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Abstract

Emotional politics instil insecurity and doubt in working-class individuals. Researchers examining social degradation through (bad) employment or other stigma have demonstrated the exclusionary impact of this process. Some suggest that individuals respond to such emotional politics and other types of exclusion by identity-management strategies aiming at a sense of worth, whereas others have found self-isolation to dominate. Here we analyse the emotional politics emerging from women's responses to exclusion in the socially degraded field of cleaning in three ethno-national contexts in Israel. The sample was composed of Mizrahi women in the southern periphery, immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and Israeli-Palestinian women from Arab settlements in the north. By analysing cleaning employees' talk, we characterize these women's struggle to derive a sense of worth from their breadwinning experience within a specific ethno-national context in terms of family, community and workplace. We discuss the similarities and differences among these three groups with regard to the relative weight of each of these circles for negotiation of belonging and inclusion.

Keywords

emotional politics, ethnicity, job/employee attitudes, labour process, subcontracted cleaning, work and family

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Introduction

This article analyses the degradation experienced by cleaning workers from three different collectives, and the ways they confront it by attempting to position themselves as worthy members of their family, community and workplace. When employees cannot elicit a sense of worth from their job because it is not socially recognized as an achievement, they seek various ways to experience it as worthy and tend to view themselves as having the power to choose and benefit from its specific conditions (Padavic, 2005). Padavic argues that shame and humiliation are countered with the pride derived from feeling part of an organization. Her study of temporary employment raises a key issue that goes beyond temporary employment and extends to those whose job is degraded in other ways, such as in cleaning jobs. How do cleaning employees combat feelings of shame and humiliation in their jobs? How do they establish feelings of self-worth and pride? Cleaning employees are often part of stigmatized and discredited collectives; in what social circles can their pride be validated? Given that ethnic/racial based Othering is central to cleaning employees' experiences (Schwalbe et al., 2000) answering these questions involves examining how specific ethnic contexts can provide a framework to maintain one's pride and respect.

Skeggs's analysis (1997) of working-class women's longing for respectability prompted her to suggest that women's experience of their own and others' perceptions of themselves and their work is shaped in three different but at times interrelated, circles: the family, the community and the workplace. Her perspective seems particularly conducive to characterizing the complex experiences of women employed in domestic and commercial cleaning.

The family circle relates to how family members can be supportive of women but may also look down upon their work, be ashamed of it, condemn women for engaging in such activity or discredit their contribution to the family's income. The community circle consists of the public opinion and the intruding gaze of the community, which at times interacts and at times negates the family circle. The third circle is that of the workplace itself, which is composed of employees' relationships with co-workers and with supervisors and employers. These relationships may also be validating or degrading and often some combination of the two. We conceptualize the process through which women combat humiliation and shame generated in their interaction within these three circles. Because family and community responses to women's work can intimidate women's ability to hold on to their jobs (Reid, 2002), we see these processes as exclusionary. However, the experience of shame and humiliation in one or more of the three circles may well lead to refutation on the part of the women workers.

In this article we examine women's experiences of cleaning work in the family, community and workplace and show that these experiences can vary according to their ethnic or national ties and the specific historical and social circumstances of their respective collectives. Our objective is to contribute to a better understanding of the relative weight of each of these circles as experienced in specific ethno-national locations, as regards negotiation of belonging and inclusion. Studying cleaning workers' experiences allows us to theorize the ways in which different ethno-national contexts in Israel shape the experiences of Israeli-Palestinians, immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU)

and second and third generation Mizrahi women. We assessed negotiations in the family, community and workplace for each of the ethno-national categories in terms of their derogatory responses to cleaning work and the ways in which the women countered and challenged such responses.

Social degradation versus women's own definitions

Romero's (1992) analysis of the 'dirty work' debate clearly presented the problematic nature of stereotypical assumptions about cleaning work. While highlighting the continuous, socially constructed degradation of cleaning work as women's work, particularly as women-of-colour's work, Romero called on researchers to attend to cleaning employees' experiences as proud providers in their families. Our own point of departure is that historically, cleaning work has often been primarily exclusionary in relation to employment-related entitlements (O'Connor et al., 1999) and has become more so with the increase in commercial subcontracted cleaning (Mayer-Ahuja, 2004). Class and race/ethnic intersections that shape low levels of education, migration, geographic locations, family circumstances and restricted occupational opportunities make women unable to escape cleaning (Browne and Misra, 2003). They may, however, move between different forms of cleaning work although they do not escape substandard payment and bad labour conditions, particularly if they depend on the subcontracting employment system (Aguilar, 2006; Rees and Fielder, 1992).

Romero (1988) noted that 'Many women found the stigma attached to domestic work painful. A few manifested embarrassment and anger at being identified as a housecleaner. Other women were very defensive about their work . . .' (p. 87). The sense of degradation associated with cleaning is historically loaded with social hierarchies as being served by members of the subordinate group was in many places a prerequisite of membership in the dominant group (Glenn, 1992). Doing the 'dirty job' is thus historically assigned to specific race/ethnic categories in ways that vary by region. In both domestic and public settings racialized women shoulder heavy, dirty, 'back room' chores that respectable members of society can avoid. Further, cleaning is constructed as unworthy and low in status (Anderson, 2000) arousing a sense of degradation particularly for those women who expect more significant occupational achievements. Here the sense of humiliation may be owing to letting oneself down. These various sources of degradation may reinforce one another but may also appear separately or in different combinations, all depending on the historical and social circumstances of women from different ethnic, national or other forms of collectives.

