

Tone Sommerfelt (ed.)



# Domestic Child Labour in Morocco

An analysis of the parties involved  
in relationships to “Petites Bonnes”



Fafo



Save the Children  
UK





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ISBN 82-7422-352-7  
ISSN 0801-6143

Cover page: Jon S. Lahlum  
Cover photo: Tone Sommerfelt  
Printed in Norway by: Centraltrykkeriet AS

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## Preface

This report is the outcome of a research project requested and financed by Save the Children UK. For Fafo, it is a continuation of a long engagement in research on child labour issues.

Several individuals and organisations have contributed to the present study. At their first arrival in Morocco, researchers Liv Jorunn Stokke and Tone Sommerfelt were fortunate to be received by Mme Nezha Chekrouni, the Minister under the Ministry of Employment, for issues related to women, family, children and the handicapped. Fafo is grateful for the assistance they received from the Ministry and its staff. Other governmental institutions have been involved, first and foremost the Royal Moroccan Embassy in Oslo. Ambassador Abdel Ouahab Bellouki should be thanked in particular.

Throughout the period of work in Morocco, Fafo has been assisted by the Norwegian Embassy in Rabat, and in particular by Ambassador Ole Kristian Holthe, and First Secretary Nils M. Gunneng. We are also indebted to INSEA in Rabat, and Professor Mehdi Lahlou at INSEA. Lahlou participated and shaped the study from the beginning till end. In the fieldwork phase in Morocco, we are thankful to several individuals and organisations, who should be mentioned one by one: Rajae Msefer Berrada in UNICEF in Rabat, Nick Hughes in Terre des Hommes, and Khadija Bourjilat in Club des Enfants Sidi Othman. We also take the opportunity to thank Ligue Marocaine pour la Protection de l'Enfance (who run the Sidi Othman Club, partly with UNICEF), INSAF, Association Solidarité Feminine, Ligue Democratique de Droits des Femmes, and Association Marocaine de Planification Familial in Fes. Touria Houraira has been assisting Fafo, and we are truly indebted to her. Khadija Sabil and Naïma Lahlou have also contributed with comments and assistance.

We appreciated the assistance provided by Abdeslam Kelai and the rest of the staff in Save the Children in Casablanca, and Eddie Thomas in Save the Children in Beirut. Hala Ghoseh, engaged on another research project for Save the Children, has contributed with valuable comments. In Fafo, the project has been executed by researcher Tone Sommerfelt, who also edited the report. In addition to Sommerfelt, Jon Pedersen contributed as author, and Liv Jorunn Stokke, Anne Hatløy, Bjerne

Grimsrud, and Cristophe Gironde have given feedback and shaped the project in its different stages. Kyrre M. Knudsen assisted in the final stages.

Obviously, all errors and misinterpretations are to blame on the authors and Fafo, and not on all those who spent their time trying to avoid them.

On behalf of Fafo, I take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to Save the Children UK for providing us with this opportunity to expand our research on issues pertaining to child domestic labour to Morocco. It is my hope that the project is the first in a more extensive engagement with this fascinating country.

Oslo, March 2001

Jon Hanssen-Bauer

Managing Director

Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

## Executive Summary

This report describes the extent, social organisation, and economic contexts of child domestic labour in Morocco. The study places a particular emphasis on the child domestic workers; their parents or families of origin; the relationships between employers, parents, and children; and the arrangements surrounding children's moves to employers. More specifically, the focus is directed toward girls, the so-called "petites bonnes" (small maids), which make up the majority of child domestics in Morocco. The "petites bonnes" are young girls (here defined as under the age of 15 years) who perform various household tasks, and who live with their employers.

Domestic labour in Morocco is largely an urban phenomenon: young girls work as maids in the cities (migrating from rural and semi-urban areas). We estimate the number of petites bonnes to be between 66 thousand and 88 thousand. With dramatically reduced fertility rates in recent years, however, the number of girls (potentially) available for work will be greatly reduced in coming years. Even so, the development of the number of petites bonnes depends on other factors too, e.g. the level of salaries, development of educational system, parents' living conditions, and living- and working conditions in rural and urban areas more generally.

By way of an analysis of the opportunity situations of girls, parents, and employers, we describe the networks and relationships that surround young working girls. Both employers and parents regulate the young girls' working- and living conditions. Parents send daughters to work as a response to an economic situation where they are in need of a source of income, i.e. the income of their daughters. Employers restrict the social network of petites bonnes, or allow them certain freedoms, as a result of their needs and fears, in a social setting where they are afraid of losing labour services. Whereas the youngest girls have little say in decisions on their introduction to working life, and few opportunities to take action when they dislike their environments, older girls relate actively to their working situation. For many of them, the question is not *whether* to work, but *whom to work for*, and they take action by changing employers, or trying to improve their conditions. Often, parents assist the girls in their search.

Moreover, children's work is a commodity for sale, and the conditions involved in the trade shape the power relationships between the involved actors. The commercialisation of girls' work seems to empower older and experienced girls, but

weakens parents and younger or inexperienced girls. Interventions aiming to alter the situations of parents, girls, and employers, must take into account that the networks that surround young working girls constitute a social system, in which a change of possibilities of one party ultimately affects other parties. Thus, when empowering petites bonnes, we must be aware of and avoid a situation whereby employers react negatively in a way that affects bonnes. We must also avoid that parents are pacified (or distanced) in relations to their daughters.

Preventive and ameliorative interventions can be directed toward both employers and parents of petites bonnes, and toward younger and older bonnes themselves. Among several specific points and recommendations related to the different actors involved, we hold that as an ameliorative step, multifunctional resource centres for petites bonnes should be established in urban areas, offering girls education, counselling, discussion forums (where they can participate in discussions on topics that concern them), and if possible health facilities. Such centres offer an opportunity for young bonnes to extend their social network, and enable them to compare their situation to that of others, a precondition for taking action in response to their own situation. Such resource centres can also be used in prevention of new recruitment of girls to the labour market of bonnes. Thus, former and present petites bonnes can be involved in information work in schools, also in rural and semi-urban areas where girls claim to “want to go to town”.

In addition to interventions in the urban area, community- or activities centres for children in rural areas may offer opportunities to rural girls to engage in other activities than domestic work in their families’ households. Finally, the latter centers can be used in awareness-raising activities with rural parents, aiming at both preventing (new) daughters’ recruitment, and encouraging parents to control the working- and living conditions of their working girls.

## Résumé

Ce rapport est une analyse du travail des enfants domestiques au Maroc; il donne la mesure du phénomène, en décrit l'organisation sociale et son contexte économique. L'étude met l'accent sur les enfants, leurs parents ou famille d'origine, les relations entre parents, employeurs et enfants, et les arrangements aboutissant à l'emploi de ces enfants. L'étude se concentre plus spécifiquement sur les filles, appelées "petites bonnes"; elles constituent en effet la majorité des enfants domestiques au Maroc. Ces "petites bonnes" sont des jeunes filles (définies en fonction de leur âge, ici moins de 15 ans) qui accomplissent toutes sortes de tâches ménagères, et qui vivent chez leur employeur.

Le travail domestique au Maroc est principalement un phénomène urbain ; les jeunes filles migrent des zones rurales ou semi-rurales pour travailler comme domestique en ville. Nous estimons le nombre de jeunes filles concernées entre 66 000 et 88 000. Avec la forte diminution de la fertilité ces dernières années, le nombre de filles pouvant potentiellement travailler devrait certes diminuer. L'évolution du phénomène des petites bonnes dépend toutefois d'autres facteurs tels que le niveau des salaires, le développement du système d'éducation, les conditions de vie des parents, et plus généralement des conditions de vie et de travail dans les zones rurales et urbaines.

Nous analysons les opportunités que constitue le travail de domestique, pour les jeunes filles, leurs parents, et les employeurs. Ce faisant, nous mettons en lumière les réseaux et relations à travers lesquels s'organise ce travail. Ce sont à la fois les parents et les employeurs qui contrôlent les conditions de travail et de vie des jeunes filles. Les parents les envoient travailler parce qu'ils ont besoin de leur revenu. Les employeurs restreignent le réseau social de ces filles, ou leur accordent certaines libertés selon qu'ils craignent de perdre leur service. Les plus jeunes filles n'ont en général pas leur mot à dire dans le processus d'embauche ; elles n'ont pas non plus de possibilité de réagir contre les conditions de travail ou de vie qui leur sont imposées. Il en va différemment pour les filles plus âgées : pour bon nombre d'entre-elles la question n'est pas si elle travaillent ou non, mais pour qui elles travaillent ; elles agissent en changeant d'employeurs ou en essayant d'obtenir une amélioration de leurs conditions de travail et de vie. Souvent, les parents aident leurs enfants dans leurs actions.

Le travail des enfants est un bien à vendre, et les conditions de l'échange déterminent les relations et rapports de force entre les acteurs impliqués. La marchandisation du travail des filles semble ainsi renforcer les filles les plus âgées et les plus expérimentées, mais affaiblit les parents et les filles les plus jeunes et les moins expérimentées. Les interventions visant à changer les relations entre les jeunes filles, leurs parents, et les employeurs, doivent tenir compte du fait que les réseaux à travers lesquels s'organise ce travail constituent un système social où tout changement des opportunités et contraintes pour l'une des parties se répercute sur les autres parties. Ainsi, si l'on apporte soutien aux petites bonnes, il faut veiller à ce que les employeurs ne réagissent pas négativement et d'une façon qui portent atteinte aux intérêts des jeunes filles. Il convient de même de veiller à ce que les parents conservent leur fonction de soutien de leurs filles.

Les interventions ayant pour but la prévention contre le travail domestique ou l'amélioration des conditions de travail peuvent être menées directement, à la fois auprès des employeurs et des parents des petites bonnes, et auprès des enfants domestiques. Parmi les recommandations à l'adresse des différents acteurs impliqués dans le travail des petites bonnes, nous pensons que l'établissement de centres de ressources polyvalents (offrant programmes d'éducation, conseil, espace et forum de rencontres et discussions, et si possible des services de santé) constituerait une amélioration. De tels centres permettraient aux petites bonnes de se constituer un réseau social ou de l'étendre ; ils leur permettraient également de comparer leurs conditions de travail et de vie, prise de conscience nécessaire pour que ces jeunes filles prennent des mesures pour améliorer leur situation. De tels centres polyvalents peuvent servir également à la prévention de la "mise sur le marché" des jeunes filles. Des ex petites bonnes, tout comme des petites bonnes en activité, pourraient participer à un travail d'information dans les écoles, et dans les zones rurales où semi-urbaines où les filles expriment souvent leur désir d'"aller en ville".

Parallèlement aux interventions en milieu urbain, des activités pourraient être menées en milieu rural, par exemple l'établissement de centres communautaires qui offriraient aux jeunes filles vivant en milieu rural l'opportunité d'avoir d'autres activités que le travail avec leur famille. Ces centres communautaires pourraient enfin servir pour des activités de sensibilisation auprès des familles rurales, pour que les jeunes filles ne soient pas envoyées travailler, et pour encourager les parents à contrôler les conditions de travail et de vie de leurs filles.

# 1 Introduction

**Tone Sommerfelt**

This report describes the extent, social organisation, and economic contexts of child domestic labour in Morocco. The focus is directed toward girls, the so-called “*petites bonnes*” (small maids), which make up the majority of child domestics in Morocco. The “*petites bonnes*” are young girls – here defined as under the age of 15 years – who perform various household tasks, and who live with their employers.<sup>1</sup>

The study places a particular emphasis on the girl domestic workers; their parents (or families of origin); the relationships between employers, parents, and girls; and the arrangements surrounding girls’ moves to employers.

## Background

“Child domestic labour” is a special term (or expression) within studies of children’s work and child labour. Historically, children’s work within industry and artisan crafts has been accorded most attention, Morocco being no exception. Domestic activities within households has not always been recognised as “work” or “labour”, especially when performed by girls (or women). Presently, however, more international attention is being directed toward children’s labour and work in domestic settings (cf. Black 1997, Nieuwenhuys 1994, 1996; UNICEF 1999).

The issue of child labour entered the political agenda in Morocco in the 1980’s. Especially since the beginning of the 1990’s, Moroccan authorities have discussed the issue within the framework of human rights, and the protection of children’s rights. During the last few years, child domestic labour and “*petites bonnes*” have been given attention in public media. Presently, Her Highness Princess Lalla Meryem is engaged in work connected to children’s rights, and Moroccan media follow up on stories related to “*petites bonnes*”.

However, research documenting the extent and organisation of child domestic labour is limited. Most commonly, domestic labour is given only small sections in reports dealing with child labour more generally (cf. Benradi & El Aoufi 1996; Ministère du Développement Social & BIT/IPEC 1999).

<sup>1</sup> The age limit of 15 years is given with reference to internationally applied conventions regarding child labour (ILO convention no. 138). It will be discussed in the later chapters.

More specialised studies are now emerging, focusing on gender and girls' and women's work. In 1992, Aïcha Belarbi focused on the young girl in Morocco in her book "La petite fille au Maroc" (Belarbi 1992). In 1995, a study was conducted on the living- and working conditions of "petites bonnes" in their employers' households, the results published in 1996 (Ligue Marocaine pour la Protection de l'Enfance & UNICEF 1996; see also Alaoui 1996; Rabi 1996). In the latter study, information was obtained through a standardised questionnaire directed to strategically chosen informants.<sup>2</sup> At present, UNICEF is planning a more detailed study of petites bonnes' terms and conditions of work, their living conditions with the employers, and the employers' treatment of them.<sup>3</sup>

## Focus and Approaches

The present work is conducted with the objective of contributing to building up a body of information on child domestic labour in Morocco, necessary for a strategy for rights based development work with child domestics.

We approach child domestic labour in Morocco from two angles. Firstly, we seek to determine the extent of the phenomenon of "petites bonnes" in Morocco, and thus give an estimation of the number.

Secondly, we approach the issues relating to petites bonnes by analysing the opportunity situations of the different actors involved in their social networks: parents, employers, other bonnes and petites bonnes, and informal- and formal middlemen who facilitate the recruitment of young girls into domestic service. Thus, we focus on the parents' reasons and motives for giving a child into domestic service, on how the girls are recruited, and the nature of the informal agreements regarding petites bonnes. We choose this approach in order to understand the logic instructing the behaviour of the different parties. Only by analysing the opportunities the parties currently have, or their opportunities as the parties themselves see them, can we in turn analyse the effects of changing or altering these opportunity situations.

Unfortunately, the scope of this work has not allowed us to pay equal attention to all parties involved in the daily life of petites bonnes. Thus, the employer-side is not analysed as thoroughly as the experiences among parents and petites bonnes.

<sup>2</sup> The short questionnaire was directed to 450 "petites bonnes" (under the age of 15), 450 parents and 450 employers of petites bonnes.

<sup>3</sup> Rajae Msefer Berrada in UNICEF in Morocco, personal communication.

However, this is also a way to complement the existing body of reports, which primarily focuses on the girls' living conditions in their employers' households.

## **Sources of Data and Research Techniques**

The study combines two sources of data. For the estimation of the number of child workers, it makes use of quantitative data from the general population census from 1994, and the Moroccan bureau of statistics' projections of these data (to 1999); the Demographic and Health Surveys from 1992 and 1995; and educational- and reproductive health statistics.

An analysis of the parties' opportunities requires a different methodology. Secondly, therefore, the presentation is based on data produced through qualitative techniques during a month long fieldwork in Morocco. The techniques consisted of informal, individual- and group interviews and discussions with the participation of former petites bonnes, present petites bonnes and bonnes, parents, employers, resource personnel, and other persons involved in the lives of bonnes in some way or another. In order to encourage the youngest girls to articulate their needs and experiences and shape the analysis, we used drawing activities as a point of departure for discussions. Additionally, the informal interviews and discussions were complemented by a more conventional anthropological approach of participatory observation, intended to situate statements and practices from parties directly involved in the lives of bonnes within a wider social and cultural context.

## **A Social Organisation of Petites Bonnes**

The aim of the present study is to show how young girls are recruited as bonnes, and also how practises by employers, parents, and bonnes are generated. We argue that employers, parents, and petites bonnes act, react and respond to the decisions and conditions they are faced with, and thus adjust the ways in which they behave in relation to each other. In this sense, the network surrounding petites bonnes constitute a form of social organisation, with recognisable patterns. By portraying these patterns, we can better understand the effects of intervening in these relationships, and the consequences of interventions for petites bonnes, and also for employers, parents, non-working young girls, and other parties involved.

Parents send daughters to work as a response to an economic situation where they are in need of a source of income. The fact that they send girls to domestic

service (and not boys or women), however, is related to traditional relationships of gender. Similarly, the fact that employers request the services of young girls is related to socially and culturally defined notions of how a home should and could best be maintained.

Both employers and parents regulate the young girls' working- and living conditions. Employers restrict the social network of *petites bonnes*, or allow them certain freedoms, as a result of their needs and fears, in a social setting where they are afraid of losing ("good") labour services. Whereas the youngest girls have few opportunities to take action when they dislike their environments, older girls relate actively to their working situation. For many of them, the question is not *whether* to work, but *whom to work for*, and they take action by changing employers, or trying to improve their conditions. Often, parents assist the girls in their search. For the youngest girls, however, parents decide their lives for them.

We conclude that the networks which surround young working girls must be seen as a social system, in which a change of possibilities of one party ultimately affects other parties. Thus, when empowering *petites bonnes*, we must be aware of and avoid a situation whereby employers react negatively in a way that affects *bonnes*. We must also avoid that parents are pacified (or distanced) in relations to their daughters.

## Chapter by Chapter

Chapter 2 is devoted to describing the extent and prevalence of the phenomenon of "*petites bonnes*". The estimations are based on existing statistical sources.

In Chapter 3, we describe in further detail the range of arrangements lying behind the estimation of child domestics in Chapter 2, by drawing on qualitative material and literary sources. The children's situations, and parents' decisions and motivations regarding their children's working activities are assessed. Furthermore, we describe the relationships between the child domestics, their parents, and the employers, first and foremost from the point of view of "*bonnes*" and parents. Finally, the ways in which girls are recruited are described, and the "system" of domestic child labour in Morocco is situated within a wider social framework.

In Chapter 4, we conclude by pointing out the consequences of altering the different parties' opportunity situations, and describe directions that can be followed in response to the situation of child domestics in Morocco.

## 2 The Demography of Petites Bonnes in Morocco

**Jon Pedersen**

In 1999, the number of girls in Morocco who were older than seven years and under the age of 15 years was 2.87 Million out of a total population of 28.238 Million. Of the girls, about 86 thousand lived in households as “adopted” or “fostered” children or as children with no relation of kinship to the household head. If adopted and fostered girls are excluded, then the numbers are roughly 66 thousand children. It is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of these girls are petite bonnes. The majority, or about 60 of the 66 thousand, live in urban areas.

