

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of Geography

**CHILD DOMESTIC WORKERS IN DHAKA:
A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF DISCOURSES, WORK,
AND EDUCATION**

A Thesis in

Geography

by

Kari Bolstad Jensen

© 2007 Kari Bolstad Jensen

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2007

The thesis of Kari Bolstad Jensen was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Lakshman Yapa
Professor of Geography
Thesis Advisor
Chair of Committee

Chris Benner
Assistant Professor of Geography and Labor Studies and Industrial
Relations

Lorraine Dowler
Associate Professor of Geography and Women's Studies
Director of Women's Studies Department

Amy Glasmeier
E. Willard Miller Professor of Economic Geography
Professor of Geography and Regional Planning

David Post
Professor of Education, Higher Education Program and Comparative and
International Education
Research Associate, Center for the Study of Higher Education

Karl Zimmerer
Professor of Geography
Head of the Department of Geography

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

It is estimated that 300,000 children work as domestics in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 75% of whom are girls. Coming from poor households, and having little formal education, children work as domestics because of a need to sustain themselves and their families. Child domestics are often compelled to work under oppressive conditions. Domestic work is not a solution to the economic problems of poor children. However, in the short term we must recognize child domestics as workers, increase their social status, and fulfill their rights. Child domestics' rights can be protected by mobilizing agency in all sectors and scales of Bangladeshi and international society, such as implementing laws, work contracts, monitoring, and activities organized by NGOs and the government focusing on education and awareness. Access to education is important because of the potential of making these children visible to society. Laws protecting working children do not reach secluded spaces of private homes where the labor and bodies of child domestics are available to employers around the clock. In non-domestic spaces, children can meet people who may help them if there are problems with the employers. Access to semi-public spaces such as the rooftops of apartment buildings is critical to child domestics as spaces of networking and socialization. Some NGOs are using rooftops as access points for educational programs. The material conditions affecting the children are set in discourses of 'childhood' and 'child labor'. I examine discourses and workspaces with a view to improve the quality of life of these children. By combining discourse analysis and critical ethnography, I analyze three main discourses that shape the space-time frameworks and everyday lives of child domestic workers: 1) A human rights

discourse which conceives of childhood as a universal category where education and social participation should be a part of a child's life; 2) An employers' discourse which constructs a dichotomy between their biological children and their child domestics, and finally; 3) A child domestics' discourse which centers on work as a necessary duty, and where the notion of childhood ties to their identity as servants, feelings of inferiority and a desire for respect.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
My entry to the topic of child domestic work.....	1
Research Questions.....	8
Childhood and child labor in Bangladesh – Age/gender/class	12
History and geography of Bangladesh and Dhaka	17
The economy and economic reforms in Bangladesh.....	23
Economic reforms’ impact on poverty levels, employment patterns and work conditions	28
Placing this study in the broader context of the Bangladeshi economy and economic reforms	31
Education in Bangladesh and Dhaka – Age/gender/class.....	34
Chapter 2 Discourse theory and discourse analysis.....	39
Research design	39
“Where is your literature review?”—How discourse analysis impacts the structure of the dissertation by exchanging literature review with textual analysis	41
Meanings of ‘discourse’	42
Foucault’s concepts of ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’	45
Brief explanation of the terms ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods.....	49
Discourse theory	53
Discourse analysis and my data.....	57
How does discourse theory influence my data and why is discourse theory important for children’s geographies?.....	66
Concluding remarks: A theoretical framework for discourse analysis.....	69
Chapter 3 Critical ethnography as methodology in research with child domestic workers and other participants.....	72
Definitions of epistemology	72
Examples of epistemologies and my choice of epistemology	73
Definitions of methodology and my choice of methodologies.....	83
Four ways of studying children	89
From research <i>on</i> to research <i>with</i> children.....	93
Profile of the child participants.....	95
Scope for children’s participation in my research	97

Nature of children's participation in my research	99
My positionality.....	104
Ethical considerations and challenges in the research with children.....	107
A semi-public space as a research arena.....	109
Profile of the adult participants.....	110
Concluding remarks.....	111
 Chapter 4 The human rights discourse on childhood and child domestic work	 114
From welfare to human rights: The difference that 'participation' makes	115
The conception of childhood in the human rights discourse	126
Controversy in the application of the UNCRC: A discussion of 'participation' and 'best interests'	133
The government's child rights discourse.....	137
ILO's child rights discourse.....	143
UNICEF's child rights discourse.....	148
Save the Children's child rights discourse.....	152
National NGOs' child rights discourse.....	156
Media's child rights discourse	161
Power/knowledge in the child rights discourse	164
 Chapter 5 The employers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work	 173
Material conditions' affect on the employers' discourse.....	174
The conception of childhood in the employers' discourse	178
Employers' discipline of bodies and space.....	181
Employers' efforts at giving their child domestics access to education.....	186
Discipline and punish	192
Dismissal as a disciplinary method.....	200
Keeping them locked inside—Slavery or protection?.....	207
The 'self' included as the 'problem' in the discourse.....	213
Power/knowledge in the employers' discourse	217
 Chapter 6 The child domestic workers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work.....	 223
How are child domestics constituted by their own discourse?	224
Child domestic workers' concerns: Lack of agency in life and work	236
<i>The relationship to employers</i>	236
<i>Panopticon in private space</i>	243
<i>Salary</i>	245
<i>Marriage</i>	248
<i>Educational hindrances</i>	251
The life stories of two female child domestic workers.....	253
<i>Rupa's story</i>	254
<i>Shorna's story</i>	258

Restrictions in and opportunities for child participation	262
<i>Child participation – What is it according to working children?</i>	262
Semi-public space as thirdspace: The rooftop as a site of resistance	263
Power/knowledge in the children’s discourse	269
 Chapter 7 Docile minds and bodies caught in a disciplinary grid: Some suggestions for resistance, participation and agency	 273
The main differences among the three discourses	273
<i>Conception of childhood</i>	274
<i>Content, codification, and notions of space</i>	275
<i>Power/knowledge</i>	276
The importance of a balanced approach	282
Potential sites of change and agents of change.....	284
<i>The nexus of relations of child domestic work</i>	294
Final reflections, including methodological and theoretical contributions to geography	300
 Bibliography	 305
 Appendix A Playing on the rooftop.....	 324
 Appendix B Child domestics creating friendship across buildings	 325
 Appendix C Density of built structures: A view to several rooftops where children play	 326
 Appendix D The geography of rooftops	 327
 Appendix E Organizations visited	 328

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1.1: Map of South Asia. Made by Zachary Michael Tardivo, the Pennsylvania State University, 2007.	21
Fig. 1.2: Map of Bangladesh. Made by Zachary Michael Tardivo, the Pennsylvania State University, 2007.	22
Fig. 6-1. Drawing made by a 15-year-old female domestic worker.	233
Fig. 6-2. Drawing of a mango, a bird, and a flower, made by a 14-year-old female domestic.	271
Fig. 6.3: Drawing of a bird in a tree, made by a 16-year-old female domestic.	272
Fig. 7-1 Power relations in the lives of child domestics	280

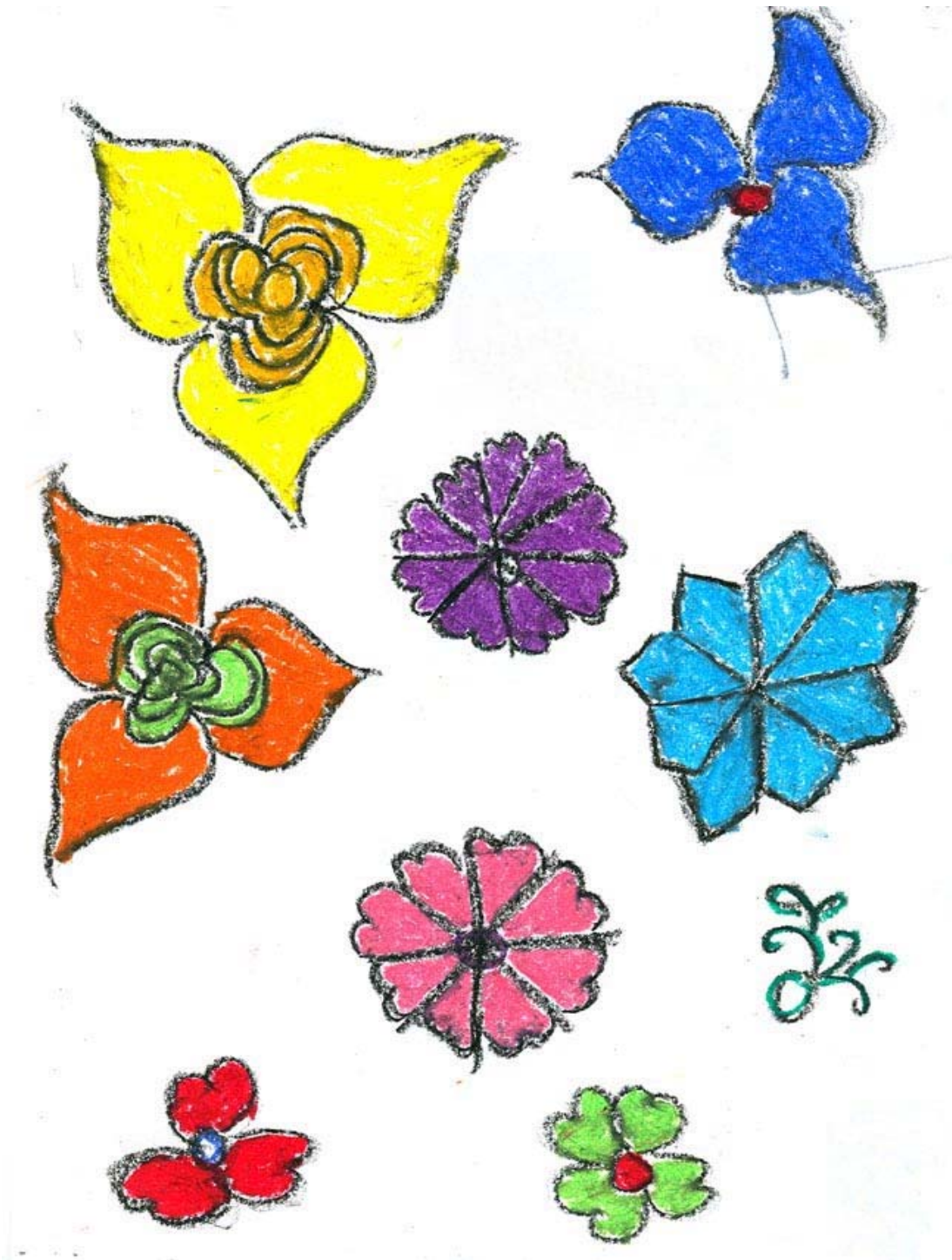
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, thanks to all my research participants for sharing your time, experiences, thoughts, and stories. I am grateful to the Society of Woman Geographers for giving me the Evelyn L. Pruitt National Fellowship for Dissertation Research and to the Save the Children's Research Fund for a research grant, and to the Department of Geography at the Pennsylvania State University for funding my preliminary fieldwork travel in 2004. Thanks to my advisor Lakshman Yapa for stimulating discussions and constructive feedback, and to doctoral committee members Chris Benner, Lorraine Dowler, Amy Glasmeier, and David Post, for inspiring me in different directions with my doctoral research. Thanks to Stuart Aitken for showing initial support and appreciation for my ideas for choice of topic, and to Monira Ahsan for being helpful in the field and also reading and commenting on the dissertation. Thanks to Naser Khan and Sharmin Farzana Khan for interpreting and otherwise assisting me in the field. Thanks to Ayesha Pervez for doing much of the transcribing and translating, and to Shakila Ahmed Susana for sharing knowledge and experiences. Thanks to Claire O'Kane, editor of the special issue of the journal 'Children, Youth, and Environments' on 'Pushing the Boundaries: Critical International Perspectives on Child and Youth Participation' for commenting on several early article drafts while I was still in the field. The journal article helped me think through many of the topics that went into this dissertation. Lee Carpenter deserves sincere appreciation for her diligent and sophisticated editing. An extra thank you to my husband Naser Khan for being so patient and supportive and for sharing my engagement

and passion for people in difficult situations, and to our daughter Amina for being so patient with my odd work hours. Finally, thanks to my parents Torgunn Bolstad Jensen and Ole Jensen, for sparking an interest in me for global social justice already as a young child.

May 6, 2007

Kari Bolstad Jensen



Drawing made by a 16-year-old female child domestic.

Chapter 1

Introduction

My entry to the topic of child domestic work

As a citizen of Norway, a country well known for its egalitarian ideals, my first exposure to Bangladesh in 1994 left me in a state of frustration and disappointment. My interest in child labor grew out of my negative reaction to the stark unequal nature of the Bangladeshi society. Spending some months with my husband's family in Bangladesh where a servant was expected to take constant orders from everyone, made me reflect on the situation of domestic workers in general, and especially of those who start working as children. This brought me into some heated conversations with Bangladeshi people about how they treat their domestic workers and about responsibility for their domestic workers' future in the form of access to education and savings. Having been born and raised in Norway, where we have a strong welfare state and traditionally a strong sense of people's equal rights and equal access to services, my reactions to the rigid class system in Bangladesh were very negative.

I did indeed have knowledge about the social system in Bangladesh before going there, through readings, documentaries, and stories from family and friends. However, it is a very different kind of knowledge one gets by living there, especially when one takes part in the daily life of local people from different social classes. This inspired me later on to write my M.Phil. thesis on reasons for low participation rate in primary schools in

Dhaka among children from low-income families. It gradually led me to explore different forms of child labor. Bangladesh is a relevant place to study child labor—it has 12% of the world's labor force under age 16 (Feldman and Larson 2004) but only 2.5% of the world's population.¹

For my dissertation I considered many different kinds of child labor, including that occurring in formal-sector manufacturing, informal-sector manufacturing, street vending, brick chipping, and garbage picking and recycling. One of the reasons for my decision to focus on child domestic work was the lack of research on this type of child labor. Another reason is that the majority of child domestic workers are female². Girls and women face a lot of discrimination in a patriarchal society like the Bangladeshi. Female child domestic workers have very limited opportunities to meet people outside the home in which they work. They usually do not have access to public places because the employers prefer that they stay at home at all times.

Child domestic work is different from most other kinds of work because of its unique space-time framework. General laws protecting working children do not reach the space of child domestics. Hence there is a need to develop an understanding of the

¹ In my experience statistics from Bangladesh should be taken with a grain of salt. Still, numbers like these give an idea about the magnitude of child labor in the country.

² A survey conducted by the NGO Shoishab in 1999 concluded that 75% of child domestic workers in Dhaka are female. UNICEF (2004) estimates the percentage to be 86. According to the National Child Labour Survey for 2002-2003 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2003), 55% of child domestic workers in Bangladesh are female (based on my calculations from different categories in their material – as the report does not specify the gender ratio). These numbers are not comparable as the two first sources estimates only Dhaka and the other the whole country. The two estimates for Dhaka are not comparable either, because Shoishab defines a child domestic worker as a person below the age of 18, whereas UNICEF in Bangladesh defines it as below the age of 16. I am skeptical towards the gender ratio resulting from the numbers in the National Child Labour Survey report. All the Bangladeshi people I have talked with have the clear impression that there is a vast majority of girls in domestic service, more similar to the estimates from Shoishab and UNICEF.

geographical aspects of this work. Servant work, and especially female servant work, is characterized by its occurrence in private spaces, away from the public's potentially protective gaze, but under almost constant surveillance by the employer. The fact that the employer has access to the child's labor and body around the clock makes child domestic work a unique category of child work. The scope for monitoring is even more limited than for other kinds of child labor. In general, work that takes place in private spaces happens in the home of the worker. This is not the case for domestic work, which takes place in the employer's home. This has significant implications for the characteristics of the job, such as work hours, general work atmosphere, the power play between employer and employee, and possibilities for regulation and monitoring. In the book *Arguing with the crocodile: Gender and class in Bangladesh* (1992) White writes about female domestic workers in Bangladesh: "They are open to physical beating and their sexual abuse is very common. The onus on them is to please, and they face expulsion if they fail to do this" (ibid.: 84). For several years, Human Rights Watch has conducted investigations on abuse against child domestic workers from different countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Human Rights Watch 2007a). The following quote from Human Rights Watch demonstrates the importance of focusing on child domestic work:

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that more girls work as domestics than in any other form of child labor. Yet they have received little attention, and even less protection. Government laws often exclude domestic workers from basic labor rights, labor ministries rarely monitor or investigate conditions of work in private households, and few programs addressing child labor include child domestics. (Human Rights Watch 2006: 49)

Since opportunities to monitor private workspaces are limited, the child domestics' possibilities for a social life outside of the private spaces in which they work are crucial. Child domestic workers' opportunities for social participation, such as meeting peers in a formal or informal setting, depend on the attitudes of the employers, but also on the built environment³. Since most female child domestics are either never or very seldom allowed to go outside of the home in which they work, they have few opportunities to meet other domestic workers or other people with whom they can share their thoughts and experiences. If there are semi-public or public leisure spaces right outside where they live, they may have access to a place where they are free to share their experiences with other domestics or others who understand their situation. With the boom of high-rise residential buildings in Dhaka, most urban middle-class households now reside in apartment buildings without yards, gardens or other open spaces nearby, decreasing the scopes for children and youths to find meeting places for social interaction outside formal arenas like schools. This fact drew me towards the exploration of child domestic workers' access to educational programs. In other words, I wanted to explore these workers' access to education not only because of the intrinsic value of education, but also because education is a collective activity that takes place in public space. It is crucial for children who work and live in their employers' homes to have access to a meeting place where they can discuss experiences and problems with peers and adults who may be in a position to offer assistance in difficult work and life relationships.

³ The concept of children's social participation will be discussed in chapter 4.

Additionally, teachers can pick up signs of maltreatment or other problems and report them to the relevant unit within their organization.

Many poor children in Bangladesh work as servants for wealthier families, performing tasks such as cleaning, washing dishes, grinding spices, cutting vegetables, doing laundry by hand, and babysitting. Many of them perform dangerous tasks such as carrying big pots of hot water from the kitchen to the bathroom. ILO has documented that child domestic work takes place in poor countries all over the world (ILO-IPEC 2004a). Books and reports on cases that are similar to what I found in Dhaka has been published from many different countries (see for instance Flores-Oebanda, Montano, and Pacis 2001; Human Rights Watch 2007b; ILO-IPEC 2004a; Kielland and Tovo 2006; Sommerfelt 2001), including an autobiography by a former child domestic worker in Haiti (Cadet 1998). Authors of reports on child domestic work agree that it is difficult to come up with good estimates of the number of children employed as domestic workers. Estimates of the number of child domestic workers in Bangladesh and Dhaka vary widely, reflecting the invisible nature of the work. According to the National Child Labour Survey for 2002-2003 carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2003), the number of child domestic workers in Bangladesh is 155,883. According to an estimate reached by the NGO Shoishab in 1999, there were 300,000 child domestic workers in Dhaka alone (Shoishab 1999). UNICEF⁴ estimated in 2004 that there were 131,965 child domestic workers in Dhaka (UNICEF 2004). UNICEF has pointed out the problem of invisible child labor in the informal sector. According to UNICEF, research

⁴ UNICEF is an acronym for the United Nations Children's Fund.

on the extent of this kind of work as well as on its impact on the lives of children should receive priority (UNICEF 1997).

Most child domestic workers in Dhaka are ‘live-in’ (*bandha*, literally meaning ‘tied-down’), which means that they live with their employers and work more or less full-time, depending on the employers’ decisions. Others live with their parents or other relatives and work in the employers’ household for a number of hours at certain times of the day (they are called *chhuta*, literally meaning ‘non-bound’⁵). Despite its scale and pervasiveness, there is little academic research documenting and analyzing child domestic work. Several studies on child domestic workers in Bangladesh have been conducted over the last decade (e.g. Momen 1993, Hoque 1995, Rahman 1995, RCS 1999, Shoishab 1999, Shoishab 2001, Khair 2004, UNICEF 2004). However, the involvement of child domestics as research participants in these studies was mostly limited to quantitative, one-time interviews in the presence of their employer. An exception is a field study conducted for the book *Lost innocence, stolen childhoods*, written by anthropologist Therese Blanchet (1996). Her local field investigator visited the employers several times and also talked with the children when the employers were absent. However, in-depth research with child domestics is almost non-existent.

I attempt to start filling this gap in the literature by analyzing child domestic workers’ daily life with a focus on their opportunities for agency and participation in society. In this dissertation I first use the concept of agency in a strict sense, where

⁵ The national NGO “Shoishab Bangladesh” conducted a survey of 10,097 households in 1999. Of all child domestic workers employed by those households, only 5% were *chhuta* (Shoishab 1999). UNICEF estimates that 8% of the child domestic workers in Dhaka are *chhuta* (UNICEF 2004).

agency refers to capacity for self-determination—i.e., children’s capacity to express their views, and power to make decisions about their own life. However, in my concluding chapter I use the agency concept in a broader sense, where agency for social change can be used by all kinds of social actors at all geographical scales and in all sectors in order to help solve one particular problem (Yapa 1996, 2002). My research is formative in the sense that it is meant to involve development of ways of thinking about child domestic work that can potentially help inform broader studies on the topic. It can thus be seen as complimentary to broader surveys of the phenomenon. This qualitative, inductive research captures lived experiences, attitudes, and behavior that cannot be acquired in surveys. I utilize a mix of discourse analysis and ethnography that will be explained in chapters 2 and 3.

Child domestic work has a long tradition in Bangladesh. Children who come from low-income families are placed in wealthier families in order to obtain board and lodging, and in many cases also to earn some money for their families. Child domestics are usually not employed by relatives, but in most cases they are employed by people who have relatives in the same village or rural town as them. Families belonging to the lower middle class more often bring in a poor relative to work for them. Such a domestic worker works for board and lodging only, and is called ‘pete bhate’, which directly translates to ‘food/rice for the stomach’, which means that they get food but are paid nothing. The employing families who participated in my research belonged to the middle class or upper middle class.

Research Questions

I first developed a preliminary research question that I answered after spending two months in Bangladesh the summer before I did the main research for this dissertation, and by reading academic and more action-oriented literature. This question was: *What are the prevailing discourses on childhood and child labor in Bangladesh?* This is an important question because ‘childhood’ and ‘child labor’ are not neutral terms—they are socially constructed. This means that there are many different ways of understanding these concepts—and the way people understand them influences the reality of the children. The recognition that the term ‘childhood’ expresses a socially constructed phenomenon has challenged traditional approaches to the study of children. The traditional approaches focused on socialization of children through stages of development (Holloway and Valentine 2000). I see myself as a researcher representing ‘the new social studies of childhood’. We have two main challenges to the traditional approach to the study of children: First, “childhood is a social construction which varies with time and place and as it articulates with other social differences” (Prout and James 1990, cited in Holloway and Valentine 2000: 5). Second, children are studied “as social actors, as beings in their own right rather than as pre-adult becomings” (Holloway and Valentine 2000: 5).

I found an answer to my preliminary research question mainly by spending time with people from different social classes in Bangladesh. The three main discourses⁶ that I

⁶ Identifying these as the *main* discourses implies that there is a spectrum of nuances of thinking, talking, and acting within each discourse. For instance, I observed different levels of consciousness and understanding of child rights in the way people talked, wrote, and acted in various institutions (i.e., the government, national NGOs and international NGOs). As with the human rights discourse, the employers’

found on childhood and child labor are the human rights discourse, the employers' discourse, and the child laborers' own discourse. The human rights discourse is the official/public discourse that the government of Bangladesh, international agencies, and NGOs subscribe to, at least on paper. People demonstrate by their statements that they understand the importance of implementing the 1989 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter called 'the Convention of the Rights of the Child' or just 'UNCRC'). The second discourse is an unofficial/private discourse on child labor, existing predominantly among the middle class and the Bangladeshi elite, and encompassing attitudes that hinder child domestic workers' access to education and social mobility. The third discourse is the child laborers' own discourse. Their discourse includes a strong notion of desire for more agency, i.e. power to make decisions about their own lives, but also a notion of duty to help their families. When exploring this discourse, I analyze the children's own stories and statements about their lives and work conditions. In Bangladesh, children's opinions are usually not paid attention to, particularly if they belong to children who are servants. Recording these voices is therefore an important part of my research project.

The three main research questions for this dissertation are the following:

1. *How do different discourses on childhood constitute child domestic workers?*

How is the situation for child domestic workers influenced by the way different groups of society perceive them, talk about them and behave towards them? What scope is there for

discourse also contains nuances in thinking, talking and acting. Some employers are sincerely occupied with improving the situation for their domestics, including facilitating their education. For the purpose of this analysis, however, I focus on the dominant aspects of each main discourse.

children's agency and social participation in each discourse? In chapter 2, titled *Discourse theory and discourse analysis*, I develop a Foucauldian power-knowledge framework to be used when analyzing the different discourses. In chapter 3, titled *Critical ethnography as methodology in research with child domestic workers and other participants*, I explain the type of ethnography I used to analyze the written, spoken and lived discourses.

2. *What is the meaning of private and public space in the life of child domestic workers?*

I argued earlier that the 'space' in which work is performed affects the nature of work and the relation between the employer and the employee. Thus, I am interested in knowing how private and public space affect work. How is the use of space tied to the children's status as workers, and to their gender? I discuss this question to some extent in the ethnography chapter (chapter 3) because of the difference between private and public space as research sites. In chapter 4, titled *The human rights discourse on childhood and child domestic work*, I analyze how NGOs employ spatial adaptation of semi-public spaces in order to make schooling available to working children. In chapter 5, titled *The employers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work*, I analyze how the employers control their domestics' use of private and public space in order to maximize their power over their workers. In chapter 6, titled *The child domestic workers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work*, I analyze how child domestics negotiate that control by utilizing different public, semi-public and private spaces.

3. *What can be done to improve the quality of life of child domestic workers?*

Child domestics are very vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because of the characteristics of their work. Lack of contracts, regulation, and monitoring combined with the space-time geography of their job, makes their situation complicated. It is neither realistic nor smart to abolish child domestic work overnight. Since it is so arbitrary what kinds of employers the children are hired by, it is important to look for ways to protect the children. The quality of life for child domestics can be improved through many means: changing discourses, new legislation, implementing new programs, better monitoring and so on. Here I focus on the concept of agency in the context of a post-structural view of social change. The argument in the post-structural view of society is that material conditions cannot be understood independent of discourse. Hence my own argument that child domestic work cannot be understood independent of discourses about children, work, and working children. Child domestic work is seen to exist in a vast discursive material formation diffused through the larger society in economic, social, political, cultural, and academic relations, and agency can be found at all these sites. This implies social change can be accomplished by different people at a large number of different sites using skills, knowledge, and local power. The concept of agency is central to this view of social change, and agency also depends on the discourse we choose to privilege in our analysis.

What are some possible sites for the mobilization of people's agency, to enable child domestic workers to participate in society and find their own agency? I draw on an idea developed by Yapa (1996, 2002), who describes agency as finding "multiple possibilities for agency in the world" (Yapa 2002: 37) by identifying agents of social change at all scales and all sectors of society. In order to change cultural attitudes that

inhibit child domestic workers' social participation, agency in all sectors (economy, culture, politics, media, etc.) and all scales (from individuals and households up to the government and international organizations) must be mobilized (Jensen 2007). When I make the child domestic workers' voices heard by presenting this research I exert my agency as an academic. Thus, agency can be found in the work of researchers, in the efforts and discourses of children themselves, in work by NGOs that promote change in attitudes, and so on. For all of the possible sites I give special attention to education due to its potential to give the child domestics access to public spaces away from the employers' disciplining gaze, where they can meet people to talk with; people who may be able to help them if there are problems with the employers. Education has the potential to empower and emancipate and thereby improve the lives of child domestics. The intrinsic value of education is important. However, for children living in hidden spaces behind the closed doors of their employers, maybe the most important function of education is the spatial element of access to potentially liberating spaces. In chapter 4 I will look at some educational programs for working children that have sprung out of a human rights discourse.

Childhood and child labor in Bangladesh – Age/gender/class

The term 'children' is defined differently in different societies and the definition also varies within societies. I use the definition used in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely that all human beings under the age of 18 years are children. This definition is adopted by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the government

of Bangladesh and used in their policy documents. However, in Bangladeshi society there are different definitions of the word ‘child’. The most common translation of ‘child’ is *shishu*, which is the word used in the translation of the UNCRC from English to Bangla. Blanchet (1996) has done some research on the meanings associated with the word *shishu*. She found that the word is usually only used for children up to the age of 5. If it is used for older children, up to a maximum of age 12, it is used only for those children who are regarded as innocent, well provided and cared for, and kept away from responsibilities. Blanchet argued that by using this word when translating the UNCRC into Bangla it was possible for the government of Bangladesh to get enough support to ratify the convention, as rights for small and innocent children did not sound controversial. I asked several people in Bangladesh to define the word *shishu*. Elderly people defined it as a kid up to the age of 2, and maximum of 7. The other answers varied from up to age 10 to up to age 18. Several respondents said that *shishu* means a child up to the age of 10, and that a child aged 11 to 18 is a *kishor/kishori* (adolescent boy and girl, respectively). These gender-specific words reflect the distinct gender roles for young females and males in the Bangladeshi society (Stalker 1996). One of the respondents who studies at a university said that in colloquial language *shishu* means a little or young child, but she had learned in social studies that in formal documents it means a person up to age 18⁷. These different translations of the word ‘child’ demonstrate the importance of language and discourse in the formulation of laws and policy.

⁷ In Bangla there is no word equivalent to the neutral ‘minor’ in American English.

The notion of childhood in Bangladesh varies across gender and social classes. Most children of middle-class and elite families are expected to focus on their education almost exclusively, and it seems unusual for most of their parents to ask their children to do any kind of work either inside the house or in public. Children from low-income households, on the other hand, are expected to work long hours, often foregoing an education. Together with other poor children, like the children of the streets, they do not really have much choice other than to work. Some of the children have no parents, some have parents who are sick, disabled or drug addicted, and some have only one parent who is not able to earn enough to sustain the whole family. Among poor children it is common to combine school and work⁸. This is not compatible with the ideal notion of childhood often propagated by representatives of the human rights discourse that I discuss in chapter 4.

Gender notions set quite strict limits on what people can and cannot do in Bangladeshi society. Ideally, girls and women are supposed to work in private spaces, and boys and men in public. However, poor people are often not able to follow these social norms. It is therefore quite common to see poor girls and women doing jobs that traditionally are done only by the male population, like working in the fields and selling things in the streets. After decades of globalization and modernization it has become increasingly more common for middle-class women to take jobs outside their homes, as office staff, teachers, nurses, doctors, government employees and business managers.

⁸ Although children from middle-class and elite families usually do not work, a new trend is that young university students from privileged backgrounds have started engaging in some income-generating activities such as serving in restaurants in the better part of the city.

Many people still hold traditional gender attitudes. This was demonstrated by one of my respondents in the slum and squatter settlement survey I conducted in Dhaka some years ago when a mother gave this answer to my question of whether her sons ever do any household chores: “No! They are boys!” (translated from Jensen 2000: 62).

It is common that girls and women have the sole responsibility for household chores and childcare. Many young girls take care of their younger siblings and do household chores for long hours every day. It is therefore unfortunate that this work is not counted in the International Labor Organization (ILO)’s or the government’s labor statistics. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) builds on the labor statistic definitions of the ILO and defines the category “Working child/Economically active child” like this: “Children who were working one or more hours for pay or profit or working without pay in a family farm or enterprise or organization during the reference period or found not working but had a job or business from which he/she was temporarily absent during the reference period (last 7 days) is a working child in the case of current activity status” (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2003: 17). To make it even clearer, BBS writes: “Children who were not engaged in any activity, that is, those children engaged in household chores only were treated as economically inactive and remained outside the scope of working children” (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2003: 18). In other words, if a child works one hour per week in the field or in a family business it counts as work, but if she or he works 80 hours at home, cooking and cleaning, taking care of children, elderly, and sick people, it does not count as work. I know Bangladeshi cultures well after having spent a considerable amount of time there with people from different social classes, and I have observed that girls and women usually do all household chores. The

fact that much, and maybe most, of the work that girls do is invisible in the labor statistics is gender discrimination.

Domestic work undertaken by a child in a household different from the child's own household does count as work in the statistics. However, as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the estimates that do exist of child domestic work vary widely, which reflects the invisible nature of the work and the low reliability of the data. According to the BBS (2003), Bangladesh has an estimated 7.4 million child workers aged 5-17, among them 5.4 million boys and 2.0 million girls. Of these 7.4 million child workers, 3.2 million are defined as child laborers—among them 2.5 million boys and 0.7 million girls⁹. If work inside the girls' own homes were counted, these numbers would look very different.

The main objective of this research is to identify successful ways to increase the life quality of child domestic workers. This necessitates an understanding of how childhood, and more specifically child labor and child domestic work, is constituted through the way people think, talk, and act, i.e., through the prevailing discourses. By understanding the cultural hindrances implied in local discourses it becomes possible to identify agency for social change in all sectors and all scales of the Bangladeshi and international society. In the long term my aim is to ensure that no child is compelled to work in other people's homes for a living, due to the risks associated with work in private spaces, and because all children have a right to be protected from abuse and

⁹ The government of Bangladesh uses ILO's definitions of child work and child labor, which means that child work is defined as work that is compatible with education and not hazardous, whereas child labor is the exploitative types of child work.

exploitation¹⁰. In the short term, however, it is not feasible to abolish such work because of the widespread poverty in Bangladesh. It is therefore unrealistic in the short run to prevent children from working as domestics.

History and geography of Bangladesh and Dhaka

Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy with a short, turbulent history; it obtained independence in 1971. The area that is today Bangladesh used to be East Bengal, a state in India. When India became independent from British rule in 1947, the partition of India led to East Bengal becoming a part of Pakistan. In 1955 East Bengal was named East Pakistan (CIA 2007). Although East Pakistan was richer in natural resources than West Pakistan (the area that today is Pakistan), most wealth ended up in West Pakistan. The patience of the Bengali people was endangered when the government in West Pakistan decided in 1952 that Urdu should be the only official language; a language that very few of the Bengali-speaking East-Pakistanis knew. The famous language movement was born, and Bengali patriotism became strengthened by the government's killings of numerous demonstrating Bengali students. (It happened on February 21; the date that UNESCO¹¹ only a few years ago decided should be celebrated worldwide annually as "The international mother language day"). The language movement gradually grew into an independence movement. A short but very bloody war from March to December 1971

¹⁰ I am aware that this sentence reveals my position in the human rights discourse. I will elaborate on this in the section titled 'My positionality' in chapter 3.

¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

led to an independent country for the Bengali people: Bangladesh¹². However, the “nation father” Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had led the independence movement was soon blamed for corruption and nepotism, and he was assassinated in a violent coup d’etat by a section of the army in 1975 (Siddiqui 2003: 49). Several coups followed, and Bangladesh was led by different military governments from 1975 to 1991, when a fledgling democracy emerged. Bangladesh has been plagued by political instability ever since the state was created. According to Transparency International, Bangladesh was ranked as one of the two most corrupt countries in the world from 2001 to 2005 (Transparency International 2007). Since October 2006 Bangladesh has been led by a caretaker government following the law established with the 13th amendment to the constitution, which states that for the last six months before a parliamentary election the country should be led by a neutral caretaker government. The caretaker government that was in power from October 2006 was blamed for being biased under the leadership of former President Iajuddin Ahmed, and the critique led to withdrawal of the international election monitors in early January, a few weeks before the election was supposed to take place. The election has been postponed indefinitely. The new caretaker government has started raids on the main suspects of governmental corruption in the country, including ministers and the secretary and sons of the last prime minister. Several top government officials have fled the country. Many people in Bangladesh seem to be content with the current situation because their frustration with the extremely corrupt system has built up over several decades.

¹² The state of West Bengal in India is also inhabited predominantly by Bengali people.

The physical geography of Bangladesh is varied and dramatic. Due to the combination of yearly monsoons and the intertropical convergence zone that moves between equator and the northern part of Bangladesh on a yearly basis, bringing torrential rain, the precipitation in the northern parts of Bangladesh is among the highest in the world. In combination with snowmelt in the Himalayas that are located close to the North of Bangladesh (see maps of South Asia and Bangladesh on pages 21 and 22) the amount of water flowing through the Padma-Jamuna-Meghna¹³ River Delta is enormous. As though this was not enough, Bangladesh is also plagued by cyclones from the Bay of Bengal in the summer season. The combination of these factors leads to yearly floods. Six percent of the land area of Bangladesh is permanently under water; when there is a flood up to two-thirds of the country is under water (Feldman and Larson 2004). The floods bring alluvial material that makes the soil fertile, but they also bring damage, disease and death. It is always the poorest people who are hit the hardest by floods, because they can only afford to live on marginal, flood-prone land. This results in thousands of people being added to the land-less part of the population every year. Many landless people migrate to cities, especially the capital of Dhaka, in search of jobs. This has led to extremely rapid urbanization, and thereby to growth in the city's slum and squatter populations. A new trend is that children migrate alone to the cities, placing themselves at great risk (Staff Correspondent 2005b; Khair 2006). The population of Dhaka city grew by 56.5% between 1991 and 2001 (UNICEF 2004) and Dhaka is now estimated to have 16 million inhabitants. Clearly, Dhaka has a very high population

¹³ The rivers Padma and Jamuna flow into Bangladesh from India, where they are called Ganges and Brahmaputra respectively.

density. More than 40% of Dhaka's inhabitants live in slums and squatter settlements (Islam 1994). These areas are extremely crowded. People rarely have access to safe water or sanitation, and around one-third of people in slum communities are probably ill at any time (United Nations 1994).

Bangladesh is a small country: The total land area is 144,000 square kilometers—slightly smaller than Iowa. With a population of 147 million, Bangladesh is the second most densely populated country in the world after Singapore, and the most densely populated agricultural country. The total fertility rate has decreased from 6.7 children per woman in 1960 (Pulsipher and Pulsipher 2006) to 3.11 children per woman in 2006 (CIA 2007). The population is young—almost 33% are below the age of 15. Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world that has more men than women, which indicates that there are some social norms in women's disfavor. For instance it is a tradition in Bangladesh that the male household members are served food before the female household members. If there is a food shortage, this could lead to more malnutrition of girls than of boys. The majority of the population is Muslim—around 83%. The rest is predominantly Hindu (16%) with small minorities of Animists, Buddhists and Christians. The Bangladeshi population is ethnically homogeneous except for 2% who belong to tribal groups or who are non-Bengali Muslims (CIA 2007).



Fig 1.1: Map of South Asia. Made by Zachary Michael Tardivo, the Pennsylvania State University, 2007.



Fig. 1.2: Map of Bangladesh. Made by Zachary Michael Tardivo, the Pennsylvania State University, 2007.

The economy and economic reforms in Bangladesh

Before I start explaining which employment options are open to girls and young women in Bangladesh, I will give an overview of the economy. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Bangladesh, adjusted for purchasing power parity (ppp), is \$330 billion¹⁴. The 2006 estimate of GDP (adjusted for ppp) per capita is \$2,200. For the purpose of comparison, US GDP (adjusted for ppp) per capita is almost 20 times greater: \$43,500. The Bangladeshi GDP is extremely low but it has increased steadily over the past several years by 5-6% per year (CIA 2007). The distribution of wealth in Bangladesh is very uneven, with 45% of the population living below the poverty line, and a small elite enjoying world-class luxury. Seventy-five percent of the people in Bangladesh live in villages. Agriculture now counts for less than a quarter of the GDP, but almost two-thirds of the workforce, which indicates that people depending on agriculture have a low income. Within the industrial sector, manufacturing generates more than half the income. The manufacturing sector consists predominantly of ready-made garments, which is the most important export commodity for Bangladesh. The main export destination for Bangladeshi garments is the US. Service counts for almost one-half of the GDP but only one-quarter of employment. The Human Development Index (HDI) for Bangladesh is quite low; Bangladesh is ranked as the 137th country out of 177 (UNDP 2007) due to the low GDP per capita and low literacy rates—32% for women and 54% for men (CIA 2007).

¹⁴ Since my focus is on living conditions of the population I use the GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity.

In the first few years of independence, 1972-1976, Bangladesh's development strategy was characterized by "heavy administrative controls on the means of production and pricing"(Ahmed and Sattar 2004: 4062). The government nationalized most of the manufacturing enterprises, as well as banking, public utilities, and distribution of agricultural inputs. Around 1976, Bangladesh started moving towards a market-based economy. Price controls were removed, and de-nationalizing was initiated. The government also reduced regulatory barriers to private investments. From 1991 on, the deregulation and privatization of manufacturing has gone more rapidly. Privatization of banking has also started, and private telecommunication services have emerged (ibid.).

The initial reason for economic reforms was the political convictions of the new government in 1976. Only later, towards the mid-1980s, did Bangladesh embark on structural adjustment reforms because the World Bank and the IMF required them as conditions for obtaining further assistance. I now briefly show the different economic reforms that have been adopted.

Tariffs in Bangladesh were steadily reduced in the 1990s, starting from very high levels. In 1997, however, a standstill occurred in tariff reductions until 2002, but then the reductions increased again. According to Ahmed and Sattar (2004), it is not possible to quantify the overall impact of the specific tariffs, but estimates of the unweighted averages of the combined protective effect of customs duties and other taxes show that tariffs are still very high in both India and Bangladesh (ibid.: 4059).

Quotas: Bangladesh has kept its so-called 'quantitative restrictions' with the explicit purpose of protecting local industries, even though such quotas have been largely removed from the rest of South Asia. The most important quotas exist on the import of

textile products. Bangladesh has also retained “general administrative controls over imports which, depending on how they are implemented, can amount to a form of import licensing” (Ahmed and Sattar 2004: 4059). “Quota restrictions covered 42% of imports in 1985. These have been reduced to 2% of imports as of the 1996-7 fiscal year” (Tait 2003: 50). A quota change not in Bangladesh but affecting Bangladesh happened in 2000 when quota-free access of ready-made garments into the North American markets was withdrawn (Mohiuddin and Khatun 2003). The Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) allowed the allocation of export quotas to different textile-supplying countries from 1961 until January 1, 2005. Under MFA, many developing countries had favorable quotas that protected their export industries from competition. This led to an increase in the export of manufactured goods from these countries. In Bangladesh, the garments sector enjoyed the artificial environment of little competition from China and other large producers and grew to become the largest earner of GDP. After the end of the MFA the competition became tougher for developing countries. The consequences of the final MFA phase-out in January 2005 has been surprising - newspapers so far have reported strong results for the garments sector in Bangladesh (Zamir 2005; Rahman 2006), with growth between 10% and 30% for different types of garment export (Rahman 2006).

Reduction of taxes and free exports, and deregulation of foreign exchange rate: In the two Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Bangladesh, all exporters, both local and foreign, who export 100% of their products receive a 10-year tax holiday, an exemption from income tax on interest on borrowed money, and an exemption during the tax holiday from the dividend tax for foreigners. They also are allowed the duty-free export of goods produced in the zones (Tait 2003). Exchange rate management has improved

gradually since 1976, but did not gain momentum until the 1990s. In 1992 the “flexibility of the exchange rate system was enhanced to strengthen the competitiveness of exports” (Ahmed and Sattar 2004¹⁵).

Reduction of subsidies to own industries: Elimination of subsidies on agricultural development inputs has been an ingredient of Bangladesh’s planning and policy documents since the 1980s (Rahman 2003). In the 1960s the government subsidized pesticides, fertilizer, seeds, and tube wells. With increased use of these inputs, the World Bank initiated a reduction of subsidies (Muhammad 2003). The WTO requires Bangladesh to remove any subsidies it gives to the garments sector (Mohiuddin and Khatun 2003).

Privatization: Several manufacturing enterprises, as well as banking, public utilities, and distribution of agricultural inputs, have been privatized. The most prominent example is the jute mills. All were nationalized during the first years of Bangladesh’s independence, but they are all in private hands today. Some had to be closed down because they “failed to adjust following liberalization” (Ahmed and Sattar 2004).

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs): The SAPs in Bangladesh have covered every aspect of economic policies. Special focus was laid on trade-oriented reforms in order to integrate the economy of Bangladesh into the global economy. Government incentives for producers and exporters of non-traditional items included cheap credit, fiscal incentives for export, tax reductions, and lease of public land (Rahman 2003). Input

¹⁵ Many references after quotes lack page numbers because the source is a web page. Full references including URLs can be found in the bibliography.

supplies have been privatized, private sector investments have been strengthened, and subsidies on agricultural development inputs have been eliminated (ibid.: 101).

Bangladesh's public debt is 46.7% of GDP (CIA 2007). This puts huge constraints on the country's economic freedom. All of the country's different governments have prioritized the payment of interest on the loans. When debt relief has been granted to other highly indebted countries over the last few years, Bangladesh has sometimes been mentioned as a country that is suffering unfair treatment due to its poverty—by trying to keep up with its debt it is sacrificing other expenses, and is therefore now not rewarded with debt relief.

Bangladesh receives \$1.575 billion in economic aid each year. Although a big number, the remittances received from Bangladeshi people who work abroad is even higher, estimated at \$1.71 billion in 1998-99 (CIA 2007). In 2001 the remittances amounted to 2.2 billion, and they were expected to reach 4.5 to 4.7 billions last year (Staff Business Reporter 2006). Together with the garments industry, it is the export of manpower that brings Bangladesh its highest and increasing foreign currency earnings (Feldman and Larson 2004). Many Bangladeshi people work in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, and Malaysia (CIA 2007). Women work predominantly as domestic workers; men work as drivers, janitors, welders, construction workers, and small business owners. The export of labor helps keep the unemployment rate low. An estimated 2.5% of the population in Bangladesh is unemployed or underemployed (CIA 2007).

Economic reforms' impact on poverty levels, employment patterns and work conditions

Mujeri (2002) tried to answer the question of how poverty has been affected by economic liberalization in Bangladesh. He found that both urban and rural income poverty had declined. In 1983-84, the incidence of poverty was 59% and declined to 45% in 1999. He admitted the existence of variations in different estimates due to differences in underlying assumptions and methodologies. It is also not possible to know whether the decline in poverty stems directly from economic reforms. When poverty was measured by the human poverty index (HPI), i.e., in terms of longevity, health, knowledge and economy, the results indicated that Bangladesh achieved faster progress in reducing human poverty than in reducing income poverty. The human poverty decreased from 61.3% in 1981-83 to 41.6% in 1995-97. The increase in Bangladesh's human development index (HDI) has been faster than the rate of economic growth (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies 2001, in Mujeri 2002: 151).

The geographer Islam (2004) argued that economic liberalization in Bangladesh has led to economic growth, and that growth has reduced poverty in some sectors. Agricultural growth led to higher income among farmers and increased agricultural laborers' wages. This was accelerated by high growth in the rural non-farm sector that directly employed the rural poor. Growth in small-scale industry and garment export factories also decreased poverty. The last poverty-decreasing sector mentioned by Islam is the construction sector, which has benefited both from remittances and quota-free imports of cement.

Employment patterns in Bangladesh have significantly changed as a result of market-based economic reforms. Due to government incentives given to export producers, as well as the beneficial quotas given until recently (MFA), the ready-made garments sector in Bangladesh has been thriving over the last 15 years. Ninety percent of the garment workers are women (Ahmed and Sattar 2004), and most are aged 15–30 (Mohiuddin and Khatun 2003). The garments industry employed 1.8 million people in 2004 (Ahmed and Sattar 2004). Most of the garments workers migrate from rural places to the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong. Before the garments factories came into being, the only option for these girls and women outside the farm was to work as domestic servants, due to lack of or little education and rigid gender notions. The growth of employment in the ready-made garments sector has also helped create jobs in “complementary industries or services, such as accessories, packaging, toiletries (demanded by newly employed female garments workers), courier, finance, transport and telecommunications services, etc.” (Ahmed and Sattar 2004).

The growth in the construction sector, which can be seen as a result of economic liberalization, has also contributed to changes in the employment pattern. Lots of poor unskilled workers migrate to Dhaka to work in the construction sector. Although most of them are men, a significant number of women are among them.

Working conditions in the ready-made garments sector are poor, but employers, employees, researchers and activists do not agree about whether they are too poor. Work conditions include facilities at the workplace, payment, work hours, and age of workers. According to workers in the garments sector, facilities are very crowded. Many studies have found that “this workspace crowding is associated with general tension, fear of

entrapment, and fire hazard” (Wiest, Khatun, and Mohiuddin 2003: 182). On several occasions, a large number of workers have died in garment factories in Bangladesh. In one incident a fire broke out when the workers were locked in. In another incident the whole building collapsed due to extremely poor construction work and/or poor quality of inputs for the construction.

Workplace conflicts build up in the garment factories between workers and management due to problems such as delayed salary payment and sudden dismissals (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003). In general, the management in garment factories has a negative attitude towards unionization (Khan 2001). Lack of unity between garment workers also impedes creation of successful trade unions. The workers have little opportunity to pressure the management due to lack of job security. Many workers call for safety measures such as emergency exits, emergency care and facilities, and insurance in the event of injury (Wiest and Mohiuddin 2003). Tait (2003), however, claimed that the work environment in the ready-made garments industry does not differ greatly from that observed in developed countries, as buyers routinely do quality inspection of the premises. In May 2006, there was a wave of uproar in garment factories in and around Dhaka. Workers of Universal Knitting Garments Ltd had articulated a written demand “to address their grievances of poor wages, non-payment of arrears, excessive workload, lack of job security, harassment, etc.” (Rahman 2006). The factory authorities had promised to come up with a decision promptly, but they closed the factory less than two weeks later. This led to hundreds of workers from this and nearby factories taking to the streets. “The workers resorted to vandalism when musclemen hired by factory owners swung into

action against them” (Rahman 2006), and in the uproar that lasted for weeks, several people were killed, and several hundred factories were affected.

Until 1993 tens of thousands of children were employed in the ready-made garments sector. However, most were dismissed after rumors reached the Bangladeshi employers that the US would stop buying products manufactured by children. Almost half of Bangladesh’s export of ready-made garments used to go to the US, so the owners of the garment factories were afraid and acted quickly (Bissell and Sobhan 1996; Marcus and Harper 1996; Bissell 2003). One result of monitoring the garments industry is that now, on paper, only children over the minimum age of 14 years work in the factories. However, a garment factory owner with whom I spoke explained how easy it is to get doctors to write false age certificates for the children¹⁶, and he openly told me that there are still many under-aged workers in the factories.

Placing this study in the broader context of the Bangladeshi economy and economic reforms¹⁷

The economic backdrop was provided in order to explain which employment options are open to girls and young women in the Bangladeshi economy. If they do not get married early they may become domestic workers or employees in garment factories. Both

¹⁶ Bangladesh has birth registration laws but they are not enforced and this makes it difficult to ascertain the actual age of a child.

¹⁷ It is difficult to know the consequences of the economic reforms when even general data on poverty are unsure. I am very skeptical about data from Bangladesh due to the pervasive corruption in the country and my own experiences with governmental offices’ handling of data on school enrollment.

options usually require migration to cities, although some are able to find domestic work in rural towns.

For the girls and young women who have an opportunity to work in the export industry, their life has changed considerably from having early marriage or domestic work in other people's homes as their only options, to having the option of being in charge of their own life through a wage job in the city, where they usually stay with other young women in certain labor quarters. This emancipatory aspect is important, although much has to be done in order to ensure better work conditions for the garment workers. I do share Rahman's skepticism: "The problem is that economic liberalization was seen by the ruling elite as a necessary condition for obtaining the flow of foreign aid funds into the country, and were not based on the needs and ideas of the population" (Rahman 2003: 93.) In other words, when the political leaders are motivated by the money flow and not the best interest of the people, the results will probably not be good. This is parallel to the implementation of human rights conventions to be discussed later. It is difficult to obtain results intended by donors when the government's main driving force is continued financial aid. I also agree with Rahman's concern about environmental problems resulting from adherence to market-based reforms:

"[...] economic development without enforcement of environmental regulations has resulted in environmental degradation, with some areas already reaching critical thresholds. Thus, Bangladesh appears to be one of the few South Asian countries where massive social change created by the interacting and interdependent forces of globalization, urbanization and environmental degradation are most clearly discernible" (Rahman 2003: 93).

Due to my concerns about workers' rights and environmental sustainability, I see a need for a strong state that can prevent the economic reforms from becoming a race to the bottom. Governmental control requires dedicated, honest and skilled leaders. At this point we have a serious problem in Bangladesh, which the economist Islam bluntly addresses: "To manage an open economy in an interdependent, globalizing world is a daunting challenge. It requires an efficient and a sophisticated government with a wide range of skills and expertise that have hitherto been unavailable in Bangladesh" (Islam 2004: 37). With a government dominated by people who are preoccupied with filling their pockets as much and for as long as possible, any reforms are difficult to obtain. Therefore, I hope for improvements now that there is an ongoing fight against corruption by the caretaker government¹⁸.

The opening up of the Bangladeshi economy has resulted in many new work opportunities for women outside the home. Middle-class women in Dhaka who used to be homemakers have increasingly found jobs in the private sector over the last 20 years. However, childcare facilities barely exist, and appliances like washers and driers are still not common in middle-class homes—neither is fast food or semi-finished frozen meals. This has led to a continued and steady demand for low-paid domestic workers in private homes. The majority of domestic workers are girls and young women. These women also have received new opportunities for employment due to economic liberalization. Many poor girls and women who used to be recruited to domestic work now work in export garment factories. This may have created a somewhat better negotiating position vis-à-vis

¹⁸ For information on the work of the caretaker government to curb corruption, see Chowdhury (2007) and Karim (2007).

potential employers who want them for domestic service, as indicated by Ward, Rahman, Islam, Akther, and Kamal (2003). They found that many employers pay garment level salaries to their domestics and also ensure better work conditions in general. The relatively new trend of women being employed in garment work has also made the women more independent of male family members such as fathers, husbands, brothers, and uncles. With increased economic power comes more power in general in family matters. Women from low-income backgrounds now have an alternative to getting married early or working as domestics, as there is scope for obtaining positions in the export industry, and in particular in the garments industry.

The economic model in Bangladesh is one of export-led growth. It does not focus on the poorest of the poor, beginning with the provision of basic needs. A large number of people in Bangladesh has not benefited from economic growth and still find employment in the informal sector. Many families still depend on child labor because the new economy has created a demand for increased child labor on two fronts: First, low skilled wage work is seen as a comparative advantage in Bangladesh and children are a plentiful source of low-skilled, low-wage labor. Second, increasingly, both spouses in middle class families are finding work in the open economy, which creates a demand for child domestics.

Education in Bangladesh and Dhaka – Age/gender/class

The literacy level in Bangladesh is low, especially for women. I now introduce the broader picture of primary education in Bangladesh, with a focus on who has access to

education, what kind of education and what are some reasons that education can play an important role in the lives of poor people, and how can education be especially emancipating and empowering for children in domestic service?

The education system in Bangladesh is complex. There are several categories of primary schools in operation. The majority of these schools provide formal education following the curricula set by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. The Board produces textbooks in Bengali, mathematics, English, environmental studies, social studies and religious education (Hossain 1997). Approximately three quarters of the children in primary schools in Bangladesh go to governmental schools (Ahmad 1995). In addition to the formal schools, several NGOs provide non-formal education (Nath, Sylva, and Grimes 1999). The curriculum of NGO primary schools includes Bengali, mathematics, social studies and English (Hossain 1997). Surveys show that non-formal school programs have been far more successful in teaching children basic literacy. After five years of formal primary schooling only 64% of the students had become literate. Of those who completed four to five years of non-formal education programs, 97% became literate (BSAF 2003: 56-57). There is a parallel system of religious education at all levels. Some of the religious schools follow the national curricula whereas others focus mainly on Koran studies and Arabic.

