



Petite Bonnes: Explanation and Analysis of the Plight of the Moroccan Child Maid

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Abstract

Morocco is a country stricken by poverty. In the 1990s, Morocco, whose economy is largely agricultural, experienced a severe drought. This led to an economic recession, felt especially by people in rural areas. Because these people are so desperate for money and food, they will often send their young daughters to work as maids in the city.

These maids are generally between the ages of seven and 15, with the majority between the ages of 10 and 12. Once they are employed in the city, they do not go to school, and all the money that they earn goes directly to their parents.

The maids will often rise before anyone else in the household is awake and work long after everyone else has gone to bed. The maids often speak only Berber, whereas their employer families speak French and Arabic. Even after the young maids learn Arabic, often no one in the house will speak to them.

This isolation and lack of education will often lead to psychological problems and exceptional vulnerability to the suggestions of men. The maids often experience unwanted pregnancy and later, enter into prostitution when their former employers eject them from their homes.

The Moroccan government and other government groups are aware of this problem. Morocco has passed a new labor code which raises the minimum age of employment from 12 to 15. It has also passed truancy laws requiring children between the ages of seven and 15 to attend school.

Because it is unrealistic to place an immediate and inflexible ban on child domestics, the government and U.S. sponsored programs such as ADROS set up schools for maids which will over time integrate these girls back into society.