If the age limit is expanded downwards to 5 to 14 the figure increases to about 88 thousand using the wider definition (including “adopted” and “fostered” girls, see below) and stays practically unchanged using the restricted one. The fact that the figure only increases when the wider definition is used may reflect the fact that girls younger than 7 years are probably not much use as workers, and that interviewers or respondents have considered the terms adopted or “guarded” as fitting.

To some extent the above numbers are an example of the old adage that if you torture data sufficiently, they will yield information. They are based on the 1995 Demographic and Health Survey<sup>4</sup> (calculated from raw data files) expanded to the 1999 (mid year) population projection of the Direction de la Statistique (Direction de la Statistique 1999: [www.statistics.gov.ma/poptotal.htm](http://www.statistics.gov.ma/poptotal.htm)). Thus the estimate is associated with uncertainty both because of the sampling and because of the projection. Considering just the sampling error<sup>5</sup>, the estimate of 86 thousand adopted, fostered or non-related girls has a 95 percent confidence interval of 61 to 112 thousand girls. Thus, an interpretation of these figures is that we can be 95 percent sure that the real number of girls is between 61 and 112 thousand. Similarly, the estimate of 66 thousand girls that have no kin in the household has a 95 percent

<sup>4</sup> The Demographic and Health Surveys (henceforth referred to as DHS) are supplied (as raw data files) by Macro International. We have used data from two surveys, those of 1992 and 1995. Some data, such as school attendance, are unfortunately only available in the 1992 survey.

<sup>5</sup> The sampling errors have been estimated from the micro data files from the 1995 DHS survey using the software package SUDAAN (Shah et al 1997) that takes into account the sampling design. Due to incomplete information about the sampling design the confidence intervals may be overstated, but probably not by more than by four to five thousand persons.

confidence interval of 43 to 90 thousand. The uncertainty resulting from the projection from 1994 to 1999 is not necessarily very large. Since the children in the relevant age groups were all born in 1994, the projection is only dependent on mortality and migration. While conceivable differences in mortality from those assumed in the projection would have little effect on the estimate, differences between projected and real migration patterns may be important.

In addition to the uncertainty stemming from the mechanics of the statistical calculations are the uncertainties resulting from how the data were collected. The data we have used stem from the question that were asked about the relation to the household head of each member of the household. Of particular importance is the question of whether or not households actually reported their “*petites bonnes*” as household members and if the interviewers recorded the girls. It is clear that the survey was designed so that that “*petites bonnes*” should have been included, but we have no way of evaluating the step from theory to practice.

A second question is the use of the term “adopted” or “fostered” (“cared for”) in the survey. The terms are standard in DHS. There is no obvious Arabic equivalent that is current in Morocco for the term adopted, adoption being in general very rare in the Arab population, but to some extent practiced among the Berbers.<sup>6</sup> Since the categories “adopted” and “fostered” were merged in the survey, there is no way of knowing if “adopted” was actually used. The respondents were probably not confronted with the terms because the interviewers would assign categories based on their interpretation of the responses they obtained.

A third question is whether all the girls that are reported as having no kinship affiliation are actually “*petites bonnes*” or if they enjoy some other relation to the household. Finally, it is conceivable that divorced women with children have remarried, and their children would in such a case be recorded in the survey as without any relation to the household head, or possibly as adopted or fostered. However, in Morocco it is likely that this complication is negligible.

Despite these caveats one should note that in most surveys there is a tendency that persons unrelated to the head of the household are omitted. This is especially the case for unrelated children. Therefore one would surmise that the number of children that may be *petites bonnes* is in fact biased downwards. Nevertheless, for an Arab county, the number of children recorded in the DHS as living without kinship links to the household head is very high. For example, the data from the Demographic Survey of the West Bank and Gaza Strip carried out in 1995 by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Fafu show only 0.03 percent of the

<sup>6</sup> In her work on women and property in the Middle Atlas, Maher (1974) holds that adoption is prohibited, but that people practice different forms of fostering.

children (aged 7 – 14) as having no relation to the household head (calculated from raw data files).

Despite the uncertainties, the data show some tendencies that reinforce the conclusions drawn in the qualitative analysis and from other work on domestic child workers in Morocco. The data indicate that the “petite bonne” is predominantly an urban phenomenon and that there is a heavy preponderance of girls (table 1). Thus 5.3 percent of the urban girls aged 7 – 14 (completed years) are living without kin (and are therefore possibly petites bonnes), while only 0.7 of the rural ones are.

Table 1 Children without kinship links to household head by gender and residence (percent of children aged 7 – 14 years, source: Macro International: DHS 1995 raw data files)

Boys			Girls			Total
Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	
12.1	8.7	10.1	14.8	9.5	11.6	10.8

A similar but weaker tendency, namely that girls are more likely than boys to live in households where none of their parents are present, is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2 Children without any parent present in household (percent of children aged 7 – 14 years, source: Macro International: DHS 1992 raw data files)

Boys			Girls			Total
Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	
12.1	8.7	10.1	14.8	9.5	11.6	10.8

Since Morocco is a country where labour migration is important, it is not easy to give a direct interpretation of the data in table 2, but the data do point to the fact of girls living less with their parents, and that this is more common in urban areas.

## Petite Bonnes and the Census Data

The estimate of petites bonnes made here is not directly comparable to the figure given for working children in the census of 1994 (Direction de la Statistique 1996, table 02A). The census records altogether 356,530 working children aged 5 – 14 years. This census count includes children (girls and boys) who are working regardless of whether they are living with their parents. Most of these children are probably working outside of their homes. The census did not explicitly try to cover domestic workers and censuses generally underestimate domestic work. The lower age limit

in the census than in our estimate is of little importance: only 7,777 children aged 9 year and below were recorded as working.

Of the 122,917 working girls recorded in the census, 42,723 (35 percent) were living in urban areas (and 80,194 in rural). In the urban case as well, it is probable that most of the girls recorded in the census as working were working outside of the home. If that is true, then the total number of urban working girls surpasses 100 thousand (i.e. 60 thousand *petites bonnes* as estimated from the survey data plus 40 thousand who work outside of the households as counted in the census).

The result found in the DHS that boys are less likely to be in households where they have no relation to the household head can be usefully compared to the finding in the census regards children's work. When it comes to work carried out by children under the age of 15 as recorded in the census of 1994 in urban areas, boys make out 54 percent of those working. Thus, boys work, but not in households (Direction de la Statistique 1996, table 02A) and they stay with their parents even if they work.

## **A Note on Education**

As will be discussed in the next chapter, it is quite likely that the *petites bonnes* have less education than other girls. That enrolment and levels of education of girls are lower for girls than for boys is well established by a number of studies. Of the probable *petites bonnes* (i.e. girls aged 7-14 completed years with no relation to the household head) about 70 percent was recorded as neither attending nor having ever attended school in the 1992 DHS (calculated from the DHS raw data files) in comparison to 45 percent of other girls in the same age group<sup>7</sup>.

*Petites bonnes* are thus recruited predominately from the pool of girls without education (or who are not enrolled), or they lack education because of their status as *petites bonnes*. Nevertheless, *petites bonnes* make up only a small proportion, about 6-8 percent of the girls that are currently not enrolled<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it is unlikely that even radical increases in enrolment rates will reduce the number of *petites bonnes* significantly. For example, an instant halving of the number of un-enrolled girls will still leave a pool of about 470 thousand girls available for work, and since enrolment rates cannot be increased instantly the likely population growth

<sup>7</sup> Note that this measure is not an enrolment rate.

<sup>8</sup> Using the net enrolments as found by the Enquête nationale sur les niveau de vie des Menage 1998/1999 (Direction de la Statistique 2000) and the projections of school children by the Direction the la Statistique. ([www.statistic.gov.ma](http://www.statistic.gov.ma)).

will make the pool even larger. Moreover, the reduction of numbers of petites bonnes is likely to be much less than proportional to the reduction in available girls.

The above should not be construed as an argument for diminished efforts in increasing education for girls. Rather, it is just to note that efforts to increase enrollment should not be expected to have large effects on the number or situation of petites bonnes, unless such efforts are especially targeted to the families that are likely to provide petites bonnes to employing families or to the girls that already are petite bonnes.

## The Demographic Dynamics of Petites Bonnes

The pool of girls available for work is progressively reduced by another factor, namely the reduction of fertility rates in Morocco. According to the PAPCHILD of 1996-97, the urban total fertility rate is 2.3, i.e. that a woman experiencing the current age specific probabilities of birth can expect to have 2.3 children throughout her life time. This is down from an urban rate of 4.6 in 1979-80. The corresponding rural rates were 7.0 and 4.1 (Royaume de Maroc 1998). Thus the average rural woman can expect to have about two girls. This means that the supply of rural girls for work will be reduced. Nevertheless, some women, and most likely the poorest and least educated, will have more girls.

Already, a large majority of households in both urban (89 percent) and rural (79 percent) Morocco has no or only one girl present in the household (Table 3).

Of course, some of the households with no or only one girl may have already given away one or several girls. Nevertheless, the table illustrates how the supply of girls decreases with the diminished fertility, and that even in the countryside, there are not all that many households with girls to give away.

Table 3 Number of girls aged 7 to 15 present in households by residence. Source DHS 95 raw data expanded to 1999 population. Thousands households

# of girls	Urban	Rural	Total
0	1,242	1,063	2,304
1	595	654	1,249
2	182	308	491
3	42	113	154
4	6	34	40
5	-	3	3
6	-	2	2
Total	2,067	2,176	4,243

A likely consequence of the drop in fertility is that the market for *petites bonnes*, seen in purely supply and demand terms, will change. In Morocco the increase of absolute numbers of children has stopped. Thus, on a national basis there are now more children in the 10-14 age group than in the 5-9 age group and more in the 5-9 age group than in the 0-4 age group (Direction de la Statistique 1999). Simultaneously, the number of people entering adult status and thus who form families is likely to continue to grow for some time. Accordingly, one would expect the demand for *petites bonnes* to continue to increase, and the pool of girls potentially available to be reduced. This may increase remuneration for their work. However, whether a new equilibrium between supply and demand will result in lower and higher numbers of *petites bonnes* is not clear. The outcome depends on the form of the supply curve with respect to decreased pool of girls, increased wages and the general income situation for rural households. It is likely that the willingness of the parents to part with their child decreases with decreasing number of children, and increases with lack of alternative income sources. Comparison of the figures from the 1992 DHS with the 1995 one suggests somewhat fewer *petite bonnes* in 1992 than in 1995, but sampling errors make firm conclusions difficult.

A similar argument as the above may be employed for child labour in general. However, as we have seen above, most of the child labour in Morocco takes place with the child still living in (mostly his) home. Therefore the costs and benefits to both child and parents will be different, and there is no reason why the development of child labour in general should mimic that of *petites bonnes*. The general picture as regards trends in child labour is equivocal. The 1994 census shows a substantial decrease in child labour from that recorded in the census of 1982 (Direction de la Statistique 1996) with about 50,000 children. The recently published labour force survey appears in contrast to show an increase in child labour between 1994 and 1999 of about 160,000 children, i.e. a reversal of the 1982-94 trend.

The indication of a reversal of the decline in child labour is difficult to interpret in conjunction with the census, as one normally would expect a labour force survey to identify a larger proportion of working persons than a census. For example, part time workers will often not be identified as employed in a census, while they will be in a labour force survey. Therefore, the labour force survey's identification of 518 000 children aged less than 15 as working may be a better indicator of the number of children engaged in work than the census numbers, but it is dangerous to interpret the findings as a trend.

## **3 Petites Bonnes and Their Parents: Experiences and Motivational Factors**

**Tone Sommerfelt**

This chapter has two main purposes: Firstly, to look in more detail on the information and analysis of child domestics in the previous chapter. Thus, it describes the range of arrangements lying behind the estimate of the number of “petites bonnes” given in Chapter 2. Secondly, the purpose is to give an independent description and interpretation of child domestic labour in Morocco, based on qualitative data produced during a month long fieldwork conducted in Morocco at the end of the year 2000, and on literary sources. This description focuses on motives, experiences, and practices related to child domestic labour, and provides more detailed information on the children’s situations and on the parents’ decisions regarding their children’s working activities. Furthermore, the relationships between the child domestics, their parents, and the employers are described, first and foremost from the point of view of “bonnes” and parents. Finally, the ways in which girls are recruited are described, and practices related to child domesticity in Morocco situated and explained within a wider social and cultural framework. The aim of these procedures is to understand the logic instructing the practices and behaviour of the different parties (children, employers, and parents), or expressed differently, why people do the things they do. Only by analysing the opportunities the parties currently have, or their opportunities as the parties themselves see them, can we in turn analyse the effects of changing or altering these opportunity situations.

### **Methodology**

This presentation and analysis is based on discussions, interviews, and activities with former petites bonnes, present petites bonnes and bonnes, parents, employers, and other persons involved in the lives of bonnes in some way or another.<sup>9</sup> The fieldwork took place in the months of October and November 2000, in urban areas in,

<sup>9</sup> Though the term “young maid”, or in French “petite bonne”, will be discussed during the text, the prefix “petite”, or “small / young” will preliminarily be used to refer to “bonnes” or maids under the age of 15 years. The concept “petite bonne” will henceforth be applied without quotation marks.

and rural areas around, Casablanca, Rabat, and Fes. We also conducted fieldwork in rural areas near Marrakech, and between Fes and Taounate.

The fieldwork included conversations with 23 former *petites bonnes*, of which nine were now between the ages of 15 and 18 and still working as *bonnes*. We also discussed the issue with 6 girls who had started working between the ages of 15 and 18 (two of which were presently 15 and 16 years old respectively).<sup>10</sup> Though we met many more, we talked in more detail with 10 present *petites bonnes* (below the age of 15). Among relatives of *petites bonnes*, we interviewed 30 parents and/or siblings, with one to four daughters/sisters working as *petites bonnes*. Additionally, we talked with employers of *petites bonnes*, and interviewed seven of them. We also had a number of informal discussions and interviews with adults and children not directly involved as *bonnes*, employers or parents of *bonnes*, in order to get their evaluations and meanings on issues related to work, future possibilities and plans in general, and to *petites bonnes* more specifically. All in all, we discussed about 68 cases of girls starting work as *bonnes* under the age of 18, either with the girls or women themselves, or with employers, parents or other family members.

All interviews and discussions were conducted in an informal way, allowing us the flexibility to follow issues that arose during each session, and to adapt to the specificity of communities, persons, and situations. Mainly, these informal interviews and discussions with adults and youth had two forms: individual and group sessions. Though they both should be described as informal, they were structured in the sense that we introduced topics, and often directed the discussions by following up on points of particular interest.

During the fieldwork, we interviewed young *bonnes* as they were visiting their parents in the countryside. In addition, we met young *bonnes* outside of home settings, i.e. without employers' or parents' presence. No interviews or conversations with *petites bonnes* took place with employers present. With the youngest *bonnes* (under 15 years old), we conducted activity groups in a classroom setting (evening classes). Here, we asked the girls to draw all the houses they had ever lived in and the people in them, using this as a point of departure to get an idea about their own conception of their situation. During the drawing activities we talked with several girls one by one. Many of the girls themselves brought up the fact that they were working as *bonnes* in the houses they currently live in. In turn, several of the girls told us about difficulties they had had, or talked about their past lives' pleasures and pains. Others, on the other hand, did not, and two girls spoke as if they were still living with their parents, in spite of the fact that they were working as *bonnes*, and lived with their employers. In either of these cases, our idea was to avoid pressuring them to say anything they did not feel like saying.

<sup>10</sup> In the text, we thus also include cases of girls who started working under the age of 18.

In conversations with adults and youth who were not directly involved as parents or employers of *bonnes*, we searched for evaluations of *bonnes* and their parents more generally. Also, we asked young girls who were *not* working as *bonnes* about their future plans and hopes, their evaluation of their lives in the countryside, and parents' views on children's possibilities in rural and urban areas respectively. Here we complemented the informal yet structured interviews and discussions with a more conventional anthropological approach of participatory observation, intended to situate statements and practices from parties directly involved in the lives of *bonnes* within a wider social and cultural context. This was a method we used in all the places we conducted interviews and discussions.

Thus, the methodology in this qualitative part of the study was developed to allow for a more in-depth understanding of the views, situations, and opportunities of employers, parents, and *petites bonnes*.

## What is a Petite Bonne?

### **A girl performing paid housework, living with the employer**

The French term “*bonne*” – or *khadēma* in Arabic – is applied by Moroccans to refer to women and girls who perform household tasks in homes other than their own, and who are remunerated in one way or another. It is also implied that the girls or women live in the houses of their employers. The masculine counterpart in Arabic – *khadēm* – refers to a man (or boy) who provides services, and does not give the same connotations to household tasks, or the profession as “maid” as does *khadēma*. Performing household tasks is associated with women and girls, and not with men and boys. However, both masculine and feminine forms derive from the verb “to work” – *khadēma* – and the nouns *khadēm* and *khadēma* can both be translated as “a worker”.<sup>11</sup> *Petite bonnes* are occasionally also referred to as *m'taâlma*, which means an apprentice, or a girl who is in the process of learning.

Generally speaking however, if “domestic service” is linked with activities in the household, it is predominantly girls who make up the domestic workers in Morocco. Pedersen also documents this in Chapter 2. When we asked people in Morocco about boys in domestic service, the idea that boys perform “women's tasks” was almost unthinkable, and represented as extremely rare. One woman started laughing when thinking about what such a boy or man would be referred to in French, “*bon*”, as if this was unknown.

<sup>11</sup> The terms *khadēm* (masculine) and *khadēma* (feminine) are different from the term *khādem* (m) and *khādema* (f), applied in Moroccan Arabic to denote “slave”, even though they derive from the same verb. In classical Arabic, a waitress is referred to as *khadīma*.