Previous research has highlighted cleaning employees' refusal to accept the social degradation of their work. Romero (1992), for example, quoted her interviewees' insistence that they were not maids, so that they could benefit from the semi-skilled image of 'housekeeping' work. Women cleaning workers may well attempt to resist such degradation by countering the demeaning evaluation constructed by those close to them, and putting forward a different definition of their actions and position, thus enabling their self-definition to enhance their sense of worth (Collins, 1990). Women's considerations regarding their work, the choices they make and their explanations for such choices can reveal their own definitions of their activities and the positive value of their work.

As we shall discuss in detail in this article, women's experience of cleaning work in the three circles of family, community and workplace may vary according to their ethnic or national affiliations and to the specific historical and social circumstances of their respective collectives. Our research focused on women cleaning workers in Israel from three different ethnic and national collectives: Arab Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel, immigrants from the FSU and second and third generation Mizrahi women living in the southern periphery. The respective salience of the different circles and the sources for humiliation and degradation differ significantly among the groups studied. Briefly, Arab women refer to their degradation as constructed by others, mainly at the family and community level. They portray the workplace itself and their relations with their employers primarily as reinforcing their sense of value and emphasize their achievements as the sustainers of their families. Women from the FSU attribute little significance to family and community circles in shaping their experience of cleaning work, but consider the workplace itself as the crucial circle. Their experience of humiliation and degradation is mainly the outcome of the 'dirty work' they are engaged in and their exploitative and derogatory relations with their employers. The Mizrahi women appear to share, in an attenuated form, some of the experiences of the Arab women on the one hand and of the women of the FSU on the other. Mizrahi women refer to the community circle and to that of the workplace, with no mention of the family circle. They are aware of the derogatory external gaze of others in their small town communities, though it is a far less intrusive gaze than that experienced by the Arab women. They also discuss exploitation in the workplace, though assessing it far less harshly than the women of the FSU. Their sense of humiliation, expressed less emphatically by them than by the women of the other two groups, appears to be based on the construction of others and on their unfulfilled expectations. These differences will be discussed in detail, by relating these women's accounts to their collective social circumstances.

Emotional politics

As a distinct labour market, domestic cleaning can be a means of economic survival but it also acts as a huge mechanism of exclusion and ghettoization for working-class, racialized minority women (Bonacich et al., 2008; Rollins, 1985). Lan (2003) recently showed how employers seek to enhance their control over employees through gestures of belonging to the family, and how cleaning employees must work around these gestures. Warr (2005) inquired whether women would actually be able to use such ties as social capital, citing the dichotomy between close ties and bridging ties. Whereas close ties are known to provide support and assistance (Warr, 2006), bridging ties may reinforce opportunities. She found that for women who operate within discredited communities, self-isolation is more common than the skilled ability to translate ties into supportive social capital. Warr's work problematizes social ties in women's lives by raising questions regarding women's ability to rely on their social ties for their sense of worth.

Skeggs (1997) suggested that working-class women's experience of exclusion is typically characterized by a 'structure of feelings', which includes insecurity and self-doubt. She pinpointed working-class women's interpretations of social ties as damaging to their self-worth because they exert a critical gaze that magnifies their deficits. Hondagneu-Sotelo reinforced this analysis by explaining that often leaving the community of origin

means immigrant women encounter 'stigma, guilt and others' criticism' (2007: 25), which maintain previous communal discrediting voice in their present world. Social degradation in the form of stigma and criticism, Skeggs explains, exposes women to the 'emotional politics of class fuelled by insecurity, doubt, indignation and resentment' (1997: 162). The outcome of such feelings for her working-class interviewees, writes Skeggs, was the inability to feel comfortable with themselves, since they remained convinced that others were critical of them. Studying temporary employment, Padavic (2005) argued that employees are not necessarily susceptible to the emotional politics as described by Skeggs but instead protect themselves by identity-management strategies, particularly constructions of belonging. It can be inferred from Padavic's work that women struggle to maintain self-worth in bad jobs by seeking ways to benefit from respectable belonging by adopting a 'we' language despite one's exclusion from the specific organizational 'we'. Alternatively, belonging can be extracted by imitating African American women for whom the home environment provides a space, a family-related 'we', where they are protected from racism and can feel comfortable, proud and respectable (Collins, 1990). Because communities, families and workplaces differ in their practices of social control we argue that specific ethnic locations of cleaning employees may provide them with specific circles where they feel they belong and can experience themselves as members of a 'we' category or 'we images' (Mennell, 1994).

In what follows we undertake to study women's struggles for respectable belonging as they experience it at work, in the community and in the context of extended or nuclear families. If longing for respectability is central to working-class women's identity (Skeggs, 1997), their responses to their marginalization and degradation may be conducive to an understanding of inclusionary processes. Skeggs's notion of 'emotional politics' is central to our analysis because it captures the power struggle between the social degradation of cleaning work and women's attempts to challenge this degradation by insisting on pride, respectability and belonging. Women's responses to the shame of devalued and deskilled work (Rogers, 2000), the pride derived from providing for their children in the struggle to shield them from the shame of poverty (Kochuyt, 2004) turn emotional politics (Skeggs, 1997) into a useful framework for examining concurrent shame and respectability in women's subjective experience of their work. Thus, we write from a standpoint that examines cleaning jobs as a form of de-legitimization associated with non-respectability, but concurrently, as a source of the respectability that breadwinning and its related benefits entail.

