basti walas) want the Party to support you, you have to* 'give *them something'*, in this case, numbers at their rally. Conversely, the idea that '*acchay log*' are those who support the poor has an in-built assumption that '*acchay log'* are those who are rich *and* generous; much like the idea of '*acchay maalik*' or good employers.

While in some cases, *basti walas*' participation in the rally was also a means to reciprocate and 'give back' to the AWP, for others, like Gulzar Bibi, public protest was a survival strategy. In her speech at the 7 November rally, she declared her intention to bring women and children out onto the streets to resist *katchi abadi* demolitions. "We will fight you, we will go to jail, but we won't sit by quietly while you do this!" she said to an energised audience that frequently interrupted her speech with applause and appreciative slogans. One of Gulzar Bibi's survival strategies over the years has been to create a spectacle when needed. Her personal history is one of firm resistance in the face of actions that she sees as unjust. When the CDA came to demolish her home because of a neighboring *kothi wala's* objection to her use of concrete blocks and other 'upgraded'

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materials, she made a racket on-site and on social media (the latter by successfully mobilising *basti* residents and the AWP), fought her way into an in-person encounter with the CDA Chairman, and was eventually allowed to complete the construction but without any formal protection for her home.[287] For Gulzar Bibi then, politics is a means to generate visibility and voice, expose the injustices and hypocrisy of the powerful, and thereby, survive.

Conclusion

This chapter explores how the political subjectivities of Islamabad's domestic workers are shaped by their experiences of (actual and/or imminent) forced eviction from the *bastis* they live in, and by their participation in collective action to resist these evictions. In doing so, it offers a combined view of each of the three 'elements' that Modonesi (2014) holds to be constitutive of subaltern political subjectivation: namely, experiences of subordination (power-over), insubordination (power-against), and emancipation (power-to). By giving an account of the 'everyday' forms of state violence experienced by Islamabad's *basti* communities, the chapter also furthers Elias and Rai's (2019) 'space, time, violence' (STV) framework theorising social reproduction *as* the everyday, and illustrates the links between invisible forms of everyday structural violence experienced by domestic workers within and beyond the realm of 'work', and the tangible, materially destructive forms of violence they experience in the form of forced demolitions of the impoverished *bastis* that they live in.

The G-11 *basti* demolition and its aftermath showed clear gendered differences in *basti walas'* strategies, subjectivities, and in their orientations towards organised political action, supporting this study's contention that gender must be understood as central to subaltern politics and political subjectivation, rather than as "an occasional topic of special interest, but of no general theoretical import" (Bannerjee, 2000, p. 904). During the demolition period itself, this was evidenced by the G-11 women's refusal to leave the *basti*, their collective confrontation with the CDA to secure the release of AWP members, and their energetic participation in both spontaneous and planned protests. Since the demolition, the women of this community have maintained and deepened their relationship with the AWP (more actively than the men), expressed interest in running for local government elections, and become integrated into the party's regular activities. The G-11 women's particular affinity for the AWP may be explained by the fact that no other

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[287] Visit to Gulzar Bibi's home in I-10/1 *katchi abadi*, 03-11-2021.

political organisation had hitherto engaged with women as equal political subjects or created space for them to emerge as *basti* leaders and representatives, in addition to the experience of shared risk/vulnerability with the AWP that transpired during the demolition. For women of other *bastis*/communities too, it appears that the AWP offers more space for 'safe' participation, not least because of the presence of women in the AWP itself. These outcomes reaffirm the importance of a Left vision that sees politics as a process of recognising and engaging with those who are "part of the 'no-part'" (Rancière, 2001/2015, pp. 35-36); those, like *basti* women, who have been refused the title of 'political subjects' by "assert[ing] that they belong to a 'domestic' space, to a space separated from public life" (ibid, p. 38).

The chapter also shows that the experience of forced eviction reinforced the chasm between *ameer log* and *ghareeb log* in interlocutors' subjectivities. This was fuelled both by how they were treated by the state- as (non)-citizens, 'encroachers', and 'outsiders' to Islamabad- and by the callousness and indifference exhibited by most G-11 *kothi walas* during and after the demolition, as employers and as neighbours. While most *basti walas* did not find this treatment unusual, they were, however, taken aback by the ferocity of the CDA's operation, giving rise to growing concerns that earlier strategies (which would combine apparent acquiescence with bribes to the CDA crew to ensure a quiet, gradual return to the original site) were no longer working. Combined with rampant 'development' and privatisation of state land, the shrinking space for squatters and the existential threat to Islamabad's *katchi abadis* was a new source of anxiety for *basti walas* (both within and beyond the G-11 *basti*) in the aftermath of the G-11 demolition.

This chapter explores how the demolition affected the G-11 *basti's* internal social relations. It shows that while the community fragmented into a number of clusters in the aftermath of the demolition, they also remained connected with one another, mainly through their continued connections with the original *basti* site, which, like other elements of political subjectivity and strategy discussed in this chapter, also had important gendered dimensions. While chasms along caste, kin, and regional affiliation did emerge in the post-demolition phase, this chapter shows that the formation of these clusters was a fluid and complex process informed by a combination of factors, including kinship, regional affiliation, caste, and interpersonal histories. However, the experience of eviction (followed by the challenges of relocation) also engendered an appreciation amongst all (former) G-11 residents that togetherness- while it came with its challenges- had offered them all important benefits and for many of them, remained their preferred living arrangement. The experiences of G-11 residents- especially the women's- both during and after

the demolition, suggest political organising and collective struggle as forms of social reproduction, particularly the reproduction/maintenance and in this case, post-demolition rebuilding of community.

Juxtaposing the responses of the H-9 *basti* to the possibility of eviction with the experience of the G-11 *basti* where the 'threat' in fact materialised, the chapter shows how each of these situations generated distinct subjectivities and responses and were intertwined with the particular histories and social location of the respective *basti* residents. Both cases featured claims to being 'Pakistani' and expressed an entitlement to be treated as citizens, with men invoking these claims more frequently and vociferously in public gatherings (both within and outside the *basti*) than women.

The final sections of the chapter explore *basti walas*' participation in post-demolition protests- both spontaneous and organised- and their relationship with the AWP, with a view to understanding what these reveal about their political subjectivities. These sections demonstrate that while organised politics (even in the case of the AWP) continues to be described by *basti walas* largely within a status-quoist patron-client framework (or, as Akhtar 2018 would put it, as a 'politics of common sense'), there are important counter-hegemonic events that occur in practice during their participation in AWP protests (such as women's experiences of having fun, shouting slogans, engaging in public speaking, participating as equals in sociologically diverse public gatherings, and listening to speeches, among others). Based on interlocutors' post-facto accounts of these protests, it appears that their participation in these gatherings contributed to a shift in their perceptions of 'politics' and of themselves as 'political subjects', in addition to widening their sense of community beyond their individual family and *basti*-level social networks.

These explorations also show, however, that materiality continues to be an important factor in shaping *basti walas*' discernment of what kinds of politics and political entities are worth engaging with: 'benefits' of political participation are largely equated with (usually short-term) material gains. However, as this chapter shows, immediate material benefit is not the only aspect determining *basti walas*' relationship to organised politics; rather, material, ideological, and affective factors combine to give shape to the *basti walas*' relationships with the AWP in particular and organised politics more broadly.

Chapter 8

A Desire for 'Something Else'

> As soon as I desire, I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world- that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions.
>
> <div align="right">(Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 218)</div>

Previous chapters of this thesis have explored the subjectivating effects of, and subjectivities produced by, domestic workers' experiences in the *kothi*, in the *basti* and (imminent and/or actual) demolitions thereof, and of collective mobilisations in their wake. This final chapter extends this exploration to the realm of desire, tracking how, when, and in what forms it appears and recedes from view in my interlocutors' narratives and self-fashionings. This chapter explores desire through a focus on the spatial, subjective, and affective realms of my interlocutors' personal and intimate lives- where the personal and the intimate are understood to be distinct from but in interaction with that which is public, cultural, and structural.

There are two parts to this chapter. The first part charts out the contours of my interlocutors' everyday lives in the home, with a focus on their marital relationships and how this relationship and/or its absence shapes their everyday. It looks at the various forms of gendered unfreedom that constitute their everyday lives in the domestic realm, particularly the prohibition on women's personal autonomy which manifests as restrictions on their physical mobility, on their participation in public life and space, and the connections between these restrictions and patriarchal anxieties around sexual piety.

The second part of the chapter is a discussion of prescribed and proscribed forms of selfhood and desire that are available to and circulate in/around my interlocutors' lives and persons. It explores the various (and sometimes stark) differences in self-fashioning of my interlocutors and their choice of strategies in the face of the prohibitions on desire(s) and selfhood, remaining attentive to the resources available to each of these individuals in their particular contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my interlocutors' relational explorations of '*dosti*'- friendship- and how *dosti* comes to signify a relationship of desire: a desire for 'something else'.

As discussed in Chapter 2, I theorise desire as a thread connecting 'moments'[288] (Lefebvre, 1959/2014)- particularly moments of 'affective dissonance' which suddenly bring forth a "gap between self-narration and social reality" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154) and in which their comportments had suddenly shifted, become strange and unfamiliar (even to their own selves) and unusually animated. I have chosen to name this animation as desire, rather than affect, for reasons outlined in Chapter 2.[289]

I also conceive of desire as an *orientation* towards the future, even if its production lies in the past and is co-constituted by the 'self' and social forces outside oneself (Goodchild, 1996, p. 21). This orientation towards the future may or may not be *hopeful* or forward-looking. Indeed, in various instances that have already appeared in previous chapters and will follow in the pages to come, an overt negation, rejection, and suppression of desire can be seen, including a negation of oneself as a desiring subject, bringing into view the futility and the dangers of desiring for marginal subjects in particular (Pile, 2019). It is both in the expression and the suppression of desire that my interlocutors' selves come into view; a process accompanied by a range of affects and affective states, notably grief, anger, anxiety, disappointment, and cynicism. The expression of desire sometimes appears as longing, driven by lack; at other times as imagination and fantasy; at yet others, as revenge. Indeed, conceptions of and longings for justice find expression in my interlocutors' frequent and semantically complex invocations of Allah (God), which have been explored in Chapter 6.

Desire is also conceived of in this thesis as a force (see Chapter 2)—a force that creates vitality and insists on materialisation; on translation into material, enacted, and embodied forms. In doing so, it compels movement; movement potentially in all realms (from the intimate and the individual to the structural and the collective). This movement enables— sometimes even *compels*— risk-taking, materialising in a range of choices and actions, shifting the field in and around my interlocutors. This chapter tracks how desire operates as a force in my interlocutors' lives, describes the movement it engendered in different interlocutors' lives, and dwells on the implications of this movement for my interlocutors' subjectivation and for my understanding of

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[289] As discussed in Chapter 2, I understand Lefebvre's concept of 'moment' as a theorisation of how possibility emerges in/from the everyday, changing from a distant possibility into an immanent one, serving as a temporary disruption to the staleness and inevitability of everyday life (Lefebvre, 1959/2014, pp. 511-525).

them as political subjects. I am equally attentive here to the work that the suppression of desire does, the forms taken by the 'redirection' of this force, and the impacts it has for my interlocutors' subjectivities and relationships.