The government of Bangladesh adheres to the goals set forth by the UNESCO-led Education for All movement. This movement aims at meeting the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults by year 2015 (UNESCO 2007). Even though primary education (grades 1–5) is free and has been compulsory for children aged 6–10 years since 1993, the law is not enforced, and many poor children in Bangladesh are deprived

of their right to education. Only two-thirds of all children complete the five-year primary education cycle. Almost as many girls as boys do participate in primary school: 49% of all primary school students were girls in 2001 (UNICEF 2006). There is a strong notion of the importance of education in Bangladesh in general, especially among the wealthy and middle-class people, but also increasingly among poor people. One of the main findings from a survey I conducted in slums and squatter settlements in Dhaka in 1996 and 1997 was that there were several reasons for children's lack of access to education: while most children had parents who wanted them to get an education, they were hindered from going to school by practical matters such as high direct costs (fees, books, etc.); the parents were not able to forego their children's work at home or for pay; the route to school was dangerous, and parents did not have time to escort their children due to their own work schedule (Jensen 2000).

Keeping in mind the correlation that has been demonstrated repeatedly in the international development literature between women's literacy levels and other development indicators, the low literacy level for Bangladeshi women indicates a serious situation for the women themselves, for their children and their country. "In 1980, [...] only 26 percent of all Bangladeshi women had reached the education level of grade five. The literacy rate for Bangladeshi women is still low. In 2002 it was only 31.4 percent for adults and 41.1 percent for youth – far below the average for women in developing countries" (Oishi 2005: 109). Oishi has done research on Asian labor-migration. In her interviews with women from several Asian countries she found that low-income Bangladeshi women stood out in a negative way due to their limited knowledge about the world outside their own homes:

In Bangladesh, [...], most low-income women are illiterate, which tends to make them passive as well as indifferent to the world in general. Low-income Bangladeshi women even lack general knowledge about their own society. During the interviews, I was often stunned that some women did not understand the difference between recruitment agencies and the government. Many women fear strangers outside their own village, let alone employers in foreign countries. (Oishi 2005: 109).

These factors are crucial to understanding the situation of young female child domestic workers, who are the main participants in this study. Most come from the very poorest families in Bangladesh, meaning that most have illiterate parents and they themselves have only a few years of education, if any at all. Thus they are easy to mold into docile workers by middle-class employers who easily exert power over them. It also means that education has the potential to play a crucial role in the emancipation of these docile workers. As I pointed out when introducing my research questions, access to education is important not only for its intrinsic value but also because education is a collective undertaking that gives the child domestic workers access to a public place in which they may become empowered by communicating with understanding peers and teachers. This relates to my post-structural argument about the different sites and ways in which social change can be accomplished. By giving child domestics access to public space, they can become empowered by leaving their restraining private workspaces in order to undertake the collective educational pursuit. The role of space in the education of child domestics is therefore crucial. If it was education per se that was the point in question, in the meaning of knowledge achievement, education could have been provided by giving the child domestics access to an educational computer program since most middle-class homes in Dhaka have computers. This is not the way the importance of education is conceived in

this thesis. Although knowledge and skills are important, my main point here is that education provides a chance for child domestics to come out of their potentially repressive workspaces in order to take part in a positive collective undertaking, where they get a chance to interact with peers and adults in a public or semi-public space. Thus the geographical aspect of the role of education becomes clear. In this way my dissertation contributes to the theoretical development of the subdiscipline of children's geographies, because little research has so far been done on the role of private and public space in the lives of child workers.

Chapter 2

Discourse theory and discourse analysis

In this chapter I explain the research design for this dissertation: a discourse analysis combined with the methodology of critical ethnography. I discuss the methodology of discourse analysis and how this choice of methodology impacts the structure of the dissertation. I lay out the discourse theory framework that I used to analyze the three discourses on childhood and child labor in Bangladesh that are analyzed in chapters 4, 5, and 6. This is a power-knowledge framework built mainly on the writings of Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980; 1990 [1978]; 1995 [1977]). I also discuss how discourse theory influences my data.

Research design

In order to investigate different discourses, I chose to employ a combination of discourse analysis and critical ethnography. I had a specific purpose for my exploration of discourses on child labor: to understand how children and their work are constituted through the prevailing discourses. An understanding of the cultural hindrances implied in local discourses makes it possible to identify agency for social change in all sectors and all scales of Bangladeshi and international society. However, I realized that in order to become able to understand the discourses, and especially those of child domestic workers

and employers, I had to increase my understanding of the culture in which they operate by living as close as possible to them. I therefore chose ethnography, but a certain type called critical ethnography, which is more focused than the conventional ethnography and usually aims at some kind of social change (Jensen 2007). In the next chapter I elaborate on my use of critical ethnography.

I mainly analyzed spoken discourse in the form of interview transcriptions and fieldwork notes from private conversations and formal meetings in different organizations and agencies. In addition, I employed the method of textual analysis—I analyzed written discourse (government policy and planning documents, NGO reports, documentaries produced by NGOs, newspaper articles, a selection of academic books and articles, and a few life stories written by children). Discourse analysis and deconstruction of text implies that it is “naïve to assume that texts have a single meaning which is intended by the author and is read and understood by all. Instead there are multiple layers of meaning that can be derived from a text.” (Forbes 2000: 127)

Adoption of a discourse theory framework has several profound implications for how research is conducted and for the actual writing of a dissertation. I explain what happens to the traditional literature review in a dissertation involving the conduct of discourse analysis and how data are affected by discourse theory. I mainly build on Foucault’s ideas, but some ideas from critical discourse analysis and feminist discourse analysis were also used. Foucault himself wrote little that concretely guides us in how to perform a discourse analysis. Fortunately, many scholars have taken that as a challenge, and I draw on several of their outlines for possible ways to conduct discourse analysis. Before I commence with the main part of this chapter, let me add a quote that

demonstrates the importance of being clear in what one actually intends to do with a discourse analysis: “The terms ‘discourse’ and ‘discourse analysis’ are highly contested. To claim that one’s approach is discourse analytical one does not necessarily tell anybody much; it is not a simple definitional issue, but involves taking up a position in an extremely charged – though important – set of arguments” (Gill 2000: 173 quoted in Marvasti 2004: 107).

“Where is your literature review?”—How discourse analysis impacts the structure of the dissertation by exchanging literature review with textual analysis

To explain how the structure of this dissertation differs from that of a traditional dissertation I first present the most common ways to use literature in academic studies, according to Creswell (2003). He presented three alternative roles for the literature: In the first role the literature is a frame for the research problem, presented in the introduction to the study. This use of the literature review goes for any type of qualitative study. In the second alternative, “the literature is presented in a separate section as a ‘review of the literature’”. This type of literature review is, according to Creswell, “used with those studies employing a strong theory and literature background at the beginning of a study, such as ethnographies, critical theory studies” (Creswell 2003: 31). Such a literature review is a comprehensive rebuilding of the relevant literature. The third possible use of literature is as a basis for comparing and contrasting findings from the qualitative study, usually presented at the end of the study. Creswell claims, “this approach is used in all types of qualitative designs, but is most popular with grounded theory, where one contrasts and compares his or her theory with other theories found in the literature” (ibid.:

31). I now show that when discourse analysis is the primary component of the research design, none of these uses of literature applies.

In a dissertation in which discourse theory and discourse analysis are employed, there is no need for a separate chapter called ‘literature review’. The reason is that in a discourse theory study the literature reviewed by the researcher becomes her data. The researcher chooses some main books, reports and articles and a selection of other texts (the term ‘text’ in a broad sense, encompassing pictures and films) on the topic under study and treats those texts as data. In other words, the role of the literature review disappears, as literature is part of your data—i.e. the literature is text that you analyze as data, and not text that you show as a frame to be used for comparison or explanation of your data. Before I explain in more detail how I pursued my discourse analysis I explain what is meant by discourse.

Meanings of ‘discourse’

There are many different understandings of the term ‘discourse’. According to Cameron (2001: 123), there are two main meanings of the term: In the first sense it means “language in use”, and in the second sense it means “a form of social practice that constructs the objects of which it purports to speak”. It is the latter meaning that is most important to my discourse analysis. Analyzing the language that is used by the different actors in the child labor discourses in Bangladesh is a smaller part of my study; the main focus is on how the situation of child laborers and specifically child servants is constituted by the way in which people think, speak, act, and write.

According to Rose (2001: 136), discourse “refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it.” Hay (2000: 187) gives a slightly broader definition of discourse: “[discourse is] a constructed system of arguments, ideologies and interpretations that shapes social practices, affecting the way we see things and talk about them”. These definitions are all based on Foucault’s writings. To Foucault, discourse was a form of discipline, as it “disciplines people into certain ways of thinking and acting” (Rose 2001: 137). Therefore, Foucault saw discourse as productive and powerful. This power is exercised through the way the object of the discourse is understood, be it childhood, child servants, students, or the children’s labor and their work relations. Another important aspect of Foucault’s discourse concept is that “Our sense of our self is made through the operation of discourse. So too are objects, relations, places, scenes: discourse produces the world as it understands it.” (Rose 2001: 137). Based on Foucault (1972), Prior (2003: 126) defined discourse as “a set of closely integrated ideas and practices about the nature of the world”.

Carabine (2001) wrote that Foucault was interested in discourse on several levels. To Foucault, discourse is visible as: “sometimes...the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (Foucault 1972: 8 quoted in Carabine 2001: 268). Foucault studied “discourse as a system of representation” (Hall 2001: 72). According to Hall, Foucault defined discourse as:

[. . .] a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But...since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect (Hall 1992: 291, quoted in Hall 2001: 72).

I agree with Hall (2001), who argued that when some people argue that Foucault says that “nothing exists outside of discourse”, they have misunderstood Foucault’s writings (ibid.: 73). What Foucault did argue is that “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse” (Foucault 1972 in Hall 2001: 73). “The concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from” (Hall 2001: 73). Fairclough, known for having developed critical discourse analysis, wrote:

Foucault's work on discourse was explicitly directed against Marxism and theories of ideology. For Foucault, discourses are systems of knowledge (e.g. medicine, economics, linguistics) that inform the social and governmental ‘technologies’ which constitute power in modern society. Discourses are partly ways of using language, but partly other things (e.g. ways of designing prisons or schools) (Fairclough 2001: 233).

In my analysis I use the “systems of knowledge” definition of discourse. I analyze how power is exerted through each discourse, and what kind of knowledge is demonstrated. I also examine the relationship between discourse and space. To this end I find Pratt’s definition of discourse useful. Pratt wrote that discourses can be seen as “socio-spatial circuits through which cultural and personal narratives are circulated, legitimated, and given meaning”, and that discourses are “situated practices in particular places; they are inherently geographical.” (Pratt 2004: 20).

Some feminists have critiqued Foucault for being fatalistic and not concerned with the material, real sides of life (see, for instance, Hartsock 1990; Nussbaum 1999). However, I agree with feminist geographer Pratt's view that Foucault indeed was occupied with real-life material struggles and that it is fruitful to use his conceptualizations to analyze the situation of workers today. Pratt (2004) argued in her analyses of Philippine domestic workers in Canada that "imagining discourse in the concrete allows for fresh opportunities for conceiving agency" (ibid.: 9-10). Powers (2001) wrote that Foucault believed the purpose of discourse analysis was to "describe the connections, contradictions, and puzzles of a discourse with the goal of producing a tool for radical political action" (Foucault 1977: 205 cited in Powers 2001: 53). In the next section I demonstrate how Foucault's power concept implies possibility of anyone exerting power.

Foucault's concepts of 'power' and 'knowledge'

"Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 100). According to Foucault (ibid.: 93), "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere." If power comes from everywhere, it should imply that anybody can wield power, including the people who are exploited by other people's exertion of power—this is a focus of my exploration of working children's own discourse. "Where there is power, there is resistance" (ibid.: 95). Foucault argued that power relationships depend on multiple points of resistance. "These

points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (ibid.: 95). In chapter 6 I analyze the points of resistance that child domestic workers utilize.

The following quotes demonstrate how Foucault’s power-concept differs from a traditional understanding of power: He argues that “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 93). “Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.” (ibid.: 94). This is Foucault’s concept of non-sovereign power, which I apply in my analysis of the employers’ discourse and the child domestics’ discourse.

This new mechanism of power is more dependent upon bodies and what they do than upon the Earth and its products. It is a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner by means of a system of levies or obligations distributed over time. It presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign. (Foucault 1980: 104)

This quote demonstrates the relevance of Foucault’s concept of non-sovereign power for my analysis of the working conditions of child domestics. They are under constant (threat of) surveillance by their employers, who try to extract as much time and labor, and as many kinds of labor, as possible from their workers. The ‘tightly knit grid’ corresponds to the ‘disciplinary grid’ that Foucault wrote about in *Discipline and punish*. Foucault continued about non-sovereign power:

This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of the great inventions of bourgeois society. It has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment. This non-sovereign power, which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is disciplinary power.” (Foucault 1980: 105)

Foucault feared a disciplinary society (Love 1989: 270). However, he did not perceive power as always negative/disciplinary/exploitative. The points of resistance that are present everywhere in the power network (see quote on the previous page)—are they a reaction to non-sovereign power or are they a part of his concept of non-sovereign power? I agree with Waitt who wrote:

In summary, Foucault conceptualized power not as monopolised by one centre and imposed onto individuals. Instead power is conceptualised to operate through discourse in which social relationships between individuals are negotiated. It is these negotiations of how the individual is positioned to the discursive norms that has the potential to be disempowering through compliance, or empowering through resistance. (Waitt 2005: 174)

The following quote from Foucault’s book *Power/Knowledge* demonstrates the empowering potential of his power concept:

In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1980: 119)

This is an important quote to have in hand when seeking to understand Foucault's power/knowledge concept. Power produces knowledge and discourse. In my analysis of discourses on childhood and child labor in Bangladesh I use the concept of non-sovereign power in a way similar to Yapa's (1996) use of the concept in his substantive view of poverty. Yapa's concept of non-sovereign power draws from the positive, non-repressive power concept demonstrated in the Foucault-quote above. This is how I use the concept of non-sovereign power in this study; as "power exercised in concrete actions from innumerable points" (Yapa 1996: 722), enabling "multiple possibilities of agency in the world" (Yapa 2002).

Foucault further explained his power/knowledge concept in this way: "[...] there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Foucault 1995 [1977]: 27). In my discourse analysis I explore the knowledge that comprise each discourse, and how power is wielded through this knowledge. I also analyze how power relations have produced knowledge systems (i.e., discourses).

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) wrote about Foucault's theory of power/knowledge and the consequences for Foucault's conception of truth. "Foucault claims that it is not possible to gain access to universal truth since it is impossible to talk from a position outside discourse; there is no escape from representation" (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002: 14). Instead of focusing on whether something is true or false, one should focus on "*how* effects of truth are created in discourses. What is to be analyzed are the discursive processes through which discourses are constructed in ways that give the impression that they represent true or false pictures of reality" (Phillips and Jorgensen 2002: 14). What

this means is that there is no essential objective thing called ‘childhood’ outside of discourse. There is no essential truth to the concept of ‘child’. Apart from a very basic idea of childhood as representing a particular stage in the evolution of a human being, everything else is particular to discourse. My interest is not the ‘truth’ about childhood but the effects of different discourses on children. Related to this discussion about ‘truth’, in the next chapter I discuss the possibility of objectivity in research.

Brief explanation of the terms ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods

I have reflected a lot on how to say anything about anything in society. In order to make sense of some of my thoughts, the terms ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods are helpful in clarifying how research design will always stem from people’s ideas about reality. In particular I find it intriguing that social science researchers often try to represent people who are very different from themselves. How can we be sure that what we convey has any importance? Who is given authority in academia and is it efficient for what we want to convey? How is my research design and strategies different from other people’s research and why is it different? Does it matter? Do we focus too much on following the path of other researchers and the ‘recipes’ that they have outlined in methodology books and journal articles, and too little on being innovative, creative human beings exploring the social world around us? These are some of the questions I have struggled with. I mention them here as a backdrop for this section but I am not attempting to answer all of them directly.

Based on Patton (2002) I define *ontology* as “what you believe about the nature of reality” (Patton 2002: 134). In other words we can think about ontology as what exists in the world, e.g., what you think exists, or what comes to your mind when you think about how the world works. Ontology can thus be seen as the overarching beliefs that inform your research, beliefs about structures and ideologies. The ontology has consequences for the way that research is approached because it informs the topic chosen by the researcher. For instance, when a researcher identifies herself as a Marxist or feminist or postmodernist or neoliberalist, her convictions stemming from such ideologies will inform the way she looks at the world and what she sees as possible and important to conduct research on. A researcher with a Marxist ontology will focus on topics related to capitalism, economic exploitation of workers, and profit maximization of capital owners. A researcher with a feminist ontology will focus on topics related to patriarchy, paternalistic structures in societies and belief systems, gender discrimination, and gender identities. A researcher with a neoliberalist ontology will focus on topics related to the world economy and how the market works best when let to itself without too much governmental regulation. A researcher with a positivist ontology could focus on any aspect of reality because she sees everything as being real and value neutral. A researcher with a postmodernist ontology will focus on topics related to diversity and the view that since it is not possible to single out one aspect of reality, one structure, or one ideology as more important than others, it is important to focus on those topics and voices that are often silenced. Some people argue that postmodernism has nothing to do with research; it is a genre of architecture, literature, and art. I do not share that view because there are some clear connections between those disciplines and social science research. Take

postmodernist architecture, for instance. The main idea in postmodernist architecture is that no architectural style has preference. Therefore the typical postmodernist building or neighborhood is a mix of styles from different epochs. In the same way, postmodernism applied to social science means that no one ideology or structure or part of society or social group is given preference. All aspects of reality and all social actors should be visible in the academy, i.e., all views should be represented in research. Therefore postmodernists often focus on giving a voice to those who are usually overlooked in mainstream academia. It should be noted that putting people, beliefs and ideologies into categories is not a favorite activity of mine. This matches my postmodernist identity, because in postmodernism the world is seen as being in a seamless flux, with no distinct categories of anything. Categories and concepts are made by humans; they do not exist in reality. The world is constantly changing. In order to make sense of the world and have meaningful conversations about it, categories are a necessary heuristic tool.

I define *epistemology* as philosophical statements about knowledge production. Epistemologies are often shared across ontology boundaries. Post-structuralism and constructivism, which I explain in the next section because it is my own epistemology, is shared by postmodernists, feminists, realists and also some Marxists. I also explain how our epistemology stands in clear contrast to positivist epistemologies that focus on value neutral data and value neutral researchers. Here I briefly mention that post-structuralism has gotten its name by rejecting structuralism or going beyond structures. Structuralism started in linguistic science where language was seen as one large structure, and post-structuralism changed that view by focusing on how all concepts are socially constructed;

they have different meanings for different people and these social constructs change with time and place.

The philosophical opinions held about knowledge production influences the methodologies and methods found useful. Methodology is your approach to carrying out one specific research project. It is an outline of what to do in a research project, without specifying technical details on how to do it. Examples of methodologies include: case study, biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and discourse analysis.

Methods are the specific techniques used in the field with research participants/subjects/objects (these terms vary with epistemological standpoint). Examples of methods are observations, interviews, conversations, and participatory techniques such as mapping activities, drawing activities, ranking, taking pictures, looking at images, and telling stories.

With this section I have demonstrated that I see ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods as a hierarchy in which the first is more philosophical and abstract, thereafter becoming more tangible and technical the farther down you go. Methodology is often conflated with methods, which in my view are more technical and entail a more concrete description of ways in which to do research. In chapter 3 I will go more in-depth with definitions of epistemology and methodology because of the importance of these terms in order to understand the different approaches to the study of and with children.

Discourse theory

Discourse theory is so many different things that it can be quite confusing. In this section I show that discourse theory is critical, constructivist, and anti-positivist. My research is based on a social constructivist epistemology because I see language as “constitutive and constructive rather than reflective and representative” (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 13). In other words, the language we use constructs the social reality, and does not only reflect reality. The concepts used to describe the world are not neutral; they mediate our understanding of the world. These notions are central in discourse theory. We have seen that Foucault wrote about how discourse produces reality. For this reason, analysis of the prevailing discourses on childhood and child labor in Bangladesh is important.

Discourse theory affects my data by promoting concepts such as ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’, and by critiquing binaries such as ‘self/other’, ‘non-problem/problem’ and knowing subject/needful object and ‘source of resources’/‘resource-less’ (child domestic workers are often seen as resource-less but do have unreleased resources/capacities) (Yapa 1996: 712). As a continuation of the discussion on how to use the methodology of discourse analysis, I now present additional ideas from discourse theory that influence both the type of data I collect and how I analyze them.

My decision to focus on the voices of working children is in harmony with my postmodern ontology that tells me to reject ‘grand narratives’ such as positivism, Marxism, neoliberalism, and feminism, in favor of different views¹⁹. “In eschewing

¹⁹ It is not my intention to say that researchers with other ontologies cannot focus on the voices of children.

metanarratives, postmodernism allows for multiple voices. No theory, particular aspect of society or 'voice' is privileged (that is, given priority) over others, as postmodernism celebrates difference" (Graham 1997: 26). Graham elaborated by saying that in postmodernism, "knowledge is seen as multiple and situated (or positional). This promotes a sensitivity to different ways of 'reading' social relationships and their human geographies and favours minor theories over the totalizing metanarratives of modernism" (Graham 1997: 26). In the next chapter I elaborate on the meaning of situated knowledge. Minor theories I lean on in my analysis are based on discourse theory and constructivist thinking. I do not rely fully on any one theory, but I find support for my thinking in work from different disciplines on the deconstruction of text and social construction of childhood.

Since I have identified my ontology as postmodernist I now wish to define different types of postmodernism because some people mistakenly draw conclusions about postmodernism that only pertain to a certain type of postmodernism. Yapa (1996) distinguished between skeptical and affirmative postmodernists. I find this distinction useful in order to explain the type of postmodernism I identify with.

The skeptical postmodernists offer a gloomy, negative assessment of the contemporary world as one of fragmentation, malaise, and meaninglessness; hence, no political project is worthy of commitment. Rosenau (1992:15) believes that the skeptics are inspired by Continental European philosophers, especially Nietzsche; they practice a form of politics of despair; they speak of the death of the subject and author, the impossibility of knowing truth, and the abolition of social science. The affirmative postmodernists share this sense of disenchantment with modernity and the failed promises of the Enlightenment. Yet, they retain a more hopeful, optimistic view of postmodernism's possibilities. They are open to, and participate in, issue-specific social movements; they eschew the relativist stance of "anything goes"; they take ethical stands and make normative choices. (Yapa 1996: 709)

Postmodernism is often misunderstood because affirmative postmodernism is not well known or is conflated with skeptical postmodernism (Yapa 1996). I clearly identify with the affirmative postmodernists, although I am ambivalent when it comes to epistemological questions about the possibility of finding truth through research.

Scholars do not agree about whether postmodernism is only an ontology, i.e., a way of seeing or understanding the world, or an epistemology or method (Graham 1997). Cloke, Philo, and Sadler (1991) defined postmodernism as object and attitude. I agree with Yapa (1996), who equates ‘postmodernism as object’ with ontology and ‘postmodernism as attitude’ with epistemology. However, I prefer to call my epistemology post-structural, and thereby limit the term postmodern to ontology. More specifically, my epistemology is a mix of post-structuralism and constructivism. Post-structuralism is an epistemology stemming from the post-modernist rejection of large structures as all-encompassing forces in society. Post-structuralism problematizes especially “the role of language in the production of knowledge” (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine 2004: 349). Deconstruction is an important method belonging to postmodern ontology and post-structural epistemology. By deconstructing, or disentangling, texts (in a wide interpretation of the term, such as written stories, images, oral conversations, etc.), different discourses can be deciphered. Perhaps even more important, different possible meanings ascribed to the text by the author and by readers can be outlined. One way to do so is to analyze the positioning of the author and the readers in terms of class, culture and gender, for example. Such an analysis would demonstrate a text’s range of meanings (Ley 1994).

The decision to use discourse theory provides guidelines for my research. I agree with Yapa (1996) that it is important to be conscious about how the researcher (subject) constructs the participant/informant (object), and how they are both mutually constituted with the discourse²⁰. In order to understand my participants' views, I need to understand my own role and influence as a researcher as well as the prevailing discourses pertinent to the topic under study.

If I had seen the existing discourses on childhood and child domestic work as unproblematic, I would not have bothered to use time and effort to get to know some of the working children, as well as their employers. When I chose to collect that type of data (or I should rather say 'construct that type of data' as I work from a constructivist epistemology, which means I see data as co-constructed by the researcher and the researched), it already says something about what type of researcher I am and whose voices I think are important. I want to give a voice to 'the other' because I think it is wrong to discuss solutions and make policies without involving those you are supposed to help. Children's participation in research may help 'the other' to start finding her agency so that she can influence her own life. In the next chapter I explain more about my position as researcher and also about involving children in research.

²⁰ This way of using the terms 'object' and 'subject' is not to be confused with my use of the term 'subjects' for research participants in chapter 3.

Discourse analysis and my data

Just as there are many definitions of discourse, there are also different approaches to discourse analysis. Wylie (2006) pointed at “the critical potential of Foucault’s concepts of discourse and power.” I found the following explanation of the methodology of discourse analysis particularly useful:

Discourse analysis is a critical method which seeks to describe how certain identities and narratives are produced, privileged, sometimes naturalized, and asserted over identities and narratives which are comparatively marginalized, excluded or silenced. Discourse analysis seeks to describe in detail, with close attention to particular events, episodes and practices, how certain behaviours, attitudes and beliefs come to be sedimented and reproduced through continual repetition. (Wylie 2006: 305)

In line with Wylie’s definition I search for particular events and practices in each discourse and how behaviors and attitudes are created through such events and practices. I analyze how the child domestic workers’ identities are socially constructed through the discourses about them.

Many of the approaches to discourse analysis are solely linguistic, and they are mentioned here but not fully applied in my study. According to van Dijk (1997 cited in Prior 2003), discourse analysis deals with “talk and text in context”—in other words, with linguistic activity. He does state that discourse analysis also can refer to styles of thought and analysis. This wider understanding was the one held by Foucault. Foucault emphasized how the world is “known and understood through discursive practices, and how a change in discursive regime can change the world (and social relationships within

it) itself. In short, how reality is constituted through discourse” (Prior 2003). This view, also shared by Yapa (1996, 1997), Escobar (1995), and Said (1978), demonstrates the type of discourse analysis I find most interesting and therefore apply in this dissertation. To Yapa it is not the language per se, but the prevailing discourses supported by knowledgeable and powerful people in the society that hinders social change. An example is the poverty discourse produced by professors and other researchers. They wield power through knowledge by sticking to the same poverty analyses in which they define themselves (the ‘self’) as part of the ‘non-problem’ when in fact they are part of the problem. They act as a hindrance for a change to the better for poor people (the ‘other’) by the way they define themselves and their way of living as part of the non-problem.

Marvasti (2004) further elaborated on the Foucauldian type of discourse analysis. We have seen how Foucault was interested in the relationship between power and knowledge, and he was also preoccupied with how the relationship has changed over time. In addition to genealogical discourse analysis (Carabine 2001; Powers 2001; Perakyla 2005), Foucault’s writings are being applied in institutional discourse analysis (Marvasti 2004), and textual discourse analysis (Marvasti 2004). In textual discourse analysis Foucault’s ideas can be seen in the focus on the “‘authority’ of the text (the social and political factors that give a written work the power to influence human action) rather than its ‘authorship’ (who wrote it). So the focus is not the presumed subject behind the text and her or his intentions but what realities or ways of seeing are made possible through the text” (Marvasti 2004: 111). I apply this Foucauldian way of analyzing text when I analyze policy documents from organizations and the government

of Bangladesh. I see it as relevant because what matters for the working children in Bangladesh are not the intentions behind the policy documents but the types of thoughts and actions opened through those documents.

Carabine (2001) made a “Guide to doing Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis”. Although I am not doing genealogy, which focuses more on the historical evolution of a discourse, I found useful hints about how to conduct discourse analysis from reading about genealogy. The main points from Carabine’ guide are as follows:

Select your topic – Identify possible sources of data. If you were undertaking a social policy analysis then sources might include policy documents, discussion papers, parliamentary papers, speeches, cartoons, photographs, parliamentary debates, newspapers, other media sources, political tracts, and pamphlets from local and national government, quangos, and political parties. You might also wish to include an analysis of counter-discourses and resistances; here you might use material from campaigning and lobbying groups, activists and welfare rights organizations, etc.

Know your data – read and re-read. Familiarity aids analysis and interpretation.

Identify themes.

Look for evidence of an *inter-relationship* between discourses.

Identify the discursive strategies and techniques that are employed.

Look for *absences* and *silences*.

Look for *resistances* and *counter-discourses*.

Identify the *effects* of the discourse.

Context 1 – outline the background to the issue.

Context 2 – contextualize the material in the power/knowledge networks of the period.

Be aware of the *limitations* of the research, your data and sources.

(Carabine 2001: 281)

In Bangladesh I followed Carabine’s general advice and collected lots of data on childhood, child labor, and child domestic work from different sources, such as books, newspapers, TV documentaries, reports and documentary films from different NGOs, governmental reports and so on, in addition to taking notes and tape-recording meetings

and workshops in NGOs, interviews and conversations with child domestic workers and their employers and teachers. These books, reports, and articles are my data; they are not literature and other texts to be presented in a literature review and later compared with my findings. They are parts of my findings. In the different materials I analyze how notions of 'self' and 'other' are evoked through words and images. One question to keep in mind is whether the authors are implicitly presented as a part of the 'non-problem' in the child labor issue.

According to Foucault, "discourse cannot be analyzed only in the present, because the power components and the historical components create such a tangled knot of shifting meanings, definitions, and interested parties over periods of time" (Powers 2001: 11). I am not analyzing discourses on childhood and child labor over time. However, Carabine (2001) argued that studies focusing on a certain topic at a specific point in time will eventually add up to an understanding of how that certain topic is constituted through time. I share her view, although I think it's a too big stretch to call what I'm doing genealogy.

According to Powers (2001: 53), "in order to analyze a discourse, the analyst must read all of it, see it in action, discuss it with people, and read what other people have said about it." I see the relevance of this approach. However, I do not believe that it is possible to read all that is published within the human rights discourse, as it includes an almost infinite number of books, research articles, newspaper articles, other short articles and NGO reports. More importantly, it is not necessary to find the full picture. Therefore, I find Phillips and Hardy's (2002: 75) approach to discourse analysis more useful. They recommended answering the following questions:

What texts are most important in constructing the object of analysis?
 What texts are produced by the most powerful actors, transmitted through
 the most effective channels, and interpreted by the most recipients?
 Which of the above texts are available for analysis?
 Which of the above texts is it feasible to analyze?
 How will I sample these texts?
 How will I explain the choices I have made?

An issue taken into consideration in my discourse analysis that is relevant to these questions is the fact that when it comes to written discourse, I am mostly analyzing documents available in English. Only by using translators do I obtain full access to the discourses in the local language, Bangla. However, important parts of the human rights discourse are published in both languages, such as reports and policy documents from the government and from most of the involved NGOs.

Powers (2001) recommended performing interviews and observations dictated by the discourse, in addition to analyzing written texts. Powers saw three objectives in discourse analysis—genealogy, structural analysis, and power analytic/analysis—but she claimed that a discourse analysis may combine all three objectives in one discussion. She compiled some guiding questions to each of the three objectives. For genealogy, she recommended that the analyst asks the following questions with respect to the discourse:

What other discourses and/or events provided models or ideas that influenced the functioning of the discourse under analysis, and in what ways? What words in the discourse have a linguistic and social history that is significant for assessing the role of the discourse within current power relations? What historical context influenced the development of the discourse? What physical, bodily space was created by being described by the discursive practices of the discourse? What surfaces of emergence and conditions of possibility were acknowledged and appropriated and made visible by this discourse, and by what means? By what processes did the discourse construct the right to pronounce truth in some region of experience? What other discourses were affected and how? What power struggles or turf battles occurred, and what was the outcome? In whose

interests was the social construction of this discourse? Whose interests were ignored and/or rejected? (Powers 2001:55 based on Rawlinson 1987).

I find some of these questions helpful to my discourse analysis. Some of the topics I examined are based on her suggested questions. For example: What is the relationship between the prevailing human rights discourse and the preceding welfare discourse? In whose interests was the social construction of the human rights discourse and the employers' discourse? From a geography standpoint the following question is also interesting: "What physical, bodily space was created by being described by the discursive practices of the discourse?"

For the objective of structural analysis, Powers (2001) mentioned the following issues that must be addressed. These are based on Foucault's advises on how to conduct discourse analysis in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), as cited in Powers (2001: 56).

1. the "system of differentiations" or privileged access to the discourse,
2. the "types of objectives" of one group over another,
3. the "means of bringing power relations into being" that reveals surveillance systems, threats, and dismissals,
4. "forms of institutionalization" such as bureaucratic structures, and
5. "degree of rationalization" required to support power arrangements.

I also see these guidelines as relevant for my discourse analysis, since access to the discourse(s) definitely is an issue due to the vast power difference between policy makers and child domestic workers. Their objectives are not necessarily the same—what may seem like fulfillment of human rights for one may be starvation for the other. The power relationship between employer and child is also important. The child servants live and work under surveillance from their employers, often receiving threats as a means to instill

work discipline. The use of dismissals is also important to understanding the nature of this special kind of work relationship. Institutionalization is an issue to be discussed in the section about child domestics' access to education.

For the objective of the power analysis within discourse analysis Powers (2001: 62) suggested the following questions:

In whose interests are the continuation of this discourse? Whose autonomy and responsibility are enhanced by this discourse? Whose autonomy and responsibility are reduced? What dominations are established, perpetuated, or eliminated? What subdiscourses of resistance are present within the discourse? What mechanisms are in place for systematic co-optation of resistance discourses? Whose voice is being heard? Whose voice is being left out? Do people feel constraints against speaking? Are all voices equally informed? What power relations exist between this discourse and others?

These questions are most relevant for my discourse analysis as they deal with the concept of power. Domination, resistance, and voice, are all important concepts in my analysis, especially when I analyze the interviews conducted and my conversations with child domestics and their employers.

Perakyla (2005) wrote about two types of discourse analysis: historical discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. On historical discourse analysis he wrote:

Foucault did not propose a definite set of methods for the analysis of texts; hence, the ways of analyzing and interpreting texts of scholars inspired by him vary. For all of them, however, a primary concern is, as Potter (2004) aptly put it, how a set of "statements" comes to constitute objects and subjects. (Perakyla 2005: 871).

Yapa (1996: 713) referred to this as the subject, object, and the discourse as mutually constituted. In other words, the object (what we study) has no meaning without the

context of the subject (the researcher) and the discourse we operate within. The same was said by Gregory (1994) as presented by Wylie (2006: 303):

[...] a discourse is *not* a series of things that are said and done regarding a pre-existing thing – gender, say. A discourse of gender is not ‘about’ gender: instead it *creates* gender, makes it really, actually exist as a consequential and meaningful set of beliefs, attitudes and everyday practices and performances.

Critical discourse analysis is characterized by Perakyla as a merger of major concerns in linguistics and critical social research. In critical discourse analysis the key concern is “the ways in which texts of different kinds reproduce power and inequalities in society.” (Perakyla 2005: 871). Critical discourse analysis was developed by Fairclough, who stated that it “aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination, and in ideology” (Fairclough 2001: 229).

I am a bit skeptical about embracing critical discourse analysis as my methodology because I do not have a background in linguistics and do not see language per se as the starting point for my analysis. However, I do find critical discourse analysis interesting and important, and it makes sense to label my discourse analysis as a mix of a Foucauldian power-knowledge discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. The issue of analyzing “whether those who benefit most from the way social life is now organized have an interest in the problem *not* being resolved” (Fairclough 2001: 236) is of high relevance to my project, as many of the people shaping and dominating the discourses on childhood, child labor and child domestic workers in Dhaka do themselves benefit from child labor, directly or indirectly. It is also possible to argue that child domestics fit functionally into the larger logic of neoliberal economic reforms. Even

though child domestics existed prior to this period, the needs of a contemporary middle-class household regulate domestic service.

Cameron (2001: 123) wrote that the ‘critical’ in ‘critical discourse analysis’ refers to “a way of understanding the social world drawn from critical theory. Within that paradigm reality is understood as *constructed*, shaped by various social forces.” I think this demonstrates that Foucauldian discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are compatible. However, critical discourse analysis is essentially a form of textual analysis (Cameron 2001).

Cameron illustrated some aspects of critical discourse analysis by showing examples from different researchers’ work. One is the issue of labeling the groups under discussion, resulting in a language of ‘them’ and ‘us’. Another issue is that the communication is not always/only/exactly what is explicitly said in the text. Therefore, it is crucial to ask what is *not* said in a certain discourse, just as Carabine (2001) mentioned in her “Guide to doing Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis”. Wylie (2006: 304) explained the ‘us’ and ‘them’ way of thinking in this way: “[...] discourses establish some behaviours and identities as normal and natural and establish others as unusual, marginal or unnatural.” From this he concluded that discourses must be considered in terms of power.

In addition to my proposed mix of a Foucauldian power-knowledge discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, I follow Lees’ (2004) two-dimensional framework for discourse analysis. The first dimension is the social setting in which discourse is located; the other is the rhetorical organization of the discourse. To obtain an understanding of the social setting of each discourse, I spent time with people

representing the different discourses on childhood in Bangladesh. The methodological aspects of the observations, interactions, and interviews carried out in this ethnographic part of my research are explained in the next chapter. The rhetorical organization of the discourses is explored via analysis of interviews, conversations, behavior, and written texts in the three analysis chapters (chapters 4, 5, and 6).

How does discourse theory influence my data and why is discourse theory important for children's geographies?

In the introductory chapter I used some statistical data from surveys in Bangladesh, which show the number of child laborers in the country and in Dhaka. When engaging with these data it is important to keep in mind the infinite number of different types of child work, with different degrees of exploitation. There are also instances in which children are content to do the work they are performing. Quantitative data will always have a problem in capturing these dimensions. Therefore, instead of simply presenting such data I discuss the consequences of putting up such numbers. For example, when a middle-class citizen in Dhaka is presented with an official statistical discourse that conveys the fact that Bangladesh has more than 3 million child laborers, she will probably get the impression that child labor is a phenomenon that is natural, inevitable and very difficult to reduce due to the huge number. This is an example of what Foucault refers to as “‘authority’ of the text (the social and political factors that give a written work the power to influence human action)” (Marvasti 2004: 111), which I identified earlier in this chapter. If the middle-class citizen had received some information and

suggestions about ways to help the child laborers in the neighborhood, or success-stories from some of the NGOs who have helped child laborers get an education, very different thoughts or actions could have been evoked. I do realize that we need statistical information to solve problems. It is helpful to know the range of children's engagement in different types of jobs and to ascertain whether the numbers increase or decrease and how they relate to school participation rates, in order to come up with policy adjustments and programs such as 'money for education'. However, it is important to be conscious about the fact that all data stem from discourses and therefore both result from and influence how people think and act on a certain issue. I demonstrated in chapter 1 that the official, statistical discourse is gender-biased because it does not count household chores in own home as work no matter how many hours spent on such chores. Many people may look uncritically at the numbers from the child labor survey, not think about the work that is not counted, and thereby take the information as truth, since authority is usually granted to the 'grand narrative' of official, statistical information.

There are several ways my data are influenced by discourse theory in a way that is not necessarily unique for discourse theory. I will give two examples: First, I do not support the traditional, positivistic, social science model where objects are treated as if they have 'naively given' properties that are out there just waiting to be found by the scientists (Yapa 1996). Positivism is criticized by postmodernism and discourse theory, but that does not mean that other social scientists do not also critique positivism. Much, and probably most, quantitative social science research today is post-positivist, which means that the traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge is challenged. Post-positivists thus recognize "that we cannot be "positive" about our claims of knowledge

when studying the behaviour and actions of humans” (Creswell 2003: 7). More importantly, within qualitative research there are several epistemologies and methodologies other than discourse theory/discourse analysis that acknowledge the social construction of reality and multiple meanings according to the interviewees. Ethnography and feminism are just a few examples. Several geographers, feminists, ethnographers, and sociologists use Foucault without claiming to use ‘discourse theory’ or ‘discourse analysis’. Foucault’s work is often used as ‘critical theory’ or ‘social theory’.

Second, my reason for desiring to hear the child servants’ versions of their work and life stems from a conviction that there is not one ‘truth’ or one ‘big story’, but many different views, and many different discourses, and all of which are important. My opinion can be explained by my engagement with discourse theory; however, a student of feminist geography or women’s studies could have designed a similar study and explained it with an interest in feminist theory. Even though gender plays an important part in the life and work of child domestics, I do not privilege gender as the central focus of analysis. However, my study has a lot in common with writings in women’s studies epistemologically and methodologically. Links between women’s studies and childhood studies have been aptly discussed by several researchers; see for instance Alanen (2005). Epistemological similarities among postmodernism, post-structuralism, and feminism are further discussed in chapter 3.

I mentioned in chapter 1 that in the new social studies of childhood with which I identify, and which includes children’s geographies, childhood is seen as a social construct. Still, few researchers in the new social studies of childhood explicitly state that they use discourse theory. I think it is important to explicitly analyze different discourses

that influence the life of children, be it child domestic workers in Bangladesh or middle class children in day care centers in the US. The life of children is a complex conglomerate of spatial and social relations that are shaped by forces outside the control of children but also by children's own way of looking at their lives. Studies informed by discourse theory would make clear how different systems of knowledge (i.e. discourses) constitute children's lives. I therefore think children's geographies would benefit from more discourse theory studies.

Concluding remarks: A theoretical framework for discourse analysis

In this chapter I explained the theoretical framework to be used in analyzing the human rights discourse, the employers' discourse, and the child domestics' discourse. I explained how this power-knowledge framework is based on my poststructural and constructivist epistemology and my readings of Foucault and critical discourse analysis. The main analytical points of my discourse analysis are as follows:

- What is the rhetorical organization of the discourses? (e.g. interviews, conversations, written texts).
- What is the relationship between the prevailing human rights discourse and the preceding welfare discourse?
- What is the subject and object of the discourse? (i.e. who are the authors of the discourse and who are they writing/talking about?)

- Is the 'self' (the author of the discourse) at any time included as the 'problem' in the discourse?
- What topics is not part of the discourses and why are those issues omitted?
- What is the social setting for each discourse?
- Who exerts power through the discourse? How is this power exercised?
- What kind of knowledge is demonstrated through the discourse and what is the relationship between knowledge and power?
- What behaviors and identities are established as normal and natural and what behaviors and identities are established as unusual, marginal or unnatural by the discourse?
- Whose agency is enhanced through the discourse?
- Are the discourses predominantly reactive or proactive?
- Is the discourse an expression of resistance? If so; resistance against what?
- What is the relationship between each of the discourses and space? (i.e., how is power enacted in space for each of the discourses?)
- Is the discourse codified, and if so, by whom and for what purpose?
- Is there intertextuality between the different subdiscourses within the discourse?
- To what degree do the discourses have a regulatory function?
- Which of the analyzed discourses are the most powerful in terms of how they affect the daily lives of working children?

Hitherto all analytical points have aimed at explicating how discourse affects material. As pointed out in chapter 1, the material condition of the neoliberal Bangladeshi economy requires cheap labor for factories and households. Therefore, discourses in which cheap labor and child labor are justified would be evident. Similarly, it is probably possible to discern a link not only from discourse to childhood, but also the other way around. Alanen (2005: 35) formulated this as one aspect of “the methodology for child-centred research that seeks [...] to examine how social constructions of childhood not only structure their lives but also are structured by the activities of children themselves.” On the basis of these thoughts I formulated the following questions to be used in my discourse analysis:

- How do material conditions affect discourses?
- What kinds of discourses justify the continued practice of child domestic work?

The questions from this last section will be answered through my discourse analysis in chapters 4, 5, and 6. The question of which discourse is most powerful will be saved to chapter 7, where I compare and contrast the three different main discourses that I decided to analyze.

Chapter 3

Critical ethnography as methodology in research with child domestic workers and other participants

This chapter examines the difference between epistemology and methodology and how the two intersect. Such an understanding is then used to explore the different approaches to child research and how there has been a gradual paradigm shift in social sciences from doing research only *on* children to also doing research *with* children. I explain how this transition was based on a change of epistemology. Research *on* children is only mentioned briefly, as it is not an approach that I use in this study. This chapter will specifically focus on children's participation in research, as I see that as the epitome of the new approach to children's studies; research *with* children. In my discussion of children's participation in research I explain my fieldwork experience with child domestic workers in Dhaka and why I chose the methodology of critical ethnography in my research with children and other participants.

Definitions of epistemology

All definitions of epistemology do contain the word 'knowledge'. Some refers to epistemology simply as 'theories of knowledge' (Kvale 1996: 14; Mason 2002: 16). Mason (2002) exemplifies this by explaining that an ethnographer's epistemological

position suggests that “knowledge or evidence of the social world can be generated by observing, or participating in, or experiencing ‘natural’ or ‘real-life’ settings, interactive situations and so on” (ibid.: 85). “How do we know what we know?” (Patton 2002: 134). Patton writes that epistemological debates are “about possibility and desirability of objectivity, subjectivity, causality, validity, generalizability” (ibid.: 134). I will discuss some of these concepts later in this chapter. Rossman and Rallis (2003) explain epistemology with these questions: “What is knowledge? How do we know what we know? What do we take as evidence? What convinces us that something is “true”?” (ibid.: 8). They only discern quantitative and qualitative epistemologies, which is an easier picture than what one gets from most other sources.

Another definition of epistemology is given with this question: “What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 22). I will come back to this definition when I discuss my positionality as researcher. Goodall (1987) defines epistemology this way: “A branch of philosophy which is concerned with the study of the nature of knowledge, the source and possible forms of knowledge, and the criteria of knowledge (the conditions in which valid knowledge may be achieved)”. (ibid.:157). The next section will look at some concrete examples of epistemologies.

Examples of epistemologies and my choice of epistemology

Many of the mentioned authors are vague in their presentation of epistemology. Some do not mention any examples at all. A discussion of epistemology opens up for philosophical discussions that authors may be reluctant to commence. However, it is important for

researchers to consider how one decides what to regard as knowledge of social phenomena. Sparke (1999), who defines epistemology as a “diverse set of philosophical arguments used to answer the question ‘How do I know what I know is true?’” (ibid.: 75). According to Sparke there are three distinct epistemologies: The first is the empiricist epistemology, where “the facts speak for themselves” (ibid.: 75) and where it is generally presumed that “truth is guaranteed by direct observation.” (ibid.: 75). The empiricist epistemology belongs to the philosophy of positivism. The second type of epistemologies is the epistemologies based on phenomenology, pragmatism, and hermeneutics, where “the interpretative and local quality of all knowledge claims” is asserted (ibid.: 75). This epistemology is shared by many of the humanist scholars, and in their opinion “truths are underwritten by our common experiences of being and communicating as humans” (ibid.: 75). Sparke’s third category of epistemologies is the critical epistemologies that have influenced the development of a separate feminist epistemology. Here, interpretative knowledge production is combined with an appreciation for “empirical research that actually helps elucidate power relations while simultaneously attending to the structures of social life through which such critical knowledge is itself produced.” (ibid.: 75). According to Sparke, many Marxist, feminist, and critical realist scholars share this kind of epistemology. However, this epistemology has evolved into a post-structuralist epistemology, which is the epistemology I identify with. I will examine this kind of epistemology in the next paragraph where I discuss Donna Haraway’s contribution to a feminist epistemology focusing on situated knowledge. First let me introduce one more categorization of epistemologies that helps explain my own epistemology.

Guba and Lincoln (2005: 193-196) have made several tables that give an overview of different “basic beliefs (metaphysics) of alternative inquiry paradigms” where ontology²¹, epistemology, and methodology are the main categories. It will go beyond the scope of this chapter to present the whole tables, but I will draw on some of the information in order to explain my own epistemological position and the implications this position have for my use of methodology. For the paradigms of ‘positivism’ and ‘postpositivism’ Guba and Lincoln name the keywords for epistemologies as ‘objectivist’ and ‘findings true’, and ‘findings probably true’ respectively. For the paradigm ‘critical theory’ the epistemology is titled ‘subjectivist’. For the ‘constructivism’ paradigm the epistemology is named both ‘subjectivist’ and ‘co-created findings’. Using these terms, my research belongs to the category of constructivism, where the epistemology is termed ‘subjectivist/co-created findings’. I will explain this further in the next paragraph. However, first I want to explain the crucial work of Haraway (1996) who developed the concept of *situated knowledges* already in 1987 (Haraway 1996), in which she rejected the common epistemological claim that there is such a thing as a ‘view from nowhere’. In other words she rejected that absolute objectivity and value-neutrality is possible in any kind of research. She also rejected relativism as a position in knowledge theory. Her main point is that all knowledge is seen from a specific place. It is therefore crucial to make it clear to the audience what your positionality as researcher is, so that the reader can understand how the knowledge is produced. She described this new kind of objectivity as

²¹ One of the points I make in this chapter is that the change of methodology in child research is a result of a change in epistemology (and a researcher’s epistemology stems from her ontology). Therefore, I am not going more in detail on the meaning of ontology here, but I refer back to my brief discussion in chapter 2 where I defined ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods and where I also explained my own postmodern ontology.

an “embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*” (Haraway 1996: 115). This kind of objectivity is based on making one’s positionality known and realizing that all knowledge is a result of a particular combination of researcher and place. Haraway is a proponent of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (ibid.: 117). She used this focus on positioning to strongly criticize both relativism and “totalizing versions of claims to scientific authority” (ibid.). By inaugurating this new meaning of objectivity, Haraway wrote: “I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situatedness where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (ibid.: 121). According to Mansvelt and Berg (2005), Haraway’s conception of objectivity requires a different form of writing practice, where we should reject the third-person narrative and “reflect upon and analyse how one’s position in relation to the processes, people, and phenomena we are researching actually affects both those phenomena and our understanding of them” (Mansvelt and Berg 2005: 253). In a review of geographers’ encounter with situated knowledges, Rose wrote:

“The imperative to situate the production of knowledge is being formulated by feminist geographers through a rhetoric of both space and vision. Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi (1995: 428-29) are typical in their statement that, in order to situate ourselves, it is necessary “to make one’s position vis a vis research *known* rather than invisible, and to *limit* one’s conclusions rather than making grand claims about their universal applicability”” (Rose 1997: 308).

I agree in this caution about making grand claims from partial knowledge. Later in this chapter I will describe my position in this specific research.

For a moment I return to Guba and Lincoln's categorization of inquiry paradigms (2005: 193-196). If they were to place my research within their systematizing matrix, it would be in a cell that said 'subjectivity' because they use the terms 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in a traditional sense where 'objectivity' means scientific objectivity, i.e., perceived value neutrality, whereas 'subjectivity' means that the researcher builds on her own evaluations and interpretations, producing research that in many scientists' eyes fits better in arts than science (for a discussion of whether geography belongs in arts or science, see Johnston 1997: 97). However, if I had to describe my epistemology using the terms objectivist and subjectivist, I would say that my epistemology is critical objectivist, i.e., objectivist in the Haraway sense. I do agree with what I understand to be Haraway's intention to make situated knowledge approved of in wider circles of academia than among those researchers who already employ and/or understand the importance of socially situated research. However, I am a bit ambivalent about labeling my research "objectivist". I am skeptical of trying to fit into a scientific world where research has to be of a certain kind in order to count. For that reason I usually avoid the terms objectivity and subjectivity when explaining my epistemology²². But I do agree with Haraway that traditional science is full of "unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims" (Haraway 1997: 117). In that regard I experienced some 'aha' moments when analyzing my quantitative data about school participation in Dhaka some years ago. I encountered firsthand how easy it is to play around with variables and categories in order to

²² I actually find it relieving when an established researcher like Melissa Wright puts right up front in her text that her study is not objective, which she does in her book "Disposable women and other myths of global capitalism". After having explained her political and personal engagement with her research topic, she wrote: "I realize that, in admitting these beliefs, I have dashed any claims to objectivity or impartiality with regard to the outcome of this research" (Wright 2006).

manipulate the material so that it showed some specific tendencies. It is a myth that what we traditionally call 'science' is value neutral. This is the bottom line of Haraway's argument. Her writings have been of immense help to all people who do more untraditional forms of science; work that traditional scientists probably would prefer to categorize as art. There is nothing wrong with art; it is incorrect to believe, however, that traditional scientists have a monopoly on knowledge production! Haraway and other feminist scholars after her have done a great job in making my type of research more respectable in a wider circle of geography than feminism and humanism²³. No research can claim to have found the truth—the true data and the true knowledge. All research is colored in some way by the researcher. By making one's positionality known to the audience, qualitative research can be as valid as research based on a more traditional science epistemology. To accentuate the argument that no knowledge is value neutral, I quote Brinkley (1968): "If I were objective or if you were objective or if anyone was, he would have to be put away somewhere in an institution because he'd be some sort of vegetable" (Brinkley 1968 quoted in Patton 2002: 96). We are all subjective but we can produce objective knowledge by making the context of our knowledge production known: Who are we as persons and researchers, where do we do research, why have we chosen the specific topic and place, what are our opinions on the topic that we study, and how do we interact with our research participants?

²³ Yi-Fu Tuan is an example of a humanist geographer who has worked along some of the same lines of thinking about the importance of "personal experience, subjectivity and self-discovery" (Rodaway 2004: 309), although not directly linked to feminist geographers' work. However, Haraway is critical of humanists in general and group them with other scientists who see the world as a resource, whereas she claims that feminists see "the world as active subject" (Haraway 1996: 125).

Referring one last time to the categorization in Guba and Lincoln (2005: 193-196), I identify my own research paradigm as constructivism, and my epistemology as critical and constructivist with a focus on co-created data. By this I mean that I do not generate data alone, but in co-operation with the people I try to learn about and from. For example, when I interact with child domestics, the creative process of coming up with topics for conversation, which again spurs my ideas for questions later on, never is conducted by me alone—it is a co-operative process in which my participants' ways of communication influences the kind of data I end up with. The concepts we use have importance for our understanding of the world. Phenomena that we study are socially constructed by the way we think, talk, and write about them. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, my study focuses more on the role of discourses in constructing reality, than on the role of language per se. Physical objects do exist, but they only gain meaning through discourse (Foucault 1972; Yapa 1996; Phillips and Jorgensen 2002).

A researcher's ontology and epistemology inform the type of data she will collect, and how she will go about collecting the data. Your ontology and epistemology may even influence you to use the verb 'generate' rather than 'collect' when talking about data (Mason 2002). This is the case for me, as I see my data as being constructed in the process of my interaction with people. My data are not some neutral, ready-to-be-picked entities. In other words, I do not believe in positivist social science. I see data as mutually created by the researcher and the researched—the mentioned 'co-creation' in the categorization of Guba and Lincoln. Postmodernism²⁴ is characterized by openness to a

²⁴ Postmodernism as ontology is briefly explained in chapter 2.

range of voices in social enquiry (Johnston, Gregory, and Smith 1994). Based on a postmodern ontology and a constructivist epistemology I see the importance of listening to different voices in order to produce knowledge on a certain topic. Children's voices are often not heard in issues that affect their life and well-being. My research flows from the current trend among social science researchers and children's geographers to view "children as meaningful actors in their own right who can speak for themselves and express multiple ideas and opinions" (Scheyvens, Scheyvens, and Murray 2003: 173, based on Valentine 1999). However, I agree with Haraway's warning when she wrote: "here lies a serious danger of romanticizing and /or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions. To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if 'we' 'naturally' inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges" (Haraway 1996: 117).