Younger boys may, however, run errands or assist in other ways, boys are often hired to work as assistants (or “apprentices”) in shops or the various crafts. As the distinctions between working life and family life may be blurred, these tasks may verge on domestic chores.<sup>12</sup>

### **Age: When does a *petite bonne* become a *bonne*?**

In the previous chapter, the number of “*petites bonnes*” is estimated to be in between 66.000 and 88.000 (depending on whether alleged “adopted” and “fostered” children are included or not). This number includes girls under the age of 15 years. The age limit of 15 years, delineating “young maids” from “maids”, is not unproblematic in the Moroccan context. On the one hand, it reflects a distinction drawn in French in Morocco, where the “young” or “small” maid is referred to as a “*petite*” *bonne*. On the other hand, the term “*petite*” is added to loosely refer to a “young” *bonne*, but does not imply an exact upper age limit (of 15 years). Furthermore, distinctions used by Arabic speakers in Morocco are often connected with marriage status rather than absolute age. If at all it is specified that a maid is “young”, the word *sghera*, meaning “young” or “small” is added. Most often, however, a “young maid” (“*khadēma sghera*”) will simply be referred to as a “girl” (*bent*), as opposed to a “woman” (*m’ra*), the latter indicating married status. Thus, a maid aged 15 years or more would still be referred to as a “girl” (*bent*), as long as she is not married, regardless of her absolute age. Partly, this also reflects the fact that most maids live with their employers, and thus cannot easily combine this line of work with marriage and a family life of their own.

Nevertheless, a benefit of the use of the upper limit of 15 (i.e. not older than 14) years is ILO Convention 138, ratified by Morocco in 2000, which stipulates that the minimum age for admission to employment is 14 years (for developing countries).<sup>13</sup> According to ILO Convention 138 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an absolute limit of 15 years constitutes one of two conditions for defining (and prohibiting) “child labour” (cf. Grimsrud & Stokke 1997:6). The second condition relates to the consequences of children’s work, and that work performed by children should not interfere with the child’s education, or be harmful to his or her health and development. With respect to interference with education,

<sup>12</sup> In only a very few cases do these live with their employers. People generally held that boys cannot work in town, far away from their parents, as they get a problem with lodging: Employers do not accept boys to stay in their home. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to focus on boys who actually do live with (or adjacent to) their employers in the present study.

<sup>13</sup> Morocco has not ratified ILO convention no. 182, on the “worst forms” of child labour (and of child domestic labour), but has indicated that it will do so.

regulations in Morocco prescribe six years of compulsory school attendance between the ages of seven and 16 (UNESCO 1999). If a child thus starts primary school at the age of seven, compulsory schooling may be completed as early as at the age 12. As Morocco has ratified ILO Convention 138, however, we relate to the age limit of 15 in this study.

As noted in the previous chapter, the number of *petites bonnes* is not altered considerably if including children under the age of seven. Occasionally, girls are hired at the age of five or six years. During our fieldwork in Morocco, however, we found few indications that this occurs frequently. Out of the (about) 68 cases that we discussed with people (either with the girls or women themselves, or with employers, parents or other family members) of girls starting work as *bonnes* under the age of 18, only two had started before the age of seven years. Both of these girls claimed that they did not really work during the first years, and if at all they performed any chores, ran errands for the women in the houses in which they lived. Most adults claimed that girls under the age of seven years are “useless” in terms of work, and that people who hire them do so in order to make the girls “used to them”, and to slowly accustom them to working. At the same time, it should be mentioned that for *petites bonnes* over the age of seven years, a main duty is precisely to run errands. Thus, girls under seven years of age do in fact also contribute with labour force. From the point of view of the employer, the period before the girl reaches the age of seven is often regarded as a tutoring period. Hiring particularly young girls can also be considered as a means to “mould” or impress the child with “good habits” while still, or especially, susceptible.

### **Domestic service and fosterage: The “bonne” as commercial category**

In Morocco, children are expected to contribute to the running of households, also those children who live with their parents. Their activities are often referred to as *work*. This reference is perhaps made more explicit in (agricultural settings like in) Morocco, where the household (and/or the family) is one of the primary factors organising production. This is to say that the household is fundamentally and explicitly an economic unit, with work as one of its functions, also for younger household members.

Thus, the fact that girls *work*, or that their activities are referred to as work, does not necessarily imply that they are regarded as domestic servants, or *petites bonnes*. In principle, nor does the fact that they do not live with their parents. The distinction between “fosterage”, on the one hand, and “domestic service” on the other, may be blurred, as it is suggested in the analysis in Chapter 2 as well. This is especially so in cases when girls live with families who enrol them in school, and where the

children attend school full time. We recorded two such cases during our fieldwork. Perhaps significantly, these two girls had both moved to the families in question before they were seven years old, and the families had no other children (of their own). After school, they performed household tasks, like running errands, assisting in washing and cleaning, and so forth. In these particular cases, however, the girls represented these as activities expected from daughters in general, and which they would have performed had they lived with their original families too. They said that they would rather stay in their current homes than return to their parents. Moreover, the two girls in question filled other roles than “domestic servants” in their respective houses, and were included in family life. Though this does not necessarily indicate that the girls were regarded as “true daughters”, it illustrates that there is a broader continuum of arrangements regarding girls who do not live with their “biological” parents.

At the same time, the two cases mentioned above bring to mind that children’s work in households is hidden, compared to work in e.g. industrial sectors, and that the blurred distinction between commercialisation of children’s work and home duties leave children vulnerable to exploitation. This is especially the case when children work for other families than their own.<sup>14</sup> In more general terms, findings from our fieldwork suggest that children’s domestic service is more clearly defined and recognised as a commercial category in Morocco than in many other areas. This in the sense that people openly discuss domestic labour in terms of *wage labour* and *employment*, and *petites bonnes* in terms of supply and demand.

Viewed against this background, one may conclude that a *petite bonne* is a girl under the age of 15, or with the appearance of a very young girl, who is not married, who lives with her employers, and who performs household tasks. The relationships between employers and *bonnes* vary a great deal in terms of the degree to which they are included in family life. In most cases, however, the relationships between *bonnes* and employers primarily fill *one* function: that of work.<sup>15</sup> These relationships are thus different from fosterage, as the employers do not take over parental responsibilities in relations to the children. The exception is the “responsibility” to avoid that the girl engages with strangers (premarital sex). This is taken up for discussion later, in the context of the vaguely defined “agreement” between parents and employers with respect to the child.

<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the labelling of children’s activities in their own households as “duties” or “socialisation”, on the one hand, and their paid services in e.g. industry as “labour” or “commercialisation” on the other, hides the economic aspects of children’s labour contributions in their own homes, as e.g. Nieuwenhuys (1994) has pointed out.

<sup>15</sup> In sociological or anthropological terms, the relationship may thus be described as uniplex, as opposed to multiplex, the latter which involves a wider range of caretaking activities.

Among girls who are referred to as “bonnes”, workload and various arrangements regarding pay, visits to or by parents, etc. constitute a shared pattern. At the same time, arrangements and girls’ interpretations and understandings of these seem to vary a great deal. Below, we describe some aspects of these different conditions under which “petites bonnes” in Morocco live.

## **Petites Bonnes: A Brief Profile**

### **Rural youngsters**

Hiring girls as bonnes under the age of 10 seems to be common. In one of the few surveys of child domestics in Morocco, carried out by Ligue Marocaine pour la Protection de l’Enfance (LMPE) and UNICEF (1996), results show that about a quarter of the 450 interviewed girls working as petites bonnes were less than 10 years old. The rest of the girls were aged between 10 and 12 (45%) and 13 and 15 (28%) (Alaoui 1996:41). Out of the (about) 68 cases of girls working as bonnes before the age of 18 that we discussed with people, 19 started before they had reached the age of 10 years.

As far as we can see from our discussions with former or present bonnes, the absolute majority of girls who work as bonnes in the cities originally come from rural areas (see also Pedersen’s Chapter 2). Alaoui (1996:42) suggests the same pattern, showing that of the (450) interviewees, almost three-quarter of them said they came from rural areas. Out of the remaining quarter, more than half came from what is referred to as “sub-urban” areas (in the outskirts of urban areas, as opposed to “urban”, with the remaining 11%). Unfortunately, precise sources documenting the numbers for petites bonnes’ origins (whether urban, rural, or semi-urban) do not exist.

Among parents of young maids that we spoke to in the countryside, most told that their daughters were working in the bigger cities of Marrakech, Casablanca, Fes, Meknes, Rabat, Tangier, and Agadir. A few daughters were working in smaller towns (or villages) in the rural area, close by their parents.

By parents of bonnes (and other adults) and girls (still living) in the countryside, the view generally held was that the towns and cities are where the money is located (we will return to this below). Even girls we spoke with in the countryside, who claimed that they were looking for an appointment as “bonne”, said that one of their reasons for looking for work was that they wanted to live in towns, not in the countryside.

### **Domestic labour as an “alternative” to education**

In the survey by LMPE and UNICEF, less than a quarter of the children interviewed had been to school, and more than half of these had not completed their second year (Alaoui 1996:42).<sup>16</sup> In the previous chapter, Pedersen too shows that the level of education among petites bonnes is low.

During our fieldwork, girls and parents alike represented working as a *bonne* as an *alternative* to going to school, not as an additional activity. The girls had quit school because the parents could no longer pay books or the like, or because they needed their daughters’ income (see the subsection on parents of petites bonnes for details). This is to say that the parents did not initially, i.e. at the time of starting work, believe that their daughter would attend school while living with their employer. This is not to say that petites bonnes themselves have or develop such aspirations or hopes (a point to which we will return below). Neither did employers say, or “pretend” toward parents that the girls would go to school. Once again, the fact that girls *work* is made explicit.

### **Tasks**

The tasks performed by young bonnes include running errands, going to the market or shopping, taking care of children (and bringing children to and from school), and various household tasks, like washing clothes (smaller items), and keeping the house clean, etc. Generally, adults we spoke with in Morocco claimed that older and younger maids perform different tasks, and thus, that having a young maid does not contradict the “need” for having an older maid at the same time. For instance, whereas the younger, or petites bonnes do not usually cook, the older maids do. Similarly, the “big cleaning” (or “grand ménage” in French) is usually left to the older bonnes, whereas the younger bonnes may perform tasks like washing clothes and scrubbing floors (which also may be physically heavy).

In order to describe the daily chores of young bonnes, we provide a specific example below.

<sup>16</sup> Later in the current chapter, we will return to the issue of petites bonnes attending evening school.

### **Daily routines of a bonne: Hanane<sup>17</sup>**

Hanane is 16 years old, and works for Fatima. Fatima lives with her three young children and mother. Hanane gets up at about 6.30 a.m., together with the rest of the household members. While Fatima and Hanane help the children clean and dress, Fatima's mother prepares breakfast. They eat at 7.15. Hanane then takes the three young girls to school and pre-school. When she returns, Fatima has left for work, and Hanane spends the day together with Fatima's mother. Generally, Hanane's duties include bringing the children to and from school, washing and ironing clothes, washing the tiled floors in the three-room apartment, doing the shopping, and assisting Fatima's mother in running the household on a daily basis. The household is atypical in the sense that it contains no adult men, as Fatima is divorced. Thus, instead of Fatima staying home, receiving money from a husband and then administering these (with the help of a *petite bonne*), it is Fatima who provides the money, and her mother who administers the household with the help of Hanane.

After bringing the three children to school in the morning, Hanane assists Fatima's mother in doing the final cleaning after breakfast. Fatima's mother gives Hanane money to go to shops and market place, and Hanane goes to buy groceries and foodstuffs for the day's meals. Generally, Fatima's mother makes the meals, but Hanane assists her in washing and rinsing vegetables, cleaning up, etc. Hanane also goes back to school to get the children home during the lunch break, and bring them to and from school for the afternoon lessons. Fatima comes home for lunch at mid-day, if she has the chance.

When the children are in school in the afternoon, Fatima cleans up after lunch, the day's main meal, and washes and irons clothes. Fatima's mother prepares the evening meal, which most often is leftovers from lunch. Fatima comes back from work around 7 p.m., and they all eat. For Hanane, the remaining of the day is not as laborious as before the evening meal. She runs errands if Fatima and her mother tell her to, or watches the children if they are outside playing. If Fatima's mother starts breakfast preparations in the evening, Hanane will also assist her. Unless she has an unusually big laundry, Hanane will usually watch TV with the others. The lights are turned off around 11 p.m., and Hanane goes to bed. She sleeps in the living room, alongside Fatima's mother.

<sup>17</sup> The girl in this example is 16 years old, and is thus not, according to a strict definition, a "petite" *bonne*. We have still chosen to give a resume of her day, as we had the possibility to observe her activities from morning till evening, whereas we saw younger girls only for periods of time during the day. The resume still illustrates the kinds of tasks performed by many *petites bonnes* under the age of 15 years. Names used throughout this chapter have been altered to ensure respondents' and participants' anonymity.

The above account illustrates the tasks that define the workday of many younger *bonnes*. However, Hanane's working- and living conditions are not necessarily representative. In the study by LMPE and UNICEF (1996), several indicators on *petites bonnes*' living- and working conditions in their employers' households are described, including the level of salaries, and hours of sleep (Alaoui 1996:41 ff.). Instead of duplicating the above-mentioned study, we refer to some of their findings, as we found similar patterns during our fieldwork. In turn, we proceed to experiences and interpretations of these and other aspects of the living- and working conditions of *petites bonnes*.

### **Aspects of the *petites bonnes*' working- and living conditions**

In the study, the issue of working hours is approached through asking the girls about their hours of sleep. Alaoui thus finds that the workday of the *petite bonne* is very long: "elle se réveille la première et dort la dernière" (1996:49). 72% of the interviewed girls get up before 7 a.m., and 65% go to bed after 11 p.m.. 81% say that they have no days off (1996:49).

Regarding salary, 73% of the girls interviewed earned less than 300 Dirhams per month. In 1996, when the survey was conducted, 300 Dirhams were equivalent to about £ 22 or US\$ 35.<sup>18</sup> 80% of the girls give the salary directly to their parents, or the parents collect the salary without money being passed by the hands of the girls.

Regarding parental contact, the study shows that 25% of the girls say that they are never allowed to visit their parents, 16% visit for feasts and celebrations, and 14% say that they are allowed to visit their parents once a month (Alaoui 1996:48). Finally, 75% of the interviewed girls answer "yes" to the question of whether they like the work in the household, whereas 25% say that they do not. 20% of the latter say that this is a result of the employers abusing them, whereas 65% of those who say that they like their work say that this is due to employers treating them nicely (Alaoui 1996:50).

Before we proceed, some accounts from our fieldwork should be described in further detail. The *bonnes* below express views about about several aspects of their working conditions, about parental contact, and also, how they feel that they are, or have been, treated by their employers.

<sup>18</sup> The figures derive from average exchange rates in 1996 of ca. 0.07 (for British Pounds) and 0.12 (US Dollars). In November of 2000, while our fieldwork took place, 300 Dirhams were equivalent to £ 19 (exchange rate of 0.06326). In comparison, a teacher's salary (in public school) in Morocco is about 2800 Dirhams. The minimum salary (SMIG) in commerce and industry is currently 1650 Dirhams per month. We will return to the issue of the economic significance of girls' salaries on household income later.

## Latifa

Latifa is 26 years old, and presently works as a *bonne*. We meet her as she attends an evening class in an informal educational centre. Latifa started working at the age of 8. Her father became ill, and could no longer work, and had no pension or other source of income. Latifa agreed to work as a means to help her father and family, even though, she says, it was her father's decision. She was hired for the first time through an acquaintance of her father. A man Latifa refers to as a "superior" approached the father; a civil servant who asked the father whether he knew a girl who could "simply help his wife with their baby from time to time", as his wife had recently given birth. The father decided Latifa should go living with them. Latifa tells that, every day, the husband asked Latifa to do a little more. Soon, she was washing clothes, doing the dishes, running errands, and several other duties. The wife soon started to beat her. Latifa recalls that she often had to wash clothes on the roof terrace, even when it was raining, with her feet and hands in the water for a long time. She was also ordered to wash the baby's diapers. As an eight-year-old, she did not always manage to do this properly. As a punishment, the wife made her eat the excrement of the baby.

After four months the father came to collect the salary (200 Dirhams per month), and Latifa told him she could no longer stay. The father agreed, and took her to another family, where she worked for two months. Latifa says that this was even worse than what she had gone through with the first employer (and gives no further account of this). Once again she told her father, who took her with him, and placed her in a third family. This employer, a woman, promised the father to treat her as her own daughter. Latifa has stayed with this woman ever since, till now, for 18 years, and says that this family is better than her original family. Better, because she would never, for the first few years go back to her father because she was afraid he would place her with an "evil person". After she was 13 to 14, she lost this fear, and started going to see her family regularly. Latifa says that she is very happy with her present employer. Now, she goes to evening classes to learn how to read and write, for the second year.<sup>19</sup>

Earlier, Latifa says, the father got all the money. Now, he is dead. She tells that she helps her mother by giving her a part of her salary, but says that presently, her working is not a result of the need for money. She is paid 300 Dirhams. She holds that there are very few tasks to be done in the household and also, the "new family supplies me with everything". Even so, Latifa stresses that *no* young girl should be forced to work under the conditions she has worked under earlier,

<sup>19</sup> Children above the age of nine or ten years of age are often denied enrolment to regular school by the schools' authorities. We will return to this issue later. In this particular case, Latifa's employers would most probably not allow her to go to regular school, as she would then not fulfil her duties in the house.

and becomes angry when stressing that parents have no control of their daughters when they work as *petites bonnes*, and thus live in households other than their own.

### **Aicha**

We meet Aicha in her home in a village near Marrakech, and talk with Aicha and her mother Mina. Aicha is 14 years old, and has worked for one year for a “very rich” family in Marrakech. They are additionally six other *bonnes* working for this family. The employer is a highly ranked man, with an “important job”, who receives many guests, and this is why there is very much work even though there are many maids, Aicha and Mina explain. Aicha earns 400 Dirhams per month. She got the job through a girl from the same village who also works as a *bonne* in Marrakech.

Now, Aicha is sick, and has boils on her hands and feet. This sort of boils and wounds basically comes from the work, washing, etc, explain both Aicha and her mother. Usually, Mina goes to get Aicha’s salary each month, but this time, the employer sent the money. This worried Mina: “It was as if they didn’t want me to come”. Therefore, she went to Marrakech to see what was happening and found Aicha ill. Now, Aicha does not want to work anymore, or to go back to this family. Mina says that Aicha has to work, because she needs the money. Aicha says that if she *has* to work, she does not want to go back to this family, as the work is too tough. But Mina says that she prefers Aicha to work for this family, because it is a “big family”, that is to say, rich and important.

### **Ikrame**

Ikrame is 16 years old, and comes from a village in the countryside. Her father worked whenever he could find something, but had no steady job. Ikrame’s got her first job at the age of 12, in Tamaris near Casablanca. The mother of the woman in her (coming) employing family came to the village, and asked around for a girl (*bonne*) for her daughter, and was taken to Ikrame’s family. The husband in the employing family was also a friend of Ikrame’s father. For the job, Ikrame earned 300 Dirhams per month. She says that she was not happy here, because Tamaris is located in the countryside too, whereas Ikrame wanted to work in town. Consequently, she says, she only stayed with the employing family for five months.