I distinguish desire as orientation/force from particular, concrete desires, understanding the two as distinct but connected. This distinction is illustrated in interlocutors' narratives about openly challenging their employers (shared in Chapters 5 and 6), which frequently named/voiced the desire to be treated with respect by *kothi walas*. Vocalising the desire to be treated respectfully by employers in many instances led to a shift in interlocutors' demeanour towards becoming bolder and more assertive. As Fanon (1952/1967) observes, "When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of *desire*- the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit" (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 218). Making a similar observation, I found that interlocutors' speech about experiences of indignity often flowed into an assertion of (dignified) being; a desire— expressed as a moral *right* and an *entitlement*[290]— to be treated with dignity and respect, to be recognised as a worker and a human being. I argue, however, that such assertions of rights offer only a glimpse of a more radical subjectivity that comes into view when my interlocutors move from the realm of dignity into that of desire, which takes them beyond existing, socially sanctioned rights and entitlements. It is their encounter with desire— their transformation into desiring beings with autonomous, recognisable selves that exceed definition by/for the Other (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 212), which brings out the most radical, vulnerable, determined, pained, and courageous selves that I have seen my interlocutors inhabit.

I understand the ambivalence of my interlocutors towards desire and desiring, and the prohibitions on them as desiring subjects, as part of a longer and wider history of denial of subject status and human status in postcolonial contexts. Coloniality scholars have argued that these denials have altered these societies profoundly and that these subjugations continue to organise life in the postcolony (Wynter, 2003; Mignolo, 2015; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). As already indicated in previous chapters, I find particular resonance between my interlocutors' subjectivities and those of Fanon's colonised Black Antillean subject. One of these aspects is colonialism's relegation of the colonised to the realm of the 'natural'; as an entity to be tamed, subdued, domesticated (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 250), which feminist scholarship has long shown

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[290] I use the terms 'rights' and 'entitlements' interchangeably here to refer to moral, and *not* legal, claims made by interlocutors (unless specified otherwise).

to be intertwined with the process of gendered socialisation.[291] As explored in this chapter, patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality as an attempt to tame, subdue, and domesticate women is one of the core anxieties around which the fabric of my interlocutors' everyday life is woven. Within this context, certain forms of (gendered) selfhood are prescribed and others are proscribed; however, there is rarely a coherent, unified 'self' that navigates these prescriptions and restrictions. This ambivalent, contradicted, self-doubting self is a second point of resonance between Fanon's depiction of the colonised subject and my interlocutors' subjectivities:

> Because it is a systematic negation of the other person, and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces those it dominates to constantly ask: "In reality, who am I?"
>
> (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 250)

Fanon's observation aptly describes my interlocutors' ambivalent self-fashionings when speaking about their selves: vociferous expressions of 'selflessness' on the one hand and confusion, anger, and/or grief when speaking of themselves as desiring subjects on the other, abound in this chapter. Similarly, Fanon's observation that "everything that an Antillean does is done for The Other […] because it is the Other who corroborates him in his search for self-validation" (Fanon, 1952/1967, pp. 212-3) aptly describes my interlocutors' emphases on hegemonic narratives of self-sacrifice and moral uprightness in their self-fashionings as women and as workers. A phrase I heard often from (women) interlocutors was, "I've worked like a man all my life", a phrase signalling pride, dignity, and self-respect, in most instances *despite* the men in their lives not having worked 'like men' (Kabeer, 2014). While the 'Other' in this case is not the white coloniser that Fanon's texts refer to, and neither does my analysis seek to simplistically 'equate' these distinct forms (and contexts) of domination, this recurring phrase use by Pakistani domestic workers brings out a pattern that these contexts share in common: namely, it shows subordinate subjects orienting towards and/or claiming association with the dominant group and/or its characteristics as a means of self-valorisation, thereby reinscribing hegemonic values and social hierarchies.

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[291] See Federici (2004), Lugones (2010), Mies (1986), Wilding (2010), and Wynter (2003).

8.1. The Gendered Unfreedoms of Everyday Life

> I don't think my life has changed much since I got married. Before marriage, I was [working/living] in the *kothis*. When my brothers would visit me there, I would wish that they'd take me out somewhere. *Mein bhi insan hun*- I am human, too- I also feel like getting out sometimes. Now that I am married, I wait in the hope that my husband will take me out. That's all that's changed.
>
> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

These are Maria's words, spoken during my visit to her in Lahore, three months after her marriage—an event that she had been eagerly awaiting when I first met her nine months earlier when she was a live-in worker in Islamabad. Maria's marriage was a '*pasand ki shaadi*', a term used in the Pakistani context to imply that mutual consent and desire are present in the decision to marry; that they have *chosen* to marry each other rather than merely acceded to their respective family's decision. In a social context where it is common for the parents/family to take decisions about their children's (especially daughters') marriage unilaterally, '*pasand ki shaadi*' is the most 'freedom' most women can hope to exercise vis-à-vis the decision to marry. For most of my interlocutors, '*pasand ki shaadi*' was a luxury that they had not been afforded.

Maria had found Raheel (her fiancé/husband and also a first cousin) attractive for some years before they got married, at a time when he was engaged to someone else. When that engagement 'mysteriously' broke up, Maria became convinced that it was in her and Raheel's *naseeb* (destiny) to marry one another, despite occasionally expressing apprehension (to me) about how '*sakht*' (strict, controlling) Raheel was with her even though they were not yet married.

The excitement and eagerness with which Maria had awaited her wedding when I first met her overlapped with an increasing disaffection with her job at the time, which, she'd often say in those days that she wanted to leave but was staying 'only for (her employer) Tariq Bhai's sake'; and besides, it was now only a matter of weeks before she would be married and that would be the end of it anyway. Maria had said to me in those days, with both pride and excitement: "*Wo mujhe ghar bitha k khillaye ga*"; in other words, that Raheel would be sole earner/provider for the family and that she would no longer need to leave the home *to earn* (emphasis mine). '*Ghar bitha k khillana*'- or 'providing for the woman inside the home' is widely understood in the Pakistani context as an important marker of a 'good husband'. While this is rarely the case in practice for the working-classes (as evidenced by my interlocutors' lives themselves, the vast majority of whom are, or have been, married, and all of whom are domestic workers), the 'breadwinner-

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housewife' ideal still carries significant ideational currency and conditions the desires of many of my interlocutors. This appears to be a form of "cruel optimism",[292] to use Berlant's (2011) concept, since this ideal itself impedes the flourishing, and attainment, of many of my interlocutors' desires for personal freedom and autonomy, as evidenced by the quote from Maria at the start of this section and as seen in the excerpts from interlocutors' narratives quoted through this chapter.[293]

I understand Maria's longing for a husband who 'provides for her in the home' as grounded in a desire for relief from the ungratifying monotony, depletion, and indignity of domestic service in general, and from the particular set of difficulties she encountered in her most recent employment experience. If Maria's pull towards the 'breadwinner-housewife' ideal indicates, among other things, a desire for a financially secure situation in which income is sufficient, regular, and dependable, her words quoted at the start of this section- "I am human too, I also feel like getting out sometimes"- indicate her desire for personal freedom, mobility, leisure, socialising, and autonomy. While Maria's desire for a husband who 'feeds her inside the home' may be 'cruelly optimistic' with respect to her 'other' desires, it is arguable whether the absence of a desire/excitement to marry would have any bearings on her attainment of these 'other' desires, given that Maria would almost certainly have been married by her family, if not to Raheel (who she liked) then to someone else, who she may or may not have liked but who would have the same patriarchal entitlements as any husband in her social context. Hence, it is in a context where a young woman's realm of 'freedom' is restricted to *who* one will marry, rather than *if* one will marry, that the meaning(s) associated with Maria's excitement about marriage and her 'choice' to marry Raheel must be located and understood.[294]

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[292] Berlant (2011) defines 'cruel optimism' as a relation of attachment in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (p. 1), that is, "the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming" (p.2).

[293] See fn. 208 on how I understand autonomy in this thesis.

[294] I am not arguing that women are always or necessarily 'forced into' marriage without their 'consent'. Rather, marriage is idealised as the 'goal' of life for many Pakistani/South Asian women and their place in the world is still envisioned as located primarily in the realm of the patriarchal home/family (Menon, 2012, pp. 1–50). Thus, getting married also becomes a 'desire' of/for many women, as a means of belonging and achieving social mobility within the social contexts they are embedded in. Much like the operation of the 'mute compulsion' of capital (Mau, 2023) in which the only thing that is worse than being exploited is *not* being exploited; the only thing worse than being married is *not* being married, particularly for women in non-elite and non-urban contexts. Having said this, this cultural norm- i.e. the imperative of marriage- does not reflect the wide variety of actually existing social relations and arrangements, of which Roshni is one example.

The asymmetrical entitlements that accrue to men and women in the marital relationship are illustrated by an argument between Maria and Raheel that occurred during my visit to Raheel's workplace (a *kothi*) in Lahore, some months after their marriage. Taking advantage of my presence to 'settle scores' with Raheel, Maria brought up an incident that had occurred a few days earlier in which Raheel had slapped her in the (*kothi's*) kitchen, in public view of the *kothi walas*, for 'being too loud'. "*Mein bhi to insan hun*," she said, addressing Raheel. "When you hit me in front of other people, *dukh lagta hy* (it feels hurtful)." Vigorously objecting to her description of his action as '*maarna*' (hitting/beating), Raheel replied: "*Maarna* [hitting/beating] is what happens in anger, not in love. If I can't even hit you lovingly, if I don't have even that *haq* [right], then go to hell!" In the midst of what was becoming an increasingly heated argument between him and Maria, Raheel turned to me and said:

> Look, *Baji*, she is my wife. The rights she is entitled to as an *aurat zaat* [someone with woman status], I will surely give her. But if she does '*ghalat kaam*' (something wrong/immoral), even then I should just sit back and do nothing?

> (Raheel, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

Here, Raheel is appealing to me (as the de-facto 'judge' in this situation) to recognise his right to punish/retaliate/act if Maria does not fulfill her obligations as a wife, clarifying that as far as her rights (and their limits) are concerned, she is '*aurat zaat*'- a woman, referred to explicitly in this case as a *zaat* (translated here as 'status' but also a term used to denote 'caste'). Raheel insists that he will give her what she is entitled to as a wife, implying that this is different from what an *insan* (human), *mard* (man) or *shohar* (husband) is entitled to. What this conversation makes clear is the skewed nature of the gendered entitlements that accompany the marital relationship as well as the gendered character of the term '*insan*'.

Absent Husbands

As indicated by Maria's story, the marital status and relationships of women domestic workers were central aspects of their lives in every realm: in the home, in the *basti*, and in their work lives. The marital status of these women ranged from widows, to married women with children, to women with absent husbands (i.e. husbands who are neither dead nor formally divorced but

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Whether to construe this non-conformity/diversity as 'resistance' is another matter, which is beyond the scope of the current discussion.

physically, and in terms of economic contribution, absent), to unmarried women- the latter of whom (with the exception of Roshni)[295] were less than the 'marriageable age' (which varies somewhat between different ethnic and caste groups) and hence were either engaged or soon to be so.

Interlocutors' relationships with their husbands were (expectedly) complex and varied significantly in how they were narrated. In *my* interpretations of their narratives, however, most of my interlocutors' husbands were either (literally or figuratively) dead or away; *non-existent* as a means of physical/material, economic, and/or emotional support for these women. This remains true even for interlocutors in whose narratives the husband/marital relationship was foregrounded. In these cases, the husbands were often abusive, controlling, and insistent on constantly surveilling their wives and thus maintained a 'presence' even during periods of physical absence from the home. '*Sakht*'- literally, 'hard', strict- was an often used adjective to describe such husbands.

The most amicable and satisfactory marital relationships described by my interlocutors were ones in which husbands were earning a living, even if a meagre one (and hence they too would be 'away' for work for much of the day); husbands who were trusting of their wives and less intent on surveillance, and those who were 'morally upright' and steered clear of drugs. In rare instances, interlocutors described enjoying '*hansi-mazaaq*' (joy, playfulness) in their marital relationships or conversely, lamented its absence. Most of my interlocutors, however, expressed neither of these sentiments, spoke little about their husbands, and even less about the marital relationship. While this silence could reflect a lack of intimacy, safety, or trust in their relationships with me, I interpret it as also signifying the insignificance of husbands in the attainment and fulfilment of my interlocutors' material and emotional needs and desires.