Feminists, postmodernists, and post-structuralists agree in their critiques of 'whose truth' counts (Gillies and Alldred 2002: 35). The shift in epistemology that is relevant here is the one resulting from postmodernist and post-structuralist critique of grand theory, and feminist critique of the dominant epistemologies that treat knowledge as something that can be mastered by one (masculine) subject (Johnston, Gregory, and Smith 1994). This transition goes away from the dualism of self/other to seeing the former 'other' (in this case, children) as social actors capable of thinking and acting according to what they regard as best for themselves and who are able to express their values, opinions and preferences. This shift marks the transition from doing research *on* children to doing research *with* children.

If we stay in the empiricist/positivist epistemology, what we need to know about children can come from databases containing information about school attendance, results and work. Those data may be gathered by using school protocols, asking teachers questions, or asking parents for an account of their children's activities. My point here is not necessarily to say that research *with* children cannot be quantitative; it is possible to collect data directly from children on a big scale. One could even conduct quantitative research with children as researchers/research assistants, having the children themselves as researchers choose to design a quantitative study. However, as the literature on research *with* children mostly covers qualitative methodology and I do not use quantitative methodology in this research, I'll only briefly mention some quantitative methodologies based on the new research approach *with* children before I focus on qualitative research with children.

Corsaro (2005) mentioned three quantitative, or what he calls macrolevel, methods for research with children: demographic studies, large-scale surveys, and historical methods. Demographers have begun to use the child (rather than the family or the household) as the unit of analysis. Large-scale surveys now sometimes involve the direct participation of children. Children have been found to be "good questionnaire respondents if they are asked about events that are meaningful in their lives. Children can be willing and able to answer questions about their experiences if the response alternatives are appropriate and ordered well" (Corsaro 2005: 47). As with qualitative interviews, it is crucial for the researcher to create rapport with the children and assure them about confidentiality. To a hardcore positivist it would not matter whether you used the child itself or its parents or teachers as respondents; the results would be the same

since the neutral data are laying out there in the world, waiting to be ‘picked’ by a neutral researcher, which also implies that any other researcher collecting the same types of data in the same place would obtain the same results. This view is not shared by the researchers conducting surveys using this new approach (research *with* children)—they think that the traditional approach gives the researcher false data since adult respondents would not necessarily give the same answers as children about the children’s situation (Corsaro 2005).

However, in defense of the traditional approach (research *on* children) I will say that it is not always feasible to get the needed information for a research project only from children, and so ‘research *with* children’ is not the only valid approach in my eyes. For example, in my M.Phil. study of the reasons for low school participation among children living in slums in Dhaka, I did talk with children, but my main respondents were the parents. This was mainly based on my decisions about the types of data I wanted, where many of the questions could not have been answered by the children, and partly based on my experience with children’s shyness around outsiders. Creating rapport with children is very time consuming and thus it would not have been possible for me, given my time frame, to get enough interviews for a statistical survey. Perhaps the researchers referred to by Corsaro under these ‘new’ kinds of quantitative approaches can be labeled as post-positivists.

The third quantitative approach based on the ‘research *with* children’ paradigm mentioned by Corsaro (2005) is historical methods. Many historians are now using materials like autobiographies, paintings, photographs and diaries to gather knowledge about children’s lives in the past. This is based on a realization that there are few versions

of children's own lives in earlier research, due to the power inequality between adults and children.

Corsaro (2005) mentioned two microlevel methods, which is his term for qualitative methodology: "individual and group interviews", and "ethnography and sociolinguistic analysis". Corsaro called for more use of "nontraditional methods in studying children" in order to "encourage children to present their own images and representations of their lives" (ibid.: 55). As examples of the latter he mentioned 'child-centered' methods such as using drawings to elicit stories and understandings of children's everyday lives. Several geographers have used children's drawings as a tool in their research with children (see for instance Young and Barrett 2001; Punch 2001, 2002; Aitken, Estrada, Jennings, and Aguirre 2006)²⁵. Child-centered methods are often called "participatory techniques". I discuss my use of drawings and other child-centered methods in the section titled "Nature of children's participation in my research".

Definitions of methodology and my choice of methodologies

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 22) defined methodology in this way: "How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?". Silverman (2001: 4) defined it like this: "A methodology refers to the choices we make about cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc. in planning and executing a research study". These definitions, and especially the first of them, demonstrate the overlap between the

²⁵ For ideas on how to use children's drawings as a research tool, see also Klepsch and Logie 1982; DiLeo 1983; Krampen 1991; Malchiodi 1998; and Holmes 1995 in Corsaro 2005.

concepts of 'epistemology' and 'methodology'. Both concepts entail studying how we come to know anything about the things we study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a researcher's choice of ontology, epistemology, and methodology can be termed a paradigm or an interpretive framework.

My choice of methodology is based on my postmodernist ontology and constructivist²⁶ epistemology. Furthermore, it is based on what I see as practically feasible. I employ a mix of discourse analysis and critical ethnography. "Critical ethnography examines cultural knowledge and action with the aim of forcing society to identify and act on values and ethical and political issues" (Morse and Richards 2002: 53). It is more focused than traditional ethnography and does not necessitate as long a stay in the studied culture as traditional ethnography (ibid.). By employing critical ethnography I was able to explore child domestic workers' agency and opportunities for social participation through interaction with people representing the three main discourses of my analysis: the human rights discourse, the employers' discourse, and the working children's own discourse.

Conventional ethnography's plea for 'thick description' is exchanged with description of selected observations with a specific purpose when employing critical ethnography. I agree with Thomas (1993) who stated that: "critical ethnography begins as a value-laden project that directs attention to things that are not quite right in our culture." He said, "critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose." (ibid.: 4). I also agree with Thomas that critical ethnography should not be "confused

²⁶ For more discussion of my ontology and epistemology see chapter 2.

with critical theory (associated with the Frankfurt school), which is a theory of capitalist society” (ibid.: 4). As a further explanation of the difference between conventional and critical ethnography, Thomas wrote:

Conventional ethnographers generally speak *for* their subjects, usually to an audience of other researchers. Critical ethnographers, by contrast, accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak *to* an audience *on behalf* of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects’ voice. As a consequence, critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that, by modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change. Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it. Conventional ethnographers recognize the impossibility, even undesirability, of research free of normative and other biases, but believe that these biases are to be repressed. Critical ethnographers instead celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change. (Thomas 1993: 4)

This harmonizes with how I view my research: I want to make people aware of the lived experiences of child domestic workers in Bangladesh in order to invoke agency at all scales and in all sectors of society so that child domestic workers’ situation can be improved.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, discourse analysis is the overarching methodology for my dissertation because my main activity is to analyze the different discourses on childhood and child labor and more specifically on child domestic work in Bangladesh. However, in order to understand the different discourses I found it necessary to immerse myself in the culture of the proponents of the different discourses. I spent time with representatives of the human rights discourse both in professional and leisure settings. I also spent much time with employers in their homes and at community

meetings and parties. In order to attain an understanding of the child servants' own discourse, I spent time with the children while they were working, playing and relaxing.

Corsaro (2005: 54) provided an example of the usefulness of ethnography that reminded me of my own research. He mentioned an episode in which a girl in elementary school came to him and wrote what for him was interesting data directly into his notebook. For the girl it was just a part of spontaneous play, as the researcher has spent much time with friends and is sitting there with his notebook while the children are playing. I had a similar experience when one of the child domestics I spent time with spontaneously started singing and telling stories into the tape recorder. These are now important data for me, but I never asked her to perform. I doubt that this would have happened if I had just been there for one visit.

My reasons for employing critical ethnography can be summarized as follows:

- I wanted to get as close to the culture of my participants as possible and therefore decided to live among the employers and their domestics (see further description under the heading "My positionality").
- I compensated for my relatively short stay by focusing on certain ethical and political issues that I want to make more people focus on and act on.
- I wanted to enhance my ability to understand the child domestic workers' everyday experiences and the attitudes of the employers
- I wanted to blend in, as much as possible, with local people and get to know my participants so that my interaction with them was as natural as possible so that we could create data together not only from interviews but also from our conversations and by spending time together relaxing, watching TV and chatting,

and from my participant observations. (see further description under the headings “Nature of children’s participation in my research” and “My positionality”).

What is participant observation? It is both a methodology and a method. In a broad sense, participant observation includes “activities of direct observation, interviewing, document analysis, reflection, analysis, and interpretation” (Schwandt 1997: 111). I tend to use the concept “participant observation” in a more narrow sense, as one of many methods belonging to my methodology of critical ethnography—as a method of observing. The other methods mentioned by Schwandt (i.e., direct observation, interviewing, document analysis, reflection, analysis, and interpretation) are methods that I use in addition to participant observation. Participant observation represents a continuum of degrees of participation, ranging from the researcher being fully immersed in the setting or culture of its participants, “to complete separation from the setting as spectator” (Patton 2002: 265). I find myself somewhere in the middle of this continuum. I tried to blend in with the employers by spending time with them, chatting, sharing meals, and visiting the same parties. And I spent time chatting with the domestic workers (both children and adults), taking on a role as a friend (Fine and Sandstrom 1988) and not only a spectator. However, I was not able to fully immerse in any of these groups²⁷.

“Critical ethnography is grounded empirically in explicit prior evidence of a variety of debilitating social conditions that provide the departure point for research” (Thomas 1993: 33). I used some statistical data from surveys in Bangladesh in the first

²⁷ When discussing positionality later in this chapter I write more about observations.

chapter in order to set the stage by showing the number of child laborers in the country and in Dhaka, and providing an estimate of child domestic workers in Dhaka. Newspaper articles demonstrating the plight of child domestic workers also influenced my motivation to examine this topic. Thus, my study is “grounded empirically in explicit prior evidence” (ibid.), just as Thomas stated—a common trait of critical ethnography.

Being critical is essential for me as a researcher. I agree with Thomas (1993), who wrote:

The term critical describes both an activity and an ideology. As social activity, critical thinking implies a call to action that may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement that includes political activism. As ideology, critical thinking provides a shared body of principles about the relationship among knowledge, its consequences, and scholars’ obligations to society. (Thomas 1993: 17)

On the spectrum of social activities from ‘rethinking of comfortable thoughts’ to ‘political activism’, I am nearer the rethinking end. However, it is my hope that my research will inspire political activism. I aim to fulfill my obligation to society as a critical researcher. Thomas provided some guidelines that are highly relevant to my analysis of discourses on childhood and child labor, and perhaps most relevant to my analysis of the employers’ and children’s discourses:

Critical researchers begin from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance. This tension is reflected in behavior, interaction rituals, normative systems, and social structure, all of which are visible in the rules, communication systems, and artifacts that constitute a given culture. Critical ethnography takes seemingly mundane events, even repulsive ones, and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, taming, power imbalance, and the symbolic mechanisms that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviors over others. (Thomas 1993: 9)

In chapters 5 and 6 I show how the power-play between employers and their child servants is in tension between control and resistance. While analyzing the discourses of the employers and the children I simultaneously analyze their cultures. Among a myriad of definitions of culture I have found the following definition useful: “Culture generally refers to the totality of all learned social behavior of a given group; it provides the “systems of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting” (Goodenough 1981: 110) and the rules and symbols of interpretation and discourse” (Thomas 1993: 12).

Four ways of studying children

In 1992, McDowell wrote, “feminist-inspired notions of doing research ‘with’ or ‘for’ rather than ‘about’ women (or other ‘others’) seem admirable and are becoming widely accepted within human geography (at least by those who hold to a notion of emancipatory geographies)” (McDowell 1992: 407). This section looks at the road from research *on* to research *with* children.

Christensen and Prout (2002) cited four ways that children and childhood have been studied: the child as *object*, the child as *subject*, the child as *social actor*, and the child as *participant or co-researcher*. The first of these, the child as object, is based on a positivist epistemology. The children are acted upon as they “are seen as dependent, incompetent, and not able to deal appropriately with information” (Robinson and Kellett 2004: 85). In the second approach the children are seen as subjects. “Key to this ‘child-centered’ perspective is that it recognizes the child as a person with subjectivity and takes

this as its starting point” (Christensen and Prout 2002: 480). The extent of children’s involvement in research is based on how the researcher judges their cognitive and social maturity. Researchers do not agree about whether this second approach represents research *on* or *with* children. Corsaro (2005) is the only writer I have found who calls it *with*. However, I do not think that the main point is to categorize and judge the different approaches regarding the extent to which they follow the latest fashion in research. It is much more important to look at what the different research projects and programs can attain. Even though I chose to use qualitative methodology for my dissertation research and tried to do research *with* children, I see that there is a need for both quantitative and qualitative research, and for both research *on* and *with* children.

The third type of study is children as social actors. In this perspective the children “act, take part in, change and become changed by the social world they live in” (ibid.: 481). There is no necessary distinction between adults and children in this perspective, and methodologies are the same as for research with adult participants. I am skeptical about this argument, as there will still be significant differences between research with adults and research with children and thus a need for different methodological considerations of research with children depending on their age and maturity (Fine and Sandstrom 1988).

In the fourth perspective the children have an active participant role. This perspective builds on article 12 in the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989), which according to Robinson and Kellett (2004: 86) recommends that children should be “informed, involved and consulted about all activities that affect their lives – including research”. This perspective

opens up “a quasi-partnership of children as co-researchers” (ibid.: 86). If children have an active participant role in research, they participate in both designing and conducting the research. “Participation research”, also called “Participatory action research” and “Participatory rural appraisal”, is a research approach that has grown quickly in last decades, and not only in research with children. According to Pain (2003), the characteristic element of participatory research is that “research is undertaken collaboratively with and for the individuals, groups or communities who are its subject.” (Pain 2003 cited in Samers 2006: 280). Hart (1992) illustrated the different nuances of child participation with a ladder starting with manipulation, decoration, and tokenism as non-participation, and then gradually evolving the participation concept via “assigned but informed”, “consulted and informed”, “adult-initiated shared decisions with children”, “child-initiated and directed”, up to “child-initiated shared decisions with adults” as the top type of participation. Referring to Hart’s (1992) ladder, my research is probably closest to the “consulted and informed” rung. I consulted the children about the content of my research project and informed them about my purposes and methods. However, the children were not part of the decision-making process leading up to the fieldwork in Bangladesh. Considering the four research perspectives with children identified by Christensen and Prout (2002), my research is probably closer to the “social actor” perspective than the “participant or co-researcher” (ibid.: 480) perspective because I see “children as social actors with their own experiences and understandings” but not always as “active participants in the research process” (ibid.: 481). However, in general I see my data as co-constructed by my participants and me, as described in the previous section on constructivist epistemology. But I see a need for a differentiated approach towards

research with children depending on the maturity level of each individual child with whom I am working and on the social context of that child. The more mature the child is, the more likely the potential for children's active participation in research design and conduct. Thus I do also draw on ideas in the 'children as subjects' approach. Another factor to consider is that the social context of children's lives may not be conducive to a uniquely active involvement at all stages of the research process, and there may be constraining practical factors to their participation. In the sections "Scope for children's participation in my research" and "Nature of children's participation in my research", I go more in depth on these issues. The concept of children's participation as found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child is elaborated upon in the analysis chapter on the human rights discourse.

The transition from conducting research *on* children to research *with* children has ethical implications (Christensen and Prout 2002). When the child is seen as an object or subject, there is an implicit notion of difference between adult (researcher) and child (researched). However, in the two newest ways of seeing the child in research (the child as social actor or active participant/co-researcher), the difference is blurred; this implies an ethical symmetry between researcher and participant (ibid.). This creates new ethical problems and dilemmas for the researcher, and also new responsibilities. I discuss ethical problems and dilemmas later in this chapter.

From research *on* to research *with* children

Historically, most research on children has been *on*, not *with*, children. “The quest has not been to understand children but to pursue the lofty academic goals of the absolute universal law and the ultimate treatment” (Graue and Walsh 1998: 1). Although Piaget²⁸ used qualitative methodology, his and his colleagues’ work did not pay attention to context or children’s experience (Graue and Walsh 1998). The following quote shows the discontent many researchers have felt with the traditional research *on* children:

“Most research directly on children is devoted to measuring them, using the model of animal research to measure their growth, disease or behaviour. Such research can bring great benefits to children’s health and education. Yet it is largely impersonal. If children’s views are collected, this is usually to atomise and process them through the grid of adult designed research” (Alderson 1995: 40 in Woodhead and Faulkner 2000).

I now switch to a discussion of the research approach applied here: Research *with* children. Establishing rapport is crucial in all qualitative research, and even more so when the research participants are minors. Spending time with the children is necessary to build rapport. It is also important to give the child participants opportunities to ask the researcher all kinds of questions about the research. Another helpful strategy for attaining rapport is for the researcher to demonstrate that she enjoys the company of her participants (Holmes 1998; Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 17). In the section “Nature of children’s participation in my research”, I comment on my use of these strategies.

²⁸ Piaget is known for his development psychology theory of stages. According to this theory the development of children’s intellect is a progression through distinct stages of intellectual ability (Corsaro 2005).

Positionality is another important factor to consider in research with children. The researcher's gender, age, social and marital status, and ethnicity are all factors that are likely to influence the rapport established with all participants, including children (Holmes 1998). I discuss my positionality later in this chapter. It is important to realize that when I interview child domestic workers, the relationship between us is a potentially exploitative relationship because I am in a position of greater power than the person I am interviewing (Punch 2001). When any of the children told me that their work conditions were difficult, I tried not to allow them to feel more pity for themselves; rather, I sought to empower them to do something about their situation. Empowerment is especially important for girls in Bangladesh because of the patriarchal culture. In a later section titled "Ethical considerations in research with children", I discuss ways to create empowering research relationships with children.

The geographers Matthew, Limb, and Taylor (1998) wrote beautifully about research with children, such as the need to "understand children from the perspective of their own lifeworlds" (ibid.: 313). They stated: "Rather than assuming children know less than adults we suggest that they may know something else" (ibid.: 313). I tried to let these kinds of attitudes and approaches guide my research with children.

Profile of the child participants²⁹

Many children were involved in my research in different ways, ranging from core participants, to someone I just talked with once or twice in schools that I visited. Five children were my core participants. Their ages ranged from approximately 8 to approximately 17³⁰. I visited them repeatedly and I got to know not only them but also the families for whom they worked. Altogether, I interviewed 28 children in-depth and/or in a semi-structured format. All except two were currently working as domestic workers. Twenty-four of these 26 child domestic workers were live-in, and only three were boys. I predominantly used the snowball method of recruiting participants, which means that I started out with families that I already knew and increased the list of participants gradually by getting references from those I worked with to other households with child domestics. The gender ratio in my participant group reflects the fact that the majority of domestic workers in Bangladesh are female³¹. For girls, domestic work is considered a way to learn the chores necessary to master the role of a future wife and care-worker for

²⁹ Profile of the adult participants comes at the end of this chapter.

³⁰ Few children from low-income households know their exact age. In some cases when their own estimate varied substantially from their employers' estimate, I used the average of the two numbers. Birth registration is still not common in Bangladesh, especially not among the poor. The youngest child domestic worker that I observed and talked with at a dinner party was only 5 years old.

³¹ The previously mentioned survey conducted by the NGO Shoishab in 1999 concluded that 75% of child domestic workers in Dhaka are female (Shoishab 1999). According to the National Child Labour Survey for 2002-2003 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2003), 55% of child domestic workers in Bangladesh are female. (The report does not state this number but I have calculated it based on information in tables 5.12 and 6.6.) According to UNICEF's survey of 1,066 child domestic workers in Dhaka in 2004, 86% of the child domestics were female (UNICEF 2004). In an ILO survey of child domestic workers in Dhaka (Khair 2004), 5,092 child domestic workers were interviewed, and 1,118 of them were boys, i.e., 22%. However, the report stated that the respondents were "chosen on the basis of purposive, stratified and random sampling methods", but this was not explained further, so we cannot necessarily conclude that this gender ratio is valid for the total population.

children and parents-in-law. None of the children I recruited by using the snowball method and ringing doorbells in my apartment building did currently go to school. Therefore I got assistance from an NGO that works with working children to recruit three child domestics who go to school. Through an acquaintance I also recruited a female child domestic who studies in her employers' home and goes back to her village twice a year to take exams. All of the 26 live-in child domestics had been recruited from their employer's ancestral village or rural town, either directly by the employer, by relatives of the employer or by an agent³². This is a common trend also found in the surveys I referred to in the footnote on the previous page.

The degree of a child's participation both in society and in research depends on their age and maturity, as well as their gender and (dis)ability. Very few of my participants were boys, so I cannot make any valid gender comparisons. The male child domestic workers participating in this research were quite shy, but I think that was more a product of their young age than their gender. Only one of my participants, a girl of approximately 14 years, was disabled. She was blind in one eye and had limited mental capacity. Obviously, such factors limit the degree of participation, both in research and in decisions that affect her life. However, it is crucial that we do not automatically (consciously or otherwise) dismiss mentally disabled children, as they can all participate in one way or another as long as the facilitators have the needed resources and qualifications (Jensen 2007).

³² The tradition of recruiting domestics through the employer's ancestral, rural place is seen as a point of safety both for the working children and the employers.

In addition to the child domestics with whom I interacted in their employers' homes, I spoke with many children in schools. These were non-formal schools specifically targeting working children, and some targeted only child domestic workers. I also talked with working children who attended workshops and roundtable discussions organized by some of the NGOs with which I was involved.

I concur with Sumaiya Khair's methodological reflections. She wrote the report on ILO's survey of 5092 child domestics in Dhaka who were selected by a mix of purposive, stratified, and random methods of sampling. The very last paragraph of the report reads as follows on the methodology of future research with child domestics:

Given the sensitive nature of the practice, it would do well to bear in mind that the methodology of any proposed research may not necessarily conform to traditional procedures. As such, it may be necessary to depart from normative research techniques and rely more on purposive sampling based on opportunities and access. (Khair 2004: 54).

Scope for children's participation in my research

The limited existing research on child domestic workers, especially the limited qualitative research, is probably due to the difficulty of access. However, I have a broad network of relatives and friends in Dhaka, and several either employ children themselves or have relatives or neighbors who do so. Many gave me permission to spend time with their employees. I mostly used this 'snowball' sampling method but I also recruited participants by approaching their employers in private or semi-public spaces in the apartment building where I stayed. An NGO that ran a school for working children also helped me gain access to a few families with child domestics (Jensen 2007).

It was not possible to spend much time with all child participants. The amount depended on their employers, and also on whether the children ever spent time outside the apartment. It is difficult to know whether those employers who were a bit reserved had anything to hide or whether they just wanted to protect their private life. I doubt that those child domestic workers who lived in abusive work relationships would ever be given an opportunity to participate in this type of research. Thus, a limitation to this type of study is that the quantity and quality of access to child domestic workers will likely be correlated with the quality of the relationship between the working child and their employer. In other words, it is difficult to avoid getting a biased sample in favor of the better functioning work relationships (Jensen 2007).

It would have been interesting to try to involve some of the child domestic workers as research assistants, but it was unrealistic to obtain consent from employers for this activity. If I wanted to let some of the child domestic workers interview some of the other child domestic workers, which I think could have yielded some interesting results, it would have been far more difficult to get consent from the employers³³, especially since many employers rigidly restrict their child domestic workers' geographic mobility. Another obstacle to letting the children participate as researchers in this particular study is that many are 'on call' around the clock, making it difficult for the employers to accept anything that would occupy their employees' time more than a few minutes now and then, unless it can be done simultaneously with their work tasks.

³³ Most of the parents of child domestic workers in this study live far away from Dhaka. Therefore, their children's employers were regarded as their guardians for the purpose of obtaining informed consent.

I did not involve the children in the research design, as that would have demanded spending time with them in the phase of writing the research proposal and funding applications, which was not practical for me. However, I was open to making changes in the research design after reaching Dhaka, and I told this to the children. I explained my project to each of them, but it seemed too abstract for them to come up with any suggestions on the research design.

Nature of children's participation in my research

Based on my experiences in earlier fieldwork in Bangladesh where children were shy or reserved about answering questions, I tried to spend as much time as possible with the children in addition to interviewing them. With children it is unrealistic to expect to obtain much useful information from an in-depth interview before one really knows them, so I used semi-structured interviews at first (Jensen 2007). At least one of the child's employers was almost always present for the first interview. I always started the first interview by asking the children to describe their family background, length of employment, and previous work experience. This worked well, because the children seemed comfortable and relieved to find my questions easy to answer. The employers' reaction to my many basic opening questions was to relax and in some cases even withdraw from the room, perhaps feeling assured that my questions would be straightforward and facts-based. In most cases when an employer left the room the child domestic worker seemed to feel more relaxed and comfortable.

In order to establish rapport with the children, I spent time with them in informal settings whenever possible, such as chatting in the stairways, in the elevator, or up on the rooftop. I also spent time with them in their employers' homes while they were working and relaxing. My Bangla is not fluent, but I manage to carry on shorter conversations. For longer conversations and interviews I used an interpreter. We tried to be conscious of the children's level of maturity and cognitive development when communicating with them. Gradually, during several conversations I asked them what they thought was most important for outsiders to understand about their situation in order to enable outsiders to work for improvements, and whether there was anything they wanted to tell outsiders about their life experiences, thoughts or dreams. With the younger children I was less abstract and asked shorter, more concrete questions such as, "What is your favorite activity?" and "What are the things you do not like to do?" The fact that it was difficult to get as much time as I wanted together with the children made it a challenge to get useful information, especially from the younger kids. The most important thing I could do was to ensure that the kids felt that I enjoyed their company (Jensen 2007). Most child domestic workers in this research were girls. The fact that my translator for most of the interviews was male did not create significant problems. My experience is that the translator's behavior and way of communicating is more important than the gender.

When employing participatory techniques, the researcher is the facilitator of activities (O'Kane 2000). I worked with the children mostly individually but sometimes in groups. The group work was spontaneous rather than planned, occurring when we gathered to talk or play in the afternoons and early evenings on the roof. My experience supports Nieuwenhuys (1996 in O'Kane 2000), who wrote that it is often more effective

to spend time on activities preferred by children, such as playing games, telling stories and making drawings, rather than following traditional methods normally applied with adult participants. The types of suitable activities depended on the children's maturity.

With the older girls I often found it most effective just to chat. In order to elicit the children's own perceptions of their life, identity, everyday routines, experiences and geographic mobility, I encouraged them to make drawings and/or write stories.

Unfortunately, I did not gain as much as I had expected from using children's drawings as a method for eliciting their view of their life. I agree with Punch (2002) who, based on her fieldwork with children in Bolivia, found that "it should not be assumed that drawings are a simple, 'natural' method to use with children as it depends on children's actual and perceived ability to draw" (Punch 2002: 331). Some of the children I asked to draw had obviously very limited drawing practice. I had planned to ask them to draw their self portrait, their families, their employers, etc., but except for one girl they did not feel comfortable drawing any person, perhaps because they were ashamed of their poor drawing skills. My strategy was to first let them draw anything they wanted, and that worked out fine. Even though I did not end up getting many drawings, I learned new things from the process, and observed how the people around them reacted to the drawing opportunity and commented on the drawings.

Most of the children were reserved when I proposed writing or drawing activities. They were reluctant because they lacked confidence in their drawing skills. In some cases this was worsened by employers who observed them while drawing and made fun (directly or indirectly) of the quality of the drawings. This experience made me more careful with proposing drawing activities when employers were around.

The opportunities for drawing sessions on the rooftop were quite limited, so drawing became an almost insignificant part of the research plan. I had hoped to have the children draw mental maps of the sites of their daily activities, of their home place, school and so on. Research on children's drawings provides many ideas about how to approach the drawing activities, questions to ask, and probes to use. That information was not used due to the children's reactions. One of the activities was built around having them draw a person, but only one of my participants agreed to do so! When asked, they said that they had not learned how or did not know how to do it. Most of them wanted to draw flowers, trees, fish, and fruits. On the one hand I was very disappointed because I had big plans for the "draw a person" activity. On the other hand, I was happy that they actually dared to refuse to do what I wanted them to do. I interpreted this refusal as evidence of trust in our relationship.

On several occasions, one of my core participants—with whom I spent much time watching TV and chatting in her employer's home—would spontaneously tell stories and sing songs for me. This added valuable information to my research³⁴. In some cases I used the technique of "playing dumb" (Tammivaara and Enright 1986) in order to get more information from my participants. For instance, when I watched TV with one of my child participants I often asked "what's happening?", "why did she say that?" etc., in order to get a sense of how much she understood about the drama we were watching. Another time I pretended I did not know as much about local Bangladeshi female

³⁴ In such instances it was helpful to have a small tape recorder nearby. Usually I used the tape recorder for longer conversations and interviews. But sometimes, especially on the rooftop if there were some people around who did not yet know me, I chose not to because I wanted to avoid creating an unnatural setting.

clothing as I do in order to elicit a girl domestic worker's views and attitudes about different ways of dressing. This sparked an interesting conversation about what is involved in being a respectable girl in Bangladeshi society.

I have observed that some child domestic workers do not receive attention from their employers or employers' children, relatives, or neighbors except when being told about their work tasks. Thus, it is valuable for these children to have an opportunity to share their views and experiences with someone who is interested in listening to them and who respects their views. The children seemed happy to have this opportunity, and I believe that the children's self-esteem was enhanced as a result. The opportunity to discuss one's problems with another person may also develop a person's awareness, communication skills and problem-solving capacity. Some of the children learned about their rights through the topics we talked about³⁵. In other words, children's opportunity to express themselves has a value in itself. If it can contribute to awareness raising and action among those who receive the results of such research, so much the better (Jensen 2007).

A possible disadvantage of participating in this research could be that the child domestic workers' employers may have become annoyed when the children's time with me hampered their work. Even in one household where I was always welcomed and spent much time both with the family and alone with the child domestic worker, I still felt that the employer sometimes was upset if the child's work was delayed due to my presence (Jensen 2007).

³⁵ More about this will follow in the section "Ethical considerations in the research with children" and in chapter 6, on the children's own discourse.

My positionality

At the beginning of this chapter we saw that Denzin and Lincoln define epistemology based on the relationship between the inquirer and the known. This relationship is related to the topic of positionality, which is crucial in situated knowledge-production. We saw how Haraway's objectivity concept results in a need to "reflect upon and analyze how one's position in relation to the processes, people, and phenomena we are researching actually affects both those phenomena and our understanding of them" (Mansvelt and Berg 2005: 253). I attempt such reflexivity throughout my analysis chapters. Here I explain my background as it relates to the research site and the people and cultures found at the research site. By providing this information it is my intention to give the reader an understanding of how my findings are influenced by who I am as a person and as a researcher.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I have been married to a man from Bangladesh since 1989, and we had a daughter in 1991. Until we moved to the US in 2003 we lived permanently in Norway, but we visited Bangladesh together several times, for a total of 14 months. Having made several visits prior to the current research, I was already quite familiar with different cultures in Dhaka and had experience communicating with Bangladeshi children, youth and adults from all social classes through research and voluntary work. For this specific research project I immersed

myself in Bangladeshi culture in Dhaka for three months in 2005³⁶. Together with my husband and our then 14-year-old daughter, I rented an apartment in a middle-class area of Dhaka. We spent most of our free time, including most meals, with a middle class family in the same apartment complex; the family of my husband's sister. It was helpful to be able to refer to that family whenever I introduced myself to new families in the building. I spent a great deal of time in different households with child domestic workers in the same building and other places in Dhaka in order to observe their daily lives and also to encourage them to communicate their own perceptions of their life and work.

I was an outsider while doing research in Bangladesh, as I differed substantially from my informants in many respects (Dowling 2000). Even though I dressed in local clothes and tried to follow the local culture, including greeting people and engaging in small-talk, I was marked as an outsider due to my ethnicity and my limited knowledge of Bangla. I do understand most of what people say to me in Bangla, but I cannot speak fluently. One consequence is that people with whom I interact may have behaved differently from their norm. I think the children became overly excited by my 'foreign' appearance, and I know that some of the employers felt it was valuable to spend time with me because knowing Westerners enhances social status in many middle-class environments. Cross-cultural fieldwork thus sets some limits for what a researcher can accomplish, especially with observations, as my presence as an outsider most probably influenced the participants' behavior. However, observations will always be influenced by the researcher's presence (Kearns 2000). As mentioned earlier in this chapter I tried to

³⁶ I spent two months in Dhaka on preliminary fieldwork in 2004, exploring discourses on childhood and child labor, but I had not yet decided to focus on child domestic workers.

use the method of participant observation, but it was not possible to employ it fully due to significant differences between researcher and researched (Graue and Walsh 1998).

I tried to be as much of an insider as possible when spending time with employers. Renting an apartment in the complex where most of the participating employers lived, being observed often with my Bangladeshi husband and our daughter, dressing in local clothes and chatting in Bangla all fostered an atmosphere of willingness to share thoughts and experiences with me. Sometimes it was a challenging balance though; to try to be a good friend with everybody while the relationship between child domestic workers and employers was in many cases tense.

In Bangladesh it is very uncommon that adults do not get married. Therefore I think it was easier for people to accept my involvement in their families since they knew I was married and especially because they knew I was married to a man from their own place and culture. They were glad to see that I tried to learn about their culture and respected their culture by dressing locally and trying to improve my language skills. There are few foreigners in Bangladesh, and the foreigners who stay there usually keep themselves mostly to the wealthiest areas of the city and do not mingle much with ordinary middle class people outside of work settings. Therefore many local people are both interested to get to know foreigners and willing to help out if needed. These factors influenced my fieldwork in a positive way.

I briefly mentioned in chapter 1 that I regard myself as a representative of the human rights discourse. This obviously influences how I analyze that discourse and how I perceive people who belong to that and other discourses. However, it helps being

conscious about one's position and constantly reflect on how it colors one's interpretations of texts, conversations, and behavior.

Ethical considerations and challenges in the research with children

When an adult researcher interacts with child participants, and especially with marginalized children, the relationship is potentially exploitative because the adult has more power than the child (Punch 2001). With this in mind, I tried to establish empowering research relationships with the children (Holt 2004). In order to limit risks for the child participants, I did not interview any child without consent from her or his employer. I also obtained verbal consent from each child. However, I did have some concerns about the process of getting informed consent from children who are used to always taking commands from others. None of the children or employers denied my request to take part in my research, but with their employers present, I was not sure whether the children felt they had a choice. Asking a child domestic worker to participate in research is very different from asking an average, Western, middle-class child. Child domestics are used to taking commands from other people around the clock and it is therefore not clear to me whether they would have dared to turn down my request. However, all of the children did seem glad to be involved in my research, which lessened my worries. I also made a point of telling the children repeatedly that they should not feel that they had to answer any of the questions, and that they could refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the research anytime without giving me a reason (Jensen 2007).

While some employers and employers' children do also talk nicely and attentively with their child domestic workers, in several cases it was clear that the child had been deprived of positive contact with adults, or perhaps with people in general. It was therefore sometimes a difficult balance to be there for them and at the same time not make it more difficult for them by leaving them feeling lonelier or experiencing employers' negative reactions. While talking to child domestic workers I sometimes noticed that employers seemed surprised and a bit uneasy about the fact that I was talking at length with their employees and that I obviously enjoyed their company. However, no participants withdrew from the research, nor did employers stop me from interacting with their employees (Jensen 2007).

Sometimes it was challenging to conduct ethically sound research when the child and I were surrounded by listeners who would interrupt the child from time to time. I tried following the helpful practical advice formulated in "The geography of children: Some ethical and methodological considerations for project and dissertation work" by Matthews, Limb, and Taylor (1998). However, sometimes it was challenging to create a nice atmosphere for my conversations and activities with children because one or more of the listeners would comment negatively about what the child said or did. The listeners could be employers, employers' children, or other people, like neighbors.

It is very important to be sensitive when talking with disadvantaged children about their rights. Sarah C. White (2002) researched development agencies' child rights program experiences by interviewing program staff and disadvantaged children in Bangladesh. She found that some of the program staff had stopped the direct training on child rights with disadvantaged children because of their mixed experiences. "The gap

between the rights they have in CRC theory and the realities of their practical experience was simply too great for the children. Instead of being ‘empowering’, the training made them either angry and destructive or frustrated and depressed” (ibid.: 730). My experiences are very limited compared with those organizations’ experiences. With my participants I did not try to do any systematic teaching, but we talked about child rights in several low-key conversations. It is important to be aware that informing exploited children about rights they may never enjoy may leave them more frustrated with their condition.

There have been several media cases about child domestic workers in Dhaka who have been abused by their employers (see, for example, Amin, Hussain, & Islam 2005). To avoid putting any child in a difficult situation, I did not ask them about their employer’s behavior with the employer present. My strategy was to establish rapport with each child and then let them tell me about any problems if they wanted to. The opportunity for each child to inform me of anything negative in their work situation obviously depended on whether we had a chance to talk without the employer listening.

A semi-public space as a research arena

During this research, I found that moving the research site from private to semi-public spaces changes the behavior of the children, and thereby changes the research dynamics and broadens the spectrum of research methods open to the researcher. Servant work is characterized by taking place in private spaces, away from the public’s potentially protective gaze, but under almost constant surveillance by the employer. The fact that the

employer has access to the child's labor and body around the clock makes child domestic work a unique category of child labor. Many of the child domestic workers never go outside of the home in which they work, which means that they have few opportunities to meet other domestic workers or other people with whom they can share their thoughts and experiences. However, many of the high-rise apartment buildings in Dhaka have a rooftop where domestics can hang up laundry, or look after their employers' children while they are playing, or simply chat and play with other child domestic workers. The rooftop was therefore an excellent place for me to interact with and observe the children. It was also a good place to gain access to new participants, as the employers sometimes would come up for a short afternoon stroll. I felt uncomfortable the few times I rang on people's door bells without having ever talked with them before. Up on the roof, however, I could easily introduce myself and my research in a relaxed atmosphere and obtain invitations to visit new households. The Bangladeshi people's great sense of hospitality meant that I was invited to visit most of the people I talked with on the roof or in the stairways (Jensen 2007). In the chapter on children's discourse (chapter 6) I discuss at more length the importance of the rooftop as a semi-public site of resistance.

Profile of the adult participants

I researched the official discourse by interviewing people working for national NGOs that run schools and/or legal aid units for child workers. I also interviewed employees of Save the Children, Plan International, UNICEF, ILO, and the Ministry of Labour and

Employment³⁷, as well as some media professionals. Altogether I interviewed and/or interacted in meetings and workshops with around 40 adults representing these organizations and institutions. (For a full list of these organizations and institutions, see Appendix E).

The employers' discourse was explored through conversations and interviews with employers in their homes, and also by following media debates and attending meetings in NGOs where employers were present. In some of the homes I spent much time with the employers, the employers' children and the child domestic workers. Child workers in these homes became my core participants. I interacted with approximately 25 employers; approximately as many female as male. All of the employers were from the middle class. Most had been born in Dhaka but had close ties to relatives in their ancestors' rural home place. In most cases their child domestic workers were recruited from those rural places.

Concluding remarks

Child research in the social sciences has gone through a tremendous transformation as demonstrated here. Based on a shift in epistemology, considerable creativity has been invested in creating new ways of doing research *with* children, not only *on* children. However, the most important thing is for research to be useful in solving social problems. Usefulness does not necessarily correlate with an application of the newest and most

³⁷ I also talked briefly on the phone with a senior officer in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs but did not manage to get an appointment there.

fashionable ways of doing research. The plea for usefulness has been raised in many articles in the journal *Children's Geographies* (Catan 2003, Cunningham 2003, Karsten 2003, Cahill 2004, Pain 2004, Smith 2004, all cited in Horton and Kraftl 2005). The authors of these articles call for more policy-relevant, purposeful, and applied Children's Geographies. However, in 2005 guest editors Horton and Kraftl critiqued this plea for usefulness because they felt that the diversity makes the sub discipline of Children's Geographies valuable.

My point is not that research *with* children is the only useful approach to solving social problems. However, I argue that in order to acquire an understanding of child domestics' lived experiences it is important to do ethnographic research. Such research can capture many aspects of the children's life and work that surveys cannot. My research should be seen as complimentary to survey research; both types of research can play an important role in explicating what is going on and what needs to be done in order to improve the life quality of child domestic workers.

My research paradigm is constructivist, which means that I see the language we use and the discourses we adhere to as constitutive of the social reality—reality is constructed, not reflected. My data stem from a process of co-creation with my participants. In other words, I am doing research *with*, not *on*, children. However, in order to be able to present a broader picture of the living conditions of child domestics, I do use some secondary data from studies on child domestics in Bangladesh that I mentioned in chapter 1. Most of these reports were based on research *on* children.

The combination of discourse analysis and ethnography is not common in geography, but it has been practiced in sociology. Prout and James (1997) wrote that

some see it as a problematic combination because of for instance deconstructivism's rejection of 'the authentic experience of childhood' and ethnography's search for the 'truth' about what childhood is. However, Prout and James reject the dilemma with this statement, with which I agree:

Modern ethnographic methodology, however, concurs with discourse theory, at least to the extent that it rejects a naturalistic view of ethnographic data. All ethnographic material has to be understood reflexively, that is as a product of a research process in which a particular interpretation is made by an observer in relation to the settings in which the observations are made. But is it not possible for ethnography to make a claim to a weaker sense of authenticity in which previously unexplored or unreported aspects of childhood are made available and previously mute children empowered to speak? Much of the work on pupils' experience of schooling, for example, seems to fall into this category. Whilst not (usually) claiming to be privileged accounts of school-children's lives (and in this sense claiming authenticity), such work has, within the limits of any situated interpretation, given voice to the previously silent. (Prout and James 1997: 26)

Chapter 4

The human rights discourse on childhood and child domestic work

As stated in chapter 1, my primary goal is to improve the lives of child domestics. By examining the existing discourses on childhood and child domestic work, I will be in a better situation to help these children. In this chapter I discuss how the human rights discourse on childhood and child labor has come to dominate the scene, especially after the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted unanimously and by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989. The convention has been ratified by all countries in the world except the US and Somalia³⁸ (Khalil 2002). I identify the focus on children's participation and agency as the main concepts that distinguish the child rights discourse from the previously dominant child welfare discourse. The Convention's applicability is discussed using some of the critiques that have been put forward by people who have worked directly in the field with working children. Different assumptions about childhood that are implicit in various organizations' work are discussed. I analyze spoken discourse (meetings, interviews, and other personal communication) and written discourse (i.e., textual analysis of a selection of academic books and articles, government policy documents, NGO reports, and newspaper articles).

³⁸ Somalia's unstable government is usually referred to as the reason for not ratifying the CRC. When it comes to the US it is more complicated to understand why the country does not ratify the convention. For some possible explanations, see Free the Children's homepage section "Ask the professor", which I retrieved 06/15/2007, from http://www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/geteducated/asktheprof_archives/20070305.htm

The human rights discourse is prevalent to some extent among government officials and more clearly in intergovernmental organizations like UNICEF and among NGO practitioners trying to protect and support working children in Bangladesh. I found the clearest focus on child rights in the international NGO Save the Children, both in the way the employees talked and in their written reports, policy documents, and in education programs initiated and funded by them.

From welfare to human rights: The difference that ‘participation’ makes

Most organizations and academics have begun to use the language of ‘rights’ rather than the language of ‘welfare’ when advocating for working children and seeking to reduce child labor. The human rights discourse is an international discourse that has been absorbed in Bangladesh by the intergovernmental organizations and also gradually by the government³⁹ and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on humanitarian issues. This section demonstrates how the paradigm shift from welfare to human rights has been a gradual one. I point out some differences between the two paradigms via the predominantly academic literature.

There are many different ways to conceptualize the difference between a child labor discourse focused primarily on children’s welfare and a discourse focused primarily

³⁹ I do not attempt to analyze the government as a whole in this dissertation. I merely focus on their policies and planning documents, specifically on children’s issues. If I were to analyze the government’s approach to human rights in general it would be colored in a negative way by the Rapid Action Battalion—a para-military/para-police force carrying out killings and other severe punishments without hearings. I would definitely not place the government of Bangladesh in the human rights discourse when taking the whole apparatus of law-making and law enforcement into consideration. However, the task here is to analyze discourses on childhood and child labor, and thus the government’s discourse on childhood and child labor.

on children's rights. These conceptualizations can be seen as a system of duality: a welfare perspective versus a human rights perspective is sometimes conceptualized as a focus on children as victims versus children as agents (Post 2001), children as recipients versus children as participants (Bissell 2003), needs versus capacities (Yapa 2004, personal communication), and needs versus rights (Bissell 2003).

The welfare discourse uses the language of social welfare. This means a focus both on the importance of fulfilling the children's need for basic necessities such as food, cloths, shelter, and health services, and on the consequences for the society if these needs are not met. The welfare approach focuses on measures such as average life expectancy, height of children, nutritional status, infant mortality rate, literacy levels, and basic facilities like access to safe drinking water and access to doctors.

The human rights discourse uses language inspired by the most important human rights document for children—the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UNCRC was unanimously adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1989 after a decade of drafting (Melton 1999), and it is the main codification of the child rights discourse. However, the convention is a compromise document that includes both the human rights perspective and the welfare perspective (Post 2001). According to the convention, children have a right to food, shelter, education, privacy, legal representation and fair trial, protection from abuse, protection in times of armed conflict, a say in decisions about their life, freedom of conscience, and to hold and express their opinion freely (Burr and Montgomery 2003: 144). The different rights in the convention are often categorized as provision rights, prevention rights, protection rights, and participation rights. Due to the substantial overlap between needs and rights, a human rights approach

is usually characterized by a focus on the most obvious difference between the two approaches: participation rights and children's agency.

The complexity and sophistication of the welfare project [...] leaves little respect for the agency of children. In contrast, participation and the language of children's rights presupposes and encourages their agency, the expression of their self-defined needs and interests. The idea of rights presupposes a more active role for the young person. (Roche 1999: 484)

Definitions of child participation that are used by NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, and governments are based on the UNCRC. The term 'participation' is not used in the UNCRC, but several articles are usually interpreted as child participation. Article 12:1 is the main source of the focus on children's participation: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations General Assembly 1989). The language here is open to interpretation regarding the weight to give to children's views and the definition of a suitable age and level of maturity for a child in any context. To obtain a full understanding of a child's participation rights, it is important to consider the whole convention. I agree with Miljeteig (2005) who stated: "It is only when participation rights are understood as civil and political rights, or as democratic rights, that participation rights gain full meaning and become possible to implement" (ibid.: 124). This refers particularly to Articles 12 to 17, which ensure children "the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of association, the right to protection of privacy and the right to access to information" (ibid.: 123). According to

Griesel et al. (2004), the UNCRC “addresses children’s right to participate in two senses: their possibilities for engagement in the social life and physical world that surrounds them, and their opportunities to have a voice in more formal processes of democratic decision-making” (Griesel, Swart-Kruger, and Chawla 2004: 281). Both aspects of participation are addressed in this dissertation, but the main focus is on the former sense of participation.

My own definition of child participation is inspired by the UNCRC, but also by the crucial research done by Roger Hart for the report, *Children’s participation: From tokenism to citizenship* and on research and practical work by organizations I have researched, among them Save the Children. Hart provided one of the first and most influential definitions of child participation in 1992, based on the formulation of the UNCRC (Miljeteig 2005). According to Hart, participation is: “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured. Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.” (Hart 1992: 5). Many actors in the academic and NGO child rights discourse have linked the right to participation to the notion of children’s citizenship. According to Roche (1999: 484), the UNCRC provides “a framework for a broader vision of citizenship for children.” Save the Children has done research on children’s participation and citizenship. Their citizenship concept is explained in the Save the Children section later in this chapter.

I define child participation as a process in which children have opportunities to articulate their views, be listened to, and be respected for those views, and in which they have a chance to influence decisions about their lives, communities, and the larger

society. In this process, children may challenge decisions made by people with more authority than themselves. This definition refers to children's "social participation", distinguished from children's participation in research. When social participation takes place, the involved individuals increase the chances of finding their agency. I thus see agency as an integral part of social participation (Jensen 2007).

During my two months of preliminary fieldwork in Dhaka in 2004, one of my aims was to find out which organizations most frequently used a welfare approach in their work for working children, and which organizations most frequently used a human rights approach. I found that all organizations to some extent were influenced by the UNCRC. Monira Ahsan, the Country Director in Save the Children, Australia, agreed with my findings: "More or less all organizations have gradually shifted to a rights based approach the last years - at least on paper." (Interview August 1, 2004). Among all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) with which I met and from which I collected written materials, I found only one where the representative explicitly used the language of the welfare approach. She talked about the repercussions of not helping 'those children' with basic needs, and she told me that the problems will come back to us like a boomerang-effect—increased criminal activity, etc. In other words, we should help the poor children not because they have a right to a better life but because of the negative consequences for society if we don't interfere. The notion 'the slum children of today are the gangsters and criminals of tomorrow' is a notion I have heard uttered by many people in Bangladesh. However, all of the organizations I met with in Bangladesh use the language of human rights in their written material. Most annual reports and program descriptions from NGOs and INGOs

in Bangladesh are clearly informed by a human rights approach. Many organizations mention the UNCRC in their documents. Others show their adherence to the human rights approach by focusing on children's participation and life skills training. None of the foreigners working in INGOs and intergovernmental organizations like ILO used welfare language, but some of the Bangladeshi people working for national and international NGOs used it, although their written documents clearly are based on the human rights discourse. When I discussed this with Syeedul Milky, a project officer for UNICEF in Dhaka, he told me that this was a familiar phenomenon to him. He had observed that many people working for different NGOs use the human rights language because that is what they are expected to do, but few people really understand what it entails (Interview, August 22, 2005).

This observation agrees with that of White (2002), who argues that the language of child rights dominates the development agencies working on children's issues. She wrote that: “the shift from ‘welfare’ to ‘rights’ and ‘political economy’ to ‘culture’ in the language of development agencies in Bangladesh reflects their membership of the global community” (ibid.: 726). She partially explained this shift according to the need to use the donors’ language to obtain funding. White critiqued the UNCRC for taking the focus away from political economy and over to “culture, ideology or attitudes”:

The problems of disadvantaged children are thus attributed not to their exploitation as poor, but to their non-recognition as children. The remedy lies not in addressing the structures that produce (child) poverty, but in convincing parents, employers, civil society and the state that children constitute a distinct social group with specific rights. (White 2002: 726)

I support White's critique only to some extent. As mentioned in chapter 1, neoliberalism has led to continued inequality in the distribution of resources in Bangladeshi society. Something needs to be done to change unjust social structures. However, it is important not to rob people of their agency, which I think a political economy focus often does. For instance, it may not help poor people in Bangladesh to tell them that they are poor because of the way the world economy works, if we do not at the same time focus on concrete things that can be done to make their situation better. It is important to give people the necessary tools to fight for themselves. This does not mean that we cannot at the same time protest unjust societal structures, but consciousness raising should occur so that people become aware of the rights shared by them and all other people in society. My argument ties into Yapa's concept of a nexus of production relations of poverty, which means that there is no root cause of poverty (Yapa 1996, Yapa 1998, Yapa and Wisner 1995). It does not make sense to single out one reason for poverty as more important than any other cause. By saying that exploitation of the poor is the root cause of poverty (as stated indirectly by White), the message seems to be that if we manage to stop exploitation all problems will be solved for the poor people. This is not the case. I use Yapa's discourse theory to argue that the conventional science-based logic of causation is not more important than the logic of agency. He uses an example of the importance of both land reform and nutrition in hunger alleviation in Sri Lanka. "The nutritionist does not need to wait until land reform is completed to carry out his or her work. This is because there is no logical basis to say that land reform is more important than changes in habits of food consumption" (Yapa 1998: 111). In a similar way, my argument is that a human rights activist (focusing on, for example, children's right to

education, their right to be free from labor exploitation or their right to be heard in decisions that affect them) should not sit and wait until the structures of society have eliminated exploitation of the poor before taking action. This is not an argument against work towards just economic structures, but I want to contest the privileged status White gives to such an effort. It is unproductive to believe in root causes because doing so robs people of their agency.

There is another dimension to my argument about the importance of a human rights perspective: By teaching people about human rights and gradually improving children's rights, exploitation will be reduced. If people really respected the human rights conventions, we would have a more just distribution of resources and no economic exploitation. We can then reach the result desired by White (and me)—annihilation of the exploitation of poor people—by fulfilling people's human rights. I think it is unproductive and unfair to portray the human rights discourse as though people who support it focus only on rights and culture. Human rights advocates in Bangladesh usually see the larger picture of societal development. For instance, Asgar Ali, the director of BSAF⁴⁰, the national network of child rights organizations in Bangladesh, says that child labor cannot be abolished overnight. "We'll have to help the adults in poor families get work and jobs. It has to be ensured that poor families earn more so that they can send their children to school instead of work" (Ali quoted in Labanno 2004). It is simply not the case that the organizations and individuals belonging to the human rights discourse think that just by convincing all the stakeholders that "children constitute a

⁴⁰ The direct translation of Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) is Bangladesh Child Rights Forum.

distinct social group with specific rights” (White 2002: 726), the poverty problem will be solved. Karunan (2005) has developed an approach with which I can identify: There is a need for both a child rights-based approach and a focus on the structural factors that shape the large-scale demand for child labor.

Basic needs are included in the UNCRC as provision rights. The possibility that all children can enjoy their childhood would first and foremost require a fulfillment of basic needs. But we cannot sit and wait until that happens before we begin to work towards fulfilling children’s protection rights and participation rights. In other words, I support the continuation of the implementation of the UNCRC. However, I think that successful implementation depends on sensitivity about different cultural notions of childhood. I thus agree with Boyden (1997, quoted in Myers 2001), who argued that “the ultimate impact of the UNCRC will depend as much on the style of its implementation as on the content of its text” (Myers 2001: 42). I agree with her focus on the importance of being sensitive to differences in social and economic context in order to avoid misguided good intentions of Western actors. This is discussed further in the next section, where an example from Bangladesh will be used to illustrate misguided good intentions that were involved in an attempt to reduce child labor.

Two crucial international conventions for working children, in addition to the UNCRC, are the ILO convention 138 Concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and the ILO convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The ILO convention 138, passed in 1973, establishes a minimum age for different kinds of work. The ILO convention 182 declares that certain kinds of child labor are harmful for children and should be

abolished. Myers (2001) saw both of these ILO conventions as belonging to an evolving human rights discourse, although he makes it clear that convention 138 did not explicitly use the language of rights. This contradicts Post (2001: 79), who placed ILO and their conventions in the category of 'welfare consequences' and 'welfare rationale' (ibid.: 9). Weston (2005) gave a more nuanced and detailed picture: He stated that the ILO conventions have evolved from a focus on people's needs and wants, to a focus on their human rights. Weston stated that the ILO convention (No.29) Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour was concluded in 1930, which means that it was "adopted before human rights law began to be taken seriously in world affairs, beginning with the 1945 Charter of the United Nations and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (ibid.: xvi). He argued that this fact may excuse the lack of a human rights focus. But he criticized the ILO for the lack of a human rights focus in the conventions that have come after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely the ILO Convention (No.105) Concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour, and the ILO Convention (No.138) Concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. These conventions were concluded in 1957 and 1973, respectively. Weston saw these two conventions as "joining a long list of ILO conventions that address all sorts of worker issues without engaging human rights discourse" (ibid.: xvi). He argues that since the adoption of the UNCRC in 1989 and the 1999 ILO Convention (No.182) Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, "a commitment to the abolition of child labor as a human rights imperative has taken hold and begun to spread" (ibid.: xvi). He explained the lack of human rights focus in the ILO before the UNCRC in this way:

The reason seems clear. Although its roots can be traced to antiquity, the idea of human rights is relatively new on the world stage; and as everyone knows, social change—especially progressive social change—ordinarily takes place slowly, the more so in a context where, both nationally and internationally, command and enforcement mechanisms familiar to mature legal systems are relatively lacking. Yet there are prices—often steep prices—to be paid for such human rights quiescence. As James Gross has observed regarding worker rights specifically: “This lack of [human rights] attention has contributed to workers being seen as expendable in worldwide economic development and their needs and concerns not being represented at conferences on the world economy dominated by bankers, finance ministers, and multinational corporations.” (Weston 2005: xvi, quoting Gross 2003)

The human rights discourse is more an expansion of the welfare discourse than an alternative to it. This concurs with the argument made earlier by Post (2001), stating that the UNCRC contains both welfare and human rights perspectives. When we focus on *what* we are supposed to provide to children according to the two discourses, the human rights discourse clearly builds upon the welfare discourse, because basic needs (i.e., provision rights), prevention rights, protection rights and participation rights are included in the UNCRC. However, when we focus on *how* implementation and intervention should take place, the discourses can be seen as opposites because the welfare discourse views children very differently than the human rights discourse—as passive recipients (Bissell 2003) / passive dependents (Mason 2005: 91) versus active, individual, and competent participants (Mason 2005: 97) / active, meaning-producing beings (Prout and James 1997: 27).

