

DOMESTIC WORK: ISSUES, LITERATURE AND POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a review of the main issues that, today, structure the investigations of paid domestic work, showing that a multiplicity of factors, mostly related to the entry of women into the labour market, have intensified the problems encountered in this field. Continuities are displayed in the configuration of domestic work, as well as processes undergoing transformation. Finally, some themes are pointed out that deserve deeper consideration in future research.

IN THE COURSE OF THE LAST TWO DECADES, academic interest in domestic work has increased. It is not that this theme represents new interest among academia, but rather that the first efforts on the part of feminists to place domestic work in the spotlight (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007; ROSALDO; LAMPHERE, 1979) finally seem to have found greater resonance.

Whereas the feminists of the 1970s sought to identify the roots of the invisibility of unpaid domestic work, indicating its contribution to sex/gender inequality and female subordination, in the context of the 90s and in the first decade of the 21st century, a multiplicity of factors aroused new interest in the theme – the majority related to the growing, definitive entry of women into the labour market (BRUSCHINI, 2006). Among these factors, we highlight: restructuring and productive flexibilisation in post-industrial societies, raising the female participation rates in the labour market; the precariousness of the work and the decline in the welfare state in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere; and, furthermore, the ageing population, leading to a global care crisis, which, in turn, brought into question the transnational logistics of the social division of work, in which the categories of gender, ethnicity and nation are interlaced (SOLÍS, 2009; GUTIÉRREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, 2007; COLEN, 1995; ANDERSON, 2000; EHRENREICH; HOSCHILD, 2002). Although the feminist revisions of the Marxist theory of value have claimed inclusion of reproductive tasks in the generation of surplus-value (GUTIÉRREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, 2007, p. 201), the visibility and nervous attention that the value of domestic work has received in the last few years can perhaps be explained by

Simmel's perspective (apud APPADURAI, 2008), according to which "we called valuable those objects that oppose resistance to our desire to possess them". Until a short time ago, the needs and desires of persons and groups that used to demand reproductive work,¹ were, in general, immediately satisfied at the cost of unpaid domestic work performed by women from within the kinsfolk, or through meagre payment dispensed to women originating from the subaltern class strata and/or disparaged ethnicities. The shift of middle and upper-class women from their home occupations to remunerated job positions ended up revealing (at least initially) the distance and the time interval between the need and/or desire and the effective performance of that which was desired. Just like Ávila (2009), we consider that the relation between paid and unpaid domestic work is a fundamental link, the anchorage point of the other complexities that are coupled to the questions about domestic work today.

In this article, we analyse how such questions have been highlighted by the recent academic production, above all in the social sciences, but not exclusively. We do not proceed to an exhaustive review of the authors on the themes; before, our intention is to selectively show the main structuring issues of the field in the current debates. Thus, regions are cited as unique examples of the main themes. Whenever possible, we give preference to data about Brazil and Latin America. We have not made insertions about the realities of the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and we have not delved deeply into information about the United States. Some important themes that would deserve more precise analysis, due to space limitations, have not been dealt with here (such as child labour) or have been merely mentioned (care and global care chains, affects).

In Brazil, recently, two books accomplished the task of making a sufficiently broad review of the literature on the theme. Alexandre Barbosa Fraga (2013) indicates the principal authors (above all, the Brazilians) and conceptions in which the studies about domestic work lie: statistical, theoretical, historical, configurational, organisational, legal and relational. In a work by Maria Betânia de Melo Ávila in 2009, in order to present the contribution of a considerable number of authors, with emphasis on national production, she established three categories: historical approaches; studies in the field of Marxism and development theories; and matters of citizenship (formation of proactive persons and social actors).

Both male and female researchers who study domestic work usually say that there is a disproportionate difference between the expansion of the phenomenon in reality and the academic production about it. For a long time, we used to count on a handful of authors to support our investigatory paths. Little by little, the theme of domestic

1 Shellee Colen (1995) defines reproductive work as that which is "physical, mental and emotional and necessary for the generation, upbringing and socialisation of children, as well as maintenance of the home and care of the persons (from infancy to old age)"..

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The work of indexation and publication of the Scientific Electronic Library Online databank – SciELO – was begun in 1997, with support from the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo – Fapesp; it includes periodicals from South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Spain, Mexico, Portugal and Venezuela; the publications involve the areas of agrarian, biological, exact, human sciences and literature, linguistics and the arts; it allows search by category as defined by the researchers. We researched according to the following categories: *domestic work*, *domestic workers*, *domestic servant* (<<http://www.scielo.org/php/index.php>>). The Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y El Caribe, España y Portugal – Redalyc – was created in 2002, with support from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México; the network also indexes and publishes scientific works produced in and about Latin America; it publishes articles distributed across 35 disciplines (social sciences, agrarian studies, demographics, communication, politics, among others), from 165 countries. The Redalyc search system is predefined, and in it we found articles in the following categories: *concepto de trabajo domestico* [concept of domestic work], *contextos domesticos* [domestic contexts], *división del trabajo domestico* [division of domestic work], *domesticos* [domestic servants], *empleo domestico* [domestic employment], *entorno domestico* [domestic environment], *espacio y trabajo domestico* [space and domestic work], *estados domesticos* [domestic states], *grupos domesticos* [domestic groups], *servicio domestico* [domestic service], *trabajador domestico* [domestic worker], *trabajo domestico* [domestic work], *trabajo extra domestico* [work outside the home], *trabajo intra domestico* [work within the home], *turismo domestico* [domestic tourism] (www.redalyc.org/).

work has come onto the scene, and the field has presented significant production and on a considerable scale, albeit still little disseminated among readers in the human sciences area. Fraga (2013) found that, in 2010, there were 61 theses and dissertations about domestic work in the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Capes portal.

In order to perceive how much studies about domestic work have been divulgated, we conducted a survey in two renowned article repositories with free access, available on Internet sites, which mainly divulgate the academic production in Brazil and Latin America as a whole – SciELO and Redalyc.² Adding together the production in both systems, we find that there are 71 articles, distributed among the following areas: sociology, with 26 references; psychology, 10; anthropology, 8; social sciences, 5; health, 5; history, 3; and another 7 areas with only one each. The themes lie in diverse categories: work (with 65 references, the two main ones being extra and intra-domestic work, with 15, and gender division of work, 17); feminism (26, the principal one being the category, gender division of work, 17); social policies (13), theories and concepts (8); representations (6); care (6); migration (5); family organisation (5), among many others covered by other categorisations (economics, social stratification, politics, among others, total totalling 16). We observe that the production, on the whole, is dominated by authoresses (76.7% of the 133 writers).