As suggested by the previous discussion, while a woman's marital status had significant bearing on her (gendered) entitlements, it was not the only factor configuring the (un)freedoms of everyday life. Previous chapters have noted important differences in the norms, expectations, and entitlements that accrue to women across class, caste, and ethnic lines. It is important to add here that the intersection of age with marital status also produces a particular configuration of gendered entitlements for women. Older women, irrespective of whether their husbands were

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[295] Given the centrality of marriage to having a place in the social worlds inhabited by most Pakistani women, Roshni's 'choice' to remain unmarried is unusual and is explored later in this chapter.

dead or alive (and particularly those with large family networks of children and grandchildren), appeared to be the least inhibited in matters of physical mobility (age-related physical limitations notwithstanding), in their socialisation and engagement with the public sphere, and in their entitlements to indulge in otherwise 'masculine' behaviours such as smoking, swearing, and being in physical proximity/contact with men outside kin and family networks. Amongst my interlocutors, these women had the greatest degree of autonomy (and authority) with respect to financial, familial, and community matters, and in this sense, were the least constrained by patriarchal norms in their life choices and self-fashionings. However, while gendered norms around women's physical mobility vary by age, class, caste, ethnic and religious community, they differ only in a matter of degree with respect to where, how, and which restrictions on women's autonomy- both physical and subjective- come into play. Common to all such restrictions is the underlying connection between patriarchal concerns/anxieties about women's presence in the public sphere and the gendered imperative of sexual piety for women, to which we now turn.

8.2. The Imperative of Sexual Piety

The gendered imperative of sexual piety and its connection with the ideal of seclusion (that is, confinement to the private sphere) is manifest in various aspects of my interlocutors' lives and narratives. This includes their use of language, and notably, their choice of slurs. Though swearing is generally considered a masculine preserve, particular women- especially older women in relatively more impoverished and/or socially marginal *basti* communities (Christians, *mussallis*, and Oudh caste groups in this research context) were unabashed in their frequent use of slurs. One of the common slurs used by my interlocutors for other (usually *basti*) women was '*gashti*'. '*Gashti*' is (one) Urdu word for prostitute, derived from the Urdu/Persian word '*gasht*' which can appear (depending on the context of its use) as a verb meaning 'to patrol' or refer (as a noun) to a 'tour' or 'excursion'. Common to each of these uses is the element of physical, public mobility; implying that a '*gashti*' is someone who 'moves around'. Additionally, the semantics of '*gasht*' as a tour or excursion- and hence as something pleasurable- implies that a '*gashti*' is someone who provides men with pleasurable (read: sexual) 'tours' or 'excursions'. Hira explained to me the use of the term '*gashti*' in her *basti*:

> Someone has a fight with someone else, and one woman will call the other a '*gashti*'. Then the other will retaliate and call them or someone else in their family a '*gashti*', since they too go out for work. And so it continues, such that almost no one is spared from being called a '*gashti*'. (Hira, Awami Basti, 16-09-2021)

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What I find particularly fascinating in Hira's explanation is how 'almost no woman is spared' from being called a '*gashti*'. This appears to be a function of the fact that the vast majority of *basti* women are in regular interaction with the public sphere due to the imperative of earning (and they may or may not be accompanied by a male relative in the process). Interestingly, the ubiquity and frequency of use of this slur does not seem to reduce its intensity.

In contrast to the promiscuous '*gashti*', the '*achi aurat*' or 'good woman' emerging from domestic workers' narratives is '*ba-izzat*' (respectable). This '*ba-izzat*' woman is celibate and pious, stays in the home, away from the male gaze and the public sphere, doesn't do '*dosti*'[296] (friendship), keeps to herself, doesn't have '*shauq*' (desires/preferences/hobbies), has no romantic interests/desires in particular, is faithful/obedient to her family/husband, devoted to her children, and doesn't make requests or demands of others (especially material ones, such as demanding a share in property or the family's material resources, which is legally allowed but socially discouraged).

For Raheela, a widowed working-class woman of Punjabi ethnicity residing in Farash Town, her emphasis on '*izzat*' (respect/honour/dignity) goes in tandem with a religious self-fashioning, one that Raheela vigorously inhabits. Since her husband's death many years before, Raheela has been compelled to enter domestic service to make ends meet for herself and her children, which has had implications for her *izzat*. One instance of this appears during the group discussion in Farash Town, where Raheela shared having recently left her job because the *baji* had disrespected her. When I asked what exactly had happened, Raheela said that the *baji* had asked her if she had gotten re-married. Raheela found this incredibly insulting.

> *Meri izzat majrooh ki hy uss aurat ne.* That woman violated my *izzat* [honour/respect]. Just because I work in a *kothi* means that I have no *izzat*? No. If she is inside the *kothi* getting others to work for her, I too am working inside the *kothi*.
>
> (Raheela, Farash Town, 07-05-2022)

Raheela's comment makes apparent her equation between *izzat* (honour/respect) and being 'inside the *kothi*'; secluded (from the public sphere), irrespective of one's status as an employer or a worker. Notable also is Raheela's response and its intensity (such that she chose to leave the job) to the suggestion that she may have decided to remarry. I understand Raheela to have taken

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[296] The term '*dosti*' in the Pakistan context is an ambiguous and complex term, depending on the context of its use. It can refer to a platonic 'friendship' or to an illicit romantic/sexual affair, to same-sex or inter-sex relations. The final section of this chapter explores the concept- and potential- of *dosti* in greater depth.

offence at the implication that she is, or could be, a sexual/desiring being, who, after her husband's passing, has (or may have) desired someone other than her (ex) husband.[297] The intensity of Raheela's response testifies that she feels her piety (and fidelity to her former husband) to have been called into question, a matter of such grave insult that she chose to leave the job.[298] Growing in passion and vehemence as she recounted the event, Raheela went on to tell the group how she responded to the employer: "*Agar roadon par chal kar kamanay wali hoti, tho izzat se na ati aap k ghar!* If I were a woman who roams the streets to earn, I wouldn't be coming to your house in respectable fashion!" (Raheela, Farash Town, 07-05-2022). Raheela's emphasis on seclusion, exemplified no less by her strict observance of *purdah* (veiling) when in the public sphere- is so great that she not just dissociates herself from 'the woman who roams the streets to earn' (even though she too traverses the streets to earn), she vilifies this *type* of woman (who 'earns on the street') because the latter is a 'dishonorable' woman, unlike herself, who works in the 'private' (and hence chaste and honourable) sphere of the home.

It is the social perception of domestic service as a potential avenue for sexual promiscuity and transgression that I understand my interlocutors to be responding to in many of their self-fashionings as workers and as women shared across various chapters. Virtually all interlocutors said they had no interaction with men at all in the *kothis* where they work, and some of them even said they'd refuse to enter the *kothi* if there were men at home at the same time.[299] Anxieties around sexual piety also showed up in my interlocutors' frequently cited concerns about leaving their '*jawaan betiyaan*' (young/unmarried daughters) unsupervised and unguarded at home.

I understand sexuality to be one of the core (though not exclusive) concerns underlying a frequently recurring phrase in my interlocutors' narratives- "*Mein nahin chahti k meri beti wo karay jo mujhe karna para*"- "*I don't want my daughter to do what I had to do*". Most interlocutors

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[297] It would be more accurate to describe Raheela's response here as an expression/expectation of loyalty to- rather than desire for- her (ex) husband, since even within the marital relationship, women are not supposed to be 'desiring beings' themselves; they are expected to serve and fulfil the desires of their husbands and family members, rather than their own.

[298] As noted in Chapter 5, such incidents of indignity/moral outrage usually served as catalysts for domestic workers to leave jobs that were already somewhat dissatisfied with. This is also true in the present case, where Raheela had spoken earlier in this discussion of her dissatisfactions with this *baji's* refusal to give her days off during Eid and other religious/cultural occasions, coupled with a 'standard' low salary that she'd be able to earn even if she chose to work for a different employer.

[299] While it is common practice for men (when they are present) to leave the room that is being cleaned/used by a domestic worker, complete segregation or absence of men is unusual. I understand this self-fashioning as an anxious response to the perception- and practice- of sexual transgressions, and abuse, that occur in the realm of domestic service.

used this phrase to mean that they did not want their daughters to enter domestic service (as they themselves had). The phrase was often accompanied by a statement of resolve to ensure that their daughters get a good education—which interlocutors themselves did not have (with the exception of Roshni, who had pursued a college degree alongside her job), so that their daughters may find a '*ba-izzat naukri*', i.e., a respectable job. Implicit in the desire for their daughters to be educated is the assumption that their daughters will have to find employment at some point in their lives (in addition to the social capital associated with being educated), and that the 'breadwinner-housewife' ideal is exactly that- an *ideal*, rather than the reality that their daughters will be living. This phrase also indicates my interlocutors' desire to reduce their daughters' vulnerability to the (various co-constituted) indignities and exploitation that they have experienced in the *kothis* and in their own homes, and which is particular to their experience *as women* (which explains why this phrase is directed towards their daughters specifically and not towards sons). Maria, however, is not speaking exclusively of daughters when she says:

> I will never leave my kids at the mercy of these people [*kothi walas*], *never* [emphasis hers]. I've been doing this since childhood, I've seen what they do to children. I'm not going to produce children to serve these people. I will send my kids to a good school, I will make them capable of becoming something.
>
> (Maria, Islamabad, 16-08-2021)

The clarity and intensity with which Maria asserts the distinction between herself and 'these people' (*kothi walas*) is a reminder of the centrality of class distinction, inequality, and injustice in my interlocutors' subjectivities (explored earlier in Chapter 5). It is notable however, that this phrase was also used to refer to the gendered subordination and indignities that my interlocutors have had to endure in their personal, particularly marital lives. Zara, for instance, spoke of her commitment to ensuring that the man they choose for her daughter is an '*insan ka baccha*', a human being:

> I want him to be an *insan ka bacha* [literally, son of a human]. But if he turns out to be a *dangar ka bacha* [son of a donkey], there's no need for her to spend the rest of her life stuck with him. What happened to me, I will never let happen to my daughter. Until I am alive, she will know that '*uss ka koi hy'—that she has someone of her own in this world*.
>
> (Zara, H-9 *basti*, 22-09-2021, emphasis mine)

This quote from Zara not only reflects her resolve to protect and support her daughter in the latter's life as a married woman, it makes visible the expectation that women will not leave the marital relationship even if they are abused or unhappy. This quote also indicates the deeply

troubled nature of Zara's own marriage, discussed later in this chapter. The words used by Zara in her last phrase- where she wants her daughter to know that she has 'someone of her own in this world'- is indicative of the deep loneliness that marital life brings with it for many of my interlocutors, who, as in Zara's case, are explicitly told that they no longer 'belong' to their natal families after marriage, and simultaneously told that '*andar ki baat andar hi rehni chahye*', i.e. that "private matters should remain private", discouraging women from sharing and seeking support for their marital difficulties.

For Zara, as with most women in this social milieu, leaving the marital relationship- even an abusive one- does not appear as an option; or is rather, an option 'of the last resort', and this too requires both material resources and social support from one's family and/or community networks (none of which Zara appears to currently have or to have mobilised). Maria's words below, a few months after she got married, confirms this assumption:

> I now say to Raheel that you used to say that you're not like other men who hit their wives. So why do you do this to me now? Just because we're married and you're thinking, 'ah, now I can do whatever I like, it's not like she's going to get up and leave'?