The conception of childhood in the human rights discourse

Inspired by post-structural discourse theory I now explore different social constructions of the term “childhood”.

Childhood is not an objective, natural category. Rather, the meaning of childhood is subjective, a product of particular cultures and social structures. Thus, our essentially sentimental vision of childhood reflects relatively recent historical developments in Western society. (Best 1994, quoted in Bass 2004: 179)

This quote points at history in order to remind us that the conception of childhood that is prevalent in the Western world today is a result of relatively recent changes in the development of our societies. Zelizer (1985: 57) wrote that the child labor conflict in the early twentieth century “is a key to understanding the profound transformation in the economic and sentimental value of children”. In her writing about the historical change in Western childhood she pointed out that children have become “economically useless but emotionally priceless” (ibid.: 57). Most children in Western countries today are not expected to work for a living—if they do have a job it is usually a job that can easily be done before or after school in order to get some extra pocket money, and has not been taken to help sustain their families. In poor countries, however, childhood for the average child entails responsibility for the family’s upkeep from a quite early age.

The welfare discourse saw children as passive recipients, whereas the human rights discourse views children as “competent members of society” (Wyness 1999: 353). I have demonstrated that the human rights discourse is the prevalent discourse in the public sphere in Bangladesh today. There are, however, different nuances in the

conceptions of childhood within the human rights discourse. In order to illustrate this point I show two different nuances of the conception of ‘child’ among international organizations in Dhaka: The World Bank, representing a human capital economic perspective on children, and Save the Children, representing the notion of children as competent social actors.

The World Bank is “the biggest international player in education and social development” (Fyfe 2001: 77). It has also played an important role in Bangladesh, for instance by having supported the government’s stipend program for girls’ education with interest-free credit since the start in 1993 (The World Bank Group 2007). I will now show that the World Bank has gradually moved towards a human rights perspective. In the main publication from the World Bank on child labor, entitled *Child labour: Issues and directions for the World bank*, Fallon and Tzannatos (1998) wrote that the Bank has to have an economic approach because its purpose is to “assist its borrowing members in their reconstruction and economic and social development” (ibid.: 7). They contrast this with other organizations that are guided by a human rights perspective. This economic approach is called human capital theory and posits that individual children can be empowered, or capacitated, to create or add value to an economic product, thereby increasing wealth and welfare. The child is thus viewed as a potential actor who can influence her own well-being (Post 2007 personal communication).

The international NGO Save the Children also sees children as actors, but focuses more directly on how children can participate in society as active citizens (Save the

Children 2004)⁴¹. This view builds on new ways to understand childhood, where children are seen as active agents in their own lives, who must be listened to because they can make sense of their own worlds and shape their environments. On the first page of a position paper on children and work from Save the Children's international alliance (Save the Children 2003), it is stated that Save the Children's goal is to ensure that girls and boys are protected against harmful work, and then the authors write: "In achieving this goal, we seek to ensure that governments, families and other 'duty-bearers' fulfill their obligations to address children's rights. We also seek to ensure that boys and girls fully and meaningfully participate in decisions which affect them". This quote clearly demonstrates that the text is inspired by the main codification of the human rights discourse, the UNCRC, and especially by the participation rights.

The similarity in the World Bank and Save the Children's conceptions of 'child' has been pointed out by Post (2001). He sees both organizations' view of 'child' as 'potential agent of actualization and social progress' (ibid.: 79). Several publications have recently drawn attention to the World Bank's indirect human rights approach; Human rights are usually not mentioned directly in the World Bank policy documents but one goal of the bank is the fulfillment of human rights as a result of successful development work funded by loans from the bank (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004; Alston and Tobin 2005; Danino 2005). "Development is precisely what the World Bank works for and we believe that this work consistently contributes to the progressive realization of human rights in our member countries" (Danino 2005: 509). In a UNICEF

⁴¹ A more thorough exploration of Save the Children's child rights discourse is placed in a separate section later in this chapter.

report on key legal and institutional aspects of the impact of the CRC, the authors made the following observation of the World Bank's use of the CRC:

The CRC is occasionally acknowledged explicitly as being part of the overarching international legal framework within which the Bank's responses are situated and more frequently, as a source of inspiration for the Bank's approaches, or benchmarks of international community concern or consensus on issues within the Bank's mandate. In exceptional cases the Bank has explicitly – albeit without reliance upon specific legal formulations – suggested that a client country had violated its obligations under the CRC, for example in connections with the Bank's criticisms of orphanages in Bulgaria in April 2001. (Alston and Tobin 2005: 71)

These writings on the World Bank serve as an example of the gradual shift that has taken place from a welfare discourse to a human rights discourse in organizations in general.

The conceptions of childhood in Save the Children and the World Bank point out the different nuances of childhood conceptions within the human rights discourse.

Bissell (2003: 51) argued that the CRC is “the most vivid illustration of the global social construction of childhood”. In the CRC as well as in most of the recent research on child labor, a child is defined as a person below the age of 18. For the purpose of consistency I used the same definition of ‘child’ in this research, although chapter 1 demonstrated that traditionally in Bangladesh, different words are used for different periods within this 18-year period. Blanchet (1996), Boyden (1997), Montgomery (2001), and Bissell (2003) argued that since the CRC is built on what we in the West consider to be a ‘normal’ or ‘ideal’ childhood, problems may arise when implementing the UNCRC in developing countries where the economic, social, and cultural context is different. The result is sometimes that the ‘best interests’ of the child are compromised, as occurred for

instance when 50,000-200,000 children were dismissed from their jobs in Dhaka in the 1990s because of a CRC-inspired proposal (the “Harkin Bill” or formally the “Child Labor Deterrence Act”) in the US Congress to stop importing garments made by children. The result was that many of the dismissed children ended up in worse or more unsafe and invisible work situations (Bissell 2001, 2003; Delap 2001; Marcus and Harper 1996) such as domestic work, street vending, sex work, brick breaking, and begging. Tom Harkin, the senator from Iowa who proposed the new bill in 1992, had good intentions. Based on a Western human rights discourse he had reacted strongly to media exposure of child labor in garment factories in Bangladesh, and he wanted to do something to change the situation. Based on his conception of childhood, a child’s life should be filled with school and play, not endless toil in factories. However, the consequences of his proposal were negative because Senator Harkin and the other people supporting the bill did not have sufficient knowledge and understanding about poor children’s situation in countries like Bangladesh. This is a good and widely cited example of the unintended consequences of applying a Western conception of childhood in a very different social context. Interestingly, right after the ratification of the CRC by the majority of the world’s leaders in 1990, some anthropologists warned about “the possible unintended consequences that could result from the dissemination of a universal approach to individual rights” (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998: 7). They argued that imposing a Western notion of childhood on societies in the global South would serve the larger means of a global economy:

The rights rhetoric could serve as a screen for the transfer of Western values and economic practices dependent on a neoliberal conception of independent and rights-bearing “individuals” as opposed to ideas of social

personhood embedded in, and subordinate to, larger social units, including extended families, lineages, clans, and village (or ethnic) communities. These more “traditional” social formations have alternative, and sometimes competing, definitions of the person, his or her “rights,” and the notion of “the good society”. Moreover, these more collective societies are certainly less compatible with the workings of advanced capitalism in a global economy. The global society needs workers who are above all independent and mobile, who are not attached to the land, traditional forms of labor, kinship obligations, or ritual funds that siphon off profit and reduce individual initiative and competitiveness. (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998: 7)

When an attempt is made to implement one conception of childhood globally, it is called a ‘universalistic’ approach, whereas when policies take different cultural and social constructions of childhood into consideration, it is called a ‘relativistic’ approach. White (1999) explored the tension between an ideal, universal notion of childhood and local, culturally specific notions of childhood. He argued that global standards for children’s rights and children’s work require universal notions of childhood. My opinion is that implementation of the CRC has the potential to empower children everywhere as long as all of the involved parties are informed and sensitive about economic, social, and cultural contexts and local social constructions of childhood. This corresponds with the view of Aitken et al. (2006: 365-366): “Certainly, one of the most egregious forms of exploitation is to build the values of goods on the bodies and spirits of young people. And yet, we believe that ‘child labor’ is too often raised as a scapegoat, and advocating its wholesale ban is risky in terms of unintended consequences when policies are applied without attention to context and local complexities.” This view also harmonizes with Post’s assessment of the efficacy of conceiving child labor in human rights terms; Post writes that it has to be done in a context-specific manner: “[...] context-specific choices are

inevitable. Legal reform initiated by the mere ratification of the CRC is neither an essential nor a sufficient element in progressive change to eliminate child labor. However, when this reform serves as a focus for broadly based mobilization, it certainly can help.” (Post 2005: 288). I believe that it is possible to follow global standards for children’s rights and children’s work and still keep cultural identities intact. Although children’s work is a part of the cultural norms in many societies in poor countries, we should not tolerate exploitative child labor. The aim of the codifications of the child rights discourse such as the CRC and other conventions inspired by it (such as the ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labor) is to get rid of the exploitative work, not to get rid of all child work. I agree with Hensman (2001: 439) who stated: “There is surely an element of class racism in any justification for allowing poor children in the Third World to be subjected to deprivation and abuse which would be unthinkable for middle- or upper-class children.” We do need international standards for rights and work, for children as well as adults. However, we must be sensitive to cultural variations when implementing these standards.

Boyden (1997) argued that we should focus less on preventing children from working than on improving protection in the workplace and creation of more improvements of their economic and social situations. This view is in harmony with article 32 in the CRC on child work: “States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development” (United Nations General Assembly 1989). In other words, the CRC does not state that children have a right to be

free from work, but that there should be certain standards for their work so that exploitation and harm may be prevented. I agree with Miljeteig (2005: 123) who argues that “the whole text of the Convention and the spirit behind it establishes an exhaustive framework for protecting children from *any kind of exploitation.*”

Controversy in the application of the UNCRC: A discussion of ‘participation’ and ‘best interests’

Earlier in this chapter I argued that the most important difference between the welfare discourse and the human rights discourse is that the human rights discourse ensures children a right to have their voices heard in matters that affect them. We have seen that the UNCRC clearly states that all children have the right to be listened to on occasions when decisions affect them, and that their opinions should be given due weight depending on the age and maturity of the child. Another important aspect of the convention is the concept of the best interest of the child. This stems from article 3:2 which reads: “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (United Nations General Assembly 1989). When combined, the concepts of ‘participation’ and ‘best interests’ raise difficult dilemmas, because children’s opinions may go against what adults perceive as being in the children’s best interests. When supporting the child rights discourse it is therefore important to keep in mind that the children themselves may prefer to keep doing work that in some adults’ eyes is exploitative. In 1997 the Peruvian working children's movement attended a world conference on child labor where they demanded that the UN

insert a new clause into the UNCRC, providing for the right to work and for the recognition of their organizations (Post 2001). Similar demands have been put forth by working children attending several international conferences during the last decade. This demonstration of working children's agency has not always been appreciated by the actors in the international development society. ILO viewed this as problematic and decided to exclude children from the follow-up meeting in Oslo (seminar with Post 2004).

I now describe a moral dilemma resulting from the application of the UNCRC by examining a journal article on child prostitution written by Montgomery (2001). Thailand has, like Bangladesh, ratified the UNCRC and has many child laborers. Thailand is especially known for the high prevalence of child prostitution. In a Google search on 'Thailand child labor', the four first sources had the following titles: 'trafficking in children and women', 'child labor in illicit drug activities', 'child sexual exploitation trade', and 'child prostitution'. All of these belong to what ILO defines as the worst forms of child labor. Montgomery (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of a slum in a town in Thailand where many of the children are engaged in prostitution. She discussed the rise of the human rights approach in Thailand and possible consequences for children engaged in prostitution. It is clear from her writings that Thailand also has NGOs that have adopted the language of 'rights'. She offered the following about the implementation of the UNCRC:

Article 34 of the Convention declares that 'States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.' For the majority of people, the morality of child prostitution is straightforward and Article 34 is one of the most heavily invoked and non-controversial Articles of the Convention. It is taken seriously throughout

the world and the international codification of Western morality has undoubtedly gathered an indigenous momentum in local discourse. This discourse is fuelled partially by national governments, which have changed laws in accordance with the treaty, and practices that contradict it are outlawed (although these bans are not always policed). It has also been given impetus by local elites, especially those in the non-governmental organization (NGO) movement, which are fluent in the new global language of international conventions, and whose calls for changes in behaviour and for closer monitoring of those who do not live up to this new 'universal' law have had a large impact (Montgomery 2001:86).

This statement relates to White's argument (provided earlier in this thesis) about global standards that highlight a global notion of childhood. Montgomery noticed that "the international codification of Western morality"—i.e., conventions like the UNCRC and ILO's conventions on child work—has become popular in local discourse. In other words, the notion of childhood in local discourse is becoming increasingly more influenced by the Western, global, notion of childhood. The argument about the NGOs' fluency in "the new global language of international conventions" (Montgomery 2001, quoted above) reverberates in the aforementioned argument by White (2002) about the necessity of belonging to the right discourse in order to receive funding.

The main problem identified by Montgomery with the human rights approach is that "the assurance of one right often occurs at the expense of others. How these rights are prioritized is not culturally neutral and forms one of the greatest problems in their implementation. Even when there is worldwide acceptance (at least by governments) of children's rights, some rights will inevitably take precedence over others" (Montgomery 2001: 85-86). One could think, as I did the first time I read this, "so what, the assurance of some rights must at least be better than not getting any rights fulfilled?" However, her arguments open a crucial debate that demonstrates the problems and dilemmas

highlighted in the UNCRC and identified by many NGOs today as one of the core justifications for their activities: the children's right to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions that affect them. Montgomery's critique stems from the reality she has witnessed in Thailand: People in the slum cannot afford to buy enough food. Prostitution pays much better than other kinds of work: five times better than begging, plus the possibility of staying at a luxurious hotel and eating well. Other types of work attempted by children included selling sweets, and working in factories or on the garbage dumps. All of these jobs were perceived as hard and the children were often vulnerable to theft or intimidation from older street children or the police. Montgomery explained that the UNCRC explicitly offers children protection from sexual exploitation. However, many of the children she spoke to claimed that they were not being exploited. Montgomery pointed at the dilemma of adults' ignoring children's voices in order to attain their perceptions of the children's best interest. If taking the children out of prostitution means that they must go without food, shelter, and family unity (other rights in the UNCRC), how can one judge what is in the child's best interest? Montgomery's study raises an extremely difficult moral dilemma.

Bissell (2003) was very critical of the way in which the UNCRC is being implemented. She claimed that the Convention "is being misused and abused by a wide range of political actors, policy makers, and so-called children's right advocates" (ibid.: 68). She warned of the dangers of applying the convention 'piecemeal'. In the child labor debate she missed a concern for the best interest of the child, the child's right to participate, and the child's right to an adequate standard of living. This resembles Montgomery's plea for a more holistic view of the child prostitutes' situation in Thailand.

A similar critique came from Boyden (1997) as she pointed out “obstacles in the export of ideal childhoods” (ibid.: 202). She blamed the obstacles on the ethnocentrism of people in industrialized countries. Boyden, Lyng, and Myers (1998) held similar concerns as Montgomery about the lack of a balanced perspective about policy and programming based on the convention when they asked:

[H]ow should a country balance the various rights when they cannot all be met equally, or, more vexingly, when they conflict? What does one do, for example, in cases where immediately applying the right to a standard of living adequate to permit the child's development may conflict with the right to education, or the right to education may conflict with the right to freedom from violence? Are some rights to be preferred over others and, if so, by what criteria? Who should decide that sort of trade-off and how? (Boyden, Lyng, and Myers 1998: 195)

Even though I agree with this critique of the lack of implementation guidelines for those occasions when different child rights are in conflict, I do think that ultimately the human rights approach is more effective in mobilizing social change than the previously dominant welfare approach. When people are encouraged to be active participants in their own lives and learn that they have the same rights as all other people, possibilities for mobilization of agency at all scales are higher.

The government’s child rights discourse

In some of the government’s documents and in the statements of some government officials I have found signs of an adherence to the human rights discourse. The government of Bangladesh ratified the UNCRC already in 1990. Its commitment to child rights is visible in documents like the National Plan of Action for Children (Ministry of

Women and Children Affairs 2006) and the National Plan of Action against the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children including Trafficking (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs 2003). In these documents the government explains its adherence to the UNCRC and its focus on child rights programming. However, I found a much more elaborate and in-depth understanding of the human rights perspective in UNICEF and Save the Children. This coincides with the statement from a UNICEF employee cited earlier in this chapter about a lack of understanding of the human rights discourse among many of those who use the language belonging to that discourse. The government is picking up the concept of a rights-based approach to children's affairs from the intergovernmental organizations present in Bangladesh, such as UNICEF and the ILO, and from international NGOs like Save the Children. One of the people I spoke with in an intergovernmental organization in 2005 told me that the government relies heavily on help from foreign consultants in developing policy documents like, for example, the National Plan of Action for Children. This fact has also been pointed out in a magazine published by Save the Children in Bangladesh (Staff Correspondent 2004b).

In the last several years, the government, through the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, together with BSAF (Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum), Save the Children, and UNICEF, has facilitated children's participation in the formulation of The National Plan of Action for Children (NPA)⁴². These facilitators have held many consultations with children (Save the Children Alliance 2004). The five main issues

⁴² When I conducted fieldwork, the second NPA, meant for 1997–2002, was still in force. It was replaced by the third NPA in 2006.

considered in the third NPA includes ‘food and nutrition’, ‘health’, ‘education and empowerment of the girl child’, ‘protection from abuse, ‘exploitation and violence’, and ‘physical environment’. For each of these topics the government has appointed an advisory committee, with two children serving on each committee.

Finally, the NPA was published in July 2006. The plan includes the following guidelines about social participation:

Children should be involved in defining their needs and status as beneficiaries, developing and delivering the interventions, and evaluating their success. Families and communities should also be involved in programming decisions affecting their children. Decision making (including budgetary) should, as far as possible be **decentralised** to local and community levels, involving local leaders, duty bearers, parents, and children. (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs 2006: 24 [Ministry’s emphasis])

This definition of social participation clearly demonstrates the UNCRC’s influence.

However, nothing is written about how such participation could be facilitated.

In the 150-page document, child labor is only mentioned twice. First, in the chapter titled, “Protection from abuse, exploitation and violence”, the Ministry wrote the following about child labor: “In order to protect children being abused and exploited, and [who] are victims of violence, the following interventions are required: [1,2,3,4] 5. *Take immediate and effective measures to protect child labourers*, and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, with a particular focus on child domestic workers, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups” (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs 2006: 80). When I interviewed government officials in Bangladesh in 2004 and 2005, child domestic work was not included either in the list of hazardous labor or in the list of the worst forms of child labor. The fact that the government now has included child domestic

work as one of the worst forms of child labor is promising, because it means that they will have to come up with plans for the regulation and monitoring of the work.

One of the frustrations government officials in the Ministry of Labour and Employment expressed to me was the government's limited capacity for monitoring. The number of labour inspectors is far from sufficient. This means that it is impossible for the labour inspectors to monitor the informal sector, where most child labor is found. Also, no labor laws apply to the informal sector. This concern was also expressed in a consultancy report on child domestic workers in the Asia-Pacific area, where Maria (2002: 6) wrote on Bangladesh: "[T]he Ministry of Labour has fewer than 110 inspectors to monitor 180,000 registered factories and establishments. Outside of the export garment sector, there is no child inspection/monitoring enforcement."

One government official proudly told me that the government of Bangladesh does not have lower standards than the international standards in all areas; in some areas it is opposite. As an example, she mentioned that according to Article 43 of the UNCRC, 15-year-old children can be recruited to the army and take direct part in hostilities. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, children below the age of 18 cannot be recruited to the army.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has been working on a draft of a planning document on child labor for many years. The document, titled "National Child Labor Policy", existed as a draft document when I was in Dhaka in 2004, but the ministry

was not willing to give me a copy. ILO, through the IPEC program⁴³ has been assisting the government in the formulation of the document. In email conversation in September 2006 with one of the advisors in IPEC, I was told that “the National Child Labour Policy is still hanging in the air.” In March 2007, a representative of SUF, one of the national NGOs in Dhaka, told me via email that his NGO had just participated in consultation meetings and a workshop in the Ministry of Labour and Employment in order to finalize the National Child Labor Policy document. He said that they expect it to be finalized in 2007.

After the government ratified the ILO convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2001, a project titled “Preventing and Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Selected Formal and Informal Sectors” was implemented by the government in cooperation with ILO-IPEC in Dhaka, supported by the US Department of Labor (ILO-IPEC 2005). Child domestic work is one of the sectors included in the project. Five NGOs were selected to carry out the part of the project that IPEC designed to help child domestic workers. This specific project had ended before my fieldwork in Dhaka, but I visited the NGOs that had participated in it and learned about their experiences, which is reflected in the sections on ILO’s and NGOs’ human rights discourse.

⁴³ IPEC is an acronym for International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. Bangladesh began implementing the IPEC country program in 1995.

Bangladesh has several laws on children's work in specific sectors⁴⁴, and has ratified the UNCRC and the ILO convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. However, "[n]otwithstanding obligations under international law, there is no formal mechanism to date to regulate child domestic work in Bangladesh" (Khair 2004: 4). A '*Domestic Servants' Registration Ordinance of 1961*' requires domestic servants to register themselves with the police station, but "this law does not delineate any rights and privileges for domestic workers nor does it define the obligations of employers. Consequently, domestic workers are devoid of any formal mechanism for effectively enforcing their rights." (ibid.: 4).

In order to promote children's school attendance, the government of Bangladesh began to implement conditional cash transfer programs in the 1990s (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2004). The first program was 'Food for Education', where poor families received wheat if their children's school attendance in primary school was above a certain level. A few years ago the government changed the program into a 'Money for Education' program. "[...] 40 percent of poor children in all rural schools benefit if they meet the minimum criteria for attendance (85 percent) and achievement (marks of 45 percent). Stipends, including grants for books and stationery, are given to all unmarried girls from rural areas up to Grade 7 who have 75 percent attendance and achieve marks of at least 45 percent in the annual examinations" (UNICEF 2006). The World Bank has also been funding a secondary school scholarship program aimed at countering the large

⁴⁴ The minimum age for different types of child labor in Bangladesh varies from 12 to 15 years, but no minimum age exists for child domestic work. For an overview of the minimum age for different sectors, see ILO (2006).

gender gap. “Girls are paid a small monthly cash stipend, and all of their school fees are waived. To earn the stipend, girls are required to attend classes. Their parents must also promise not to marry off their daughter before the age of 18” (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2004: 296). Research has showed that parents respond to these incentives, and enrollment, attendance, and completion has increased in program areas (ibid.: 315; Meng and Ryan 2003; Ravallion and Wodon 2000; UN Millennium Project 2005: 49).

ILO’s child rights discourse

The International Labour Organization (ILO) argues that developing countries will see both economic and social benefits if child labor is replaced by universal education (ILO-IPEC 2004b). In order to understand this argument it is important to keep in mind that the ILO distinguishes between child work and child labor. Child work is not harmful to children’s physical, mental or moral well-being, and can be combined with education, whereas child labor is work that is exploitative and harmful to the child and not possible to combine with education (ILO 2002). According to ILO, child labor can be grouped into three categories, and all of them should be abolished:

- 1) Labor performed by a child who is *under a minimum age* specified in national legislation for that kind of work.
- 2) Labor that jeopardizes the physical, mental or moral well-being of a child, known as *hazardous work*.
- 3) The *unconditional worst forms of child labor*, which are internationally defined as slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other

forms of forced labor, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities. (ILO 2002: x)

In other words, ILO does not aim at abolishing all kinds of work that children do. It is the exploitative work that should be eliminated, and exploitative work is explained with these three categories. ILO has concluded that child domestic work is among the worst forms of child labor and therefore should be abolished (ILO-IPEC 2004a).

The 12th of June is celebrated annually by ILO as the World Day Against Child Labour. In 2005 I spent that day in Dhaka. ILO ran a campaign several days before the event, informing the public about ILO's views on child labor. These ad messages were printed in the biggest newspapers on June 9 and June 10, 2005: "The worst forms of child labour are morally abhorrent in any society, whatever its developmental stage or cultural traditions", and "Child labour is linked with many factors such as poverty, adult unemployment and lack of local educational opportunities. These problems must be addressed comprehensively. So, the equation is simple: parents to work, children to school." The ads were signed by Juan Somavia, Director General, ILO. On June 12, the World Day Against Child Labour, this was the message in a similar ad: "The world is uniting to move millions of child laborers from the workshop to the school yard. Join the fight to eradicate the worst forms of child labor! Our hope is in you." All of these notes featured in an abstract way a young girl running with a wind-driven propeller in her hand, apparently symbolizing freedom. Just the day before the big celebration of the World Day Against Child Labour in Dhaka, newspapers wrote that the Director General of ILO had met with Bangladesh's State Minister for Labour and Employment in Geneva and

“praised Bangladesh’s commitment to eliminating the worst forms of child labour from the country” (BSS 2005).

In a workshop I participated in on the World Day Against Child Labour, organized by BSAF and sponsored by Plan Bangladesh, Mr. Fonseka, one of the Chief Technical Advisers in ILO’s IPEC program, spoke about hazardous work. He said that according to an ILO survey in 1996, there were 47 sectors of hazardous labor. By 2005, the number had increased to 66. However, the laws in Bangladesh operate with only ten hazardous sectors of child labor, and these are only regarded as hazardous for children under the age of 10. Fonseka said that it is important to make the public understand what it should do, and he thinks that the public should prioritize the following: 1) Determine which sectors of child labor are hazardous; 2) Make plans for elimination of child labor in those sectors; and 3) Give priority to child labor in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Bangladesh and in the National Plan of Action for Children, as well as in university courses and lessons in school units. Fonseka believed that this strategy would help create awareness and a consensus about the moral obligations and responsibilities for the next generation. I found it encouraging that he used this opportunity to point at the lack of an academic discourse of child labor in Bangladesh. Very few professors have published anything on child labor.

Ihjalul Chowdhury, one of the coordinators of the IPEC program in Dhaka, explained that from the beginning of the implementation of the project called “Prevention and elimination of selected worst forms of child labour in the informal economy of Dhaka”, the IPEC aimed to withdraw the children fully from work. This turned out to be difficult to do because UNICEF had a different philosophical stand—UNICEF’s view

was that children can continue working while getting an education. They struggled with this in IPEC for three months before they came up with a solution: Children can be *gradually* withdrawn from work. The result was that motivation of employers became an aspect of the project. This is an interesting illustration of the different conceptions of childhood within the human rights discourse: ILO with the rigid “only school, no work” conception and UNICEF with the more pragmatic conception “school and work can be combined”. The statement also illustrates the shift in childhood conception that has taken place in ILO, from a classical example of the universal notion of childhood where there is only room for school and play, to a more flexible, pragmatic notion where it is possible to keep working besides going to school.

After having realized that it is unrealistic to withdraw children from domestic work, ILO, through their IPEC program in Dhaka, started trying to improve child domestics’ working conditions through an awareness-raising program for employers of child domestic workers, called “Improving the quality of life of child domestic workers”. The program was carried out by five national NGOs. One component was to strengthen the employers’ sense of guardianship for the child domestics. Munira Sultana, another coordinator in IPEC, explained that this is not guardianship in a legal sense. They try to stress the concrete responsibilities that employers should take as guardians of their domestics, such as allowing them to go to school 2-3 hours per day, and giving better health care, food and sleeping facilities. She said that they have seen a change of mindset with the employers, from refusing to speak with social workers from the participating NGOs to becoming convinced that it is their responsibility that their child domestics get some education. In addition to offering enrolment in the non-formal school programs run

by the NGOs, IPEC tries to motivate employers to enroll their children in formal schools. However, formal primary schools do not admit children who are (i.e., who looks like they are) over age 10 into first grade. Non-formal schools therefore enroll many children who are not accepted by the formal schools. According to Sultana, the NGOs have good experiences with vocational skills training for students who are older than 15. They learn practical skills like how to receive a phone call in a proper manner, how to cook and do ironing. IPEC's aim is that such skills will lead employers to give them higher wages and be more appreciative of their work.

One aspect of this program involves the fostering of contact with religious groups and gaining their assistance in reaching employers. This approach has been successful, according to Sultana who shared a report with me, from which I quote:

Every Friday, large numbers of people gather at the many thousands of mosques in the city to pray and listen to religious teachings. The five partner organizations working in the child domestic work sector contacted local mosques and presented its leaders with the idea of religious teachers talking about worst forms of child labor and its negative effects on children. Once the Imams and Moulouis⁴⁵ had understood the problem, they became very supportive, citing the Holy Scriptures that reinforced the communities' obligations to care for working children. (ILO-IPEC 2005: 2)

Holy Scriptures are used to inspire people to care not only for working children in general, but specifically for their child domestics:

In the Hadith, speaking about servants, the Prophet Mohammed (S.M.) has said: "You can require them to perform tasks which they are capable of doing and not beyond that. You should provide them with health support, education, acceptable leisure activities and others." This is the message being promoted by Imams in this program. (ILO-IPEC 2005: 3)

⁴⁵ An Imam is a Muslim priest. A Moulouvi is a religious teacher.

Another component of the ILO-IPEC program for awareness raising was the Community Watch Groups where members of the local community worked together to spread information and prevent abuse of child domestics. These groups produced and distributed written information in the local communities about child domestic workers and education opportunities, and they tried to motivate parents and employers to enable child domestics to attend school. According to the above-mentioned ILO-IPEC report the program was effective. When I was in Dhaka the program had ended but a few Community Watch Groups were still active.

UNICEF's child rights discourse

UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center in Florence, Italy, published an overview paper on child domestic work in 1999. In it, all UNCRC child rights that are, or might be, violated in child domestic work are listed. UNICEF summarizes their list as follows:

In addition to general rights to development (Article 6), non-discrimination (Article 2) and respect for the child's best interests (Article 3), there are a number of specific rights in the CRC that child domestic workers do not, or may not, enjoy. These rights fall broadly into six categories of rights affecting child domestic workers: independent identity, selfhood, and freedom (Articles 8, 13, 15 and 37); parental nurture and guidance (Articles 7, 8 and 9); physical and psychological well-being (Articles 19, 27); educational development (Articles 28, 32); psycho-social, emotional and spiritual development (Articles 31, 32); protection from exploitation, including sexual exploitation, sale and trafficking (Articles 32, 34, 35). (UNICEF 1999: 6)

One of the UNICEF employees in Dhaka told me that UNICEF has a Code of Conduct for its employees that includes rules for the employment of servants in their homes. The rules state that UNICEF employees should establish a work-contract with their domestics, and that they should give their domestics reasonable payment and access to education. Several other UNICEF employees confirmed this information verbally but they could not give me the document because of its internal status. Of all the organizations I interacted with in Dhaka, UNICEF was the only one with a code of conduct for its employees.

UNICEF recently initiated and funded a TV drama series called Shukno Phul Rangeen Phul⁴⁶, where the focus is on working children's equal access to and benefits from education. One of the UNICEF employees I interviewed sent me the following email:

As part of the communication campaign to promote quality education for all, Hard to Reach Project has produced a 26 episode TV Drama Serial 'Shukno Phul Rangeen Phul', that is being telecasted through Bangladesh Television at 9:25 p.m. each Monday.

From the beginning, 'Shukno Phul Rangeen Phul' became a popular TV show and was near the highest ratings. In the last few weeks it has become the top rated show on television according to the agency that conducts TV ratings.

The drama serial is written by popular writer Zafar Iqbal. It highlights the needs and benefits of education for working children through the stories of a teacher, the learners of a HTR Learning Centre, a young girl and her family. At the end of each episode there are quiz questions based on the story, information and characters of the drama serial and a lucky winner is chosen from all the correct answers received each week. In the first few weeks, we were receiving around 2000 letters per week, then the number gradually climbed to 3000, 5000, 7000 and now we are receiving around 8000 letters per week.

⁴⁶ Directly translated, the title means “Dry Flower Wet Flower”. ‘Dry flower’ is a metaphor for a child without education, almost dried up intellectually, but when you water the flower, i.e., give the child education, it flourishes.

We would ask all of our colleagues to share this message with our partners including the Government, NGOs, Civil Society, educational institutions, as well as friends and families. (Email from Syeed Milky in Hard to Reach Project, Child Development and Education Section, UNICEF, August 10, 2005)

'HTR Centre' stands for 'Hard to Reach Center', which means it is a non-formal education center in which children who are regarded as difficult to reach because they work in hidden spaces and/or in the informal economy, get education. It is also an arena for social participation in the local community through contact with peers and teachers. The series sets a good example for teachers' behavior and participant pedagogy. The teacher in the series behaves well with all students, no matter their appearance and academic capacity. In real life this is not always the case. I have for instance talked with children from low-income households in a squatter settlement in Dhaka who had been beaten by their teachers for coming to school in dirty clothes (Jensen 2000).

UNICEF Bangladesh has no specific program for child domestics, but the organization works indirectly for child domestics through its focus on developing and funding the education programs for working children. UNICEF also works for the protection against abuse of children in general. Interestingly, in a report it finalized in 2004 entitled, *Situation analysis of child domestic workers in Dhaka city*, it defines a child in accordance with the government's Children's Act (1974), i.e., as a person below the age of 16 (UNICEF 2004).

As an attempt at strengthening children's participation in media and getting children in general more involved in the society at large, UNICEF ran a pilot project in

2005 with a children's news agency called Shishu Prakash⁴⁷. Several children were engaged as news reporters in each of the 64 districts in the country (Karim 2005: 32-33). "Our primary intention is to emphasise on the various issues dealing with children in this country, namely child rights, child labour, primary and compulsory education and so forth", said the programme officer Munawir Ahmed in Massline Media Centre where the project was based. "The best part about this is that we are actually getting the children to organize themselves and venture out to learn more about these issues", she said. This quote is from the magazine article:

Belonging to various social backgrounds, these child reporters have developed a rapport with each other in their respective teams. "We have both boys and girls from upper middle class families working with orphans working for a living and going to school as well", says Ahmed, "It's surprising how these kids have shed off their differences and are working together to create a difference in society."

Neena Shamsunnahar, the coordinator of Shishu Prakash activities, informs that one of the child reporters in the Dhaka division was a child jockey once. "He was taken away at the age of two and a half," says Neena. "He was away in the Middle East for probably seven years, away from his home and parents. He is now 15 years old and goes to school, thanks to the Mohila Ainjibi Shongstha. He is also training underprivileged children to stand up in society at the Shongstha." (Karim 2005: 33.)

I find it very encouraging that the project focuses on making children from different social classes work together. This demonstrates the huge potential of projects focusing on children's participation.

⁴⁷ Translates to "Children's Express".

Save the Children's child rights discourse

Save the Children in Bangladesh applies an explicit human rights approach. In a publication from the South & Central Asia Region of the International Save the Children Alliance, entitled *Children and young people as citizens: Partners for social change*, this is how the organization introduces itself:

Save the Children believes that children and young people are active citizens of both today and tomorrow. While taking their evolving capacity into consideration, girls and boys are recognized as human beings with rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Save the Children adopts a rights-based approach to development, developing programmes underpinned by the principles of children's rights and human rights. Children's participation is a principle of rights-based programming. Children are right holders who can play an active role in increasing fulfillment of their other rights to survival, protection and development. (Save the Children 2004: iii).

In Dhaka, four member organizations of the international alliance of Save the Children are represented: Save the Children Australia, Save the Children UK, Save the Children USA, and Save the Children Sweden-Denmark. Most of my contact has been with the Australian branch, which has a strong focus on life skills training for children. We saw in chapter 1 that the purpose of life skills training is to increase children's psychosocial competency by teaching them strategies for decision-making and problem solving. One of the organization's aims is to make the children able to negotiate with their parents when needed (Interview with Monira Ahsan, Deputy Country Director in Save the Children Australia, July 25, 2005). Some of the children who have completed the life skills training are now working voluntarily as life skills peer educators and facilitators in their respective schools. They discuss topics such as early marriage and

dowry⁴⁸ with the children. I participated in a daylong workshop in which working children learned about life skills and children's participation, and I talked with many of the participants. They were satisfied with the training they had received that day and previously, and they gave me several examples from their own lives of situations in which they had benefited from their knowledge of life skills⁴⁹.

In mobilizing for social change it is crucial to ensure that ordinary people have both conventional and life skills. A welfare approach could serve people's need for conventional education, but would probably not have such a focus on life skills as was exemplified here. This argument could be countered by claiming that life skills education can be incorporated in the ordinary school curriculum. However, this might not happen in a pure welfare approach, because life skills education (at least as run by Save the Children in Bangladesh) is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child's quest to promote children's participation, and life skills education is built on a notion of childhood that is absent in the welfare discourse: the child as a competent, capable, active citizen.

When child participation becomes institutionalized, children are able to participate in forums that focus on exchanging experiences, raising public awareness, and even for policy dialogue. However, there is no forum in Bangladesh for domestic workers (Jensen 2007). What does exist is a number of forums in which children in general may participate, many of which have been initiated by Save the Children Australia (SCA). Especially in Tangail, but also in Chittagong and Goalundo, SCA has facilitated

⁴⁸ "Dowry" is the money and/or material goods given by the bride's family to the groom. Dowry is illegal but widely practiced, especially among poor people.

⁴⁹ More information about the workshop comes in chapter 6.

organization by communities of children. Problems discussed by the children range from early marriage and dowry to corporal punishment and child labor. The children have organized debate competitions on some of these issues in order to create public awareness. Additionally, over the last three years, SCA has facilitated an annual Child Parliament in which almost all districts have been represented. The institution has been declared a legitimate children's body to provide input into the National Parliament's budgetary process (Interview with Monira Ahsan, Deputy Country Director, SCA, June 22, 2005). Children have also used drama to get their message across. For example, by highlighting the negative impacts of early marriage through drama and a range of other actions, a child council in a Bangladeshi village succeeded in stopping several child marriages (O'Kane 2002). Another initiative that has increased child participation in society is the Ichchey children's media house, run by Save the Children Sweden - Denmark. Since 2003, Ichchey has produced a newspaper, TV programs and videos. The majority of participating children are recruited from the disadvantaged section of society, but only from those who already have had some experience with media through different NGOs. One of the organizations represented in the Ichchey media house is Child Brigade—an organization of street-working children (Interview with Shamsul Alam, Programme Officer, Save the Children Sweden - Denmark, August 14, 2005).

Alam (interview, August 2005) said that Save the Children has been successful in convincing the government to include children in the policy formulation process, and to consider all recommendations stemming from the children's consultations. However, he does have some reservations about the ways in which participation has been practiced. According to Alam, the biggest limitation is that the children are not well prepared to

contribute at the policy level. The participating NGOs should take the responsibility for preparing the children. “Otherwise,” says Alam, “this participation is not that meaningful, it’s only for the physical participation, because we are 20 people in the meeting and 2 children are sitting with us. This is tokenism, this is for the sake of participation”. He also noted the adults’ lack of preparation for participating together with children: “[...] adults were not ready to accept these children in the meeting situation. Sometimes the adults were talking in English which is very difficult to understand for children who are working in the street!” In most cases they would be able to get the conversation back into Bangla, but such incidents are illustrious of occasions in which real, meaningful social participation is difficult to attain for children (Jensen 2007).

Children's participation is an element in the formulation of the National Plan of Action against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children including Trafficking. A National Children’s Task Force was established so that children could provide input and monitor plan implementation. Both privileged and underprivileged children have participated in these various consultations, organized by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in conjunction with UNICEF and Save the Children. Some of the consultations have been attended by children from all of the country’s districts. However, only children already affiliated with an NGO have attended the consultations. In the future, Save the Children aims to also involve children without such an affiliation (Save the Children Alliance 2004).

National NGOs' child rights discourse

Foreign aid plays a significant role in the economic and social development of Bangladesh, and much of the aid is distributed through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The conglomerate of thousands of NGOs in Bangladesh is very visible both in the physical landscape and in the media. In addition to a few international NGOs (like Save the Children), there are national and small local NGOs. The important role of NGOs has been pointed out by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the leading think-tank in Bangladesh:

It has been widely noted that globally, an increasing amount of aid is being channelled through the NGOs. This is also true for Bangladesh. Donors tend to believe that aid disbursement through NGOs is more effective in reaching the target group, as well as most cost-effective for realising poverty alleviation in developing countries. In the context of the new global political economy, the NGOs have created a “space” for themselves, usually complementing, and sometimes displacing, the state’s functions. (Center for Policy Dialogue 2007)

In providing education to working children, NGOs are to a large extent complementing the state’s functions, as indicated in this quote. The government runs primary schools that are located in areas in which reside lots of poor children, and the schools are free of cost, but little is done to really make working children feel welcomed and nothing is done to adjust the schedules to the work days of child domestics. The NGOs thus play a crucial role in providing education to working children, and especially to child domestics. NGOs are dependent on foreign aid and therefore have no real choice but to follow the newest philosophical trend in the international donor society. When it comes to work with children, the newest philosophy is definitely child rights. As pointed

out, this dependency on foreign donors explains the “lip-service” status that is attached to some NGO employees’ knowledge of the child rights discourse.

I analyze the work of some NGOs in this section because of their crucial role in helping working children get access to education. NGOs also raise awareness among children and their parents about the dangers of different kinds of child labor. Several NGOs run non-formal school programs to which employers can send their child domestics free of cost. The non-formal schools provide education to many poor children who are "over-age" for the formal system due to late enrollment or dropout. Several of these NGOs have created compressed versions of the national curriculum so that the children can study two grade levels per calendar year to make up for late enrollment. Some schools are called ‘learning centers’ or ‘drop-in centers’ because they teach children together in one group, no matter the learning level of the child, and they do not require regular attendance.

Non-formal schools visited in 2005 have incorporated life skills and child rights into their curriculum. Life skills training aims to increase children’s psychosocial competency by teaching them strategies for decision-making and problem solving. Child rights education teaches the children that all children are entitled to the same rights, no matter their socioeconomic background. This is quite revolutionary in a society in which social class traditionally determines a child’s life chances almost totally. I also found that they practiced a more participatory pedagogy than what is common in formal schools. Many formal schools in Bangladesh practice a pedagogy that is old-fashioned, focused on learning by rote and repeating what the teacher says. Siddique (2003) pointed out that this top-down system of education does not encourage children’s creativity. It was

encouraging to observe classes in some of the NGO schools that provide education to working children. I sat in on classes in schools run by the following NGOs: Society for Unprivileged Families (SUF), Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Underprivileged Children's Educational Program (UCEP), Shoishab, and Palli Mongol Karmasuchi. Especially in the three first of these schools, the teachers facilitated much more interaction with the students than what I have observed in formal primary schools, and they gave the students individual attention. The teachers asked the children questions that they could answer based on their own experiences, and they were given opportunity to make drawings and sing songs. Some of the songs they learned were related to their experience as working children. It was clear from my observations that most of the children really enjoyed these pedagogical and recreational activities. Interviews with some of the children confirmed their positive experience of school as a place where they could study and play with kids who shared some of their experiences of life and work. Interviews with teachers and some principals revealed that they consciously seek to increase the children's self esteem. Several of these NGOs are funded by and receive pedagogical advice and training from Save the Children. Thomas Hammarberg, one of the NGO people who participated in the drafting of the UNCRC, wrote that the UNCRC "seems to argue for a democratic school in which the child is an active participant, rather than a listener" (Hammarberg 1998: 18). From my observations and conversations with NGO employees, teachers and principals, it was clear that this notion of the student as active participant has been adopted in many non-formal schools in Dhaka. Although the teachers and other NGO workers demonstrated by their words, written reports and practice that they adhere to a

participatory pedagogy and see education as liberating for working children, none of them referred to Freire (1998 [1970]) and his emancipating pedagogy.

Not all of these NGOs do have school buildings. They have found that it is difficult to make the employers send their child domestics to a school in public space, so they have figured out ways to bring the school to the children instead. In other words, these organizations have found a way to bring the public to the private. They also point at the need to keep costs as low as possible as a reason for why they utilize semi-public spaces for education. ASK and Shoishab use rooftops and garages in buildings where many child domestics work. This spatial adaptation is perceived to result in higher school participation among child domestics. I observed classes that took place both on rooftops and in garages. The children seemed to receive as good an education as the children in ordinary classrooms. However, it should not be romanticized. When the summer monsoon sets in with torrential rain, it is not possible to use the rooftop and so the children and the teacher have to work together in cramped and dark conditions in the stairways of the apartment building. A better solution would be to have access to a room in the building. I visited an NGO that is renting a room from a child domestic's employer, for two hours in the afternoon five days a week, and uses it as a school for child domestics. The room is little and full of children, but it seems to work well. However, keeping in mind the reflections made in chapter 3, there is no reason to believe that what I observed on my visits to different school is exactly what usually takes place. The situation will always to some extent be influenced by the observer's presence, and even more so when the observer is an outsider.

According to several NGO workers and teachers I spoke with, the children often form nice friendships with their peers and teachers. In cases in which child domestics suffer abuse from their employers, such friendships can be invaluable. Several NGOs offer legal services, health services and shelter homes for working children. Teachers can pick up signs of maltreatment and report them to the relevant part of their organization. This is a way to reverse the panopticon-like situation of the employers' disciplining gaze that I described in chapter 1, because the teachers to some extent can monitor the behavior of the children's employers through paying attention to the children's physical appearance, mood and behavior⁵⁰. These are examples of the importance of education not only for its intrinsic value but also for the opportunity of gaining access to a space in which one can meet peers and adults who can help in difficult situations. Education thus has the potential to be both emancipating and empowering, both through the skills the children can acquire and through the access they gain to people who can potentially help them if they are abused.

The national NGOs vary in how well they have internalized the child rights discourse. They all use the language of the human rights discourse, but in some cases more lip service is paid to the child rights language than real understanding and implementation. Some NGO employees "fished" for my opinion when I asked questions about a welfare approach versus a human rights approach. I do not write this in order to criticize them—just for the sake of analysis.

⁵⁰ In chapters 5, 6, and 7 I go more in-depth with what I refer to as the panopticon in the relationship between employer and child domestic.

Media's child rights discourse

Over the last few years several articles have been written about child rights in Bangladeshi newspapers, both in Bangla and English. The concept of children's participation has reached the media, as seen in articles with titles such as "What kids have to say" (Karim 2005) and "Let the children speak" (Saleheen 2005). Fortunately, such articles have exposed not only the voices of privileged children but also of children who live in poverty. A focus on human rights violations in general has become more common over the last decade, both in newspapers and on TV.

Several newspaper articles over the last few years have focused specifically on human rights violations suffered by child domestic workers. These articles have had titles such as "Shocking conclusions to grisly tales" (Amin, Hussain, and Islam 2005), "Does anybody care?" (Amin 2004a), "Out of darkness" (Morris 2006), "Another child domestic worker tortured and killed" (Amin 2004b), "Work unto Death" (Ahmed 2007) and "Abuse of minor domestic workers" (Anwar 2005). The latter article described the situation of two girls, aged 8 and 9, who both worked as child domestics and ended up at Dhaka Medical Children's Hospital after having been tortured by their employers. Although disturbing reading, the encouraging fact here is that the media has begun to pay attention to the plight of working children, including those working in private spaces. In another article published about the same two girls, it was reported that they had recovered physically at the hospital and had been taken care of by the NGO BNWLA⁵¹ and by the

⁵¹ BNWLA is an acronym for Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association.

police, respectively, but the challenge now is not only to deal with the mental scars but also to find the children's families. They were so young when they left home in their villages that they could not remember where they came from (Mollah and Palma 2005). This is just one example of a case in which it would have been very helpful if the government had required enforcement of the '*Domestic Servants' Registration Ordinance of 1961*' mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Many of the newspaper articles about abuse and killings of child domestics have been long and full of the reporter's anguish, accompanied with pictures of the victim and sometimes the victim's parents, and often placed in a primary section of the newspaper, for instance on the first page or in the weekend magazine. The articles are often followed up by comments or letters to the editor where people explain how disgusted they felt reading the stories. This is a significant change compared with only a decade ago, which can be seen from this statement from 1996: "The murder of a servant is hardly a sensational event. It is a very ordinary occurrence, usually reported in a few lines and without commentary or follow up." (Blanchet 1996: 120).

In a short newspaper article in *The Daily Star* entitled, "International Day for the Abolition of Slavery 02 Dec 2006", referring to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, domestic labor is listed as one of many kinds of new slavery. We have seen that in the same year, 2006, the government of Bangladesh went from not even including child domestic work in its list of hazardous child labor, to defining it as one of the worst forms of child labor.

Although media's focus on child rights has increased, all journalists are not appreciative of or even conscious about a child rights focus. The following story

demonstrates both the ignorance of some journalists about child rights, and the vulnerability of children in general in the Bangladeshi society: Age of criminal responsibility in Bangladesh is 16 years. However, sometimes there are news stories about young children who have been put in prison randomly in order to help the culprit go free. Lack of birth registration is one reason why such acts are possible—police ignorance is another. When I was in Dhaka in 2005, one such story received media attention. An innocent 11-year-old boy had been held in prison for more than a year in a murder case, allegedly by mistake. The police had been looking for a 32-year old male suspect who had bribed them to put the 11-year-old boy in jail instead. Not having enough money to bail their son out, the family had no power to help him. The police officer who had taken the bribes was later fired from his job, but he was not put in jail, and the boy remained in prison. I called the newspaper in which I had read the story. The journalist I spoke to was not very interested in talking about the case. He was not outraged about it at all. He said that there was some dispute about the boy's age, and that the police argued that he was 18, and after all he had the same first name as the suspect! The journalist said: "There are lots of children in prison, it is a kind of business now. Families pay money everywhere; to police stations, to judges, for food in prison and so on." When I confronted him with the fact that his newspaper had written that the boy had been declared innocent, so that even if he was 18 it was wrong to keep him in prison, he responded that the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs were looking into the case and that the boy would probably be released after a day or two. One week later the same newspaper wrote that the boy had been released with help from a women's NGO.

Power/knowledge in the child rights discourse

Some of the questions that belong to the power/knowledge discourse theory framework described in chapter 2 have been answered directly and indirectly in this chapter. I now address the remaining questions.

What is the subject and object of the discourse? (i.e., who are the authors of the discourse and who are they writing/talking about?) We have seen that the objects of the human rights discourse on childhood and child domestic work are the children, defined as every human being under the age of 18, and the subjects of the discourse are the adults in the different agencies and organizations that work from a human rights programming framework. The authors of the human rights discourse are predominantly highly educated people with either a sense of the important philosophical statements of the leading, Western actors in the international development community, or a sense of the importance of applying such ways of thinking for pragmatic, financial reasons. Those children who have been consulted about policy documents based on a child rights perspective can also be seen as subjects or authors of the human rights discourse, although they are still also the objects for the very same discourse.

Is the 'self' at any time included as the 'problem' in the discourse? The main 'self' in the child rights discourse is the adult—more precisely, a well-educated, relatively wealthy adult. Unfortunately, most of the actors in the child rights discourse are isolating non-fulfillment of child rights from other causes of working children's problems and do not see or do not want to see the non-fulfillment of rights for children in the global South in relation to our affluence and misuse of resources in the global North.

What topics is not part of the discourse and why are those issues omitted? This question is closely linked to the earlier paragraph. The reason for the non-inclusion of the unjust distribution of wealth and opportunities as well as other structural causes of child labor in the child rights discourse is that most of the really powerful authors of the discourse are themselves part of the problem, by living in affluence and not being willing to share their resources or fight for fair trade. By omitting the links between the violation of the rights of poor children, on the one hand, and the neoliberal reforms that have resulted in biased trade rules in favor of the Western countries and unequal distribution of wealth within countries, on the other hand, nothing has to be done about the uneven distribution of resources. This has parallels to Yapa's critique of conventional poverty research: "By viewing the poor (the object) as the problem, the nonpoor (the subject) are automatically situated in the realm of the nonproblem." (Yapa 1996: 712). This statement can be adjusted to fit my discussion: By viewing the non-fulfillment of rights as the root cause of child domestic workers' suffering, we (the authors of the human rights discourse) and our way of living are automatically situated in the realm of the nonproblem. Some representatives of the child rights discourse do look at the link between trade regulation and child labor (see for instance Garcia and Jun 2005). However, they look at trade regulations because of the possibilities for sanctions against countries that practice exploitative child labor. This is not what I have in mind by mentioning unjust trade rules. Trade regulations have the potential to make all countries able to compete on similar terms, so that poor countries can prosper economically and thereby prevent children from work that hinders their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development and well-being. Garcia and Jun (2005) briefly mentioned a

“cautionary note”—poverty-reduction should be a component in all regulatory strategies. Earlier in this chapter I wrote that White (2002) has pointed out the problem with a one-dimensional focus on human rights. However, the problem with her suggested solution is that it exchanges one root cause (nonfulfillment of rights) with another root cause (economic exploitation of the poor). This argument is expanded in the last chapter, where I will illustrate my argument with a discussion that builds on Yapa’s concept of a nexus of production relations of poverty (Yapa 1996: 709).

What kind of knowledge is demonstrated through the discourse and what is the relationship between knowledge and power? Who exerts power through the discourse? How is this power exercised? Employees in international and national agencies and organizations and individual consultants exert power through the human rights discourse. The power is exercised through a knowledge monopoly. The knowledge that is demonstrated through the child rights discourse is a theoretical type of knowledge focusing on the idea of human rights in general but more importantly on the specifics of child rights. Many of the authors of the child rights discourse also have knowledge that is derived from practical experience with children in the field. This is the case for many employees of UNICEF, Save the Children and other organizations, but also for many of the representatives of the academic subdiscourse. The government has little choice but to use a human rights perspective in their work if continued foreign assistance is to be continued, whether they like the human rights approach or not. Although knowledge of and interest in child rights varies among government officials with whom I spoke, several did have solid knowledge of and work experience with child rights. The human rights

discourse has the potential to influence many working children by raising awareness among employers, rights-inspired education programs and lobbying for new labor laws.

How does the human rights discourse constitute child domestic workers? The human rights discourse involves children in Bangladesh as individuals who have the same rights as children everywhere in the world, no matter their ethnic, socioeconomic, religious or family background. Children are active participants in their own lives, participants who are competent to have their own opinions, who can share those opinions and who can act based on their own opinions. All working children are therefore supposed to be able, if they get the chance, to participate in activities and decision-making in their households and local communities. Thus, children are seen as citizens who are able to influence their societies. However, not all child domestic workers in Dhaka come in contact with people who represent the child rights discourse. The child domestic workers who attend school programs run by NGOs that adhere to the child rights discourse have a good chance of increasing both their self-confidence and skills (basic skills like reading, writing, and math as well as life skills). Many child domestics do not have access to such school programs.

