

**Brazilian Women in the International Division of Reproductive Work:  
Constructing Subjectivities**

**By**

**Manoela Carpenedo**

**Submitted to**

**Central European University**

**Department of Gender Studies**

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies*

**First Supervisor**

**Prof. Francisca De Haan**

**Second Supervisor**

**Prof. Liamar Duran Almarza**

**Budapest, Hungary**

**2011**

## **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this work for all my informants, for their strength for their grace.

I gratefully acknowledge my supervisors: Francisca de Haan and Liamar Duran Almarza (for the intense support and critical perspectives).

I am very grateful to the GEMMA Program for this unique opportunity of personal and professional growth.

To my feminist friends, for our struggle, for our diversity: Arpita Das, Ana Castro, Ana García, Barbara Mazzotti, Milica Mínic , Svitlana Shymko and Zach Rivers

## Abstract

This study aims to comprehend how Brazilian transnational domestic workers are subjectivated through migration, gender and reproductive work. Through Foucault's argumentation on the production of subjectivities, this research analyzes the effects of the migratory *événement* in the life of ten Brazilian women working in the Parisian reproductive sector. An historical approach was introduced in order to enhance the understanding of the status and subjectivities of transnational domestic workers. As the findings suggest, the migratory *événement* can be characterized by a multifaceted set of experiences and elaborations that respond not only to oppressive and an exploitative regimes but also provide domestic workers, to some extent, spaces of resistance, which enable them to recreate their lives through migration in an empowering and emancipatory way. On the one hand, Brazilian migrant domestic workers experience subordination and exploitation within their labor lives in Paris. Their undocumented status, lack of rights, informal labor contracts, restricted job opportunities and unequal relationships between employer and employee contribute to their hardship, subordination and sub-human status. On the other hand, despite their precarious situations, migrant domestic workers are able to reinvent themselves through a set of resistance strategies. This study stresses the importance of both their individual forms of resistance as well as their solidarity networks that enable the survival and coping of the migrant women. Firstly, they are able to reverse their diagram of subordination through migration and the thereby ceasing the reproduction of poverty. Secondly, the set of resistance strategies (creative solidarity and sisterhood) emerge as fundamental elements in their lives that are able to protect and defend these women within a foreign context. These supportive networks stress the agency of these women by promoting new social organization that clearly creates new "*esthétiques de l'existence*" equipped to confront the individualistic social mandate.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Domestic work .....	4
1.1 The invisible hand: reproductive work .....	4
1.2 The Care Crisis: Privatizing care.....	8
1.3 The current discourses about transnational domestic work.....	13
1.4 Doing Gender, Class and Ethnicity through domestic work .....	19
Chapter 2. Why Brazilian women? Brazil: historical specificities .....	23
2.1 The slavery past and servant figures in the Brazilian context (today and in the past).....	23
2.2 The colonial era in Brazil (1530-1808): a short overview of slave work.....	24
2.3 Reproductive work and slavery in Brazil.....	25
2.4 Migrant domestic work: the contemporary “free” slavery? .....	27
2.5 Brazil and its specificities .....	34
2.6. Social inequalities: a brief panorama in Brazil.....	34
2.7 A short overview of Brazilian political and economic changes in the last decades .....	37
2.8 The impact of structural adjustment policies on Brazilian women.....	42
2.9 Chapter’s conclusion .....	46
Chapter 3 Theoretical framework.....	47
3.1 The constitution of the self as a subject .....	49
3.2 Producing subjectivity through work.....	52
3.3 Migrant subjectivities .....	54
3.4 Migration as a rupture point in life trajectories .....	57
3.5 Methods .....	58
3.6 Exploring the Field .....	62
3.7 Informants’ general profile .....	64
Chapter 4. Domination.....	67
4.1 Non-documented workers: “I know where my place is in Paris”.....	67
4.2 Informal labor contracts and working regimes in Paris .....	74
4.3 Power relations between employers and employees.....	82
4.4 Emotions in the work.....	91
4.5 Chapter’s conclusion .....	95
Chapter 5 Reinvention, Re-articulations and Resistance .....	96
5.1 Servant subjectivities? Not only: Reversing subordination’s mandate.....	97
5.2 Changing mentalities through domestic and care work practices.....	105
5.3 Cultural Capital and migration .....	110
5.4 Being Brazilian woman abroad: particular resistance strategies. ....	116
5.5 Chapter’s conclusion .....	121
Conclusion .....	123
Appendix 1.....	127
Appendix 2.....	130
Bibliography.....	132

## Introduction

This research is a result of multifaceted experiences. It is about reinvented subjectivities, it is about visibility, it is about resistance. For me, it is a great pleasure to share these intense and beautiful stories which have been inhabiting my own subjectivity throughout this research process. These stories are from particular women. They are Brazilians like me. They have dreams, like you, like me. They have strength and grace. Actually, they are heroines within this oppressive and normalized context in which we live. This study is about them. It is about transnational domestic workers who are inhabiting and working in a global city. They are almost undetectable, almost invisible; however they are there, reinventing themselves, recreating new ways of being/existing. The main ethical aim of this work is to give them voice, to give them space, to transmit and to proliferate not only their hardships or/and desolations, but to show their creativity, their strategies, their beauty.

This study focuses on the effects of the production of subjectivity in Brazilian transnational domestic workers who live in Paris. In this research, I would like to explore the way that migration and domestic work impact the way that Brazilian migrant reproductive workers are subjectivated. With this aim in mind, I will demonstrate how these women are able to negotiate their identities and their subjectivities through the set of rules existing within a normalizing society. Therefore, I will investigate the production of subjectivity from this specific group by focusing on the interconnections between work, migration and gender.

Starting from the Foucauldian (1997) argument that the constitution of subjectivity is a result of power effects arranged by power/knowledge structures (domination) and through the individual creation of certain points of resistance, I aim to explore how transnational domestic work can re/construct for Brazilian women a specific *rapport à soi*<sup>1</sup>, which is able to re/articulate the complex and interrelated dimensions of domination/resistance, exploitation/emancipation. Through this

---

<sup>1</sup> In English “Care of the self” It is the self reflexive ethical activity by which we create ourselves as subjects.

framework I developed two main hypotheses. The first one is that the migratory experience for transnational domestic workers can be seen as an extension and/or reproduction of oppressive and exploitative regimes, which organize our normalizing society as such. In this sense, I would like to demonstrate through this study how (in part informal and implicit) rules concerning working regimes, ethnicity, gender and nationality contribute to a set of specific rules that operate in order to subject and coerce transnational domestic workers. The second hypothesis of this study is that these women - even though they live within an oppressive and exploitative context- can reinvent themselves and create new *esthétiques de l'existence*<sup>2</sup>, by producing a set of resistance strategies and rules, that are able to confront existing domination. The negotiation between these two spheres will mediate and conciliate their subjective identities abroad and in their native country.

In the first chapter of this study, I will introduce the current feminist literature on migrant domestic work with the main aim to integrate this present study within these emerging discussions. I will also discuss the scope of my research. First of all, I will define the concept of reproductive work by addressing the geopolitical inequalities caused by the international division of domestic work. Through a critical approach, I will analyze the way that care and domestic work became important commodities within in our global and interconnected economy, by stressing its internal logics based on racism and sexism.

In the second chapter, I will highlight relevant aspects concerning the historical, economic, social and political contexts that surround Brazilian women. For this, I will briefly introduce historical events and discourses that were able to influence Brazilian women's subjectivities such as the history of slavery, the figures of servants in colonial Brazil, the economic and political changes in Brazil during the last fifty years, and the impact of the macro economic packages imposed by the World Bank in Third World countries. Through this historical review I would like to track some existing specificities regarding Brazilian women.

---

<sup>2</sup> Judith Revel (2009 p.44)

The third chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework that I will use in this study. First of all, I will situate my research question within the Foucauldian theoretical framework that analyses the constitution of the self as a subject. Secondly, I will demonstrate how work itself within our normalizing society emerges as an important component able to produce specific modes of subjectification. Thirdly, I will discuss the interesting view on migration studies proposed by Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996), who proposes an integrated perspective that interconnects micro and macro approaches to study the effect of migration on women's subjectivity. Finally, I will address the importance of a focus on life histories for understanding the particular and unique effects of migratory processes on Brazilian migrant women. Using this approach I aim to elaborate a multifaceted view able to include the subjective effects promoted by migration on the women whom I interviewed.

In the fourth chapter, I will demonstrate how my informants experienced oppression, subordination and exploitation in their daily labor life as domestic workers in Paris. In this sense, I will explore the way by which the power relations based on domination and subordination are integrated in the daily life of Brazilian domestic workers within the European context.

In the fifth chapter, I would like to demonstrate the way that these women are able to reinvent themselves through the migratory event, producing an *esthétique de l'existence* that is not only connected to domination and oppression, but also to reinvention and resistance. For this, I will analyze how the migratory event was able to stop the reproduction of poverty in their lives, producing in the same way empowering and emancipatory outcomes. Moreover, I will also stress how solidarity networks inventively reshaped their subjectivities by introducing new forms of living and existing within the normalizing society.

Finally, in the last chapter I will draw some conclusions and address further commentaries.

## **Chapter 1: Domestic work**

This chapter will discuss the current discourses on domestic work. In the first section, I will introduce the most important characteristics and the importance of reproductive work in our social organization. Secondly, I will explore the commodification of domestic and care work in our contemporary world. In the third section, I will focus on the current discourses about transnational domestic work. I will connect these discussions by demonstrating the relevance of this research. Finally, I will argue why transnational domestic work can not be seen as a simple job, but is work through which gender, race, class and nationality are produced.

### **1.1 The invisible hand: reproductive work**

The first issue to discuss is the meaning of reproductive work. According to Johanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett (1991), reproductive work involves the set of tasks performed within the private sphere, which have the aim of sustaining the productive work executed in the public sphere. So, all the domestic tasks related to the reproduction of the “labor force” can be considered as being reproductive work; tasks such as cleaning the private space, cooking meals, taking care of clothing, creating a hygienic and salubrious environment, etc. In addition, reproductive work also includes the care of the elderly and youth, the socialization of children and the maintenance of social ties in the family (Brenner Laslett, 1991 p.34).