The segmented labour market in Israel

Cleaning jobs in Israel fall into four categories: 1) commercial cleaning with direct employment by a public agency, a form of employment that was once protected by the Histadrut (General Federation of Labour in Israel) but is gradually undergoing restructuring owing to institutional pressures for outsourcing (Bernstein, 1986); 2) commercial cleaning as an employee of a cleaning subcontractor exposed to tendering and harsh competition, which implies strict supervision and poorer conditions on the job (Rees and Fielder, 1992); 3) domestic cleaning through direct employment by a house owner, a job historically affected by gender and ethnic relations that sometimes leads to Othering and low

pay (Browne and Misra, 2003); and, finally, 4) the more recent option of domestic cleaning as an employee of a cleaning agency, which implies an implicit loss of control over the labour process (Bickham-Mendez, 1998).

In Israel, the social categories or groups most exposed to violations of the minimum wage law are labour migrants, Israeli-Palestinian women, Israeli-Palestinian men and Jewish women, in that order (Tajar, 2006). On the basis of interviews with 40 cleaners employed by different cleaning subcontractors who had won state tenders, Beynish (2006) showed how subcontractors systematically contravene employees' rights. In fact, the rights of every employee interviewed had been violated in some way, resulting in losses of hundreds and even thousands of Israeli shekels to each worker each year. The author writes that at least some of the contracts between the state and the subcontractors included prices that were 'definite loss prices' or 'nearly loss prices'; that is, prices insufficient to cover the employees' basic working hours if they were paid according to their legal rights (even without considering the subcontractors' profit). Common violations included failure to pay the full amount for actual working hours, no paycheque distribution, no registration of workers' working hours, illegal fines, no announcement of employees' terms of work and no payment for days off or for extra hours (Ophir, 2007).

Opportunity structures in the centre of Israel are potentially greater than in the periphery. A report based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics between 2002 and 2004 indicated 10 percent unemployment for men and 11.5 percent for women in the country as a whole. Orenshtein and Feferman (2008) give the average rate of unemployment in the centre of the country as 8.8 percent and 11.7 percent in the periphery. By 2006 the centre-periphery gap in unemployment in the periphery had risen to 40 percent. At this time, 14 unemployed individuals competed for every job in the northern periphery, six in the southern periphery and only four in the centre of the country.

Research method

This study was carried out with three distinct populations in the south, centre and north of Israel. In the south we contacted Mizrahi Jewish women (specifically, women born to families who immigrated to Israel during the 1950s and 1960s from Morocco and India). In the centre, we approached Jewish immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. The participants in the north were women from two Israeli Arab towns. We interviewed our participants using diverse semi-structured approaches as the process of developing the latter took a somewhat different shape within each of the three contexts.

Mizrahi women in the periphery

Whereas exclusionary forces exerted on Israeli-Palestinians and immigrants are more explicit and publicly discussed, the exclusionary forces exerted on Mizrahi communities are more implicit and indirect and have primarily been silenced (Motzafi-Haller, 2001). In order to elicit thick descriptions in the context of such continuous silencing, a somewhat different method was used. The interviews of the Mizrahi women in the south were conducted within a broader project of ethnographic participant observation over a span of some seven years (between 2000 and 2002 and again between 2003 and 2007). Over the course of this extended period, the ethnographer contacted 55 women who spoke about

their lives and work, sharing their knowledge of daily violations of their workers' rights. Ten of these 55 women were first generation Mizrahi women who had primary level formal education; the others were Israeli-born who had a high school education ranging from 10 to 12 years of schooling.

The data recorded for each woman varied widely, from notes written after informal conversations and observations of the women in their workplaces and their homes to more formal recorded interviews lasting two to three hours. The interviewees were contacted while employed in subcontracted commercial cleaning but had had experience in domestic cleaning as well. Interviews were carried out in Hebrew.

FSU immigrants

Twenty immigrant cleaners from the FSU were interviewed. Six of these emigrated from European areas of the FSU (Russia, Ukraine) and had higher levels education. Fourteen were from Asian areas (Georgia, Uzbekistan) and had a high secondary level of education. Before they became cleaning employees in Israel, they often had a substantial work history with diverse occupational directions and workplace conditions. The interviews were conducted by two Russian-speaking men. Even though the power hierarchy was tripled (interviewer/interviewees; men/women; local/immigrant), we chose these interviewers because both were sons of immigrant cleaning women and were politically sensitive to the oppressive nature of commercial cleaning. However, the resulting interviews did not validate our decision, as the interviews remained clearly 'question and answer' rather than a conversation. Still, we found the data provided substantial details on the local emotional politics.

Seven of the interviews were conducted in a hospital where the interviewees held tenured unionized jobs. The interviewees were approached for brief random conversations in the corridors after obtaining the supervisor's permission. Seven of the interviews were conducted with women employed by cleaning subcontractors. One of the employers required payment for the interviewees' time. These interviews were generally short, between 30 to 45 minutes each, characterized mainly by worries about time and monitoring by the supervisor. Another six interviews, conducted in the women's own apartments, were generally longer, about one hour, and were more relaxed. Of the six women interviewed at home, four were directly employed in domestic cleaning and two were employed by subcontractors. The interviews were taped, fully transcribed and translated into Hebrew. The interviewees were not asked about their religion, as the issue is sensitive, but all of them benefited from the absorption policy aiding Jewish immigrants.