What behaviors and identities are established as normal and natural and what behaviors and identities are established as unusual, marginal or unnatural by the discourse? In the child rights discourse an impression is established about children's behavior and identity that may be generalized to such an extent that it hampers the practical application of the UNCRC. Children are assumed to be active, even protagonists, in their efforts to help themselves. They are expected not to be too scared to speak their opinions in front of other people, even people they may have not met before.

In this regard, child domestic workers are in a unique work situation that influences their behaviors and identities. When a child is socialized into thinking that she is inferior to her employers and to her employers' kids and should never say anything against them, it is a huge step to then suddenly be in a forum where she is expected to share her opinions with other people. Children who are used to taking commands from others around the clock may not be able to easily switch into being a protagonist child as portrayed by the child rights discourse. It is important to take these aspects into consideration when formulating programs for children's participation. The statement from Alam earlier in this chapter about his experiences in a forum where two children were present among twenty adults in consultations about a policy document, illustrates a need to train both children and participating adults.

Whose agency is enhanced through the discourse? Children's agency is enhanced through the child rights discourse, because the childhood conception focuses on the competency and capacity to act by all children when given the right support and opportunity. Children are seen as active individuals who are ready to fend for themselves. Based on the notion of childhood that is prevalent in the human rights discourse, the discourse is *a proactive discourse*. In other words, it is a discourse that focuses on peoples', including children's, need and ability to take action in order to make the situation better for themselves and others. Children are seen as potential protagonists, but adults are supposed to help them fulfill this protagonist role. "Adults are able to translate children's perspectives into public discourse. This is an advance on simplistic assumptions that call for children to be involved in public life in the same way as adults". (Fattore and Turnbull 2005: 55). The agency of the authors of the discourse—mostly

NGO and intergovernmental adult employees—is also enhanced in the sense of Yapa’s expanded agency concept. This means that through a child rights discourse, actors at different scales, from the individual child and adult to the global intergovernmental organizations, can engage in problem solving in many different sectors, such as education, media, politics, and culture.

Is the discourse an expression of resistance? If so, resistance to what? The human rights discourse can be seen as an expression of resistance against those actors in the international development discourse who argue that a focus on rights makes poor people passive because it impedes them from seeing the structural reasons for their suffering. The representatives of the human rights discourse thus resist those who see the human rights discourse as a set of unrealistic, beautiful phrases that takes the focus away from global and national economy and politics. We have seen that White (2002) used her political economy view of society to critique the human rights discourse.

What is the relationship between each of the discourses and space? (i.e., how is power enacted in space for each of the discourses?) The human rights discourse is aspatial. It is not connected to one specific country or one level of society, but is prevalent in the international donor society, in intergovernmental organizations present in Bangladesh, national NGOs, governmental agencies, and among many individuals, especially those working for these institutions. The next chapters demonstrate that knowledge and consciousness about human rights also is present among some of the child domestic workers and some of their employers. However, it is among the actors described in this chapter that the human rights perspective is dominant and codified.

Is the discourse codified, and if so, by whom and for what purpose? The most important codification of the child rights discourse is the UNCRC. Other codifications, such as international labor and human rights declarations and conventions, program documents, policy documents, planning documents and annual reports from different international and national agencies and organizations, as well as academic books and articles, are inspired by the UNCRC.

Is there intertextuality between the different subdiscourses within the discourse? Since all actors in the child rights discourse use the UNCRC as their guideline for policy formulation and activities, there is a high degree of intertextuality between the child rights discourse of the different organizations and agencies. Most documents in the child rights discourse, both the academic subdiscourse and the different organizations' subdiscourses, as well as the media subdiscourse, refer directly to the UNCRC. This is especially visible in the focus on children's participation, because this concept received attention after the adoption of the UNCRC in 1989.

To what degree does the discourse have a regulatory function? The child rights discourse has a strong regulatory function because it is aimed at guaranteeing that strategies and policies that are implemented to help children do follow the UNCRC. I argue that ILO has gradually become a strong representative of the child rights discourse, especially with the 1999 Convention on the Worst Forms of Child labor. This convention has a strong regulatory function with its distinction of the different types of child labor that should be abolished.

This chapter has demonstrated the challenges in employing a human rights discourse in countries where the culture differs from that in Western countries where

much of the inspiration of the UNCRC came from⁵². However, I agree with Myers (2001: 53), who optimistically ended a journal article by asserting: “The ‘right rights’ seem not to be those imposed by the rich and powerful but those that are more broadly defined and more democratically adopted. The case of child labor suggests that globally representative children's rights just might indeed be possible, even if it takes a few tries to get them right.”

Human rights conventions state the rights held by all children, not the political or economic system by which they may be best attained. What I primarily try to explore in this dissertation is how different childhoods are constituted through discourses, and what can be done to improve the life quality of child domestic workers. Changes that could improve their situation include the following:

- More participation in society by children
- Access to education as a forum for learning and meeting peers and adults, and as a space where one can be free from the disciplinary grid of the employers’ home for a few hours a day
- Access to health services (both preventive and remedial)
- More respect from everyone in the household and society
- Laws and monitoring, including registering with police station. (This would require institutionalized birth registration.)
- Frequent visits to their home/relatives

⁵² A draft from Canada was used “as the basis of the incorporation of participation rights for children, adding to the rights of protection and provision that came from the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child.” (Edmonds and Fernekes 1996: 9).

- Frequent visits from relatives (or other contact persons, such as a local social worker)

Chapter 5

The employers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work

The employer is the most powerful element in the life of a child domestic, so it is important to understand how the employers' discourse affects the children who work for them. A discourse analysis of the spaces of child domestic work can help reveal potential sites of engagement for improving the quality of life for these children. The geographical space in which child domestic work takes place is crucial because the work occurs away from public scrutiny and a potentially protective public gaze. Therefore, the employers' statements may not coincide with their actual behavior. So when we try to visualize the points of engagement for improving the quality of life of children, we must at all times be aware that domestic work for the most part occurs in private spaces.

In this chapter I discuss how the employers' discourse may hinder fulfillment of child rights for child domestics. The employers' discourse affects child domestic workers via perception, conversation/description, and behavior. Thus, I analyze spoken discourse (i.e., interviews and informal conversations with employers and NGO-people who have worked closely with employers), written discourse (newspaper articles written by employers of child domestics, NGO reports about efforts in raising employers' awareness, and a few academic books and articles about child domestic work and the role of the employer), and lived discourse (i.e., observations of how the employers behave with the children). The employers' discourse is not a uniform one. I highlight both ends

of the spectrum of the employers' discourse—attitudes hindering child rights, as well as attitudes supporting ethical work standards and education for child domestic workers. For the sake of analysis, however, I focus predominantly on the most prevalent opinions, attitudes and behaviors towards child domestic workers found among the employers. In the employers' discourse, child domestics are predominantly seen as young minds and bodies that can be easily disciplined and that should not demonstrate agency. Thus, this perspective differs significantly from that which reflects how child domestics are constituted in the human rights discourse.

Material conditions' affect on the employers' discourse

Households in the global economy need domestic labor for reproduction as both parents are drawn away for production. Traditionally in Bangladesh, the culture also sanctions the custom of having domestics. This has created a discourse of guardianship, in which parents are willing to give up the authority of their own children to adults whom they do not even know. On the basis of the argument presented in chapter 2 on the cross-cutting influence between discourse and material conditions, I now explore how material conditions affect the employers' discourse.

The employers justify the existence of a cheap, easily exploitable child workforce in several ways. In households where both wife and husband work outside the home, most, and especially the women, explain their need for domestics by pointing at the near non-existence of childcare services and the unavailability of washers, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners etc. Some also pointed at time-consuming food traditions and lack of

semi-prepared or frozen meals. With the exception of a few foreign-owned companies that run their own daycare facilities, very few childcare facilities are available. The few existing services may be located far away from both home and workplace. With the chaotic traffic in Dhaka, a relatively short distance will often take one hour due to traffic jam. Readymade food is not common but an increasing number of modern grocery stores in Dhaka sell food that makes it easier to save time in the kitchen. My experience is that most people still prefer the traditional, time-consuming cuisine, and preferably for every meal. Many middle class homes do not have warm tap water, and it is the domestics' job to carry big pots of hot water from the kitchen to the bathroom. For these reasons, combining job and household work without employing a domestic worker is difficult. Household machines like washers and driers are now available in Dhaka. The reason that they are still not a common sight in middle-class families is the lack of a steady supply of electricity, as well as cost of the machines and the electricity. Often disruptions last for several hours, and the voltage is not stable so that the machines are easily damaged. These explanations were offered by employers when asked why they did not wish to add different time-conserving machines to their homes.

One day I spoke with an employer about the fact that most middle-class households in Dhaka have at least one domestic worker, whereas in Western countries we manage without one. I said that to some extent I understood the perceived need for domestics in Bangladesh because in Western countries we have washers, dishwashers and other machines. The employer responded:

Oh, machines are available here also, but it [i.e. the explanation of why domestic work is so prevalent] is in the *culture*. Everyone wants to have

one or more people to do the work for them! (Female employer of a 16-year-old female and a 10-year-old male domestic worker, July 4, 2005).

This statement clearly demonstrated the role that culture plays in the perception of domestic help as a necessity. From my conversations with employers I got the sense that having domestics is a kind of status symbol. Traditionally it has been seen as a privilege to be able to be inactive and not have chores.

Most employers told me that it would have been really difficult to manage without a domestic—either both spouses work outside the home or they have one or more small children to take care of. I even visited households where the children were above 10 years old, and the mother was a homemaker, and still they had one or two child domestics. In such cases the employers often focus on their roles as benefactors. They point out the benevolence they practice by taking needy kids in to their safe and clean homes. In a study of opinions and attitudes towards child domestics, it was found that “[t]he most predominant perception that emerges is the perceived role of the employer as that of the benefactor of the child domestic.” (RCS 1999: 59). I found that employers perceive themselves as benevolent whether they provided education for the domestics or not. This is not surprising when the child domestics’ background is taken into consideration. Child domestics are recruited from the poorest families in Bangladesh. In a pure materialistic sense it is therefore a huge step forward for the children to have a clean place to eat and sleep, and to remain dry indoors, even in the rainy season, and where, except in really abusive work relationships, they do not need to go hungry or cold. So far I have not seen child domestics who looked undernourished. They do, however, in many cases eat mostly leftovers from the employers’ family. In some households, the

homemaking mothers were overweight and inactive. It seemed that they used the benevolence argument as an excuse to hire a domestic and thus not have to perform any physical activities. Some of them even pointed out that they know that in Western countries people manage without domestics, and that household chores are good exercise. One of them told me that she has a relative who moved to a Western country and she looks younger and healthier than her peers in Bangladesh because she keeps herself active with household chores.

In addition to the dual-income household that require reproduction services and the fact that the custom of having domestics is culturally sanctioned, a third material aspect influences the employers' discourse on child domestics, and specifically on female child domestics: Due to the prevalent poverty in rural areas, the average housing standard is very low. In fact, it is so low that, as pointed out by both employers and a few child domestics, when a girl reaches puberty it is not safe for her to remain in the village. "Men of bad character" in every village can make it dangerous for a girl to stay in a simple house where intruders have easy access. I read several newspaper articles about girls who had been raped and/or abducted from their homes in rural Bangladesh. This aspect contributed to the parents' perception of middle-class households in the city being a safe place for their daughters. The sentiment of domestic work as a good option for their children because of their own low standard of living is captured in this quote from a study of child domestic work in Dhaka:

Employing children as domestics is such a widespread practice that, to many Bangladeshis, it is invisible and hardly deserves any attention. Although the children are found as domestic helpers in homes throughout the country, the practice is growing in the cities. Its roots lie in the impoverished condition of rural families, who are economically incapable

and at the same time, ignorant of the value of education and of child rights. Extreme poverty and increasing landlessness in the rural areas have led to urban migration at an unprecedented high rate. The parents and guardians of the children feel privileged by having been able to send their children to work for urban families. (Hoque 1995: 4)

The conception of childhood in the employers' discourse

The human rights discourse does emphasize children's rights as people and as agents, but ultimately what matters for the children is how their employers view and treat them. Employers see child domestics as young, uneducated, pliable, and totally dependent. Therefore, child domestics are treated in a manner that is overbearing, highly regulatory, very disciplined, and occasionally abusive. The employers operate with very different notions of childhood for their own biological children and for the children who work for them. It is uncommon that their own children do any kind of work in the house, and certainly not outside. The child they employ in their home, however, is expected to take commands around the clock, and their services are taken for granted. The child domestics are expected to be passive, docile, submissive, and subservient in mind and body. Thus, under the same roof two diametrically opposed childhoods are being lived—one that includes education and play, and one that includes work, work, and more work.

In Bangladesh, children are traditionally not encouraged to express their opinions in the family, at school, or elsewhere in society. Adults often take decisions on behalf of their children until long after the children have reached the age of 18. Decisions about what and when to study are only one example of the occasions in which Bangladeshi parents make more decisions for their children than Norwegian parents do. Agency is not

very strong for middle-class kids in general, but compared with child domestic workers, middle-class children have rather strong agency. The employers' discourse characterizes child domestic workers as persons without agency⁵³. Being less powerful than their employers both due to their low age and low social status, working children have few opportunities to be heard, and little scope for being taken seriously. In a rigid class society like Bangladesh, "there is a mental perception among the middle and upper classes that the people from the poorer sections should perform services for them including serving them as domestic hands" (UNICEF 2004: 70).

Due to cultural attitudes, poor children and youths are often categorized as '*chalak*', a derogatory word that can be translated into 'uppity', 'smart' or 'clever'. In an interview with an employer who lets her boy servant go to school for two hours a day, we talked about employers who do not let their servants go to school.

After I had started sending Asraf to school, my neighbor told me she could not understand how I could take such a decision. She said he would become *chalak* and not respect me anymore. And he would get bad influence from the other kids [...] I just laughed at her. Now he has completed his primary education and is getting vocational training. He really likes it and he always takes responsibility for his household chores. (Female employer of a 14-year-old male domestic worker)

The prediction made by the neighbor of this progressive employer was wrong: Asraf still has a very good relationship with his employers after having completed basic education and he is now receiving vocational training.

Another example of attitudes that demonstrate reluctance to let the young and powerless enjoy their rights is the comment made by an acquaintance in Bangladesh

⁵³ Agency will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter.

when I presented my research plan at the beginning of the fieldwork. He is an employer of a 15-year-old female domestic. I told him about my focus on children's right to social and school participation. He reacted negatively and said that I would make the domestics more demanding: "You will spoil our girl servants [by doing those things]"⁵⁴. It is not, however, only the employers' attitudes that can restrict school participation for child domestic workers. Their parents' attitudes can also be restrictive. Very few employers had been asked by the child's parents to send the child to school.

One of the employers gave me an interesting answer when I asked her how she decides whether to employ a child or an adult. She told me that if she employs an adult lady, she would feel bad about calling her in the middle of the night for a cup of warm milk for the baby, since that lady could be of the same age as her mother. In other words, the employer does not feel bad, or she feels at least less bad, about disturbing a child in the middle of the night to be commanded to work for her. When I asked employers why they had employed a girl instead of a boy, the answer I usually got was that they prefer that the women in the family do not have to come in contact with a male domestic. Khair found the same in her study, but she also found another interesting reason:

It is evident from the present study that the majority of employers preferred to hire girl children as domestic workers. The primary reason behind this is the relative docility of female children. This practice is reflective of the socially ascribed sex roles that delegate an inferior status to the girl child thereby increasing her vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. These transgressions also reinforce the popular notion that a female, by emerging from seclusion of her home, invites the risk of sexual

⁵⁴ He said, "*amader kazer mehe noshto hoe jabe*". The adjective *noshto* has more negative connotations than the English word 'spoiled'. It could mean, "destroyed, lost, unchase, corrupted" (Samsad 1992). When I asked a Bangladeshi friend to translate the statement, she said that in addition to the translation given here it implies that in the long run "we will lose our child domestic workers".

molestation. In other words, the fault lies with the girl for breaching the culturally sanctioned rules that demand that she remain within the safety of her own home. (Khair 2004: 52).

Hoque (1995) found that employers prefer to hire girls because “they are faithful, obedient and efficient in household work. Besides, the girls stay inside the house and are less eager to go out and mix with others.” (Hoque 1995: 101).

Here, I demonstrated that employers see child domestics, and in particular the female child domestics, as young, dependent, and pliable. The child domestics are expected to take commands around the clock without complaint. If they demonstrate the kind of characteristics that I would like to see in a child—an ability to articulate their meaning and argue according to their views—they are seen as ‘chalak’ (uppity, smart, clever). In other words, the child domestics are not supposed to have agency.

Employers’ discipline of bodies and space

Unlike most other kinds of child work, space plays a crucial role in child domestic labor because work occurs in private places away from public gaze or checks. The location of domestic work lends itself to disciplinary control. In an attempt to answer the discourse theory-derived questions about “Who exerts power through the discourse?” and especially “How is this power exercised?”, I demonstrate the important role played by the use of—and perceptions about—private, semi-public and public space in order for employers to maximize their power over their workers.

The employers of the child domestic workers exert power by surveillance, discipline and punishment. Work conditions are totally at the mercy of the employers. No contracts exist – no distinct sleeping period or breaks. The constant gaze of the employers disciplines the child into a certain kind of behavior, almost like the Foucauldian panopticon, where the prisoners feel that they are constantly being observed even when they are not (Foucault 1995 [1977]). When the employer is present, the child domestic worker always feels like the employers are watching her, no matter whether she is doing laundry, mopping the floors, grinding spices, or eating. And even when the employers are not present, many domestics do not feel free to do anything other than what the employers expect. This is probably what Foucault (1995 [1977]: 201) referred to when he wrote, “Surveillance is permanent in its effects”. Some child domestics told me that they are allowed to take food from the fridge when their employers are outside, but they do not like to take any in case they would be blamed for having taken too much or having taken the wrong food. Similarly, one girl told me that she was allowed to read the books belonging to the girl in the family when the girl was in school and the parents at work, but she still felt reluctant to touch the books in case she would make them dirty or not manage to put them back in the exact same order on the shelf.

For many live-in child domestic workers the amount and conditions of their work is a hindrance to social participation. They are normally on duty from early morning until late night, and in some cases around the clock. Most child domestic workers have very limited geographic mobility, which hinders the possibility for any social participation involving activities or meeting places outside their employers’ home. This is especially the case for female child domestic workers. Usually a girl’s tasks are confined to private

and semi-private spaces, where a boy is sent out into public space to purchase groceries and run errands, and to bring lunch to household members. Due to the fact that the employer has access to the child's labor and body around the clock, domestic work is a unique category of child work with an important space-time geography attached to it.

The employer exercises power by surveying not only the behavior, but also the geographic mobility of the child domestics, controlling their ability to go outside and to access education and other arenas of social participation. The employers control their domestics' use of private and public space in order to maximize their power. Within the home there are strict rules for where a domestic can and cannot stay. Usually, a domestic cannot sit any place other than on the floor⁵⁵. Most domestics also sleep on the floor, no matter how many empty beds and extra bedrooms there are in the home. Only in a very few households does the domestic have her own room. Many child domestics sleep in a pantry or in a small room without windows, almost like a walk-in-closet. I know an employer who has two extra bedrooms, each with a bed, but her domestic still sleeps on the floor⁵⁶. She eats all her meals sitting on a piri (very small stool just a few inches above the floor) in the kitchen, and she never sits on an ordinary chair or sofa. When I asked the employer why the domestic could not sleep in a bed, eat at the table and sit on

⁵⁵ I am not attempting to generalize, because I do not have sufficient data to permit generalizations. However, of all of the middle-class homes I have visited in Bangladesh since 1994 (probably around 80), I have only twice seen a domestic seated at a table. None of the reports I have read about child domestic work in Bangladesh mention where the child domestics eat. This probably demonstrates that it is so common for the child domestics to eat on the floor in the kitchen that the survey designers did not think about including it.

⁵⁶ A survey of 1,920 child domestics found that 84 % of the child domestics sleep on the floor, usually on the kitchen or veranda floor (RCS 1999). A UNICEF survey from 2004 found that 41 % of the child domestics slept in their own room. These were regarded as upper middle class or rich households. However, the report did not specify whether the domestics had a bed. 30 % were found to sleep in the kitchens, verandas, and corridors in the employers' homes. Blanchet (1996) found that child domestics slept on the kitchen or on the living room floor.

the sofa, she gave me a rather long answer including a story. She said that if we start changing our customs regarding servants, we threaten the social order. If the poor people feel that they may have more power, they will gradually take over the society. When I said that I had difficulties understanding her argument, she told me a story about a middle-class couple who lived nearby. The husband had started treating the young woman who worked for them with more respect. The domestic had misinterpreted his behavior as flirting and began flirting with him. Now they are married and the former wife has been kicked out of the house. The employer who told me this story was clearly upset about it. “There you see what can happen!” she said to me loudly. This urge to keep domestic workers “in their place”, not only physically in space but also metaphorically in society, was a sentiment I noted in interviews with several employers.

Some employers see access to education for poor people as a threat to the social order. They want to keep the class structure as it is. Other reasons employers gave for not being willing to send their domestics to school were safety issues. The traffic in Dhaka is extremely chaotic and many accidents happen, especially with pedestrians. There are also frequent kidnappings. The employers are responsible for their child domestics—the children’s parents regard the employer as their child’s guardians—and if anything wrong happens the employers will be in trouble. Several employers told me that for their child domestics to be able to attend school, the school would either have to be in their residential building, or transport would have to be offered by the school. Some employers do not think that child domestics have the capacity to benefit from education. Such an attitude is reflected in the quote below. The first quote is my paraphrasing of a part of a

conversation I had with an employer whom I knew well. We just talked informally about my project and suddenly she said to me in a determined way:

Employer: “There is no scope for educating the working children. No scope!”

KBJ⁵⁷: “What do you mean?”

Employer: “It is not that easy just to send them to school. And you know, even if you try to educate them, it won’t work – they simply cannot absorb it. They cannot learn like other children.”

KBJ: “Are you talking about working children in general, or...?”

Employer: “Full-time labor is the best option for the child domestic workers. They are just not ready for school!”

(Female employer of 16-year-old girl domestic worker, June 20, 2005).

Some weeks later I formally interviewed the same employer:

KBJ: “What is your opinion about efforts to educate working children?”

Employer: “All children should go to school. It is their right, and it is our duty to make sure it is fulfilled.”

These two quotes illustrate why qualitative methods and especially participant observation is important. If I had done a survey, with one short visit in each household, it would have been difficult to capture the attitudes of the employers and the children. Participant observation opens up opportunities to engage in conversations like this one because the researcher spends time with the participants in their natural settings. In the first conversation, when the employer talked to me as a relative and friend, I believe she was honest about her feelings. Then, almost two months later, in a formal interview in front of the tape recorder, she gave this diametrically opposite answer! This is just one example of employers being savvy about the human rights discourse. In media and among international development workers the human rights discourse is a prevalent

⁵⁷ Kari Bolstad Jensen

discourse – and this woman is employed by a Western NGO. She had a sense of me belonging to the human rights discourse, so she knew what I wanted to hear. The employers thus often evoke the human rights discourse without necessarily believing in it. They do not feel that I, and other Westerners, understand fully the realities of the social and cultural context in which they live. They know that the human rights rhetoric is important to us, but they feel that they live in a different reality where children cannot necessarily expect to get an education or a salary, or have time to play. Indirectly, several employers told me that they do not believe in a universal notion of childhood.

Employers' efforts at giving their child domestics access to education

Education has been emphasized by many people—parents, children, government officials, NGOs, academics—as a way to provide working children with traditional, vocational and life skills. To me, education has an additional value for child domestics because it gives them access to semi-public and public spaces, so at least for a part of the day they can spend time outside the home of the employer. If they have been abused, the teacher or other people would see it. Thus, access to education can also be liberating as well as a possible site of agency.

Several employers told me that they would like their child domestics to receive an education. When I interviewed employers, several showed me the books that they had given to their child domestic. Some had tried to teach their domestics at home – with limited success, as shown in this quote from an employer:

I bought books for her, but she has not showed any interest or ability to learn. She forgets easily. She does not want to study....I even told her that her small sister could come and stay with us and go to school, but I did not get any response.

(Male employer of a 16-year-old female domestic)

Other employers explained the difficulty of sending their domestics to school.

This is how an employer explained her thoughts about the possibilities of access to education for her child domestic:

Another thing is, I can send her to the school but who is going to take her there and bring her home? In the evening I am home. At that time if she wants to go to the school she can certainly go, provided there is an opportunity to go to school at that time. [...] If there is an NGO from where they will take the responsibility and take her to the school for 2 hours and bring her to home....but nobody does that. They would only say: "Send her to study!" But who is going to bring her? I am a working woman; I come home at around 5 or 6 p.m. Then I have to do some household chores, I have some personal work, which need to be attended. I cannot possibly take her to the school at that time. I cannot even take my own child to the school. That's why I arranged her to go to a school where they have a school bus. Because my office time and her school time are exactly the same. It is not possible for me to drop her off at the school. That's why I made arrangements that the school bus will take her and drop her off. So that's why if there is any NGO who provides this kind of opportunity they also have to pick their students and drop them off to houses.....There is another problem. Not every family has the same time schedule. My office is done at 5 p.m. I come home at around 6 p.m. Then she is free and can go to school. But in another family at that moment the maid may be busy. Her free time may be at around 10 am or in the afternoon. So that creates a problem.

(Female employer of a 14-year-old female child domestic, July 2, 2005).

Several NGOs have found that timing of school hours is crucial to participation by child domestics. Most school programs for child domestic workers run from 3 to 5 in the afternoon. But for those domestics who live in households where both the mother and the father work outside the home, it is not possible to go out before one of them reaches the

home. In some households an elderly relative is always at home, but in most urban middle-class households this is not the case. Unless the employers are willing to give their domestic worker a key to the apartment, the school hours would need to be adjusted accordingly. None of the employers I spoke with would give a key to their child domestic worker.

I did interact with employers who were conscious of human rights, treating their workers with respect, sending their child domestics to school or teaching them at home, and paying them a relatively decent salary. I mentioned in chapter 4 that I visited an NGO that used a room in an employer's apartment as an afternoon school for child domestics. The employers' own child domestic was one of the students, and one of the employers was the teacher. I learned about many other ways that employers help their domestics obtain an education. A 17-year-old female domestic that I interviewed studied at home. Her employer's father, who lived with them, helped her with schoolwork whenever she needed it. Twice a year she received ten days off to go to her village to take exams. Her employers paid the 800 Taka⁵⁸ required to take the exams each year. She wrote her life story for me (presented in chapter 6).

One employer showed her commitment to helping disadvantaged children by employing a child who would otherwise probably not have gotten any job. Her domestic worker is blind in one eye and has limited mental capacity. This 14-year-old girl's employer is a child rights activist who had employed her because she knew it would be

⁵⁸ In May 2007 800 Taka equaled approximately 12 US Dollars.

very difficult for her to find any job. My impression is that it is very uncommon for anyone to employ children with any disability.

As mentioned in chapter 4, some organizations try to raise awareness about child rights among employers. However, they reach only a limited number. National NGOs such as ASK, SUF, and Shoishab have experienced that it often takes a long time, and repeated visits to each employer, before she or he may start considering their offer of sending their domestic to a free afternoon school. Several NGO workers told me that when they go door to door to inform employers about the existing school programs for child domestic workers, the employers are usually very skeptical in the beginning. Many doors have been slammed in the faces of NGO workers. Employers are often concerned that if they send their domestics to school, they will learn something that will make them more attractive on the job market and they will no longer be interested in working for them.

In one of the learning centers I visited, an NGO-employee who is responsible for monitoring the NGO schools told me about their experiences with employers of child domestics:

KBJ: Do you have many problems with children not coming to school; especially if the employer has visitors?

NGO-worker: Yes, many times there are problems like these. If there is a guest at home the employers are usually reluctant to send them to school at that time. Also some of them don't want their domestic workers attend the school for the fear that they might get *chalak*⁵⁹ as they come to school—they will be more aware of their rights. For these reasons initially the employers were not very enthusiastic about the school, but as the school was only for 2 hours—also the children's eagerness and our

⁵⁹ As explained earlier in this chapter, '*chalak*' is a derogatory term that can be translated as 'uppity', 'smart' or 'clever'.

motivation helped them to agree. Now—as the teacher said—they are also beginning to see the benefit of education in their domestic workers. If one employer asks a child domestic worker to bring a newspaper, he can read it and bring the paper. Similarly if someone asks them to bring a particular book from the shelf, he can read the title and bring the correct book. So in the long run they are also getting some benefits - as well as the children.....We also have to adapt to some situations like if a guest is invited, we tell the children to prepare their work and reading earlier. We also tell the employer to spare him or her only for a little while. It becomes difficult sometimes but still we have to manage.....We always maintain a continued relationship with the employers.
(NGO-worker at a Shoishab learning center on a rooftop, July 30, 2005).

Again, we see that employers are afraid that the children may become too smart, clever, or uppity when they increase their skills and learn about their rights. Helen Rahman, who started the NGO Shoishab and worked closely with child domestics and their employers for many years, believes one should not attack child domestic labor from a high moral stand—“This only hardens attitudes” (Rahman in Seabrook 2001: 100). NGOs have learned to prevent negative attitudes by building a strong and positive relationship with employers, as referred to in this statement:

Employers are usually seen as the enemy; but one organization—Shoishab in Bangladesh—has over time managed to enlist the employers themselves as the principal change-agents in meeting child domestics’ rights. (Black 2001: 7)

Several other NGOs now use this kind of thinking in their work with employers—in particular SUF and ASK. The NGOs that run non-formal schools for child domestic workers also organize forums for employers of child domestics, where employers can meet and exchange experiences about their efforts to improve the situation of their workers. Some of the forums, such as the “Active Employers’ Groups” organized by Shoishab, include stakeholders in the local communities.

The teacher in the Shoishab learning center on a rooftop shared her experiences on contact with employers:

KBJ: Do you have any experience of direct contact with their employers? (The teacher is nodding).

KBJ: Can you please tell me a little bit about it?

Teacher: Yes, I always have to maintain direct contact with the employers. If a student does not show up to school, I have to go personally and find out why she (or he⁶⁰) is absent for 1-2 days. Sometimes they get sick, as for example here are some children who were sick. I got permission from their employer to take them to doctors, it has all been arranged through our office. The doctor asked to do some tests; we did them. In every three months we have an employers meeting, where the employers of the domestic worker also participate. They also share their ideas with us, how to improve the system, how to help them [the domestic workers] better. We all discuss it together; our senior officials are also present at the meeting.

KBJ: Have you also been working in trying to ask the employers for the permission that the child workers can come to the school? Or do the other persons from this office do that?

Teacher: Our seniors arrange initially the starting of a class. After the class begins I sometimes get some children from my area; sometimes the office helps to arrange the recruitment of the students. If the office gets informed that a new child worker has joined in some house within the area we go ahead and let the employer and the child worker know about the school. Also if a new family moves into this area that has a domestic worker, we let them know that we have a school with such and such facilities so that they will be encouraged to send the child to school.

KBJ: How do you get the information that a new family or domestic worker has moved in?

Teacher: Most of the time I get to know about it from our students. They tell us that a new family has moved in or a new boy or girl has come to work for a family. I live in this neighborhood; I also get information myself. In my building a new tenant moved in 3rd floor. I went there and introduced myself and asked whether they will be interested to send their domestic worker to the school. Some times the employers also encourage one another. As the school is on the rooftop; they are able to see it from another roof and they appreciate it. They encourage other families to send their domestic workers.

⁶⁰ In Bangla the same word is used for both 'she' and 'he'.

Here another advantage of the location of the school is demonstrated: Employers and child domestics in nearby buildings can see the children and the teacher on the rooftop and thereby become aware that such a school program exists.

In a newspaper article about the non-formal education program of the national NGO Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF), an employer's positive experiences with the program received attention:

“Only by extending a little cooperation, you can also make room for education for a child working in your house as a domestic help like Maryam. Just allow him or her 3 hours to go to school and let he/she be a citizen like your kid,” urged housewife Rebeka Banu to others. “Following her schooling and training on housekeeping, she can now give us better services,” said Rebeka, mother of two sons and two daughters. “She can now receive phone calls, she has developed hygienic senses, and also has she become a good cook now. I had to spare only three hours from 2pm – 5pm for her to go to the school. If she were my daughter, I had to do the household work in the absence of her. So, I consider her as one of my daughters,” said Rebeka Banu (Staff Correspondent, *The Bangladesh Observer*, 2004)

Discipline and punish

I observed different disciplinary methods used by the employers of child domestics. The way they talked with them, the way they talked about them in front of others, and the way they behaved with them all reflected their work relationship. One employer told me in front of his child domestic that her cooking was awful; he said he would not even taste the food if she made it. This child domestic always looked uncomfortable in her employers' presence. I observed child domestics who were corrected impatiently and rudely by their employers if they made the slightest mistake, such as putting too much or too little sugar in the tea, using too little or too much oil when frying the cakes, or not

being thorough enough while washing and rinsing the laundry. Such repeated correction executed in a negative way influences the child's behavior and self-esteem. This observation is from my field diary:

When she served tea she looked nervously at her employer all the time. I feel that she is nervous in the presence of her. Also whenever she stopped working for a second in order to look up at her employer to receive orders about her work, she had that nervous look in her eyes. (Fieldnotes, August 8, 2005).

I spent much time with this girl, chatting, watching TV, accompanying her when she worked and so on, so I knew that she did not always look nervous. When we talked, her eyes were often shining with happiness. The employer would yell at her for very minor mistakes. Another frustrating observation occurred when this girl sat down to make a drawing for me—the employer came and began to comment negatively about her drawing in front of her. Such situations were difficult to handle. It was tempting to correct the employer, but at the same time I did not want to lose my good relationship with her and thereby risk losing access to her domestic. I praised her domestic highly for her drawing while the employer was with us, and I think that was enough of a statement in that particular situation. It is my impression that there is a huge need for parents to learn some basic-level child psychology—true everywhere in the world. I observed that parents in Bangladesh often also correct their own children in a very negative way. It is therefore easy to draw wrong conclusions about how they treat their domestics badly while they may treat their own children in a similarly poor fashion.

With regard to drawing, I would add that the activity of drawing is perceived differently in Bangladesh than in Norway. Several times in Dhaka I observed that when

middle-class children make drawings, it is usually because they are learning formally from an art teacher, and they are doing their drawing homework. Drawing is about learning specific skills and specific motives, and you “must” have an art teacher and professional equipment. I have very seldom seen any Bangladeshi child just sitting and spontaneously drawing anything freely. This may be another explanation for the way the employer handled the drawing situation. I interpreted it very negatively, but she may be used to correcting her own child whenever she tries to create any specific drawing. I am not trying to excuse the employer for her arrogant comments to her child domestic, such as: “Mango! She says that is a mango! That does not look like a mango! Hahahaha!” but I try to understand the cultural context for such comments in an effort to avoid misinterpretation. Perhaps her comments illustrate how she treats children in general, not only her child domestics. I tried to be conscious about my outsider status that may lead me to draw conclusions about treatment of child domestics which may pertain more to a culture of commenting children’s drawings negatively in general. Unfortunately, I did not observe any situation in which this child domestic worker drew with the child in the house. I did, however, observe another incident in the same household that indicated that the employers did praise their own child but not the domestic. On one evening, the employer called my husband; they wanted us to come visit them because Munni⁶¹ (the 10-year-old daughter in the house) had cooked something. Her parents were very proud and praised her repeatedly in front of my family and me. We sat in their bedroom, which is somewhat breezy and therefore the most comfortable place in the hot summer season.

⁶¹ The children’s names have been changed to protect their identities.

A little later, when I was in the kitchen with Rahima (the 14-year-old domestic), Rahima was extraordinarily eager to show me all of the items she had cooked for dinner that day: lentils, several types of spinach, rice. Only after returning to my own room and writing did I see the connection between the employers' loud praise of Munni for her few fries and Rahima's begging for appreciation from me for her cooking.

Seabrook wrote about the endless duties accepted by the maids of Dhaka:

At the same time, a degree of perfection which is not expected in any other form of employment is demanded of them. If a child breaks a dish or an ornament, she will be scolded and, possibly, punished. She will be told only of the things she does wrong; almost never praised for the patience and diligence with which she performs her daily duties." (Seabrook 2001: 102).

A friend of mine who was brought up in Dhaka observed several times how his parents behaved diametrically opposite when one of their own children broke something and when a child domestic broke something. He observed similar situations in the homes of relatives and friends. When the employers' own child broke a drinking glass, the parents would come rushing to the scene, asking whether she was hurt. If she was not, they would say things like, "Oh, thank God my child did not cut her hand. It's OK, my child...you did not hurt yourself, that's the main thing." But when a child domestic broke a glass, the situation would turn into an earthquake. The employer would shout things like: "Oh, no! You broke a glass from that expensive set of glasses! Now the whole set is damaged! I have been working so hard and saved money and bought this set, and now you have destroyed it! You eat so much food, but you cannot even do small work tasks like this!" Some employers would even start crying and/or beat their child domestics.

There is much violence in Bangladeshi society, especially against women and children (see for instance Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association 2002; Marium 2004). Newspaper articles about the abuse of child domestics and conversations with people who work for NGOs who run shelter homes for abused women and children reveal that many of the perpetrators of violence against child domestics are women. There could be two reasons for this. One, women have most contact with the domestics. Two, the women live in a patriarchal society and are subject to domestic violence by their husbands. In order to understand the scale and pervasiveness of violence in Bangladeshi society it is necessary to realize that the patriarchy in Bangladesh is strong. As pointed out by Altschuller (2003: 195), “women in Bangladesh continue to face challenges ranging from discriminatory policies and practices in the home to explicit exclusion from economic and political participation.” Until the last few decades, women were not supposed to work in public space unless they had to in order to survive. This paternalistic tradition is changing rapidly, as pointed out in chapter 1. However, violence against women and children at home and in school is common. In some households there is a vicious circle of violence: the husband beats his wife, and the wife takes her anger and frustration out on the powerless working child. An example of this problem was given in a *Daily Star* article titled “Crimes of the normal and respected”:

When you read about an eight-year-old domestic maid being clubbed to death with a rolling pin, the scenario is eerily familiar as innumerable such incidents have been reported. But it still fills most of us (hopefully) with horror and dismay. Horror that educated adults with the given 'respectability' of being middle class can inflict so much pain on a helpless child. Dismay that the child whose short life had already been marred by neglect and deprivation, could not survive the ordeal.

Rupali, only eight years old, was brought to Dhaka all the way from Gaibanda to work for Atiar Rahman, a better off relative in Paikpara

Mirpur. She was supposed to look after his five year old daughter. This was only a month ago. Selina Akhter, Rahman's wife slapped Rupali over something as trivial as not making the bread on time. This prompted her husband to reprimand Selina and at one point he slapped his wife.

Later when her husband had gone to the office, Selina lost no time in taking her revenge on the poor, helpless child. She started beating her mercilessly with a rolling pin until there were no more places to hit. (Amin 2005).

The vicious circle of violence is illustrated here, going from the wife to the child domestic, then from the husband to the wife and then again from the wife to the child domestic. Interestingly, in this specific incidence, the wife started the violence, not the husband. Several of the female employers I interacted with did not seem to be content with their lives. Unfortunately, the mood of the employers strongly influences the well-being of the children employed in their homes, especially since the working children live with them. More seriously, the aggression of the adults can be life threatening to the child domestics. The same newspaper article provided details about another kind of vicious cycle:

The vicious cycle continues. Poverty will force families to make their children work in households with absolutely no idea whether the employers will keep their children safe, give them enough to eat or even allow them to live. With no accountability and a legal system that, in spite of stringent laws, is constantly thwarted by influence and the power of money, employers of domestic workers get the impunity they need to continue to exploit and abuse their employees. (Amin 2005).

The *Daily Star* printed an article in January 2007 entitled: “947 workers killed at workplace.” The article was based on a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies on the basis of news stories published in national daily newspapers in 2006.

At least 35 domestic servants died in the reporting year due to torture and cruel behaviour by their employers. At least 31 were injured and 13 violated by the employers or their relations.

Army officers, teachers, lawyers, physicians, businessmen and a religious leader were in the list of persecutors of the housemaids. Among the victims, more than 50 percent were child domestic help. (BSS 2007).

In addition to patriarchal violence against women and children, there are also other issues in the Bangladeshi society that lead to violence. The society's class structure is rigid, and the social hierarchy is based not only on wealth but also on skin color. Ethnically, there is not much diversity in Bangladesh. Except for a few indigenous groups of people who live predominantly in the Chittagong division in the southeast area of the country and in some places in the north, and some non-Bengali Muslims, the society is ethnically homogeneous. However, skin color varies greatly, from almost white to very dark brown. Even among siblings, skin color can vary significantly. Unfortunately, there is a very strong notion in Bangladeshi society about beauty being correlated with lightness of skin complexion. It is no secret that some people have a very negative reaction when a dark brown child is born into their family. I have seen several examples of families having problems getting their daughter married if she is darker than average. For child domestics, their skin color is a factor that could influence the way that their employers treat them. This is illustrated in a story printed on the first page of one of the most popular Bangla language newspapers in Bangladesh, *Prothom Alo*, on June 29,

2005⁶². It was the first of five case studies about girls who had faced severe violence because of their dark skin:

Nasima, a 12- or 13-year-old girl, was working as a housemaid in Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The family she was working for had a lovely child whom she used to baby-sit. Nasima had a great affection for that child and often loved to kiss the child gently. But the child's mother had forbidden Nasima to kiss the baby as she had a dark face! For that reason, the young maid would kiss the baby only when the mother was at work. Accidentally, one day the child's uncle saw Nasima kissing the baby and he slapped her on the ear in anger. He hit her so hard that Nasima's face and chin became swollen, and she could barely hear anything with her left ear. However, this was only the beginning of abusing the young housemaid. When the mother came home from work and heard all of this, she started beating Nasima. The mother asked her, "Why did you kiss my baby with your dark face? Haven't you seen in the mirror how dark and ugly you are!" Nasima replied with a heavy heart, "My love is not "Dark" indeed". Hearing these words from the housemaid, the mother burst into fire and said, "How dare you argue with me and try to give me lessons on racism!" Then she started beating Nasima even harder. When the maid went back home that afternoon, she still could not hear anything with any of her ears. At night, she had high fever and her face and ear was still swollen. Although the fever went down after three or four days, she still could not hear anything. So, Nasima went to the doctor and the doctor found that a sensitive membrane of her ear was torn which caused internal bleeding. The doctor said that she would need major operations on both of her ears in order to get her hearing ability back (the expense of which is quite impossible to bear for a poor maid like Nasima). While interviewed by the news reporters, Nasima's mom burst into tears and said, "Why does Allah⁶³ make people dark? And after making them dark, why does Allah fill the heart of the mankind with hatred for the dark people?" (Biu 2005).

This story exemplifies the problems related to skin color in Bangladeshi society. The fact that the employer became furious when her domestic replied to her discriminatory statement, supports my argument that employers do not want to see any sign of agency in

⁶² Thanks to Shejuti Silvia for her prompt and diligent translation.

⁶³ 'Allah' is the Arabic word for 'God'.

their child domestics. The child domestics are expected to passively receive everything from their employers—commands, scolding, yelling, beating, and abuse.

Dismissal as a disciplinary method

The power relationship between employer and child is important. The child domestics live and work under surveillance from their employers, and the employers often use threats as a means to instill work discipline. The use of dismissals is also an important disciplinary method in this special kind of work relationship. Two of my female research participants were dismissed from their domestic work while I was in Dhaka, and I followed those two dismissals closely. The stories demonstrate people's attitudes about female child domestic workers and to some extent about poor people in general.

One of the neighboring households in my apartment building employed a child domestic named Saleha, who was approximately 14 years old. She was recruited from the employers' ancestral town. Here are some of my first impressions of her:

Saleha looks very confident; most child domestic workers I interact with are much more introvert. Her posture and facial expressions express confidence. She is very attentive with the girls – she always follows their moves with her eyes and often she suddenly steps in to get them down from chairs they have climbed or to give them some correcting comments.
(Observation described in my fieldnotes, June 2005).

I was in the process of establishing a rapport with Saleha and had often talked and interacted with her and the two girls she looked after. One late afternoon I went to request an interview with Saleha and her employer. The employer asked her other domestic, an old woman, to go up on the rooftop and bring Saleha down with her. The employer's two

young daughters were taking an afternoon nap, and so Saleha had asked for permission to go up on the roof to chat with some other domestics. Although I repeatedly said to the employer that I did not need to interview Saleha at that point, she did not want to listen and insisted that I should meet Saleha. She said it was time for Saleha to come down anyhow. We started the interview. She said she was satisfied with Saleha's work and wanted to keep her as her maid. She looked uncomfortable that Saleha had not come home yet. I kept saying that I could talk with Saleha another day, but the employer kept replying that it was really time for her to come in anyhow—it would soon get dark. Then the old woman returned without Saleha—she had not found her on the rooftop. The employer became very upset and asked the old lady to go and look for her in the stairways and ask neighboring families whether they had seen her. A little later, while I was still in their living room chatting with the employer, one of the neighbors came and said that her domestic had not come back either. I left the apartment because the employer said she would go and look for Saleha, and she did not want me to help her.

The next day I was busy the entire day. When I came home in the evening I was told by the neighbor of Saleha's employers that Saleha had been sent back to her village that morning. A relative of the employer's had come to take her. The employers did not want to have the responsibility for her any longer, because they had found out (from the guards at the entrance gate) that she had been out in the streets several times recently. She had always said to her employers that she would go up on the rooftop to play with some of the other child domestics, but she had actually gone out into the streets. To the guards she used to say that her employers had sent her to buy a few things from the corner shop; that is why they had opened the gate for her. Several of the adults I talked with in this

building explained the danger in allowing young girls to roam around by themselves in Dhaka—kidnappings occur frequently and lots of “immoral people” in public spaces can negatively influence young kids. I tried to say that maybe Saleha just wanted to look around for a while, to explore her surroundings a bit. The reaction from the others in the room (a woman and three men) illustrates how people view young, working girls. They said things like: “She is not an innocent girl; she is smart, and she had certainly made contact already with some bad guys from a bad social environment. We fully understand that her employers did not want to have the responsibility for her any longer.”

A few days earlier, Saleha had been talking about us with the old lady who works in the same household, and according to that old lady Saleha had said: “I think they are going to bring me to America, because they like me so much!” We had only interacted with her a few weeks, and we had only behaved the way that we try to behave with everybody. I take this as an example of how much it means to the domestics to be treated with respect. It probably also demonstrates that she was not used to being treated like that.

The story about Saleha illustrates two points: first, employers talk about young female domestics as someone who cannot be trusted because they are not responsible and will not listen because they have a loose moral character. However, employers do have good reasons for restraining children from walking in public by themselves. The child domestics’ parents have given them guardianship for their child and it is a big responsibility. Employers of child domestics do not usually permit their own biological children to go out alone either. Second, child domestics are not used to being treated with respect by their employers or other people. Therefore, it makes a strong impression on

them when anybody behaves nicely with them. This can easily be misused by outsiders who can persuade the child domestics to come with them and try out other options than domestic work. Several employers told me that some young domestics are recruited to work in different types of industries or worse, in brothels, because they are naïve when approached by outsiders who show them respect and/or affection.

My other dismissal story has to do with an eight-year-old female domestic named Popy. She was brought to a household in my neighborhood while I was staying in Dhaka. She seemed to know how to behave respectfully, and she had already gone to school for four years in her rural town. The employer knew Popy's mother because she used to work for her own mother in the northern part of Bangladesh. Here is an excerpt from my first interview with her employer:

KBJ: What is your plan regarding her? She will stay here; what type of job will she do?

Employer: Now her job is simply to be a companion to Taslima [the employer's two-year-old daughter], she will play with her. Some times she may have to do some small chores like to clean the floor, wipe the grills⁶⁴ or to wash the dishes if needed. I know she will not be able to do other jobs. Mainly she will be a playmate to Taslima.

KBJ: Does she know how to take care of Taslima?

Employer: No, she does not. I will teach her. I know she never did any type of work. So I will teach her.

KBJ: Do you plan to train her to do other work as well? Like mopping the floor?

Employer: No, she will not be able to mop the floor. She is a small child; I will not let her. She may have to clean the floor in the morning once and again in the evening. She may wipe the window grills and furniture and so on. I made a promise to her mother that I will teach her and continue her studies at home no matter what. I will not stop her study. Her mother requested me that.

(Interview with employer of an 8-year-old female domestic, July 3, 2005)

⁶⁴ The decorated iron rods in front of the windows.

The employer was very sincere about taking on guardianship for this young girl. I asked her whether Popy's parents had requested her to do anything more for her than send her to school. This was her reply:

Employer: They asked me that I teach her to read the Koran.

KBJ: So you will teach her that?

Employer: Maybe I will teach her; or I will appoint a huzur⁶⁵ to teach her. But in any case I have to ensure that she learns to read the Koran. I will teach her how to do the namaz⁶⁶. I will also teach her good manners; culture.

KBJ: How do you define teaching culture? Will you teach her poetry or something?

Employer: No, like the usual things. How she will behave in a good society, what her manners are going to be, how to talk in a decent and polished way etc. I will try my best to teach her. I will teach her as much as I know and as much as she can adopt or pick up with her own merit.....Another thing is she will grow up and eventually get married. In our country guardians have to pay a lot of money for the dowry⁶⁷. I will help as much as I can for that.

KBJ: This is also a condition?

Employer: Yes, it is.

KBJ: Will you help to find a suitable husband for her or will you help only with the money?

Employer: I will help only financially. Her parents will find a husband for her. I will give her ornaments and money for the wedding.

KBJ: So you are not giving her any money now. You will give the money when she gets married, right?

Employer: Yes. I will help with the wedding.

KBJ: Are her parents very poor?

Employer: Yes they are.

(Female employer of an 8-year-old female domestic, July 3, 2005)

⁶⁵ 'Huzur' means a religious teacher.

⁶⁶ 'Namaz' is the ritual prayers in Islam.

⁶⁷ The practice of dowry, i.e., money and/or goods that the bride's family gives to the groom's family, is illegal in Bangladesh but widely practiced.

I observed this employer doing something that I have never seen before: She went to get a glass of water for her servant! She let Popy sit at the table, on the sofa and bed— wherever we sat, she was allowed to sit. She was also very patient with Popy in general, and treated her respectfully, as if she was her own daughter. She tried to guide Popy in how to take care of Taslima, the 2-year-old whom Popy had been hired to look after and play with.

Two weeks later, I talked with Taslima’s father. He had become very frustrated about Popy:

It is a problem that she is so young – she is just some years older than my daughter whom she is supposed to take care of – so instead of taking care of her and doing other things we ask her to do, she starts playing – and sometimes when she is working – doing laundry for instance – Taslima comes along with a toy, and Popy starts playing with her and forgets her job. It is a problem! And my daughter also gets tired of it sometimes – because Popy takes her toys from her to annoy her.
(Male employer of 8-year-old female domestic, July 19, 2005)

Then, in an attempt to explain why Popy is not more diligent about her work, he made a strong generalization about poor people in general, or rather poor people from the north of the country, where Popy came from:

You know – people from the North are so lazy. Take farmers in Sylhet for instance – they have only one harvest per year – but they could have had two! But what do they do? They just sit and say: “Why should we work so hard? We are after all getting money from our relatives in London⁶⁸ – and we have one harvest per year!” And the domestics from the North of this country are also lazy!My mother in law has a domestic that we wanted – but she did not find anybody else – so therefore we took Popy. Anyhow, we want another domestic – a *bandha*⁶⁹ - but it will be an older

⁶⁸ Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants in London are from the division Sylhet.

⁶⁹ *Bandha* is the Bangla term for a live-in domestic. For further explanation see chapter 1.

one since this small one cannot manage much else than just playing with Taslima.

(Male employer of 8-year-old female domestic, July 19, 2005)

Popy's babysitting did not develop well. She was often mean to Taslima. I observed it myself, and my 14-year-old daughter, who spent more time with the family than I did, also observed it. As soon as Taslima's mother was out of the way, Popy would beat her, pinch her, throw a ball at her, or take a toy from her.

A little more than one month after Popy had come to Dhaka with them, they sent her back to her rural town together with Taslima's uncle. I asked Taslima's mother why they decided to send Popy back. This was her answer:

She beat Taslima – and she did not do her chores properly either. She was too young – it just created more work for me. She was mean to Taslima - so I had to look after her instead of getting some relief.

(Female employer of an 8-year-old female domestic, July 3, 2005)

This story illustrates that employers may be unrealistic about the level of services and maturity to expect from young children. Popy's employers took it for granted that this 8-year-old girl would easily and quickly adjust to their family's needs and be a good companion for their 2-year-old daughter as well as be able to do several chores around the house. Child domestics are discursively constructed as children who are pliable and who will do anything they are told to do. There seems to be no minimum age for child domestics according to employers. The youngest child domestic I observed was only five years old. She worked non-stop in a dinner party I attended. She constantly walked swiftly around, filling big jugs with water, giving people glasses, refilling their glasses and so on.

It is important to keep in mind that when a child domestic worker is dismissed, she does not only lose her job, but she also loses her place to stay. Several of the child domestics I talked with did not want to go home to their parents or other guardians. Jorina, for instance (who will be described in the next chapter), said that she was viewed as a burden by her stepmother and was therefore treated badly and not allowed to continue her education. For that reason she never wanted to go home, not even when her father asked her to come. Popy also had problems with her stepmother. Her father had married two times⁷⁰ and the two wives—both had children of approximately the same age—did not get well along but still lived together.

Keeping them locked inside—Slavery or protection?

Given the restricted mobility of child domestics, does such labor amount to slavery? It is common practice to keep the child domestic workers locked inside the house when the employer's family leaves for work and school. This is obviously a violation of children's rights, tantamount to making their work situation similar to slavery⁷¹. According to Bales' (2004) definition, if a person is kept for the purpose of exploitation, has no freedom of movement, does not receive a salary or only enough for her upkeep, and is

⁷⁰ Polygamy is illegal in Bangladesh but is practiced by some few people. To my knowledge it is mostly practiced by very poor people.

⁷¹ Several authors have described the situation for child domestic workers in Bangladesh as slavery or a "slavery like situation" (Blanchet 1996: 114, Rahman 1995: 20, Seabrook 2001: 103, Sur 2003: 238).

controlled by the use of violence or by the threat of using violence, she is a slave⁷².

According to this definition, some of my research participants were clearly on the borderline of belonging in the slave category. However, the full nature of work conditions was not necessarily revealed to me. For instance, in one household the child domestic worker said that she has never received any salary, whereas the employers said that she was receiving a salary. In several households the employer had promised and/or actually given the child domestic money for her yearly trip home, but without specifying how much. Some employers had promised to pay a dowry and other wedding expenses for their girl domestic when she married. In addition to the opaque nature of the salary issue, the degree of threats and violence in each household was almost impossible for me to assess. For these reasons I do not know how many of my participants were slaves⁷³.

Seen from the employers' side, the locking of the entrance door from the outside is done both for the purpose of control and protection of the child domestics. I spoke with many employers about the issues of security of child domestic workers and the responsibility of the employers for their live-in child domestics. Here is an excerpt from one of my interviews with an employer of a 14-year-old girl. The family consisted of this female employer and her husband, and their 10-year-old daughter. The woman worked

⁷² Bales, one of the leading experts on contemporary slavery, estimated in 1999 that globally, 27 million workers are slaves (Bales 2004: 8).