Magdalena Días Garfinkel (2008 p.73) states that this important social and economic facet of the reproductive work is indispensable to the social structure, since this work is a central element of assuring the reproduction and the growth of the population. In this sense, the care (social care) can not be considered as being only a micro-social activity performed within the private sphere, but also as a relational activity that has a macro dimension by



interconnecting the family, the state and the market (Mary Daly & Jane Lewis, 1998, 2000). Therefore, reproductive work plays a crucial social role, as it is able to sustain the reproduction of the labor force necessary for the economy. Moreover, it is also a fundamental activity regarding the reproduction of the population. Cristina Carrasco (2001 p.7) points out that the capitalistic mode of production literally exploits the familial/domestic sphere, since the capitalist model is premised upon accomplishing all the tasks related to the reproduction of the labor force within the private sphere for free. Thus, care and domestic work are configured as being “private” problems that each subject or family has to solve individually with its own resources. Reproductive work thus constitutes an important facet of our economic and social system.

Reproductive work not only ensures the daily reproduction of the labor force, but also it is through this work that new individuals are educated and socialized to participate as productive laborers in the work market. Therefore, reproductive work produces human capital - through care, socialization and education - which is so important to the global economy. According to Cristina Carrasco (2001 p.7), the magnitude and the responsibility of reproductive work can be seen as an “invisible hand”, even more powerful than the one proposed by Adam Smith, since it is through the reproductive work that daily life is organized, thereby allowing the world to keep on working.

Despite the evident relevance of reproductive work in our contemporary world, we see that care and domestic work have a political, societal and economic invisibility in our society. Reproductive work is often not considered “proper” work, as its final products seem to be “immaterial”. The notion of reproductive work as being a kind of unproductive work is widespread, since it is frequently not recognized as being an economic activity. For instance, it does not enter in the registries of production and/or state’s books (GDP)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, as Ann Crittenden (2002 p.76) argues, the economic order itself takes advantages of the devalued status

---

<sup>3</sup> Gross domestic product

of domestic work by affirming its unproductive character. In doing so, it can avoid paying for this work: as it does not “officially” exist, it does not deserve to be paid - or only deserves to be low-paid, in the specific case of domestic work force. In addition, there is almost no social recognition for this kind of labor. The function and the location of the work performed in privacy and isolation contribute to this low social recognition. In this context, it is important to point out that domestic and care work are historically performed by vulnerable and oppressed groups and, it is therefore not a coincidence that reproductive work is done mostly by women (Hannah Arendt, 1998). Ann Crittenden (2002) further stresses the central role played by women in caring for children and in producing the kind of human capital that the modern industrial economy needs. So, on the one hand, there is the fundamental economic contribution of reproductive work by raising individuals able to be integrated into the society, both economically and emotionally. On the other hand, there is the complete lack of social and financial acknowledgment regarding this crucial economic activity.

Reproductive work has historically been naturalized as “women’s work”. The sexual division of work imposed specific occupations and labor rules appropriate for men and women. Helena Hirata (2007) states that, generally speaking within the labor context, this division reproduces gender hierarchies based on liberal and patriarchal standards. So that men would occupy more socially and economically prestigious work positions (in the public sphere), while women would be incorporated in second-class jobs normally connected to social and care abilities (in the private sphere). Reproductive work would be conferred on women not only because of its social and economic undervaluation, but also because of the symbolic gendered attributions that care and domestic tasks have historically and socially acquired.

The burden of domestic work is naturalized as being women’s social function. Dawn Lyon (2006) states that women have traditionally been thought to have this innate capacity for caring and maintaining the private space. She argues that in spite of the overcoming of biological and essentialist conceptions on the matter, we can still see persistent narratives that

echo these orientations, as every day experiences keep on stressing women's role in care and domestic chores. According to Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007), care and domestic work are still key issues in organizing gender relations able to produce an unequal distribution of domestic tasks within the family. Unfortunately, women's economic emancipation and participation in the public and productive sphere did not redefine social roles in the private sphere, so that women are still the primary care-givers in the family. This fact is related to the specific gendered cultural aspects of reproductive work, since it has been understood as a labor of love and as women's moral duty and obligation.

Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich (2003) argue that men are generally resistant to assuming domestic chores within the household. Despite the evident necessity caused by women's incorporation in the productive sphere, men still insufficiently engage with care and domestic tasks. This fact produces a clear tension between care, reproducing the population and the labor force and the growing requirements of the labor market. According to Cristina Carrasco (2001), the impact of the changes of productive work<sup>4</sup> has had devastating consequences for working women, since this new working regime demands flexibility, mobility and availability. These new demands created a clear conflict in the social and economic system; on the one hand, we have the new requirements of the capitalistic labor market, which seeks benefits (profit) through flexible and demanding work, and on the other hand, we have the maintenance and care of human life.

The centrality of the capitalistic production as the main economic goal, the dependence on salaries for an important part of the population and the culture of masculine work contributed to obscure the relevance of the process of social and human sustainability. These processes contributed to hiding the connections and interdependencies that maintain the capitalist production.<sup>5</sup> (Cristina Carrasco, 2001 p.3)

---

<sup>4</sup> The restructuration of the global capitalism gives rise to a set of new requirements such as long work journeys, flexibility, mobility and an intense dedication.

<sup>5</sup> Author's free translation (spanish-english)

A real reassignment of gender roles did not take place in the private sphere. Magdalena Días Garfinkel (2008 p.77) suggests that this situation promoted a redistribution of domestic tasks among women on the basis of social class and nationality variables. As Dawn Lyon (2006) claims, the labor of caring in contemporary societies is marked by gender, class and, in the recent decades, by ethnicity and nationality as well.

In this research my starting point is that reproductive work, i.e. care and domestic labor, is an economic activity indispensable for the maintenance of the economic order and the reproduction of the population. Therefore, reproductive work promotes well being and goods, whether it is recognized or not as such by individuals or institutions and regardless of whether it is paid or unpaid, emotional or physical.

## **1.2The Care Crisis: Privatizing care**

The emerging tension between reproductive work and the new economic demands gave rise to a global care crisis. According to Bridget Anderson (2000 p.107) this situation has been rising especially in Europe as the decline of the welfare state, the rise in the ratio of older to younger people, the feminization of the work force and the decline of the extended familial contributed to this growing demand for domestic workers.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) suggests that the work organization in postindustrial economies has radically changed old modes of production (networks, flows), products (information, communication, creativity, affect) and condition of work in Western countries (informality, flexibility, mobility, precariousness). This transformation was followed by a growing necessity to recruit migrant workers in order to fill in the low strata of these new service occupations created in the emerging flexible and informal sectors of the economy. According to Rhacel Parrenas (2001) the globalization of the market has extended the politics of reproductive work to an international level. As a result, we have what the author calls an

international division of labor within the reproductive sector. The massive migration of Third World women and women from former state socialist countries to Western countries is an additional dimension contributing to the international division of reproductive work.

Supporting this view, Saskia Sassen (2003 p.472) claims that the new dynamics of globalization drastically changed the history of migration and contributed to the exploitation of Third World workers. According to her, there are two main sets of intertwined processes that contributed to the rise of these new migration dynamics. On the one hand, we have the emergence of so-called global cities. On the other hand, we have the rise of new global survival circuits in response to the misery and unemployment in Third World countries.

Saskia Sassen (2003) states that global cities accrued, during the last decades, almost all global economic key functions, decisions and resources. In this sense, these indispensable places for the world economy create an intense demand for low-paid service workers. The author claims that these global cities situated in well developed countries have to work like clockwork, which is why a massive demand of low-paid service, including care, cleaning services and maintenance emerged. This process was also propelled by large incorporation of professional working women into a highly competitive labor market that characteristically features long work hours and intense engagement. According to Nicola Yeates (2005) the increasing demand for domestic workers in Western countries is a result of a combination of socio-demographic factors, labor market and the decline of welfare state's protection in Western countries. The aging of the population in western countries, the feminization of the labor force, the high requirements concerning time and flexibility of women's employment, and the deterioration of public care services in the West contributed to making it difficult for female family members to accomplish the so assigned reproductive work in the private sphere. Moreover, we also have to highlight as a first cause of these migratory processes that men have not taken up their share of the unpaid work despite though the massive incorporation of women in the public sphere.

Contributing to this circuit, we have Third World women, who have been systematically hit by poverty during the last decades. In fact, because of the precarious economic situation in their home countries, they are increasingly ready to enter the migratory circuit in order to protect and support their subsistence and the subsistence of their families by sending valuable remittances. In this sense, it is possible to see the way by which the migration process emerges for these women as a risky, but efficient survival strategy able to protect their families and to help them construct a better future. Therefore, we have to understand these migratory processes as an important part of an international chain of mutual needs created by the new exigencies of the (unequal) development process and the unequal share of domestic and care tasks between women and men within the household.

In this context, we see the way by which reproductive work (including care and domestic tasks) could emerge as commodities in the globalized market. Dawn Lyon (2006 p.212) argues that these new circuits inaugurate a de-familialization of care, as the set of reproductive labor nowadays has become a commodity. So, reproductive activities become managed in parts, such as care, cleaning and cooking services, which have a temporal and monetary value in the market. In this sense, the time of the care and domestic work has specific costs: the labor itself is time-organized. As Saskia Sassen (2008) points out, reproductive labor has long been a commodity purchased by the privileged classes. Therefore, we can also understand this international division of reproductive work as being a global expansion of the old modes of servitude (as will be further discussed in the second chapter).