In both cataloguization bases, we find a significant percentage of works with co-authorship, indicating that collaboration is an important data item in this type of debate (on average, from 2000 to 2012, there were two authors per article in the SciELO database, and 1.3 authors per article in the Redalyc database). However, authors fundamental for field study do not always appear in the production of indexed articles, indicating that dossiers, books, collections and reports of international organisations are often forms employed to divulgate the research on this theme.

Over these years, we have also followed the multiplication of significant seminars, both national and international,³ directly centred on the theme, “domestic work”. However, although production in the social sciences is thriving, in the scientific events of the area there are few regular and/or specific spaces for the theme, which continues to be residual and leveraged principally by male/female researchers of gender.

Next, we shall present the issues that have emerged in the literature, observing that, while many of them are continuations, others appear as processes undergoing transformation. Finally, we shall indicate the themes that should receive a greater boost in order to elucidate the complexities of domestic work.

CONTINUATIONS

The reality of domestic work has presented change, although some practices have been consistently maintained. In particular, we would like to stress the social place where paid female domestic workers are recruited, the lack of legal protection for paid domestic work, and the potential for unionisation.

RECRUITMENT: GENDER, RACE-ETHNICITY AND POVERTY

In Brazil, the studies about domestic work emerged in the wake of the sociology of work, arising from the concerns borne by the theories of modernisation. It was the pioneering work of Heleieth Saffiotti (1979) that had the double merit of breaking the silence regarding issues about women and work, discussing the very matter of domestic work. She debates the relations between productive and unproductive work, and analyses domestic work as articulation of the capitalist mode of production with non-capitalist forms of work, and its importance in the constitution of the industrial reserve “army”.

At the end of the 70s and in the early 80s, two other authoresses were equally innovative: Alda Brito Motta (1977) and Zaíra Farias (1983). The former brought the anthropological approach to unveil the universe of women’s experience working and living in others’ homes. And the latter pointed out contradictions inherent in domestic work, above all in terms of the relations of domination and inequality.⁴

In 1977, the profile of female domestic employees in Salvador, Bahia State, revealed by Motta, presented similarities with that of such workers in Latin America in general, and which are not very distant from the reality today:

In the Conjunto de Todos os Santos Condominium, the domestic employee is, above all, young (73.2% are aged 12-27), half-caste (56.5%) or black (31.7%), from a subsistence background (70.7%) in the interior of the state (87.8%). Schooling level: incomplete primary (51.2%). [...] 90.2% live in their employers’ homes. [...] the average salary between September and November 1976: Cr\$286,00. The highest salary was Cr\$500,00 (found in just one case), and the lowest, Cr\$150,00 (for 7.3% of those aged 13-22). Also, 7.3% did not receive a salary at all, their employers justifying this by alleging that they provided all their needs. (MOTTA, 1977, p. 29)

Muchachas no more..., a collection organised by Elsa Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro (1989 in English; and 1993 in Spanish), was the first work to compile studies about domestic work in Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the themes addressed, we found: the historical dimension, the quotidian work relations, the ideological

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As examples in Brazil, we quote the organisation of the 4th Seminário Nacional A Informalidade, o trabalho doméstico e as mulheres, by the NGO SOS Corpo (2007); in Argentina, the I Jornada de Estudios: trabajo doméstico remunerado. Perspectivas cruzadas latino-americanas, organised in conjunction with the Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento and Universidad Nacional de San Martín; with two editions (2009 and 2010), in Manchester (UK); and, in Santa Maria (RS, Brazil), workshops were held regarding the Feminization of Labour: domestic work and the affects in a transnational context, attended by researchers from Latin America (Brazil, Argentina) and Europe (UK, Spain); in Mexico, gathering researchers from Latin America, the UK and France, the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores em Antropología Social held the event, Colóquio Internacional Dimensiones del Empleo Doméstico Latinoamericano (2012); also, in Argentina, the 11th Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de las Mujeres and the 6th Congreso Ibero-Americano de Estudios de Género, were held in Buenos Aires, with the session, Género, trabajo doméstico y cuidados em América Latina durante el siglo XX. Some texts quoted in this article are taken from these seminars, and are currently in the process of publication.

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Our objective is not to analyse authors, but rather reveal the problems that continue to affect the reality of domestic work; the works are mentioned as tributes to the inaugural contributions of the authoresses and for stressing the current nature of the issues raised. For other significant contributions produced in this period, see Ávila (2009).

perspectives, the debate with feminism and unionisation (the Spanish translation added statements by leaders of the union movement) and the relations with the State. In the diversity of the set, what is outstanding is an effort to characterise domestic service in countries like Chile, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil. The authoresses reveal the high indices of the remunerated female labour force engaged in domestic work; they characterise it as an overwhelmingly female activity, and, as such, it is undervalued as much by those in government as by the general public; they indicate that domestic employees in all these countries are generally the poorest and have minimal education; the majority are migrants and their cultures and ethnicities are stigmatised in the system of national values.

Three decades later, it is still common to find that in paid domestic work there persists inequality of gender and class, of ethnicity and race, and also of geographical origin (POBLETE; TIZZIANI, 2013; GOLDSMITH, 2010, 2013; DURIN, 2006).

In 2011, the International Labour Organisation - ILO registered that, in developing countries, 1.3% of the women were occupied in domestic employment: in Asia, this index was 1.2%; in Africa, 1.4%; rising to 5.6% in the Middle East; and 7.6% in Latin America, featuring exponential growth (POBLETE; TIZZIANE, 2013). Based on these percentages, we can underline two remarkable characteristics of remunerated domestic work: it is a predominantly female activity and the result of an intersection of inequalities.

In the report, *Estudos do trabalho doméstico no mundo*, 2010, the ILO showed that 17% of the women who work in Brazil performed domestic tasks, a percentage slightly less than those found in the neighbouring countries, such as Argentina (18.3%) and Uruguay (18.5%), not to mention Costa Rica (17.3%) and the Cayman Isles (17.3%), and, on the other hand, a higher percentage than, for example, Chile (14.3%), Colombia (13%), Venezuela (14.4%) and Mexico (10.3%).