Ikrame says that she got her second job in the same way as she got her first. Someone came to the village and looked for a girl. Ikrame was employed, and she has been staying with this family since, for three and a half years now. The husband in the family works as a civil servant and the wife works for a private company. Her employers live in Casablanca, as Ikrame originally preferred.

In the beginning, Ikrame earned 350 Dirhams per month, and now gets 400. She performs work in the household, like dusting, cleaning, and washing, and follows the children to school. Ikrame has started evening school herself, and learns how to read and write.

Ikrame tells that her father collects the monthly salary. But, she says, the (employing) family buys her clothes, nice jewellery, etc. She visits her family once a month and claims to be happy with her employers. The reason, she says, is because they are nice, and Ikrame does not like the countryside, and does not want to go back to her (original) family. Even if she did not have to work, she insists, she would still want to be with the family that employs her. She wants to stay in the city.

Earlier, Ikrame asked her employers about education, but “even though they are nice, they objected”. Now, however, they have accepted that Ikrame go to evening classes, which are held two evenings a week.

We meet Ikrame during one of her classes, along with other former petites bonnes (and present bonnes). Ikrame tells her story as the other bonnes are listening, among them Latifa. The girls laugh a bit in recognition of Ikrame’s “dream of the city” and longing for “life in the city”. Latifa too says that she would not want to return to the countryside, but retains her strong critique against the employment of young girls as bonnes.

### **Workers, or children of the house?**

The above accounts give an impression of three bonnes’ experiences of the conditions under their different employers. The bonnes and former petites bonnes we spoke with distinguish good and bad experiences, explaining that they have been “unhappy” with some employers, and “happy” with others, the latter without indicating that they are/were treated equally with other children born in the households in which they work(ed). Often, employers claim that they treat the petites bonnes who work for them in the same way as they treat their own children (cf. Alaoui 1996:49). However, this does not include enrolling the bonnes in school, and employers do not admit to beating the bonnes who work for them.

Bonnes do not really expect to be treated equally with “children of the household” in terms of schooling and workload. As noted earlier, working as a bonne is mostly considered as an alternative to school, and not a complementary activity. Also, whereas petites bonnes refer to their activities as “work”, other children in the household do not “work”. However, bonnes’ own representations of their well-being are affected negatively when they experience very heavy workloads, as they often do.

Most of all, girls working as petites bonnes interpret (and talk about) their well-being in terms of the degree to which they are included in family life. The criteria

for inclusion are defined as eating by the same table, sleeping in the same rooms as the rest of the family, being included when the family goes out, watching TV with the others in the household, and not being beaten or abused in other ways. Thus, when LMPE and UNICEF (1996) measure living conditions by using indicators like their place of sleeping, whether they join their employers when they go out, and the social frame around TV-watching and eating, this is not coincidental. In fact, without us bringing this up in conversations with former or present petites bonnes, parents, or employers, these criteria were often mentioned automatically as “signs” of how the *bonne* is treated. For instance, in order to “prove” cases when they meant that their daughters were well treated, mothers referred to that daughters eat from the same table as their employers. Aicha, the girl referred to above who worked for a “rich family” in Marrakech, went beyond the issue of hard work when explaining why she did not want to go back. To her, the strict division between family members and the maids (and others working for the family) was a sign of the employers’ arrogance. She would not even dream of eating with children of the family, or sleeping in the same room as them.

Similarly, many *bonnes* claim that working for the “upper class” is worse than working for representatives for the “middle class”, as they feel social differentiation more profoundly here than among middle class people, in terms of the criteria mentioned above.<sup>20</sup> Middle class people, on the other hand, have nothing to “prove”, and thus let *bonnes* watch TV with them, bring them along for trips, and leave them sleeping in the same room as the other children (or simply have too little room available to put them elsewhere). People from the middle class often say the same, and “demonise” the upper class. Upper class representatives, on the other hand, often say that petites *bonnes* are worse off working for middle class people, due to their limited economic resources. Regardless of the truth in these generalisations and stereotypes, they illustrate that the criteria according to which both *bonnes*, employers and parents judge the treatment of *bonnes*.

Though employers recognise the petite *bonne*’s activities as “work”, they usually describe her working day in terms different to those describing persons working outside of the house, in formalised working agreements. In the latter case, the employees work constantly during their scheduled working hours, whereas the *bonne* works *from time to time* during her hours awake, as employers see it. The same applies to the work of a housewife, whose activities may well be referred to as work, but where her working hours are not formalised. Though the workload varies from

<sup>20</sup> People from the “upper class” are referred to as *Fasi*, which literally means “people from (the town of) Fes”. Fes is historically the power centre of Morocco, and many among the intellectual and economic elite originally come from (or trace ancestry to) Fes. Even people who do not trace ancestry to Fes will be referred to as *Fasi* if talking about social classes, as long as one is not discussing geographical origin per se.

one case to the next, the majority of *petites bonnes* we spoke with (and reflected in their employers' statements too) tells that young maids are expected to be prepared to answer to requests from the employer for as long as she is awake. Moreover, the working hours of *petites bonnes* (and others performing "housework") seem to be measured differently than other professions.

### **Parental contact and parents' visits**

Above, we referred to the figures presented by Alaoui (1996:48) on how often the interviewed girls are allowed to visit their parents. It should be underlined that the most frequent contacts between parents and daughters take place in the girls' work places, in connection with the monthly payment of salaries. Evaluations and understandings of these visits vary a great deal among daughters and parents, and the views of the visits' purposes seem to be contradictory. Views among former *petites bonnes* also depend on their present relationship with their parents.

We spoke with a number of former *petites bonnes* who today are single mothers, and who do not have regular contact with their parents (but stay in resource centres for single mothers with their babies). All of them had bad memories of their childhood as *petites bonnes*, and told that they mostly saw their parents when they came to their work place to collect their salary. All but one of them held that the purpose of these visits was simply to get the money and then leave (and NGOs and other organisations in Morocco basically echo this same view). They perceive of this almost as abuse: "All they thought about was the money, not us".

Other women, former *petites bonnes*, who have retained a good relationship with one or both parents, interpreted this differently. They expressed that they had missed their parents, but saw the collection of the monthly payment as one of few opportunities the parents had to see them, as employers tried to prevent or simply refused other visits. For some girls, these visits also represented opportunities to communicate discontent to the parents.

From the parents' point of view, the formal reason for the monthly visits to daughters is, obviously, to collect their salary. Additionally, many parents see this as an opportunity to check on their daughters' welfare. Occasionally, parents ask their daughter about their well being directly, or they silently interpret signals while in the house of employers. In Latifa's case referred to above, the father read Latifa's complaints, and took her to a new employer. In Aicha's case, we saw another indication of the same: her mother Mina became suspicious when the employers *sent* the money, i.e. that she was prevented from seeing her daughter for the occasion. Mina, however, has not yet accepted that Aicha change employer. And, generally speaking, young girls do not necessarily understand that parents worry. What they see is simply money changing hands.

During visits to their original home, petites bonnes get the possibility to communicate undisturbed with their parents. Many petites bonnes do not return after such visits. Below, we discuss this in relation to the fact that many bonnes change employers.

### **Changing employers**

In interviews and conversations with parents, present- and petites bonnes, we found that many petites bonnes have numerous employers for short periods of time. The above accounts are illustrative in this regard. In some cases, this may be due to that the girls are recruited to new appointments by professional middlemen, or *samsar(a)s*, a point to which we will return below. It may also be a result of parents' dissatisfaction with the pay, or of parents' intervention as a result of the daughters' complaints of how they are treated. However, it usually takes several months, at the least, from the parents hear the girl's complaints, and to the girl is taken back home or moved to another employer. Considering that the petite bonne usually only sees her parent once a month, her possibilities for communicating that she wants to move is rather curtailed. Often, former and present petites bonnes also explained that the employers will not leave them alone with their parents on their monthly visits, for fear of losing the bonne. In addition, parents often feel that they are tied by rules of courtesy, and will not confront the employer with the daughter's complaints. Thus, parents may invent excuses in order to get their daughter along with them, like family celebrations or ceremonies. Sometimes, the girl needs to "persuade" her parents to take her back home, as the parents may suspect her of "being lazy", and in their view, not recognising that they need her salaries as a source of income. Some parents thus seem to distance themselves from their daughters' complaints, not really taking action to investigate into daughters' living conditions. In this way, parents who are desperate for an income "protect themselves" from information about the girls (lack of) well-being.

In most of the cases of change of (or disrupted) employment that we came across, the girls had simply stayed with their parents and not returned to their employers after the visits back home. In these cases, the girls had communicated their discontent, and their parents had responded by not sending them back. During such visits, the girls have the best possibilities to freely express their complaints without fearing sanctions from employers. Thus, regular visits to parents are a petite bonne's best insurance against persisting maltreatment, as it gives her the opportunity to communicate discontent, stay on, and not return. Also, young girls' own initiative to such moves should not be underestimated. Often, girls themselves seek out new employers in search of better conditions. Thus, the fact that petites bonnes have numerous employers can be seen as an expression of discontent, or even maltreatment

and abuse. At the same time, it expresses that there are ways in which to escape or change employers, and that girls regularly use this opportunity. As we shall see, employers deny or try to restrict girls' visits to their parents, as a way to avoid that the girl leaves them permanently.

### **Remuneration**

We have already mentioned that the absolute majority of the *petites bonnes* interviewed for the study by LMPE and UNICEF were paid 300 Dirhams or less (Alaoui 1996:48). A further comment should be made to the remuneration of girls' work, and the responsibilities of employers toward *petites bonnes* in terms of medical care and clothes. Generally, we found that employers provide *petites bonnes* with clothes. The clothes that employers give to *bonnes* are often second hand, passed on from other children in the household. It does not seem as if employers calculate this as an expense, and (perhaps consequently), providing clothes is not usually a source of explicit conflict in the relationship between employers and parents. The girls themselves, however, see this as an expression of unequal treatment between children born in the household and themselves. Especially older girls often perceive this as degrading, as they compare themselves with other girls in the household.

Generally, the question of who has responsibility for the girls' health is not discussed when employment commences. Medical expenses are occasionally the source of open disputes in the relationship between parents, employers, and girls. As an example, after one employer had taken a *petite bonne* to a doctor, the medical expenses had been taken away from her salary. This led to intense protests from the girl and her parents, and the parents had taken her back home, thus ending her working relation to the employer. The mother of another *petite bonne* told us a similar story of expenses for dental care. Not all employers pose conditions or disclaim responsibility for the child's health in this way. Still, we asked parents why they do not discuss this responsibility at commencement of employment. They responded that they were not in a position to do so; it is not expected, and they do not feel that they can demand anything on behalf of their daughter, but simply settle with the fact that she now has a job. Others did not answer, but conveyed the impression that this is simply not customary.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> According to article 11 in the decree of February 8<sup>th</sup> 1958, which applies to the *Dahir* of July 1957, young working children are entitled to a health check every six months (see Appendix). As far as we can see, this law was originally intended to benefit working children in industry. With a recognition of *petites bonnes*' domestic work as "labour", the decree may be made applicable to *petites bonnes*. For findings on statistical indicators on *petites bonnes*' health care, see Alaoui (1996).

Employers may also negotiate, or represent, other donations as a part of remuneration. This is illustrated in the below case, which recounts how an employer deducted costs for health care, and what the girl thought was a “gift”, from her salary.

### **The argument over Hasana’s remuneration**

Hasana is 15 years old, and started working at the age of 13, after her father lost his job when the big olive- and orange farm near by let the employees go. She started her last job eight months ago, in Marrakech. We meet her together with her mother and father in their village near Marrakech. Hasana sits close by her father, holding his hand. He is upset on her behalf. Hasana says that when she started her last job, her salary was set to 500 Dirhams per month. However, during the entire seven months she was with them, her employer did not pay her more than 400 Dirhams. They gave her a gold ring, which Hasana shows us, that cost 400 Dirhams, but deducted this from her salary, after giving it to her. Now, they claim that they spent the rest of the salary on dental care for Hasana, and they regard the payments as completed. Therefore, Hasana has not returned to them (after having “visited” her home village for a ceremony). An additional reason is that the work was too exhausting. In practice, Hasana tells us, she had to work in three houses, also for the employers’ children, and had to accompany her employer to the sauna (*hammam*), where she was put to rub down everyone. Hasana does not want another job as *bonne*. Her father says that as long as Hasana does not want it herself, she will not have to work, and he will keep on looking for jobs for himself with other employers.

### **The informal “agreement” between employer and parents**

The working relations of *petites bonnes* are not clearly defined, and no agreements or contracts are formally made between parents and employers of *bonnes* regarding responsibilities of other kinds than payment. As demonstrated in the case above, there even seems to be little agreement on what should be accepted as “salary”. Generally, parents say that they are not in a position to pose conditions. Also, parents say that they feel that it would be rude to pose conditions, as they should be “thankful” for the appointment the girl has been “awarded” instead.

The feeling that it is rude to pose conditions is not only rooted in the relationship between parents and employer, but also in the relationship between parents and the person who has put the employer in touch with the parents. This informal middleman may be a relative or friend of the parents. Often, parents say that they feel that it would be rude toward the middleman to pose conditions to the employer, as the middleman will then become unpopular with the employer, for the “difficulties” with the family he has found (We will return to the issue of middlemen below).

Generally, the fact that parents do not explicitly pose conditions reflects the asymmetrical relationship between employer and parents of *petite bonne*: Parents of a *bonne* are perceived as poor, and the employer as a person of assets, or at least of *more* assets than the parents. In this relationship, the parents' prestige is lower, and they feel that they should express respect, rather than pose conditions, which would be seen as an expression of resentment (or even disrespect). Furthermore, the employer is often represented as a "benefactor" in this relationship, and a family aid in a difficult situation (in the manner of a "patron"). Thus, not only the parents' "prestige" affects their possibilities to regulate the work-relationship to their daughter, but also self-imposed restrictions of a more emotional kind.

However, parents always say that the ideal employer is the one who takes the best care of their daughter; she has to be well fed, well dressed, and not beaten. And, there is an expectation from parents that employers ensure that the girls is kept under surveillance, or kept in the house, to prevent that she "runs around" (also implying that she engages in premarital sex). For the girl, however, this may imply that she is trapped in the house, not being allowed to go out at all.

### **A comment on the experience of punishment**

Following the murder of a *petite bonne* by a woman employer in Casablanca in the beginning of the year 2000, and a follow-up TV dramatisation shown on Moroccan TV in November of the same year, the abuse of *petites bonnes* in their employing households have lately been devoted much attention. We conducted parts of our fieldwork after this specific TV documentary, and parents and employers constantly referred to it. There is little existing documentation of the extent of violence and sexual abuse of *bonnes* by employers.<sup>22</sup>

At this point, we can only emphasise an important point with respect to *petites bonnes*' experience of corporal punishment by employers. Former *petites bonnes* we spoke with claimed that they themselves, or other *bonnes*, are most commonly beaten or punished in other ways by the woman or wife in their employing household. As a *bonne* performs the tasks of the wife of the house, it is the wife she answers to. Slapping, or otherwise physically punishing children is not uncommon, and women occasionally sanction their own children by corporal punishment; slapping them or giving them a punch. Here, however, "equal treatment" (of children of the employers and *petites bonnes*) is not the standard by which punishment of *petites bonnes* should be judged. In conversations with present or former *petites bonnes*, it appeared that girls experience punishment by employers differently from

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF in Morocco is currently planning a more extensive survey of the conditions of *petites bonnes*, which also includes violence and sexual abuse (Rajae Msefer Berrada in UNICEF Morocco, personal communication).

punishment by mothers. This may be due to the fact that a petite bonne usually cannot seek comfort after she has been punished. Beating by employers is experienced differently, and generally, as degrading. Former petites bonnes emphasised that the same applies to “verbal abuse”; insults and negative remarks of their “shortcomings”. As one former petite bonne put it: “it makes you feel as if you must always be at others’ service, and it destroys your self-esteem”. Another point is that bonnes are not surrounded by the same social network as children born in the household, and thus, that the possibilities for family members (or others) to intervene are so much less.

### **Social network**

The social network of petites bonnes differs from that of other children. We have already discussed parental contact. Another aspect is contact with siblings. Many petites bonnes come from families who send several daughters working as bonnes. If they live near by each other, employers may allow them to visit each other, and some bonnes spend time with sisters. Petites bonnes may also work near by other girls coming from their home village or area.

However, a usual obstacle against contact between sisters, or bonnes coming from the same village, is that they are not allowed leisure time by their employers. In addition, petites bonnes often find that their employers do not allow them to talk with other bonnes; sisters, cousins, or friends from their home village, without the employer being present at the same time, similar to the situation when parents visit daughters in their workplace. Thus, petites bonnes often describe their lives with the employer as a “prison” existence. An exception is when two bonnes work for related families. In these cases, the bonnes often run errands between the two families, or accompany their employers on visits, and thus get the opportunity to see each other. Employers also seem to allow that bonnes spend time together unattended in these cases. Often, the girls see each other over work, when the “visiting bonne” is put to assisting the bonne(s) in the house.

Generally, petites bonnes have an almost remarkable overview of other bonnes working in the same area as themselves. A bonne can usually point out the families in the area that have bonnes working for them, or distinguish a bonne from a daughter of the house. One of the reasons for this is not simply way of dressing, but the fact that they are out of school in the daytime, and thus run into each other, or in turn, actively look for each other when running errands.

Contact between bonnes is also developed in the few existing evening-schools and resource centres for bonnes. We interviewed former and present bonnes in Casablanca, when they were attending evening lessons for women and girls aged 15 and above. We also visited a day care centre, which gave literacy classes for girls under

the age of 15. This class meets for two hours every day during the daytime, and the pupils learn Arabic, maths, and are taught Koranic studies. Out of 20 pupils in this (all-girl) class, 12 were working as bonnes. Here, the girls talk freely with each other. They are allowed a social space independently from their employer, and develop friendships with other bonnes. We also heard the girls speaking among themselves, about their daily duties, discussing what they had done during the day, telling stories about their employers, and discussing future hopes and plans. Here, they also complained about their employers, or talked about nice experiences in their households. Moreover, classes for bonnes do not simply serve the function of education, or leisure time, but also establishes an arena for bonnes to discuss and contemplate their experiences. This provides an opportunity for the girls to judge whether what they go through is acceptable or not, as they implicitly or explicitly compare their experiences. Additionally, the teacher in this particular class was always on the alert, commenting on the pupils to us, explaining who were worse off than others. She told us that she had tried to speak with employers when she got the chance. Thus, though it is difficult for a teacher to do so, the evening school also established a safety valve for the children.