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) suggests that the postcolonial conjuncture also contributed to the establishment of these “new working regimes of servitude” in Western European countries. According to her, a postcolonial framework is a tool in understanding the technologies of representation and the logics of racism that are implicitly established through the organization of the transnational reproductive market:

The uneven relationship between former European colonial powers and their former colonies remains, even though this relationship has been modified by struggles and processes of independence and national liberation. This process of political independence, coupled with cultural and economic dependence, characterized the “post-independence” societies of former colonized countries. This continuation of colonial rule after political independence has been characterized as postcolonial. (Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2007 p.61)

For Helma Lutz (1997 p.101) the fact of hiring a domestic worker means reinforcing the patriarchal structures within the household. She argues that the sexual division of labor remains unquestioned and, even for women pursuing a career the family organization did not change “and any guilt-over exploitation [of another woman] is assuaged by the knowledge that a less fortunate woman is being provided with work” (Helma Lutz, 1997 p.102). It is important to stress the unchanged dynamics that still organize this international transfer of care-taking and domestic tasks promoted by migration circuits. The feminized nature of this international migration indicates that the domestic division of labor between men and women remains unchanged. So, the labor of one group of women was simply substituted with the labor force of less privileged women from Third World (and Second World) countries. In this sense, we can argue that this international division of reproductive work has as its base patriarchal relations that were combined with macro-structural forces that did not change the norm of the sexual division of labor.

As Rhacel Parrenas (2001 p.63) argues, this international transfer of reproductive work inaugurates a new social, political and economic relationship between women and the global market. We can assume that this clear division of labor based on the international transfer of reproductive work constitutes a structural relationship of inequality based on class, gender and citizenship. In order to capture other nuances of this complex dynamics of power, it is important to introduce the concept of the global care chain. The concept of the global care chain was coined by Arlie Hochschild (2000) in order to explain the personal connection between people and reproductive work across the world. These global care chains are

constituted basically by women from different places so that the sexual division of work is permanently reproduced in a global level.

Nicola Yeates (2009) explains the internal logic of this chain. First of all, we have women with independent children in developed countries that have paid employment and can not accomplish all the reproductive responsibilities of the “second shift”. These Western well educated women find a solution for this burden by purchasing in the market reproductive services from other women. Secondly, we have migrant women from poor countries searching desperately for a living, so they enter in this chain by accomplishing the reproductive work that these first women are unable to do. Frequently, these migrant women have their own domestic duties in their home countries; having dependent children or in the case of this research, dependent parents as well. Due to their migration, these women will need help from another woman to provide domestic and care services for their families. These other women can be members of the migrant women’s family or a poorer woman who invariably needs to work. Nicola Yeates (2009) states:

As we go ‘down’ the chain the value ascribed to the labor decreases and often becomes unpaid at the end of the chain. Thus at the end of the chain an older daughter often substitutes for her mother in providing unpaid care for her younger siblings. Many care chains start in poor countries and end in rich ones. Finally, GCCs vary in terms of number of links and their geographical spread. (p.40)

It is clear how social reproductive work plays a very important role in the new global dynamics of development and migration. However, in spite of these elucidations that the care chain concept provides us with, not all domestic migrant women fall into these categories. There is a need to diversify the application of this concept, as not all female migrants are mothers sending remittances to pay care and domestic services for their dependents. For instance, in this study we also have the example of *au pairs* and students who work in the European reproductive sector in order to finance their studies abroad. Despite occupying the



same metier as other migrant domestic workers, au pairs and students in general have other motivations and goals regarding the migratory experience. Therefore, as Nicola Yeates (2005) argues, we must recognize diverse contexts and situations that push migrant women to the European reproductive market.

Rhacel Parrenas (2001) claims that the image of the impoverished and miserable women who migrate to Europe in order to ensure the economic survival of their families must be reviewed, since many domestic migrant workers belong to middle-class families, have a high-level education and were in professional occupations before their emigration. In this context, migration emerges as a way to continue to maintain a middle-class status by earning higher salaries abroad. This study partially corroborates with these premises, as a considerable part of my interviewees were engaged in the European domestic sector in order to improve their social status by paying for higher education for their children or by saving money to invest in their own private business in Brazil.

### **1.3 The current discourses about transnational domestic work**

In this section, I aim to establish some initial notions about transnational domestic and care work by focusing on some key assumptions expressed in the current literature about the topic. I will focus on the production of subjectivity promoted by these emerging transnational working regimes in Europe.

As the current feminist literature on the matter suggests, this specific occupation produces gendered and racialized modes of subjectivation. These literatures argue that on the one hand, transnational domestic work produces subjectivities which are marked by servitude, oppression, normalization and domination. On the other hand, I can also argue that through domestic work these women can potentially reverse their subaltern status by changing power dynamics in a very significant way (Elisabetta Zontini 2004, Arlie Hochschild, 2000). Through

their work they might potentially alter their social class and the previously established gender hierarchies in their homeland (Nicola Yeates, 2005). In addition, the domestic workers whom I interviewed developed through this work experience different skills and thereby cultural capital that -in some cases- was transmitted to their children.

According to the literature on migration and transnational domestic work, Western private households emerge in the global economy as a good option for undocumented migrant women to make a living. Dawn Lyon (2006) claims that care and the domestic work in Western private households is the largest employment sector for migrant women entering in the European Community. According to Helma Lutz (2004), the life of an undocumented worker is a twilight zone. In fact, often this zone does not only mean clandestinity, but also informal labor contracts that usually disassociate these women from workers' social security rights. As the author argues, this combination of factors will culminate in the loss of citizenship status and frequently the loss of human rights as well. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) states that the isolation and the privacy of western households, the non-regularized status in the country and informal labor contract, produce powerful structures of exploitation and domination for migrant domestic workers. Therefore, according to the existing literature, we might assume that the migration process can produce negative consequences and unconstructive labor experiences for Third World women since the European care market regularly imposes a set of job opportunities characterized by low-paid wages, vulnerability and exploitation. These elements combined produce an important impact on women's subjectivity, since it can intensify existing subordination as well as subjecting women to new forms of control and domination.

Contributing to these oppressing structures, we have the problem of the regulation of resident permits that hinders migrant women is acquiring a legal status in EU countries. In addition, we also have the issue of the poor regulation of domestic labor within the European context, as this kind of work is normally performed through informal labor contracts. A lack of regulation and control characterizes domestic service in Europe and this fact reinforces migrant

women's illegal and invisible status. The reproductive work performed by non EU-immigrants is frequently precarious, transitory, unstable, and dependent on the employer's will. Moreover, these women live/work in private households (outside the public sphere), in a *metier* considered as being "not productive" and in this sense invisible. The private space location and the naturalization of a feminine kind of labor contribute to this invisibility. Because of the informality of their contracts, they become at the same time invisible to the state.

Nonetheless, Bridget Anderson (2000 p.110) claims that European states are the main actors profiting from this kind of undocumented labor. The receiving state clearly profits from migrant workers firstly because the labor power is produced without any charge from the receiving state. Indeed most migrant workers return to their home-countries, saving in this sense any expenses associated with pensions. Secondly, generally speaking, domestic workers do not bring their children with them, so the state does not spend any money on their health or education. Moreover, immigrants, even if they do not pay taxes on social provisions, do pay all indirect taxes on food, rent, clothes, etc. Taking all these elements into consideration, we can see that the receiving states do take advantage of these migrant circuits since migrant workers (as labor force), besides producing welfare and goods for the populations, do not compromise state's coffers. Therefore, it is possible to understand why regulations and specific policies for migrant population are so insignificant (and in some cases, non-existent) in EU countries: illegal migrant labor force is great business. The state neither needs to invest in public care and social policies - as the care becomes a private problem- nor in regularizing immigrant status.

According to Bridget Anderson (2000) the informal labor contract makes transnational domestic workers vulnerable by exploring them, exploitation and inhumane work conditions. In addition, domestic migrant workers are frequently in a situation of irregularity (having no documents/residence permit ), this precarity plays an important role as their fear of deportation contributes to their acceptance of poor treatment and abuses within the labor context. Nicola Yeates (2005) states that the recognition of fundamental rights of immigrants is linked to

immigrant legal status and their status as workers. The lack of documents and informal contract promotes a quasi-citizenship. The right to decent work and an acceptable income is not necessarily applicable to the migrant domestic workers' case, as they are normally largely exploited and exposed to all kind of subjugations. Domestic workers are forced into a situation where they are highly dependent on the good-will and the mercy of their employers.

Reflecting these hierarchies, according to Linda Bosniak (2009 p.137) the system of transnational care work reflects a systemic inequality by which Western women take more benefits than Third World domestic workers. The author states that the citizenship of a group of women - western women who are incorporated into productive labor - could be only acquired at the expense of the citizenship of their Third World domestic workers who perform their vital domestic work. Pei-Chia Lan (2006) highlights this unequal relationship by stressing the asymmetrical power relations between women established by these labor interactions. The author states that it is not a bond of sisterhood that characterizes the relationship between employers (white Western women) and employees (Third World women), but a bond of exploitation.

The European domestic market is anchored in a broader system/structure of geopolitical subordination. In this sense, we can understand how a hierarchy of individuals can be established based not only on an oppressive gender regime but also on racial and geographical subordination. Therefore, as Bridget Anderson (2000) and Saskia Sassen (2000) suggest, Third World women form in our contemporary social organization the new paradigm of "serving classes": the servant now has the face of a Third World migrant. As a result, vulnerability, precariousness and a lack of citizenship status characterizes the European care market for migrant domestic workers. So, it is possible to see how domination and exploitation are currently present in the daily life of migrant domestic workers.

In spite of this hard reality, we also have to explore how resistance and empowerment can be promoted even in this context of significant oppression. According to Nicola Yaetes

(2006), migrant domestic workers can not be seen only as an invisible and disempowered class of workers serving the new global economic model, but are also important actors who have access to job opportunities in a growing market field.

For instance, Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich (2003) argue that the migratory process can potentially empower migrant domestic workers, who are normally hit by poverty, violence and/or lack of opportunities in their home-countries, since transnational work produces not only economic benefits, but also promotes independence as well as opportunities to explore a different context, a different culture that as I argue it might produce cultural and social capital for these women. In addition, as Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996) suggests, the experience of international migration for migrant women has the potential, even if limited, for autonomy and empowerment. The author states that the migratory opportunity can also reorder, to some extent social and gender and other social hierarchies.