In Brazil, over the last few decades, the index of women in the category, “domestic worker” has not dropped below 93%. The employment rates in domestic service fell from 17.2%, in 1999, to 15.6%, in 2011, a reverse flow of 1.6% among the economically active population. Without precedent, domestic work lost its place as the major female employment category in the country. The employment index has not yet been studied qualitatively in order to determine whether there exists a tendency towards decline or there are conjunctural factors that generate the phenomenon. However, correlated studies show that there have been an increase in women’s schooling levels and ageing of the population involved in domestic service (FRAGA, 2013). There are also factors that lead us to believe that

young Brazilian women have been finding openings in commerce and services, which are not necessarily better paid, but, at least, provide greater social recognition (BRITES, 2013).

The predominance of females in domestic work does not only represent high indices of women's participation in the labour market. As Gutiérrez-Rodríguez states, symbolic elements attributed to women are found to be linked:

...feminization does not only refer to the quantitative overrepresentation of women in a certain work sector, but to the quality attached to this specific form of labour... The quality of domestic work is historically determined by the correlation of this work with women's reproductive faculties... As such feminization draws attention to the persistence of naturalization and its subsequent devaluation of certain sectors of work in which women are not only overrepresented as well as those historically associated with women and culturally predicated as part of 'women's nature'. (GUTIÉRREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, 2010b, p. 6)

In domestic work, the labour force is recruited among women, who generally come from poorer strata with lower schooling levels, characteristics overlain by a strong racial component. Among the Brazilian female domestic workers, 62% are black and earn salaries 15.6% lower than their white counterparts. Furthermore, the schooling level of these black females is also lower – 6 years of study against 6.4 among the whites (PINHEIRO; FONTOURA; PEDROSA, 2011; FRAGA, 2013).

The phenomenon of race is not only a residual characteristic in the survival of domestic work; in fact, it constitutes the basis for the maintenance of its logic. In countries like Brazil, in most regions, the weight of the slavery in the colonial society continues to accentuate the inequalities between blacks and whites – it is in this social place that the greatest recruitment of female workers takes place, and where other inequalities intersect (BERNARDINO-COSTA, 2012). In other nations, it is the indigenous ethnic groups that are attracted to performing the reproductive tasks, and their inclusion in this category respects the national ethnic hierarchies.⁵ Among many recent studies, we can quote those of Durin (2008) and Montemayor (2008), who described the close relation between indigenous women and domestic work in the north-west of Mexico. As Chávez González observed:

The fact domestic work is the main employment for urban indigenous women is a sign that there persists segmentation between indigenous and non-indigenous women, expressed in

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In the national researches, there is a silence with regard to indigenous labour in paid domestic work. One exception is a study by Araújo and Torres (2011) about domestic work and the identity of Saterê-Mawê women.

menial, badly paid work in the city ... the fact that these women are migrants and also indigenous leads society to consider them inferior, thereby perpetuating the racial or ethnic segmentation in this type of work. (2012, p. 22)

The new international migratory flows, above all in a south-north direction as of the 1990s, have highlighted the re-creation of racialised hierarchies in the use of foreign female labour to perform domestic tasks in homes in northern countries. The researchers have coined the term, “global care chains” to refer to the migrations of women who leave their communities, families, including their children, to join an international reproductive labour force in post-industrial countries (HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, 2001).

Naturalised attributes of gender, race and nation identify skills in the female immigrant contingent to carry out the domestic work in the host countries. Regarding the preference for “coloured” servants in the USA, observed by Judith Rollins (1990), Colen (1995) recognised that Caribbean nannies were valued in the country exactly because, unlike poor North American women, they accepted long working hours, being away from their families, and even established much appreciated bonds of affection with their employers’ children. Busch and Cox (2012) describes the mutant predicates about education and cleanliness that the native employers in the United Kingdom attribute either to young Eastern European women or those from Latin America as carers of their children.

Domestic workers, in general, are poorly paid. Research conducted in the 90s, in the ambit of countries that are members of Conferência Latinoamericana de Trabajadoras del Hogar – Conlactraho, revealed that the average salary of domestic workers (although there was variation in the work modalities among the countries) was much lower than those in the other work categories women occupy. In Costa Rica, where there was greater inequality, the domestic workers earned 32% of the general starting salary paid to women in other occupations. In Peru, which presented the lowest degree of inequality, the domestic worker salary was 87% of that paid to women in other occupations (GOLDSMITH, 2013; OIT, 2010). In Brazil, statistics show that the average income of Brazilian domestic workers, in 2009, was R\$ 386,45, varying according to the region: R\$ 254,46 in the north and north-east, and R\$ 451,06 in the south-east (PINHEIRO; FONTOURA; PEDROSA, 2011).

The researches show that, despite the expectations of the modernisation theories that envisaged a correlation between technical developments and more democratic scenarios (BRITES, 2000; ÁVILA, 2009), paid domestic work and the inequalities that it entails have

grown over the last few decades,⁶ including in societies with a well established capitalist economy. Milkman, Reese and Roth (1998) justify the growth of domestic service in the USA and its world geographical variation in terms of inequality. The increase in domestic employment has coincided with the growth of the number of elite women practising professions or holding administrative positions, who have greater means to hire domestic services. Without underestimating the advances brought by the gender studies, which have contributed significantly to the sociological knowledge of these realities, Milkman, Reese and Roth (1998) stressed that, in a certain manner, some of these studies concluded their analyses with ethnic, racial and gender segmentations, leaving aside the determinations of class. Resorting to a macro-sociological comparison, the authoresses verified that domestic work is directly proportional to the level of social inequality in the countries or regions where it is established.

UNIONISATION: WHERE DOES SO MUCH STRENGTH ARISE?

There is a double consonance, apparently paradoxal, in the studies about the organisation of domestic workers into unions. On the one hand, there is observation of difficulties in expansion and maintenance of the union entities, which, as a rule, result in diminutive institutions in relation to the size of the population involved in this sector. On the other, there is recognition of the tremendous force that few striving militants manage to muster.

Although it deals with an important aspect of domestic work, there are relatively few studies about this theme. The majority recognise in the very specificities in exercising their occupation the obstacles to a political recruitment on the part of union entities. The isolation and fragility of female workers in their employers' homes, the pressure they suffer in these spaces against their politicisation, the personalised and clientelist relations and the heterogeneity of their labour situations are impediments to direct access that unions find to enlist members.⁷

Many works have revealed the political construction of the unionised domestic workers in Brazil and Latin America, but, in the majority, the political activity of these women is taken from a perspective that privileges absence, lack or incompleteness.