> (Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

The prohibitions on women as desiring beings is indicated by the use of the term '*shauq*' with reference to women. The term '*shauq*' can be used in different contexts to mean hobby, preference, desire, or "an enthusiastic predilection towards any activity for the attainment of pleasure" (Kavesh, 2019, p. 230). While the term is not literally gendered in its meaning, its usage in common parlance indicates that *shauq* is an exclusively male preserve, and an arena of masculine performativity (ibid.). That *shauq* was used as a derisive term when ascribed to women was nevertheless striking to me, which came up as Maria was telling me (in the early days of our relationship) about her frustration with the perpetual delays in her wedding date due to ongoing negotiations between the families.

> The worst thing about this is that as a girl, you simply cannot say anything [to push the family to hurry up the wedding], otherwise people will jump on you and admonish you for speaking. So you've got to shut your mouth and just listen. If I get to a point when I'm really upset and say, hey, stop playing these games with me, they'll say, 'Oh, you're in a big hurry to get married, eh? *Shauq hy tumhe*?'

> (Maria, Islamabad, 30-09-2021)

Not only does the taunting/derisive use of the term '*shauq*' in the above quote indicate that it is inappropriate for Maria to have or express *shauq*- desire, interest, inclination, or longing- even in the context of her own marriage, it also implies that a woman who has '*shauq*' or eagerness to get married is suspect because it must be a result of her '*chalaaki*'- cunningness- and/or engagement in illicit (romantic or sexual) affairs.

Having sketched the context, contours, and manifestations of the co-constituted gendered unfreedoms in which my interlocutors' everyday lives are embedded, the next section of this chapter focuses on the forms of self-fashioning adopted by my interlocutors in this social milieu and explores what their self-fashionings tell us about them as desiring beings in a context where desiring, and indeed, the inhabitation of an autonomous self is prohibited for these subjects.

8.3. Suppression of the Self and the Repudiation of Desire

> Before you get married, obey your mother, father, brothers; after you're married, obey your husband. *Apni bhi koi zindagi hy kya?* Is there such a thing as one's *own* life?
>
> (Maria, telephonic communication, 17-03-2022)

Maria's rhetorical question in the above quote is in fact a question that I asked my interlocutors, though not in these rhetorical terms. Rather, I asked interlocutors if they had ever attended to the fulfillment of their own desires (as they described doing for their children, husbands, and other family members), and the common response was 'no'. Zarina's views below are paradigmatic:

> I've honestly never thought about myself, about my clothes or shoes or what I may need… or [thought] ah, here's some money, let me go and buy myself something nice to eat or cook… And when I do feel like it, I think, ah forget it, if this money is saved, it'll go towards the kids' school fees, or their tuition fees, or somewhere else… There's always some debt or the other that needs to be paid off.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021)

In the above quote, Zarina begins her response by saying 'she has never thought about herself', implying that she does not have needs and desires of her own. In the sentence that follows, she acknowledges that there are things she could *potentially* desire ('something nice to eat or cook') and then admits that she *does* 'feel like it, sometimes' but denies herself so that others' needs can be met. One explanation of Zarina's gradual entry (which I interpret as reluctance) into the terrain of desire- particularly, the admission that *she* has desires- is that it serves as a reminder that the attainment or fulfilment of her desires will likely remain elusive or perhaps even impossible (Pile,

2019). I read the latter half of her quote as a reflection of where Zarina places her own self and her needs/desires in relation to those of others. Her words indicate that the needs/desires/selves of others come first, and illustrate her self-fashioning as a 'selfless, sacrificing woman/mother', a commonly prescribed form of gendered selfhood in the Pakistani social context. Later in the same interview, Zarina speaks again of desire (this time without a prompt) while describing her experience of domestic service:

> Doing housework in one's own home is tiring enough. Then on top of that, if you work in someone else's home, and you do it *daily, daily, daily* and you do the *same* work, sweep the *same* floor, the *same* rooms… *tho dil nahin bolay ga*? [Won't your heart complain?] If you keep eating *chawal* (rice), *chawal, chawal, chawal*; every single day, won't you feel like eating *roti* (bread)? Or if you eat *roti, roti, roti* every single day, won't you want to eat *chawal*? That's how it is, you see, *dil tho mera boht chahta hy* [there's a lot that my heart desires] but what can I do, one looks at one's *majbooriyaan* (compulsions) and then says, well…
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021, emphases hers)

It is noteworthy that in describing the monotony of domestic service, Zarina uses the analogy of *chawal* and *roti*- both everyday food staples in her context, implying that even a change from one 'staple' to another is elusive for her. She ends by acknowledging (and here her voice becomes more high-pitched, and she shifts from speaking in the third person to the first person) that she *does* have desires—many desires, in fact ('*dil tho mera bohot chahta hy*')— but which she has no option except to suppress because of her *majbooriyaan* (compulsions). What stands out in Zarina's narrative is not only an attempted suppression of desire, but also that depletion coupled with *majboori* appears to silence desire, as seen in the trailing off of her words at the end of the above quote. This can also be seen in her words below:

> I swear to God, the time that I've spent here talking with you, us husband-wife have never spent this much time sharing such things with each other. There simply isn't time… And by the time it's 9pm, I'm ready to rip everyone apart (*me kehti hun sab ko kha jaoun*). I'm so exhausted by then that I don't want anyone in the house talking, chatting, moving, doing anything; I just want to sleep.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021)

In this quote, Zarina appears not just exhausted but *angry*, evidenced by her 'readiness to rip everyone apart' by the end of the day and her desire 'only for sleep' which appears to offer a means of temporary relief; an escape from the monotony, depletion, and joylessness that characterises Zarina's every day. She continues:

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> Sometimes I get very angry with my husband. When we fight, he says, we have nothing. I say to him, if *you* have nothing [to give the family], then sit at home. At least look after the girls. Our life has gone by however it has; what's left of it now, nothing. But we've got to think about the future of our girls.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021, emphasis hers)

In this comment, Zarina's orientation towards the future appears hopeless- "what's left of our life now, nothing"- and yet there is an anxious pull- her daughters- *forcing* her to orient towards the future, even though there is nothing left *for her* in life. (Zarina was 35 years old at this time). I understand Zarina's anger at her husband here not merely as disappointment in him for not fulfilling his obligation to provide as a 'good' husband is expected to, but also arising from the indignity she endures due to the resulting *majboori* (compulsion) for her to undertake domestic service (a theme she kept returning to during our interview). Her anger may also be a response to the suppression of her self and her desires, as described in earlier paragraphs. When I asked Zarina to imagine what other kind of work she would have taken on in place of domestic service if she had had the option, she said:

> If I had the option… [pauses, stutters briefly, and then continues] But I didn't have an education. I don't have an education. So what could I have done? I couldn't have done any other type of work; nothing other than physical labour.
>
> (Zarina, Farash Town, 14-10-2021)

It is striking to me that Zarina jumps from saying '*if* I had the option' to '*but I didn't* have an option'; she jumps from *imagining* (the future) to *describing* (the limitations/constraints of) the past. Notable also is the initial wobble in her speech: the stutter at the beginning of the sentence, in the transition from the future to the past, after which she moves briefly into the present before returning to the past. Zarina's swift multi-directional turns suggest that imagining—letting thoughts roam outside the confines of the reality that one has lived/known—can be a painful and risky endeavour, serving as a sharp reminder of what has *not* been possible in the life of these subjects.

'Alone, but strong'

Another of the paradigmatic self-fashionings that emerge from the oppressive contexts that my interlocutors inhabit is that of the 'alone, but strong' woman. Zara, who is in an abusive marital relationship, offers one such example in the way she presents herself to me during one of my visits to her home. This was one of the fortunate instances in which her husband was away, and she

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spoke with me about how she had reached out to her parents for support with her marital difficulties in the initial period after her marriage. Zara describes being turned away from her natal home and returning heartbroken, only to resolve that she would never reach out to them for support again. Something hardened inside her, she said:

> Just like I was dead for them [my natal family], they were dead for me now. From there on, I decided I would stay '*chupp*' (silent)... From there on, I would see family on occasion as is expected, but I stopped expecting anything from them. I knew then that I would have to face everything on my own. And it made me strong (*mazboot*).

(Zara, H-9 *basti*, 22-09-2021)

Zara repeated various times during this visit (as she had in the past also) that she had become 'very strong' (*boht mazboot*) because of all that life had thrown her way; that now when her husband swore at her or beat her, she would simply pretend that 'she's not there' *(mein idhar hun hi nahin)*. She also spoke of the '*chupp*' (silence) having begun to create *nasoors*- puss-filled wounds or ulcers- inside her; that it feels 'as if something is accumulating in there' (holding her chest as she said this) and that 'it hurts, sometimes unbearably'. Prior to this visit, I had been instinctively aware that her domestic situation was unhealthy, but this was the first time I had witnessed Zara experiencing visceral, embodied pain. It also made me understand better why Zara had been so keen for me to visit her these past weeks: The '*chupp*' (silence) was becoming unbearable for her. That evening was the first time that Zara explicitly acknowledged that the strategy of staying silent ('*chupp rehna*') that she had earlier claimed made her '*mazboot*' (strong) had in fact morphed into a disease, an affliction. Zara's use of the term '*nasoor*' as an embodied metaphor for her emotional and psychic injuries implies an admission that the *chupp* (silence) had been an attack on herself- a form of self-harm rather than a strengthening- in response to which these painful *nasoors* had developed and were now growing. I found Zara to be unusually groggy that evening; I learned during the visit that she had been taking sleeping pills. Like for Zarina (who we saw a few paragraphs earlier), one of the few accessible forms of relief for Zara appeared to be sleep; an exit from consciousness, for as long as possible, to the extent possible.

In a subsequent visit to Zara's home some months later, the 'alone, but strong' Zara appeared less debilitated than in the visit described above. She did not attempt to convince me of her 'strength' as she had been eager to do earlier. While she continued to fashion herself as having sacrificed her desires and self for the sake of her husband and children, she was now finding (or perhaps, beginning to voice) that this 'sacrifice' was becoming increasingly unbearable for her:

If one has to seek permission for everything, what's left in life? If in a relationship of 21 years, I could not find trust (*aitbaar*), tell me, where will I find it? In the 21 years of my married life, I have never bought anything for my own self- no clothes, no shoes, nothing. My children are witnesses... But yes, I do eat *roti* (bread). [Her eyes teared up].

(Zara, H-9 *basti*, 03-02-2022)

In the last phrase of this quote, Zara is referring to her husband's taunts about her being an economic burden since she was laid off from work (which was due to her prolonged absences from work to tend to her son after his life-threatening accident). But neither would her husband let her take on a job when she found one, finding some reason or the other to deny her permission. One of Zara's struggles throughout her marital life has been to deal with her husband's mistrust and the resulting surveillance she is subject to. From time to time, Zara is barred by her husband (entirely on his whims) from visiting her sisters, parents, or other relatives, and from speaking with them on his phone, even in his presence. She is no longer allowed to leave the home without his permission, which was not the case some months earlier when she was employed. Indeed, in the weeks after she lost her job and her son's condition had improved, Zara spoke to me for help in finding a new job. *At least I'll get some time away from here*, she said to me at the time; an illustration of the myriad ways in which domestic service appears in my interlocutors' lives, including as a form of escape from domestic violence and abuse. I understand Zara's words- "but yes, I do eat *roti*"- (accompanied by tears) to be a reflection of the humiliation she experiences in the marital relationship; a lament that, despite the erasure of her self and her desires, her body continues to exist, resists erasure. Perhaps that is why she chooses to take sleeping pills from time to time—so that her consciousness of the body, too, ceases to exist, at least for some time.