Unfortunately, these centres are not numerous. In practice, they release the potential in informal contacts and friendships between bonnes in neighbourhoods. Additionally, they lay the basis for giving the girls skills that they can later use to pursue careers in other lines of work. Unfortunately also, however, the girls have few chances of being transferred to the formal educational system.

## **Parents' Decisions, Girls' Manoeuvres**

### **Parents' decisions: Petites bonnes under the age of 10 years**

The majority of present and former petites bonnes we met with during our fieldwork in Morocco claimed that one or both of their parents decided that they were to start working. Others presented it as a joint decision by themselves and their parents. Among the very young, below 10 years of age, many had not really understood what their move would imply for them, whereas others had obviously heard explanations from other bonnes who had returned home for shorter or longer periods of time.

In the day care centre for present bonnes in Casablanca, we met with Souad. Her statements show that she does not have a clear picture of her background, and at the same time that, she is in denial of other aspects of her situation.

## **Souad**

It is difficult to tell Souad's age. Some papers say that she is nine, others 13. She does not know her age herself. When we ask her, she says that she is 30 years old. Nor does she have any idea of where she is from, but her teacher's papers say that she comes from a village near Marrakech. Souad's teacher says that Souad works a lot, and points discreetly to Souad's hands. She explains that her skin has the kind of wrinkles you get from having them in the water for hours and hours, after laundry. She also adds that Souad is often late to class, as she cannot come before she has completed her chores.

We ask all the girls in the class to draw the houses they have lived in. In relation to Souad's drawing, we ask her whom she lives with: "An uncle", she says, pretending that this is a "real uncle". When commenting on the people she has drawn in her picture, she covers up the fact that she is a *bonne*, and says, "the *bonne* does the housework in our house", and smiles.

Souad's statements show that she is trying to hide the fact that she is working as a *bonne*. At the same time, they reveal a lack of orientation: that she has no idea of where she is from, or her age. In interviews with girls who had started working at the age of seven or eight, it appeared that this was a more general pattern. Many of them did not know how old they had been when they started working, and even had no memory of their life before working life.

## **Former *bonnes*' relationship with parents, and evaluations of the past**

Former *petites bonnes* evaluate their pasts differently. Former *bonnes* who have been exposed to abuse obviously think of their past with horror. Also, *bonnes* who live in social isolation, and no longer stay in touch with their parents, blame their parents for deserting them.

In some cases, parents have also cut off contact with their daughters. This is particularly the case with women who have children out of wedlock. In some instances, the connections between single motherhood and a past as a *petite bonne* are obvious. *Bonnes* are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse in the household of their employer. Several single mothers also conveyed the impression that they had simply been in search of emotional comfort, and/or told us that they became pregnant after their employers ended their job or they had to leave themselves, and were in desperate need of a place to live. Amina's case illustrates this last point.

## **Amina**

Amina is now 19 years old and just gave birth. She has worked from the age of seven. She has had a number of different employers, the last one in Casablanca. During her last appointment, the woman in the house decided that she did not want Amina to stay any longer, as she was afraid that it would lead to trouble with her living in the same house as her sons (i.e. trouble of a so-called “romantic” kind). Therefore, she had to leave. Amina’s parents were living in a neighbouring country at this time, and consequently, she had no place to go. She lived here and there, constantly looking for a place to work and stay. No one wanted to have her with them, she explains. For one and a half years, she had no fixed home. She tells this to explain how she came to the point where she is now, with a new-born baby in a centre for single mothers.

In Amina’s opinion, her father had *one* thing in mind when he decided that she was to start, and always continue working: Money. She tells us that he partly funded Amina’s brothers’ school fees and later, their bride wealth, with Amina’s salaries. Amina means that he never worried about her welfare. And she concludes: “I will *never* make my daughter work as a *bonne*”.

Former *petites bonnes*’ evaluations of their parents’ decision to their working largely depend on their past experiences as *bonnes*, but also, on whether they presently stay in touch with their parents regularly. Former *petites bonnes* often support their parents’ decision to make them work. Even girls, who told us that they have been beaten by employers, or have disliked their lives as *bonnes*, would occasionally express strong solidarity with their parents, and explained that their parents had no choice but to get an income from their working. This defence for parents also reveals that girls are put in a squeeze between parents’ and their own needs.

In some of these cases, girls also claimed that they themselves had agreed to work, and that it was a joint family decision. Hasana’s case, that we referred to above, for instance, is one of several such examples: The mother, father and Hasana had discussed their options, and concluded that Hasana’s working would be a way out, and a reliable source of income. Of course, many former *petites bonnes* interpret these past decisions in light of their sympathy with their parents, and thus, they adapt their views to the present relationships to their parents.

## **Girls’ initiatives and manoeuvres: Countryside life and city life**

In surprisingly many cases, however, girls not only claimed to *want* to go working in town, but also pushed their parents or siblings to find them a job as maid in town, or accept that they look for a job themselves. While we were travelling around the country, several girls approached us, to ask whether we could take them with us,

and make them “our bonnes”. And it was not their parents who had sent them to us. In fact, the girls often quarrelled openly with parents or brothers, who refused them to go. At first, we interpreted the approaches as a result of the researcher’s European appearance, which may signal wealth in a poor environment. However, this turned out to be a more general pattern. Earlier, when Moroccan women told similar stories, we interpreted this as a way to legitimise that they themselves, or others in general, hire young girls as bonnes. Though the last interpretation may hold true, it is a fact that young girls often *initiate* their moves to town, and themselves ask for appointments as bonnes.

The following examples illustrate some girls’ seemingly active attitude toward finding jobs as bonnes and moving to town. While we were doing fieldwork in rural villages (or compound clusters - *douar*<sup>23</sup>) in northern Morocco (between the city of Fes and town or village of Taounate), we talked with a mother of a former petite bonne, and with the girl herself, Farida, who was back from her last job in Tangier. Farida has had two appointments earlier, and has worked for 11 years already. She is now 17 years old (she started at the age of six). She says that both of her earlier appointments have been fine, but she left because she thought that the salary was not good enough. Also, she had returned to assist her mother, who had been ill. Farida is now the only daughter staying home, as three of her other sisters are presently working as bonnes, whereas her last sister is married and lives with her husband near by (also a former bonne). Five of her six brothers live in the compound with their mother.

We discuss Farida’s experiences from her life as a bonne, and we talk with the mother about the reasons for her daughters’ working. Farida says that she wants to go back to town, as she is no longer used to living in the countryside. Here, she has to walk far to get water, carry firewood, look after the sheep, cook, and wash all her brothers’ clothes. In the city, she says, the food is better, and it is possible to watch TV (as there is electricity). Also, Farida says, she wants to marry in town.

As we were leaving the compound cluster (after having conducted other interviews in other compounds), Farida’s mother comes out of her house. She tells us that Farida was inside crying to come with us, to work as a bonne: “She so badly wants to go to town, and with someone who seems nice”, the mother explained. She was laughing a bit, but told us to hurry off, as the daughter had already packed her suitcase. One of her elder brothers refused to let Farida go.

Present or former bonnes’ relationship with their brothers, and workload in their home compounds, are recurring themes when young girls tell us why they want to

<sup>23</sup> The term *douar* is used by Moroccan Arabic speakers to refer to a village, or cluster of compounds/houses in the rural area. It is different from the term *dar* (of conventional Arabic), which refers to a family, lineage, or to a house. One may say that a *douar* is a cluster of *dar* in the rural area.

work in town. In Farida's case above, I asked the mother whether the brother's refusal of Farida working was because he wanted to protect her. The mother answered that he refused because he wanted her to stay to assist her (mother). Another person commented (in a low voice) that the brother probably wanted a "maid" himself. Though not necessarily true, the statement reveals a tension in the brother-sister relationship.

Another example is Hanane, the 16-year old whose daily routines were described in the first part of this chapter. Hanane's father died several years ago, her mother died recently. With six brothers living in the compound and her as the only girl present, the workload was enormous. Hanane explains that she "ran off" with Fatima, her current employer, who was visiting the village, after having "begged" her to bring her along. Hanane laughs a bit of herself as she tells this story. She says that her cousins too, who come from the same village, have tried to find her a job. We speak with one of her cousins, who is the only daughter staying with her parents. She is angry because the parents will not allow her to go working in town.

Girls who themselves actively search for work are either girls above 10 years of age (i.e. not among the youngest), or they have already had experience as *bonnes* earlier, and are back in the countryside after an ended appointment. In the above cases, the girls were all more than 15 years old. However, in the same compound cluster as Farida's, we also met a girl of 12, Hafida, who was the only daughter left in the household. Her two older sisters work as *bonnes* in Tangier. Hafida has quit school after having failed the exams several times. Now, she looks after the sheep. She starts crying when telling that she misses her sisters, and says that she too wants to go working in Tangier, to see her sisters more often. Also, it is boring in the countryside. But her mother will not let her go. Other examples of girls in the same age group as Hafida, who say that they want to work as *bonnes* in town, are numerous.

Among young girls, who claim to want to go working as *bonnes*, the reasons given not only relate to the workload in their home compounds. Additionally, they all centre on *the city*. Many have ideas of the pleasures of *city life*, and the experiences that girls in the city get. Parents label this attitude "the dream of the city", and explain that it is motivated, among other things, by the "hard life in the countryside". Also, present and former *petites bonnes* say that life in the countryside puts too many restrictions on them: they have to wear long skirts and cover themselves up, and girls in the villages are not allowed to go outside unattended. Some even claim that their life in the villages was more of a prison life than their life as *bonnes*. Amina, for instance, the single mother who felt that her parents had abandoned her, and who would never make her own daughter work as a *bonne*, had a similar attitude. She said that her life in a village in the mountains of Rif was like a prison, and as restricted as her life as a *bonne*.

In cases when parents decide that their daughters must work, it appears that *in some instances*, the daughters comfort themselves with an idea that working as a *bonne* may be a road to a better life in the city. Amina expressed this when we spoke with her. She had not been consulted about being sent, and felt that the father did not think about anything else than money. However, she started laughing when saying that she too had a dream of city life at the time. Two other former *petites bonnes* laughed as well, and agreed. And Amina said that perhaps this was the reason why she had not resisted the father's decision more. But, Amina concluded, with intense agreement from the two other women: "What a chock I got! The gap between the dream and reality – the city I got to see – was *so* vast and devastating!"

### **Girls' initiative as survival strategy**

The seemingly active attitude among some girls in the countryside, who claim that they "want" to go to work as *bonnes* in the cities, should primarily be seen as a survival strategy<sup>24</sup> in a situation where the main question is not *whether* to work, but *whom to work for*. Among girls from semi-urban areas, this "active attitude" mostly seem to be inspired by hopes of a better life.

In many areas, sending girls to work as *bonnes* has become commonplace, and decisions to make girls work as *bonnes* normalised. In a situation where domestic labour has become commonplace, young girls become particularly vulnerable. The reality that meets many young girls who get, or are placed, with employers in towns, is so different from the image they have of city life. In other words, Amina's description tells the story. Thus, the normalisation of domestic labour creates a vicious circle in which young girls are easily introduced into professional working life, with the heavy workloads it implies, and into potentially abusive work relations.

The fact that children relate actively to their situation shows that they try to find ways to survive, and create options in a world where *not working* is not a possibility. In many communities, therefore, girls discuss among themselves who make the best employers, as the discourses of "Fasi" versus middleclass employers reveal. Some girls have aspirations of finding "nice" employers, who in time will let them pursue their own plans and hopes, like getting an education, though they know that the chances are few.

Another aspect of girls' active attitude in relation to their working life is that they pose conditions when discussing employment with potential candidates. For instance, girls who have already worked as *bonnes* may deny working for people who do not have a washing machine. Or, they negotiate remuneration, and what should be regarded as remuneration. During our discussion with Farida, for instance, she

<sup>24</sup> By "survival strategy", we mean actions they take in attempts to improve their lives as *bonnes*.

told us that she would not accept a job for less than 600 Dirhams, or, 500 Dirhams if employers provided her with new clothes. In other words, she attempts to turn powerlessness into a position where she can influence her situation.

In many compound clusters we visited, adults and children pointed out, and distinguished, the households that have sent daughters, from those that have not. Being in a situation of *not* having to send daughters to town to work as *bonnes* has become synonymous with being blessed economically. Also, those who see themselves as dependent on their daughters' incomes, often send more than one daughter. Among those who have not sent daughters, the daughters explain that they do not want to go, and stress the value in education. Engagement in domestic labour thus resembles a broader identity label, signalling economic position and (low) educational level, which creates divisions within communities, between households which include both children and adults.

In households where several girls work as *bonnes*, younger sisters look up to their older sisters, whom they see as more experienced than themselves, "educated" in city life and city habits. And many girls do not tell sisters, friends, or girls who *do* attend school in their home villages about the hardship they are going through. As they know that they *have* to work to help their parents, they may even hide that they are unhappy with their employer, in order not to hurt their parents, or keep up a good face with other girls in their village. Once again, their "way out" is to search for better employers, or to pose conditions before or during employment.

### **The employers' response**

In turn, employers and people who recruit *petites bonnes* benefit from young girls seemingly "wish" to work in town. Also, they interpret girls' active negotiations for salary or washing machines as an expression of stubbornness. Employers thus see this as a sign of that *petites bonnes* are not in need of "protection", and employers convey the impressions that the girls therefore have to be watched at all times, and be kept more in their place than ever before, or even disciplined harder.

Employers reveal this attitude often. We were regularly told that:

"these days, the girls are very cheeky, they demand things, and are not servile enough"

"it is very important now not to give girls the impression that they are daughters of the house. There has to be a limit, and they have to stay *bonnes*".

"Earlier, it was easy to get nice *bonnes*. These days it is impossible".

What these statements and descriptions of the past show, is that the complex of child domestic labour gets its own dynamic, and that the rhetoric which accompanies this dynamic changes among young working girls as well as among employers.

## **“Like a fire in the heart”: Parents of Petites Bonnes**

“To find the reasons for the problem with bonnes, we must look to the parents. Parents in the countryside have become very cruel toward their children. They don’t support them, they don’t care about them, and abandon them with very little money. And they are not *so* poor! These people have lost their sense of family solidarity. They exploit their daughters, and only think about themselves! We need a change of mentality among the parents”.

This outburst comes from an adult woman, who herself has hired 120 young girls and women as “bonnes”, or maids, during a period of 36 years. Her outburst is not atypical. During our fieldwork in Morocco, this was a view often expressed. However, it was very often *employers* of petites bonnes who held and expressed such views. Moreover, this is somehow symptomatic of a mutual blaming or “demonisation” among the parties involved in child domestic labour: Employers demonise the parents, *samsars* (recruiters/middlemen), and/or bonnes themselves; bonnes demonise parents, employers, and/or *samsar(a)s*; and parents demonise the *samsar(a)s* and/or employers. Generally, parents’ explanations reveal a situation very different from the one described by the employer cited above.

### **Poverty, drought, and loss of fathers’ income**

The terms “unemployment” and “drought” were perhaps the words we most commonly heard while discussing daughters’ working with parents. When explaining why their daughters work, parents automatically started talking about their economic situation, basic needs, and/or events that had suddenly changed their economic situation. In both urban and rural areas, unemployment was a recurrent explanation to the decision that daughters work. The loss of fathers’ or other male family members’ incomes due to illness or death is also an important pushing factor.

The Moroccan economy has undergone significant changes during the past decade. From 1994 to 1995, the average GDP growth declined from 11,9 to -6,0. The drought, especially during the last half of the 1990’s (cf. Ministère de l’Agriculture 1997), has threatened many peasants’ livelihood, either because the

produce from their plots is dramatically reduced, or because the larger agricultural companies no longer have jobs to offer. Property relations to land make this situation even more accentuated, as the vast majority of peasants are tenants, and thus have no land that they can try to get the most out of, or even exhaust as an emergency survival strategy. The farmers who *do* have small plots stress their need for cash income, as they are forced to buy the products they could earlier grow themselves.

Parents in the rural area explicitly link the drought to unemployment and/or inability to live from their own plots, and to the fact that their daughters work. In the account of the argument over Hasana's remuneration (above), this clearly appears; Hasana's father tells that Hasana started working after he lost his job with the big olive- and fruit farm. Several other fathers in the village too, tell us that earlier, this farm (or company) used to employ people in the whole area. Explanations in the entire area centred on this particular company's reductions and notices, and the economic spin-off effects of the more general increase in unemployment that followed.

In the larger agricultural companies, a period of cut-downs usually precedes unemployment, so that a full time appointment is reduced to engagement for a few times a week. This happened in Hasana's case too. When the effects of the drought slowly affected the produce in the company farm, the work with oranges was reduced, and in the end, all that was left was olives. Now, Hasana's father still has occasional work during the olive harvest, but this is not more than one and a half months per year.

In the areas visited, not only have the larger agricultural companies let employees go, but the smaller landowners who earlier employed peasants have stopped hiring people. The latter is also, and in part, a result of that smaller landowners have converted to less work-intensive (and less rain dependent) crops as a strategy in response to the crisis. During fieldwork, we conducted interviews and discussed with parents of present and former *bonnes* in a rural area between Mediouna and Berrechid near Casablanca. Here, the drought did not hit seriously until four years ago.<sup>25</sup> The below example shows how the drought affects parents' possibilities for jobs in the fields.

### **Drought and unemployment among parents in a rural area**

The area only has a few landowners. Most of them (two or three) own extensive areas, and live in Casablanca. Most of the landowners who live in their farms

<sup>25</sup> The drought has spread north and to the coast with time. Thus, whereas the inland areas were affected already 10 to six years ago, it did not become precarious in the rural areas by the coast (e.g. near Casablanca and Rabat) until four years ago.

bought their land a few years ago, and have two to three hectares each. A few “middleclass” landowners own as much as 20 hectares.

One of these, Abderrahim, is present while we discuss with parents of *bonnes*. He says that he has been “blessed”, and has not had to send his daughters to work in Casablanca. A few years ago, he bought 20 hectares of land. However, he can no longer employ anyone in his farms. He explains that in the four last years, his production has gone down by at least 50 percent. And he continues to say:

“I used to employ 15 to 20 people, but now, I have no paid help. I have turned from vegetables to grain [wheat], like everyone else, because it is easier. If I had managed to grow potatoes, I could have engaged many, many workers for six months. But there is no rain, no money or credit, and we small and middleclass farmers with no fridge have no possibilities for storage. So I am bound to stick to grain, and employ no one.”

The other adults, parents of *bonnes*, who are present, do not own land. They have built small houses on pieces of land that they do not own themselves. Instead, they have been allowed to stay on the land for free, after Abderrahim asked the owners (who live in Casablanca) if they could stay there.