Reflecting this idea, Elisabetta Zontini (2004 p.1125) believes that a new approach is needed in order to synthesize the positive elements of migrant domestic workers' experiences. There is a need to overcome the model that establishes migrants as passive victims, and to highlight that migrant domestic workers are important social actors. Therefore, we should see migrant domestic workers as active political subjects by analyzing and considering "the social, political and economic power structures, at the national and international level, which limit and influence their actions" (Elisabetta Zontini, 2004 p.1123). The author claims that immigrant women are intensively engaged in negotiating their citizenship status and struggling to secure a space for themselves within the labor context. In this sense, migrant domestic workers do not accept passively the subordinate status, rather than they are forging practices of "everyday- life citizenship". (Elisabetta Zontini, 2004 p.1123).

Furthermore, domestic workers in our neoliberal and globalized order can no longer be considered as only "domestic helpers" or "unskilled labor force". As Abigail Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis (1997 p.116) suggest, the requirements in the transnational care market are high, as

domestic workers have to be able to speak a foreign language and to have a proper education in care and organizing household work. Therefore, the stereotypes that link third world women to unskilled kind of labor force must be reviewed. Elisabetta Zontini (2008 p.17) persuasively states that migrant women are undoubtedly oppressed by their labor conditions and their undocumented status; however she also stresses that this focus on domination might obscure these women's agency and their personal stories and life trajectories: "By focusing exclusively on their oppression we do not explain why they accept these situations and often act in ways that may seem irrational from the point of view of the receiving society" Elisabetta Zontini (2008 p.17).

Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996) stresses this double dimension that the migration process might produce for migrant women. In her specific study on gender and ethnicity and work in the lives of Jewish and Italian women in New York during the period 1870 to 1924, the author explores how domination and empowerment could be articulated in the lives of migrant women marked by racial, religious and class issues. According to the author migrant women (re) articulate potentially empowerment with coercive elements within in the receiving country context.

Reflecting these ideas, my sample indicates that migrant domestic work aims are connected to first; to earn a higher income - for supporting their families, paying a private school or college for their children and for starting a private business in Brazil; second, to study and to have the opportunity to live in a different context marked by new cultural possibilities; finally, to enjoy economic independence. In this context it also important to point out the increase of their autonomy and prestige within their home communities due to the wages they earn abroad and the cultural capital acquired in a foreign context.

Having all these elements in mind, we can clearly see the need of a perspective able to reveal the distinct nuances of this transnational experience. Inspired by this perspective proposed by Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996), I aim to explore in this investigation the way that

these two dimensions domination/resistance, exploitation/empowerment can be (re) negotiated in the context of Brazilian migrant women's subjectivity.

#### **1.4 Doing Gender, Class and Ethnicity through domestic work**

Besides all the elements noted above, it is also important to highlight the hidden dimension that reproductive work has in our social regime. The reproductive work is strictly connected to gender norms which give us social intelligibility within the social context. Contributing to this view we have Joan Scott's (1986) elaboration of the gender concept:

Gender becomes a way of denoting 'cultural constructions'—the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men. It is a way of referring to the exclusively social origins of the subjective identities of men and women. Gender is, in this definition, a social category imposed on a sexed body. (p.32)

As the author suggests gender as an imposed category works also as a normative construct that introduces and organizes power relations. Joan Scott (1986 p45) states: "Gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated." Gender is a category that strongly impacts the construction and the organization of power itself. Therefore, gender emerges as a normative rule that stipulates what and who can be recognized as intelligible within the social context (Judith Butler, 2006). Hence, domestic work socially emerges as an important component of what we can understand as being an adequate and intelligible feminine performance. So, this social mandate of performing domestic tasks connected to care and maintenance of the private space strongly impacts the way by which women produce their subjectivity according to the social rules established by the set of social norms.

In this context, the concept of intersectionality is able to help us understand other variables that strongly impact women's identities such as race, nationality, sexuality and social

class. Mary Hawkesworth (2006 p.207) argues that intersectionality emerged as an analytical tool reflecting feminist struggles to correct omissions and/or distortions concerning the non incorporation of these important power structures in their previous research. As the author points out, variables such as race, ethnicity, class and sexuality play an important role concerning hierarchies of difference. In this sense, the concept of intersectionality aims to reveal these hidden power games established in these interconnected forms of social oppression. Mary Hawkesworth (2006) claims that intersectionality dramatically changes the understanding about the “social constitution of subjectivity, patterns of desire, sexual practices, gendered performances, the organization of domestic activity, structures of formal and informal labor, the potent contradictions of globalization (...)” (p.212). Taking these elements into consideration, we can clearly see through an intersectional approach how politics has produced, in a normative way, gender and race, since through naturalized norms institutional power produces and reproduces gendered and racial divisions. In this context, it is important to stress that we can not separate one category from another, since all these variables are interconnected within the production of subjectivity and identity formation.

In my specific analysis of transnational reproductive workers we can clearly see the interrelation between these social markers. Along similar lines, Helma Lutz (2008) asserts that domestic work is not merely work but also a way of “doing gender,” of doing a specific kind of femininity, which is related to a specific social regime. Ann Crittenden (2002) suggests that domestic work has been naturalized in a way that it is not socially created as work, but a pure demonstration of love. Therefore, the intelligibility of woman in our cultural context implies her “vocation” in accomplishing care and domestic tasks.

This performative “equation” becomes more complex when we consider paid migrant domestic work. According to Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) gender is a controlling factor regarding the outflow of labor in a globalized economy, as gender shapes the economic divisions of labor and migration. Moreover, we also have normative assumptions of ethnicity



and nationality that also influences the organization of care and domestic market in Europe. These observations underline the relevance of the concept of intersectionality in the problematics raised by transnational domestic work. Not only gender organizes the structure of reproductive work, but also cultural assumptions of ethnicity and nationality that define who should care and perform domestic work. As I shown through my field research, migrant reproductive work not only produces gender, but ethnicity, class and nationality as well. Reinforcing my perceptions, Bridget Andersen (2000 p.2) states that domestic work is disproportionally performed by racialized groups. The author claims that this fact is to some extent connected to the servitude paradigm frequently produced through racialized premisses. She contends that domestic work, when it is paid, can not be conceived only as a set of tasks, but also is a social role that gives status to the employer. Bridget Andersen (2000) claims:

The domestic worker, whether cleaner, nanny or servant is fulfilling a role, and crucial to that role is her reproduction of the female employer's status (middle class, non labourer, clean) in contrast to herself (worker, degraded, dirty). (p.2)

Thus through migrant reproductive work emerges a racialized distinction between women, which promotes racist hierarchies between them. Helma Lutz (1997) clearly suggests that one of the outcomes of economic and globalized development is, in fact, the maintenance of a binary division in terms of racialized relations: the European vis-a-vis the "other" woman. On this specific issue Saskia Sassen (2008) claims: "The immigrant woman serving the white middle-class professional woman has replaced the traditional image of the black female servant serving the white master" (Saskia Sassen, 2008 p.481).

All these elements contribute to creating the idea that some women are more suitable for domestic work than others. Many stereotypes determinately confer abilities to certain nationalities. Specially, Latin American women are usually described as being "natural mothers" perfect for caretaking work, but another million of descriptions can be found. All of

them connect nationality and ethnicity to a specific work performance. Therefore, stereotypes based on skin color, nationality and religion are able to construct a hierarchy between women from different places, with some situated as more suitable for certain kind of work than others. This fact will inevitably influence migrant women's subjectivities, as they also will construct themselves and their labor trajectories within these gendered and ethnic norms in the receiving country.

## **Chapter 2. Why Brazilian women? Brazil: historical specificities**

In this chapter, I aim to establish the historical specificities that surround Brazilian women. For this, I subdivided this chapter in two sections, each dealing with a specific historical period. In the first section, I will explore how the legacy of slavery still influences the production of subjectivity in the domestic work regime. I will demonstrate how slavery and its ancient discourses are reproduced in the context of the transnational reproductive market. Subsequently, I will explore some historical facts that strongly impacted the Brazilian population during the last decades. I will demonstrate how economic crises, lack of work opportunities, and political changes affected Brazilian women's reality and necessitated migratory work in order to secure more stable lives.

### **2.1 The slavery past and servant figures in the Brazilian context (today and in the past)**

In this section, I aim to demonstrate how the “*slaverist*”<sup>6</sup> discourse is able to influence not only working regimes in the global economy, but also produces a specific kind of subjectivity which is connected to ancient modes of servitude.

First, I will explore through an historical approach some of the characteristics of the colonial era in Brazil that, from my point of view, still strongly influence the present domestic working regimes. Thus I would like to establish how the legacy of slavery could influence the current discourses about reproductive and domestic labor not only within the Brazilian context but also by expanding this lens to the Western society. I strongly believe that this historical review is essential in order to understand the production of subjectivity of contemporary Brazilian migrant domestic women, since only through this approach are we able to reveal how the patriarchal structures which founded the slaverist society in Brazil (Gilberto Freyre, 1956), have been - implicitly or explicitly -

---

<sup>6</sup> I will use this word in order to characterize the slavery system.

reedited by the new rules of global economy. Having this aim in mind, I will illustrate some similarities that make this comparison between slavery and the reproductive working regimes in our contemporary world possible.

## **2.2 The colonial era in Brazil (1530-1808): a short overview of slave work**

First of all, it is impossible to dissociate Brazilian history from slavery. Almost immediately after the “discovery” (1500) of what we refer to today as Brazilian territory emerged the figure of the slave that was first embodied by native indigenous inhabitants. What at first was characterized by a friendly *quid pro quo* between the first Portuguese explorers and native indigenous people, the latter who used to trade the valuable Brazilian wood (pau Brazil), gold and precious stones for all kind of gadgets such as mirrors, hooks and other kinds of materials, quickly gone away to very cruel kinds of subjugation and domination by the portuguese explorers over the native indigenous. At the beginning, Portuguese conquerors enslaved indigenous people in order to work in the exploration and extraction of valuable pau Brazil which was - during the 16th and 17th centuries-a real hit in Europe because of its red color. Later on the indigenous slaved labor force was also used for further exploration of mining and rubber, joining during 16th century the African slaves in the cultivation of monoculture production.