Israeli-Palestinian cleaners

Israeli-Palestinian cleaning workers living in two Arab towns were interviewed. The first town, Faradis, a Muslim town of about 10,000 people, is located on the coastal strip between Tel Aviv and Haifa, adjacent to Zikhron Yaakov, a small Jewish middle- and upper-middle-class town incorporating a number of well-off Jewish agricultural settlements. The population in Faradis is becoming increasingly religious. The second town was Shfar'am, adjacent to a number of Jewish middle class villages. Shfar'am is much larger than Faradis and its population is more diverse, consisting of Muslim, Christian

and Druze religious communities. Interviews were conducted in Arabic by women students who were residents of the town. Payment of approximately a day's work was offered to each interviewee. The interviews lasted between one and three hours and were recorded and translated into Hebrew by the interviewers. All the women interviewed were Muslim and all had low levels of education. Of the 24 interviewees, 19 were employed directly by house owners in domestic cleaning and five were employed through cleaning subcontractors in both domestic and commercial cleaning.

Findings

Cleaning employees are exposed to a threefold exclusion from the workforce. As pointed out by Mayer-Ahuja, '[f]irst, exclusion by the undermining of material standards, second, exclusion by the undermining of legal standards, and third, exclusion from the community of colleagues and from institutional forms of articulating interests in work councils and trade unions' (2004: 118).

Confined opportunity structures operate to exclude breadwinning women from quality jobs. The opportunity structure for the Mizrahi women cleaners in the southern periphery is defined by three key factors: geographical remoteness, a limited educational system and the collapse of a marginalized economy based on unskilled labour in local low-tech factories. Formal education in development towns like Yeruham or Dimona only provided limited vocational training that did not lead to the development of marketable skills. Geographical remoteness from employment opportunities in urban centres and the irregular public transportation system hinders efforts to travel to jobs outside the economically depressed peripheral communities. In a depressed local market, even a cleaning job at a local factory requires networking and special recommendations from relatives. For others, the lack of transportation confines opportunities: one woman was offered a temporary job at a kibbutz factory 30 kilometres from her home in Yeruham. In the absence of regular public transportation in and out of Yeruham and without any means of personal transportation, she could not take this type of job even if she wanted to. The only feasible employment option for her was to work for a private cleaning contractor who provides organized transportation to employment sites at a distance of almost an hour by car from their homes. These labour organizers act as middlemen and most of the cleaners interviewed for this study in southern Israel were dependent on them.

The limitations facing the immigrant employees who can travel more easily to distant workplaces to find better employers are of a very different nature. The women are very conscious of their limited language skills and the lack of fit between their formal education in their country of origin and the skills needed for the local Israeli market. One said:

There are various reasons why I must work as a cleaner, but you have to understand that here, in my town, even people who can speak Hebrew and were born here find it difficult to find a job.

Well informed about the local labour market situation, this immigrant indicates that the confined opportunity structure is a problem for many rather than a unique immigrant issue. Despite the fact that women immigrants are rapidly developing language

skills (Remennick, 2005), the older women still tend to remain longer in cleaning owing to their difficulty in acquiring basic language skills (Stier and Levanon, 2003). Both immigrants with high levels of formal education (mostly from the European regions of the FSU) and those from the Asian regions of FSU, who tend to have more limited formal education, are similarly marginalized in the Israeli labour market. For example, a woman who emigrated from Russia with an academic degree as an economist and 20 years of work experience in the FSU said: 'After just five days in this country I had already started cleaning houses. As I didn't have any [knowledge of] Hebrew, it was clear that I had no chance of finding employment in my profession'. Since a cleaning position requires no language skills, for many it is the only available opportunity to earn a living.

The opportunity structure for Israeli-Palestinian women living in the two Arab settlements in the Israeli north is particularly restricted. Employment for women in Arab towns in Israel is limited to a few local positions as school teachers or nurses; these positions are reserved for the small number of educated local women. There are almost no local employment opportunities for under-educated and unskilled women.¹ These women are forced to seek employment outside their communities. One explained:

I had all my kids sit down and I told them I'm going to start working in domestic cleaning through this subcontractor. I explained to them exactly what I was going to do. And they couldn't accept it. They only agreed when I told them that we have nothing and they must face it, they agreed, and even then it was hard for them. But that was that. I told them that cleaning it must be as there were no other jobs for me.

The work situation

There are key differences between domestic and commercial cleaning in levels of pay, social benefits, level of social control and social interaction in the workplace. Similar to the secondary part-time workers in Webber and Williams's (2008) study, our interviewees were often aware of the low pay and the fact that there were few or no benefits in commercial cleaning jobs, especially when working for a contracting company. As shown for breadwinning mothers, these typical conditions meant a constant search for work and informed decision-making within a segmented labour market.

Wages

In terms of hourly wage, there are significant differences between directly employed domestic cleaning employees and women in the other categories. Domestic cleaning is often based on long-term relationships. The hourly rate our interviewees reported (35 to 40 shekels) is 50 to 100 percent higher than the minimum wage (19.50 shekels/hour in 2008). Cleaning employees who are directly employed by a hospital earn 22 shekels/hour, a rate just above the minimum wage, but have the security of a full-time job and job-related advantages. One woman from the FSU told us how she escaped from a job with a subcontractor:

In the morning I took an accounting course and for four hours in the evening I cleaned their offices, for two years . . . you had to clean 22 rooms in three hours. Then the management changed and I had to leave. The new subcontractor made us do more rooms in the same amount of time and then switched us to another place – I couldn't stand the exploitation so I quit.

This interviewee clearly depicts how employers' attempts to reduce wage-related expenses have changed cleaning work (Aguiar, 2006; Smith, 2001). She has a good grasp of the dynamics of commercial cleaning and (possibly informed by anti-capitalist Soviet education) was able to term this dynamic exploitation.