Among Zara's strategies to deal with her oppressive domestic situation is to keep hens and birds. The one time I saw her face lighten up that evening was when she showed me her baby hens. 'People in the *basti* laugh when they pass me by,' she said, smiling. 'They say, *twaaday aath nawway puttar ne.* You've got eight new offspring.' In those days (except for the times when her husband forbade it), Zara would sit outside her home in a patch of garden she had created and watch over the chicks. The chicks would all come and sit in her lap together, which is what earned her the reputation of being 'a new mother of eight'. Zara laughed as she told me this, fondling the chicks huddled together in her lap.

'Apni Marzi Karna' [To Act From One's Will]

What kind of life is this, if you can't do anything yourself? *K jahan jaye banda buss qaid ho jaye* [If everywhere you go, you're just stuck, imprisoned]; *apni marzi kar hi nai sakta* [you simply cannot do what you want]. You can't come and go as you please, you can't leave the house. If you do, it's bad; and if you ask [to be taken out] but they don't do it, that too is bad.

(Maria, Lahore, 11-03-2022)

While '*apni marzi karna*'- to act from one's own will/choice- is something that interlocutors like Maria fashion themselves as actively wanting (as the above quote and earlier parts of this chapter have shown), for Roshni, '*apni marzi karna*' is something that others may want and do, but it is not something that she does, or even *wants* to do:

All [girls/women] don't necessarily think like me; some may want to live their lives according to their own wishes/desires [*apni marzi se*]… My disposition is completely different. I don't think much for my self; I wish to do things for others… I never saved up [my earnings] for myself, I just spent them all on others. It makes me happy to give to others. That's why I think, forget it, what's the point of saving. Besides, [she laughs lightly], I'm old now.

(Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

This quote illustrates Roshni's self-fashioning as 'selfless'—that is, as someone who does not live (or even seek to live) life according to her will or wishes ('*apni marzi se*'), as someone who has no wishes/desires of her own and is content with fulfilling the desires of others, and as someone who does not need to save for herself because she is now 'old'. (Roshni was 36 at the time of this interview). The reference to 'being old' at the end of the quote appears to be a dismissal of the need for self-care and a form of self-deprecation, as if *there's no point* in saving up or spending for herself. Rather than a reference to her actual age or health, Roshni's labelling of herself as 'old' here indicates her evaluation of her life as 'over', devoid of 'youth', of hope for happiness, fulfilment, or companionship.

Later in the same conversation, I asked Roshni if she'd consider living anywhere other than her hometown. Roshni responded, with a hint of uncharacteristic sharpness:

How can I think of relocating elsewhere? I know what my *auqaat* [place] is… To venture beyond that is *fazool* [futile]. Something that isn't in your reach, that isn't *for* you, and you start desiring it… that is *be-waqoofi* [foolishness]. It is merely putting yourself through torture.

(Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022)

I understand the sharpness in Roshni's tone as an expression of pain engendered by the suggestion (implicit in my question) that she *could* live elsewhere. This pain could be connected

to the fact that she *has* lived elsewhere for many years: in her employers' sprawling *kothi* in Islamabad, where she lived and worked for more than a decade, where she went to college and became familiar with the city and the lifestyles of the city's elite, accompanying her employers to various social gatherings, restaurants, excursions, and shopping trips. Roshni's proximity (via domestic service) to a life that she would (or could) want for oneself, a life in which she was simultaneously an outsider and an embedded but subordinate insider, may have served to sharpen the distinction between what is 'for her' and what is not. Roshni's use of the phrase "I know what my *auqaat* (place) is" in this context suggests that desiring is akin to transgression; akin to venturing into a space/place beyond the one assigned to her. Roshni calls it *be-waqoofi* (foolishness) and *fazool* (futile), but the last phrase confirms that this transgression is also risky; one risks 'putting oneself through torture'.

For Roshni, the futility of desiring is not limited to material desires but also to emotional ones:

> You people's marriages are much different than ours, they are good. In our family, sometimes it's the girl, sometimes it's the boy, sometimes it's the in-laws that at fault. Some friends of mine even married the man of their choice ['*pasand ki shaadi*'] but they too now lament that they didn't find the contentment [*sakoon*] they were looking for when they fought their families for it… I also have friends who have more than one '*dost*' [literally 'friend' but used here to mean 'boyfriend'] and haven't gotten married, but they too are not happy. After seeing all this, it seems to me that one simply can't be happy if there's a man in your life. It's best to just remain alone, [do/live] as you please ('*apni marzi se*'). 'Don't do this', 'don't wear that', 'don't go there', 'who were you speaking with', 'why did you look at him'… *Your* men don't do this, but many men do.
>
> (Roshni, Islamabad, 07-04-2022, emphasis hers)

From the quote above, Roshni's repudiation of sexual/romantic desire appears motivated by her observation and knowledge of other women's experiences—importantly, those of her own class/status, not of the upper classes; a distinction that runs centrally throughout her life narrative. It is also notable to hear Roshni speak of wanting to live 'alone, *apni marzi se*' (that is, as per her will) when at other points in her narrative she declared herself to be someone who does *not* do '*apni marzi*' and does not wish to do so either. I understand this apparent contradiction as reflecting two distinct and co-existing inhabitations of self: one is that of the 'selfless, sacrificing woman' (in Roshni's case, as a daughter and sister) and the other is that of the 'strong, independent woman' who believes that living alone is the only way to live in choice and integrity and who is unwilling to put up with being policed and subordinated by a husband, even if it means choosing to remain unmarried- a choice that is very rarely made by women of

her social location. "To not marry has been my own decision," Roshni told me. "And maybe I will [get married]. For now, I think I should do something for my family. What's the big deal in getting married anyway, one can do it whenever," she says with a wry smile.

Roshni's narrative about marriage implies that she understands marriage as something that one does for oneself, as a progression in one's life-stage. This is why she supported/assisted her younger siblings' marriages even though it had been 'her turn' before theirs, something that she said to me explicitly at a different point in the same conversation. Her words also imply that after marriage, she would be unable to support her natal family because her autonomy would be subsumed by caring responsibilities for her husband and in-laws once she was married, as indicated in previous quotes. It important to note that Roshni's decision to take on the role of bread-earner and primary caregiver for her mother instead of getting married (which, from Roshni's narrative, clearly appear to be mutually exclusive roles) takes place in a context in which her father has been 'missing' since Roshni and her siblings were very young.

When I asked what she'd look for in a marriage if she were to consider it, Roshni said it would be for companionship rather than for children. "I've raised enough kids in my life," she said wryly (referring to her childcare responsibilities in the *kothi*). "Besides, there are so many destitute children out there, one can simply adopt a child if one wants." She also shared her fear of childbirth and the pain she had witnessed other women undergoing during labour. "It's as if they [women giving birth] come back from the dead," she said, wincing, and shaking her head.

Roshni's ambivalence towards marriage belies her desire for companionship, for maintaining connections with her natal family (especially her mother), and for personal autonomy in a context where marriage appears to require a trade-off between autonomy and companionship. Her ambivalence may also be connected to an earlier event in Roshni's life, when she had been in love with one of her cousins and wanted to marry him, but it didn't work out for a complex set of reasons, including 'her own mistakes' (as she put it). Much to my surprise, Roshni told me this 'love story' without prompting and at great length; that too after telling me that she generally chooses not to speak about herself.

Roshni's 'love story', and her telling of the story, appear as a rupture in her otherwise 'selfless narrative and 'desireless' self-fashioning. Whether the story itself or its telling shifted something for her outside of our interactions, I do not know. But it is in the telling of her love story that Roshni, for the first time in our interactions, presented herself as an explicitly desiring being. In

the telling of the story, Roshni acknowledged various moments where she was pretending/performing as if she were undesiring and indifferent to the outcome of those events and interactions. Indeed, it was these performances of being undesiring and indifferent (which Roshni conceded were motivated by fear of rejection and shame) that led to her missing the chance(s) to marry the man of her choice. At the end of the story, however, she ends up 'glad' that she didn't marry him because he begins to do what, in her words, 'most men do'—that is, the men of *her* class. For Roshni, as we have seen throughout her narrative, class figures prominently in who can desire and what they can desire, irrespective of what *should* be possible.

Roshni's story offers a good example of how deeply contradicted the 'self' can be. Given Roshni's self-fashioning throughout much of the fieldwork period as someone resigned to her class/social status and 'realistic' in her desires, it took me a while to accept that this was the same person who, two years later, revealed to me in a moment of utter desperation that she was in massive debt- to the tune of millions of rupees- in her attempt to become a successful entrepreneur. In effect, she had done exactly the opposite of what she says in these narratives: she had refused to accept the inevitability of her '*auqaat*' (status) and her place in the world because of it. That it ended tragically is not altogether surprising, given that she was inexperienced and immensely constrained by her social location (particularly in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, and region). The entire operation, spanning almost two years (which included the fieldwork period) had been conducted secretly, without the knowledge of anyone in her family or in her immediate social networks, and involved taking out multiple large loans that were beyond her capacity to repay. It was thus an extremely intense and *risky* exercise. This exercise serves as a vivid illustration of desire as force, compelling movement and risk-taking in search of 'something else', something beyond the stifling confines of a realistic, predictable reality. Roshni's 'alter-reality' brings to mind the following words, cited by Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*:

> It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus it is tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not *bare existence*, is not the mere immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life.
>
> (Hegel, 1949, cited in Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 218, emphasis in original)

I turn now, in the final section of this chapter, to a discussion of '*dosti*'- friendship- and its limitations and potential to serve my interlocutors as a means towards 'something else'.

8.4. '*Dosti*'

Many of the interlocutors I met and befriended over the course of this project took great pains to present themselves as 'good', i.e. chaste women who do not do '*dosti*'. '*Dosti*' in Urdu literally translates to 'friendship'. It is telling, however, that '*dosti*' can refer to platonic relationships between people of any gender as well as to illicit (and consensual) sexual and romantic relationships. '*Dosti*' is different from '*jaan pehchaan*', the latter of which refers to a form of everyday socialisation with neighbours or other community members outside of one's close family networks, and is considered a social 'good', if not an obligation, in my interlocutors' contexts in the *basti* and in their villages. Mumtaz Bibi's following comment makes the distinction between '*jaan pehchaan*' and '*dosti*' thus:

> I'll go for events like *shaadi* (weddings), *janaaza* (funerals) or *khushi-ghammi* (events of celebration or mourning), but not *be-wajja* (without reason). I don't like getting too close to people.
>
> (Mumtaz Bibi, Awami Basti, 16-09-2021)

'*Dosti*' in my field sites appeared to be an acceptable form of relationship for adolescent, unmarried girls. However, the term was rarely used with reference to relationships between adult women; and in most instances where it was invoked by adult women with reference to their relationships with peers, it was to suggest that they do not do '*dosti*' and keep to themselves. However, some of my interlocutors— the ones with whom I shared the most intimacy— used the term to describe/name their relationship with me. In Zara's case, it is telling that the context in which she names our relationship is one marked by sadness, grief, and despair, which she is sharing with me during one of my visits to her home (scenes from which have also been described earlier in the chapter):

> *Mein toot gayi hun.* [I am broken]. I no longer have the will or the strength to keep going. I want to go somewhere far away, completely alone. And to not have to look back and worry about my children, or about anything else…
>
> *Mein iss rishtay ko barra sambhaal k rakhna chahti hun.* I want to guard this relationship; I want to keep it safe. I feel it is the only relationship in which I can say and share anything and everything of mine, all that I cannot share with my children or my husband or with anyone else. I don't know what to call it—*dosti* or something else, I don't know. But I know that this relationship is precious to me; that I want to guard it and keep it close to me.
>
> (Zara, H-9 *basti*, 03-02-2022)

For Zara, our '*dosti*'- or maybe it is 'something else'- is precious to her. Even more precious when it comes at a time when she feels broken, stuck, and wants to escape the confines of her everyday reality. My field encounters show that it is the rare instance of forming a trusting relationship with an 'outsider' that brings with it a unique kind of freedom for my interlocutors to be vulnerable, to share the most painful and difficult aspects of their lives without fear of backlash (at least from the person they are sharing with).