The slavery of African descendants started in Brazil in the middle of 16th century and was motivated by the expansion of the production of monoculture of sugar cane. The same labor force was used to farm coffee, and cacao plantation, during 17th century, as well as mining exploration during the 17th and the 18th century. The abolition of the slave labor force began in the imperial<sup>7</sup> era (1822-1889) with the sexagenarian law in 1885 and with the free

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1808 Brazil became the seat of the Portuguese Kingdom. This fact contributed to the formation of the Brazilian Imperial organization.

belly law in 1887 that were both very controversial. It was only in 1888 due to British pressure<sup>8</sup> for slavery abolition that abolition was official proclaimed through the *Auria* law which was signed by Princess Isabel.

### 2.3 Reproductive work and slavery in Brazil

According to Jacob Gorender (1980 p.456) and Sergio Buarque de Hollanda (1973 p. 23), the colonial and imperial period in Brazil was intensively characterized by the use of slave labor force to accomplish manual work in many different fields. Therefore, during this period any kind of work characterized by manual, physical activity was directly connected to race and ethnicity through the slavery system. The slaves, either indigenous or African descendants, embodied the duty of manual and hard work in a wide sense during the Brazilian colonial period. Hence, it is not a surprise that reproductive work fell into this category, as all chores related to the maintenance of the house and care of family members were done mainly by female slaves.

Jacob Gorender (1980 p.462) claims that from 1550 to 1888, the end of slavery, every domestic servant was a compulsory slave. Even the arrival of Portuguese servants - at the beginning of the colonization-, could not reformulate the naturalized slaved labor structure of domestic service. These free Portuguese servants quickly understood that this occupation was, in the Brazilian colonial context, socially considered a slave's work (Jacob Gorender, 1980 p.465). Free people simply avoided to perform reproductive tasks, since white and free people had a strong aversion to performing any manual work, as this kind of work was considered that of slaves.

Although domestic slaves were concentrated in urban spaces during the colonial and imperial period in Brazil, we could also find domestic servants in the rural areas. The number

---

<sup>8</sup> It was not based on humanitarian or humanistic principles but on economic reasons, since the British Empire wanted to expand their economic markets by pressuring colonies to end the slavery system. They could sell their goods for former slaves through the growing trade market.

of servants was considered determining aspect of a family's power and wealth: it indicated status and influence. Wealthy citizens had many slaves working in their household. According to Luis dos Santos Vilhehna (1969 p.127) a big house in a rural zone would often have sixty to seventy domestic slaves including adults and children. A "decent" family in Rio de Janeiro during the peak of slave's traffic would have a minimum of twelve domestic servants.

In spite of domestic work's status as "unproductive work" many "senhores"<sup>9</sup>, could take economic advantages of their domestic servants. A new commercial sector started to emerge in 1824, when renting or selling domestic servants became a very lucrative activity (Jacob Gorender, 1980 p.468). Charles Expilly (2000 p.134) claims that in 1826 we could see the rise of work agencies specializing in domestic slaves: the "alugados"<sup>10</sup>. Emília Da Costa (1998 p.228) argues that the "senhores" used to rent their female slaves to accomplish domestic tasks in other houses such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes (the very famous Brazilian figures of "the lavadeiras"<sup>11</sup>) wet nursing etc (...) in order to obtain profit trough their slave's work in the market. The master charged their prices per day or week, based on the slave's work capacity, intelligence and behavior. Sometimes, as Jacob Gorender (1980 p.452) argues, the masters, as proprietaries, used to obligate their female slaves to prostitute themselves. Modest families in Brazil could live in a comfortably by having three or four female slaves working as prostitutes in the town. As we can clearly see, the slavery order during Brazilian colonial era exploited not only women's work but also their milk and their bodies.

In spite of the intense exploitation and subordination suffered by female slaves, according to Jacob Gorender (1980) and Emília Da Costa (1998), we have to consider domestic slaves as belonging to the "aristocratic" class within the slavery organization. In this context, it is important to highlight that personal slaves, pages and mucamas (room maids), iáiás or mãe-

---

<sup>9</sup> Masters

<sup>10</sup> The "renteds"

<sup>11</sup> "washers"

preta<sup>12</sup> (wet nurses), were in the top of the slave's hierarchical organization. The most prestigious position was reserved for the wet nurses, since they played a very important emotional work within the colonial family by feeding the children and taking care of them. Moreover, they had an intensive contact with the family in general thereby creating in this sense strong emotional ties.

According to Gilberto Freyre (1956 p.231) the relationship between master and domestic slaves in Brazil can be considered as good, since these interactions were often bonded with "sweetness" when compared with other master/slave relationships in North America. The author affirms the slavery social organization in Brazil was based on a familial kind of patriarchal organization often characterized by benevolence in relation to the slaves. The author supports this characteristic through the high levels of miscegenation between different ethnicities of Brazilian population. I particularly do not agree<sup>13</sup> with this statement, considering that the "successful" Brazilian miscegenation could be the result of systematic rapes or/and forced prostitution of female slaves.

Having all these elements in mind, through this historical review, I would like to point out the relevance of the slavery legacy regarding Brazilian women's production of subjectivity in the present. I introduced this approach because many references on this specific kind of labor/living/existing contract (contrasting and comparing contemporary reproductive working regimes with slavery) appeared in a considerable number of narratives in my field work. Therefore, I strongly believe that is impossible to analyze the contemporary processes of subjectivation regarding Brazilian women that involves reproductive paid work and ethnic relations without considering the inheritance of the master-slave power relations.

## **2.4 Migrant domestic work: the contemporary "free" slavery?**

---

<sup>12</sup> Black mother

<sup>13</sup> For further information see Flávio Rabelo Versiane 2007. "Soft" slavery in Brazil: was Gilberto Freyre right?

As Brigit Anderson (2000 p.126) claims, slavery is commonly used to describe domestic work not only in past but also the present. This fact can be clearly seen in the case of migrant domestic women who I interviewed for this research, considering that clandestinity, long work journeys, informality, no social recognition characterize their occupation as well as that of slaves. Saskia Sassen (2008 p.481) argues that the immigrant women has replaced the figure of the black slave serving the white master and in this sense we observe the evident reproduction of unequal power relations characterized by dominance and servitude.

In this specific point, I would also like to stress the kind of work exercised by migrant domestic workers. The manual characteristics of reproductive work would mirror the work division existing in the colonial period between manual and intellectual work. As we saw above, “bodily”, “dirty” and physical work was strictly restricted to slaves. However, I believe that we can also observe the dissemination of these attributes and prejudices against physical and manual work<sup>14</sup> within the contemporary global economy, as manual work is still considered as a kind of unskilled and a socially unrecognized occupation.

As Brigit Anderson (2000 p.127) points out, comparing the ancient slavery regime with the contemporary migrant domestic workers can teach us important lessons, since the ancient relationship between slaves and masters (and even the life of some slaves can,) in some cases, be very close to domestic migrant’s reality. For instance, this comparison between contemporary working regimes in the reproductive sphere and ancient modes of servitude can be exemplified through the power exercised over the worker by the employer. Migrant domestic workers are often in a position of a complete lack of control over their lives, frequently ignoring and/or not exercising their rights as workers.

---

<sup>14</sup> Actually we can also problematize these claims that establish reproductive work as being a kind of manual and physical work. I think that the set of tasks that involve the maintenance of the household and the care of the others can not be consider only a bodily and a manual activity, as it compromises a set of abilities connected to highly developed social skills, management, organization, planing etc... For further information see : *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Marjory Devault (1994)



Taking some situations that I observed in my interviews into consideration, it is not an exaggeration to consider migrant domestic workers as being formally enslaved in their working context. Actually, these new working regimes, that in reality are not so new, can be conceived as a kind of “wage” slavery in the specific case of domestic servants because of their intense exploitation and subjugation. I could fully understand these principles regarding the experience that I had in my field work. The privacy of the household produces a perfect veiled space propitious for exploitation and for reproducing unequal power relations. It is in these private working regimes where power is strongly invested and concentrated in the employer’s hand, as there are no institutional mediation on labor contracts. This reality becomes more explicit when domestic workers are undocumented in the country, living in the house and/or working off the books. Considering the narratives that I collected in my field research, I was able to fully understand the way by which these workers do not have entire control of their lives due their existence and their work possibilities in the receiving country depending on the good will of the employers, not only concerning the work itself but also because of the constant fear of these women of being denounced and deported.

This strong domination is clearly represented regarding their labor regimes. Like former slaves, migrant domestic workers usually do not have their free time for themselves: their time is not their own time. Illustrating this perception, I have one informant that worked for a year as an *au pair* in a Parisian family which had five children. As some *iáiás* (wet nurses in colonial Brazil) she had to sleep with two of the children (infants). No time for resting or for privacy characterize her labor journey. The work never ended for this young Brazilian student, who enrolled in the *au pair* program in order to improve her French.

As during slavery, many contemporary domestic workers are not allowed to rest during their working time. Another informant reported abuses concerning her daily duties in the household where she works. Her informal but verbal contract was previously restricted to babysitting two babies. The initial arrangement was that she would work 5 hours per day as

nounou<sup>15</sup>, however, a few months after this informal arrangement her tasks began to increase. Now she is responsible for ironing the family's clothes, this because the mother of the house did not allow her to rest in the sofa with her while the two babies take their afternoon nap. In spite of the increase of her tasks, her salary did not augment.