Labour benefits

According to Israeli law, employers of domestic cleaning workers are required to pay social security for their employees. Social security is paid by many employers but certainly not by all. In our study, social security was usually paid by Jewish upper middle-class women for the Israeli-Palestinian women they employed as domestic cleaners. Jewish employers in the southern periphery tended to pay social security when explicitly requested to do so by employees. Employees seemed less concerned with social security and gave more weight to travel payments:

I worked for a man who was originally from Lithuania. He had a studio on the top floor of a building in Tel Aviv. He was a painter. I used to climb up to his flat once a week. I had good relationship with him. He trusted me and how I cleaned. I did everything he wanted. I worked for him for a long time, the longest of all the flats I cleaned. I stopped when I moved – he was sorry I was leaving him but he couldn't afford paying for my bus rides.

The experience of trust appears to be the basis of stability in relationships with employers but, as the considerations above show, financial issues may be of greater importance.

Structure of day and week

Commercial cleaning imposes a strict structure on the day and week. The routine is based on a definition of the working day and work intensity by subcontractors and their appointed supervisors. As found by Gorman and Kmec (2007) for skilled employees, the cleaning employees here reported that their efforts were repeatedly ignored, criticized and rejected by supervisors who monitor them, always presuming that they are lazy. An immigrant employee said: 'If they don't see us for five minutes they begin searching for us. Where are we? As if we're not working!' Strict control structures the pace of work and renders the work environment constantly more degrading.

While the work load of Mizrahi women in the periphery seems less intensive – employees reported breaks, chats and slow times – they too struggle with constant monitoring by their direct supervisors. Roaming supervisors may prompt women to consider seriously their options through a detailed comparison of domestic and commercial cleaning. The following ethnographic vignette illustrates this point. One morning 'Shula' was in a bad mood after being 'caught' hiding in a seminar room by the supervisor instead of

doing her assigned office cleaning duties. She was humiliated and felt that she had had enough of the petty hide-and-seek game they were all playing with their direct supervisor:

Let's quit [she told Yochi]. We can find four, five homes to clean and fill our work schedule. We can make twice as much money as we earn here. I am sick and tired of this job. You work alone in a private home and finish your work and go home.

Yochi was a few years older:

Take it easy. I have worked as domestic cleaner. I know what I am talking about. Yes, you get paid more per hour, but who guarantees your employment? Here you see a paycheque at the end of each month. The benefits are paid. The transportation is organized. And domestic cleaning is much harder. It's moving furniture, cleaning windows, carrying heavy rugs . . . here, in the offices, you wash the floors, you dust. Be honest. We finish cleaning our offices and we rest. That's it for the day. No private employer would accept that.

The calculations in this conversation show that domestic cleaning is more attractive in terms of income but much more demanding physically. In contrast, the subcontractor provides more security in the form of a paycheque. The experienced employee advises the less experienced one not to be misled by the higher salary. It seems better to forgo the higher payment rather than shoulder the solitary hard work and the close scrutiny of domestic cleaning. Older immigrants from the FSU reported similar considerations:

And even if I am paid less by the subcontractor I cannot work anymore in a private home, as at my age I cannot respond to the endless demands made by women you work for. That's a job for younger women.

The immigrants had apparently already accumulated the relevant information familiar to Mizrahi women in the periphery, particularly those more experienced: the extensive demands made by home makers are difficult and are better avoided. The hard work excludes women from better-paid jobs, probably by their preference to avoid employers' disapproval. All our interviewees described themselves as seeking employers whose approval was attainable.

Communities' controlling gaze

Our data suggest that cleaning jobs impose two types of emotional experiences on employees: shame, which is linked to the visibility of cleaning, and humiliation, which is linked more closely to the work process and its embedded forms of control. The emphasis on shame reflects the extent to which our interviewees cared about their position in their communities and were anxious to protect their children from potential exclusion. They struggled to reinforce their respectability and a sense of belonging. For example, shame was described by Mizrahi women as resulting from moments in which the visibility of cleaning jobs negatively affected their social positioning processes. Shame was sometimes also connected to their concerns about their children's social

positioning. Filling in official forms with questions on the mother's occupation was cited as one such shaming moment – in that listing 'cleaning' is not respectable.

In interviews with Israeli-Palestinians, shame was engendered by the external gaze of the community in general, from the nuclear family or the husband's extended family, neighbours and, finally, communal institutions (such as schoolteachers). This external gaze is a powerful force that the women see as a mechanism of control that degrades and criticizes a working woman's ability to maintain her 'honour' and 'good name'. Overcoming the rumours about their sexual behaviour depends on women's struggles to achieve an independent definition of 'responsible womanhood' (Gallagher, 2007: 235). Their definition of themselves as responsible breadwinners can endow them with enough power to insist on making a respectable living both privately and through subcontracted cleaning.

For 14 years I never worked in Shfar'am, my home town. I'll tell you the truth, [when you do that] everybody looks at you differently, talking. If you work for a woman in Shfar'am she'd look at you arrogantly as if she's superior somehow and I wasn't willing to allow such treatment. Truth is that I'm ashamed to work in Shfar'am.