Maintaining such workers unionised is perhaps one of the most arduous union tasks. The seeking of a union takes place at extreme moments of dispute and rupture, in general for labour rights inspection at the end of the work contract. The history of the domestic worker unions in Latin America, in terms of their emergence and foundation, as spaces that articulate strife and in which the fragility of

⁶ Between 1995 and 2010, the population of domestic employees increased worldwide from 32.2 million to 52.6 million.

⁷ Bernardino-Costa (2007) pointed out that only 1.6% of the domestic workers are members of unions in Brazil, which, in absolute numbers, represents 101 thousand workers. There are around 35 domestic worker unions in the country, organised in the Federação Nacional de Trabalhadoras Domésticas - Fenatrad (ÁVILA, 2009).

politicisation are the result of contingencies and the precariousness of domestic work, is found in the noteworthy articles by Suzana Prates, Thea Schelleekens and Anja Schoot, Thelma Galvéz and Rosalba Todaro, Magdalena León and Elena Izquierdo, in *Muchachas no more...* (CHANEY; CASTRO, 1993). More recently, other contributions, such as that by Tizziani (2011), about Argentina, and that of Quezada (2013), about Bolivia, have recalled the union histories in conservative entities and they bear a strong disciplinary nature, whether in political terms or worker training.

The union organisation in the countries and the legal particularities to which they are submitted are among the issues that deserve more comparative study. In Brazil, unlike other nations, like China, Macau, Yemen and Gambia (ILO, 2009), there is no legal prohibition of unionisation, but the leaders are not dispensed from work to deal with union activity, and there are no union dues (nor even any viable way of charging them) in order to guarantee the minimal material structure of the organisation (ILO, 2009; OLIVEIRA, 2008). Besides this, in many countries, unions do not exist, but there are associations. In Latin America, only Brazil and Bolivia have unions organised into federations, and Uruguay is the only country where collective bargaining takes place (GOLDSMITH, 2013). Despite so many difficulties, the conquests of the organised workers have not been few, as may be seen from the legislative changes that have been taking place for decades, and with particular acceleration since the approval of *Convenção 189* (ILO, 2011) – all with the fundamental presence of few, but very engaged, militant women.

Goldsmith (2010; 2013) reports on two enriching experiences of organising domestic workers. She considers it equivocal on the part of analysts to invalidate union action, often conveyed under the label of “fragility” of the unions. With the obstacles faced by the organisations, she prefers an adventurous attitude: ‘They are very weak’, ‘They have reached a total of only 50’. Instead of this, I think to myself: ‘Wow! They’ve reached 50!’ (GOLDSMITH, 2013). The authoress narrated the foundation of the *Confederación Latinoamericana y de Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar – Contralctho* – and the activity of the female workers’ delegations in the 99th and 100th International Labour Conference, in Geneva, as examples of the possibilities of articulation for these women.

The foundation of the *Contralctho*, in 1998, was a reaction to the fragility of the unions and organisations, as well as the formation of the leaderships. By means of co-ordinated action by the union leaderships in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru, the first regional organisation of domestic workers in the world was created – at that time with representatives from 11 countries.⁸ At that moment, instigating the

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Contralctho's action in international associations and in the 4th International Women's Conference, in Peking, in 1995, was fundamental for the creation of the present International Domestic Workers Network – IDWN (GOLDSMITH, 2010; 2013).

protagonism in their striving was the focus of the Contralctho actions. They held innumerable seminars, congresses, workshops and leadership training programs, putting into practice their motto: “It does not suffice to have rights. It is necessary to have the consciousness to defend them” (GOLDSMITH, 2013).

In a fine ethnographic description of the activity of the domestic workers delegations in the 2011 and 2012 ILO Conferences, Goldsmith (2013) showed how the militants subverted the spaces and disrespected the protocols, repositioning the residual spaces that had been allocated to them in the United Nations Organisation - UNO meeting rooms. They noisily made themselves heard and succeeded in being incorporated with equanimity into the debates. Based on Fraser (1977), the anthropologist argues that the weak can be made strong in the scope of the relations of domination using “parallel discursive spaces, in which members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses that, in turn, allow the formulation of conflicting interpretations about their identities, interests and needs” (GOLDSMITH, 2013, p. 245, translation by the authoress).

On another line of argument, Bernardino-Costa (2007) also stresses the positive political construction of the militancy of the domestic workers unions. His starting point is the presupposition of an unfinished project of decolonisation to describe the struggle of the domestic workers unions in Brazil, perceived in his analysis as efforts towards ending a hierarchised society with colonial remnants. The author revives Quijano’s concept of coloniality of power:

The coloniality of power is the pattern of power that was constituted jointly with the Euro-centred modern/colonial capitalism, which began with the conquest of America in 1492. The modern/colonial world system, which was constituted as of that date, gave rise to a new pattern of world power founded on the idea of race, which began to classify the world population, producing historically new racial identities that would, in turn, begin to become associated to hierarchies, places and social roles corresponding to the domination patterns. (BERNARDINO-COSTA, 2007, p. 5)

Thus, the author presents us a series of examples that sustain cultural, political, social and institutional formations that rendered inferior in the colonised countries. The peculiarities of the dynamics of the social relations historically engendered by the colonisation are emphasised, thus demonstrating the superiority constructed by the whites with regard to the division of labour and race. Bernardino-Costa shows the consolidation of interiorised subalternity thinking, which, through the hegemony of the “superiors” in contact with the

colonised, make the process of legitimation of the political, symbolic and discursive violence occur. Nevertheless, thinking of power as a relational field, Bernardino-Costa shows that counter-hegemonic forces can be produced.

The way the domestic workers union is regarded is not exactly a view constructed on studies of about the union movement in Brazil, but rather a view that identifies in the ex-associations and in the unions a movement of re-resistance and resistance of the domestic workers. Furthermore, we face this movement of re-resistance and resistance as a producer of knowledge. (BERNARDINO-COSTA, 2007, p. 63)

The trajectory of the domestic workers unions in Brazil is recomposed by interviews with the main leaderships and by documental research about the congresses that sustained the rights campaigns. Conjugating Boaventura Santos' arguments about subaltern knowledge with the Quijano, Dussel and Mignolo concepts of the decolonial theory, such as the geo-politics of knowledge, frontier thought, coloniality of power, colonial difference, the activism of the militants is taken up by Bernardino-Costa (2007), not as essentialization of the perspective of female workers, but as a possibility to propose estrangement/rupture in the hegemonic narrative of the racial and seignorial democracy, fostered by the colonial legacy, in which the voices of these militants are taken in a subalternized manner.