According to Brigit Anderson (2000, p.142) the working contract that characterize domestic working regimes can not be considered as a simple exchange of labor force and money. Following the slavery system, the rationality of this kind of labor contract is based on honor. The master gains honor through slave's dishonor. As I demonstrated in the previous section, the fact of having a slave for serving and working in the household during slavery times was a synonym of status, power and influence. Nowadays, according to Anderson we do have a repetition of this pattern. Therefore, it is not only labor and money that mediates this kind of contract but also status and honor, as the status that the employer gains by having (possessing) a domestic worker plays an important role in this unequal exchange. Furthermore, the author argues the employer does not only pay exclusively for employee's labor force but also for her personhood. She claims:

The commodification of personhood results in the paid domestic work being dishonored. But domestic work paid or unpaid is dishonorable work because it is constructed as dirty and is associated with the body, physicality. Brigit Anderson (2000, p.142)

Power, subjugation, honor and dishonor at the level of personal relations are crucial elements to understand how slaverist discourses can be present in the position taken by migrant domestic workers. For instance, we can clearly see the details of this unequal contract through the every day practices that some employers perform towards their domestic workers that manifests a controlling, limiting, tracing a real difference between employer and employee. In this context, I have stressed that these limitations and the set of subordinative power's

---

<sup>15</sup> Baby-Sitter in French.

operations are much more present in the context of live-in workers, as I will demonstrate further. On the other hand, live out, part time workers enjoy, in some extent, more autonomy and less totalitarian relationship with their employers.

Illustrative of dominating structures, a common complaint that I observed through some narratives of my informants is the control of food and the limitation that they suffer in their employer's houses as live in workers. Actually this complaint about restricting of food and space appears in my research limited to the Brazilian reality regarding their lives as domestic workers there. Four informants of this study used to work previously in Brazil as domestic workers. They complained mostly about Brazilian reality on this specific issue, since now in Paris they think that the situation concerning food restriction and household environment is better than before. Precisely this difference between their status as domestic workers in Brazil and in Paris plays an important role concerning their subject production.<sup>16</sup> As I will demonstrate in the analytical chapters, most of my informants claim that the status of domestic workers in Paris is considerably more decent and humanized than that of domestic workers in Brazil. This fact represents an important improvement in their labor and social conditions. We might assume that within the European context, where slavery systems were not intensively and cruelly imposed, the discourses and practices that associate reproductive work to inhumane conditions and slave status were not as strongly established and perpetuated as on the American continent.

Generally speaking, the Brazilian reproductive working reality is narrated in a very pessimistic way by the informants that had previously worked as domestics in Brazil. Most of these informants complained about the restriction and control of food as well as the limitation of their personal space in the houses that they used to work. As the slaves in the Brazilian colonial period, they usually had to eat leftovers from the family. Moreover, they could not eat

---

<sup>16</sup> I will discuss this specific issue in the following chapters.

their meal with the family, limiting their live and their basic needs to the kitchen and service area.

Domestic workers in Brazil are expected to eat their meals in their own rooms or in the kitchen, never with the family. The materialization of this kind of prejudice can be seen in many ways within the Brazilian social and spatial organization, with the architecture in modern buildings still containing a small senzala.<sup>17</sup> The so-called “quartinho da empregada”, the maid’s room is a common space in middle-class buildings in all cities in Brazil. Normally, they are very small and often without windows or any kind of ventilation. A very small bathroom is also present in this space. Often domestic workers are not allowed to share common areas of the house except when they have to clean or organize them. One of my informants described her previous room in the house of a middle-class family in Brazil; she describes the place using many strong words, as a horrible, an inhuman place to live in. When the informant compared this old reality to her life and housing in Paris, she stressed the improvement of her living condition. The majority of my informants who previously worked as domestics in Brazil claim that the fact of sharing a meal with their employers also contributes to them leaving this previous subaltern place that they had in Brazil. In this sense, they feel that the reproductive sector in Paris has improved their social status, bringing more dignity and social valorization for their occupation.

In spite of the significant difference between the context of domestic workers in Brazil and Europe, there are also points of convergence. An example is the separation of utensils between migrant domestic workers and the family. One of my informants who is working as an *au pair* in Paris complained about having her own set of table utensils, having also separated napkins. Through all these examples, we see that it is possible to demonstrate how the legacy of slavery is still perceptible within the context of the modern organization of domestic service, not only in Brazil but also within the context of European organization of care and domestic

---

<sup>17</sup> The senzala was a huge collective housing designed to slaves in the cane sugar farms in Brazil during the slavery.

labor. Considering this problematic it is essential to introduce other intersectionalities that strongly contribute to these kinds of distinctions that connect domestic to old modes of servitude.

The notion of race, ethnicity and nationality, as I argued, definitely play a very important role regarding reproductive working regimes. Racism and xenophobia strongly contribute to this complex interrelation, since the racist conceptions in the case of “manual” workers are still present in contemporary power relations. As during slavery, the preconception that some ethnicities have a “natural” ability to accomplish manual and physical work still persists in our contemporary world. The feminist literature on the matter stresses that even though slavery is over, we do have persistent discourses that affirm women of color as more suitable for reproductive work.

According to Brigit Anderson (2000 p. 142) these distinctions based on ethnicity are a result of a process that construct the “other” through racialized rules. Therefore, this category of “others” will define some people as being trapped within their bodies. The other is cast out by the privileged employer that will systematically try to maintain their status quo. In this context, this racialized “Other” fully suits reproductive work exigencies serving and conferring status for the most privileged.

In this way, like the ancient “senhoras”, the contemporary employer of migrant domestic workers must demonstrate her superiority by contrasting another woman to accomplish their reproductive work. As Bridget Anderson (2000 p.145) argues, several historians have claimed that slavery did ostensibly benefit some white women by raising their status and giving them power over black slaves. In colonial Brazil and in other parts of the globe slavery is associated with reproductive work and reproductive work with women who, as in the past and in the present, would be defined as women of color<sup>18</sup>. This gendered and racialized organization of reproductive work is reworked by the new/old rules of global

---

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, it is not only skin color that defines this characteristic, since nationality, lack of linguistic skills, class and religion can transform any woman as belonging to this racialized category of the “other”.

capitalism. In this context, it is important to stress that these new rules that characterize transnational reproductive work would not drastically change neither gender regimes, nor racist premises, but on the contrary will leave patriarchy as well as racist mentalities intact.

Having this proximity between slavery organization and migrant domestic work in mind, we also have to consider the divergences of these two systems. Because of this, I argue in this study that in spite of this strong domination structure, inspired in some extent in slavery systems, many migrant domestic workers find ways to resist this dominant order. The resistance strategies are many; some are characterized by individual ordinary acts while others are more collective and perceptible. In the following chapters I will demonstrate how the legacy of slavery and the contemporary discourses inspired by it can oppress these women, but in the same way I would like also to show how the subordination, which is implicit in their labor arrangements, can be reinvented and re-articulated by these women.

## **2.5 Brazil and its specificities**

In this section I would like to trace a historical overview able to track the meaningful discourses that shape Brazilian society in the contemporary world. First of all I will explore the social inequalities that strongly characterize Brazilian social structures. Secondly, I will briefly summarize the most important events regarding Brazilian recent history. Finally, I will analyze the impact of structural adjustment policies, promoted by international institutions, which have had devastating effects on Brazilian women during the last three decades.

## **2.6. Social inequalities: a brief panorama in Brazil**

According to Maura Pardini Bicudo Vêras (2003 p.1) one of the most important social characteristic of Brazil is the unequal distribution of wealth in the country. The author emphatically states that “Brazil is not a poor country but a country with many poor” (Maura

Pardini Bicudo Vêras 2003 p1). Brazilian social inequality is an historical process that nowadays persists. The historical inherence of the colonial process and slavery system has been subsequently reproduced within the Brazilian social organization. Although the country has been passing through different periods, economic models, political changes, dictatorships and democratic transitions, the social structure founded in the colonial past continuities to strongly impact Brazilian social organization, which promotes a strict stratification of social classes.

The unequal distribution of resources and income among the Brazilian population has predominated as a structural social and economic model. For instance, the growing GDP that in 2006 exceeded 1 trillion dollars (IPEA<sup>19</sup>) highlighted the capacity of the country to generate wealth. However even standing among the world's biggest economies, the country is also considered one of the most socially unequal countries in the planet (Luciene Burlandy & Renato Maluf 2007, p. 2). The Brazilian GDP is classified as the seventh largest in the world, yet, at the same time we find that 31% of the Brazilian population is classified as living below the line of the extreme poverty (IPEA-2007).

It is important to stress that gender and ethnicity modulate poverty in Brazil (Mary Garcia Castro, 2001 p. 91). According to the IBGE,<sup>20</sup> during the decade of 1996-2006, Brazil had a rise of the phenomena of feminization of poverty. The number of female headed-houses increased 79% (from 10 million to 18 million). This new configuration was followed by vulnerability and precariousness. According to Hildete Pereira de Melo (2005 p.14) during the 1990s a massive incorporation of women into the Brazilian labor market took place (the rates of female participation on the active population in the formal economy rose from 20% to 40%). However, this did not mean economic stability for women, since according to the author this entrance into the labor market often resulted in informal, flexible and precarious job opportunities for women. Regarding the data provided by the IBGE (2000), women are significantly poorer than men. And when we include ethnicity, the difference becomes more

<sup>19</sup> Instituto de pesquisa aplicada. Instituto of applied research.

<sup>20</sup> Brazilian Institute in Geography and Statistics.

drastic, as women's poverty is also strongly connected to skin color (Hildete Pereira de Melo, 2005 p.26). In this sense, we can argue that gender and ethnicity are contributing to income disparities in Brazil, as women and non-white people are more likely to be in vulnerable and precarious social positions. As IBGE (2001) data suggests, women and non-white people do not have the same job opportunities and salaries as men and white people.

The social-economic inequality in Brazil is widespread. It involves modes of residential educational and occupational discrimination that literally divide the Brazilian society into strata that do not live, work and study in the same space. In urban spaces, we have a spatial division between wealthy neighborhoods, which are often central, nicely built with private security guards, whereas poor districts, normally far from downtown, are poorly constructed and dangerously affected by the growing narcotraffic scheme (the so-called favelas).