By reducing the visibility of cleaning and the likelihood of being degraded by an acquaintance, anonymity outside the community makes it possible to augment one's income and acquire respectability. The type of emotional politics Skeggs (1997) found characteristic of working-class women is validated here: these women strive for respectability. Their preference to work for a subcontractor outside the town reveals these women's belief that the only way to earn the respect of their local community is to hide their cleaning work as much as possible. They give the village community the power to instil humiliation in them as a form of emotional micro-politics (Clark, 1990), but nevertheless, struggle to confine opportunities to encounter it:

It's not easy working in Shfar'am. I felt inferior somehow and many people stigmatize me although they knew me and knew the circumstances why I had to do this work.

Shame is the politically produced response to social degradation – 'I felt inferior' – but it elicits the motivation to challenge it by insisting that under certain circumstances the woman deserves more respect and not shame for having a cleaning job. The community's reluctance to share her understanding of her needs and its subsequent stigmatization takes its toll. Nevertheless, the speaker refrains from accepting the community's gaze: she believes they should have accepted her and approved of her efforts to provide for her children.

The struggle to maintain respectable belonging through confined visibility is shared by some of the Mizrahi women. One of them told us that she was fired from her job in a resort hotel located about an hour from her home town because she stopped cleaning the dining hall when she realized some of the guests in the hotel were people from her town who knew her. Another woman described her refusal to take a cleaning job in the local health clinic in her neighbourhood, saying: 'What, am I to stand there with a wipe and a cloth for everybody to see me? How disgraceful!' Instead she took a cleaning job at a college, which required about two hours of commuting every day.

Avoiding work in a place because of concerns about being seen by others in the community often involves travelling in a commuting van that provides an alternative circle of acceptance and belonging in which the women can feel comfortable. Participants described how they dressed up and the conversations about clothes during the commute as the social peak of their day that filled them with a sense of value and pride. Warr (2005) identified elegant dressing as a disguise strategy to hide the look of poverty, an effort documented by Skeggs (1997) as well. However, in the accounts of the Mizrahi interviewees dressing up seemed to be part of positive positioning in a group rather than a disguise fed by fear. Shame, however, is often there:

I'm really ashamed of saying I'm a cleaning lady. I know that anyone who realizes I'm a cleaner looks differently at me . . . when I recall my fights with my brothers and sisters I feel so small and I have no self-respect. When the kids are shouting at me, it's the worst. That's when I think perhaps I should stop. But I can't. I need this income.

Because of powerful pressure from family members not to take cleaning jobs, Israeli-Palestinian women who take a cleaning job need to convince family members to accept their way of providing for their families. It is often very difficult to convince the family, both nuclear and extended, as most family members appear to be more concerned about the family's respect and reputation than about the livelihood of the woman and her children's well-being. But the struggle also provides an opportunity to speak out, which involves confronting and insisting on one's right not to obey the family in situations where children's needs depend on a source of income.

In the beginning everybody was against [my taking a cleaning job]. My parents, his parents. They felt it was shameful but I didn't care about anyone's [attitude], I just wanted to provide for my kids. Can you imagine what it means? Four, and later, five kids each with their own needs . . . my husband was in prison and I had no other choice even if for me it was really difficult to go out to work after having been a housewife for a long time. There were not many other job possibilities other than agricultural labour and cleaning – and I preferred cleaning as it meant making more money.

Some Israeli-Palestinian women thus handled the negative feelings associated with a lack of money and food by taking the forceful stance of ' . . . I didn't care about anyone'. Not caring reflects the awareness that the local community excludes them and that they cannot expect acceptance on that level. The continuous shaming of the communal gaze was also a source of hurt and bitterness. Many of the interviewees spoke about their feelings of being unjustly shamed:

Tell me, we work so hard, I don't even take clothes with me to change after work, so why is there a rumour that someone working in [the Jewish town] is going out with men? . . . I'm proud to have my strong personality, that's what keeps me going, I keep my opinions to myself.

The shaming community gaze is powerful; thus only a 'strong personality' can withstand the communal control and work outside the community. Out of necessity, worth, acceptance

and pride must be sought elsewhere – within the immediate family. Nevertheless, this is often highly problematic as in many cases the source of much of the pain experienced by Arab women cleaning workers derives from the husband's neglect and rejection. Many of them reported that it was the husband's lack of interest in his family that led them to work in the first place. Thus, both their responsibility and pride are related to their children. It is for their sake that they take on both the hard labour and the communal shaming. The women were proud of their ability to fend off poverty, which thus enabled their children to share the benefits enjoyed by their classmates, and in some cases support their children's goals of higher education. Above all they wanted to protect their daughters from their own plight:

Because I have worked so hard all my life, I don't want my daughter to have the same difficulties. I don't want my daughter to work in this [kind of] work, I don't want her to be humiliated as I have been.

Rumours within the community that cast doubt on a woman's dignity generate both bitterness and rage. Protecting the next generation from similar loss of respect becomes women's major struggle and is their potential source of pride.

For the immigrants from the former FSU, feelings of shame and humiliation take on a different form that has more to do with relationships at work. The next section presents the social processes involved in their workplace negotiations.

Humiliation at work

The cleaners from the FSU did not report shame, perhaps because cleaning could be regarded as a facet of the immigration process rather than as their occupational identity. Rather, they primarily experienced humiliation when cleaning and interacting with others at the workplace. This feeling was related to lack of trust and a sense of dehumanization by Israeli employers. One of the interviewees articulated this explicitly: 'It's hard work and the treatment is humiliating'. The most painful part of this experience was the lack of respect for their needs as human beings; for example, the need to make a phone call or to listen to the radio while at work. One form of extreme humiliation involved domestic work when employees are not allowed to use gloves and are expected to clean toilet bowls with their bare hands. One woman lamented:

Hard. Very hard. People here are harsh. Extremely harsh. It doesn't matter how good the work you do is, people here are harsh. In Russia, it wasn't like that. Even though they were Uzbek and not Jews they helped all the time. If we needed anything they helped as if they were family. Here everyone wants to criticize you. If I talk on the phone at work, it's wrong. If you tell them the truth, they tell you it's wrong, it's not the truth. And you can't tell them anything.