Unlike these approaches, the voice of the domestic workers is also expressed in the intimate literature produced or narrated by male/female domestic workers,⁹ in memorialistic texts, life stories, statements and diaries that give accounts or the personal trajectories of the subalterns, or describe the seignorial life of the employers.¹⁰ Editions of collections and events have incorporated the voice of the female workers themselves, not only as a record, but also as participants in the intellectual political path. The item, "In your own words", from *Muchachas no more...* (CHANEY; CASTRO, 1993), brought distinction to workers' statements, sometimes through intermediaries or reported by partners outside the movement. In *Reflexões feministas...* (ÁVILA et al., 2008), the text by Lenira Carvalho (2008), Creusa Maria de Oliveira (2008) and Cleusa Aparecida da Silva (2008) appeared side by side with the academic analyses. Even without a written record, I quote the participation of Creusa Maria de Oliveira, president of Fenatrad, in defence of the thesis by Joaze Bernardino-Costa, at the Universidade de Brasília – UnB –, in 2007.

The majority of the works about the political trajectory of the domestic workers unions recognise the importance of the Catholic

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In the literature, some male writers appear. See Roncador (2004, chap. 4).

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One example is the book by Lenira, narrated and later transcribed by Cornélia Parisius (1999). Distance from the literate world does not prevent a narrative about the experiences of Lenira as a female worker. In *El señor Borges* (UVEDA DE ROBLEDO; VACCARO, 2004), there is a different voice, that of the journalist and interviewer, Alejandro Vacaro, who steers the narrative towards the intimacy of his employer.

Church in the constitution of the first movements and in the formation of militants. The shifts in discourses, partnerships and forms of political action of these movements are observed in studies, such as those of Bernardino-Costa (2007), Ávila (2009) and Oliveira (2007), who have the merits of showing the shifts in the confrontation strategies and partnerships by which the trade unionism of the category was being constructed. Oliveira (2007) underlined the moment at which the State began to act as a partner in terms of the formation of militant groups, the raising of schooling and home ownership levels, in the implementation of the public policy project, *Trabalho Doméstico Cidadão* [Domestic Work-Citizen].¹¹

In the last three decades, a shift has been observed from partnerships to initiatives for the formation of leaderships of initial support from religious groups, and from the black movement to support from the State by means of public policies aimed at minorities. Besides this, there has also been a transformation in the ways of exercising union policy, starting from attention centred on the formation of the militant base for the practices and militant strategies capable of interacting with pressure groups – advocacy (BRITES; MONTICELLI; OLIVEIRA, 2012).

The trajectories of the militancy are fundamental not only to know the specific movement of the domestic workers, but also to ponder the ever faster pace of change in the constitution of the field of rights in Brazilian society. Thus, the discussion leads to reflection about the mishaps and advances in democratic society, and its capacity to include and exclude political and social actors in the arena of the decisions about public policies, national legislation, as well as in the creation of spaces of social and political recognition.

LACK OF LEGAL PROTECTION: CONQUESTS AND PERMANENCIES

In March 2013, the Brazilian Congress altered article 7 of the Federal Constitution, which refers to the differentiated statute of domestic workers and their guarantees of legal protection. However, the regulation of domestic work is still far from being a straightforward process. Even though many changes have been achieved, lack of enforcement of the legal conquests persists in the exercise of domestic work.

The alteration of the Brazilian constitutional text is part of a campaign that has lasted around two decades, mobilising feminist groups, union militants and deputies. The impulse that led to final approval of the constitutional amendment took place in the 100th International Labour Conference, in 2011, entitled “Decent work for male and female domestic workers”, when Recommendation 201 and

¹¹ Implemented in 2005, under the co-ordination of the Ministério do Trabalho [Ministry of Labour] and the Secretaria Especial da Igualdade Racial [Special Secretariat of Racial Equality], it encompassed a programme to increase schooling levels, political formation and occupational qualification of the domestic worker. Even though it presented an innovative format, this program was short-lived. See: <http://www3.mte.gov.br/discriminacao/LivretoPlanseq_trabalhodomestico_cidadao.pdf>.

Convention 189 were approved, representing a conquest achieved a long time ago in the international movements for the protection of human rights:

Since the 1990s, there has been renewed interest in domestic service on the part of the ILO, which is related to the research about (and campaign for) elimination of child labour, the growth of the informal sector, the increase in international migration, the great number of women in jobs that involve care, in these migratory flows and the abuses to which they are subject. And, without doubt, the crises of care, the feminist movement, the world conferences of women, the *Convenção sobre a eliminação de todas as formas de discriminação contra as mulheres* [...], the conventions about child labour and slave labour were significant. (GOLSMITH, 2013, p. 236)

Pereira and Valiente (2007, p. 7) found that, throughout Latin America, the judicial regimes established “unfavourable patterns for the sector in relation to the rest of the workers”. The situation is not different in other regions of the world. In Europe, some countries have developed specific legislation (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Holland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) while in others there are also collective agreements among the parties (Germany, Iceland and Switzerland, for example). However, in Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and the United Kingdom there is neither legislation nor any type of regulation (ETUC-CES, 2012).

In any case, all the legislation restricts the rights of male/female domestic workers. In the report, *Domestic workers across the world* (ILO, 2013) the survey showed that only 10% of domestic workers are covered by specific legislation. In the countries where there exists express labour legislation, 50% of them do not establish limits or any regulation regarding working hours, 42% of the legislation does not make provision for paid work breaks, 17.2% still allow partial payment in cash. Besides this, one third of the domestic workers in the world are not granted maternity leave.

Despite the undeniable success of the negotiations in the 100th ILO Conference, the Tripartite Commission (workers, employers and government representatives), which sustained the negotiations, did not manage to have four fundamental articles approved:

In general, all the articles were well received by the tripartite representations, which, after the various discussions, reached a consensus about the labour delimitations, except in the case

of four articles for which there was no agreement among the representatives of the countries present, including representatives of their own union movements. Thus, the minimum age for entry to paid domestic work must respect the constitutional age of majority in each country, payments in kind were not prohibited by the Convention, and likewise there was no establishment of the working day (measures regarding overtime, daily and weekly breaks/leisure), and the work inspection, the adoption of measures and possibility of access for institutional organs to the household, the respect for privacy also being the responsibility of each country. (MONTICELLI, 2013, p. 126)

Even though in Brazil we have advanced in the change from the Magna Carta text with one of the most progressive legislations in the world, alongside Uruguay, we still need to deal with the detailed regulation of the new text.¹² Some legal aspects remain resistant to social change. One of them concerns the rights of charwomen, who are still profoundly vulnerable. But the greatest of all the impasses consists of leaving the legal arena to actually putting the law into practice. Even with the regulatory labour laws in force since 1972, 73.2% of the Brazilian domestic workers subsist without having their employment booklets signed. Besides the difficulty of formalising the employment link, the labour rights inspection system encounters insurmountable obstacles. Sustained in prerogatives of the inviolability of the home, the majority of countries justify the impracticability of inspecting the fulfilment of the legal norms. It is not only in Brazil that domestic work is a vast field of informality.