Maria and Roshni were the two interlocutors who used the term '*dosti*' with the most ease. This may have partly to do with their age and marital status (Maria was the youngest of my primary interlocutors, in her early twenties at the time we met; Roshni was older- 36- but unmarried), and therefore both had greater proximity to relationships of '*dosti*' with other young, unmarried women than other interlocutors.

The first time Maria described our relationship as a '*dosti*', was eight months after we had first met. We were talking on the phone, and were saying our goodbyes when she said:

> Wait, there's one thing I need to talk to you about before we end. *Aap mujh se barri tho hain* [You are after all older than me] and we've spent this time together and all, but... Can I call you Alia? I know you're older than me, but not that much older. (She laughed). And, if we are friends (*dost*), then... You won't mind, will you?
>
> (Maria, phone conversation, 17-03-2022)

The way Maria uses the phrase '*aap mujh se barri tho hain*' is semantically complex, and the fact that she uses it twice- but to mean slightly different things each time- is evidence that it encapsulates something important for her.[300] The first time that Maria says '*aap mujh se barri tho hain*'- 'you are older/bigger than me', she is referring to my age but could also be referring to my higher class/social status. The second time she uses this phrase, she adds: "You are older/bigger than me, *but not that much* older/bigger." (This second iteration is also ambiguous in whether it is referring merely to age or also to status/hierarchy). In any case, it makes clear that Maria believes there that we can now move away from using terms of address which connote distance,

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[300] The word '*barri*' (or '*barra*' depending on whether it is conjugated with a masculine or feminine pronoun) literally means 'big', or, if used comparatively (as it is here), to mean 'bigger'. This 'bigness' can be interpreted- in this literal and cultural context- as a reference to age, size, and/or status. The Urdu word to refer to another person who is higher than oneself in age and/or status is '*aap*', whereas the word '*tu*' or '*tum*'- also meaning 'you'- signifies a relationship of horizontality, with potential to be considered a 'crude', even 'rude', form of address when used across class/social status.

hierarchy and/or formality to more equal, casual, and horizontal ones—such as simply calling each other by name, or as '*yaar*' ('friend'). Afterwards I tried to think back to what she had called me earlier and realised that she had rarely addressed me directly as anything, possibly to avoid having to 'place' our relationship in one or the other category. The few times that some form of address was necessary, she had called me 'Alia Baji'—where '*baji*' is a term that functions in complex ways to connote respect, affection and/or hierarchy between women.[301]

For Maria, the shift to calling our relationship a '*dosti*' came about after she made a leap of faith in deciding to reveal to me the story of an affair she was having with a man, a *kothi wala,* at the time, an experience that she found simultaneously terrifying and riveting.[302] Many months after this revelation, Maria told me how difficult it had been for her to make that decision:

> [At the time…] I wasn't sure whether you would believe me. What would happen if you didn't believe me? You could even have thought I was lying! I am so glad I took the leap. *Himmat ki tho badlay mein boht kuch milla. Aitbaar, pyaar, dosti…* I got so much in return: trust, love, friendship… But at the time, it was a terribly difficult decision to make.
>
> <div align="right">(Maria, phone conversation, 17-03-2022)</div>

This quote says much about the 'horizontality' of *dosti* in the context of my relationships with interlocutors. Specifically, it speaks to the risks associated with establishing relationships of '*dosti*' across class (and other) social hierarchies from a structurally subordinate position and suggests that these risks are much greater for Maria than for me. In choosing to open to me when she did, Maria risked losing her job, jeopardising her marriage, and her personal safety (as extreme forms of physical violence are not uncommon, and indeed considered legitimate, in cases where a woman has been found to be sexually deviant or 'unfaithful'). In contrast, the risks I incurred in choosing to open to Maria were mainly emotional and interpersonal (such as being judged, feeling ashamed, and losing Maria's trust and respect) and to some extent, professional (the possibility of jeopardising and potentially losing a 'rich' research relationship). What is at stake therefore for different people who come together to create a '*dosti*' is different based on their social location in structural hierarchies and not merely a question of individual or personal attributes and

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[301] 'Baji' literally means sister but is used in the context of domestic service as a term of address for (women) employers or women of the employer classes. See fn. 123.

[302] Despite Maria's consent for me to write about this relationship in the thesis, I have chosen not to do so to ensure her safety and well-being. I would like to note, however, that the story of this relationship offers an extremely rich account of the intersections between class, desire, and subjectivation.

choices, even when (and this why it is important to emphasise this point) many of the *affective* aspects of the relationship, such as relief, joy, connection, and warmth, are mutual and equally shared.

Dosti, then, requires courage. I see my interlocutors' choice to befriend me as acts of courage, of fearlessness, as a proactively chosen, agentic course of action taken in circumstances with limited, undesirable, and difficult options. I understand this 'fearlessness' as different from what I call 'recklessness': a 'choice' made from a position of desperation, where no other option appears possible (of which many examples also abound in this thesis). Given my social positioning vis-à-vis my interlocutors not as a peer but as someone who was in some instances directly (and in some cases, intimately) connected with the people who they were speaking to me about, the risks of trusting me were even higher.

For Maria and other interlocutors, '*dosti*' is, in addition to being a relationship in which they can share their deepest, most precious, and potentially dangerous secrets, also a relationship of equality and of mutuality. This 'equality' required a mutual understanding and acceptance of our *in*equality and the resulting differences between us. One such illustration is offered by the voice note I received from Maria in response to my apology for being out of touch: "*Mujhe aap ki harr baat ka patta hy*. I know everything about you, and if I were still to be upset at you for not being in touch, then this wouldn't be a *dosti*!" (Maria, voice message, 07-07-2022). In claiming to 'know my lifestyle' and to 'know everything about me', Maria signals that she feels confident in her knowledge of me. Here, she is reassuring me that she is both able and willing to understand and accept my limitations with respect to our communication, despite my communication patterns being different from her own and from what she would otherwise want or expect from me. *Dosti*, then, has been about flexibility, exploration, venturing out into mutually uncomfortable terrain, about not merely being a 'receiver' or a 'giver' but about each person doing both. To receive and give in ways that challenge rather than reproduce the structural asymmetry of deeply entrenched patronage relations is a deeply uncomfortable process, but that is, in some ways, what my closest research relationships- now relationships of *dosti*- have started to do. Goodchild's (1996) words resonate for me here:

> Desire produces itself, spreading by contagion; but this contagion is the real production of mutually affective and transformative social relations. To produce and know desire, therefore, is to express a politics of desire: the production of desire is inseparable from the creation of new modes of social existence. (p.43)

Conclusion

This chapter argues that desire must be understood as central to subaltern political subjectivation, building on the theorisation of desire as force and orientation (elaborated in Chapter 2). It brings into view the intimate lives, desires, and orientations towards desire of my interlocutors, locating these in the structural, material, and normative contexts that give rise to the multiple, co-constituted gendered unfreedoms that mark their everyday lives. It explores various manifestations of restrictions on women's mobility, autonomy, and relationality, along with prescribed and proscribed forms of 'selfhood' that domestic workers are subject to and which they navigate as they create and fashion their selves.

Building on Foucault's (1988) conception of 'self-fashioning' as a means for individuals to "perform certain operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (p. 18) in ways that can 'push the limits that are imposed on us' (Aryal, 2020, p. 71), this chapter shows self-fashioning to be a process that is grounded in material contexts but also exceeds these contexts in important ways, most vividly illustrated by the characters of Maria and Roshni. In demonstrating that interlocutors' self-fashionings provide crucial insights into their political subjectivities (particularly those subjectivities which come into view when interlocutors engage with desire), this chapter confirms the importance of employing a multi-pronged approach to studying subaltern political subjectivation (as argued in Chapter 2) which is attentive to the potentials and limitations of different sites and contexts and to what each of these reveal about the subjects in question.

This chapter shows that what emerges from the oppressive contexts inhabited by my interlocutors is a range of context- and resource-dependent self-fashionings and orientations, visible across and within the narratives of different interlocutors. Maria, for instance, can be seen fashioning herself in many instances as an overtly desirous/desiring being who wants to live according to her will ('*apni marzi se*'); as someone who demands equality, asserting that 'she is human, too' ('*me bhi insaan hun*'); as someone who frequently speaks truth to power and challenges the norms and practices that legitimise structural inequalities. On the other end of the spectrum are interlocutors like Roshni, Zarina, and Zara, who fashion themselves in different ways as 'selfless' and engage in various (verbal and material) forms of self-erasure while simultaneously resisting, challenging, resenting, and grieving this erasure.

This chapter shows that desire as orientation is far from 'straight-forward', in both the literal and figurative sense. It shows that desire does not merely produce a forward-looking, hopeful, or longing subject. Zarina's narrative in particular shows that all forward-looking orientations are not hopeful or even voluntary; they may be driven by anxiety, pressure, obligations, and apprehensions. Instead of producing a predictable, consistent, or linear orientation, Zarina's sudden and multi-directional jerks between past, present and future (in response to being asked to imagine an alternate source of livelihood for herself) indicate that desire produces various (shifting) temporal orientations, creating (and/or reflecting) ambivalence, confusion, and *dis*orientation, rather than finding expression as hope or longing. Roshni makes this point amply clear in her narrative when she emphasises the importance of 'knowing one's place' (*auqaat*) and asserts that imagining, fantasising, and desiring are not just futile, but risky, and dangerous endeavours—that is, for those like herself in subordinate positions.

Some of my interlocutors' stories and self-fashionings illustrate that ambivalence characterises their desires and also their orientations towards desire and desiring. Roshni's ambivalence about the prospect of marriage (rooted among other things in a desire to transcend the imperative of choosing between companionship and autonomy) leads her to lament her 'sacrifice' of remaining unmarried and simultaneously assert that remaining single is a choice she has made of her own will. Zarina, too, can be seen moving back-and-forth between a denial of herself as a desiring being to expressing concrete desires (of her own) and exhibiting a *will* to desire ('*dil tho mera boht chahta hy*'). In a context where desiring, in conjunction with the inhabitation of an autonomous self, is itself prohibited for these subjects, interlocutors' ambivalent orientations towards recognising themselves as desiring subjects is yet another illustration of the tensions between acceptance/internalisation and rejection/autonomisation of relations of domination that characterise subaltern political subjectivation (Modonesi, 2014).

Both Roshni's and Maria's stories of alleged and/or actual affairs- which have been excluded from the main text to protect these interlocutors- end with a confirmation of the narratives of class and gender inequality that appear consistently in their stories and descriptions of their lives and experiences. For Maria, her affair with a *kothi wala* confirmed that '*ghareeb larkiyon se koi pyaar nahin karta*' ('nobody truly loves a poor woman') and Roshni's experience of being accused of having an affair with '*sahab ka beta*' (the employers' son) confirmed for her that one's '*auqaat*' or 'place in the world' is what matters in the end. This sense-making by Maria and Roshni is reflective of their realities as working-class, gendered, subaltern subjects. Their narratives of and about

power (in particular, class and gendered power), its various manifestations and consequences for those in structurally subordinate positions are a deep, powerful, even if sometimes deceptively subtle current running throughout their and other interlocutors' narratives.