They tell us that they did not have steady jobs earlier either, before the drought. However, back then, there were always jobs to get on the fields with the big landowners, or with people like Abderrahim, who hired workers all the time. Now, the lucky ones get a month a year in the fields. They have to look for money elsewhere, in construction sites, petty trade, or the like. Mostly, they live from taking care of Casablanca people’s cows. Some use a small part of the land they live on for a garden, to produce for own subsistence.

There are several parents of *bonnes* present during our discussion. One of them, a mother of 36 years, tells that earlier, her husband had day-to-day jobs, in the fields of land-owning farmers, and in the farms of larger agricultural companies. Now, however, there are no jobs, and he takes whatever he can get. Their daughter started working three years ago (at the age of 13). According to the mother, this was a direct result of the fact that the father’s offers of paid work dried up. According to her, they had to supplement the cash they could procure from her husband’s smaller jobs. The daughter got a job with an acquaintance of her uncle.

In urban or semi-urban areas too, like the outskirts of Rabat and Fes where we conducted interviews, explanations for girls’ working are often related to unemployment, but here, not in the agricultural sector. Many stories relate girls’ working to cut-downs or closing of large factories or important companies that employed entire

neighbourhoods. Parents often justify their decisions of daughters' working with reference to such specific events that lead to widespread unemployment.

In both rural and urban areas, unemployment is also used as an explanation to why *more* than one daughter works. For instance, though Hasana, whom we referred to above, did not start working as a *bonne* before her father lost his job, she has an older sister who did, and had been working for two years at the time. Earlier, the father explains, the family got by on his salary, and that of Hasana's older sister. When the father finally lost his job, however, the older daughter's salary could not support them, and they decided that Hasana should start working too.

Another important pushing factor behind decision to send girls working is related to the loss of income as a result of fathers' unemployment, illness or death, or the inability of other male household members to get the household an income. This is also related to household composition, and traditional division of labour within the household. A critical point in household viability in rural Morocco is the dependence on economically active men who can contribute with cash income. If this fails, parents use girls' instead, and thus, according to a local view on gender, put girls in the roles of men. By the same token, parents never say that they send a daughter working because the *wife* (her mother) does not have a job, as her main task is the daily running of the household, and not cash generating activities outside the household sphere.

The below examples from the rural area between Mediouna and Berrechid show how the loss of fathers' or male family members' incomes pushes parents to send daughters working.

### **Loss of income as a result of illness or death**

During our discussions with parents, we meet Mohamed. He is about 45 years old. He tells that his daughter started working one year ago, at the age of 14. None of his other daughters have ever worked as *bonnes*. However, when he fell ill with rheumatism, he could no longer work. Without the 300 Dirhams the daughter brings, the family would not get by.

Another woman who is present, Kbir, has two younger sisters who work as *bonnes*. She tells us that they both started at the age of 12, after their father died, and the mother could no longer support the family.

Bouchra has seven children, three boys and four girls, two of whom work as *bonnes*. They both started working at the age of seven years, and they are now 22 and 18 years old. The oldest of them has now become ill with rheumatism, and stays at home, whereas the 18-year-old still works. She gives the 300 Dirhams she earns to her mother each month. Her two other daughters are married, and do not work.

People who are in the room explain to us that Bouchra's husband is old, and that even if he had found work, he cannot work. Bouchra herself explains that their sons cannot assist them either. Her youngest son is in school, whereas the last son cannot find work. Bouchra tells that one of their sons had an accident, but that she and her husband could not afford to pay for medicines. The son became lame as a result of not being treated properly. This was a "double misfortune", as it not only affected the son's life, but also has made him unable to assist and support his family financially.

The two girls in this last case started working long before the drought hit. Here, it is household composition, with working inability or unemployment among male members, which explains the parents' decisions for the daughters' working. Thus, in order to avoid sending girls to work, the household needs, and must consist of men who are able to work. Optimising the number of children, including sons in the right age, is hence a strategy among parents to enhance the possibilities for income (see also Ministère du Développement Social and BIT/IPEC 1999:62).

In LMPE and UNICEF's study (1996), interviewers asked the *petites bonnes* about the reason why they work. The alternatives for answering included parents' death, parents' poverty, abandonment, and "other", but did not distinguish parents' illness, or other causes, from poverty. The results showed that 16% answered father's death; 5% mother's death; and 72% answered parents' poverty (Alaoui 1996:43).<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult to determine how the number of *petites bonnes* has developed during the past years. Regardless, as a social phenomenon, *petites bonnes* have existed for many years, also prior to the economic recession following the drought. Sending daughters off to work as *petites bonnes* has been used as a survival strategy among parents earlier as well, in response to reductions in income to the household. It is noteworthy, however, that parents recurrently relate their decisions to send, or allow, girls to work to unemployment, and that rural unemployment or decreased productivity has become severe during the past decade.

Additionally, it seems that practices concerning *petites bonnes* are changing in character. With the operations of professional middlemen (*samsars*), the conditions of *petites bonnes* are not necessarily the same as they used to be. This will be discussed in further detail later on.

<sup>26</sup> For connections between poverty, parents' unemployment and level of income, and Moroccan child labour in general, see Benradi & El Aoufi, (1996:23) and Ministère du Développement Social and BIT/IPEC (1996:17, 61ff.).

### **The significance of daughters' incomes**

For 1998/1999, Direction de la Statistique has estimated the average household consumption level to 2720 Dirhams per month in Morocco seen as a whole and 2210 Dirhams in rural areas. Furthermore, 50% of households spend less than this average (Direction de la Statistique 2000:69). In general terms, this implies that a *petite bonne's* salary constitutes a significant contribution to poor rural household economies. Hypothetically speaking, if taking an *average* household with a monthly consumption of 2210 Dirhams, a contribution of 300 Dirhams from a daughter makes up 13% of the total. As it is reasonable to believe that the households with daughters working as *bonnes* belong to the category that spends *less* than the average, the percentage made up from daughters' salaries is most likely significantly higher.

During discussions with parents, we found that the salaries from girls' work are used to cover basic needs, and go into the expenses for the day-to-day running of households. As contributions to these expenses, and of total household income, the salaries are significant also in terms of the basic needs parents themselves claim to have. Daughters' money contributions make up as much as 20 to 80% of the cash income that parents said that they need in order to cover their basic requirements.

Interestingly, the amounts parents named when estimating what they must have to cover "basic needs", did not differ much. Parents in families of nine to 10 members (i.e. with seven to eight children) generally said that they need at least 50 Dirhams per day, or 1500 per month. Though the amounts mentioned may seem low, it is more likely that respondents overestimate than underestimate their level of consumption in an interview situation, in a wish to underline their desperate situation.<sup>27</sup> It also has to be considered that many cover parts of their own needs through produce from own gardens, or reduce costs by processing raw materials (grain, wheat), instead of buying ready-made products. Simultaneously, however, parents did not include special costs like medical expenses when estimating their basic needs. Neither did they include educational costs.<sup>28</sup>

With these considerations in mind, it is fair to say that with a salary from 250 to 400 Dirhams per month, a *petite bonne* contributes with a fifth of the amount that a family of six to 10 persons considers as "basic needs". It is worthwhile reminding at this point that families often have more than one girl working.

The below passages give an example of daughters' salaries making up almost half of the household's total income.

<sup>27</sup> Often, people overestimate consumption and underestimate income. This is the reason why we have asked about consumption, and not simply income.

<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have data that document parents' educational costs.

### **Income in Mina's household**

Earlier, we wrote about Aicha and her mother Mina, whom we met in a village near Marrakech. Aicha's 12-year old sister Khadija is also a *bonne*, and has worked for 13 months. Khadija and Aicha do not stay at home, but with their respective employers. Their family's household consists of Mina and their father, their three brothers and one sister who do not work, i.e. six people for the greater part of the year.

Aicha earns 400 and Khadija 350 Dirhams per month in their appointments as *bonnes*. Mina says that she needs a minimum of about 400 Dirhams per week to pay for the family's most basic necessities, i.e. about 1600 Dirhams per month.

At the same time, however, she explains that in *good* periods, her husband can earn 200 Dirhams per week (i.e. about 800 per month) from working as a smith and various jobs he can get in olive fields in the area. Usually, he does not earn this much, as the demand for his services varies according to season. Mina says that the family does not have other sources of income.

If reckoning a good month, in Mina's terms, the highest cash income the family has is about 1550 Dirhams per month. In this case, the daughters' income makes up almost 50% of the total. The same applies if calculating the daughters' contribution as a part of the minimum consumption level estimated by Mina, of about 1600 Dirhams per month. According to Mina, they would not survive without the daughters' salaries. This is also one of the reasons why Mina does not want Aicha to change her employer, in spite of the fact that she does not like staying with them. Mina is afraid that another employer will not pay as much as 400 Dirhams.

Mina's estimation of the household's consumption for basic needs is higher than most other families we spoke to, as her household consists of fewer people. Even so, the two daughters' contributions are considerable.

Though parents generally claim that they are not simply dependent on their daughters' salaries, but could not make it without them, others say that they will not pressure girls to work if they resist. For instance, in the same village as Mina's household was located, we also spoke with Hasana and her parents (cf. the case concerning the argument over Hasana's remuneration). Hasana refused to go working as a *bonne* again, and her father held that he would not force her. He said that he had had enough of unreliable employers who exploited her daughter, and enough of Hasana's unhappiness. This did not imply that he took a stand against girls' working as *bonnes* in general. Another of his daughters works as a *bonne* as well, but according to Hasana and her father, she says that she is being treated nicely. However, he concluded, with Hasana's mother's consent, that they would have to

find other solutions to their problems, and find a substitute for Hasana's salary. They did not know how, but repeated that they would have to look for money elsewhere.

### **Girls' work, schooling, and parents' other motivations for daughters' work**

On several occasions, it appeared from rural parents' explanations that sending a daughter to work as a *bonne* is a way to protect her from the hard work on farms. In the area between Mediouna and Berrechid, a woman pointed to one of her daughters who was present in the room, and explained that she had earlier become ill from working in the fields. Working in the fields, the mother explained, is *very* hard work: It is more physically challenging than the work as a maid, involving heavier lifts, and being exposed to the sun for hours on end. Moreover, she said, it is a kind of work that young girls are simply not built for.

Here, work on the fields is represented as more laborious than the work as a maid. This may seem illogical, considering the heavy tasks many *petites bonnes* are put to. However, when rural parents expressed this view, they also expressed the view that a *bonne* may well perform heavy tasks, and is expected to answer to requests for as long as she is awake, but she does not work "constantly".

Though adult women also perform agricultural work in gardens, the view of young girls as unfit for work in the fields basically reflects the conventional division of labour between men and women. It is seen as more "natural" that girls perform the tasks that they will perform in adult life, as married women. As they see it, *petites bonnes* perform in the employers' households the tasks they would otherwise do at home. And regardless of the "objective" truth in perceptions of the workload involved in work on fields as compared to work as maids, parents do have the idea that they are doing their daughters a favour when "saving them" from farm labour.

The dominance of girls among children not enrolled and attending school in rural Morocco is well documented (see e.g. Direction de la Statistique 2000; Benson 1995:409). In a situation where parents regard education as a "scarce resource", they are prone to give priority to educating boys rather than girls. Partly, this is related to scarce resources, and logistics, like distance to schools (cf. Direction de la Statistique 2000:44). More generally, this situation reflects gender relations: Girls are expected to fill the role as housewives later in life, whereas men will work *outside* of the household. The attitude that it is more "important" to educate boys than girls is considerably more accentuated in the rural area than in the cities. Often, former *petites bonnes* that we spoke with, who were originally from the countryside, interpreted their own working as a way for parents to sponsor the education of their brothers.

We discussed with parents whether they regard their daughters' work as *bonnes* as a form of "informal training" which is valuable for them later in life. Generally, they did not. Daughters' work as *bonnes* is perceived by parents as a survival strategy, and is not guided by an idea of "training" as a pulling factor. The kind of tasks that girls perform as *bonnes* are the same as they would otherwise learn had they stayed at home. As we will return to below, parents generally see their daughters' working as a necessary evil.

Occasionally, however, parents reveal a view whereby an important employer is a gateway to other resources than their daughter's salary. This was the case with Aicha, and her mother Mina, whose stories were recounted in the first half of this chapter, and in the previous section. Mina insisted that Aicha stay with her current employers, as they are a "rich" and "important" family. Obviously, her preference was guided by the fact that Aicha had a comparatively good salary (400 Dirhams). Additionally, however, Mina indicated that the family could help her in other ways, with papers, or connections of other kinds.

Often, outsiders interpret this attitude (or hope) as "snobbery of the poor". They claim that rural parents are "competing" over the social standing of their daughters' employer (where, for instance, a civil servant is more prestigious than a middleclass worker is). Parents, on the other hand, generally emphasise the "pushing factors" of unemployment or other crises, and not such "pulling factors".<sup>29</sup> Parents also stressed that usually, they were not in a position to "choose" between different employers. As we have seen, more experienced girls *do* claim to have the possibility to "choose" between employers, but they do this by simply not returning to their earlier employer. In comparison to their more experienced daughters, parents in the countryside thus seem to be passive onlookers.

As mentioned earlier, working as a *bonne* is usually represented as an *alternative* to education. This also appears when taking into account parents' more specific reflections on which daughter to send. During our discussions with parents, we found that in households with several daughters, the ones that were sent were those who had failed in school, or who did not succeed in exams. Until recently, pupils were expelled from school permanently after three consecutive years of failure in final exams. Now, however, pupils can hypothetically fail endlessly, without losing the right to attending school. Several former *petites bonnes* that we spoke with had gone to school while the old rules were in operation. After they had failed, they said,

<sup>29</sup> Parents seldom confront employers directly on other issues than their girls' salaries. Usually, they are afraid of being labelled "rude". This point has already been discussed in connection with girls' complaints over their employers' treatment. For instance, parents will pretend to take their daughter home for a vacation, and keep her there, rather than saying explicitly that they do not want their daughters to return.

parents had seen it as “useless” that they “just stay in the house, doing nothing”, when they could contribute to the household economy by working as *bonnes*.

Young girls who go to school under the present rules regarding exam failure and expulsion are still not unaffected by educational outcomes, or lack of success in school. Several girls we met in the countryside had been taken out of school by their parents, after having failed exams. If the girls do not succeed in school, parents told us, there is no use in keeping them there. Consequently, they are exposed to the same options as girls who earlier were expelled from school, as they too are “sitting around doing nothing”. This basically tells that girls who fail school have greater chances of being introduced to the labour market at an early age.

Conversely, a pupil who is particularly successful in school is more likely to be kept in school by parents. We often met parents who said that they were struggling to keep a successful daughter in school, by finding other sources of income. Or, parents prefer that an “unsuccessful” daughter works as a *bonne*, while the “successful” one stays in school. We also witnessed cases where parents had kept daughters’ in school as a result of teachers’ encouragement. In one case, a teacher had even sponsored a young girl’s books, in order to prevent the parents from taking her out of school. The girl in this case, the parents explained, is especially talented. Her sister, however, was not, and was working as a *bonne* from the age of 13.

A related situation, which facilitates the recruitment of girls to jobs as *petites bonnes*, regards late enrolment. In principle, children should be enrolled to school at the age of seven (or six, determined by year of birth). If the child is not enrolled by the age of seven, school authorities do often not allow her to be enrolled at all. This, however, is a practise taken up by some school authorities, and does not follow from Moroccan law.

In the class in Casablanca, where we talked with young *bonnes*, three of the girls had not been allowed school enrolment by local authorities, as they had been told that they were too old. They had been eight, and seven years old, at the time of attempting enrolment. We came across several similar cases in evening classes for women. In some cases, children had in fact been enrolled as late as at the age of eight, but not all accept eight-year-olds. At the same time, we also saw cases of girls who had come to school a few months after the start of the academic year, and been denied to attend. In turn, they had been denied enrolment, on a permanent basis, at the start of the next school year, on the grounds that they were too old.

Lack of birth certificates or identity papers is also used as ground to deny children enrolment. If parents or guardians cannot document a child’s age, the child is often denied enrolment on the same grounds. We came across two girls who had been denied enrolment for this reason. They were both working as *bonnes*.

When a child is thus not allowed to attend school, many parents see a job as maid as the solution, as an alternative to the girl sitting in at home doing “nothing”,

especially if the parents are poor. Thus, girls who are denied enrolment face the same situation as girls who are taken out of school as a result of failure in exams. They too have greater chances of being recruited as *bonnes*.

### **Experiences and evaluations: The “normalisation” of child domesticity**

During meetings with parents of *petites bonnes*, parents often gave the impression of total resignation, and that they had no other possibilities than getting money other than their daughters’ appointments as *bonnes*. In these cases, sending daughters to work was represented as normal. In this sense, some parents seem to have surrendered, not reflecting on other options.

It seems reasonable to conclude, also in light of girls’ “dreams of city life”, that in some areas, sending daughters to work as *bonnes* has become so common that the normalisation reinforces the practice. It has become an accepted strategy for getting household income, and the social acceptance may make barriers against sending daughters less. Moreover, the concentrations of households that have sent daughters to work as *bonnes* seem to be higher in some areas than others, and movements of girls to the cities thus take on a pattern of chain-migration.

While we conducting fieldwork in the rural area between Taonate and Fes, we discussed girls’ work with a group of mothers. The women were telling about their situation by means of joking and laughing, and we asked them whether they ever missed their daughters. This was like pushing a button. The three mothers started crying, and one of them exclaimed: “It feels like a fire in the heart”. She had several daughters working in town, and only one daughter left with her. Though this daughter was “begging” to go to town, her mother would not let her. She said that she would not let another girl go, as missing her other daughters hurt her too much.

In rural areas in particular, these were feelings we later saw often. Here, parents represented their daughters’ working as *petites bonnes* as a necessary evil, that was surrounded by a feeling of desperation. Having daughters working as *bonnes* is also negatively evaluated in other ways. The background for this negative evaluation is multifarious. Some mentioned that it happens at the sacrifice of schooling. This, however, was not usually a point that parents themselves brought up, but was more consented to after our suggestion. Rather, parents who mention education in this context, regard it as a shame that girls cannot attend school, but that they have no choice as they themselves are dependent on the girls’ salaries.

Negative evaluations of daughters’ work are not related to the fact that girls work. Girls are expected to work, and perform chores in their home compounds. Rather, negative evaluations are connected with the fact that girls work *somewhere else* than in their family’s household, a point which seems contradictory to the view that a

girl who does not go to school can “just as well” work in someone else’s household, as she is “doing nothing”.