These restrictive legal issues have been examined by many authors, as much in terms of the campaigns and conquests (GOLDSMITH, 2010) as in the legal dogmas, founded on cultural precepts, strategies of domination and employer control, which impose absence or incompleteness of rights (PEREYRA, 2013; GUTIÉRREZ-RODRIGUEZ, 2010b, OIT, 2010; ILO, 2013). Brites (2003) analysed such conflicts from the backstage perspective, bringing the point of view of the domestic workers out of the trade union space. In her ethnographic research in Espírito Santo State, in the 1990s, she was surprised to come across groups of female workers who found advantages in domestic service, in terms of personalised relations and extra-salary payments. The authoress noted that, “from the native’s point of view”, there were not only elements of domination and subalternity, but these also coexisted with strategies and tactics that the workers developed, or maintained, in response to the contractual patterns many employers considered “modern”, which, upon observation of the legislation in force, obliterated the persistent inequalities among the social groups.

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The Recommendation functions as a manual of the OIT. On the other hand, the Convention needs to be ratified by all the Member States. In the case of Convention 189, only Uruguay, Mauritius, the Philippines and Italy ratified it. The period for such adhesion expired in September 2012 (MONTICELLI, 2013).

TRANSFORMATIONS AND PROCESSES

Since the 90s, some characteristics of domestic work have been transformed. The great turning point was the mobilisation due to the regulatory frameworks. In terms of the profile of the category, the population of resident female domestic workers has decreased significantly, while the number who work as charwomen has grown, at least in the large urban centres. There are also changes in the age pattern of Brazilian domestic workers. In the last few years, domestic work has decreased in percentage terms in relation to other occupations, even though it is still one of the three major female occupational categories in the country. The phenomenon of domestic work has, nevertheless, been acquiring an ever greater transnational flow, posing new questions of analysis, while previous themes are presented in a renewed manner.

CHARWOMEN

One transformation that is consolidated, above all for the realities of the large metropolitan centres, concerns the growing number of domestic workers in the condition of charwoman. However, many forms of domestic work contracts exist in Brazil. Based on the official statistics, it is possible to classify three types of domestic worker: resident (living at the workplace); full-time (earns a salary, but does not live at the employer's home); and charwoman (paid on a daily basis, and may render services to more than one employer). The so-called "faxineira" (housecleaner) may exercise specialised activities, such as cleaning, ironing, cooking and preparing frozen food. But, there is also the "diarista polivalente" (polyvalent charwoman), who performs a whole range of tasks on the same workday (FRAGA, 2013).

Whereas the law defines the domestic employee as "one who renders services of a continuous nature, without a profit motive, to a person or family, in the respective residence" (BRASIL, 1972), the charwoman's activities have no legal definition. Interminable legal debates about the interpretation of the expression "continuous nature" have created dilemmas in terms of legalisation of the activity that, despite all the changes, still remains without formal occupational recognition (FRAGA, 2013). Thus, this subgroup is relegated to a position of greater fragility in terms of legal protection. Anyway, the definitions of the activity and the contracts have placed greater value on the links with the employers, and, rarely, on the type of activity performed by the worker.

Quantitative researches portray participation of resident domestic workers as decreasing drastically in relation to that of charwomen. In 1992, in Brazil, 19.2% were residents. In 2008, the proportion fell to 6.4%. In the same period, the number of persons who worked for more than one employer (charwomen) increased from 16.5% to 26.5%.¹³

There is debate about what aspects of the activity of charwomen present advantages over those of the full-time non-residents. Harris (2007), in establishing a comparison between female workers in the USA and those in Brazil, observed that the charwoman's contract presented a more "modern", "rational" and "capitalist" relation, in that she obtained a higher income, had a greater chance of autonomy in relation to the affective links with the employer, and better conditions for monitoring her working hours. Monticelli, considering the point of view of charwomen in the Curitiba Metropolitan Region, observed that these increase the possibilities of consumption, highlighting as fundamental their "greater autonomy and selectivity in their work relations, allowing them to say 'No' to diverse aspects they consider abusive" (2013, p. 139). Fraga (2013), without denying that these elements represents significant gains, deemed it important to maintain caution regarding some questions that still fragilise this activity. He indicated that the full-time workers were predominantly white, older and had a better educational level. In terms of legal protection, the housecleaners bore the costs of being self-employed, without guarantees in relation to illness, remunerated breaks/holidays/leisure etc. and examination of the national reality as a whole reveals that charwomen earn more, but when focusing on metropolitan regions, it is verified that their incomes are lower (FRAGA, 2013; IPEA, 2009; DIEESE, 2006).

Coupled to the increase in the number of charwomen, the higher age bracket appears significant in domestic work as a whole. Between 1992 and 2008, the number of young (10-29) occupied in domestic work decreased from 57.4% to 22.9% of the total number of female workers. In the age range 30-60 or older, there was an increase from 42.6% to 68%.

What we have observed is that there exist other types of remunerated work that women are entering, and the participation rate is approaching that of domestic service. In general, these are young women with higher levels of schooling who have found work space in these sectors. In turn, the population of domestic workers, whether charwomen or polyvalent full-time employees, has aged, which may be an indication that the younger are finding better employment opportunities, at least in terms of recognition, given that the salary gaps are not so great, and fulfilment of the legal norms is also less common in these other sectors (BRITES, 2013).

MIGRATIONS, TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES AND GLOBAL CARE CHAINS

Other scenarios of domestic work have become outstanding in the last 30 years: international migrations of women (mostly Latin Americans,

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Since 2002, the Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios - PNAD [National Research by Household Sample] failed to make an internal differentiation of the paid domestic service workers, it being impossible to distinguish charwomen from other types of employment link, such as chambermaid, caretaker etc. Faced with this difficulty, the researchers have opted for identification of domestic workers as those who work full-time for one employer and those who work for more than one, on a daily basis (FRAGA, 2013).