The educational and working opportunities also differ from strata to strata. Middle-class and Upper-Middle class children go to private school, while working class children study in the low quality educational system provided by the state. This fact blocks the entrance of working class students into the University<sup>21</sup>. Hence, the impact of not having a superior education (a degree) maintains this youth within the labor context, as they will probably be assigned to second class jobs or be incorporated by the huge informal market existing in Brazil. Here, I would like to point out, considering the data that I obtained through my field work, the intense desire of all mothers that I interviewed with kids to offer their children a private school or college in Brazil. This reason of financing their children's studies configures in some cases the main goal that motivates these women to work abroad in the European domestic service: these women are in Paris working as domestic workers exclusively to pay for quality education for their kids in order to broaden their job opportunities<sup>22</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> Here it is important to highlight the set of affirmative actions in the University that started in Lula's administration. Now 30% of the places on public universities are reserved for people that studied in public schools, 15% of this number is assigned to people declared as African descendants.

<sup>22</sup> I will discuss this issue further in the following chapters



The social inequality is also visible regarding the services and possibilities that a Brazilian citizen might accede. For instance, we can see this phenomenon regarding health care opportunities in Brazil. Upper and middle-class strata normally have private health insurance, while working class and poorer are assisted by the precarious public health system. Here, we understand that basic rights such as quality education and health are not available for most of the Brazilian population, as quality services can be only acquired in the market.

Finally, having these issues in mind, we are able to fully understand the social consequences that unequal income distribution produces within the Brazilian scenario. Even though Brazil figures as one of the richest countries in the world, we see the way by which privileged people still maintain their status quo by controlling economic and political power. This control reflects in social inequality and poverty for millions of Brazilians. Migration as a survival strategy emerges within this difficult context for working and poorer social classes, which desperately alters their economic status and their educational opportunities by investing in short or middle-term working journeys in Europe.

## **2.7 A short overview of Brazilian political and economic changes in the last decades**

In order to comprehend the factors that contributed to the emergence of survival circuits such as migration, I strongly believe that we should trace an historical review with aim to reveal the set of facts and conjectures that literally pulled Brazilian women out of their homeland. For this I will briefly describe important recent historical events that strongly marked the life and social organization of the Brazilian population in general.

The last fifty years in Brazil can be characterized by dramatic changes. Important transitions occurred on a political level, which strongly impacted the Brazilian social and cultural structure. Moreover, the economy of the country suffered several adjustments: from an economic and industrial boom (during the seventies), followed by a huge recession and a debt

crisis during the eighties<sup>23</sup> and nineties. Through a chronologic overview, I aim to point out Brazil's most significant changes in the last decades.

The dictatorship is an excellent starting point to reveal how political modifications were able to deeply transform the life and subjectivity of the Brazilian population. The military coup (coup d'état) 1964 was inspired by the growth of fascist ideology in Latin America. The "threat" of left and Communist ideologies that enclosed all countries in Latin America after the Communist regime instituted in Cuba was solved in Brazil (having United States' support) through the rise to power of the military dictatorial government following the coup the d'état. During this time, marked by the so called AI-5 (Institutional Act Number Five) in 1968 launched by President Artur da Costa e Silva, the national congress was closed, elections for president were no longer through a direct vote, the federal government became sovereign having control of states and municipalities in Brazil, the censoring of all kinds of cultural production (media, press, music etc) was implemented, illegality of political meeting was declared and the political rights of those deemed "subversive" were suspended. In this dark scenario, we have a rise of urban guerrillas which had as a main goal to resist and fight against this very oppressive non democratic regime. For several years people "disappeared"<sup>24</sup>, or were simple arrested without any juridical process: the so called political prisoner. During this time many people were killed and/or tortured<sup>25</sup>. The legacy of the dictatorship strongly impacted Brazilian women, as during this period we see the rise of conservative and antifeminist ideologies. For instance, the military regime reinforced the family as a central institution, when produced and reproduced a women's stereotype connected to traditional and patriarchal ideals (Ana Alice Costa, 2005 p.37).

---

<sup>23</sup> The so called: the lost decade.

<sup>24</sup> In fact were killed.

<sup>25</sup> Here, I can not omit the fact that Dilma Rousseff the current president of Brazil was in her past as student prisoner of conscious. She was tortured and kept in jail for three years because of her political activity during this historical period.

In spite of this strong social and cultural repression, it was during this period, guided by the military regime, that Brazil had a spectacular economic boom (from 1968 to 1973). Brazil became an industrialized country. With the help of foreign investments, the Brazilian state constructed infrastructure to amplify its industrial production. However, this sponsored economic growth had a very salty price for the Brazilian government since during this period the foreign debt rose in a dramatic way<sup>26</sup>.

The re-democratization period started in 1984 with the popular claim for “diretas já” (direct elections now!). The president José Sarney, who was pointed by the military, initiated the process of democratic openness - the censorship ended; new political parties were allowed to emerge within the political context, etc. The constitution of 1988 plays a very important role in this effervescent period. It is in this propitious situation that the feminist movement gained space. An important role was played by supranational organizations such as the UN in pressuring through important conventions the ascension of the gender equality principle. For instance, regarding the case of Brazil, the Brazilian ratification of CEDAW in 1982 strongly impacted the constitution of 1988. In spite of this affirmation on gender equality, which was very significant in that period, the life of Brazilian women did not undergo relevant improvement, since economic and social factors negatively influenced in a negative way the realization of gender equality in practice (Marta Farah, 2004 p.56).

During the José Sarney government (1985-1990), several economic packages were proposed but all of them failed. The currency changed twice in five years. The 1986 “plano cruzado” or cruzado plan promoted the first monetary change (cruzeiro for cruzado). In addition, the public administration had frozen prices and salaries. Because of several factors, including the interest rate of the external debt and the high inflation, this economic plan failed. In 1989 the so called “Plano verão” or summer plan was instituted. Again a new monetary reform occurred: the “new cruzado” substituted the old cruzado. In spite of this attempt, the

---

<sup>26</sup> During the seventies Brazil's foreign debt reached high levels. The administration had to borrow more money from international agencies in order to meet interest payments of the foreign debt.

government could neither control the external debt nor the dramatic inflation that peaked at the end of 1989 with a rate of 82% per month. (Monica Baer, 1993 p.213)

In 1989 the first direct elections after the dictatorship took place in Brazil. This was important step regarding the consolidation of the democratic regime in the country. In this election the conservative, Fernando Collor won over the left wing union organizer Luis Inácio da Silva (leader of the Worker's party). Collor was elected by the appeal of Brazilian elites that through a massive propaganda campaign established Collor as the first president after 29 years of dictatorship. During the Collor government the economic problems persisted (Carlos Eduardo Carvalho, 2006 p.31). The inflation was not controlled (25% per month), even with the emergence of three new economic plans: plano Collor I, plano Collor II and plano Marcílio. Brazil had a new monetary reform changing the currency from the new cruzado to the cruzeiro. With the rising inflation and the foreign debt interests, the public administration blocked the whole population's savings for 18 months, the so called "state's confisco". Collor's government was also marked by high unemployment rate and the privatization of important federal companies such as Telebras (telecommunication) and Vale do Rio Doce (second largest mining company in the world). Because of the strong economic recession and high rates of unemployment the informal and black market expanded in Brazil. During the nineties the informal sector had significantly increased, almost a half of the economically active population was engaged in precarious jobs, without any vinculation to the social security system. In 1991 Collor was accused by his own brother of participating in a corruption scheme. A huge social unrest began to spread guided by student's demonstrations<sup>27</sup> asking for the impeachment<sup>28</sup> of the president. In 1992 Collor left the post as president.

It was only during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration (1995-2002) that Brazil could finally combat and control the inflation (having monthly rates between 2% and 3%). The economic plan called "plano real" real plan was implemented in 1994 which promoted a new

<sup>27</sup> os caras pintadas "the painted faces"

<sup>28</sup> Politically supported by the worker's party. (Danilo Enrico Martuscelli 2010, p543)

monetary reform and a new strong currency emerged from this economic plan: the real. Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration was characterized by the continuity of privatization program started with Collor, several government-owned enterprises fell to foreign hands. His government was a neoliberal administration marked by a lack of social investments such as in public social policies. Moreover, Cardoso is also accused to be negligent to public Universities<sup>29</sup> that suffered an huge internal economic crises.

In 2003 Luis Inácio Lula da Silva began his term as Brazilian president (2003-2010). The expectations of his self-proclaimed leftwing Marxist approach of administration was substituted by a moderate way of conducting the Brazilian economy and population. Lula followed Cardoso's economic principles that stabilized the currency and inflation. During Lula's administration Brazil had a spectacular economic growth, followed by high rates of formal employment.<sup>30</sup> Moreover we see also the expansion and consolidation of social programs aimed to redistribute wealth within the Brazilian society. For instance, I can not omit the Zero Hunger (fome zero) program offered economic aid for families below poverty line with difficulties to support their basic needs, such as food. Covered by this umbrella program we also have the family stipend (bolsa familia), which program targeted families with kids who must attend school and have medical checkups yearly. During Lula's administration we have a rise in the consolidation of public social policies aimed to protect the vulnerable population (Nilson do Rosário Costa, 2009 p.696). In addition, we also have the program of revitalization and expansion of public Universities. Women and human rights issues were definitely addressed by administration's agenda with the creation of the special secretary of women and the special secretary of human rights. Special public policies aiding women and LGBT population started to be created in Brazil.

---

<sup>29</sup> The public Universities have a very important role within the Brazilian scenario, as it is exclusively in these institutions that scientific research is done. Private Universities in Brazil follow the neoliberal mandate: they work as private enterprises in which the profit is the main goal.

<sup>30</sup> According to data from the IPEA, the 2010 rate of unemployment reached the lowest number during the last decades 6,7%. However we have to consider that also informal work is included in this calculations.

After Lula's administration we have the historical mark of Dilma Rousseff (2011), the first elected female president in the Brazilian democracy. During Lula's administration Rousseff, held the chief of state occupation (2005). In this way, her designation of president candidate by the worker's party became natural within the political scenario. Rousseff continues the main social and economic policies introduced by Lula. At the moment she is gaining increasing social and popular prestige, since she is strongly combating the political corruption within the administrative sphere. She is also responsible to stress public actions which aim to combat gender inequalities.