And finally, my interlocutors' use of the term '*dosti*' as explored in this chapter indicates a desire for *relationship;* for sharing, connection, and support. The cultural expression of this desire (like other desires and orientations discussed in this chapter) exists alongside its repudiation, as embodied by many interlocutors in their reproduction of the norm that an '*achi aurat*' ('good woman') does not do '*dosti*'. Interlocutors' narratives show *dosti* to be simultaneously desirable and deviant, ambiguous but masquerading as 'innocent', and hence treated with suspicion by custodians of the status-quo both in the *kothi* and in the *basti*. This kind of relationship- ambiguous, voluntary, mutual, and nourishing- is sometimes named as '*dosti*'; at other times, it remains unnamed, or appears (as in Zara's narrative) as 'something else' which cannot be fully captured by existing 'types' of relationship. This explains the shifting, ongoing struggles- both mine and my interlocutors'- to name our relationship in satisfactory ways. *Dosti* as 'something else' is significant also because it refers to agentic, voluntarily chosen relationships amidst a sea of unchosen or unfreely chosen relationships. My own process of creating relationships of *dosti* with particular interlocutors makes visible that while this choice requires risk-taking and courage on both ends, there is a clear asymmetry in the risks and impacts of doing so for those occupying structurally different (and distant) social locations.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This PhD project set out to explore how the everyday experiences of Islamabad's part-time women domestic workers shape them as political subjects. It looked at how this group of low-caste working-class women narrate and navigate their experiences of multiple co-constitutive forms of oppression and inequality in and across the sites of the *kothis* where they work, the *bastis* where they live, and the homes where their intimate lives unfold. Employing ethnography as both method and methodology, this project explored the political subjectivities of this group of gendered subalterns through attention to their conceptual vocabularies, practices, claim-makings, and self-fashionings and through tracking moments of affective dissonance in their narratives and field encounters (Hemmings, 2012).

In focusing on the everyday lives and political subjectivities of Islamabad's domestic workers, this project sought to challenge the equation of political subjects with only those participating in political action. ('Political action' is understood in this thesis to mean collective, public mobilisations serving as explicit expressions of resistance). Challenging binary constructions that locate political subjectivities either inside or outside political action, this project paid attention to domestic workers' individual everyday practices, narratives, and self-fashionings as well as to their participation in collective political action in response to the imminent threat as well as lived experience of being forcibly evicted by the state from the *bastis* they live in.

Political subjectivity- a term I consider synonymous with the more politicized 20th century term 'political consciousness'- is understood in this thesis as a reference to both the cognitive and emotional/affective 'inner life' of a subject (Luhrmann, 2006, p. 345) and as produced in particular material, historical, social, spatial, and temporal contexts. Understanding the relationship between a subject and their past as "never simply linear, never a question of straightforward origin brought forward" (Hemmings, 2013, p. 339), this project conceives of self-fashioning/narrativizing as a process that both reflects and produces subjectivity. Thus, in (re)producing interlocutors accounts, it attempted to remain as epistemically aligned as possible with interlocutors themselves without collapsing my identity into theirs. The project also went beyond a reproduction of domestic workers' narratives by providing an inductive, reflexive, and contextual analysis of their narratives (i.e. their accounts of their lives) and narrations (*how* they express/deliver/perform these accounts). Understanding individual subjects and subjectivities as

being in dialectical relationship with collective subjects and subjectivities, this project aspired to co-hold the individual and the collective, the particular and the universal, together, in their complementarity and their tension, without collapsing one into the other or losing sight of one or the other.

In this concluding chapter, I consolidate the research findings of this project, identify where and how these findings contribute to existing knowledge on the subject, reflect on their limitations and surprises, and discuss their implications for future research and political practice.

Research Findings and Contributions to Scholarship

This thesis (particularly in its empirical-analytical chapters) clearly demonstrates that Islamabad's domestic workers- low-caste, working-class, *basti*-dwelling women invisibilised across multiple registers- are unambiguously *political* subjects. Contrary to common sense perceptions of Pakistani women (and working-class women in particular) in both state and societal discourses as 'apolitical' and developmentalist constructions of domestic workers as passive subjects awaiting 'empowerment' (Roberts & Zulfiqar, 2019), this thesis shows Islamabad's domestic workers to be active producers of structural critique and dynamic political actors in both the infra-political and political realms (Scott, 1990, p. 184), strategically navigating numerous co-constituted forms of inequality and oppression across multiple sites and contexts. This group of gendered subalterns also has distinct subjectivities (as well as distinct needs and desires) from their male counterparts, arising from the particularities of the co-constituted gender, class, and caste oppressions to which they are subject. The particular conditions of their subjectivation create a distinct set of possibilities and constraints in the realm of organised political action, and these specificities can and must be engaged with more carefully and deeply in Left organisational practice, as I discuss towards the end of this chapter.

Class

This study finds that class, as E.P. Thompson (1987) describes it, is clearly 'happening' in domestic workers' everyday lives and appears centrally in their political subjectivities, evidenced by the sharp and ever-present sense of 'us and them' that pervades their narratives. Interlocutors' narratives make clear that domestic workers' experiences of class extend well beyond the realm of domestic service: their everyday experiences as *basti walas* are significant constituents of their class subjectivities, as these subjects are deemed by the state on the one hand to be 'illegal

encroachers', 'outsiders' to the city of Islamabad, and subjected to violent evictions from their settlements; and on the other hand, they are deemed by the city's elite and middle-classes to be 'dirty', 'morally corrupt' and 'criminal'.

As Chapter 6 in particular demonstrates, class critiques can be expressed in non-class terms; in this case, through deployments of religious discourse. Here, I argue that religious discourse serves as a uniquely potent form of social capital for this group of subaltern subjects who do not have access to other forms of capital, and that these deployments are aided by the conceptual space provided by religious discourse where (at least in principle) everyone is equal as a believer, whereas there is no such presumption of equality in the language of class or other common forms of social discourse. At the same time, I argue that domestic workers' deployments of religious discourse do not conform to (and thereby challenge) the religious/secular binary prevalent within the contemporary Pakistan-based literature on gendered political agency (A. Khan & Kirmani, 2018). Unlike Pakistani middle-class and elite preoccupations with performing piety (Maqsood, 2017), this study finds many domestic workers- particularly those from 'low-caste' groups- to be frequent users of religious discourse without a corresponding insistence on religious practice or consumption, making their deployments of religion significantly different from those of Pakistan's urban middle-classes.

Research findings show that domestic workers' narratives of class are deeply intertwined with the need/desire for and claims to dignity, autonomy, and recognition as labouring and affective beings. Indeed, interlocutors' conceptualisations of '*insan*' as autonomous, dignified, labouring, and affective beings not only echo and extend affect theorists' understandings of the human (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), they also serve as important rejoinders to decolonial scepticism of universals (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) by demonstrating that non-totalizing universals are not just possible, they can also be necessary for subaltern claim-makings and political practice.

Desire

Research findings show that the most radical, ruptural features of domestic workers' subjectivities lie not in the realm of public political action but rather in the subjective realm of desire. I argue in this thesis that desire must be seen both as an orientation towards the future (which may or may not be 'hopeful') and as a force that insists upon materialisation and thus has concrete, tangible, and material effects, in addition to its power as a subjectivating force. I thus argue that far from

being unrelated to or distant from an exploration of political subjects, subjectivation, or even organised politics, desire must be understood as central to political subjectivity (Georgis, 2019; Goodchild, 1996; Seitz & Farhadi, 2019). In making this argument, I bring together psychoanalytic theory, affect theory, Marxist, and anticolonial scholarship, and put into conversation otherwise disparate literatures on social reproduction, subalternity, political subjectivation, class, and desire, making a novel interdisciplinary and theoretically pluralist contribution to the scholarship on subaltern political subjectivation.

Unlike class which I was prepared to 'see', I stumbled upon desire during the PhD journey and it 'stuck' with me, as affect does, from the moment I encountered it (S. Ahmed, 2010). In a social context in which this group of gendered subaltern subjects is actively discouraged from being or becoming desiring subjects with autonomous lives and selves, desiring does the important and dangerous political work of compelling movement and risk-taking, thereby shifting the material, relational and ideational fields both in and around these subjects. Given this context, research findings show that interlocutors often have complex and ambivalent orientations towards desire and towards acknowledging and/or recognising themselves as desiring subjects. Chapter 9 in particular offers a clear illustration of the political import of desiring for subaltern subjects who are often engaged in modes of self-fashioning that deny the existence of an autonomous, desiring self as a way of navigating the complex, co-constituted forms of subordination they live with in the everyday. I argue, however, that it is both in the suppression and the expression of desire that my interlocutors' most intimate selves come into view. Further, it is through attentiveness to desire that the most radical, animated, and courageous aspects of their selves appear, providing a window into what may become possible at some unforeseen point in time in any number of realms, including that of political action.

Agency and Coercion in Subaltern Political Subjectivation

Research findings show agency and coercion to be deeply intertwined in various aspects of domestic workers' everyday lives and subjectivities, including but not limited to their decision to enter domestic service. Articulated by interlocutors as '*majboori*', the 'compulsion' to enter domestic service is intertwined with 'choice' about which jobs to take up or leave and how to navigate the employment relationship, albeit under conditions of stark structural inequality that are clearly not of their choosing. Beyond the 'mute compulsion' of economic survival (Mau, 2023),

majboori was a term also used to signify social pressures to conform to familial and community-level expectations, particularly around performing middle-class respectability. However, the term '*majboori*' was rarely used to describe *gendered* compulsions and pressures particularly in interlocutors' intimate lives in the marital and familial domains, indicating the depth of, and silences around, gendered oppression in their everyday lives and contexts.

Furthermore, research findings reveal the significantly gendered nature of interlocutors' vocabularies, showing terms such as *insan* (human), *shauq* (longing/interest/desire), and *dosti* (friendship) to be implicitly gendered and signalling important (gendered) exclusions. Highlighting Christian interlocutors' frequent use of Muslim terms (notably the term 'Allah') in their deployments of religious discourse, as well as interlocutors' vigorous denials of '*shauq*' and '*dosti*' in their self-fashionings as 'good', chaste women, this thesis illustrates how structural oppression moulds the linguistic choices of oppressed groups, as well as how these exclusions and oppressions are resisted by subaltern subjects through self-fashioning, speech, and action.

'Performed deference' or 'internalised oppression'?

Throughout the thesis, I grapple with the epistemological, ontological, and methodological complexities of distinguishing between apparent/performed deference and internalised oppression. Without claiming to have arrived at an unambiguous 'resolution' to this analytical dilemma, I argue, based on a careful tracking of interlocutors' narratives and self-fashionings across time and space, that subaltern subjects' acceptance of inequality serves as a means of making the experience (of inequality) *tolerable* and needs to be distinguished from an internalisation of inequality that is perceived and/or experienced as right, good, just, or *desirable* by subaltern subjects themselves. At the same time, research findings also show that the lines between 'apparent' (or external, outwardly-performed) deference and 'internalised' oppression can be(come) blurred, suggesting the constitution of ambivalent, contradicted, and incoherent selves (Fanon, 1967).