⁷³ When the conditions under which child work is carried out cannot exclude the possibility that a child is kept as a slave, that kind of work should be defined as one of the worst forms of child labor. ILO defines child domestic work as one of the worst forms of child labor. The government of Bangladesh until recently did not even define it as hazardous. The government has now started to define child domestic work as one of the worst forms of child labor. The ILO definitions of hazardous labor and the worst forms of child labor were presented in chapter 4.

for an NGO from morning till afternoon, and her husband ran his own business. Their daughter went to one of the best schools in town but the domestic did not go to school.

KBJ: Does she say she likes it here?

Employer: She says she does. She has only been here for a while. If she likes to stay here it will be good for me—for her as well. But she is young and she has to stay home alone most of the time. She might feel lonely, that is the only problem.

KBJ: Does she ever go outside?

Employer: No, she does not. When I go out I lock the door from outside. She also told me she feels secure that way. She never wants to go out on her own. I never keep the door unlocked—I don't want any harm happening to her.

[...]

KBJ: One more thing; so her Mama and Mami [her maternal uncle and aunt, i.e. her closest adult relatives in the village] regard you as her guardian now?

Employer: Yes.

KBJ: So it is a big responsibility....

Employer: They have handed her over to me, so from that moment the responsibility is all mine. So I will try my best to keep my duty. I will take the maximum caution to maintain her security and well-being. She also has to help me to maintain this.

KBJ: Will you allow her to meet other housemaids who live on the nearest floors?

Employer: Yes, I would. But if I leave the front door unlocked for her; she might come out and meet other maids of the different floors. Most of them are nice. But there may be someone who is a bit naughty and suggest her to go to the rooftop or suggest that they should go out of the building. That becomes risky. She is still very young; does not have that type of maturity or that much of responsibility yet. So it will not be that wise to leave the house unlocked. Not only for my own security but also for herself as well. If I allow her to go outside, initially she may go to places near the apartment. But gradually she will gain the courage to go further away. Eventually she will not want to stay at home all the time. She will enjoy staying outside more. Beside there may be some persons who will tempt her that they will provide her with a better place; she will be better off there. Whether it is true or not she will realize it later; probably she may leave just believing what is said. For these reasons if the main gate is kept locked she is safe and I am safe as well.

(Interview with the female employer of a 14-year-old female domestic, July 2, 2005)

We kept talking after the tape recorder had been turned off. The employer then repeated what I had heard from several other employers: If anything happens to her child domestic, the rumor will easily spread to the village where both her and the girls' relatives live, and she and her husband—the employers—will be blamed for not having looked after their child domestic properly. It is interesting to see how the employer views the rooftop as a dangerous place. The next chapter reveals a different perception of the rooftop by most children.

One incident that happened some months after I had left Dhaka, demonstrates that this employer was honest when she said she locks her domestic in to protect her. I received this story in an email from my interpreter in Dhaka, about this same family who lives on one of the top floors of the high-rise apartment building where I had stayed:

You requested me to inform you anything about the child workers living here...Nothing happened so far except one incident. Last Saturday, Munni and their maid Rahima had a narrow escape to an accident! Munni's parents locked them up and went outside. After that the girls locked the door from the inside, too! After some time Munni and Rahima went to the veranda, and suddenly the door of the veranda banged (maybe because of wind) and was locked automatically (Later they've found how it was, actually)!!! They had the gas on and one curry pot on the burner! And it was burning!! They screamed as they couldn't manage to get in from the veranda! I heard them and called Munni's dad. He called the basement and stopped the gas from the main control. Later their parents came and tried to unlock them!! As the door was locked from inside too and they were locked in the veranda, they needed to break the door from outside and enter!!! Later they discovered that the guests (There were kids with them) who visited them last night had somehow pushed the lock button.....so the next day the door got locked automatically as soon as it banged!!

(Email from my interpreter in Dhaka, Sharmin Farzana Khan, December 2005)

I found this story very interesting since I had been pondering whether it could be true that employers would lock the domestic in to protect the child and not merely to keep her from running away. This story demonstrates that since they do the same with their own biological child, it is probably more accurate to interpret the locking of the door as a protection measure than as a sign of slavery, at least in this family.

I spoke with many employers who mentioned their fear that their child domestic would grasp any opportunity to escape from their job in order to obtain a job in one of the many export garment factories in Dhaka. As noted in chapter 1, many children, especially girls, are employed in garment factories. A beginner job in a garment factory pays better than most child domestic jobs. However, taking into consideration the need to pay for house rent, clothes, and food, it is not necessarily a better option economically. On the other hand, an industry job provides more freedom than being a domestic. I spoke with a girl who is now in the garments industry and previously worked as a domestic. When I asked her which job she preferred, she said that she liked the garments job much better because it offered more freedom than she had as a live-in child domestic. As a domestic, it was difficult to put up with the employers when they were angry and used bad language. Employers' fear of domestics escaping to obtain a garments job is one reason for confining them to private space.

Some employers told me that they locked their child domestics in to avoid burglary. Their fear stemmed from many stories that swirl around the unofficial discourse among child domestics' employers. According to these stories, child and adult domestics sometimes cooperate with criminals who help them empty the apartment of valuables while the employers are away. Some of the stories have been spread through the news

media, such as a short newspaper article in the *Daily Star*, entitled, “Domestic help steals valuables worth Tk 8 lakh.”⁷⁴ (Staff Correspondent 2005a). The dramatic effect of this story was enhanced by the information that the domestic had managed to put a sedative in the employers’ food. As the family slept, she escaped with all of the valuables.

According to Blanchet (1996:115), the two main reasons cited by employers for locking in domestics are: (1) to prevent theft; and (2) “to prolong an unquestioning acceptance of the employers’ rule and authority.” Employers isolate their domestics to prevent them from contact with other people who may help to realize their exploitation. Blanchet conducted a study of child domestics in Dhaka that involved several visits with households. Here is her explanation of how employers controlled their domestics:

Young maid servants and rural women newly arrived in the city are purposely confined and isolated to prevent their ‘eyes opening’ (chok phutano). Employers will do anything so that the stage of unquestioning acceptance of their authority and control is prolonged. For employers, the ideal servant should be grown up enough to understand work, but innocent enough not to challenge orders, rebuke and punishment. Many children are forbidden to talk to other servants so that they will not compare their working conditions and find that they are disadvantaged in relation to others. They are prevented from developing any alternative support network so that they remain totally dependant on their employers. Employers do not want servants to spread tales about what goes on inside the four walls of their homes. (Blanchet 1996: 115)

This quote supports my argument about employers’ lack of desire to help domestics realize agency. It also supports my finding that employers are reluctant to send their domestics out into semi-public space, but for a different reason. For the employers involved in Blanchet’s research, the fear was that domestics would compare their

⁷⁴ ‘Lakh’ means ‘one hundred thousands’. ‘Tk’ is the abbreviation for ‘Taka’, the Bangladeshi currency. In May 2007, Tk 8 lakh was approximately 11,590 US Dollars.

situations and realize that others' working conditions were better. The employers in my study emphasized their child domestics' lack of safety and the risk of bad influences in semi-public and public spaces.

The 'self' included as the 'problem' in the discourse

In discourse analysis the authors of the discourse are referred to as 'self', as the author reflects upon and writes about the 'other'. The 'other' in this case is child domestics. In the previous three sections we recognized the problem of abuse and violence meted out to child domestics. In this section I wish to explore the extent to which the authors of the discourse, i.e., the 'self', are aware of their own behavior and the problems they create. In order to answer the question of whether the 'self' is included at any time as the 'problem' in the discourse, I analyzed both interviews and newspaper articles. Very few employers reflected on employers' negative behaviors towards their domestics. Two of the male employers did. One stated that many child domestic workers are not as lucky as his, because many are beaten mercilessly by their employers. The other employer told me some horror stories about employers' treatment of child domestics in his own neighborhood. I paraphrase his comments here:

If I had not seen what happened in that house I would have no idea about what happens around here. I know the man who brought the girl to them to work for them. One day I heard screaming and another day I saw that the girl had wounds from burning several places on her body. I rang the doorbell at their house but they did not open, so I called the police. The husband and wife were arrested, but they bailed themselves out.
(Male employer of a 16-year-old female domestic)

It is common to hear stories about employers either bailing themselves out of prison or paying their child domestic workers for not going to court (Ahmed 2006; Amin, Hussain, and Islam 2005; Amin 2004b). The employer told me about another household:

One of the apartment owners in this building is a police officer. His maid's father visited her together with his brother, and then they went back to the village the same day. The next day, her employer said that 7,000 Taka⁷⁵ was missing from his bedroom, and he blamed the maid's father even though he had not been in the bedroom. The employer commanded his maid's father to come at once, and when they came, the employer forced him to confess that he had taken the money. Many people heard the shouting and went there to ask what was going on. I was one of them. I asked: "Are you totally sure that they are the culprits? They do not look like thieves – you can see it in their eyes." Then the owner said to the domestic's father: "Your daughter also says that you are the one who took the money." The maid was there, and she said: "Yes, my father took the money." Then I said: "You do not need to keep her as a domestic any longer, just let her go". Her father said: "OK, if you say that we have taken the money, we will pay, even though we are innocent. We will pay the 7,000 Taka, but we need some time to sell our land or some animals, so that we can give you the money." I understood something was wrong, so I followed them down the stairs. Her father asked her: "Why did you say that I had taken the money?" His daughter replied: "He had threatened me with a pistol, so what could I do? I knew you had not taken the money!"Later I arranged a meeting with everybody in this building. I told people: "We are humans, therefore we must show humanity. We must lead our lives in a civilized way."

(Male employer of 16-year-old female domestic)

What this story shows is that the employers' discourse is not uniform. Some employers are willing to turn their back on their own class interests and speak about the abuse of domestic workers. I found it very interesting and encouraging that this employer had actually organized a meeting in his apartment building about these incidents. He wanted

⁷⁵ In May 2007 7,000 Taka equaled approximately 100 US Dollars.

to obtain some redress or justice for the victims. It demonstrates a new level of consciousness about employers' responsibility both to their own child domestics and about monitoring what happens with domestics in the local community. I spoke with a few other employers who had attended the meeting. They were disappointed to hear about these incidents and were glad to have the facts put on the table and to talk about it in a meeting.

I now refer to newspaper articles written by potential employers⁷⁶ who, through these writings, are trying to enlighten other employers about the rights of their child domestics. This first quote provided here is a comment printed in the "Letters to the editor" section of *Daily Star* on August 3, 2006. It was a reaction to the news about several female child domestic workers who had been tortured and/or killed by their employers recently. The title was "Tortured children":

When will the news media start talking about abuse of children? We must, as normal human beings, not let children work as domestic helps. We Bangladeshis try to picture ourselves as most caring and family oriented people. Actually, we are the most ruthless humans who have no sympathy even for little boys and girls. (Chowdhury 2006)

Another potential employer wrote a long article on the torture and death of several child domestics. I referred to a part of the article when I discussed the vicious cycle of violence.

Several disturbing trends can be discerned from these crimes. One, domestic workers are little more than slaves especially if they are minors and more so if they are girls. The notion of child rights are nowhere in sight. Second, the perpetrators are usually educated, respected in society

⁷⁶ By "potential employers", I mean people who from their writings sound like they have employed, are employing, or at least live among people who do employ child domestics.

and so have the means to influence the legal proceedings so that they can go scot-free. The fact that so many such incidents have occurred where the domestic worker was either mutilated or killed by the senseless torture indicates that there is a tacit acceptance of abuse of domestic workers among the privileged classes: *Of course you shouldn't kill them, but there's nothing wrong in giving them a few kicks and slaps to discipline them.* The topic of many conversations between housewives is about domestic maids and how they give their mistresses a hard time. Very few conversations centre on the services that these housemaids perform and how such help can be aptly awarded.

The most disconcerting fact, however, that comes out of all this is that many among us are sick, depraved and sadistic. By any psychiatric evaluation standards, individuals who continuously torture other individuals, who can burn someone's back with heated utensils or scald someone's face with an iron - these people cannot be considered 'normal'. (Amin 2005)

In a letter to the editor, an employer reflected on the recent death of a child domestic:

We all employ domestic help in Bangladesh and behave more or less the same way as this family who killed Putul, only in our case we stop short of the actual killing. Most of us who read newspapers and happen to live in Dhaka would know what I am saying. In most of the houses where domestic help is available, age is never taken as a factor in employing and underage minors are working without any legal prohibition. We who read such editorials and feel sorry about such deaths, all, in some way or other collectively subscribe to what has happened to Putul. Although there are no statistics available, domestic help constitute one of the largest workforce in our cities and in Dhaka, they outrank all other groups like rickshaw pullers, auto rickshaw drivers, etc. Yet, these domestic help have no organised strength to seek their minimum needs for gainful, decent and humane employment. They are literally at the mercy of their employers.

We who read an editorial such as the one under review are collectively responsible for what this family did in Khulna. Our treatment of the domestic help sustains and encourages some amongst us who have less self-control to cross the limit and commit murder.

We should begin by thinking that the domestic help are not slaves but humans and give them the dignity and the respect that God has given them by making them the same *ashraful maqluqat* (God's greatest creation) as us who employ them. We can for a start give those we employ at least a day off a week for themselves and ask our children not to call domestic helps by their names and without courtesy. (Ahmed 2004)

These newspaper articles have demonstrated how some employers do include the ‘self’ (i.e., the employers) as a problem in their discourse on childhood and child domestic work. They feel shame and are suffering from their conscience as they recall several employers who have tortured and killed their domestics. Now they urge their fellow middle- and upper-class citizens to behave in a more civilized and humane fashion, arguing that the “tacit acceptance of abuse of domestic workers among the privileged classes” (Amin 2005) must come to an end.

Power/knowledge in the employers’ discourse

In chapter 2 I raised the issue of power/knowledge in discourse. I did that in a rather general way. Here, I wish to retrace the issue of power/knowledge as it specifically affects the employers’ discourse. I proceed through several elements that reflect how power/knowledge works through the employers’ discourse. The most salient concepts belonging to the employers’ discourse are benevolence, surveillance, discipline, and punishment. Several questions from the power/knowledge discourse theory framework explained in chapter 2 are answered directly and indirectly in this chapter. I now address the remaining questions.

Is the discourse codified, and if so, by whom and for what purpose? All subdiscourses of the employers’ discourse are not codified. The subdiscourse that may be most powerful is not codified; this is the subdiscourse that deals directly with the child domestics’ life and work. It is the subdiscourse created by employers’ thinking and talking about, and behaving with, child domestics. I demonstrated three ways in which

the employers' discourse is codified: first, by journalists who have described incidents of extreme violence against child domestics in order to show the seriousness and extent of employers' physical punishment of child domestics. This subdiscourse describes behavior that I as a researcher do not have the opportunity to observe because participants in the research will restrain from extreme violence like this in a researcher's presence. Second, the employers' discourse is codified in newspaper articles and letters to the editor, written by employers (actual or potential) in an attempt to increase awareness among fellow middle and upper class citizens about rights that the children have. Third, the employers' discourse is codified by NGOs who write reports and brochures about the unique and potentially hazardous work situation that child domestics are in, and about positive experiences they have from working with employers, whereby they attempt to raise awareness about school programs, employers' groups and child rights. These two last codifications can be seen as protagonist subdiscourses because they focus on actions that should be taken by employers in order to improve the situation for child domestics.

Is there intertextuality between the different subdiscourses within the discourse?

The salience of culture and traditions is a common thread in the different subdiscourses of the employers' discourse. In the non-codified subdiscourse, culture and traditions are used to defend the system of keeping live-in child domestics, by pointing at how ingrained it is in the social structure, and that it is good for the poor children to stay with wealthier families. In the codified subdiscourses cultural attitudes are seen as problematic because they may lead to violation of child rights for the poor children.

What topics is not part of the discourses and why are those issues omitted?

Human rights are almost non-existent in the employers' discourse, apart from the

subdiscourses where employers try to enlighten other employers about child rights. The reason for this omission is that if all rights of the child domestics were to be fulfilled, it would be difficult to keep them in the job. I demonstrated this in the section on how material conditions have constituted the discourse; the employers' discourse has an important function in justifying the continued existence of the availability of child domestics. It is for instance difficult to combine live-in child domestic work with successful school participation, and with the right to privacy. Rights are not readily compatible with child domestic work.

Jeremy Seabrook, in his book “Children of other worlds: Exploitation in the global market”, describes the silencing of human rights violations against child domestics in Bangladesh and how it remains because it benefits the powerful:

Dhaka is full of these silent, unobtrusive waifs, without whose ministrations the lives of privilege would be laborious indeed. Yet their employer spend much time complaining of their slowness, their dullness, their unreliability and inability to follow simple instructions. It is astonishing how unnoticed evils may remain, how taken for granted they may be, while they serve the interests of the powerful. (Seabrook 2001: 102)

Many employers have no sense of the intrinsic meaning of human rights. Here is one example that demonstrates this: A social worker that I interacted with in a meeting for an “Active Employers’ Group”⁷⁷ told me and the other participants about her

⁷⁷ The national NGO Shoishab organizes “Employers’ Groups” and “Active Employers’ Groups”. In the “Employers’ Groups” all members are employers of child domestics who gets non-formal education at one of the learning centers organized by Shoishab. The “Active Employers’ Groups” exist of stakeholders from the local community, i.e. from the ward. In the “Active Employers’ Group” meeting I participated in, there were four female teachers from different Shoishab learning centers, a female social worker, a male member of the public school committee, a male public school teacher, a male banker, a male religious leader

neighbor. Her neighbor had provided education for her child domestic for many years, but now the domestic had run away to work in a garments factory! It was clear from the way she talked that she, as well as the employer, was very upset about this. Apparently the education of the domestic was meant to benefit the employers, so when the domestic herself decided to utilize her education for her own benefit, the employers felt that the domestic had cheated them. This illustrates that some employers do not see education as a right for the child but as a welfare service meant to have positive consequences for the employers and maybe for the children as long as the child stays with them, not for the children in itself or for itself.

What kind of knowledge is demonstrated through the discourse and what is the relationship between knowledge and power? The knowledge that is prevalent in the employers' discourse is the traditional Bangladeshi middle class knowledge on how to discipline workers and how to discipline children. When this knowledge is used in combination it becomes a powerful constellation of control. This was demonstrated in using the metaphor of the Foucauldian panopticon where the child domestics feel that they are surveilled by the employers at all times. Employers' use of disciplining methods and physical and verbal punishment has also been demonstrated in this chapter.

What behaviors and identities are established as normal and natural and what behaviors and identities are established as unusual, marginal or unnatural by the discourse? The behaviors and identities established as normal by this discourse is that the working child should be in full compliance with all rules set forth by the employer. The

('huzur'), a female lawyer, and at the top of the hierarchy: the female Ward Commissioner. These stakeholders may or may not be employers of child domestics.

child should be docile and subservient. Therefore, showing any signs of own will is constructed as unnatural behavior. “Any demonstration of hope, ambition or unwelcome initiative on the part of the domestics is perceived as audacity.” (Rahman 1995: 15). In other words, in the employers view, the child domestics should not have agency. They should never go against their employer, and they should never talk back. I experienced such attitudes in a middle class household I lived in for nearly five months ten years ago where the employer blamed me and my husband for having increased the self-esteem and agency of the female domestic to such an extent that she had started talking back to her employer and dared to refuse doing some of the chores she was commanded to do. The employer blamed us for having showed too much sympathy for her domestic and for having made her difficult to deal with. In our view, we had just treated her domestic with respect. We had for instance told her domestic that it was no crises for us if the laundry had to wait for some days when she was extremely busy with other chores, and we had done the laundry ourselves from time to time. We had showed a little sympathy with her for her work overload, and we had questioned the way that the employer treated her. That was too much to take for the employer.

Khair (1998) has also observed this urge for keeping class divides intact:

Domestic service engenders unequal distribution of power and segmental interaction that serve to reinforce class consciousness. Consequently within the intimacy of the household, the perceived need to strengthen the class lines demand that some form of distance be maintained between the employer and the employee. This ideology sets domestic servants apart from their employer. (Khair 1998: 2)

In the employers’ discourse it is predominantly the employers’ own agency that is enhanced, and not the child’s, although I have pointed out that some employers are

concerned about the human rights of their child domestics. Such employers open up for the agency of the child domestics and NGO workers who can help the children fulfill their rights to social participation, school participation, and their best interests in general. In chapter 2 I focused on how Foucault's concept of non-sovereign power can increase an understanding of the relationship between employer and domestic worker. I used a quote by Waitt (2005: 174) where he wrote:

[...] power is conceptualized to operate through discourse in which social relationships between individuals are negotiated. It is these negotiations of how the individual is positioned to the discursive norms that has the potential to be disempowering through compliance, or empowering through resistance.

I have demonstrated with this chapter that the domestic's positioning relative to her employers' is predominantly "disempowering through compliance" (ibid.). In the next chapter I will show how the child domestics sometimes turn this around by using negotiations of position to be "empowering through resistance." (ibid.).

Chapter 6

The child domestic workers' discourse on childhood and child domestic work

This chapter contains an analysis of the child domestic workers' own discourse on childhood and child domestic work. The purpose is to provide a critical ethnography of child domestic work. Here, I discuss child domestic workers' opportunities to participate in society and for agency. The focus of the analysis is on the children's own voices, so included here are lots of quotes, two short life stories written by child domestics, and a few of their drawings with my comments. I also include an analysis of child domestic workers' use of public, semi-public, and private space.

Child domestics' discourse is the most interesting discourse because it is the least known. The subject and object of the discourse are the same: child domestic workers. In other words, the authors of the discourse and the people they are thinking and talking about in this discourse are the same. The geographical scale of the child domestics' discourse is the household and the local community. This discourse is not available in codified form; it is inscribed in silence. It is created by child domestics alone; when gathering together in private and semi-private spaces in the apartment building where they live; and, for a few, public spaces like schools. My findings show that the children's discourse is reactive. Child domestics come together and share their experiences,

frustrations and sorrows, but also their joy and contentment. In other words, the child domestics' discourse is not a proactive discourse in which they try to figure out how they can gain access to education or make the employers treat them better. They get together whenever possible in semi-public spaces like the stairways and the rooftop, where they can enjoy their childhood away from the employers' gaze.

How are child domestics constituted by their own discourse?

The child domestics' identity is a product both of their familial social relations and their role as child domestics. Their identity seems to be linked more to their families and relatives than to a consciousness of individual identity. For example, a 16-year-old female domestic told me that she felt sad because her little sister had just gotten married. When I asked her why she was not happy for her sister, she replied that the eldest sibling is always supposed to get married first—in other words, having the younger sibling marry first is just not how it is supposed to be. “Now people will think it is something wrong with me! Because why am I not married?” When I prompted her more, she said that she did not really feel ready to get married herself—the important thing was what people would think and say about her.

The child domestics seemed to be proud of the fact that they worked and thereby helped themselves and their families. They had some agency to the extent that they could, through their own acts, contribute to their own and their families' well-being. Within their employers' home, however, they do not have much agency. This is elaborated upon

later in this chapter, in the description of the panopticon-like situation in which they are trapped.

One of my female participants said proudly that all three of her elder sisters were married, and that her younger brother could go to school because she was working. Some of the girls explained that working as a domestic is respectable work—it does not damage your marriage prospects because people back in the village will not say negative things about these young women. But those who work in a garments factory or similar situation might have negative things said about them—such work is sometimes associated with “loose” character. This was reported by some employers. Secondary sources on Bangladesh and other poor countries show that parents also view domestic work as a safe environment (Bass 2004: 155, Seabrook 2001: 99). One of my child participants said, “I cannot stay in my village—the environment is not good there” (interview with Meena, July 3). It is a common apprehension that girls lose respect if they work outside in public space. One repercussion may be difficulty in getting married (Huq 2003: 38). For these reasons, child domestics feel that although the job may be difficult and the employers complicated to deal with, at least they do not have a bad reputation as a result of their employment.

The child domestics seemed to be proud of the work in itself—the fact that they play an important role in their employers’ lives due to their work. For instance, Abdul—an 11-year-old male domestic worker—looked proud when he went to his employers’ nearby shop every day with lunch and tea, and when he sat at the entrance of the shop, greeting the arriving customers. Whenever he was at his employers’ home, he seemed to be happy to take care of the baby, who also loved him very much. Reflecting again on the

influence of my presence on the participants and the situation in which the research takes place, the main reason for Abdul's pride could have been that it was fun for him to show me his work. But it was my clear impression after having spent many hours in his employers' household that both he and the other child domestic who worked in the same household were really happy with their employers and their work tasks.

Their identity is closely linked to their role as child domestics. This is not surprising since they are constantly reminded of their status—directly and indirectly—by employers, employers' children, and employers' visitors and neighbors. To illustrate: one day I sat with a 4-year-old girl, Chhanda, from one of the nearby apartments, on my lap. Chhanda touched my collarbone and asked: "What is this?" I answered that it is a bone. Then she touched many different bones in her body and said: "This is a bone, and this is a bone, and this is a bone..." Saleha, the 14-year-old girl domestic who accompanied Chhanda, commented that the girl is very intelligent. Then Saleha said to me, my husband and our 14-year-old daughter, with a smile on her face: "You know what Chhanda said the other day? Her little sister asked me: Why is your salwar kamiz⁷⁸ torn? And Chhanda answered: "Don't you understand—that's because she is a kazer me"⁷⁹—that's [the reason] why she does not have so good cloths!". Saleha did not seem to mind the way Chhanda stated this fact—she rather seemed to find it amusing that this way of thinking had already been picked up by her employers' 4-year-old daughter. Child domestics learn to look at themselves as inferior because that is the way they are treated.

⁷⁸ The traditional outfit that girls and many women use in Bangladesh. It is a tunic over a pair of wide trousers. All female domestics use this outfit, except for pre-puberty girls who often use only a dress.

⁷⁹ Bangla for "female child domestic" - or literally "kitchen girl".

Another story illustrates how child domestics' identity becomes very different from the children of the employers: One day I attended a birthday party in the party locale of the building where we stayed. It was a big party with over 60 guests, and the birthday 'child' was the 20-year-old daughter of an employer of a 16-year-old girl domestic. Some of the child domestics in the apartment building attended the party. However, they sat in a separate row of chairs in the back of the room, and when all the other children gathered around the 'birthday child' to sing 'Happy Birthday' and cut the cake, nobody asked the child domestics to come and join them. I felt terrible and did not know what to do. Nobody else seemed to even notice. This was early in my fieldwork and I had to be careful not to lose access to employers of child domestics. So I did not encourage the child domestics to take any active part in the celebration, but I sat down and talked with them for a short while. None of the middle class people I talked with later seemed to understand why that incident was anything to be upset about. After all, the child domestics had been allowed in the party, and they had gotten the same food as the other guests! This was just one of many incidents that taught me how the identity of child domestics is developed. Not only are they deprived of any birthday celebration for themselves; when they go to a birthday party they may not even participate like the other kids!

Child domestics sometimes revealed through their communication their fate to take the role as a domestic and belief that they cannot do much to change their situation. This way of thinking is closely linked to a common layman interpretation of the concept of 'fate' in Islam: God has predestined most things for you—there is not much you can

do to change the major outcome. An example can be seen in this quote from a 14-year-old female domestic:

NK⁸⁰: Have you thought about your future at all?

Rahima: What is there to think? (Laughing) Whatever fate has for me—that will happen. If my fate has happiness for me then I will be happy, if it is only misery then be it.

But at the same time, most of the child domestics seemed to believe in education's potential for positive change in their lives:

NK: Try to think what you would do if you got a chance to get education, and got a chance to work in a good environment like the household you are working in right now⁸¹, and got a chance to work in a garments factory...out of the three options which one would you choose?

Rahima: Can you repeat the options again please?

NK: School, working as a domestic in a good place, garments factory.

Rahima: School is the best.

KBJ: Why?

Rahima: I may have to sign a paper; I have to sign it without knowing what it is about. I will not understand what it is saying because I have no education. If I go to school I will be able to read a paper before signing it.

KBJ: If you have education what will your dream [about the future] be like?

Rahima: My eldest sister always had a dream that she will make me educated. She was a teacher in a pre-school, she taught children in KG⁸² and Nursery class⁸³.

NK: Your sister was a teacher?

Rahima: Yes. She always dreamt that she would not get married and take care of her sister. She dreamt she would put me in school; I would get a good education and become a doctor some day. Before

⁸⁰ NK stands for Naser Khan, my husband, who was my interpreter in many of the interviews with the children, and sometimes he was more like a research assistant because I gave him freedom to ask questions, especially when I was interviewing children who had dialects that was difficult for me to understand.

⁸¹ Rahima had said just a little earlier that she was very satisfied with the people she worked for and several rules they had, like the fact that she can eat as much as she wants, when she wants.

⁸² KG stands for Kindergarten, which is one year of pre-school before the children can start in grade 1.

⁸³ Nursery class is usually for the youngest children who are not yet old enough to go to Kindergarten.

she died she asked me to go to my father if I could. “My stepbrothers were going to school; maybe father will send you to school as well” she said; one day when I become a doctor it will fulfill her wish. I said I will try, “I will try to become a doctor and fulfill your wish, but if I fail and cannot be a doctor there is also nothing I can do about it.” (Female 14-year-old domestic worker, July 2, 2005).

So although she believes in the positive potential of education, in the end it is fate that will decide whether she will reach her ultimate goal of becoming a doctor. Rahima had gone to school for four years in her village.

Meena, a 16-year-old female domestic, said that although she is doing respectable work that does not damage her reputation, she would need to return to her village to learn the things she needed to know before marrying. I did not understand which things she meant since I had heard and read many times that domestic work is seen as a good way to train for a role as a future wife. So I asked:

KBJ: Such as?

Meena: Such as how to maintain the house—I mean how to fix the cowdung and the soil—you know after the rain—you need to mix cowdung and soil and fix it so that the walls do not fall apart. (Female 16-year-old domestic worker, July 3, 2005).

Meena seemed to be happy that she had been able to work for a few years for a wealthy middle-class family in Dhaka, staying safe and healthy and learning some new skills. But her identity was closely related to being a rural girl, and she felt that she was missing out on some of the important skills and experiences that she was supposed to have before she married in her village.

An important aspect of some of the child domestics’ identity was to see themselves as a burden on their families if they stayed at home with them. Many of the child domestics had a complicated family background. They told me about mean

stepmothers, stepsisters and stepbrothers that they had to compete with for scarce household resources, absent parents, a father addicted to alcohol and gambling, and several disabled parents. Some had lost one or more parents. All of these family stories affected the children's identity. In some cases they were one of the main breadwinners for the family. Rahima had the most complicated and painful family history of those I heard from child domestics. Due to her painful past she had much sympathy from her employers. I knew about her past before I met her the first time because her employer had told me about it. I had planned to be very careful in my conversations with her but she seemed to be eager to share her story. The most tragic event in her life had happened three years earlier when her sister had committed suicide. As a result of that, her mother had gone mad. Here Rahima explained the condition of her mother:

She sometimes does not eat, does not take bath. She is not well at all. She has lost her health. There is no close relative to take care of her now. She sometimes does not eat at all. If anybody tries to feed her, she will push away the plate. Sometimes she will just get up and go away. She does not stay at home—roams around. Sometimes she will be totally out of control, running amok—attacking people. Or sometimes she will just sit still in one place—hours together. She sits at the riverbank every day. Sometimes she sits on the street for hours.

(Rahima, female 14-year-old domestic worker)

Rahima's father had died long ago. Now that her elder sister was not alive, Rahima's nearest relatives, in addition to her mother, were an uncle and his wife. She stayed with them for some time, but she said she felt she was a burden for them. She could feel it by the way they talked with and treated her.

Rahima also shared the tragic love-story of her big sister with me:

NK: How did the boy cheat your sister?

Rahima: The boy's mother was a crooked lady. She forced her son to marry another girl. My sister felt very offended. She said she wouldn't be able to show her face in the society for shame. The boy came to our home the next day and told her that he had gotten married...My opinion is that if he had told us about it [that he had changed his mind and would not marry my sister] before, my mother would have been cautious, we would have been more cautious...My sister was deeply hurt and committed suicide... There were numerous rumors about her in the village. People would tell her that she was living with someone else and had a child out of wedlock. Everywhere every day people would say scandalous things about her. So finally she committed suicide. After her death police took her dead body for post mortem...Police asked to pursue a case against the boy if we pay them money. I said what benefit is there in pursuing the case—we will only lose the honor of our family.

Several Bangladeshi friends who later heard this story felt there was more to it than had been reported during the interview. Probably Rahima's sister was pregnant at the time of the suicide, since Rahima mentioned her sister's fear of the rumors about having a child outside marriage. A friend of mine who grew up in Bangladesh and who transcribed this interview for me told me that it seemed unrealistic for a girl whose family depended on her would commit suicide just because she was heartbroken.

Rahima told us that before her sister died, she had asked Rahima to take care of her mother. Now she felt the responsibility both for her mentally ill mother and for her own upkeep, since none of her relatives really wanted to take care of her. Obviously, such responsibility affects the identity of a child.

Sometimes the domestics daydreamed about a better life. One of my participants provided a fantasy-version of her life when I interviewed her. She said that she had studied up to grade four before she started working as a domestic. At the time of the interview, she was approximately 15 years old. She told me that she usually studied every evening from 6 to 8. The employers' adult daughter helped her. Her plan was to continue

going to school soon. She wanted to quit the job and move in with her uncle, who lived in an upper middle-class area of Dhaka. She described her family situation as follows:

KBJ: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Shaheeda: Yes, I do. My one brother is in America, another one in Malaysia and ...(hesitating), my one brother and one sister live in America. I ran away from home. I had a quarrel with my parents and left home. That's why I am working here. There was a boy who used to taunt me. I told my parents and had a quarrel with them and came here. After I came here I am studying now. I never wanted to interrupt my studies. Here my employers do not object. They let me do whatever I want.

KBJ: OK.

Shaheeda: My Mama [Maternal uncle] is a policeman. He lives in Dhanmondi. I will go there. (August 6, 2005)

Some of Shaheeda's statements seemed incredible. If her siblings really worked in the US and Malaysia and she had a relative living in Dhanmondi, it seemed very unlikely that she would choose to be a domestic worker. Once I met one of her employers and asked about her family background. My suspicion was confirmed - she had been giving me a dream version of her story. According to her employers, she is not interested in going to school, and they are too busy to teach her after work. Later, when we did a drawing activity, I found that she was not able to write anything at all, not even her name! When I asked her to draw whatever she wanted, she quickly and decisively chose the red crayon among 36 different colors. Then, quickly, she drew a flower. Then she stopped and thought for a long time before drawing each of the other motifs. Her drawing was at the level of a young child. It is here on the next page:

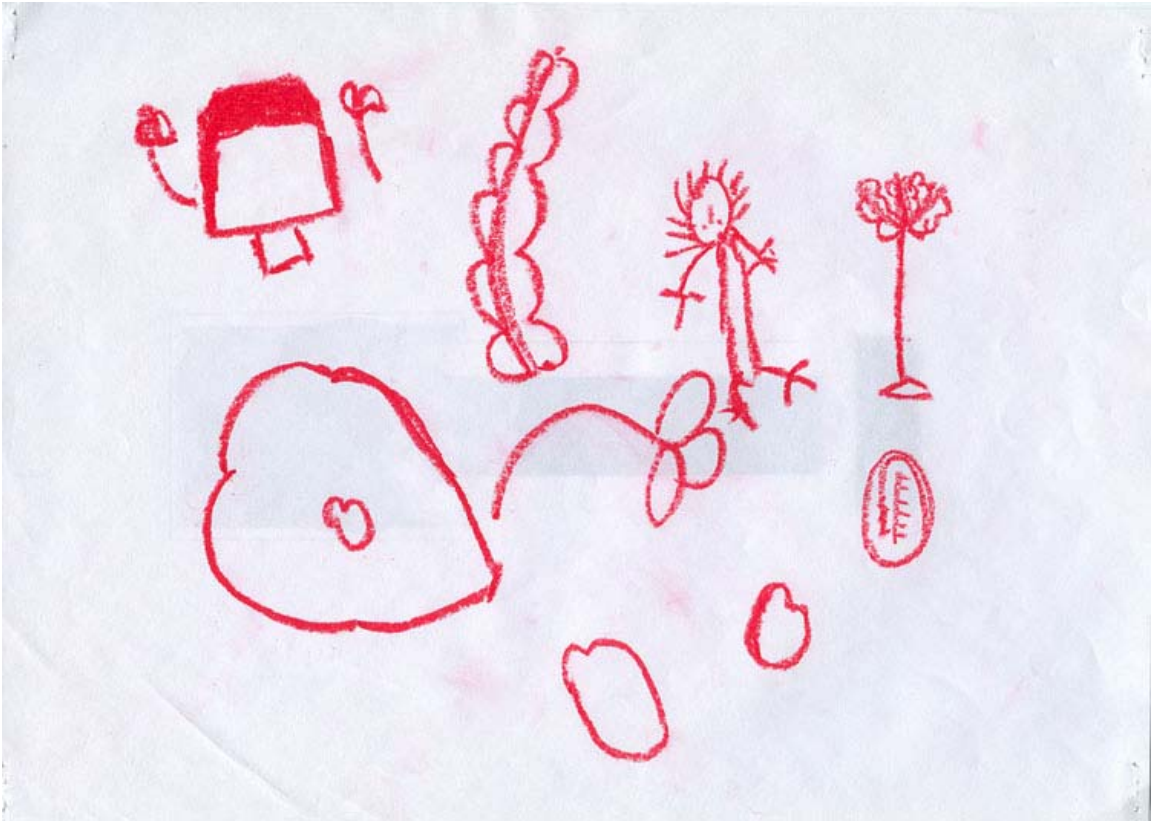


Fig. 6-1. Drawing made by a 15-year-old female domestic worker.

I find it amazing that this drawing is made by a child who is around 15 years old. When I asked her what she drew she told me that it is (from upper left corner and clockwise) a house with trees on the sides, a flower, a person (I asked “What is that?” and she answered “A person”. I asked “Any specific person?” and she answered “No, anyone”), another tree, a watermelon, an apple, a mango, a flower, and another flower in the middle. Reflecting back at my discussion in chapter 5 of another employer’s reactions to a drawing activity I did with her child domestic, I wonder whether Shaheeda has been allowed access to crayons and paper at all. The employers seemed to be a bit embarrassed

about the whole drawing activity, and I did not want to ask them directly about her access to drawing materials. Shaheeda's employers said that she had never gone to school in her village. She had said to me that she had gone to school for quite a few years, which may be true. In Bangladesh it is common that children do not learn how to read or write even though they go to school for several years. And skills not practiced regularly are gradually lost. Shaheeda had been in this household for three years.

Most of the child domestics' future dreams had to do with education, marriage, and going abroad. This was how Anju, a 14-year-old female domestic, talked about her future:

KBJ: What is your future plan?

Anju: I want to be educated. I want to have a good life. I want to become one of the respectable persons in the society. I wish to help others who are in need.

KBJ: That's very good.

Anju: I always try my best to help others. I wish to continue that in future. I will get married one day. I dream that I will teach my children; I will give them a proper life, a better future; that's why I am studying right now. I think education is very important. Here in Dhaka I feel that education is needed most. I like to study as well. I wish to become a good person leading a good life. I want to be a part of this society; I want to be welcome by the people living a decent life. This is all I want. (August 6, 2005)

The fact that she wished to "be a part of this society" clearly demonstrates that as a domestic she does not feel that she belongs to the middle-class society in which she lives and works. She therefore dreams of becoming respected among the people she works for.

Several of the children approached me with requests to help them find work in my country. Some of my participants asked me whether they could come with me to work in my home when I would leave Bangladesh. I tried to explain the impossibility of

immigration in a way they could understand. There is always the danger of giving research participants false expectations that their problems may be solved by the researcher (Jensen 2007).

I refer again to Helen Rahman, the founder of the NGO Shoishab. In a documentary essay she described the following observation of female child domestics and their “distorted sense of reality”:

Most of child domestics’ impressionable years are spent adapting to various family situations. For psychological survival, she has to subconsciously adopt several personalities. Her own hidden personality, when it finally can emerge, becomes distorted and sometimes abnormal. This distorted personality becomes an obstacle in leading a normal adult life. These girls repeatedly fail in adult relationships. (Rahman 1995: 36).

My experience is that many child domestic workers have low self-esteem. This stems from cultural norms within a stratified society based on wealth and education, where many people feel that they have greater worth than those below them in the social hierarchy, and this status must be demonstrated by the way they talk and act. Child domestic workers are among the most marginalized people due to their age and life in servitude. Their job is to always attend to other people’s needs, but not their own. This instills in them a feeling of inferiority. Low self-esteem, coupled with feeling intimidated by employers, hinders social participation by making it infeasible for a child to speak up for herself.

Child domestic workers' concerns: Lack of agency in life and work

The previous section demonstrated how child domestics are constituted by their own discourse about childhood and child domestic work. This section focuses on some of the concerns that child domestics revealed in their conversations and interviews with me. A common thread was the lack of agency: They did not have as much control over different aspects of their life and work as they would like to have had.

The relationship to employers

Child domestic workers are clearly concerned about the character of the people for whom they work. Several of the children told me that the most important thing about their work was to have 'good people' as employers. Both the employers' behavior and that of the employers' family members—kids, visiting relatives and so on—was a concern for some of the child domestic workers. In response to my question about what it means to be a "good" person, most children answered that a good person is one who is not easily angered and does not yell and beat them. Their answers indicated that they had experienced yelling and beating. Several children reported that their previous or present employers used bad or commanding language and that they feared being beaten if anything went slightly wrong.

The opportunity for each child to inform me of anything negative in her work situation obviously depended on whether we had a chance to talk without the employer listening. Some of the child domestics were content with their employers:

In some places there are men with bad intentions.... It is very hard to find a family like this these days.

(Female 16-year-old domestic)

I interacted with many child domestics outside the gaze of the employer, but only one told me that her employer sometimes used violence. Her employer had recently beaten the other child domestic worker in the household. As the beaten child moved away some days later (a move that was planned long before the incident), and as my informant assured me under four eyes that she has never been beaten herself, I did not report it to anyone.

I heard about a violent relationship between employers and a female child domestic in one of our nearest buildings. Three different sources gave me the same story. Here is what one of the child domestics told me about her, and her employers concurred:

She lives on the 9th floor. Her employer treats her very bad. They beat her off and on. If there is a bit delay in preparing breakfast they beat her. They do not give her [enough] food. They give her breakfast at 12 P.M. and lunch at 5 P.M.

(Female 16-year-old domestic)

They had friends who were neighbors of the abusing family, and they had talked with the violence-victim in the stairways. I informed a legal aid organization about what I had heard and gave them the exact address. The police went to the apartment with a female lawyer from the organization. Since both the child and her employer refused to discuss problems, and as the girl did not have any visible marks of violence right then, the police could not take her with them. The police knocked on all of the neighbors' doors and received confirmation from some of them, so they planned to send one person from the legal aid NGO back to that apartment again later to observe whether things seemed to be

normal. It is extremely important to be careful in such cases so that neither the victim nor those who have given the information will suffer. However, the organizations helping abused child domestic workers in Dhaka have much experience, so there should be no need to fear unwise steps from their side. At least two such organizations do both rescue children and offer them shelter, legal aid and education. The organizations are Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA).

One of my female participants told me about sexual abuse in her former work relationship. I never asked any of the children directly about abuse, but when I had a chance to talk with them without the employers present, I asked carefully about their treatment by their employers. Rahima shared her experience in working for her previous employers. She mentioned in an earlier conversation with me that she had run away from her previous employers because they had treated her “very badly”, and that the male employer had “bad character”:

NK: The place you used to work before you came to your Uncle's place, was the work pressure high at that place? I mean did you have to work very hard at that place?

Rahima: No, not that much. They had three rooms and a kitchen.

NK: Was it in Sylhet?

Rahima: No, not in Sylhet. It was near our home. Next village.

NK: How many family members were there?

Rahima: One daughter, their son used to live in his grandparent's home. The daughter was very ill mannered. And the husband—wife....

NK: So, was it the husband who had bad character?

Rahima: Yes.

NK: How old was the son?

Rahima: His son was grown up; he was supposed to give B.A. Exam

NK: The daughter?

Rahima: She was in class nine.

Kari: Was it difficult for you to run away from there?

Rahima: I did not run away [at once]. I was very quiet and lonely. I never went out or talked with other people. Sometimes I felt so depressed I would not eat. I would skip meals sometimes. The daughter used to treat me very ill. Whenever the electricity would go out, she would demand that I fan her constantly. Her mother would protest that, she would say [to her daughter], “Why should you need her to fan you constantly? Every one suffers in this hot weather. She lives alone. She has nobody in this world except God; all the time she is sad. Why do you bother her so much?” The daughter slapped me twice and kicked me. She took away my dress even. I never got a dress when I worked there. I had 10 Taka⁸⁴ with me. I took that money and left. Before I left I told Auntie⁸⁵ that I am leaving. Auntie told me, “Wait until your Khalu⁸⁶ comes”. But I knew what type of a person he was. Earlier I complained to Auntie that Khalu was making these types of approaches to me and was insinuating bad intentions. Auntie called up Khalu and told him “She is like a daughter to you. She may not be your own flesh and blood but she is like your own.” Khalu denied everything and he said he would never talk to me. At the breakfast table I served breakfast for everybody but the daughter never joins there. There would be only the three of us. Auntie would ask her daughter over and over again to come to the table. Khalu often would try to touch me at that time inappropriately. Auntie would get angry and ask Khalu not to do this. Khalu would stop then. But as soon as Auntie would leave the table he would make an advance on me. Then I would have to leave the table without finishing my breakfast.....The daughter never comes. She would have her breakfast after we were done. Once after breakfast I went to the kitchen and Khalu followed me there. He sat in the kitchen and asked me “Rahima,.....what are you doing?” (She said this slowly and in a disgusted manner.....hesitating...) I told him that I would tell everybody everything. I left home then. Auntie’s mother came three times and I told her everything..... Khalu came three times at our home to take me but I never went back. (July 2, 2005)

It was difficult to figure out the best way to respond to such confidences. I did not try to hide my empathy for her plight, but doubted that I should try to make her talk more about it. I chose a middle course in which I told her that if she wanted to tell me anything more

⁸⁴ In May 2007 10 Taka was approximately the same as 0.14 US Dollars.

⁸⁵ “Auntie” (used interchangeably with “Khala” in Bangla) refers here to the female employer.

⁸⁶ “Khalu” means “Uncle” in Bangla. Here it refers to the male employer.

I would listen, but I also tried to make it clear that she should never feel that she had to tell me anything.

We asked some more questions in order to understand how she had managed to escape:

NK: Did you have money when you left that place? How did you pay your road fare?

Rahima: I had 10 Taka. Khala - my employer's sister - gave it to me. She gave it to me so that I can buy something like some food that I fancy. But I never went out of the house. So I never spent it.

NK: Didn't they pay you while you worked there?

Rahima: No.

NK: They never gave you any money!

Rahima: No.

NK: How long did you work there?

Rahima: 3 months.

NK: How long ago did you receive the money?

Rahima: It is about a month ago.

Rahima: I asked for money before but they never gave me any. I had a book...a story book. I kept the money in that book. I did not remember about the money. Once I was sleeping after lunch. A vegetable seller came. Nobody was home at that time. I wanted to buy lal shakh⁸⁷, I liked lal shakh. I looked inside the book and found the 10 Taka note. But I changed my mind and did not buy shakh. So I kept the money and thought some day it may come handy. It came handy when I left the house.

NK: If you had spent that money that day you had been in big trouble. They never gave you money so that you could not leave that place. So you stayed there for only 10 Taka.....When they first employed you didn't they offer you any salary?

Rahima: They said I would work there for 3-4 years - then they will arrange a marriage for me. But I decided I could not stay there in that situation. Most of the time I was at home alone, there was no guarantee what might happen...whether I will get married or not but I decided to leave. My life and my honor come first. So I ran away and came back home. Every one at home scolded me very harshly for that, because I could not stay in my home.....I stayed with another family. My mother had a good relationship with that family. So I stayed there and did household work for them. (July 2, 2005)

⁸⁷ 'lal shakh' is one kind of spinach ('red spinach').

Rahima's statement demonstrates her difficult family situation: She cannot stay with her relatives because they make it very clear to her that they do not want her to stay with them, even when she has had a bad experience with her employers. Rahima had arrived at her new employers' home in Dhaka just some few days before this interview. She stayed in the same apartment building as us, and I visited her frequently. She seemed to be genuinely happy with her new employers. Here is her explanation of how the agreement about her new job was made:

NK: When you were employed here did they say any thing about your salary?

Rahima: Yes, they have told me. My Mami [maternal aunt] told her [my employer] that she thinks I will be fine at her place and she asked her how much I would be paid. Khala [my female employer] told her that she is an orphan child so I will pay whatever you ask me. My Mami said, "Take this child into your consideration and pay her as you think appropriate". Khala asked her to name the amount, she said "I will agree whatever amount you decide". So my Mami told her 500 Taka per month. Khala said "OK I will give her 500 Taka per month, but I will not give her the money each month. I will make a savings on her name where 500 Taka per month will accumulate. When she leaves my place for good she will get that money."

Kari: Have you been sick anytime?

Rahima: Yes, I have an illness. My previous employer - the place I worked for 3 months - was a doctor. Once I fainted and lost consciousness they promptly took me to hospital. The doctors at the hospital said that it would be costly to do the tests. So they did not do any tests and told me that my uncle will probably treat me and pay for the tests when I am home. My employer then told my Mama [maternal uncle] that I have a grave illness. I needed to be seen by a doctor. I had fever often, I did not have any appetite, did not have any energy, all the time I was sad, I sometimes get chest pain. My Mama said that he had no money; he could not afford to take me to the doctor. So my employer, who was a doctor himself, gave me some tablets. After taking the tablets I feel better now.

KBJ: Have you told your present employer about your illness?

Rahima: No I have not.

NK: Why not? They have free doctor; they will take care of you.

Rahima: Auntie's mother told me not to tell her. I have asthma. Auntie's mother told me not to mention it to her daughter. She told me that if I fall down or faint they would know about my illness eventually. She asked me not to tell it to Khalu [my male employer] even. "They have brought you

from so far; they will get upset if they know that you are sick.” I do not have appetite for any food. I have never let them know about it. They will be upset if they know about it.

KBJ: Now you are living in a high-rise building [where much fresh air comes in], I think you will feel better. It will get better eventually.

Rahima: Now that I am sitting here I still feel pain in different parts of my body. I cannot sit still in one place for long, I feel aches and pain all over.

NK: You can go to the doctor here.

Rahima: I did not tell anything to Khala, she might be upset.

NK: Do you feel better after taking that medicine?

Rahima: I feel better sometimes. But when I feel really sick nothing helps.

NK: Do you get asthma attack like this? (Mimicking laborious breathing).

Rahima: Yes, I also get whizzing (loud laborious breath sounds) and shortness of breath.

NK: Your employers are good people. Try not to work too much with water and not to catch cold.

Rahima: Yes, Khala told me not to work with water. I can wash clothes every other day. She told not to spend too much time washing. Wash 1-2 clothes a day. She told me she does not need all her clothes washed everyday, she has plenty, she will use them in turn. I can wash just 2-3 clothes a day, I can wash hers in one day, Munni's⁸⁸ clothes another day. In that way I will spend less time in washing and handling water. Khalu never lets me wash his clothes; he washes them himself. He said I already do too much time with water. So I wash only Khala's and Munni's clothes.

NK: Where do you sleep? On a bed or on the floor?

Rahima: I have a bed.

NK: That's good; if you sleep on a bed there is less chance of catching cold.

Rahima: Sometimes I have to sleep in Munni's room. She gets scared at night. I sleep on the floor in her room. I cannot sleep with her in the same bed, she moves a lot. Khala said Munni gets scared at night, so I should sleep with her. She put a mattress on the floor for me and made a bed.

NK: OK, if you have mattress then you won't catch cold.

Rahima: Khala said Munni will get used to sleeping alone in a few days, “Then you can sleep in another room by yourself.” (July 2, 2005)

The fact that the male employer washed his own clothes is, according to my knowledge and experiences, quite extraordinary. Perhaps the employers knew that Rahima had

⁸⁸ The employers' 10-year-old daughter

asthma and wanted to protect her from getting worse. Or perhaps they just wanted to protect her from getting a cold or from becoming too exhausted.

Panopticon in private space

Even with nice employers, as in Rahima's case, the panopticon situation described in the last chapter is obviously present. The following excerpt from the conversation with Rahima demonstrates her feeling of being restrained from doing things when alone, even though she knew she could:

KBJ: When you met Khala [the female employer] for the first time, what did you think of her?

Rahima: Good.

NK: What did she ask you at that time?

Rahima: She was very sympathetic; she heard that I have no one. She asked me to stay at her place for sometime. I can stay there as long as I like or leave if I don't. She explained everything to me. I will be on my own at her house, I have to take care of my self and do the work. Most of the time she won't be there to show me what to do, she is very busy with her job. So I alone have to manage most of the things. Munni [the daughter] and Khalu [male employer] will also be out most of the time; I have to stay home alone. She asked me repeatedly whether I will be able to stay alone at home. She said "if you can stay alone then come with me, otherwise I won't force you....You will cook for us. You will serve your Khalu and us, we may never query what you have eaten, and you have to take care of yourself. You will eat the same as us. I make no difference."

KBJ: Do you read the newspaper or books sometimes?

Rahima: I read sometimes. I read newspapers. Munni has lots of books, but I don't touch them. Nobody will say anything if I read those books, but why take the chance? I stay home alone. Munni goes to school, Auntie goes out, Khalu goes to office...alone I do all the work, I do the cooking, I eat, take bath, I serve lunch for Munni, Khalu and Khala. Then there is nothing to do; I just sit around.

NK: Do you read the newspaper at that time?

Rahima: Sometimes I read the paper; sometimes I just sit in the balcony. Auntie tells me repeatedly not to wait for them; I should eat whenever I am hungry. There is always something in the refrigerator, bread or something; I should help myself with whatever I like. No one will say

anything. Or sometimes if I am tired of sitting around I can always take a nap. Auntie said: “Your Khalu will always lock the door from outside when he leaves, so take a nap when you are tired of sitting alone. You can also read, you know how to read.”

KBJ: Which grade did you study?

Rahima: 4th grade.

NK: Did you open the book in front of you? (points at the book laying in front of her on Munni’s desk).

Rahima: No, it was already there.

NK: You should sometimes read books or else you will forget what you have learnt so far.

Rahima: Yes, I am forgetting some of my learning...I can read the books if I want; nobody will mind if I read.

NK: Yes, read the books and put it back in the same place, nobody will mind.

Rahima: I know, Auntie will not say anything. But I don’t do it; I don’t have the habit of touching other person’s belongings without permission. I just stay home - sit alone. Look outside through the window. Look what people are doing.

Rahima’s statement here is a prime example of the panopticon situation being experienced by many of the child participants. She knew that she was allowed to take food from the fridge at any time, even when her employers were not present. Still she was reluctant to take any and preferred to wait for her employers before she ate. She knew that she was allowed to read Munni’s books when Munni and her parents were out, but she did not want to touch them. Her confusion and feeling of constraint were clear when she contradicted herself: First she said that she was allowed to read the books, but a moment later she said, “I don’t have the habit of touching other person’s belongings without permission.”