This interviewee was constantly accused of lying, which was a way of making her exclusion clear to her. There was so little trust that the 'truth' in her definition of the situation was repeatedly undermined as false. Immigrant cleaners employed in private homes described similar experiences.

When comparing the encounter with local cleaning work with past respectable employment based experiences, immigrant interviewees were particularly critical of those who ignored or did not trust them. To convey their disappointment in the way their employers and managers treated them, the interviewees contrasted Israeli employers with their previous belonging circles in the country of origin, where people were 'like family', even if not Jews. In Israel they find themselves humiliated although they are Jews. Their hopes to belong appear to be related in the speakers' subjective world to expectations of better treatment. Belonging to the national collective but being treated as 'Others' is presented as a paradox that is difficult to explain:

When they call you 'cleaner' you feel . . . it hurts you. Everyone wants to feel good about their job and the cleaner gets no respect. I don't get any respect in my environment . . . what is important to me is the respect which I should get and I don't.

Thus, the immigrant employees describe a significant they/us dichotomy: 'You can't imagine how these people ridicule us. The treatment is what irritates me most. There are one or two who are different but the majority, they treat us really terribly'. Their critical stance towards local employers is not humiliation-proof, and employees remain exposed to hegemonic emotional politics. At the same time refuting humiliation is enabled through lesser isolation: the words used to describe the encounter with exclusion reveal the 'us' category, potentially a circle in which to experience inclusion that can be a source of a sense of belonging and worth.

Humiliation takes place in interactions with bosses and superiors. The community and family do not seem to experience shame or stigmatization. These immigrants draw on the social distance of newcomers to the country and previous occupational experiences as sources of worth, and rely on their co-workers for their sense of belonging.

Respectable belonging

The social interactions developed by Mizrahi women cleaners with other women cleaners and with their supervisors emerge as central to their considerations. They made frequent reference to the fun and comradeship they experienced in subcontracted commercialized cleaning:

I needed to get out – to see people – so I asked my mother if she could take care of the younger one and I sent the older one to kindergarten. I enjoy the girls [her co-workers]. We have lots of laughs together. I see people.

Her words suggest that cleaning provides a circle of positive social interaction that reinforces inclusion and acceptance that contrasts with the exclusionary nature of motherhood. The same theme emerged from interviews with Israeli-Palestinian women:

I can't stay at home. The work gives me social satisfaction as much as it gives me financial satisfaction. I have times when I meet people and feel the love they have [for me], the way they care for me, [these] are my happiest moments. When I go to my (private/domestic) employer

it's enough for her to say to me something as simple as 'watch out when you walk down the street'. It makes me happy to see her smiling face in the morning.

The emphasis on the relationship aspect of cleaning work suggests that at times women carve out some respectability for themselves by the identity-management strategy (Padavic, 2005) of presenting themselves as not financially dependent on the cleaning job. They talk as though they took the job as a form of entertainment. This strategy, in turn, allows respectability to be achieved through the sense of inclusion and acceptance provided by daily meetings with co-workers. The good feelings of leaving home well dressed and wearing a great deal of makeup – that is, being carefully attired, which is discussed in the commuting minibus with the other women – contributes further to the positive positioning in the group. Respectability is further nurtured by paying for expensive courses, particularly artificial nail-building courses, which help construct cleaning as a temporary stage. This strategy is used for more positive positioning within the group of the cleaning employees. However, negotiating respectable belonging through cleaning work is also an inclusionary process outside the group of cleaning employees. Mizrahi women explained how cleaning work enabled them to afford to buy gifts for family celebrations and play the social game by the local rules. Through their income they could also fulfil normative consumer dreams, such as purchasing additional furniture, eating out in the mall once a week and enabling their children to dress like their peer group.

A sense of sociability and belonging also emerges in immigrants' descriptions of their future union activity: 'We have a new union now and perhaps they'll do something for us'. This immigrant is simultaneously conveying two messages: the hope of improved working conditions through negotiations by the new union and a sense of pride related to the achievement of being part of 'us' after years of hard work. This is an achievement that she does not want to give up on, even if the urgency of her need for the income has decreased.

By contrast, the pride of being part of 'us' derives from remaining within the family for Israeli-Palestinians:

Despite the difficult feeling inside because of people's responses, I am very satisfied because I know myself well and so do my sons. With the money I was able to put aside from my work I managed to help my youngest son study at the university and help the two older ones get married. In addition, the people I work for respect me and trust me. They are very respectable people who love me and care for me [. . .] I advise all women to go out to work, it will give them satisfaction, a sense of responsibility and strength.

The cleaning job is portrayed as a path to belonging and respectability both through the pride the breadwinning mother takes in promoting her children's mobility and through the sense of worth generated by the family she works for. Over years of hard work they have become a source of recognition and respect in her life; hence the call to younger women. A sense of responsibility and strength are promised as rewards for the willingness to overcome difficulties and maintain the breadwinner's identity.