Spaces and selves

Research findings show clear connections between space and subjectivation; specifically, how particular spaces disable and/or enable the production and expression of particular subjectivities, behaviours, and expressions. In this study, individual and group discussions in the *bastis* emerged as the main sites of women domestic workers' critique of domestic service relations in particular

and class relations in general. On the other hand, state-oriented critiques and claims such as those invoking '*shehri*' (citizen) and 'Pakistaniat' ('being Pakistani') appeared mostly in public protests on the streets or in political gatherings within the *basti* and often featured significant male presence/involvement. The most sensitive disclosures, namely claims to gendered autonomy and selfhood were made the most discreetly, usually in interlocutors' homes (out of necessity rather than choice) under conditions of relative privacy/safety, or outdoors in public places where they were temporarily anonymous and unsurveilled. In making these observations, this thesis offers a conceptual corrective to James Scott's (1990) concepts of the 'public and hidden' transcripts, pointing out the single-axis view of domination they rely on and highlighting the specificity of the theoretical and political import of 'hidden transcripts' generated from any particular site. This 'corrective' also serves as a reminder of the need to *ground* the study of subjectivity in the particular material, social, and spatial contexts from which it emerges, contributing conceptually to materialist strands in the contemporary literature on political subjectivity (Biehl et al., 2007; Kipfer & Mallick, 2022; Madhok, 2018, 2021).

Caste

Exploring the everyday lives of low-caste domestic workers in a social context that denies the very existence of caste, this thesis renews the call for deeper academic and political engagement with the category of caste in the Pakistan context. Chapter 3 in particular discusses how caste has been theorised in South Asia (a matter of much scholarly debate and discussion, particularly in Indian scholarship), and debates if and how the concept is useful in explaining social relations in contemporary Pakistan. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 reveal ongoing practices of untouchability, show the prevalence of caste identity as a fluid and contextual organising principle of social life in Islamabad's *bastis*, and demonstrate a significant association between kin-based group identities, social status, and social mobility. I argue alongside Channa (2015) that these findings need to be understood as markers of caste in a context where the primary markers of caste have shifted (see Channa, 2015, pp. 53-54). In the above-mentioned ways, this thesis offers both empirical and conceptual contributions to the sparse scholarship on caste in Pakistan.

The subjectivating impacts of political action

Research findings show that political action can have important counter-hegemonic subjectivating effects, even though subaltern groups' relationships to organised politics remain largely ensconced within a 'common sense' logic of patronage. Chapter 7 in particular shows how

class subjectivity and patronage logics pervade the relationship of Islamabad's *basti walas* with the AWP despite the latter's attempts to 'do politics differently', that is, outside of a 'common sense' patron-client mode of politics.

An analysis of interlocutors' narratives about their participation in political actions to resist forced evictions shows a cross-class, mutual broadening of the 'we' (for both 'organisers' and 'organised'), arising from a set of shared experiences in conditions/situations of shared risk. This finding points to important interconnections between material/practical interdependence and widening the imagination of political community, indicating the inadequacy of solidarity politics that merely verbalizes political positions without entering into productive, collaborative, and interdependent *relationship* with those one seeks to support.

Research findings also show that *basti* women were more open to, and moved by, non-transactional modes of politics than men in these communities. Even where AWP-led efforts to resist evictions were not wholly or sometimes even partially successful in preventing or stopping *basti* demolitions, the process of political engagement, consultation, and collaboration created a sufficient basis for a continued relationship of these communities (and particularly women in these communities) with the AWP. This appeared most vividly in the case of the G-11 *basti* that was demolished during fieldwork in October 2021 (despite the AWP's efforts to prevent/stop the operation), where the very acknowledgement of women as political subjects, actors, and leaders of this *basti* (in addition to the consistent material, legal, and political support provided to the *basti* community as a whole by the AWP both during and after the demolition) appeared to cement the G-11 women's bonds with the AWP in the post-demolition phase. Interestingly, this relationship went on to spur the G-11 women's interest in political participation beyond their *basti*, evidenced by their expressions of interest in running for local government elections some months later and in other party campaigns and activities not directly related to their own particular identities or issues.

This study also finds that participation in political action for Islamabad's *basti*-dwelling working classes is- or can be- a way of showing reciprocity in return for material, emotional, or political assistance from 'good patrons' like the AWP. While this subjectivity reflects the persistence of patronage-based logics even within alternative forms of politics, it is also a reminder that the ability to reciprocate is an important aspect of maintaining one's dignity and autonomy, particularly for subaltern subjects in structurally unequal relationships for whom '*mohtaaji*'-

which literally indicates a condition of crippling dependence- is signaled by unilateral receiving rather than by reciprocal (even if asymmetrical) exchange.

The realm of political action also reveals the internal complexities of subaltern political subjectivity and the ways it can reinforce hegemonic discourses that pit oppressed groups against one another and reproduce a 'competition of oppressions' amongst working-class communities (Akhtar, 2022). This reconfirms the need to be wary of romanticising subaltern subjectivities, and strengthens calls issued by Gramsci (1971/2001), Fanon (1963) and Freire (1968/1990) about the need for political education and political organisation, understanding these to be integral constituents of the interconnected struggles for subjective, material, and structural-systemic transformation.

The road(s) not taken: Avenues for further research

Apart from the inevitable limitations of this research that stem from my positionality as a local and privileged *kothi wala* and my history as a political organiser in the communities under study, the messy and contingent nature of the research process itself featured a number of crossroads, the navigation of which had important implications for the subsequent course of the project. Here, I identify and reflect briefly on these crossroads and particularly on 'the roads not taken' as potential avenues for further research.

One of the crossroads encountered during fieldwork featured significant conceptual and methodological intersections and overlaps between an exploration of domestic workers' *subjectivities* and an exploration of the domestic service *relationship*. After some deliberation, I chose not to systematically explore or integrate employers' subjectivities into the research design and to focus exclusively on domestic workers' experiences and narratives for reasons discussed in Chapter 4. However, this research project- its questions, process, and findings- all provide rich ground for deepening the study of the domestic service relationship in Pakistan's cities. In particular, the gendered dimensions of the domestic service relationship, particularly between women domestic workers and their *bajis*, appear to be a central feature of the employment relationship, as prior scholarship on domestic service in the South Asian context has shown (Ghosh & Godley, 2020; Grover et al., 2018; Ray & Qayum, 2009; Zulfiqar, 2019). This could be explored further in the contemporary Pakistan context, where ethnographic scholarship on domestic service remains sparse. Similarly, how domestic workers maintain relations of

'pragmatic intimacy' with their *bajis* (Sengupta & Sen, 2016) is not a focus of this thesis but would constitute a fascinating area for further study.

While one of the findings and indeed the contributions of this study lies in highlighting the connections between space and subjectivity (as discussed above), there are a number of aspects of these connections that remained unexplored in this thesis and constitute interesting areas for further research. For instance, this study did not systematically investigate differences between part-time and full-time domestic service (beyond exceptions and part-time workers' narratives about prior experiences of working full-time), which would deepen and enrich studies exploring the intertwinement between space and subjectivity. Another methodological pathway (not taken in this thesis for both methodological and ethical reasons described in Chapter 4) could have been to track fewer interlocutors and shadow these individuals across the spaces of the *kothi*, the *basti*, and the home, enabling deeper insight into the relationship between spaces and selves.

Finally, limitations of space in the written output of the thesis did not allow the full spectrum of interlocutors' self-fashionings to come into view. Further exploration of the wide range of self-fashionings and the deployment of sometimes starkly different strategies by domestic workers in roughly similar social locations could be interesting areas for further study.

Having summarised the findings and limitations of this study, in the following and final section of this chapter, I explore the implications of these findings for Left political practice.

Towards the 'not-yet': Implications for political practice

This project began with a desire to reflect on my political practice and subjectivation as a Marxist political worker over the last two decades; to understand the Pakistan Left's failure to grow amongst the subaltern classes it seeks to empower and represent; to explore why its ideas, practices, and resources have not been taken up by these groups; and in particular, a desire to investigate the continued marginality of working-class/subaltern women to Left political praxis. In part, the research process and its 'findings' have somewhat undone the rather harsh judgements upon which this initial framing was based: This thesis shows that subaltern groups- particularly women in Islamabad's *bastis- have* taken up the AWP's invitation to do politics differently and that they have selectively and purposefully engaged with the AWP's ideas and its organisational structures and practices. While this 'corrective' does not diminish or do away with the need for the Left to self-interrogate, it has compelled me to shift the meaning and standards

upon which I had measured the Left/AWP's 'success' and 'failure'. Indeed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, research findings show that AWP's 'failure' to prevent *basti* demolitions did not result in their rejection by the *basti walas*; rather, the post-demolition phase in fact saw a strengthening in the AWP's relationship with the women of the G-11 *basti*. This highlights the importance of both means and ends (or both process and outcome) in political struggle and serves as a reminder of the significance of transforming political consciousness/subjectivity through building long-term, interdependent, productive, and trusting relationships in the quest for structural transformation.

There are, however, a number of further learnings that Left organisations such as the AWP can take from this project and its questions, process, and outcomes. As I have argued throughout the course of this thesis, Islamabad's domestic workers- who are low-caste, working-class, *basti*-dwelling women invisibilised across multiple registers- are very much political subjects and need to be understood as such in Left organisational practice. A careful engagement with these gendered subalterns' relationships with the AWP shows that fun, materiality, dignity, and reciprocity are all factors at work in their relationships with organised Left politics, each of which need to be taken into account and taken seriously in the process of political organising. While *basti walas*' expectations of 'good patronage' from the AWP on the one hand reproduce the status-quo logic of patronage, they also indicate the importance of using/leveraging class and other forms of privilege in service of working-class struggles rather than simply insist on its 'dismantling' privilege in every instance as had been my prior subjectivation as a political worker. These findings also open up avenues for thinking creatively about how sites and mechanisms for collective expression can open up possibilities for the emergence of distinctive, radical subjectivities that do not find expression in everyday individual encounters. As this thesis consistently demonstrates, political subjectivities are contextual and fluid—they need sites and mechanisms to flow. It is for political organisers to be on the lookout for opportunities to create such (collective) sites and mechanisms that enable the expression and flourishing of these 'hidden', less expressed, radical aspects of gendered subaltern selves. However, this thesis also shows that an understanding of the specificities of the coercive contexts these subjects inhabit is necessary in order to create such spaces for expression.

And finally, as noted earlier in this chapter, desire compels movement towards 'something else', towards the formation of a 'not-yet'. A Left politics of transformation needs to move beyond mourning and (fear of) loss, beyond an orientation of defence and protection (Brown, 2002; Dean,

2012). It needs to move towards a politics of desire, an active striving *towards* rather than defence *against*. Bringing into being 'another' politics is possible if it centres desire and desiring as an orientation; if, in accordance with the claims and demands of the primary interlocutors of this thesis, it acknowledges gendered subalterns like Islamabad's domestic workers as unambiguously *political* subjects who are simultaneously dignified, labouring, and affective beings and also *human* beings who not only think and act but also *feel* and *want*.

As I conclude this thesis, I am aware that this 'bringing into being' of 'another' politics is not just a future aspiration; it has been the ongoing, collective struggle of countless, nameless persons everywhere, glimpses of which I could see already unfolding over the course of this research project. As noted in previous chapters, when interlocutors were asked individually about their desires and/or invited to enter the terrain of imagination, many of them were reluctant. In the group discussions however, which were women-only gatherings in *basti* spaces, a very different orientation emerged, with the same interlocutors often transformed into altogether different 'beings'- more assertive, expressive, and uninhibited- from the ones I knew from our individual interactions. This pattern suggests not only that imagining/desiring collectively *creates* power, but also that imagining/desiring *needs* power/strength—which in group settings my interlocutors appeared to derive from one other through sharing their stories, being witness to those of others, through supporting each other and finding and creating common ground with one another; a common ground which is structurally ever-present but lost in patriarchal separation. Indeed, it feels like no coincidence that the sharpest, most vivid expressions of anger and pride emerged in these gatherings and that acts of revenge and 'speaking back' to the dominant were performed during group discussions through acts of mimicry, laughter, and storytelling. As I prepare to re-enter the organising world, I carry these glimpses with me as reminders that another politics— and another world— are possible.

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