Salary

Some of the children were concerned about the fact that they did not receive a salary. Others were concerned about the salary being paid directly to their parents, because they knew that their parents were not able to save anything. Child domestic workers who do not receive a salary instead receive food, clothes and lodging, which several employers think is enough. Among those who do get a salary, several were concerned about relatives' or recruiting agents' control over their salaries. For example, Meena, a 15-year-old girl, had an "uncle"⁸⁹ who regularly came to pick up her salary. He claimed to be her guardian since her father was sick, and that he was just "borrowing" the money until she married. When she protested, her "uncle" threatened to force her to change employers, which she was very reluctant to do. The current employer treated her nicely and did not overload her with work. But her agent wanted to make her work for a better-paying family. I told Meena that he could not bring her to another family without her consent, but she told me that he said that he was her guardian, as her father was sick, so she felt dependent upon him. Meena realized that she was too soft and that people took advantage of her. This is clearly stated in her last remark here:

NK: If you tell your family about your "uncle", he will no longer be able to take away your money. Because you have a future. Any one will understand that. Any body that would hear this will give you the same advice.

⁸⁹ Later I got to know that he is not even her relative—he is the agent who recruited her, and he is from the same village as her so that he knows about her vulnerability because of her family situation and he tried to take advantage of it.

Meena: Exactly. When Khalamma [my female employer] heard about it she was so shocked. She said he [my “uncle”] will never be able to return the money.

NK: That will surely happen.

Meena: He will just keep on giving excuses. Nobody in my village knows that he borrowed money from me. So if he denies it completely I have no way. I am not that courageous to confront him out front.

NK: That’s why I think your father should confront him. He will say “This is my daughter, you cannot take money from her.” Just because he [your “uncle”] found a family where you can work, it does not give him the right to take away all your money.

Meena: When I started to work here my father never took any money from me. My “uncle” took them all. He also made arrangements for many housemaids to work for different families.

NK: I think he is taking money from all of them.

Meena: No, others are not as naïve as me. I cannot say ‘no’. But others are clever. He cannot take money from everyone. (July 3, 2005).

This is an example of how the ‘self’ is included as a problem in the discourse. Meena knew that she was too soft and that people around her took advantage of her. She told us about a previous work relationship in which she had also lost her salary. That time it was her cousin who came and asked for money. On her own initiative she started talking about it:

KBJ: Do you ever go outside of this apartment complex?

Meena: No, I do not go out. I go out as far as the gate to trash the garbage. Khalamma [my female employer] used to take me out, now she does not have time.....When I was young I was very dull. I could not speak smartly; I could not understand the orders. I have learnt so much here. My “uncle” always thinks that I am stupid. That’s why he takes money from me easily. Last time he was here, he noticed that now I am asking him questions. He told me that I have become too smart now, I talk differently.....Everyone at home knows me; that I am very simple and naive. People always take advantage of it. When I worked for the foreigners they helped me a lot. They gave me money whenever I needed. My cousin took a lot of money at that time. He used to come and say that my mother was sick and take money from me. My parents never received a single Taka. He took away all my money like that. (July 3, 2005).

My research assistant and I encouraged Meena to talk with her employers about this salary problem and explain that she is strongly against the arrangement. She talked with them but at first it was in vain. The salary problem was finally solved when Meena's male employer visited his ancestral village—also the home of Meena's "uncle"—and let everyone know about the "uncle's" unreasonable behavior. This embarrassed the "uncle" enough to stop coming to claim Meena's salary.⁹⁰

In addition to cultural attitudes, sheer poverty restricts children's agency in the use of their wages. Most of the households that provide child domestic workers are extremely poor, and some are dependent upon their children's salaries for day-to-day survival. This is especially the case in female-headed households and those with disabled members, which was the reality for several of my participants.

In one household there were two girl domestic workers. One of them, a 17-year-old, recently moved home to her parents. She had managed to save her entire salary from working in the same household for more than a year. She wanted to avoid having her parents come to collect her salary each month, and for that reason she had not agreed to give them her employer's address in Dhaka. The other girl working in the same household was frustrated, because although she had been working hard for a year, she had no savings. Her salary was the same as for the girl who just moved, but her father had come every month to pick up her salary in advance, which meant she had no savings.

⁹⁰ This is only one of many stories I heard about the importance of pressure from relatives in the ancestral village.

Marriage

Due to cultural norms, early marriage is common among poor people in Bangladesh. Several of the female child domestic workers had very limited agency in decisions about their own marriage (Jensen 2007). Too early marriage, little agency concerning when and whom to marry, and the inability of fathers to pay enough dowry⁹¹ to get a ‘good’ husband are matters that many female child domestics are concerned about. The legal age for marriage in Bangladesh is 18 for girls and 21 for boys. However, there is no enforcement of the law, and 48% of girls aged 15-19 are married (Kabir 1999)⁹². Lack of birth registration restricts the children’s opportunity to prevent decisions to marry early. Parents often lie about their daughters’ age in order to marry them off before the legal age. A common trend among my participants was that they expected to get married in the home village after some years of domestic service in Dhaka. However, according to some researchers this trend has started to revert. “There used to be an expectation that girls in domestic service, or employed in garment factories in Bangladesh, would return to their villages for marriage; but this is happening less and less often, as indicated by the numbers who remain and marry locally” (Wright 2003: 414, based on Seabrook 2000). While I was in Dhaka, Jorina’s father suddenly called her back to the village against her will because he had decided to try to find a husband for her. Jorina, a female 16-year-old who seemed to be happy in her employers’ family, broke up with the employing family in

⁹¹ Dowry is illegal but widely practiced, especially among poor people.

⁹² Middle class and upper class girls usually do not marry until after they have at least completed a Bachelor’s degree. This means that it is the poorest girls who marry early.

Dhaka, whom she had known for many years, and whom she liked a lot. When I asked Jorina what she was going to do when she returned to her father's home, she told me that she would just stay at home, and she did not seem to be happy about it. When asked about further education, she said that she did not think that her stepmother would accept it, because she was the one who decided that it was time for Jorina to stop school and work as a domestic instead. Jorina did not know her own age, but her employer estimated it to be approximately 16. I asked her whether she wanted to get married now, and she gave me the same answer as I heard from many other young working girls in Bangladesh: "If they find a good person, [I want to get married], if not, I'll wait" (Jensen 2007).

While several girls told me that it was possible for them to refuse to marry if they did not like the man selected by their parents, some also said that their parents know what is best for them, so they will likely listen to them in the end. Thus, theoretically, a girl servant has some agency in the decision about whom and when to marry, but in practice the likelihood of her going against her parents is limited. Several of my female participants told me (in separate conversations) that they did not want to visit their village because their parents had started talking about marriage (Jensen 2007).

Another girl was frustrated because she knew her father would never be able to pay a good dowry for her. This meant that she would probably have to marry an illiterate person who might have some physical or mental problems or might be significantly older than her.

I have to get married some day⁹³. I know very well my father will never be able to arrange a good marriage for me. We are three sisters; he won't

⁹³ There is a strong social norm in Bangladesh that all adults should be married.

be able to arrange a marriage for any one of us. (Female domestic worker, 15-years-old).

In chapter five I wrote about two female child domestics who were dismissed from their jobs and sent back to their villages or rural towns. Rashida, one of my other female participants, was also sent home while I was in Dhaka. However, it had been planned at least two months earlier that she would go home around this time of the year in order to be with her family while they tried to find a husband for her. According to her employer, she was approximately 17 years old. Rashida's plan was to wait for a while and see whether any "good" men showed up. Then her one-year salary would be used for the dowry. If Rashida did not get married, she considered returning to Dhaka to work again, either as domestic worker or preferably in a garments factory, as that pays better than working as a domestic⁹⁴.

Another example of early marriage involved the granddaughter of the elderly housemaid working for one of the families in our apartment building. The granddaughter was getting married soon, even though her age was only around 13. Until recently, she had been working as a domestic in Dhaka, and I talked with her several times before she left for her village. According to her grandmother, as soon as she began to show interest in boys, her relatives began to feel it would be best to get her married as soon as possible before anything unwanted happened. Sadly the girl had been abandoned by her own mother, who remarried a man who would not allow his stepdaughter to stay with them.

⁹⁴ An entry job in a garment factory pays better than most child domestic jobs. However, when taking into consideration the need to pay house rent, clothes, and food, it is not necessarily a better option economically.

Therefore, the girl had partially stayed with her grandmother, and partially in employers' households in Dhaka. Even though not directly stated by her grandmother, the eagerness to get her married so early may also have stemmed from a desire to put the responsibility for her livelihood on someone else. This is a common attitude among poor people, and when the girl's biological parents do not perform their responsibility, this desire may be even stronger among the relatives (Jensen 2007).

Educational hindrances

One concern shared by many of the child domestics was their preference to receive more education. Most of my participants had gone to school for a few years before their families could not bear the direct or indirect costs any longer. Most would have liked to continue their education – preferably without working but, if that was not possible, would also have liked to combine education and work (Jensen 2007).

Many had gone to grade four or five, but then it became too difficult for their families to manage without their economic contributions, or, alternatively, their parents felt that they had received enough education. According to Jorina, a 16-year-old girl, her stepmother was the reason she had moved to Dhaka to work as a domestic worker rather than continuing her education after grade five. Her stepmother did not want Jorina to go beyond the fifth grade, nor did she want her to live with her and Jorina's father. The best solution under such circumstances seemed to be to get a job as a domestic.

Interestingly, of my 26 child domestic participants, all the 20 girls who did not currently go to school said that they would like to go to school, but the 2 boys who

currently were not in school were not interested in education. Obviously, these numbers are too small to make any generalizations. But they concur with the findings from my slum and squatter household survey in Dhaka in 1997: Girls were in general more interested in education than boys (Jensen 2000). UNICEF's survey of 1,066 child domestics found that 94% of the girls and 90% of the boys responded in the affirmative to a question on whether they were interested in attending a non-formal and skill-training program (UNICEF 2004: 68). ILO's survey of more than 5,000 child domestics found that 71% of the female and 73% of the male child domestics were "interested in non-formal education". Of the total of 5,092 child domestics, 34% (i.e. 1,731 children) said that they are able to study after work hours. 46% of those who studied attended NGO schools, 38% studied only in their employers' home, 13% went to formal schools, and 3% studied in religious schools (Khair 2004: 35). This means that 21% of the child domestics went to school (and almost 8% studied at home). This corresponds with the RCS survey of 1,920 child domestics, which found that 16% of the child domestics went to school while working as domestics (RCS 1999: 45).

Girl domestics that did not currently go to school told me that they would like to get more education, but they did not necessarily want to attain more of the traditional "book education". Several girls said that they would like to learn tailoring. They became so eager when we talked about this that I almost felt guilty for having brought up the topic without actually providing them with any tailoring material. One of the girls said that she knows how to read and write in Bangla, so if she got a chance to get more education she would prefer to learn some Arabic so that she could read the Koran in the

original language. She thought that would be good for the future so that she could give her children a religious upbringing.

The life stories of two female child domestic workers

Geographers have become increasingly conscious of power and identity issues related to doing qualitative fieldwork. Who should have authority in the research – the researcher, the participants, or both? How can authority be negotiated? How can we ensure that marginalized people who traditionally have not had influence over the research gain authority? Are we reluctant to share authorship with traditionally less powerful participants because of a fear of the text losing authority?

It is important to give participants who are usually not represented a chance to have their written and spoken words directly presented in academia. Especially in action-oriented research, it is crucial to listen to participants and report their information as authentically as possible. My reflections on the topic of authority and authorship led me to include many of the quotes in this chapter. Now, here are two life stories as written by child domestics. The first one has been shortened a bit, but the other one is presented in full. I agree with Eder and Fingerson, who stated that “we need to let children and adolescents speak for themselves in the data, as their language and speech are often marginalized in adult culture” (2003: 49).

Rupa's story

This story, written by 16-year-old Rupa, gives us a first-hand⁹⁵ view of her experiences and thoughts. Rupa's story illustrates many of the complex issues attached to child domestic work and participation in society, especially education:

[...] We moved to Dhaka with all the family members and my mother's younger brother. After three or four days my father started a business of raw materials. Mother and my uncle employed themselves in garments⁹⁶. After two months mother left the job. She thought that she needed to stay with her children to guide them, to give them proper education. She employed herself as a maid. Mother took myself and my sister to a school for working children. We got admitted there. There we got one teacher named Mina. And the book's name was "Learning while working". Mina apa⁹⁷ loved both of us, as we never missed any classes. It's not that we were eager to learn but that we loved to go to school because apa used to sing songs, rhymes, and play dramas in class besides teaching us the regular curriculum. So we were regular. We passed two years like this. In the meantime my mother took work in two more houses. I came to know that Mina apa was going to marry. I told this to my mother. The next day she went to school with us and asked apa about her marriage. Apa talked with my mother about her marriage. She also told her the name of the teacher as her replacement. The new teacher is her elder sister. Her name was Hashi. We took few classes with her. I didn't like her as she never sang songs, rhymes in class. So we left the school. Later mother admitted us to a new school which was better than that. It was Nayatola Chairman Lane Highschool⁹⁸. I went there for a few days. Later I found that I didn't like this school either! So we left that school too. My mother wanted to admit us to another school. But my sister didn't agree. So I couldn't be admitted. We left the home we used to live in and took another home. We stayed there for another two years. Mother employed us in one house as a maid. I didn't like working there as I didn't have any of my family

⁹⁵ The stories were translated from Bangla to English. Thanks to Sharmin Farzana Khan for timely and sincere translations. She has translated as directly as possible. This means there are some grammatical errors in the text that I did not want to correct, as I felt the authenticity of the text would have been reduced.

⁹⁶ 'Garments' is a common short form for 'Factory that produces ready made garments for export'.

⁹⁷ 'Apa' literally means sister. In Bangladesh the children address their female teachers as 'apa' and the male teachers as 'Sir'.

⁹⁸ In Bangladesh, 'Highschools' offer education from grades 1 to 10.

members with me. I was alone. And I need to work more than I was promised to do. I couldn't concentrate into my work. So my mother took the post of part-time maid in the same house. Thought I'd feel better. A couple of days later my elder sister came at night to take me. It was my elder uncle's wedding, so she came to take me there as everyone else was joining. But the employer didn't let me go with her. My sister tried to convince them and left when she failed. I was thinking that maybe my parents had sold me to them. Even though my sister left, mother could've come and taken me from them. I was lost in all these silly thoughts and at that moment mother came to take me. I remember I was so happy. They behaved the same with my mother and didn't want to let me go. Then we get into quarrel with them and I was released from that house forever! I felt like I'm a free bird. All these days I have been caged! We attended and enjoyed the wedding party and returned to Dhaka. My mother didn't let me work anywhere anymore. After a few days one apa from one school visited us. She talked about us with my mother. Both of them talked so that we can join school. Mother agreed. But my elder sister didn't want to join school rather she wanted to join garments and she was beaten by my mother. In spite of that she joined garments. She didn't study any more. I joined school alone. I found that it is a school for working children. One apa came and told that the school's name is 'Maloti'. Each week a doctor will visit us and we'll be shown video games. I liked her words. Later I started the school and also working with my mother in the same house she used to work. I used to help my mother there. One day I missed the school. I was busy with work. All my classmates and the teacher came to see me. I was overwhelmed. Two years have passed. Suddenly apa left us without saying anything. But before leaving she introduced us with another teacher. I didn't understand that she is leaving. We took our class with the new teacher, and we liked her. She had a nice name 'Surma'. Surma apa used to love me the way the previous teacher did. I studied up to class three over there. After I was done with the 'working children school' apa admitted us into SUF school. I wished good life for her. Now I'm in class six. My roll number is 2. I won't be able to express how much I like being here. Especially the training that we've been through those are really interesting. I learned so much from there. I developed better understanding towards life. I could make myself more conscious. The most important thing is I am teaching 40 students about life skills. I want to study more after I complete class eight. And I wish to work for working children later. I want blessings from all."

Rupa's story illustrates the vulnerability of a child domestic worker to her employers. Whether she has nice or cruel employers is an arbitrary situation. Most of the children in this research had been recruited via a family member or relative who knew the employer or the employer's relatives in the village or rural town where one or both of the employers' family descended from. This was no guarantee, however, that the employer would behave well with the child domestic worker. And even though the employers might be nice in the sense that they were not using physical or mental violence, they might still demand her permanent presence and not let her go to visit her family, even on important occasions such as weddings, as occurred with Rupa's employer. In other words, the employers in many cases felt that they owned their child domestic worker. This story illustrates the vulnerability and loneliness often felt by children who are separated from their families, having to live for long periods, often years, without the support and nurturing of their parents or other relatives. It is a common practice to lock child domestic workers in the house whenever the employers are away. This is obviously a violation of the children's rights, making their work situation similar to slavery (see earlier discussion of this practice in chapter 5). This is also true for many of the participants in this research. The employers said that they locked in their child domestic workers to ensure their security, but if a fire or other emergency situation broke out, a tragedy would occur. Some of the children told me that they did not mind being locked inside, as they felt secure in their employers' home and could watch TV and eat whatever they wanted to. Other children did not like the praxis at all.

Lack of stability in life, regarding family arrangements, living place, work, and education, are characteristic factors that were illustrated in Rupa's story. During my three

months in Dhaka, several child participants moved away from their employers. In two cases it was the employer's decision; in other cases, the parents called them home in order to find husbands for them. In chapter 5 we saw that one female child domestic aged approximately 14 was suddenly sent home to her village when her employer found that she had been roaming the streets without permission, rather than sitting on the rooftop with other female child domestic workers, as she had said. I happened to be sitting chatting with her employer when they found that she was missing, and by listening to their and their neighbors' comments about 'that type of girls' I learned a lot about attitudes towards female child domestic workers. I also learned that many employers are anxious about being held responsible for anything that might happen to their child domestic workers.

Other illustrative topics in Rupa's story include the importance of parents' decisions to protect their children and prioritize their education, as her mother did when she quit the job in the garments factory in order to look after her daughters properly so that they could get an education. Many poor parents, however, do not have any choice but to work full time to ensure at least the bare survival of the family, which is especially the case in female-headed households. And in many cases the parents' positive attitude towards education was not enough. The children's own interest in schooling often determines whether they continue their education or not. The dedication of teachers who provide a joyful classroom environment definitely contributes to the children's desire to attend school. This corresponds with the findings in the survey I conducted in slum and squatter areas in Dhaka about school participation among children (Jensen 2000). In Rupa's story we saw that attention from teachers and classmates when a student is absent

is important in making children and their parents feel appreciated. When I asked parents to state reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their children's school, several replied that they were satisfied with the school because the teacher visited them and asked about the child if she/he was absent for a day or two (Jensen 2000).

The life-skill training that Rupa mentioned had been organized by Save the Children Australia (SCA). Such training aims to increase the children's psychosocial competency by learning how to solve problems, make decisions, and think in depth and critically about a specific problem. They also discuss topics such as early marriage and dowry. One of SCA's aims is to make the children able to negotiate with their parents when needed (information received from Monira Ahsan, Deputy Country Director, SCA, 2005). Those who complete the life skills training now work voluntarily as life skills peer educators in their respective schools. I observed Rupa once as she taught her peers, and it was a delight to see how confident she was and how she managed to make some of the shy children participate in the discussion of problems they face as working children.

Shorna's story

In chapter 5, in the section titled "Employers' efforts at giving their child domestics access to education", I mentioned that a 17-year-old female domestic that I interviewed studied at home. She had managed to receive an education by studying in her employers' home and returning to her village twice a year to take exams. Her employer's father, who lived with them, helped her with schoolwork whenever she needed it. Twice a year she received ten days off to go to her

village to take exams. Her employers paid the 800 Taka needed so that she could take the exams each year. Here is her story:

My name is Shorna. I wished to get myself educated from my childhood. But there was no way to do that for me, as my father was poor. I like to read books. I like to study. But what can I do? I try to study when I can manage time. Nowadays uneducated people can do nothing. So I try to have education for the betterment of my future. I wish to stand on my own feet. But how? Getting educated requires lots of money. My parents also wished to give education to us. But fate didn't support us! My father had wealth but his uncles took all his money from him. They took them as my father was too young to look after them, when my grandfather died. Later my father tried to retrieve that money from them. Now we are so many brothers and sisters, we can't manage money. I wish to study more, but don't have money. So I study when I get time. If I could get a part-time job then I would work and study. I wish to do some tailoring. But these are all dreams. Days passed by and so did nights but my wishes remained wishes. Don't know when they'll come true. So, I like to read. But when I see that everyone is going to school, I wish I could also join them! When I left home I felt bad but when I left school I felt worst. Still my hopes are alive. If I get help from someone I will get my education. And if I can't get help, I'll try myself. I need to be educated to live. What do I need to do to get physical training? This generation is moving for work as birds move from one tree to another. Now people have nothing to do without consolidate others. I felt pain when I left my parents. But when I left school I thought why do I need to live? We don't have any rights! Later when I get attached to books, I thought I won't let my life go this easily. I started again. My parents also tried. Our house was on the bank of a river. And we lost that while the river was moving. All went under water. This was not the first time, not even the second, it was the 9th time this happened! This time my father didn't have money to build a new house let alone giving my education expenses. He asked for our forgiveness. How could I say that I want to study more? He told me that I would rather sell all my blood than to beg money from others! Now I wish to work and I'll earn enough to feed my family and I'll try to get them out from poverty. So I try to read whenever I get time. I wished to work when I came here in Dhaka. People do many types of work. But I tried to stay pure and honest. I remember when I was in school, in the lunch breaks we used to ask each other what we want to be in the future. Remember, I told that I don't have enough money, so I won't be able to make dreams come true. But I'd love study, for a better future.

This story demonstrates the potential for child domestics' agency in the employers' home, i.e., in private space. But such a possibility depends entirely on the employers' willingness to accommodate their child domestics' education. Shorna's employers were motivated to help her achieve her goal of getting an education. They seemed to provide what she needed to make this goal a reality. She needed both their understanding and the fulfillment of some material conditions. They gave her time to study, and she had her own, quiet room where she could go to study when she had free time. With the statement "My parents also wished to give education to us. But fate didn't support us!" she demonstrates the fate attitude that I found in many child domestics and which I wrote about earlier in this chapter. At the same time, she believes in education, and she feels responsible for the upkeep of her family, just like so many other child domestics: "Now I wish to work and I'll earn enough to feed my family and I'll try to get them out from poverty. So I try to read whenever I get time." (excerpt from the end of Shorna's story).

For a child domestic to be able to study in her employer's home it is not enough to have the motivation for education; support from the employers is needed both financially, practically, and mentally. Employers may feel that they have the right to command their domestics at any time of the day and night. This attitude is illustrated in the following quote from Helen Rahman's documentary essay:

Even when they have completed their assigned chores, such as washing clothes, cleaning the house, washing kitchen utensils, cooking and grinding spices, we still have power over the domestic workers' time. They cannot plan to utilize their "free" time according to their needs or wishes, because they are always on call for all types of small and large jobs, such as fetching a glass of water. They can be called at any time throughout the day or night; we own every second of their day. Even young girls can be woken up in the middle of the night for any type of job from providing

food for unexpected guests to helping to care for a sick baby throughout the night.” (Rahman 1995: 42).

I have observed this kind of attitude lived out in practice. For instance I have seen a 16-year-old employer’s daughter shouting at the domestic to come and pour a glass of water for her even though the water mug and glass was right in front of her and the domestic worker was busy in the kitchen. And I have seen domestics work almost non-stop from 5 am until over midnight for weeks when there are guests in the house. Because of the accepted nature of such attitudes, Shorna’s story stands out as an example of possible alternative ways of employing a live-in child domestic and at the same time respect her needs and rights for building a future through education. It is worth noting that Shorna is one of the girls that I purposely chose to include in the research because of her unique story. These two life stories are in no way meant to be representative for child domestics, since not many child domestics have the literacy needed to write such coherent stories. However, from my epistemological standpoint it has great value to get some stories directly from the participating children. Therefore this chapter has many long quotes from my conversations with the children. Researchers too often convey their own version of what a child has said. It is time to pay attention to the children’s own words.

Restrictions in and opportunities for child participation

The number of child domestics who already knew about the concept of child rights was surprising. I talked with the children individually about child rights. Some said that they had learned about child rights from TV, others from school. When prompted to describe child rights, most mentioned the provision rights, i.e., food, shelter, and clothing. Many also mentioned education. None mentioned social participation, and when prompted only a few of the child domestics knew what it was.

To this point, we have seen that child domestic workers have limited agency in decisions regarding their education and marriage, and the use of their salary. Before we look at other restrictions, as well as opportunities, for child participation, I present some working children's definitions of child participation.

Child participation – What is it according to working children?

In the national NGO SUF (Society for Underprivileged Families), I participated in a workshop on child participation that was attended by 26 children enrolled in schools for working children run by SUF and nine other NGOs in Dhaka. At the end of the workshop I asked the children to write a brief paragraph about their understanding of the concept of child participation. Only a few are cited here to illustrate the different types of answers:

Child participation is whether the child can do something or not. Whether they are getting recognition or not and whether they can give opinion or not (Girl, grade 5⁹⁹).

Participation is giving opinion and decision and making that true in reality (Boy, grade 8).

Child participation is something that lets the young people do whatever they wish and they are eager to (Girl, grade 6).

An interesting finding from the children's 25 answers is that most include the opportunity to express their opinions, and several also mention that those opinions should influence decisions and actions. Several of the children mention that adults should listen to and recognize the children's opinions. Another interesting point is that one of the children defined participation as being able to do whatever they wanted to do, whereas several other children mentioned learning about what they can and cannot do.

Semi-public space as thirdspace: The rooftop as a site of resistance

As described in chapter five, employers said that they locked in child domestic workers to maintain their security and ensure the safety of valuables. However, if a fire or another emergency situation occurred, a tragedy could result. Some of the children reported that they did not mind being locked inside, as they felt secure in their employers' home and

⁹⁹ The schools that these children participate in have a compressed curriculum so that they study two grades per year. For this reason and the fact that many working children enroll in school late and/or have irregular attendance, the grade that they attend does not necessarily reflect their age.

could watch TV. Other children did not like the practice at all. One of the few child domestics who was not being locked in said:

Here they trust me. When they go out to work they never lock the door from outside. They trust me - that is why they keep the door open. Besides where can I run anyway? (Meena, female 17-year-old domestic, July 3, 2005)

Meena did not want to go outside the apartment because she thought some of the other female child domestics in the same building did not have a 'good character'. Several child domestics never went to the rooftop, either because they did not want to or because their employers did not allow them to do so. Most of the participating child domestics did use the rooftop regularly.

In chapter 3, I explained the importance of the rooftop as a research site. In chapter 4, I mentioned that some NGOs use rooftops as access points for child domestics' education, and in chapter 5 I described how some employers have constructed the rooftop as a place where their domestics may get unwanted influence from other domestics. I now analyze the rooftop as an arena for children's resistance, participation in society, and temporary escape from the disciplinary gaze of the employer. Appendices A-D give additional text and images to illustrate the importance of the rooftops.

The rooftop of the apartment building I stayed in is quite big, as the apartment building has four large apartments on each floor. In one corner of the rooftop there is a garden where some of the residents grow flowers and vegetables in big flowerpots. Long clotheslines are stretched out; in between them, the children play. Domestic workers go to the rooftop to hang up laundry, to look after their employers' children as they play, or simply to chat and play with other child domestic workers. It was interesting to observe

that although most of the time child domestics would play with other child domestics, and employers' children would play with other employers' children, sometimes they also played across such class divides and obviously liked each others' company. A few times I saw girls and boys playing together but usually they would not. The girls played different games in which they ran around or played a pebble game. The boys usually played with a ball. The child domestics who used the rooftop had developed a wide contact network from spending time there.

I observed a lot of joy among child domestic workers who spent time on the roof chatting or playing¹⁰⁰. For some of the child servants the rooftop seemed to be the only place where they could enjoy their childhood away from the panopticon-like situation in their employers' home. The rooftop was therefore invaluable because they could play and talk freely there. Even though their employers might come and walk around for a short while, the children would most often be there alone. I often observed child domestic workers talking eagerly together. It was clear that this was a space that worked as an outlet for joy and frustrations. For the child domestics, the rooftop was a real space to play and chat, but it also was a site of resistance; an imagined space in which they could dream and look forward to being another person than a child domestic worker under surveillance of employers¹⁰¹. They could live out another part of their identity. One of the girls specifically comes to my mind. In the household where she worked she was very reserved and talked very carefully, in such a low voice that we could barely hear her. Her

¹⁰⁰ For some images of rooftops in Dhaka see appendices 1 to 4.

¹⁰¹ Foucault (1998 [1984]) with his 'heterotopia' concept and Soja (1996) with his 'thirdspace' concept have inspired my thinking on real and imagined space.

behavior was characterized by fear and hesitation. Her employer did not appreciate her work, which he let me know as she listened, and whenever I observed her with her employers she looked uneasy. However, when she was on the rooftop playing with other children and without her employers present, she looked very different. She ran around, yelling, shouting and laughing. It was joyful to see! Her facial expressions and her animated body language expressed a pleasant happiness and confidence, very different from that shown in her employers' home.

In my analysis of the importance of the rooftop I was inspired by Edward Soja's third space concept in which first space is the concrete materiality of spatial forms, second space is ideas about space or cognitive representations, and third space is both real and imagined space (Soja 1996). I use the concept of third space in focusing on how children and youth produce spaces of resistance. The rooftop is a concrete space¹⁰² but also a space where the child domestics can imagine themselves with another identity than the docile and disciplined worker in the employer's home. Referring back to Foucault's statements about resistance and power in chapter 2, resistance thus is negotiation of power relations, and the rooftop is the child domestics' most important point of resistance among multiple points of resistance, such as the stairways, where some of the child domestics can chat for a while if they are fortunate enough to be permitted to take a short break outside the apartment, or if they happen to meet other domestics on their way to another apartment while running an errand for their employer. Using Powers' (2001) terminology, which I presented in chapter 2, this part of the child domestics' own

¹⁰² Powers (2001) expression "physical, bodily space" which I mentioned in chapter 2 is another way of talking about the concrete materiality of space.

discourse is the subdiscourse of resistance. This subdiscourse enhances the autonomy of the child domestics.

My findings suggest that when child domestics have access to places where they can meet peers or other people with whom they can share their joys and frustrations, their quality of life is improved. It may also boost their self-esteem and make them feel they have accomplished some form of resistance against the disciplinary grid of their employers' household. One example that comes to mind is the female child domestic who told us that she felt her courage had increased by talking with us. She had felt that our conversations helped her confront her 'uncle' about his stealing of her salary.

When I visited one of the learning centers for child domestic workers that the NGO Shoishab runs on a rooftop in Dhaka, I asked the teacher to tell me about her experiences with the kids. She gave me long and very informative answers:

Teacher: The students here work in different houses; they face many problems. They left their parents to work here. I have many students here who felt very deeply about going to school while they were working in houses. They saw the children in that house go to school and they wished they could get that opportunity as well. So when they heard about this kind of school they were very happy to join here. For some, the employers were reluctant to let them come to this school. But they convinced them to let them come. They told their employers that they will work more and they will be able to work better if they are allowed to go to the school. Now they are here, they have learnt how to read and write. Previously they would just stare at a piece of paper; they could not understand what is written in it, or they would just look at the pictures in a book. Now they are able to read it. They are able to write letters to their parent. They can do arithmetic now. When they are sent to do the groceries they can calculate how much had been spent how much money remains. Their employers are also happy with this. When they go to some place they are able to read the addresses so they are able to go somewhere and come back without getting lost.....They can now receive the phone and write down the messages. If any guest comes when no one is at home and leaves their name and address; they are able to write it down for their employer. They can make a list of the groceries. I think my students will be able to tell you

more about what are the benefits they are getting from coming to school. I have some students who do not want to remain as a domestic worker when they grow up. They will take some other professions, some want to learn how to sew; for that training you need to have some education. They are telling me that they will learn here for 3 years, when they are in class three they will take the training to learn to sew, some want to get trained to work in Beauty Parlor; learn how to cut hair etc. In that way they want to improve their source of income so that they don't have to live their life as a domestic worker.

[...]

KBJ: Do you know how many of these children are *chhuta* [part-time] and how many are *bandha* [live-in]?

Teacher: Most of them get 200 taka¹⁰³ as a monthly salary. Some of them do not get any salary; they have an arrangement when they grow up the employer will bear the cost of the marriage. In case of the boys the agreement would be to give him money for some investment or to start a shop etc.

KBJ: But how many of these children are full time and how many are part time?

Teacher: All of them are *bandha* [live-in] domestic workers. We work with the domestic workers who live in the house for all the time.

KBJ: So, what about *chhuta* [part-time] workers? Don't they come here?

Teacher: Usually the small children work as *bandha*, they hardly ever work part time. Their parents work for part time in different houses. They keep their children *bandha* in some houses and they [their parents] work as *chhuta* in two or three different houses.

KBJ: Are most of the children very motivated to learn or do you have disciplinary problems?

Teacher: I think most of the children are motivated. I do get some disciplinary problem sometimes....(laughing), but it is natural. But I would say majority are very motivated; they enjoy learning.

KBJ: Isn't it difficult to teach children who are at different levels? Some body has gone to school already, somebody does not know anything; somebody may learn rapidly, while some may be very slow.

Teacher: I do get that problem sometimes; you just have to adjust to it. There are some students who are slow learners; I give extra time for them. I make the little ones sit closer to me so that I can give extra attention to them; the older ones who can pick up the lessons quickly they sit a bit further. Sometimes the older and the smarter ones help the weaker students. (Teacher in Shoishab learning center on a rooftop, July 30, 2005).

¹⁰³ 200 Taka was equivalent to around 3 USD in May 2007.

Here we see an example of spatial adaptation of the rooftop by an NGO that has turned the space of the rooftop into a school. They have succeeded in bringing the school to the children by bringing the public institution of a school to the semi-private space of the apartment building's rooftop. The child domestics are receptive and try to make the best out of it by helping each other learn.

Power/knowledge in the children's discourse

Reflecting back again on the issue of 'power/knowledge in discourse' raised in chapter 2, some questions have still not been discussed in this chapter on the child domestics' own discourse. These questions are considered below.

Who exerts power through the discourse? How is this power exercised? What kind of knowledge is demonstrated through the discourse and what is the relationship between knowledge and power? Child domestics have very limited power in their relationship with their employers. However, the child domestics exert some power through their own discourse, but more in a reactive than proactive manner. The child domestics gather in semi-public spaces like the stairways and the rooftop, where they exchange experiences of joys and frustrations. The activities and experience exchanges that take place in semi-public spaces are "empowering through resistance" (Waitt 2005: 174). The knowledge demonstrated through this discourse is a practical kind of knowledge that is gathered through experiences through their minds and bodies. Child domestics know that they should not challenge their employers, because the

consequences may be severe. They use this knowledge to maintain a very subtle way of expressing power, together with peers in spaces they regard as safe.

How do material conditions affect the discourse? The children who work as domestics are so poor that their discourse is imprinted with notions of duty and responsibility for their own and their family members' upkeep. As shown in chapter 5, the housing standard at home is so poor that some child domestics and parents feel that it is not safe for them to stay at home. This material condition influences the child domestics' discourse because it legitimizes their stay in another family's home, regarded as safer than their own home.

What behaviors and identities are established as normal and natural, and what behaviors and identities are established as unusual, marginal or unnatural by the discourse? At this point the child domestics' discourse is not uniform; there is variation in attitudes among the children. Some think that it is safest to stay in the employers' home at all times because child domestics and others with "not so good character" may come to the semi-public spaces. Other child domestics see the rooftop as the best place to be in. A common thread in the child domestics' discourse was that their identity was tied closely to their family relations. They knew that they were expected to work to support themselves and their families and they were proud to do so.



Fig. 6-2. Drawing of a mango, a bird, and a flower, made by a 14-year-old female domestic.

(This was the drawing I referred to when writing about the employer's negative comments; see my comment on the drawing process of this specific picture in chapter 5).



Figure 6.3: Drawing of a bird in a tree, made by a 16-year-old female domestic.

Chapter 7

Docile minds and bodies caught in a disciplinary grid: Some suggestions for resistance, participation and agency

A starting point for this dissertation was the realization of the crucial role of discourse in shaping social phenomena. But the specific focus was on how discourse impacts children, our concepts of childhood, and the work of child domestics. The point of such a discursive analysis is to *dis*-cover the numerous sites at which we can engage the field of child domestic work in order to improve the young workers' quality of life. Banning children from work is not a feasible option in Bangladesh. What is needed is a careful and wide-ranging examination of the vast discursive material formation that is involved in child domestic work, in order to find the interstices and the micro-spaces in which we can engage in the task of improving the lives of child domestics. This chapter contains a summary of my findings on that subject.

The main differences among the three discourses

Following is a comparison and summary of the human rights discourse, the employers' discourse and the child domestics' discourse, focusing on the ways in which they differ

from each other with respect to: conception of childhood, content of their discourse, manner of codification, notions of space, and dynamics of power and knowledge.

Conception of childhood

The human rights discourse conceives of childhood as a universal category organized according to the specific stages in a child's life allegedly occupied predominantly by play and a combination of play, school, and some work. The perception of work is that it should be only part time, and it should be light enough to combine easily with education. The human rights discourse in Bangladesh involves different degrees of the conceptualization of childhood, ranging from the government discourse characterized by lip service and tokenism in its approach to childrens' social participation, to a more genuinely human rights approach like that represented by international NGOs like Save the Children. Representatives of the human rights discourse focus on children's agency, with the child portrayed as a social actor or protagonist.

In the employers' discourse there is an extreme contrast in the conception of childhood between perceptions of biological children and the children who work as domestics. The employers' children are expected to focus almost exclusively on their education and they receive a great deal of attention and nurturing from their parents. Their child domestics, on the other hand, are commanded around the clock; quite often they are not even respected or appreciated for their work. In almost all of the households visited during the course of this research, the employers spoke negatively to and about their child domestics. The domestics are corrected in a strict manner for very minor errors

and often humiliated in front of other people. There is little room for children's agency in the employers' conception of childhood, although the employers' biological children have much more agency than the child domestics. The child domestics are portrayed as dependent, passive, docile, submissive, and subservient. This childhood conception is diametrically opposed to the childhood conception of the human rights discourse. The relationship between an employer and a child domestic is more in the nature of a patron-client relationship than a formal relationship between an employer and an employee.

The child domestics' own discourse about themselves and their work centers on work as a necessity and duty, with education and leisure time seen as desirable but difficult to obtain. The child domestics' notion of childhood is tied to their identity as servants, and to feelings of inferiority and a desire for respect and to be a part of middle-class society. They talk about their lack of agency¹⁰⁴ in many aspects of their life and work. The child domestics portray themselves as fulfillers of duty; even as children they are aware of their responsibility for their own and often their family's upkeep.

Content, codification, and notions of space

The most salient concepts belonging to the human rights discourse is 'participation' and 'best interests of the child'. In the employers' discourse the main concepts are 'benevolence', 'keeping an eye on the servants', 'discipline', and 'punish'. The discourse of the child domestics themselves is characterized by concepts of duty, obedience, and

¹⁰⁴ The children do not use the word 'agency' but they talk about lack of influence over decisions that affect their life and work.

expressions of their lack of agency in matters such as working conditions, marriage, education, and salaries.

An important difference among the three discourses is the extent to which the discourses appear in a written form—that is, codified. The human rights discourse has a rich text in the form of international conventions that have been widely ratified, NGO reports and NGO policy documents, government policy and planning documents, newspaper articles and TV programs, and academic books and articles. The employers' discourse is mostly oral except for a few newspaper articles written by actual or potential employers. And the child domestic workers' discourse is entirely oral. From face-to-face conversations with the children, I gathered how they view work and life.

We saw earlier in chapter 2 that Pratt (2004: 20) referred to discourses as “situated practices in particular places; they are inherently geographical.” This notion of discourse as inherently spatial is only applicable to that of the employers and children because space is very much a constituent element of their daily world, that is, their attachment to specific places in the Bangladeshi society. Pratt's notion of spatiality is not evident in the human rights' discourse because it is a global, universal discourse, not tied to a specific geographical place.

Power/knowledge

Foucault (1980) talked extensively about how power is exerted through knowledge in different discourses. Interesting as that topic is, here I return to a slightly different question that was part of the list presented at the end of chapter 2: *Which of the analyzed*

discourses are the most powerful in terms of how they affect the daily lives of working children? The answer to that question comes not only from discourse itself but also from the physical conditions in which children work. To answer this question I considered the site of each discourse and its connection to the object of the discourse—i.e., the child domestics.

The power of the human rights discourse is exercised in professional settings such as conventions, and in the offices of organizations such as UNICEF, ILO, and Save the Children. Proponents of the human rights discourse may or may not practice and respect human rights in their private lives, thoughts, speech, and behavior. The human rights discourse has limited power over the life and work of child domestic workers because it does not directly come into contact with them, except for the child domestics who participate in non-formal schools supported by the human rights discourse. The human rights discourse is a public, global discourse, tied to international conventions, international organizations, and to some extent also the government and national organizations. Power is exercised through the knowledge monopoly held by people in these organizations, compared with that of people who are not trained in the human rights perspective. This knowledge is theoretical, focusing on the ideas of human and child rights—although many of the authors of the child rights discourse do have knowledge derived from practical experience with children in the field. The human rights discourse has the potential to be very powerful within Bangladesh but there are too few supporting institutions in the civil society or the state to effectively monitor or implement human rights as they affect the daily lives of child domestics.

In the case of the employer, power is exercised around the clock in the location where work takes place; the effect of the discourse is magnified by the private nature of the space in which work is done. This is a powerful discourse when it comes to the direct influence exerted over the lives of child domestics, because employers set the terms of the working conditions and create the atmosphere in the home in which work takes place. The geographical scale of the employers' discourse plays out at the level of the body, the household, and the local community. Since the employers' discourse is produced and practiced in the location in which the child domestics live and work, it is the most powerful discourse because it has the strongest influence on the situation of child domestic workers. The power of this discourse is exerted through knowledge that is a powerful constellation of traditional Bangladeshi middle-class views regarding how to discipline workers and children. Of course, the effect is magnified because the workers in this case are also children. Power is exerted, too, through the fact that child domestics are neither trained nor professionals. Also, these children come from another social class. They may be orphans or from families who cannot provide for them. Employers' use of disciplinary methods and the constant threat of physical and verbal punishment leads the children to discipline themselves in a manner similar to that of a Foucauldian panopticon. The employers' discourse affects children at various levels: first is the attitude of middle-class Bangladeshi families towards people of the working class; second is the attitude towards female workers in particular; third is the attitude towards children; fourth is the attitude towards the poor; and fifth is the attitude towards domestics as non-professionals who are dependent on the generosity and benevolence of the employer. It is important to understand that all these discourses combine in a very powerful way to affect the minds

and bodies of child domestics. Finally, the effect of that discourse works out in a most exceptional way, since work takes place in the private spaces of the employers' homes away from the possibility of any public regulation.

Some employers work in organizations that promote the human rights discourse but do not necessarily practice human rights for the child domestic workers in their own homes. Thus, some employers may find themselves playing two conflicting roles. For others it is not—they are representatives of what I would call progressive employers. An example is one of the leaders of Save the Children Australia in Dhaka. She has employed a disabled girl as a live-in domestic in her home and taught her many important skills. Her motivation to do so was based on the belief that the girl would be in a much worse situation if she was not employed by her, as there are very few assistance programs for disabled people in Bangladesh and discrimination is prevalent.

The power of the children's discourse is limited. It is exercised by working children wherever they are. It is a private discourse, operated mostly in semi-public spaces of the local community. The knowledge that is demonstrated through this discourse is based on the child domestics' experiences from life and work in their employers' homes. I have demonstrated how the children's own discourse is most often excluded or silenced from that of the larger society, but it still acts as an important counter-discourse to the other discourses. The child domestics' discourse is dominated not by their perception of themselves as children but by their identity as servants bound by duty to carry out not only the wishes and commands of the employers' family, but also to provide for themselves and their families.

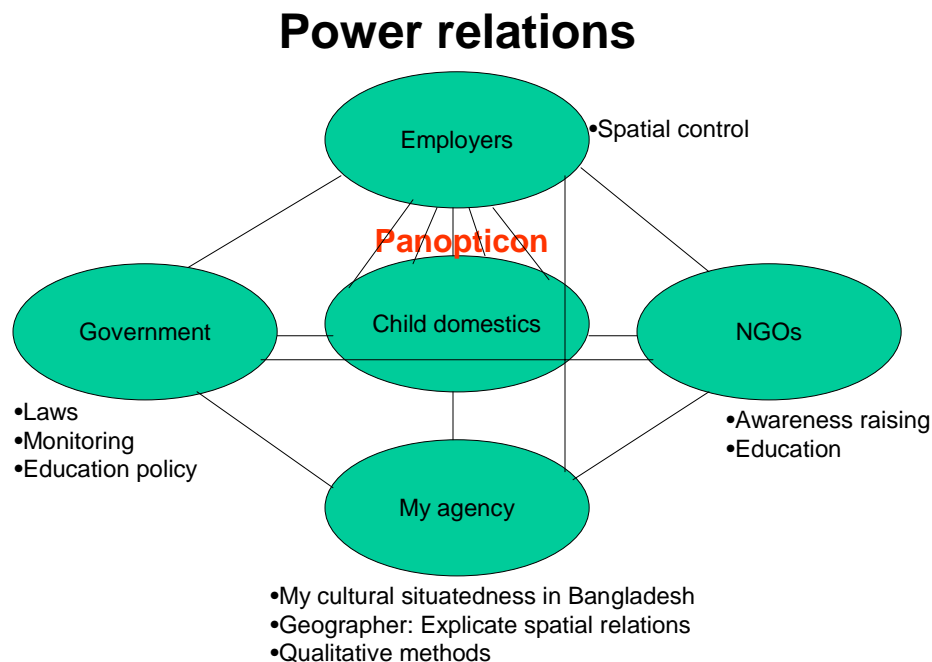


Fig. 7-1 Power relations in the lives of child domestics

This figure is a graphic representation of the ideas about power discussed so far. Child domestics are at the center of my sketch of the nexus of power relations. The government does not exert power over children directly except to the extent to which they have adopted parts of the human rights discourse. The government has the potential to wield tremendous power by enacting laws to protect children, by monitoring the extent to which those laws are adhered to by employers, by creating appropriate education policies, and by investing in education. The NGOs play a vital role by not only promoting the human rights discourse for “child as agent” but also by helping to create institutions that protect and educate children. I have argued that a regular program of conventional schooling will not work for child domestic workers. Education is not only a way to give children skills,

but a way to insert children at least for part of the day into a space that is somewhat public, allowing thereby for a certain degree of oversight and monitoring of employers via the observation of the children's appearance and behavior. Some NGOs have created such arenas for instruction, such as rooftop classrooms.

The most important source of the power exerted on the lives of children is the employer. I have already sketched the various levels at which the employers' discourse affects the lives of children. It is difficult to imagine how, in the short run, we are able to affect the attitudes of Bangladeshi families towards the poor and the working class, but it is possible to identify various techniques by which the employer-child domestic relationship can be regulated so that the worst aspects of child abuse may be prevented. Sensitizing employers to the needs and rights of children is an important area of discourse. Also, the power of employers can be tempered if there is a national focus on child domestics and a commitment to awareness raising. It is important to have a department of child welfare whose workers will visit the homes employing child domestics on a periodic basis. The offices of child welfare in the U.S. could provide models for creating such institutions in Bangladesh. Finally, we must carefully analyze the micro-geography of child domestic work. The private nature of the spaces in which work takes place is an important determinant of the conditions of work. We need a strategy that enables the opening of such spaces to protect children without necessarily violating the sanctity of private homes. As a geographer concerned with these issues I too can exert power in my own role as agent. I see my own role at several levels. First, it appears in the study of discourse as I have already done. Second, it appears in the recognition that the study of the micro-geography of children's workspaces is a crucial

determinant of their life circumstances. And I also believe that someday I can find agency by moving beyond advocacy to being an activist for improving the lives of child domestics in Bangladesh. In this diagram I have left out a crucial component of the nexus—namely, the parents of the children. I did so because I have almost no data from this study that allows me to explicate those power relations. However, this is a component I plan to investigate in future research.

The importance of a balanced approach

The literature focuses almost exclusively on the negative aspects of child domestic work. Directly and indirectly, studies of child domestic work convey the need not to look at employers as benevolent (see, for instance, Blanchet 1996; Khair 1998, 2004; Shoishab 1999). To some extent I agree that it is important to focus on the negative aspects of child domestic work because of children's vulnerability in this kind of work relationship. However, it is also important to keep in mind that many child domestics do have access to a material life standard in their employers' home that is far better than that in their parents' or relatives' homes. Several child domestics told me this without being asked and when I asked the children to compare the two homes, they all gave the same answer: Materially, their life is much better in the employers' home than in their own homes. They mentioned the following reasons: better and/or more food, better and/or more clothes, and better housing. Some of the child domestics used to live in houses that were subjected to annual floods. One girl's family had repeatedly lost everything, including their house and land. In my experience, many child domestics are content with their

employers and their life in general. Some miss their family members but many do not because of various family situations with stepmothers, stepsiblings, or parents who pressure them to get married too early, or who gamble or are sick or disabled. From participant observation I learned that in some households the child domestics almost feel that their employers' family has become a substitute family. This was, however, more the exception than the norm. I think that domestic work is not a solution to the economic problems of poor children and that we should work towards the ultimate elimination of poverty so there is no need for children to work for survival. Nevertheless, I see a need to convey a more nuanced picture of the life of child domestics than the version provided through most of the available literature. In the short term, we must work towards recognizing child domestics as workers and increase their social status and the fulfillment of their rights. Much can be done to protect the child domestics' rights through regulation, enforced monitoring and activities organized by NGOs and the government to influence the child domestics and their employers in moving toward a positive direction.

Rahman (1995: 18) summarized her view of child domestic work in Bangladesh as follows (and I concur with it):

The basis of the phenomenon is the existing gross inequities in the society at large. One has to be careful and sensitive not to be callous in accusing the employers of child domestics. Rather, one must attempt to maximise whatever potential exists to turn the employer-domestic relationship into a mutually beneficial semi-fostering relationship based on mutual need, trust and dignity. This should only be seen as a transitional phase, till societal development eliminates the existence of such an under-class of children.

Rahman was the founder and first director of the NGO 'Shoishab Bangladesh', which pioneered strategies for organizations to develop a friendly relationship with the

children's employers as a way of becoming able to help the child domestics. My main point is that while the larger unjust social situation must change and eventually poverty should be eliminated, it is important in the meantime to ensure that poor children have opportunities to work as child domestics.

Potential sites of change and agents of change

I now return to Yapa's (1996) concept of agency (referred to in chapter 1) in order to look at different potential ways in which we can begin to address the need to improve the lives of child domestics.

There are many challenges in helping child domestic workers improve their quality of life and increase their participation and agency. Work needs to be done simultaneously on many fronts, such as the economy, culture, politics, media and so on, and at many different scales ranging from the individual to the household, community, the state, and NGOs. Agency can be mobilized in children, teachers, employers, media, NGOs, inter-governmental organizations, and the government, and even in academic research. All social actors, including researchers, can use their agency to increase the capacity for social participation among child domestic workers. We have seen through this discursive analysis of childhood and child domestic work in Bangladesh that different discourses highlight different opportunities to improve the lives of child domestics. An analysis of the children's own discourse revealed their desire for greater participation in society and for finding their own agency.

Historically, in many countries of the world children have been excluded from decision-making processes in society. However, this has changed somewhat in recent decades, especially in Western countries. In analyzing the human rights discourse I found that with the emergence of a global conception of childhood epitomized by the ratification of the UNCRC by most countries in the world, many organizations and individuals have been pushing for increased child participation in decisions affecting them in their families, local communities, and even government policy (Jensen 2007). Traditionally in Bangladesh, children are not encouraged to express their opinions in the family, at school, or anywhere else in society (Blanchet 1996, O’Kane 2002). The lack of a cultural practice of listening to those who are less powerful means that poor children are rarely heard. Policy programs are too often designed without listening carefully to the people to whom the program is targeted. Even though child participation has become institutionalized in Bangladesh in the form of a Child Parliament, Child Councils, and in child consultations on government policy documents, it is still not possible for most marginalized children to participate in such forums. None of these child forums are open to working children unless they are already affiliated with an NGO. An exception is Child Brigade, an organization of street working children, but even that is not open to child domestic workers. Even if it was, it is unrealistic to think that live-in child domestic workers would be allowed by their employers to spend time organizing and attending public meetings. But it is important to facilitate the participation of child domestics in government and NGO policy and programs that affect them (Jensen 2007).

Some critics dismiss the idea of child participation as too idealistic and unrealistic. In chapter 4 I quoted Fattore and Turnbull (2005: 55), who said that adults

should translate children's views into public discourse—a more realistic practice than assuming that children have the same capacity as adults for involvement. This is an important argument in the human rights discourse because it may prevent critics from dismissing children's participation as unrealistic. In the case of child domestics, many of whom have only a limited education, it may be quite important for adult facilitators to be present so that children may participate in a more meaningful way in public forums such as the Child Parliament. Sur (2003: 237-238) concurred when she wrote in her paper on child rights and realities for child laborers in Bangladesh: "I grapple in writing a language that neither locates children as powerless nor denies their dependence on adults and often distant ones, for rights realization." A complementary strategy for enhancing child participation and child rights is to train child facilitators to involve children who are illiterate or inexperienced in different kinds of forums, following the successful model which is run by Save the Children Australia in Bangladesh, and supported by Save the Children Australia, the Government of Bangladesh, and UNICEF (Save the Children, The Government of Bangladesh, and UNICEF 2004).

From my participant observation in employers' homes, I learned that a crucial aspect of school for child domestic workers is not simply the learning of academic skills but the freeing up of children from the disciplinary grid of the employers' home for a few hours each day. This allows children to share their experiences and concerns so that problems do not get out of hand. A child who is enrolled in a school or drop-in center has an opportunity to seek help if there is a problem with the employers or the parents. According to NGO workers and teachers I spoke with, children often form trusting friendships with teachers. In cases of abuse, such friendships can be invaluable. Teachers

can pick up signs of maltreatment and report them to the relevant unit of the NGO that runs the school, be it the legal, the health service, or the shelter home. Thus, child domestics' access to education is important not only for the intrinsic value of education, but also because it provides access to peers and adults who can potentially help them in difficult situations. This is a way to mitigate the effect of the perpetual panopticon, in which a child domestic's participation in school allows teachers to monitor what happens to children in an employer's home. This changes the spatiality of child domestic work: The space-time world of the child domestic is opened up, and the child domestic is no longer confined to private space but has access to semi-public and public spaces on a regular basis. Many employers have been convinced by NGO workers to send their child domestics to school. This is a crucial area for action, which means that more money needs to be allocated and earmarked to NGOs with expertise in this field.

In my analysis of the human rights subdiscourse from national NGOs in Bangladesh, I learned that some NGOs work specifically for the betterment of child domestic workers' situation by providing educational opportunities. Examples of such NGOs include Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Shoishab, Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF), and Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs (UCEP). Both ASK and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) provide legal aid to abused child domestics as well as other women and children. To help live-in child domestic workers better participate in society, it is crucial to work with the employers. However, such organizations only reach a fraction of the employers and child domestic workers in Dhaka. More money needs to be allocated to such organizations. There should be a stronger focus on the protection of child domestics. This can be done by assigning

each child domestic to a contact person who is a social worker or a teacher in a nearby school, for example. Access to health services could be organized through this proposed contact person program.