Caribbeans, Asians and East Europeans) to meet the demand in the domestic work market, especially in Europe and the USA.

Domestic work and migration are phenomena that have coexisted for a long time. Many domestic workers have established a bridge between their local communities and the urban centres, as being employed in a home at least guarantees accommodation – the first step in establishing a migratory network (ASSIS, 2007).

Nowadays, the migratory phenomenon associated to domestic work follows international routes. In terms of Latin America, prior to the 1990s, the migratory flows to Europe and the USA were male. In the 1960s, they were related to exile from military dictatorships. In the 80s, there were many middle class persons fleeing from economic crises, including hyperinflation, in the Latin American countries. At the end of the 80s, Gil Araújo and Pedone (2008) drew attention to the fact that migration to Europe and the USA began to have a higher female contingent with intense engagement in the domestic and care work market (SALES, 1998; FLEISCHER, 2002). Curtis and Pacecca (2010), among others, have mentioned intracontinental migrations of Bolivians, Peruvians and Paraguayans to the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. In Europe, there are also internal migrations to fill less prestigious job vacancies, such as the recruitment of Portuguese and Hispanic (besides Philippine) women by English cleaning firms (COX, 1999). In Brazil, there has been little study of the migration of female workers within the Latin American continent. The exception is the study by Dutra (2012) about domestic workers coming from Peru to work in the capital, Brasilia.

Sandra Gil Araújo (2010), reflecting on the emigration of Latin American women to Spain, synthesised the phenomenon in the receiving countries involved in this process, recognising in the majority of the studies about the theme: ageing of the population, female participation in the labour market, greater qualification of female labour, new management of time worked in homes, decreased State support, and the social welfare regime modelled on that of the family. This context, marked by non-revision of the gender division of labour, has led to the externalisation of labour for reproductive tasks, exercised by foreign female workers. According to Gil Araújo (2010), the population of Latin emigrants to Spain has increased six times over the last few decades. In the USA, 46% of the women involved in the work of nannies, housecleaners and carers are foreigners, 35% of whom do not have American citizenship (BURNHAM; THEODORE, 2012). The studies about Brazilian female migration concentrate mainly on the USA with a focus on housecleaners (ASSIS, 1999; FLEISCHER, 2002).

The studies about immigration and domestic work give rise to quite intense discussions about immigration policy and the role

of the State in the reproduction of national projects in terms of race and ethnicity. Bridget Anderson (2010) contrasts the perspective of the studies of methodological nationalism with that of transnational communities, as the former naturalise the ideological projects of construction of a nation, society and State. The authoress, with regard to the UK, analyses the immigration policies concerning domestic work in order to stress how they reflect British notions and values. In the policy documents about immigration, Great Britain is portrayed as a place of great social justice, with a strong social fabric, sensitive to the needs of national workers, besides being a state that combats racism. His ideas-values can be perceived, according to Anderson (2010), as the “British way of being”.

In the United Kingdom, “domestic worker” is not a legalised labour category, nor is it a possible immigrant class. There are visas only for *au pair* student exchange or for resident domestic workers who accompany expatriates. However, a series of shifts in the immigration policies have flexibilised the range of restrictions and left grey areas, making it possible for definitions of *au pair* to be broadened in such a way that it has become difficult to distinguish the young person performing care tasks and someone involved in study abroad. Due to this, above all young women from overseas have incorporated care tasks for children, the aged and animals. Busch and Cox (2012) examined the growth in demand for domestic care work in the UK, and pointed out that particular skills are understood as inherent to certain nations of origin. For example, Colombian women were favourably regarded for industrial cleaning and commerce, but not considered sufficiently good to look after British children.

The researches on Latin American emigration to Europe or the USA have not avoided pointing out the impoverishment, fragility and vulnerability of the female foreigners (PÉREZ OROZCO, 2010). However, they have also insisted on the contexts of the immigration policies, as presented by Gil Araújo and Pedone:

The conditions of property, unemployment and overpopulation alone cannot generate emigration on a large scale; it is necessary to identify what are the new mechanisms that link the globalisation of production with international labour migration. Identifying these situations changes the focus of the precarious conditions in the countries of origin, and leads to an analysis of the processes that link the countries of destination and origin of the migration. (2008, p. 144)

Brazilian authors have pointed out another level to explain such movements, indicating the agencies and motivations of the

emigrants. They show that the processes of Brazilian female migration feature precariousness, insecurity and lack of legal protection. However, they recognise differences between the domestic worker employed in Brazil and one abroad. Fleischer (2002) highlights that many female Brazilians, who work as housecleaners in Boston, establish cleaning firms, contracting other immigrant women or act as agents, thereby earning higher incomes. The Brazilian women who work in Boston report positive aspects in their activities, such as: a feeling of greater autonomy, that they relate, not with employers, but with clients; despite the situation of illegality and not always mastering the language, they feel their work is recognised, and presume they are well remunerated, adopt new technologies and establish cleaning methods that they judge more suitable; they also value the intimacy shared with their American employers. Carpenedo and Nardi (2013), describing the experience of female Brazilian immigrants in France, showed that precariousness and vulnerability as transnational workers without documents were part of their lives and identities abroad. However, they observed that even so there were experiences of resistance and re-signification triggered by the “migratory event”. Overseas, they relinquish their identities as migrants without documents, and by this means they can rethink their migratory experience in terms of precariousness and lack of rights. In their groups of origin, they exalt their experiences, favour those who receive monetary assistance, and some even become entrepreneurs with the savings remitted from abroad.

These questions also bring to light the discussion about how externalisation mercantilization of the reproductive tasks are established, in general, with the transfer of part of the reproductive tasks to other women in less favourable situations. In the developed capitalist countries, women with better incomes and schooling pass on such tasks to foreign women, who, in turn, leave other women in their local communities performing the domestic work for their family groups. This international division of domestic work and care has been denominated global care chains, as it always manifests a transfer of reproductive tasks to someone who is in an inferior condition on the scale of domestic work (HOSCHILD, 2008; PÉREZ OROZCO, 2010).