The negative evaluation of girls working *somewhere else* is basically rooted in culturally defined perceptions of, and ideals in, upbringing of girls to adult women. A good mother is a woman who ensures that her daughters do not “run around” speaking with strangers. Though married women are strong actors within the household, reticence is an ideal among young rural girls. This norm is associated with an ideal of premarital chastity. This does not necessarily imply that becoming a *petite bonne* is seen as identical with breaking the ideal of premarital chastity. However, it is a deviation from the traditional norm that girls should stay with their parents until marriage, perceived as the best solution for the girl. In this light, parents attitude that girls “hang around doing nothing”, and therefore “just as well can work”, is an expression of the normalisation of girls’ labour. It is also an expression of parents desperation for an income, and that parents “adapt” traditional norms concerning the raising of girls to their needs and desperations.

By many *petites bonnes* that we spoke with, this norm is experienced as restrictive. They saw this as another aspect of “the hard life in the countryside”, and associated it with the imperatives imposed on them to wear long dresses and stay indoors. The city, on the other hand, was represented as the reversal of the dress codes and restrictions of the countryside. Partly, this is what underlies girls’ “dream of the city”.

### **Gender relations with respect to parents’ decisions and girls’ work**

In principle, the decision to send a girl working rests with her father. To the outside world, the household head, or authority, is a man. A woman could never make a decision to send a girl working as a *bonne*, if her husband disapproved.

In practice, however, mothers and fathers often co-operate in making such decisions. Women know the needs of the household, just as men do, and mothers are generally influential in matters that concern the household. Though men may secure the cash income to the household, women administer the household budget on a daily basis, in terms of being responsible for shopping of food and other needs. On several occasions, we met women who had taken the initiative to resolving a crisis by sending a daughter to work as a *bonne*. In widowhood, women make such decisions on their own.

It does not seem to be an option that the mother herself takes up a work as a maid. Rural women are often economically active outside their households (e.g. in trade of various kinds), but women represent working as maids as even less desirable than sending a daughter. This primarily regards married women. The justifications are basically twofold. Firstly, the married woman is responsible for running

the household. Thus, she has to take care of the smaller children, do the cooking, going to the market, etc. In this context, a married woman's work outside the household is represented as an impossibility. Secondly, her husband would not allow her to work in "another man's household". This justification was made by wives themselves, and/or by other women present during or after our discussions. The reason, they held, is that the husband would get jealous, or simply regard it as degrading, or a breach of honour. An adult woman who performs household chores in another man's household, fills the role as the wife in the house.

In fact, a similar reason was given to explain why fathers go to employers to collect the monthly salaries more often than mothers: A husband will not allow his wife to visit a daughter due to jealousy, or notions of (im)proper behaviour. If a visit implies that the wife will have to travel far, it will also lead to her neglecting her homely duties.

## **How Girls are Recruited: Middlemen and *Samsar(a)s***

There are several ways through which girls are recruited as *bonnes*, but generally, these can be grouped into two main forms: Firstly, through professional middlemen or –women, known in Morocco as *samsar* (masculine), or *samsara* (feminine), and secondly, informal middlemen (or women), and even children. Below, we describe these different forms, and discuss the basis for the (sometimes) blurred distinction between them. In turn, we discuss the consequences of the operations of professional middlemen, and their presence as an expression of the commercialisation of child domestic labour. Finally, we look at *petites bonnes*' functions as informal middlemen.

### **The *samsar(a)* and the informal middleman**

The *samsar* functions as a middleman in the relationship between employer and *petite bonne*, and works like a personified agency or broker. The *samsar* is "professional" in the sense that he or she may earn a living from this "profession", independently or as a source of income in addition to other activities, but the activities are not regulated by law. The *samsar* looks for girls, and places them in families, on a professional basis, and earns money for this "service". The person who employs the *petite bonne* pays a one-time fee to the *samsar*.

The arrangements involving *samsars* are organised in different ways. Sometimes, the *samsar* is asked by a person looking for a *bonne* if he or she can find a *bonne*,

and in turn approaches parents to ask whether they want to place their daughter with the family in question. Often, the *samsar* will ask around in the community for parents who are looking for jobs for their daughters. The arrangement may also work the other way around; parents approach a person known to be a *samsar* and inquire about the possibilities for an appointment for their daughter. In turn, the *samsar* turns to potential employers. In yet other instances, the parents are not involved in the arrangement at all. In the latter case, the *samsar* may approach a girl who is already working as a *bonne*, and offer her a better-paid job. When a girl has once been in touch with a *samsar*, the relationship between the *samsar* and the *bonne* often continues. The girl asks him or her about possibilities for a job with better pay, better conditions, or more gentle employers, and / or the *samsar* regularly presents the girl with potential employers.<sup>30</sup> *Samsars* are most basically seen as a “city-phenomenon”, and associated with activities within the cities.

The following case shows how a *samsara* intervenes in the work relationship of a *petite bonne* by dealing with the girl’s mother.

### **Appointment through a *samsara***

Touria tells that she had her first appointment as *bonne* in Casablanca at the age of 13. She got the job through her aunt, who knew someone who was looking for a *bonne*. In this job, Touria earned 400 Dirhams per month, which she gave to her family. She says that she did not “particularly” like working for this family. After some time, a *samsara* approached her mother and asked how much the daughter earned. When the mother told her 400 Dirhams, the *samsara* said that she could find Touria another job for 500 Dirhams. The mother agreed to this without consulting Touria. However, Touria was not too happy in the place where she was, and therefore she says, she accepted. Thus, she got a new job and a new place to live. According to Touria, her situation stayed the same: Not better; not worse.

Generally speaking, it is in the *samsars*’ economic interest that the *bonne* changes her places of employment regularly, as they earn money each time they “find a *bonne*” for an employer. *Samsars* often encourage *bonnes* to quit their current employment, placing them anew, etc., and thus prevent enduring relationships between employer, girl, and her parents. According to the woman mentioned above, who has employed 120 *bonnes* in a period of 36 years, the relationships between her, as an employer, and the parents of the *bonnes*, and the *bonnes* themselves, have become

<sup>30</sup> In some cases, *samsar(a)* offer the *bonnes* lodging. Also, *bonnes*’ contact with *samsars* is often represented as a gateway to prostitution. Unfortunately, we have not had the possibility to investigate this further.

undermined, or non-existing all together. The *samsar* becomes the core in the relationship, and the parents' possibilities for control diminish further. The petites bonnes are caught in the middle, between parents, *samsars*, and employers.

Most often, however, girls are recruited through acquaintances. Such informal middlemen are referred to as *wast/waset* (masculine), and *wastal/waseta* (feminine), which simply means an intermediary person, mediator, or a go-between. People in the villages have relatives or friends in towns, who use these connections to recruit a *bonne*. The initiative may be taken by either party: parents ask people with connections in town whether they know employers, or the potential employer ask a relative, friend, or other acquaintance to look for a *bonne* for him or her. In only a very few cases did we hear about potential employers going to parents in person, or go to villages looking for a *bonne* on their own.

### **Blurred distinctions between *samsar(a)s* and informal middlemen**

The distinction between formal and informal middlemen (and women) is blurred. For instance, a person may have found many petites bonnes for employers, but still not be referred to as a *samsar(a)* (but *waset[a]*). The difference between them, however, is locally defined by that the *samsar* is paid for his / her services, and demands such a payment. Still, an informal middleman or –woman does occasionally receive a “compensation”, for instance for travelling costs. Additionally, the middleman or –woman may receive a “gift”.<sup>31</sup> This is particularly the case when the middleman is perceived as poor as compared to the employer. This shows that people apply the term “*samsar*” according to the situation, as it usually carries negative connotations. The situational use of the term *samsar* most basically seems to indicate that the person is not integrated fully in a social network in relation to parents or employers, whereas the informal middleman *is*. The following example illustrates connotations of the *samsar* term, and how its use reveals the social integration of middlemen.

### **Nahjouba: The social integration of a middleman**

While we were interviewing parents of petites bonnes in Fes and its adjacent rural areas, we met with Nahjouba, who may be described as an informal middleman. She is living in Fes, but was born and has her family in a village some distance away. One of her own daughters works as a domestic servant. Nahjouba herself works as a *bonne* in several households in Fes, and thus knows many people. They constantly ask her to find girls to work for them, and Nahjouba says that to help employers solve their problem, and help poor parents in the countryside,

<sup>31</sup> The roles of middlemen or mediators (*waset*) most probably vary from one sector to another within Morocco, and throughout Maghreb and the Middle East. For a description and discussion of the significance of informal middlemen in the Middle East, see Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993).

she goes to the countryside from time to time, looking for *bonnes*. She says that she never demands a “commission”. However, the employers give her a compensation for transport, and occasionally they give her a “tip”, and she does not refuse this, as she is in desperate need of money.

Nahjouba was present during a discussion with parents of *petites bonnes* in her village. When we discussed the issue, we asked whether they would refer to Nahjouba as a *samsara*. They all protested excitedly, because a *samsara* would be a person they did not know personally, and whom they did not trust. They held that Nahjouba, on the other hand, “is a very good person who has done a lot of good for us”. And they continued saying that “the middleman *must* be a good person, and not a *samsar(a)*”. According to the parents, a middleman whom they know well works as a social insurance, as she will have to take the blame if their daughter is not treated well in the household she has placed her in.

Regardless of whether this social sanction actually “works”, or whether they adjusted their descriptions as a result of Nahjouba’s presence, the women’s statements show the negative associations brought forward by the *samsara* term, and their lack of more a profound social relationship with the *samsars*.

The negative connotations may, however, vary from one community to the next. We were often faced with generalisations like “*samsars* do not operate here”, or given directions to communities in which they *do* operate. Yet others said that the distinction between a middleman and *samsar* is nothing but cosmetic, and that there are “good” as well as “bad” *samsars*. Regardless of variances connected with the moral judgements of *samsars*, the distinction is connected with the degree to which the *samsar* is involved in a social network. In this way, if a *samsar* becomes a “friend” of the parents or the girl, people will often reserve themselves from referring to him or her as a *samsar(a)*.

### **Samsars and the commercialisation of children’s labour**

The interventions by *samsars* are an expression of the commercialisation of children’s domestic labour, as their labour is being subjected to “trade”, independent from personal ties. In the absence of documentation and historical sources, it is difficult to tell whether, or how, the presence of *samsars* has increased or changed over time. Employers, parents, and former *petites bonnes* claimed that *samsars* (in relation to *petites bonnes*) has emerged during the last 10 years. The woman who has employed 120 *bonnes* during the past 36 years held the same view. The blurred distinction between informal middlemen, connected with parents and/or employers through personal ties, and the professional *samsars*, agents operating in an anonymous “market”, may be seen as an expression of a complex situation in which child domestic

labour is organised by different and coexisting practices. However, we know too little about the processes through which persons become *samsars* to conclude that the *samsar* institution has developed as a result of individual informal middlemen turning into professional *samsars*, as a linear development.

In public discourse, the term “commercialisation” is often attributed negative connotations. The fact that girls’ work is remunerated is one aspect of “commercialisation”. This, however, is not the issue here. Rather, accounts by both girls, parents, and employers show that *samsars* roles in the organisation and recruitment of girls’ work decreases the possibilities to control (or sanction) the conditions under which *petites bonnes* live and work, for both parents and for the working girls themselves.<sup>32</sup>

### **Petites bonnes as informal middlemen: In search of social network**

Occasionally, present *petites bonnes* may also put sisters, cousins, or girls from their home village, in touch with employers, and thus fill the roles of informal middlemen. Often, this is a result of the employer’s inquiries. When employers think that *bonnes* who work for them perform their tasks particularly well, or because they like them, they see this as an assurance of getting the same relationship with the *bonnes*’ relatives or friends. Adults in a *bonne*’s village may also tell presently working *bonnes* to ask their employer about possibilities for employment for their daughters. As a consequence, there are often family or village networks between *petites bonnes* who work for families related through kinship, neighbourhood, or friendship. In effect, this contributes to increased recruitment in certain areas, and makes the pattern of chain-migration of girls to urban areas further accentuated.

In either case, we often found that the *bonnes* themselves are particularly interested in getting a sister, cousin or friend to work in the same city as themselves, or

<sup>32</sup> The term “commercialisation” is often associated with trade of commodities in an impersonal and/or “anonymous” setting, and in turn distinguished from (and opposed to) a different sphere of family, personal ties, and the giving of gifts. This is problematic, as much commercial dealings do take place within close personal relationships, and as all family life involves economic dealings (see e.g. Appadurai 1986; Parry & Bloch 1989). The opposition seems to be based on a European family ideology, in which it is almost a taboo to introduce money into relationships that are defined by personal ties, care taking, family life, and love. Moreover, the distinction is problematic in the Moroccan context, as the peasant- and agricultural organisation in fact makes the household into the basic economic unit, and attributes several functions to family life, as mentioned earlier. My point in this context, thus, is not to build on this distinction, but to underline explanations and experiences by girls, parents and employers, who explicitly connected the operations of *samsars* to lack of control with the girls living- and working conditions, as the girls’ welfare is not the ordinary *samsar*’s first concern.

within the family or even for the same employers. The “logic” in these interests is related to the life situation of the *bonne* herself, and her restricted social network, and it reflects another survival strategy adopted by *bonnes*. A motive is to build up a social network, and simply moving friends closer.

Older girls working as *bonnes* also explained that they would get less household work if they were two *bonnes* in the same household. Thus, they tried to convince their employers about the need for extra help, and their younger relatives to come to the households that they were working in themselves. Moreover, girls working as *bonnes* have influence on younger girls who live in their home communities. This influence is exercised unconsciously when younger girls perceive of them as images of the success of city life, and consciously when *bonnes* try to improve their own situation by helping younger girls they care for to work close by themselves.

## **A Brief Comment on Experiences by Employers**

We have already touched on issues pertaining to employers of *petites bonnes*. In order to analyse the “system” of which *petites bonnes* make part, the choices made by employers should also be examined. Unfortunately, and as pointed out in the introduction, the scope and foci of this work do not allow a thorough analysis, and enable us to make but a few comments.

In interviews, a view expressed recurrently was that *bonnes*, or “good *bonnes*”, are “difficult to find”. As mentioned earlier, employers partly substantiate this opinion by telling about *bonnes* they experienced as stubborn, cheeky, or rude. They contrasted this with images of *bonnes* in the past, as more servile, quite, and hard-working. They represented the present day *bonnes* as working against employers’ authority, or that their respect for employers seems to be weakened. They respond to this “empowerment” among *bonnes* by becoming stricter.

To a large extent, however, employers explained this “development” by referring to the operation of *samsars*. This was not without sympathy for the *petites bonnes*. Employers thus explained that many *petites bonnes* end up in the “claws” of *samsars*, and are being manipulated to follow their instructions. Employers recounted stories of *bonnes* whom they had caught stealing in the house, and maintained that this was basically a result of the operations of *samsars*. More generally, employers complained about weakened relationships to the parents’ of *bonnes*, and between *bonnes* and their parents. They blamed this too on *samsars*. In turn, employers saw this as a reason to keep *bonnes* under extra control, as they were not really sure who was in their house: The *bonne*, or the *samsar*.

This scepticism (or occasionally fear) of *samsars* partly explains why employers curtail petites bonnes' social network. Employers explicitly say that they want to avoid that the girls get in touch with *samsars*, and thus will not leave them out of the house. They are also afraid that contact with *samsars* will lead to that they loose the bonne, as *samsars* push girls to get new employers again and again. Employers' curtailing of petites bonnes' social network is also related to the responsibility (toward parents) to protect the girls.

The understanding that "good bonnes are hard to find" make employers especially afraid of loosing a "hardworking and polite" bonne. Many employers tries to avoid that the girls spends time with her parents, in order to prevent them from communicating complaints that will lead parents to take their daughters with them. This is also the reason why many employers try to avoid that girls go to visit their parents in the countryside. The same evaluations underlie employers' scepticism to social contact between bonnes, as other bonnes may introduce them to new employers.

The development of petites bonnes's "opportunistic attitudes", in employers' view, and employers' scepticism toward *samsars*, are also factors behind preferences for finding "very young bonnes, straight out of the countryside". If a girl is not experienced in city life, she does not have connections with *samsars*. Neither has she developed a strong mind of her own, or opinions on how she should be treated in the household. By the same token, many employers explained that they either preferred very young, inexperienced bonnes, or adult bonnes, but never teenager bonnes with a long career of changing employers behind them (unless they had been "recommended" by family or friends).

The recruitment of petites bonnes is related to gender relations in the receiving households. Many middle class women explained that if they did not have a petite bonne in the house, they would not be able to work outside the household, because it is their sole responsibility, and not their husbands', to see to it that the house is properly kept. For them, refraining from employing a petite bonne would thus mean a turn back to a life as a housewife, and as they put it, a return to "old ways".<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, however, the local standard for "keeping a home proper" is high and labour demanding.

## **In Conclusion: Acts and Responses by Employers, Parents, and Girls**

Employers, parents, and petites bonnes act, react and respond to the decisions and conditions they are faced with, and thus adjust the ways in which they behave in relation to each other. The relationships between employers, parents, and petites bonnes are not only affected by developments in face to face encounters or specific relationships, but also by evaluations that are debated or shared among employers, parents and bonnes respectively, on a more general level.

Employers, petites bonnes, and parents are faced with different opportunities. An employer may limit the social networks of the petite bonne, and/or reduce the contact between the bonne and her parents. The employer may also respond to a bonne's complaints by further adding to workload, disciplining her harder, or in other ways punish behaviour perceived as inappropriate. S/he may put up barriers between the bonne and "people of the house", by denying the girl to watch TV with the family, eating by the family table, and sleeping in the same rooms as "children of the house". This is a way to stress that the girl is a bonne, and that she is not subjected to the same rules as those that apply to other children in the house. These various responses may be a result of fear of losing a bonne, or fear of *samsars* and involvement with *samsars*. They may also result from more general attitudes developed in discourses about what constitutes a "good bonne", or how the present day bonnes behave as compared to earlier.

Employers may also react differently, by allowing the bonne greater "freedoms", "integrating" her into the family, allowing regular parental contact, a network with other girls, and even allow the girl an education. Girls may be allowed an education within the regular school system, but usually, girls who pursue education follow evening classes within the informal educational system. In both cases, employers regard this as "good deeds" that should be appreciated by the bonne and her parents.

Employers often combine or shift between these different ways of relating to bonnes. They may start by allowing certain freedoms, and then restricting the girls' possibilities after a while. Often, employers seem to be nervous in relation to, or oversensitive to, bonnes' behaviour, and quickly interpret girls' acts as signals of misuse of freedom, or that they are not thankful for the "liberties" and "possibilities" they have been offered. By the same token, employers may express that they are "disappointed" by the bonne's responses to the efforts they mean that they have made, and sanction the girl, or even the next bonne staying with them. A perspective held by many employers is thus that they "learn from bad experiences", and become more "sensible" with time. In the latter case, they establish clear barriers between the petites bonnes and "people of the house".