The analysis of the employers' discourse revealed that many employers will let their child domestic workers engage in some education if it takes place in the same building in which they live. For reasons of safety, employers are reluctant to send their child domestic workers out to the streets. Employers worry not only about their child domestic's safety, since harassments and kidnappings are common in Dhaka, but also that the children may escape to find another job. For these reasons as well as fear of the domestic running away with valuables from the house, employers do not give their child domestics a key to the apartment. Schools for child domestics must be as close as possible before employers agree to let their workers attend. Many apartment complexes have a place for gatherings, such as parties; potentially, these places could be used for schooling. Children, social workers, organizations, architects and city planners need to come together to look into creating small, non-formal schools in every neighborhood. In the chapter on the human rights discourse I showed how rooftops and garages have been adapted by NGOs to bring schools to the children. Since female child domestic workers are not allowed to go out in public, this is a way to bring the advantages of a public place to a place that will remain private. For two hours in the afternoon, five days a week, child domestic workers from nearby apartments gather on rooftops and in garages to receive a basic education in reading, writing, and math as well as some training in life-skills. These programs need to be expanded. In the long run, a rooftop or a garage is not the best place

to run a school but it is a creative solution until such time in the future when all children can go to school full-time without worrying about their own and their families' survival.

The analysis of the employers' discourse revealed that "school hours" is another restriction for child domestics' access to education. Timing should be adjusted to accommodate the fact that more female employers now work full time outside of the house and child domestics are not allowed outside before the employers return home, often around 4 pm. These sorts of considerations should influence the fixing of school hours.

I have already commented on the role of space as it affects work for child domestics. The space of domestic work is literally a grid upon which employers exercise disciplinary control. Employers exert power through surveillance, discipline, punishment, and the panopticon effect. They control the geographic mobility of their workers—not only in the sense of keeping them away from public space but also in relation to movement in private space. Child domestics work, eat, and sleep on the floor, and they are often confined to certain small areas inside the house. Therefore, it is very important for child domestics to have access to semi-public spaces like the rooftop where they can enjoy time away from the disciplining gaze of the employers. The high-rise apartment building in which I lived and did most of my participant observations had a rooftop open space. There, the child domestics appeared to be relaxed among their fellow peers. I noticed in their conversation a sense of brief liberation or even resistance to their dominating employers and constraining working conditions. On the rooftops the children played out a more joyful and free identity, however fleeting, different from their more

permanent roles as docile, disciplined and dependent bodies obeying the commands of their employer.

To change cultural attitudes that inhibit child domestic workers' social participation, it is important to raise consciousness among people from different classes of society. Schools provide a very good arena for changing the cultural attitudes not only of the child domestics but also of their employers' children. First, the life skills training offered by many NGOs is helpful in increasing child domestic workers' sense of self-esteem and agency. Second, the agency of more privileged children should also be mobilized to help disadvantaged children. In my experience, few privileged children are socialized to empathize or think about the lives and working conditions of servants in their own household. By teaching privileged children about the universality of child rights and how to help other children achieve their rights, we can see change take place within the families who employ child domestics. Schools, the research academy, and the public media could initiate and conduct such teaching. Media has recently increased its role in raising awareness. For example, there is a contemporary TV drama series about a dedicated teacher and her students in a school in which several pupils are working children. However, the raising of awareness via TV does not reach the poorest people. In fact, several NGOs are addressing this issue by trying to reach poor parents directly with information about topics such as conditions of child domestic work and early marriage. The children themselves have been creative in doing outreach work through drama and debates. Awareness-raising activities in areas in which many child domestics are recruited is one way to reduce the likelihood of parents sending their children to a household where they do not know the employers.

Newspapers can play a key role in the effort to improve life for child domestics. In the last decade Bangladeshi newspapers have begun to carry more stories about social issues and human rights. There is some focus on problems related to children and child labor, violence, and kidnapping. But like most media there is a significant focus on negative stories and occurrences of 'bad things.' It is possible that newspapers can also play a new and more interesting role by focusing more on positive stories, such as those stories of kind employers who have taken responsibility for giving their child domestic workers education and training over many years. Even though negative stories do play a role in raising awareness in a dramatic way, the quieter positive stories too play a role by setting standards of good conduct and inspiring employers to improve the working conditions of their domestics.

The following two paragraphs are from a newspaper article written by an employer of child domestics. Here, he reflects on what should be done to stop the abuse of child domestics:

So is there a way out of this sickness that seems to be part and parcel of the relatively privileged classes? There might be if we could recognise this disease in our own houses, sometimes in ourselves. Drama serials depict the intrigues and hypocrisies of middleclass or rich families. They could easily deal with the plight of domestic workers at the hands of their employers. Public service oriented advertisements, billboards, radio and TV programmes -- the means are endless through which people can be made to realise that domestic workers provide an invaluable service, one that should be rewarded with decent pay, living conditions and sane working hours. Most of all they can be used to deter the tendency to use violence against domestic workers by establishing the fact that it is a crime, one that is morally reprehensible and punishable by law.

The sad fact is that for most human beings, a crime is not a crime until one gets caught. It becomes a condonable transgression when one is caught but then set free. Thus the news of one dead child domestic worker and the arrest of her torturers is not the end of the story. Whether the culprits are

punished and whether such punishment discourages other sadistic employers—that should constitute the conclusion. (Amin 2005).

Usually, if the employers are found guilty of torturing and/or killing their domestic, they pay the involved police officers and judges enough money to be bailed out of jail. They also pay the victim's family not to be bothered or to avoid getting a bad reputation. I have heard and read several such stories in the Dhaka newspapers. The impunity of these perpetrators must come to an end; newspapers can play a key role in this by keeping stories alive and holding the public interest.

Next, I consider the role of the government in Bangladesh, where several steps have been taken to fulfill child rights, including child participation. However, the government needs to show a much stronger commitment to helping marginalized children. The Ministry of Labour and Employment is still working on a National Child Labour Policy, which was supposed to be finalized in 2004¹⁰⁵. Child domestic work is difficult to regulate because it takes place in private space. In order to improve the situation for child domestic workers, it is necessary to implement laws regarding their employment and work conditions. Child domestics face the constant threat of being dismissed arbitrarily without much notice. One way to prevent such arbitrary dismissal is to formalize work contracts for child domestics. Contracts should specify minimum requirements for breaks, days off, and vacation. Work contracts could also help prevent other problems related to child domestic work:

¹⁰⁵ As of February 2007, it has still not been finalized (information obtained from the NGO SUF in Dhaka).

If the girls had contracts, clearly stated duties, due definition of what is expected of them, this would put an end to some of the worst abuses. As it is, most girls have no idea of the limits to their duties. They accept all orders, take as given the demands made upon them. (Former Shoishab Director Helene Rahman's statement in an interview with Seabrook 2001: 102)

Another effort worth implementing is compulsory registration of all child domestics. An ordinance from 1961 requires domestic servants to register themselves with the police station. Instead of domestics being required to register themselves, I think it should be the employers' responsibility to register their domestic workers, both minors and adults, because many of them are functionally illiterate and would be afraid to go the police by themselves. A minimum age should also be established for domestic work. India established a minimum age of 14 years for child domestic workers in 2006 (Staff Correspondent 2006a). Since the passing of laws themselves cannot change the situation, enforcement and monitoring is vital and necessary. To facilitate monitoring, birth registration must be formalized and corruption curbed. Birth registration is important in enabling the monitoring of child labor laws and in preventing early marriage of female domestics. The social participation of many girls in Bangladesh is hampered by being forced to marry early.

Monitoring would require more resources to be allocated to the Ministry of Labor and Employment. They do not have enough inspectors even to do the work required in the formal sector of the economy. The government's recent acknowledgment of child domestic work as one of the worst forms of child labor and its willingness to consider input from children's consultations for the National Plan of Action are steps in the right

direction. Now it is up to the government to finalize the child labor policy document and ensure that the words translate into action.

As is evident from this discussion, there are a large number of points of entry for instituting change in the working and living conditions of child domestics. Such points of entry can be organized under headings such as economic, social, political, and spatial, or they can be organized by the topic of agency which can be attained at various geographic scales ranging from the individual and local groups, to national and international.

The nexus of relations of child domestic work

Children would not have to work as domestic servants if they were not poor. But solving the poverty problem first is not an answer in improving the quality of life of child domestics. Even though the working conditions of children have an obvious material aspect, we have seen throughout this research that the significance of that materiality cannot be understood without examining the mediating discourses of child domestic work. In that sense, child domestic work can be seen as a network of relations—that called in another context by Yapa (1996) a discursive material formation. Yapa (1996) effectively used an analytical device known as the nexus of relations to study discursive material formations such as poverty and race. I use the same device in revisiting and reorganizing my findings about what to do to improve the quality of life of child domestics. My use of the nexus does not present new insights that were not present in the earlier parts of this research, but it does help to organize systematically the various sites for engagement in the problems of child domestics. The nexus idea shows that even

though the potential sites of change are numerous, the interconnected nature of the relations requires change on broad fronts. The metaphor of the nexus is used to illustrate that these relations are all interwoven in “a dynamic system of mutually constituted elements” (Yapa 1996: 709). I briefly point out some social, cultural, political, ecological, academic, and technical relations of child domestic work. Working from a post-structuralist approach, none of these are seen as pre-existing categories. They are simply analytical categories we as researchers have created in order to proceed with our study. Nonetheless they are helpful in making us see the interconnections among different potential sites of change.

Social relations: A social relation is defined as the work relationship between the employer and employees. Looking at it from the supply side, the main reason for children’s employment as domestics is their poverty and lack of access to basic goods such as food, clothing, housing, health services, and so on. The demand side for child domestics is a little more complex. Traditionally, wealthy families in Bangladesh employed servants to do time-consuming domestic chores. Also, having a domestic worker was regarded as a status symbol in middle-class society. Beyond this is the continuing demand that is generated from modern households in the global economy where both spouses are working. This creates a unique kind of work relationship—part formal, as between an employer and employee, and part informal, drawing on the tradition of employer as a patron of the domestic who is viewed as a poor relative or client. But a most significant factor in this work relationship comes from the actual space in which work is performed—a private home away from a public gaze that could play a regulatory role. This creates a definite need for formal contracts for domestic workers.

However, the creation of a broad-based consensus about a system of such contracts requires changes in the discourse at various other sites such as culture and politics.

Cultural relations: In Bangladesh there is a strong cultural tradition of patron-client relationships between rich and poor people. This means that rich people are expected to take care of poor relatives and other poor people in society. In return, poor people are expected to be loyal to their patrons. Unfortunately, in most instances this relationship of patronage is one of inequality and condescension in which the patrons usually look down upon the poorer clients. The relationship between the employer and child domestic is a little more complicated than an ordinary patron-client relationship because the child is not taken into the home as a foster child but as a servant who works for an employer. The harshness of the work relationship is often tempered by the rhetoric of patronage and care. In statements from employers I found a discursive binary that is attributed to the concept of “Self versus the Other.” The self (the employer) is viewed as benevolent, fair and wise. Employers believe they are doing child domestics a favor by taking them into their homes. The child domestics are “the problem other” who have a lower status in the binary and are to be seen and not heard from, particularly if they have complaints. The child domestics need to be trained, disciplined, controlled, and kept in their place so that they do not disturb the social order. The employers believe that their own biological children are better and deserve the best of everything as opposed to the child domestic who should learn to be satisfied with what has been provided. Thus, the employers’ conceptions of childhood and how children should behave is different for children from different social classes. One way to change such cultural attitudes would be to educate both employers and their children about respect and sensitivity. Several NGOs

aim at sensitizing employers through programs of awareness raising, where they try to increase employers' consciousness of the child domestics' need for breaks, vacations, and being treated with respect. All children, including the children of employers, need to learn about human rights in general, children's rights to an education, and the importance of showing empathy to children who are in need.

Political relations: In the political realm there are two sources of power: sovereign and non-sovereign. The state is the source of sovereign power, and various actors at all sites of the nexus of relations exercise non-sovereign power. In the case of child domestics the key role to be played by the state relates to legislation. There has been an increasing focus on child labor by the Bangladeshi government, resulting in two national child labor surveys during the last 12 years. Child domestic work was recently categorized as one of the worst forms of child labor (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs 2006). This is an important step in the right direction because even by 2004, child domestic work was not regarded as hazardous by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (conversation with Md. Momenul Haque, programme specialist in the Ministry of Labour and Employment, July 2004). The national child labor policy document has been delayed many years and is still not finalized. Furthermore, there are still no specific laws to protect children in domestic work. In addition to improved legislation, the state should also provide money for monitoring children in households. The relations between the state and the NGOs should continue to be improved because NGOs have a valuable role to play in monitoring. They have a greater acquaintance with the specific issues that need to be changed at the social, cultural, and other nodes of the nexus. NGOs are also the appropriate institutions to initiate a discourse that could affect

the cultural attitudes towards domestic labor. This is what some NGOs try to attain by focusing on children's social participation across class divides.

Ecological relations: Here we can pursue the topic of how natural events such as floods and cyclones make many poor families landless, leading to poverty and migration to the cities, and thus create a potential pool of child labor. However, I shall not go into that topic because it is difficult to find agency in those sectors that are specific to the discourse on child domestics. Therefore, I focus on another type of ecological relation—namely, the bodies of children and their health. I recommend that basic health monitoring be made mandatory for all children, including child domestics. If child domestics are required by law to be periodically examined by health authorities, this would provide another possible limitation of the power of the employer because it would help discover the prevalence of child abuse.

Academic relations: Very few academics do research on the topic of child domestic work. The topic of child domestic work is challenging because work happens in private spaces and there is a very interesting micro-geography of space that affects all aspects of this type of work. Space affects the very nature of the labor relation transaction. Throughout this thesis I referred to how the elucidation of the micro-geography of domestic work is an important part of the strategy to improve the lives of these children. Another aspect of academic relations is the education of child domestics themselves and the development of syllabi for such education. NGOs' focus on life skills, including critical thinking skills, negotiation skills and problem-solving skills, is a promising beginning but it is not enough. Children, particularly child domestics, should learn how to recognize sexual abuse and what to do about it. They should learn to

become conscious about what it means to be loyal but still maintain a sense of personal boundaries that should not be violated. School should be an arena for the possible discussion of how to be assertive without risking characterization as ‘chhalak’ (uppity, smart, clever). It is clear that we should think of the education of child domestics not simply as general education, but as a set of instructions for children with special needs. Such education is necessary for fulfilling the rights of children and should be included in the international organizations’ analytical and practical work on child participation. Some pioneering work has been done by the National Children’s Task Force, organized by Save the Children, UNICEF, and the government of Bangladesh (Save the Children Bangladesh, The Government of Bangladesh, and UNICEF Bangladesh 2004). The task force has organized child consultations where topics such as sexual abuse have been discussed but this needs to be formalized and brought into syllabi in both formal and non-formal schools.

Technical relations: Technical relations of child domestic work refer to aspects of technology that can be harnessed to improve the quality of life of these children. As an example of such a relation, I could suggest the establishment of community laundries with washing machines. Such facilities would have two beneficial effects on child domestics: They would provide a space in which children could come together in an open communal setting and the use of the machines would lessen their workload.

Another technical relation is to work on issues of security. Often employers lock up the house when they leave for work, leaving the child domestics inside the house. There is no way for children to get out of the house in case of an emergency, such as a fire, because employers do not give keys to their domestics. Thus, engineers could be

asked to design security systems that secure a home from the outside but still make it possible to get out in case of an emergency. I cite this example to illustrate the point that the discursive material formation of child domestics provides a large number of sites at various nodes of the nexus of relations, which are opportunities for potential engagement and social change.

As we have seen, the nexus of relations is a useful device that tells us that solutions to the problems of child domestics can be found at a large number of sites, at various scales of the geographic hierarchy, and by innumerable agents whose expertise may not be directly related to the discourse on child domestics.

Final reflections, including methodological and theoretical contributions to geography

As hazardous as child domestic work is, to simply ban it is neither realistic nor wise. Therefore, it is important to find ways in which we can improve the quality of life for child domestics. I addressed this issue by treating the subject as a discursive material formation and I analyzed three main discourses that define and construct the nature of childhood and child domestic work in Bangladesh. By doing so I was able to discover sites of engagement, sites of potential change, and sites of agency. I found that these sites involve agency at different geographical scales, from the individual worker and employer to international organizations, and in different sectors of society, such as education, culture, and media.

This dissertation represents a new combination of methodologies in geography: discourse analysis combined with critical ethnography. This combination made it

possible to explore both social constructions of working children's childhood and domestics' embodied experiences of childhood. I focused on children's participation in two senses: methodologically and analytically. Methodologically, I focused on children's participation in research because I wanted the child domestics' own perceptions to come through. I see participation as the epitome of the new approach to children's studies, both in the social sciences in general and in the subdiscipline of children's geographies. Children's participation in research means that research is done *with* children, not only *on* children. Analytically, I focused on children's participation in society, because child participation—and thereby children's agency—is what distinguishes the human rights discourse from the preceding welfare discourse and also from the existing employers' discourse. The micro-geography of domestic work determined my methodology and it would not have been possible to study the nature of work in such private spaces without using methods belonging to ethnography to analyze the discourse of employers and the child domestics.

My study contributes theoretically in many ways to the discipline of geography, especially to the subdiscipline of children's geographies. Few studies of children in developing countries have been carried out in children's geographies. Even fewer studies have been conducted of children's work. Most have focused on work in rural places, such as Katz's study of children in the rural Sudan (Katz 1986; 1996; 2004), and Punch's study of children in rural Bolivia (Punch 2000; 2004), although Aitken et al.'s study of children's work as packers in supermarkets in a city in Mexico is an exception (Aitken, Estrada, Jennings, & Aguirre 2006; Jennings, Aitken, Estrada, & Fernandez 2006). Urban workspaces for children in developing countries thus are a theme that has not been much

explored within children's geographies. A unique contribution of my study is the focus on private, urban workspaces in a developing country. I challenge the usual characterization of the dichotomy of private and public space by focusing on semi-public spaces as sites of resistance for docile, disciplined child domestics who live and work in their employers' home. My analysis of private spaces of work contributes to the existing feminist challenge to the traditional notion of private space as a sanctuary and safe haven (hooks 2000). I demonstrated that for child domestics, private space has contradictory characteristics—of work, discipline, surveillance, and material security. Knowledge of the gendered nature of child labor in my study contributes insight to the subdiscipline of children's geographies; the girls are mostly tied to private and semi-public spaces, whereas the boys do tasks both in private and public spaces. My study demonstrates that important insight can be gained by focusing on the micro-geography of private workspaces.

Mansvelt and Berg (2005: 253) urge a researcher to “reflect upon and analyse how one's position in relation to the processes, people, and phenomena we are researching actually affects both those phenomena and our understanding of them.” Referring back to the section in chapter 3 on my own positionality, I reiterate that undoubtedly my findings were affected by the fact that I am an outsider doing research in Bangladesh. I know that some employers were willing to talk with me because it is seen as prestigious and respectable to have contact with foreigners. And it is possible that some child domestics shared their stories with me in the hope that I would bring them with me to my country. There is reason to believe that my foreign origin and appearance may have influenced the atmosphere, their behavior, and their statements.

I believe that all children should be able to go to school and have a good social life. As the cliché says, “all children should have an opportunity to enjoy their childhood.” From a long-term perspective, no child should have to work as a domestic due to the arbitrariness of the work relationship and the vulnerability of the child in the employer’s private home. At first sight it seems difficult to combine education and live-in child domestic work, and therefore it is easy to draw the conclusion that no children should work as domestics. But what are their alternatives to being domestics? Running freely around with the wind in their hair in the fields of their village, free from any worries and with their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter met? Not really. More realistically, their alternatives include options such as going back to a home where the stepmother beats and scolds them, or being married off to an illiterate, poor man who is 15 years older (because the parents cannot afford a dowry). The man may beat his young wife for the slightest reason and make her bear many children in an environment lacking a steady family income. It is therefore important to be realistic about the alternatives for these child domestics. I believe we must try to help them make the best of their lives in the short term while working towards more just and equitable distribution of wealth in the long term. It goes beyond the scope for this dissertation to propose concrete solutions to the presence of the structural inequality of wealth in Bangladesh. However, it is my conviction that these issues are all interwoven. For instance, working toward eliminating the cultural barriers to child domestics’ school participation will also gradually lead to a society with a less rigid class structure and more understanding across social classes. New efforts that are being tried out now in Bangladesh—efforts to make children from different socioeconomic backgrounds cooperate in forums for child participation—do

bring hope of a society with more empathy and sympathy across class divides (see, for instance, Save the Children Bangladesh, The Government of Bangladesh, and UNICEF Bangladesh 2004). It is not possible or meaningful to single out either agency or structure as the one arena for the attainment of social justice. Increased understanding among people across class divides will lead to more social justice both in the short term (e.g., access to non-formal education programs for working kids), and in the long term (e.g., less poverty in society in general).

I see children's participation in society both as a means and as an end to a better life for child domestics. Social participation has the potential to increase the quality of their life and ensures opportunities for the sharing of experiences with peers and adults who may be able to help in difficult situations. The only possible disadvantage with child domestic workers' participation in society is a risk of being characterized by middle-class people in negative terms such as 'challak' (uppity/smart/clever) or 'nosto' (spoiled). This problem has to be resolved by working to change attitudes deeply entrenched in the culture (Jensen 2007).

Inspired by texts such as "Growing up global" (Katz 2004) and "Playing with fire" (Sangtin writers and Nagar 2006), I wanted to write a dissertation that was dialogical, reflexive, and solidaristic. It is my hope that this text will inspire others to engage in the lives of people who live and work in vulnerable situations and hidden spaces in different places in the world.

Bibliography

- Ahmad, M. (1995). Recent developments in the education sector of Bangladesh. In CPD, *Experiences with economic reform: A review of Bangladesh's development 1995*. Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue and University Press Limited.
- Ahmed, S. (2004, August 4). Death of a domestic help. *The Daily Star*, Letters to the Editor (p.8).
- Ahmed, H. S. (2006, October 6). Crimes behind closed doors. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 10/20/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2006/10/01/cover.htm>
- Ahmed, H. S. (2007). Work unto Death. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*. Retrieved 01/13/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2007/01/01/hr.htm>
- Ahmed, S., & Sattar, Z. (2004, September 4). Impact of trade liberalisation: Looking at the evidence. *Economic and Political Weekly*.
- Aitken, S., Estrada, S. L., Jennings, J., and Aguirre, L. M. (2006). Reproducing life and labor: Global processes and working children in Tijuana, Mexico. *Childhood*, 13(3), 365-387.
- Alanen, L. (2005). Women's studies/Childhood studies: Parallels, links and perspectives. In J. Mason & T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously: In theory, policy and practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Alston, P., & Tobin, J. (2005). Laying the foundations for children's rights: An independent study of some key legal and institutional aspects of the impact of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Altschuller, S. (2003). Rights and challenges for women. In H. Hossain (Ed.), *Human rights in Bangladesh 2002* (pp. 195-220). Dhaka: Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).
- Amin, A. M. (2004a, May 7). Does anybody care? *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*. Retrieved 01/04/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2004/05/01/perspective.htm>
- Amin, A. M. (2004b, August 13). Another child domestic worker tortured and killed. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*. Retrieved 01/04/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2004/08/02/human.htm>

- Amin, A. M. (2005, May 27). Crimes of the normal and respected. *Daily Star*. Retrieved 06/11/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2005/05/04/perspective.htm>
- Amin, A. M., Hussain, A., & Islam, K. S. (2005). Shocking conclusions to grisly tales. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*. February 11. Retrieved 02/17/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2005/02/02/cover.htm>
- Anwar, B. S. (2005, July 21). Abuse of minor domestic workers. *The Daily Star*.
- Arends-Kuenning, M., & Amin, S. (2004). School incentive programs and children's activities: The case of Bangladesh. *Comparative Education Review*, 48(3), 295-317.
- Bales, K. (2004). *Disposable people: New slavery in the global economy* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bass, L. E. (2004). *Child labor in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Rienner.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2003). Report on national child labour survey 2002-03. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Planning Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA). (2002). *Violence against women in Bangladesh 2001*. Dhaka: BNWLA.
- Bissell, S. (2001). Young garment workers in Bangladesh: Raising the rights question. *Development*, 44, 75-80.
- Bissell, S. (2003). The social construction of childhood: A perspective from Bangladesh. In N. Kabeer, G. B. Nambissan and R. Subrahmanian (Eds.), *Child labour and the right to education in South Asia: Needs versus rights* (pp. 47-72). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Bissell, S., & Sobhan, B. (1996). Child labour and education programming in the garment industry of Bangladesh: Experiences and issues. Dhaka: UNICEF.
- Biu, J. (2005, June 29). Dark girls' pain. *Prothom Alo* (p.1). (Translated from Bangla.)
- Black, M. (2001). International workshop for practitioners on child domestic work. London: Anti-Slavery International.
- Blagbrough, J., & Glynn, E. (1999). Child domestic workers: Characteristics of the modern slave and approaches to ending such exploitation. *Childhoods*, 6(1), 51-56.
- Blanchet, T. (1996). *Lost innocence, stolen childhoods*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.

- Boyden, J. (1997). Childhood and the policy makers: A comparative perspective on the globalization of childhood. In: A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 190-229). New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Boyden, J., Lyng, B., & Myers, W. (Eds.) (1998). What works for working children. Stockholm: Radda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden) & UNICEF.
- BSAF (2003). State of child rights in Bangladesh 2002. Dhaka: Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF).
- BSS (2005, June 11). ILO lauds Dhaka's commitment. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 06/11/2007 from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/06/11/d50611100191.htm>
- BSS (2007, January 12). 947 workers killed at workplace. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 01/30/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/01/12/d70112060382.htm>
- Burr, R., & H. Montgomery (2003). Children and rights. In M. Woodhead & H. Montgomery (Eds.), *Understanding childhood: An interdisciplinary approach* (pp. 135-178). Milton Keynes: John Wiley & Sons, in association with The Open University.
- Cadet, J-P. (1998). Restavec: From Haitian slave child to middle-class American. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Carabine, J. (2001). Unmarried motherhood 1830-1990. A genealogical analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. J. Yates, (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide for Analysis* (pp. 267-310). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Center for Policy Dialogue. (2007). Revisiting Foreign Aid: An Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD) 2003. Retrieved 03/09/2007 from <http://www.cpd-bangladesh.org/work/irbd2003.html>
- CIA (2007). The world factbook: Bangladesh. Retrieved 03/04/2007, from <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bg.html>,
- Cloke, P., Philo, C., & Sadler, D. (1991). *Approaching human geography: An introduction to contemporary theoretical debates*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Chowdhury, M. (2007, April 27). Time for citizens to step up. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 04/27/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2007/04/27/d704271503125.htm>
- Chowdhury, S. (2006, August 3). Tortured children. *The Daily Star*, Letters to the Editor.

- Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2002). Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood*, 9(4), 477-497.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2005). *The sociology of childhood*. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Danino, R. (2005). The legal aspects of the World Bank's work on human rights: Some preliminary thoughts. In P. Alston & M. Robinson (Eds.), *Human rights and development: Towards mutual reinforcement* (pp.509-524). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delap, E. (2001). Economic and cultural forces in the child labour debate: Evidence from urban Bangladesh. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 37, 1-22.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin and Y.S.Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- DiLeo, J. (1983). *Interpreting children's drawings*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Dowling, R. (2000). Power, subjectivity and ethics in qualitative research. In I. Hay. (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eder, D., & Fingerson, L. (2003). Interviewing children and adolescents. In: J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium, *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns* (pp. 33-53). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Edmonds, B. C., & Fernekes, W. R. (1996). *Children's rights. A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). The discourse of new labour: Critical discourse analysis. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse as data: A guide to Analysis* (pp. 229-266). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Fallon, P., & Tzannatos, Z. (1998). Child labor: Issues and directions for the World Bank. Washington, D.C.: Social Protection, Human Development Network, The World Bank.
- Fattore, T., & Turnbull, N. (2005). Theorizing representation of and engagement with children. In J. Mason and T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously: in theory, policy and practice* (pp. 46-57). Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

- Feldman, S., & Larson, D. (2004). Bangladesh. In C. L. Schmitz, E. K. Traver & D. Larson (Eds.), *Child labor: A global view* (pp. 13-25). London: Greenwood Press.
- Fine, G. A., & Sandstrom, K. L. (1988). *Knowing children: Participant observation with minors*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Flores-Oebanda, M. C., Montano, V., & Pacis, R. R. R. (2001). *The Kasambahay: Child domestic work in the Philippines*. Manila: ILO.
- Forbes, D. (2000). Reading texts and writing geography. In I. Hay. (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 122-143). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1990 [1978]). *The history of sexuality. An introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1995 [1977]). *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1998 [1984]). Different spaces. In M. Foucault, (J. D. Faubion, Ed.), *Aesthetics, method, and epistemology* (pp. 175-185). 2nd volume of Essential works of Foucault, Series editor P. Rabinow. New York: The New Press.
- Fraser, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S., Kellett, M., & Robinson, C. (Eds.) (2004). *Doing research with children and young people*. London: Sage.
- Freire, P. (1998 [1970]). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Fyfe, A. (2001). Child Labour and education: Revisiting the policy debate. In K. Lieten and B. White (Eds.), *Child labour: Policy options* (pp. 67-84). Amsterdam: Aksant.
- Garcia, F. J., & Jun, S. (2005). Trade-based strategies for combating child labor. In B. H. Weston (Ed.), *Child labor and human rights: Making children matter* (pp. 401-424). Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Gillies, V., & Alldred, P. (2002). The ethics of intention: Research as a political tool. In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop, & T. Miller (Eds.), *Ethics in qualitative research* (pp. 32-52). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Goodall, B. (1987). *Dictionary of human geography*. London: Penguin.
- Graham, E. (1997). Philosophies underlying human geography research. In R. Flowerdew & D. Martin (Eds.), *Methods in human geography* (pp. 6-30). Essex: Longman.
- Graue, M. E., & Walsh, D. J. (1998). *Studying children in context: Theories, methods, and ethics*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Griesel, D., Swart-Kruger, J., & Chawla, L. (2004). Children in South Africa can make a difference: An assessment of 'Growing Up in Cities' in Johannesburg. In V. Lewis, M. Kellett, C. Robinson, S. Fraser & S. Ding (Eds.), *The reality of research with children and young people* (pp. 277-301). Thousand Oaks: Sage, in association with the Open University.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191-216). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hall, S. (2001). Foucault: Power, knowledge and discourse. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse theory and practice: A reader* (pp. 72-81). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hammarberg, T. (1998). Making reality of the rights of the child. The UN convention: What it says and how it can change the status of children worldwide. London: International Save the Children Alliance.
- Haraway, D. (1996). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. In J. Agnew, D. N. Livingstone & A. Rodgers (Eds.), *Human geography: An essential anthology* (pp. 108-128). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hart, R. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Hartsock, N. (1990). Foucault on power: A theory for women? In L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (pp. 158-172). New York: Routledge.
- Hay, I. (Ed.) (2000). *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. (1st ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hensman, R. (2001). World trade and workers' rights: In search of an internationalist position. *Antipode*, 33(3), 427-450.
- Holloway, S. L., & Valentine, G. (Eds.) (2000). *Children's Geographies: Playing, living, learning*. London: Routledge.

- Holloway, S. L., & Valentine, G. (2000). Children's geographies and the new social studies of childhood. In S. L. Holloway & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning* (pp. 1-26). New York: Routledge.
- Holmes, R. M. (1998). *Fieldwork with children*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Holt, L. (2004). The 'voices' of children: De-centring empowering research relations. *Children's Geographies*, 2(1), 13-27.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Where we stand: Class matters*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoque, M. (Ed.) (1995). Child domestic work in Dhaka: A study of the exploitative situation. Dhaka: Save the Children Fund Australia, Dhaka, in collaboration with Anti-slavery international, London.
- Horton, J., & Kraftl, P. (2005). For more-than-usefulness: Six overlapping points about children's geographies. *Children's Geographies*, 3(2), 131-143.
- Hossain, M. H. (1997). Decentralization of educational management and planning of primary education in Bangladesh. In A. K. Jalaluddin & A. M. R. Chowdhury (Eds.), *Getting started: Universalizing quality primary education in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press.
- Hubbard, P., Kitchin, R., & Valentine, G. (Eds.). (2004). *Key thinkers on space and place*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Human Rights Watch (2006). Governments must protect child domestic workers from abuse. In A. Manheimer (Ed.), *Child labor and sweatshops* (pp. 48-57). New York: Greenhaven.
- Human Rights Watch (2007a). Violence against child domestic workers. Retrieved 06/07/2007, from <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/02/20/global15343.htm>
- Human Rights Watch (2007b). Bottom of the ladder: Exploitation and abuse of girl domestic workers in Guinea. Volume 19, No. 8 (A). Retrieved 07/03/2007, from <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/guinea0607/guinea0607web.pdf>
- Huq, H. (2003). Children's boundary: Exploring struggle, and local contexts of child rights. Dhaka: Community Development Library.
- ILO (2002). A future without child labour: Global report under the follow-up to the ILO declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work. International Labour Conference, 90th Session 2002, Report I (B). Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).
- ILO-IPEC (2004a). Helping hands or shackled lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it. Report prepared by June Kane with technical guidance

and inputs from ILO-IPEC staff. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).

ILO-IPEC (2004b). Investing in every child: An economic study of the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO).

ILO-IPEC (2005). Emerging good practices in CDW¹⁰⁶ sector: An abstract taken from the emerging good practices report of the USDOL¹⁰⁷ project. Dhaka: ILO-IPEC USDOL project in Bangladesh to combat the worst forms of child labour in the CDW, construction, match factory, leather tanneries and bidi sectors.

Islam, N. (1994). Urban research in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka: Towards an agenda for the 1990s. In R. Stren (Ed.), *Urban research in the developing world. Vol. 1: Asia*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies.

Islam, N. (2004). *Looking outward: Bangladesh in the world economy*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.

Jennings, J., Aitken, S., Estrada, S. L., & Fernandez, A. (2006). Learning and earning: Relational scales of children's work. *Area*, 38(3), 231-239.

Jensen, K. B. (2000). Why do not all the children go to school? A study of poor children's school participation in Dhaka. Occasional Paper #29. Human Geography, Department of Sociology and Human Geography. (Revised version of M.Phil. thesis). (Norwegian). Oslo: University of Oslo.

Jensen, K. B. (2007). Opportunities for agency and social participation among child domestic workers in Bangladesh. *Children, Youth, and Environments*, 17 (1), 148-170. Retrieved 04/30/2007 from <http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye>

Johnston, R. J. (1997). *Geography and geographers: Anglo-American human geography since 1945* (5th ed.). London: Arnold.

Johnston, R. J., Gregory, D., & Smith, D. M. (Eds.). (1994). *The dictionary of human geography*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kabir, R. (1999). Adolescent girls in Bangladesh. Dhaka: UNICEF Bangladesh.

Karim, E. (2005, July 8). What kids have to say. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*: pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ Child domestic work

¹⁰⁷ The U.S. Department of Labor

- Karim, E. (2007, February 9). Chasing corruption. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 02/09/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2007/02/02/perspective.htm>
- Karunan, V. P. (2005). Working children as change makers: Perspectives from the South. In B. H. Weston (Ed.), *Child labor and human rights: Making children matter* (pp. 293-317). Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Katz, C. (1986). Children and the environment: Work, play, and learning in rural Sudan. *Children's Environment Quarterly*, 3(4), 43-51.
- Katz, C. (1996). On the backs of children: Children and work in Africa. *Anthropology of Work Review*, 17(1&2), 3-8.
- Katz, C. (2004). *Growing up global: Economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kearns, R. (2000). Being there: research through observing and participating. In I. Hay, (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 103-121). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Khair, S. (1998). Children in domestic service: A concept paper. Dhaka.
- Khair, S. (2004). Child domestic workers in Dhaka city: Situation analysis. Dhaka: ILO, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), Project on preventing and eliminating the worst forms of child labour in selected formal and informal sectors.
- Khair, S. (2006, January 7). The case of Bangladesh: Towards a rights-based approach for child labour migrants. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 02/04/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/law/2006/01/01/investigation.htm>
- Khalil, G. (2002). *Child rights: The historical evolution*. Lebanon: Chemaly and Chemaly.
- Khan, S. (2001). Gender issues and the ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh: The trade union context. In R. Sobhan, & N. Khundker (Eds.), *Globalisation and gender: Changing patterns of women's employment in Bangladesh* (pp. 167-218). Dhaka: Centre for Policy Dialogue and University Press Limited.
- Kielland, A., & Tovo, M. (2006). *Children at work: Child labour practices in Africa*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Klepsch, M., & Logie, L. (1982). *Children draw and tell*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Krampen, M. (1991). *Children's drawings: Iconic coding of the environment*. New York: Plenum Press.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Labanno, S. S. (2004, July 16). Children engaged in hazardous jobs. *Observer Magazine, The Bangladesh Observer*: p.21.
- Lees, L. (2004). Urban geography: Discourse analysis and urban research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(1), 101-107.
- Ley, D. (1994). Postmodernism. In R. J. Johnston, D. Gregory, & D. M. Smith (Eds.), *The dictionary of human geography* (pp. 466-468). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Love, N. S. (1989). Foucault and Habermas on discourse and democracy. *Polity*, 22(2), 269-293.
- Malchiodi, C. (1998). *Understanding children's drawings*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Mansvelt, J., & Berg, L. (2005). Writing qualitative geographies, constructing geographical knowledges. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (pp. 248-265). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marcus, R., & Harper, C. (1996). *Small hands: Children in the working world*. London: Save the Children.
- Maria, A.S.S. (2002). Study on the legal protection of child domestic workers in Asia-Pacific (A review of the existing legal framework for the protection of child domestic workers). Consultancy report. Manila, The Philippines.
- Marium, L. (2004). *Children cry alone*. Dhaka: Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK).
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology: An introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Mason, J. (2005). Child protection policy and the construction of childhood. In J. Mason & T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously: In theory, policy and practice* (pp. 91-97). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Matthews, H., Limb, M., & Taylor, M. (1998). The geography of children: Some ethical and methodological considerations for project and dissertation work. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 22(3), 311-324.
- McDowell, L. (1992). Doing gender: Feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17(4), 399-416.

- Melton, G. B. (1999). Foreword. In A. B. Andrews & N. H. Kaufman (Eds.), *Implementing the U.N. convention on the rights of the child: A standard of living adequate for development* (pp. xi-xvi). Westport: Praeger.
- Meng, X., and Ryan, J. (2003). Evaluating the food for education program in Bangladesh: Feeding children helps keep them in school. Canberra, Australia: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies.
- Miljeteig, P. (2005). Children's democratic rights: What we can learn from young workers organizing themselves. In J. Mason & T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously: In theory, policy and practice* (pp. 123-135). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (2002). National plan of action against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children including trafficking. Dhaka: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (2006). National Plan of Action for Children 2005-2010. Dhaka: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Mohiuddin, H., & Khatun, A. (2003). Viewing through a "transit society" model: Methodological perspectives on the study of livelihood of women garment workers of Bangladesh. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation, environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh* (pp. 339-360). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Mollah, S., & Palma, P. (2005, May 21). Too feeble to speak out, too young to go home. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 05/22/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/05/21/d5052101022.htm>
- Momen, M. A. (1993). Case studies on abuse and exploitation of children in domestic service in Bangladesh (Dhaka city). Dhaka: Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum - BSAF.
- Montgomery, H. (2001). Imposing rights? A case study of child prostitution in Thailand. In J. K. Cowan, M.-B. Dembour, & R. A. Wilson (Eds.), *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (pp. 80-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Morris, A. (2006, December 1). Out of darkness. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*. Retrieved 12/02/2007, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2006/12/01/hr.htm>
- Morse, J. M., & Richards, L. (2002). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Muhammad, A. (2003). Bangladesh's integration into global capitalist system: Policy direction and the role of global institutions. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation,*

environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh (pp. 113-140). Dhaka: University Press Limited.

- Mujeri, M. K. (2002). Globalisation - poverty links in Bangladesh: Some broad observations. In CPD, *Bangladesh facing the challenges of globalisation: A review of Bangladesh's development 2001* (pp. 143-176). Dhaka: University Press Limited, for Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).
- Myers, W. (2001). The right rights? Child labor in a globalizing world. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575, 38-55.
- Nath, S. R., Sylva, K., & Grimes, J. (1999). Raising basic education levels in rural Bangladesh: The impact of a non-formal education programme. *International Review of Education*, 45(1), 5-26.
- Nussbaum, M. (1999). The professor of parody: The hip defeatism of Judith Butler. *The New Republic*, 22 February: 37-45.
- Nyamu-Musembi, C., & Cornwall, A. (2004). What is the "rights-based approach" all about? Perspectives from international development agencies. IDS Working Paper 234. Brighton, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- O'Kane, C. (2000). The development of participatory techniques. Facilitating children's views about decisions which affect them. In P. Christensen, & A. James (Eds.), *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (pp. 136-159). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- O'Kane, C. (2002). Marginalized children as social actors for social justice in South Asia. *British Journal of Social Work*, 32(6), 697-710.
- O'Kane, C. (2003). Children and young people as citizens: Partners for social change. Kathmandu: International Save the Children Alliance, South & Central Asia Region.
- Oishi, N. (2005). *Women in motion: Globalization, state policies, and labor migration in Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Perakyla, A. (2005). Analyzing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Phillips, L., & Jorgensen, M. W. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Post, D. (2001). *Children's work, schooling, and welfare in Latin America*. Boulder: Westview.
- Post, D. (2005). Conceiving child labor in human rights terms: Can it mobilize progressive change? In B. H. Weston (Ed.), *Child labor and human rights: Making children matter* (pp. 267-292). Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Powers, P. (2001). *The methodology of discourse analysis*. Boston: Jones and Bartlett.
- Pratt, G. (2004). *Working feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Prior, L. (2003). *Using documents in social research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Prout, A., & James, A. (1997). A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 7-33). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Pulsipher, L. M. and Pulsipher, A. (2006). *World regional geography: Global patterns, local lives*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Punch, S. (2000). Children's strategies for creating playspaces: Negotiating independence in rural Bolivia. In S. H. Holloway and G. Valentine (Eds.), *Children's geographies: Playing, living, learning* (pp.48-62). New York: Routledge.
- Punch, S. (2001). Multiple methods and research relations with children in rural Bolivia. In M. Limb & C. Dwyer (Eds.), *Qualitative methodologies for geographers: Issues and debates* (pp. 165-180). London: Arnold.
- Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, 9(3), 321-341.
- Punch, S. (2004). Negotiating autonomy: Children's use of time and space in rural Bolivia. In V. Lewis, M. Kellett, C. Robinson, S. Fraser & S. Ding (Eds.), *The reality of research with children and young people* (pp. 94-119). Thousand Oaks: Sage, in association with the Open University.
- Rahman, G. (2006, June 11). Recent vandalism in garment industry - how to avert recurrence? *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 06/11/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/06/11/d60611020529.htm>
- Rahman, H. (1995). Child domestic workers: Is servitude the only option? Dhaka: Shoishab Bangladesh.

- Rahman, M. (2003). Bangladesh's early experience with globalisation. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation, environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh* (pp. 81-112). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Ravallion, M., & Wodon, Q. (2000). Does child labour displace schooling? Evidence on behavioural responses to an enrollment subsidy. *The Economic Journal*, 110(462), C158-C175.
- RCS (1999). Prevailing opinion and attitude towards child domestics. Dhaka: Research and Computing Services Private Limited (RCS) for UNICEF.
- Robinson, C., & Kellett, M. (2004). Power. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson (Eds.), *Doing research with children and young people* (pp. 81-96). London: Sage.
- Roche, J. (1999). Children: Rights, participation and citizenship. *Childhood*, 6(4), 475-493.
- Rodaway, R. (2004). Yi-Fu Tuan. In P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin, & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Key thinkers on space and place*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305-320.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Saleheen, T. (2005, August 4). Let the children speak. *Star Weekend Magazine, The Daily Star*.
- Samers, M. (2006). Changing the world: Geography, political activism, and Marxism. In S. Aitken and G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to human geography* (pp. 273-285). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Samsad (1992). *Samsad Bengali-English dictionary* (2nd ed.). Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad.
- Sangtin writers and Nagar, R. (2006). *Playing with fire: Feminist thought and activism through seven lives in India*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Save the Children, The Government of Bangladesh, and UNICEF Bangladesh (2004). National children's consultation on the National Children's Task Force in Bangladesh: Strengthening monitoring of NPA implementation through child participation. Dhaka.

- Save the Children (2003). Save the children's position on children and work. London: Save the Children UK on behalf of the International Save the Children Alliance.
- Save the Children (2004). Children and young people as citizens: Partners for social change. Kathmandu: International Save the Children Alliance, South and Central Asia Region.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. and Sargent, C. (1998). Introduction: The cultural politics of childhood. In N. Scheper-Hughes and C. Sargent (Eds.), *Small wars: The cultural politics of childhood* (pp. 1-33). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scheyvens, R., Scheyvens, H., & Murray, W. E. (2003). Working with marginalised, vulnerable or privileged groups. In R. Scheyvens and D. Storey (Eds.), *Development fieldwork: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, Sage: 167-193.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Seabrook, J. (2001). *Children of other worlds: Exploitation in the global market*. London: Pluto Press.
- Shoishab (1999). A quantitative study on child domestic workers in Dhaka metropolitan city. Dhaka: Shoishab Bangladesh, with financial support from Save the Children UK.
- Shoishab (2001). Case study on child domestic workers of Dhaka Metropolitan City. Dhaka: Shoishab Bangladesh, sponsored by Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum.
- Siddiqui, K. (2003). *Better days, better lives: Towards a strategy for implementing the convention of the rights of the child in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Soja, E. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sommerfelt, T. (2001). Domestic child labour in Morocco. An analysis of the parties involved in relationships to "Petites Bonnes". Fafo-report 370. Oslo: Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science. Retrieved 06/08/07 from <http://www.fafo.no/pub/370.pdf>
- Sparke, M. (1999). Epistemology. In L. McDowell & J.P.Sharp (Eds.), *A feminist glossary of human geography*. New York: Arnold.

- Staff Business Reporter (2006, May 8). Remittance to reach \$4.5b this year. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 05/08/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/05/08/d60508050564.htm>
- Staff Correspondent (2004, June 7). SUF runs 40 non-formal schools in city. *The Bangladesh Observer*.
- Staff Correspondent (2004, September 1). NPA in final stage. *Amader Khabor* (p.6). (Amader Khabor is a monthly magazine in Bangla with one page summary in English, published by 'Ichchey media house for children', run by Save the Children Sweden - Denmark in Dhaka.)
- Staff Correspondent (2005a, July 23). Domestic help steals valuables worth Tk 8 lakh. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 07/23/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/07/23/d50723061974.htm>
- Staff Correspondent (2005b, December 18). Migrant child workers: 'Frame national policy to protect rights'. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 12/20/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/12/18/d51218060156.htm>
- Staff Correspondent (2006a, August 3). India bans employing children as domestic helps. New Delhi: AP, in *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 08/28/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/08/03/d608031322135.htm>
- Staff Correspondent (2006b, December 2). International Day for the Abolition of Slavery. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 12/03/2006, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/law/2006/12/01/campaign.htm>
- Stalker, P. (1996). Child labour in Bangladesh: A summary of recent investigations. Dhaka: UNICEF.
- Sur, M. (2003). Reflections on child rights and realities. In H. Hossain (Ed.), *Human rights in Bangladesh 2002* (pp. 237-252). Dhaka: Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).
- Tait, R. W. (2003). Trade liberalisation and economic change in Bangladesh. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation, environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh* (pp. 49-80). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Tammivaara, J., & Enright, S. (1986). On eliciting information: Dialogues with child informants. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 17, 218-238.
- The World Bank Group (2007). Bangladesh country overview 2006. Retrieved 06/11/07, from <http://go.worldbank.org/organizations/740EA5PIFO>
- Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing Critical Ethnography*. London: Sage.

- Transparency International (2007). Surveys and indices. Retrieved 02/14/2007, from http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2005
- UN Millennium Project (2005). Taking action: Achieving gender equality and empowering women. London: Earthscan, for UN Millennium Project, Task force on education and gender equality.
- UNDP (2007). Human Development Report 2006. Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty, and the global water crisis. Retrieved 03/04/2007, from <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/>,
- UNESCO (2007). Education for All International Coordination. Retrieved 05/02/2007, from: http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=46881&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.
- UNICEF (1997). Relationships between education and child labour. Issues paper. International conference on child labour, Oslo, 27-30 October 1997. New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF (1999). Child domestic work. Innocenti Digest 5. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- UNICEF (2004). Situation analysis of child domestic workers in Dhaka city. Dhaka: UNICEF Bangladesh.
- UNICEF (2006). Primary School Years. Retrieved 11/04/2006, from http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/children_355.htm
- United Nations (1994). A fork in the path. Human development choices for Bangladesh. Dhaka: United Nations.
- United Nations General Assembly (1989). The Convention on the Rights of the Child. Geneva.
- Valentine, G. (1999). Being seen and heard? The ethical complexities of working with children and young people at home and at school. *Ethics, Place, and Environment*, 2, 141-155.
- Valentine, G. (2004). *Public space and the culture of childhood*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ward, K., Rahman, F., Islam, A. K. M .S., Akhter, R., Kamal, N. (2004). The effects of global economic restructuring on urban women's work and income-generating strategies in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 1-40.
- Waite, G. (2005). Doing discourse analysis. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* (2nd ed., pp. 163-191). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Weston, B. H. (Ed.). (2005). *Child labor and human rights: Making children matter*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- White, S. C. (1992). *Arguing with the crocodile: Gender and class in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press.
- White, S. C. (2002). From the politics of poverty to the politics of identity? Child rights and working children in Bangladesh. *Journal of International Development*, 14, 725-735.
- Wiest, R., Khatun, A., & Mohiuddin, H. (2003). Workplace, residence and relationships among garment workers in the globalising export economy of Bangladesh. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation, environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh* (pp. 165-208). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Wiest, R., & Mohiuddin, H. (2003). Shifting social relations and cultural change in the livelihood strategies of women garment workers of Bangladesh. In M. Rahman (Ed.), *Globalisation, environmental crisis and social change in Bangladesh* (pp. 209-246). Dhaka: University Press Limited.
- Woodhead, M. (1999). Is there a place for work in child development? Implications of child development theory and research for interpretation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular reference to Article 32, on children, work and exploitation. Stockholm, Sweden: Save the Children.
- Woodhead, M., & Faulkner, D. (2000). Subjects, objects or participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children. In P. Christensen and A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (pp. 9-35). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Wright, D. (2003). Child labour in Bangladesh: Recent trends and labour standards. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 26(3), 409-422.
- Wright, M. (2006). *Disposable women and other myths of global capitalism*. New York: Routledge.
- Wylie, J. W. (2006). Poststructural theories, critical methods and experimentation. In S. Aitken & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to human geography* (pp. 298-310). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Wyness, M. G. (1999). Childhood, agency and education reform. *Childhood*, 6(3), 353-368.
- Yapa, L. (1996). What causes poverty? A postmodern view. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 86(4), 707-728.

- Yapa, L. (1997). Reply: Why discourse matters, materially. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87(4), 717-722.
- Yapa, L. (1998). The poverty discourse and the poor in Sri Lanka. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 23(1), 95-115.
- Yapa, L. (2002). How the discipline of geography exacerbates poverty in the third world. *Futures*, 34(1): 33-46.
- Yapa, L., & Wisner, B. (1995). Building a case against economic development. *GeoJournal*, 35, 105-118.
- Young, L., & Barrett, H. (2001). Adapting visual methods: Action research with Kampala street children. *Area*, 33(2), 141-152.
- Zamir, M. (2005, January 29). Post-MFA era and Bangladesh. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved 01/30/2005, from <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/01/29/d50129020326.htm>
- Zelizer, V. A. (1985). *Pricing the priceless child: The changing social value of children*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Appendix A

Playing on the rooftop

In the foreground are child domestics, playing with pebbles and looking after the baby. Behind them are employers' children. Sometimes they played across the class divides. The girl looking at the view of the city had just arrived from her village to work as a domestic for one of the families in this building. All female child domestics I interacted with wore the traditional 'salwar kamiz' - a wide pant and a tunic, except for a few pre-puberty girls who wore dresses. Many of the employers' children use Western clothes.



A.1: Photo by Naser Khan used with permission.

Appendix B

Child domestics creating friendship across buildings

When side-by-side buildings have the same height, friendship can form on the rooftops across buildings. Here are two child domestics who used to chat on the rooftops whenever they had a chance. The distance between the buildings here is the minimum legal distance: four feet!



A.2: Photo by Naser Khan used with permission.

Appendix C

Density of built structures: A view to several rooftops where children play

This is the view from the rooftop of the apartment building where I stayed and where I did most of my ethnographic research. Children play on many of the rooftops that can be seen here. This second layer of the city plays an important role for children in general due to the dense city structure and lack of open spaces or playgrounds near the apartment buildings. The rooftops play a crucial role for female, live-in child domestics because the employers usually deny them access to the world outside the apartment building.



A.3: Photo by Naser Khan used with permission.

Appendix D

The geography of rooftops

In this satellite image from Google Earth™ I have marked the rooftops where children can play (white dots) and one rooftop that is utilized as an NGO school (white star). None of the employers in my building (large white dot) were willing to send their child domestics to the NGO school a few hundred feet down the road. (Usually, the traffic here is heavy—this photo must have been taken before the morning traffic starts). Thanks to Google Earth™ mapping service for granting me permission to use this image.



Appendix E

Organizations visited

- Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK)
- Aparajeyo-Bangladesh
- Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA)
- Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF)
- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)
- Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES)
- Dhaka Ahsania Mission
- ILO-IPEC (The International Labor Organization's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor).
- Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Nari Jibon
- Nari Maitree
- Palli Mongal Karmasuchi
- PLAN International, Bangladesh
- Save the Children Australia
- Save the Children Sweden-Denmark
- Save the Children UK

- Save the Children US
- Shoishab Bangladesh
- SUF (Society for Underprivileged Families)
- UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs)
- UNDP Bangladesh (United Nations Development Programme)
- UNICEF Bangladesh (United Nations Children's Fund)

VITA

Kari Bolstad Jensen

EDUCATION

2003-2007 Ph.D. Geography, Pennsylvania State University. Dissertation Title: *Child domestic workers in Dhaka: A geographical study of discourses, work, and education*. Advisor: Dr. Lakshman Yapa.

1996-2000 Candidata rerum politicarum. (equal to M.Phil.) Human Geography, University of Oslo. Thesis Title: *Why do not all the children go to school? A study of poor children's school participation in Dhaka*. Advisor: Prof. Jan Hesselberg.

1992-1996 Candidata magisterii. (equal to B.A.). Human Geography, University of Oslo. Thesis Title: *An analysis of the development strategy of Bangladesh*. Advisor: Associate Prof. Sylvi Endresen.

RECENT PUBLICATION/ PUBLICATION IN PROGRESS

Jensen, Kari B. 2007. Opportunities for agency and social participation among child domestic workers in Bangladesh. *Children, Youth, and Environments* 17 (1) 2007. <http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye>

Glasmeier, Amy and Kari B. Jensen. 2007. Research design and the socially situated researcher. In: Aitken, Stuart et al. (Eds.) 2007, *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Human Geography*. Thousand Oaks, Sage. (Accepted for publication with minor revisions.)

RECENT AWARDS

2007. James T. Meyer Graduate Teaching Assistant Award. Department of Geography, the Pennsylvania State University.

2007. George H. K. Schenck Teaching Assistant Award. College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, the Pennsylvania State University.

2005-2006. Society of Woman Geographers' Pruitt National Fellowship for Dissertation Research.

2005-2006. EMS Centennial Graduate Research Award, from the EMS College at the Pennsylvania State University.

2005. Research grant from Save the Children's Research Fund, for fieldwork in Bangladesh.