It is in the wake of the discussions about the work of charwomen, migrations and care chains that the theme of affects has reappeared, repositioning old readings about the incongruence among affects, work and market. It is no longer being considered as the “shackles of subordination”, the affective relations are now taken as constitutive of the relations established in the reproductive tasks (HOSCHILD, 2008; ZELIZER, 2009; MONTICELLI, 2013). Domestic work involves relations between beings, and the reproduction of life is also an affective task. In a

review about the work, *Migration, domestic work and affect...*, by Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010a), Bernardino-Costa writes:

Besides covering pragmatic questions – better living conditions, higher salaries, punitive legislation for sexual, physical, psychological harassment etc., the political battle also involves the design of a decolonising project that overcomes the modern/colonial cultural formation and its social structure in the name of a “new humanism” [...]. Perhaps in this new humanism the affective work may be duly recognised, as well as lead to respect and universal recognition of all human beings. (2012, p. 457)

INSISTENT QUESTIONS

Although the literature about domestic work is not so vast, the issues addressed span innumerable fundamental aspects involved in the trade.

Domestic work is a phenomenon that lies at the intersection of various levels and degrees of inequality with such amplitude that whoever dedicates himself to understanding it, assumes, as a consequence, postures, if not engaged, at least indignant regarding the injustices that it propagates. This is one of the characteristics found in all the texts analysed. If this approach has been important to articulate social movements and public policies, or even aid the construction of new mentalities, one can, at times, run the risk of being excessively manichean, thus allowing to escape the necessary complexities to be analysed in order to unveil how the social injustices over the centuries have been perpetrated.

Thus, among the topics that may be encouraged in future study of domestic work, there would be incorporation of deeper analysis of the uncertain spaces, the contradictions, the dark areas, whether in the employer-employee interaction, in the motivation of the workers, or in the employer’s vision of the world. One example concerns the studies about international migrations that, without doubt, raises innumerable problems and deep feelings about the global division of women at work and ethnicity, but rarely brings to the surface the motivations of the migrants. Or when they adduce their justifications, they are interpreted within cultural frameworks distant from the universe of these women. In this manner, they end up constructing universalism in terms of the woman, motherhood, family – questions that were widely deconstructed by authoresses like Crenshaw (2002) and Kofes (2001). The actions of female workers, migrant or not, are generally considered as homogenising subalternity, in not knowing the resistance movements,

the tactics and symbolic creativity of the actors; they run the risk of not recognising the subalterns as subjects (BRITES, 2000).

Also worthy of greater stimulus would be studies about the provision and externalisation of the reproductive tasks, fundamental to articulating the universes of production and reproduction, besides bringing to the debate other actors (such as the State and the market) in the conciliation between the universe of the family and work. In this sense, scarce works, such as those by Marcondes (2012) and Devetter (2013), are still isolated to reveal how the dimensions of domestic work surpass the volitional and political universe of couples. Above all, Marcondes incorporates the subject in the discussions about the productive system and the policies that support it. The labour market, in its current configurations, incorporates both sexes, and often even children, but makes domestic work in the reproduction of social life invisible. As Dalla Costa (1972) suggested, disguised domestic work is a masked form of productive work and acquisition of surplus-value.

We know that the family transformations and the sensitivities that sustain them are the most significant vectors of change in the contemporary reality. The domestic workers' families, whether for good or bad, have been scrutinized, at least in Brazil, by the tradition of studies about low-income families (FONSECA, 1995; SARTI, 1989; DUARTE, 1986; FONSECA; RIZZINI, 2002, among others). However, there remains a fundamental gap in the research, namely the universe of the employers. Although much is spoken of it, an effort is still necessary to achieve a detailed picture, not only of the practices and values, but also of the socio-demographic characteristics of this segment.¹⁴

A great part of the studies insist on the incorporation of the woman into the labour market, but avoid placing men in the opposite direction, bringing them closer to sharing domestic tasks. Making a political space intimate has been the desired task since the second wave of feminism; breaking away from convenient truths is part of the opening of windows. The format of the family has changed beyond the configurations of the couple. It is also necessary to study the new family configurations and the generational issues. Furthermore, there is a need to research (and educate) the children and the young of the employer segment in terms of the intimacy policies, where, since early on, are naturalised separations between the clean and dirty, dignified and undignified work, the employer and the female employee.

Authors, like Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, have dedicated themselves to revealing the values of the employer world in the realities of Spain, Germany, England and Austria. In Argentina, a generation of sociologists and anthropologists have researched the employer universe in terms of hierarchical ideological planes and interlacing of the contractual world with the affective spaces (CANEVARO, 2009; PEREYRA,

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The outline of a research along these lines was presented in the seminar, *Que trabalho doméstico queremos para o Brasil do século XX?* [What domestic work do we want for Brazil in the 20th century?], by Lilian Marques, of the Dieese team. However, this work was not included in the final publication with the results of the seminar (MORI et al., 2011).

2013; GORBÁN, 2012; 2013). All these authors conduct qualitative analyses, and we know that the challenges to break the isolation to enter the intimate universes of the middle and upper strata of society are not few. Methodological discussions are necessary to stimulate our creativity and overcome these barriers.¹⁵

In Brazil, an important support for more effective public policies would be the conducting of quantitative research that would lay bare the socio-demographic characteristics of the employers. Who are they really? What is the composition of the domestic nucleus? What are the salary ranges? Schooling level? Family composition? Housing characteristics?

Finally, it seems essential to return to the beginning. The inequalities of domestic work can only be revealed through articulation of the understanding of paid and unpaid work. The concepts, interpretations and authors who provide analytical keys are still few. Mode of domestic production (Delphy), gender division of work (Hirata and Kergoat), uses of time (Ávila), production of differences (Kofes), global care chains (Orozco) are the analytical stuffing we count on to explain the relations established by domestic work. The post-colonial studies have encouraged us to seek chinks in the subalternity and counter-discourses; the international migrations redimension the perspectives and discourses about rights in terms of communities that go beyond the frontiers of State-nation; the crisis of care teaches us to relocate the reproductive tasks in the centre of existence; the questioning regarding provision and externalisation of the tasks broadens the notions about public and private. The contemporary challenges of reproduction in post-industrial societies broaden the circle of discussions and place domestic work as the central point to understand the work ontologically and epistemologically not only of the woman, as Solís (2009) would have it, but society as a whole.

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In this item, a dialogue with studies of the middle class strata in Brazil, provided by Gilberto Velho and his disciples, can bring innovative methodological perspectives to break down barriers that, without doubt, demands profound revision of the subjectivities of the researchers. Perhaps also useful are the researches by Capranzano (1985), who, as an anthropologist in South Africa, had to face social values and groups that were far from his political ideas and personal sympathies.

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