Petites bonnes too relate to employers and parents in different ways, or change their attitudes and behaviour with time. Their possibilities to make choices, however, largely depend on their age. As six- or seven-year-olds, girls usually have no other possibilities than to “accept” the decisions made by parents and employers, and the living- and working conditions involved in these decisions. They are thus completely in the hands of the employer, unless they attend school or evening classes. In these cases, classes do not simply give them an education, but also offer a network outside their employers’ households, which in turn enhance their possibility to evaluate their own experiences. In some cases, teachers or other personnel also keep an eye on the girls’ welfare, and discretely address employers on issues related to the girls. If offered time alone with them, young girls are also in a position to communicate discomfort or tell about abuse to parents. The degrees to which parents react to a girl’s complaints, however, are highly varying.

Often, girls continue being subordinated in relation to employers, with few possibilities to improve their conditions. In time, however, girls become experienced. They discuss their conditions with other bonnes or people outside the employers’ household. In this sense, petites bonnes undergo a process of socialisation and learning in relation to their working life. Now, some have the possibility to relate to their parents more actively and raise complaints more loudly. Girls’ attempts to better conditions are often made in this way, by telling parents to take them home, to keep them home, or to find them a new employer. Moving between employers after parents’ interventions is thus a way to escape employers. Accepting offers by *samsars* is another expression of girls’ attempts to better their conditions. This, however, may work counterproductively.

Girls who have had earlier experiences as bonnes, or who have been influenced by other girls who have, may also relate to the fact that they “have to” work by posing conditions. For instance, they may deny appointments with employers who do not have a washing machine, deny to work as the only bonne in a big family who do not have other or older bonnes, try to get appointments near the households of working friends or relatives, etc. They may also negotiate for salary or “benefits” of different sorts (e.g. clothes).

Most parents see themselves as completely dependent on their daughter’s salary, and therefore only rarely decide to end the “working careers” of all daughters. Parents seem to follow a few main directions. When listening to daughters’ complaints, they may take her home, and find a new employer. They may also decide that another daughter should work in her place. As they are so desperate for an income, some parents seem to protect themselves against the daughter’s complaints, for instance by interpreting it as laziness, or not allowing themselves to listen to complaints at all. Others convince a daughter to “change her attitude”. Parents

occasionally legitimise decisions of daughters' working by referring to rural girls' "dream of the city".

In cases when daughters constantly change employers, parents become passive onlookers to their daughters' dispositions. In these cases, the daughters themselves "take over" when relating to their own working life. In turn, this further reduces the parents' possibilities for exercising control, or to intervene in their daughters' lives.



## 4 Conclusions and Consequences

**Tone Sommerfelt**

In preceding chapters, we have described the social and economic contexts of young girls' work as domestic servants, or "petites bonnes". In this chapter, we draw on these insights and describe directions that can be followed in response to the situation of child domestics in Morocco.

Two main approaches to child labour, and child domestic labour more specifically, can be identified: Firstly, an approach intending that the children's living and working conditions are altered, or ameliorated, and secondly, steps taken with the intent of preventing or reducing the extent of child labour (with the long term objective of eradicating child labour altogether). In this chapter, we discuss prevention and amelioration of petites bonnes' living and working conditions related to the different parties (or "stakeholders") involved in the relationships in which petites bonnes take part.

Before going into the description of steps in connection with child domestics in Morocco, a brief comment to the current debates of approaches to child labour issues is appropriate. An argument raised against the "ameliorative approach" is that it signals that child labour, and child domestic labour, is condoned, and that "improvements" in children's labour conditions work against the process of reducing the number of child workers.<sup>34</sup> The dilemma implied in this argument is by no means resolved. However, the current "trend" in child labour issues involves exactly such ameliorative steps. This trend has its parallel in "child centred approaches" to child labour, which insist on the participation of working children in research and advocacy which concern them.<sup>35</sup> In academic terms, one may say that this approach acknowledges that children have "agency" (Nieuwenhuys 1996), or that children relate actively to their environments. By the same token, NGOs are currently aiming at project activities which include the participation of young children.

<sup>34</sup> There are numerous examples of written material that implicitly or explicitly touch on this dilemma. To mention but a few (of different character), see e.g. Gunn and Ostos (1992); Myers & Boyden (1998); Nieuwenhuys (1996); UNICEF (1996).

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Myers & Boyden (1998); Nieuwenhuys (1996; 1997) and Save the Children (1999).

## **Altering Opportunities of Parents, Employers and Girls**

With this context as a backcloth, we return to our main concern in this section. The analysis of perceptions and practises in the previous chapter gives a point of departure for analysing the effects of changing the opportunities and possibilities of parents, petites bonnes, and employers. Changing the parties' opportunity situations can be seen as intermediary steps toward both preventing the recruitment of new girls to a life as bonnes, and toward ameliorating the living- and working conditions of petites bonnes.

In turn, preventive and ameliorative interventions can be directed toward both employers and parents of petites bonnes, and toward younger and older bonnes themselves. In our opinion, it is important to focus on the total social system or network which surrounds young working girls, as a change of possibilities of one party ultimately affects other parties. Thus, we must avoid a situation whereby the empowerment of petites bonnes leads to reactions from employers in a way that affects bonnes negatively, or the pacification (or distancing) of parents. This dilemma has to be kept in mind as we summarise the more specific points and recommendations related to the different actors.

### **Petites bonnes**

A main concern in work with petites bonnes should be to strengthen their social networks. One way to do this is to support the establishment of (formal and informal) educational centres. Here, girls get the possibility to develop relationships with other working children. This is particularly important for girls under the age of 10 years, who do not have the "experience" from working life that older girls have. Moreover, young bonnes under the age of 10 should be a main priority.

Also, young girls' presence in educational centres allows teachers' observation. In this sense, such centres have important functions in addition to education. The aim should be to make educational centres and schools into a more formal "safety valve" than it is today, by encouraging the development of multifunctional resource centres.

As an extension of this point, a training program for teachers in both formal and informal education should be worked out, with the intention of improving teachers' possibilities to assist and listen to the children's concerns and complaints.

Multifunctional resource centres for children may also offer an arena for providing child domestics with health facilities. As a health care program may be costly and resource demanding, an alternative may be to offer the children a health check which employers should be made responsible for following up.

Most importantly, young girls pointed out informal educational centres as an important resource in discussions with us. They also asked for possibilities for counselling, and a place where they could be informed about their rights and possibilities.

In extension, forums for petites bonnes' participation in discussions that concern their welfare should be established. In Chapter 3, we saw that girls take initiatives to improve their own living- and working conditions. Discussion forums and multifunctional resource centres can thus benefit from girls' own initiatives.

Activities which include the participation of present and former petites bonnes should acknowledge the fact that older bonnes influence the lives and "careers" among younger girls, and that young girls may be introduced into working life as a result of their relationships to more experienced bonnes. Thus, former petites bonnes can be involved in information work in schools, also in (rural and semi-urban) areas where girls "want to go to town". Involving present or former bonnes in multifunctional resource centres may thus serve both the purpose of ameliorating the situations of bonnes, and prevention of recruitment of girls who are not presently in the labour market (through information work and awareness-raising activities).

In extension to this point, community- or activities centres for children in rural areas offer opportunities to address the "dream of the city" held by many girls in the countryside. This should be done in close co-operation with parents in the area, and may also be developed in co-operation with already existing (formal or informal) local organisations (religious, commercial, etc.). Here too, present and former petites bonnes that are participating in activities in resource centres may be involved in such work aimed at preventing recruitment.

As noted in Chapter 3, there seems to be a pattern of chain migration in the recruitment of petites bonnes. Communities can thus be targeted through present and former petites bonnes. As will be noted below (under "Other measures"), local resource personnel should also approach the individual households that have lost their source of income (as a result of father's illness, unemployment, or death), as girls seem to be recruited as bonnes at such critical moments.

An important point should be stressed in this context. Though networks, forums, and resource centres should be established with girls' own participation, petites bonnes must not themselves be made responsible for insisting on (their) rights in face-to-face-encounters with their employers. This may create further antagonism in these relationships, and may lead employers to enforce further restrictions on the girls' lives. In specific employer-employee relationships, intermediary resource persons should thus act on the girls' behalf. Once again, this leads back to the recommendation to support the establishment of resource centres with trained personnel.

A problematic point is the issue of parents' receiving their daughters' salaries. If it was not for the salaries, the girls would most probably not have worked at all.

Furthermore, insisting that the girls should keep the salaries may in fact alienate the parents, split daughters from their parents, and even create antagonism in the relationship between parents and children. The parents are one of the most important sources of assistance and support (or “safety valves”) that *petites bonnes* have, and an insistence on girls’ keeping the money may in fact work counter to its intention. It may thus “give them a right”, but deprive them of one of their most important resources. It is worth reminding at this point that girls who themselves insist on keeping their salaries have already had their relationships with parents cut off – that is to say – the reason why they keep their salary is that they do not stay in touch with their parents.

## **Employers**

As already noted, we have the possibility to make but a few comments on the employer side of the network surrounding *petites bonnes*. Obviously, more research should be devoted to this “demand-side” of the networks.<sup>36</sup>

At this point, we simply stress that action in relation to employers should be made in a way that encourages their co-operation without creating (or increasing) defensive responses that may affect *petites bonnes* negatively.

Employers should be encouraged to enrol to school the girls who work for them, or to let them participate in informal training courses. In the various educational centres, teachers and resource personnel can approach employers regarding the working- and living conditions of the *petite bonne* who works for them. The way in which this best should be done, however, should be discussed in greater detail with the personnel who currently work with *petites bonnes*, and who have experience from contacts with employers.

In more general terms, employers should be encouraged to allow intensified contact between *petites bonnes* and parents, and also allow girls to go visiting parents, i.e. outside the employers’ household.

As a final point regarding the employer-side, Moroccan authorities should be encouraged to establish agencies for adult women who seek employment as maids. This would be a small step in the direction of establishing alternatives to informal networks of *petites bonnes*. This is not only a way to make it easier for employers to find adult employees, but also a way to create “politically correct” alternatives to child domestic labour in the Moroccan opinion.

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF Morocco intends to carry out research on *petites bonnes* in their employers’ households.

## Parents

Paying parents' costs for their children's education would be a direct response to parents' explanations and complaints. Unfortunately, it requires considerable economic funds.

With the present unemployment rates in Morocco, it is not surprising to hear parents' claim that "school leads to nothing". However, parents may be encouraged to keep daughters in school for other purposes than providing them with a formal education. One of young girls' most common explanations to why they "want to go to town" is the intense workload (and pressure from brothers) in their home households. Keeping girls in school in the daytime would thus protect them from the heavy workloads they state are the reason behind wanting to leave the countryside. Furthermore, parents must be informed about their children's rights to enrolment, regardless of the children's age and (lack of) identity papers.

Awareness raising initiatives among parents should be aimed at both prevention of girls' recruitment and amelioration of girls' living- and working conditions. For instance, parents must be encouraged to listen to their daughters' complaints. Though it is a problematic point, parents should rather be encouraged to find a daughter a new employer (and workplace) than to distance themselves from the girls, in cases when they are in desperate need of their daughters' incomes. Parents "protecting" themselves from daughters' complaints must be avoided at all costs.

By the same token, one should insist on the value in *petites bonnes*' parental contact. As travelling to their daughters' workplace may be expensive, parents should be encouraged to insist that employers allow, and even finance daughters' regular visits back home. At the same time, religious institutions in the rural areas should play a role in addressing fathers on the issue of restrictions of mothers' contact with working daughters. Fathers must allow their wives the time and "freedom" to go see their daughters in the employing households.

Moreover, parents should be encouraged to pose conditions to employers when their daughters start working, both in terms of frequency of visits, and regarding the responsibilities (medical, caretaking more generally) that employers take on when employing young girls. Parents do have possibilities to exercise control. This is particularly the case in a situation where employers actually complain about the "difficulties of finding *bonnes*".

With the tendency of chain migration, in which the frequency of sending (or occasionally allowing) girls to work seems to be higher in some areas than others, one way to target parents is to work through resource centres for present *petites bonnes*, as we described above. Parents in the rural and semi-urban areas are also accessible through already existing (formal or informal) organisations of religious, social (and medical), or commercial kinds (to mention but a few), and awareness-raising initiatives can be launched in co-operation with these. As noted above, parents

can also be involved in community activities in rural areas. An aim should be to provide parents with forums where they can discuss their daughters' conditions, and how they can best maintain control with the treatment of daughters who work as *petites bonnes*. Both mothers and fathers should be involved in discussions concerning their daughters' present situations and futures, as they are both decision makers in these questions.

### **Other measures**

In terms of measures not involving parents, employers, or *petites bonnes* directly, school authorities (or headmasters) should be given proper information about Moroccan law with respect to children's rights to enrolment, regardless of age or (lack of) identity papers. In turn, one must insist that school authorities actually follow Moroccan law on this point. This should also be a point in discussions with national authorities.

Resource persons (in mosques, schools, clubs, local informal "associations") should be informed about critical moments in household cycles, when girls are more prone to being introduced to the labour market. Such critical moments are father's death, illness, or unemployment, or when "core companies" in the area reduce activities. The same is the case when other persons responsible for the household income fall ill, lose their job, or die.

Teachers within the formal educational system should also be informed that girls' school failure is a triggering factor behind parents' sending girls to work as *bonnes*. Moreover, both teachers and parents should be encouraged to work toward keeping girls who do not succeed in exams in school.

Though *samsar(a)s* provide girls with a "service", their activities are not controlled or regulated, and former *petites bonnes*, parents and employers are sceptical to their operations. Generally, it seems to be difficult to get middlemen under government control. However, more research should be done on the various roles of *samsars*, and developments of middlemen's activities through time.

Labour statistics in Morocco should include investigations of the working activities of all children, especially those aging seven years upwards. Questions in such surveys would have to be tailored especially to children, as a simple extension of an ordinary labour force survey to children tends to lead to underestimations of children's working activities.

In the Appendix, we sum up the existing national legislation in a child labour perspective. In general terms, an exclusively juridical approach, e.g. by introducing a general ban on child labour, does not seem to be effective (Grimsrud, in press). However, an important point in this context is to encourage that the existing laws actually be applied. Also, Moroccan authorities must be supported in its efforts to

make Moroccan law consistent with international conventions that Morocco has signed (e.g. ILO convention no. 138, which stipulates that the minimum age for admission to employment is 14 years). An additional point is to encourage that Morocco sign ILO convention no. 182, on the worst forms of child labour.

In Morocco, the existing national laws seem to have been developed with the intention of regulating the work of children in industry and the crafts. As noted earlier, no formal contracts are made between parents and employers of *petites bonnes*, and in this sense, the relationships between *petites bonnes* and employers are not legally regulated. One way to narrow this legal gap would be to make the present laws applicable to children's work in households. Another approach would be to include *petites bonnes* in contract laws. However, it seems to be difficult to enforce contract laws in working relationships that are in operation in individual homes. Also, an inclusion of *petites bonnes* in contract law would have to imply that legal authorities condone that children work under the age of 12. This is particularly problematic when Moroccan law today makes it illegal to employ children under the age of 12, which already is lower than the age stipulated in ILO convention 138 (see Appendix). Thus, including *petites bonnes* in contract laws would have to imply that the authorities in practice lower the minimum working age. This would be a step in the opposite direction of encouraging Moroccan authorities to make national law consistent with international conventions that Morocco has signed. Thus, the two approaches of amelioration and prevention reappears as a dilemma between regulating and condoning on the one hand, and prohibiting on the other.

# Appendix: The Principal Laws and Rules

**Mehdi Lahlou**

In Morocco several laws regulate children's work. The principal ones are those of May 16, 1945; July 2, 1947; October 29, 1961 and April 24, 1973. None of these laws give strong protection, nor do they appear to be closely adhered to. Morocco ratified ILO convention 138 in 2000, but laws have yet to be changed to be consistent with the convention. Morocco has not ratified ILO convention 182, but there has been made political commitments to do so in the near future (Source: [www.longmarch.org](http://www.longmarch.org)).

Below, we give a brief summary of national laws that regulate children's work and child labour (for a longer summary, see Direction de Travail / Departement de l'Emploi & UNICEF 1997). As will be evident, these laws mainly pertain to types of employment other than domestic child work.

## **Minimum working age**

Children cannot be employed nor admitted in a commercial, industrial or other establishment before the age of 12 (article 9 from the *Dahir* of July 2, 1947). Article 13 of the same law stipulates that the age of 12 also is the minimum age for entry into agricultural work. If children have an acrobatic or strenuous job, they must be at least 16 years old (article 23, from the *Dahir* of July 2, 1947).

## **Salary**

Moroccan law specifies a minimum salary for working children through tying the minimum salary to that of adults. Thus workers below the age of 18 in commerce, industry, liberal professions (article 6, May 16, 1945 law) and agriculture (article 5, April 24, 1973 law) are entitled to minimum wages that are 50 to 20 percent lower than those of adults. The reduction is greater the younger the child is. The current adult minimum wage (SMIG - Salaire minimum interprofessionnel garanti) is 1650 DH or about 155 USD).

## **Paid vacation**

Young workers and apprentices are entitled to 15 days paid vacation, when they have been employed for six consecutive months. After the first six months, each month

of work entitles the worker to two days of vacation. (Article 3, from the *Dahir* of January 9, 1946, modified by the *Dahir* of October 29, 1961).

### **Length of the work day**

A child below the age of 16 cannot work more than 10 hours per day (*Dahir* of July 2 1947, Article 72). During the day there should be at least one break of at least one hour.

### **Rights to health checks**

According to article 11 in the decree of February 8, 1958, which applies to the *Dahir* regarding medical services in labour relations of July 1957, young working children should be subjected to a medical check-up every six months.

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# Domestic Child Labour in Morocco

Many of the maids who work in households in Moroccan cities and towns are young girls. This report is an analysis of the phenomenon of “small maids”, or “petites bonnes”, in Morocco, in a child labour perspective. Drawing on survey data, and anthropological and qualitative research techniques, the report describes the extent, social organisation, and economic contexts of child domestic labour in Morocco. By focusing on the views and opportunity situations of parents, employers, middlemen, and young girls themselves, the social relationships that shape the living- and working conditions of “small maids” are analysed. In a final chapter, possible interventions in these relationships are assessed.

The report is the outcome of a study funded by Save the Children-UK.



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**Fafo-report 370**

**ISBN 82-7422-352-7**

**ISSN 0801-6143**