Discussion

Intrigued by the possibility that specific ethno-national locations may provide women with particular ways of refuting hegemonic emotional politics we examined the social process through which women excluded from appropriate employment opportunities negotiate their sense of inclusion and belonging. Skeggs (1997) claimed that the women in her study would never identify themselves with inferiorizing categories such as gender or class, as they always seek to position themselves as worthy. In this sense our interviewees never identified themselves as Mizrahi, Russian or Arab. Instead, the significance of specific ethno-national historical and social contexts modified the relative weight of negotiating worth and belonging against family, community and workplace.

Israeli-Palestinian women experience a very powerful process of shaming from within their nuclear and extended families and from within their communities, who accuse them of improper behaviour and deny them respect. While some emphasized the shame exerted by the community, including being stigmatized because of working away from home, others focused on the shame exerted by the family when its members protest against the visibility of men's inability to provide for women and children once women go out to work. The place of work, on the other hand, was frequently described as a source of support and respect. The women themselves countered the accusations levelled against them by emphasizing their dire need for income, their total confidence in their integrity and worthy behaviour, and the respect and understanding they received from their children. Thus, they were all deeply engaged in defeating the hegemonic emotional politics they encountered within their communities and families. Belonging is achieved once children's achievements can be displayed, and alternative definitions of social acceptance are used.

The dual pattern of negotiating inclusion consists of: a) rejecting their devaluation by the community, producing alternative self-definitions based on their responsibility as breadwinning mothers; and b) a continuous effort to convince their children and other family members to accept their cleaning work. This dual pattern is embedded in a socio-cultural context where families still exert social control over women's demeanour. In the context of national oppression and the continuous gap between lack of employment opportunities and increased children's material needs, such social control remains a central constraint in women's lives.

Mizrahi women felt degraded mainly by their community's gaze and supervision and control in the workplace. The community gaze may have been central to descriptions of shame because of these women's own expectations that, as second or third generation immigrants, they should have better opportunities in the labour market than those available to their mothers. Structural unemployment in their region leaves them dependent on cleaning jobs. Even though, like the Israeli-Palestinians they report shame-based emotional politics, shame for the Mizrahi women may well derive from their own evaluative gaze rather than that of either the community or the family.

By contrast, Mizrahi women point to aspects of their work that give them a sense of solidarity and worth. The money earned is described as benefitting their families, both nuclear and extended, and the relation between the women cleaners is depicted as a

source of pleasure and support. Thus, their exclusion to the margins of the labour market and the margins of their community is countered by their inclusion in a supportive circle of friends and in a family circle to which they are able to contribute through their work. Respectability is achieved in these circles by dressing up for work, purchasing signifiers of community membership like gifts and furniture, constructing their cleaning employment as temporary, and struggling for moments of increased autonomy at work. Mizrahi women did not challenge the social degradation of cleaning verbally but they instrumentally utilized cleaning jobs in resourceful ways to generate an inclusionary process and enhanced their sense of respectable belonging.

The immigrants from the FSU located their degradation almost exclusively in the workplace. The condescending attitude, the 'Othering', the lack of any concern for their needs, all created a strong sense of exclusion. They often used their past occupational identities and experiences to maintain a social distance that lessens humiliation. In this sense their experiences differ from those of both the Mizrahi and Israeli-Palestinian employees for whom being identified by the community as in need of a cleaning job can entail a social price. Thus, they challenge the degradation they experience by attempting to improve their work conditions. They reported the emergence of a 'we' category in the context of future union activities where being part of a 'we' could be experienced as a source of hope.

By analysing the negotiation of worth described cleaning employees, we have documented the specific exclusionary processes exerted upon working-class women of stigmatized ethno-national categories. Bonacich and her colleagues (2008), Browne and Misra (2003), Rollins (1985) and Zeytinoglu and Muteshi (2000) traced the contours of the relationship between ethno-national Othering and cleaning work. By focusing on both exclusionary and inclusionary processes we contribute to this literature suggesting a method that relates attributes of a specific ethno-national context to a particular 'dialectic between exploitation and empowerment' (Bickham-Mendez, 1998: 128). Moreover, because of our interest in the particularities of the ethno-national location we were able to highlight the differential relative weight of family, community and workplaces in women's struggles for respectable belonging. We found that the workplace is far more important to the immigrants' sense of worth than family or community are; both the workplace and the community shape daily negotiation of worth for Mizrahi women in the periphery; and finally, Israeli-Palestinian women experience their families, both extended and nuclear, as an intensive sphere of worth, but at the same time develop a shield of self-definitions against community degradation and can direct a critical eye towards disapproving employers. Consistent with Padavic's (2005) identity management strategies, while broadening Skeggs's emotional politics, three types of Othering and marginalization emerge and were responded to by three distinct forms of respectable belonging achieved through moments of pride.

Our theoretical interest in women's negotiation of their worth vis-a-vis exclusionary forces and processes led us to the identification of ethno-national specific inclusionary processes negotiated by the cleaning employees we interviewed. Instead of interpreting their negotiation with their families over acceptance as avoidance of stigmatization and internalization of stigma (Warr, 2005), we interpret statements in our interviews as insistence on pride and worth. The identity-management strategies resulting in pride (Padavic,

2005) were not powerful enough to allow these women to enter into society at large. Nevertheless, they appeared so significant in women's daily lives that they fuelled them with energy to persist in the hard work they do under oppressive conditions. Future research is needed to explore the specific aspects of social capital that emerged in our study; namely, the bonds that enhance women's resources by enabling ethno-national specific inclusionary processes.

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Note

1. The other option is that of agricultural seasonal work. Most women explained that such work was both more difficult and earned them far less money, in addition to being seasonal.

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