## **2.8 The impact of structural adjustment policies on Brazilian women**

In order to understand the economic factors that propelled Brazilian women to turn to transnational domestic work as a survival strategy, we have to analyze the relevance of the economic macro-policies largely applied in developing countries (including Brazil) during the last three decades: the so called structural adjustment policies. These policies did not only influence the economic and politic order itself, but as a result changed the population's life conditions and work opportunities, which impacted in a relevant way Brazilian women's lives.

First of all, I believe that we have to trace the conditions of possibility which made these structural adjustment policies emerge within the Brazilian scenario. The need to reach acceptable levels of economic growth and stability conduced many Third World countries, including Brazil, to obtain loans from international institutions<sup>31</sup>. During the eighties, with the goal of paying off these loans obtained through supranational structures such as IMF and World Bank used for the basic infrastructural, industrial, economic development, many developing countries adopted structural adjustment policies (SAPS). These new policies

---

<sup>31</sup> We could see this within the Brazilian scenario regarding the "catching up development" strategy developed by the dictatorial regime that produced the "artificial economic boom" with foreign money.

worked in a way of guaranteeing the payment of the international debit for the refereed supranational institutions.

These structural adjustment policies changed in a significant way the economic and political orientation of the receiving countries. In general, we can highlight some economic consequences of these SAPS: promotion of a mode of industrialization focused on exportation, the incentive to export-oriented agricultural monocultures (fact that neglect in Brazil the familiar agriculture), strong devaluation of the local currency, high inflation, privatization of public firms and, above all, trade liberalization and openness to foreign markets and investments (free trade). We can clearly see the adoption of this new approach in Brazil during Collor's and Cardoso's administration.

The political consequences of this process, as Peggy Antrobus (2004) suggests in her article "The Global Women's Movement", is the primacy of the logic of capital over the interests of the civil society; promoting what the author calls "market friendly states". Peggy Antrobus (2004) claims that these structural adjustment policies were clearly gender biased, producing in this way more disadvantages and burdens for women than men.

In this point, it is important to stress these different consequences experienced by Brazilian women in this unfavorable scenario. Lenas Lavina (2001) suggests that since the eighties the Brazilian work market massively incorporated women's labor force, so we can assume that in certain ways these policies helped women to get into the labor market. However, as the author affirms in the Brazilian context the incorporation of female labor force into the labor market can be characterized by precariousness, low incomes, informality and bad work conditions. This produces in this sense second class job opportunities for Brazilian women. Lavina argues " more job opportunities, but with labor agreements with less protection, based on instability and few opportunities of advancement" (Lavina, 2001 p. 4).

Having this premise in mind, we are able to understand how this neoliberal mandate characterized by market liberalization could propitiate the implementation of multinational

industries in developing countries. In this context, the women's labor force emerges as an exploitable group (Aiwa Ong, 1999). According to Stephanie Seguino, Guesnili Berik et al. (2010), these new job opportunities for third world women were characterized by flexibilization of work, precariousness and informal labor contracts, which disconnect working women from the social security system. Therefore, as the authors argue, women's labor force emerges as an important element able to be exploited by long work days for low wages. Taking these elements into consideration, we see that in spite of this women's incorporation into the labor market; (as a consequence of these macro economic policies and by this new economic regime), women's labor insertion was followed by a strong gender inequality and exploitation of the women's labor force.

Moreover, the high male unemployment rates in Brazil during this period in addition to salary reduction in the productive sector promoted an intensive expansion of female work in precarious activities, as there was a high necessity of searching other ways to supply their family's necessities. Thus, Brazilian women belonging to vulnerable social classes started to seek new strategies to guarantee the survival of the familial group. Among these strategies according to Helena Hirata (2003) we have women's incorporation into the informal sectors of the Brazilian economy. Following this trend, the feminization of poverty also rises.

It is important to stress the emergency of migratory flows among these new survival strategies. As Saskia Sassen (2008) states, "The growing immiseration of governments and whole economies in the Global South has promoted and enabled the proliferation of survival and profit making activities that involve migration and trafficking of people" (Saskia Sassen 2008 p. 459). According to the author, the same economic structures that have facilitated the flow of capital trade and information, also contributed to the increase on illegal migratory flows of Third World women to developed countries.



Moreover, the high inflation combined with the currency devaluation<sup>32</sup> in developing countries contributed to the legitimacy of this alternative survival strategy. Transnational work can be seen for these women occupying precarious situations as being a good opportunity to obtain relevant amounts of money (through the change in strong currencies) by working in the so called “unskilled” occupations: the reproductive social sector. In this sense, we can understand the ways by which this combination of factors strongly influenced by structural adjustment policies, propelled Brazil’s women out of the country to find work due to the oppressive and constrained environment at home.

Moreover, the benefits that third world states can obtain by these individual and mostly illegal kind of migration, as it clearly has become an interesting economic alternative because the money sent by immigrants strongly contributes to the economy of these debited countries. Regarding specifically the Brazilian’s case, we see that in spite of the national government lack of a well structured labor export program (as Philippines for example), the total amount of money obtained from Brazilian immigrants around the world contributes in a significant manner to the Brazilian economy. According to data of the World Bank (2001), Brazilian immigrants send to the country 2.600 billion dollars a year. Brazil is the second major recipient of international remittances sent by immigrants in Latin America.

Taking all this discussion into consideration, we can clearly see the conditions that literally pulled Brazilian women out of their home country. The several failed economic packages and political crises added to the strong social disparities in Brazil, which made these women search for other strategies in order to assure their survival and the survival of their families. The migratory strategy emerges as a response to the difficulties faced by women within this oppressing economic and social context. For the other group of middle class students that I will also include in my analysis, the migratory act does not correspond to the set of constraints described above. They are mainly engaged in the European reproductive sector in

---

<sup>32</sup> As we saw Brazil changed several times the monetary system during the last decades.

order to finance their studies abroad and as a way to improve their cultural and human capital for competing in the Brazilian labor market by having more skills and qualifications such as a foreign language and high quality Bachelor's degree.

## **2.9 Chapter's conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the main historical discourses that strongly impacted the Brazilian context. Firstly, I explored how domestic work was culturally and historically constructed in Brazil as being a second-class job and often connected to a slave's style of life. I also emphasized how these discourses reverberate within the transnational reproductive work market in Europe. Secondly, I introduced some important characteristics of Brazilian social structures, that, as we could see, still reproduce inequalities founded by a colonial patriarchal slave-based society. Thirdly, I constructed a brief historical overview of the most important facts that impacted the social, political and economic organization in Brazil during the last fifty years. Finally, I analyzed the way that structural adjustment policies were able to affect Brazilian women's reality in a negative way. As I argued these policy packages imported by international agencies played an important role regarding Brazilian women's migratory decision.

### Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

This study is situated within the theoretical framework that analyzes the production of subjectivity in our contemporary world. Starting from the Foucauldian elaborations on the production of subjectivity, I aim to analyze the way by which the migratory experience is able to produce for the subject new ways to acquire, recreate or even reproduce specific modes of subjectivation. According to Michel Foucault (1997), the constitution of subjectivity is a result of power effects that are arranged by power/knowledge structures (domination) but also through the individual creation of certain points of resistance. Taking this premise into consideration, I would like to explore how transnational domestic work and the migratory experience itself can re/construct for Brazilian women a specific *rapport à soi*,<sup>33</sup> which is able to re/articulate the complex and interrelated dimensions of domination and resistance.

In order to problematize the way the informants construct(ed) their subjectivity through migration and domestic work, I will focus my analysis on the existing interrelations between work and gender. Having this aim in mind, I would like to highlight two decisive elements, from my point of view, regarding the production of subjectivity within a normalizing society: one is the work activity, which emerges as a mandate in our capitalist mode of production able to produce utile and docile bodies for our global economy; the second is the production of gender, race, nationality and class performances constructed in interrelation through domestic work.

First of all, I strongly believe that through a Foucauldian approach we are able to problematize the way that objectification techniques are involved in producing and reproducing the set of normalizing premisses that surround domestic work. Even though domestic work is a kind of socially unrecognized labor, often characterized by informal contracts, or/and in the

---

<sup>33</sup> In English “Care of one self” It is the self reflexive ethical activity by which we create ourselves as subjects

most part of the houses done for free and for “love”, we can see that this specific labor regime is regulated by the principles that manage a population’s utility and docility. In this context, it is important to stress that gender and its norms will operate as the organizing logic this kind of work, as reproductive work will be connected as a moral activity destined almost exclusively for women. These arrangements between gender norms and working regimes within the private sphere give to women a social acceptance and intelligibility not only as women but as carers as domestics. Performing domestic work is a mandate regarding women’s lives, interconnecting women to an exclusive productive mandate characterized by invisibility and low or non existing remuneration. As I it was stated, domestic work produces well-being and good, thus it is an indispensable labor that perpetuates capitalist systems. Therefore, the specific rules that defines domestic work as women’s work produces docile and utile female bodies that in to some extent are connected to the work to productive mandate of capitalism.

As it was argued, domestic work can not be seen only as simple work, but as a way of doing gender, race, and class; of performing, as well, a normative mode of third world femininity. In this sense, I aim to investigate the way that the working activity itself and the construction of gender through domestic work emerges as an important axis of the constitution of subjectivity for Brazilian women working as domestics or baby-sitters in Europe. How does the migratory experience impact the subjectivity of Brazilian domestic workers? How are the domineering elements, which are inherent within their living contexts, understood and felt by these women? Is it possible to reinvent resistance strategies in this context of strong domination? How do these women negotiate potential subordination with practices of liberation within the transnational context?

In the attempt to answer these questions the present study will investigate ten labor and life trajectories of Brazilian women living in one of the most important global cities in the world: Paris.

### 3.1 The constitution of the self as a subject

According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1984 p.297) the modern individual is a result of technologies that transform the subject into an object of knowledge, marked by utility and docility which are the terms that justify the whole process of its constitution. On the one hand, we have the constitution of the subject through scientific/disciplinary technologies controlled and invested by disciplinary power through institutions, discourses and norms that produce docile and utile individuals. Concerning this facet of constitution of the self Deborah Cook (1993 p.2) claims “the condition of the disempowered in the modern age is the result of certain relations of power and knowledge comprised in practices, techniques forms of behavior, concepts, institutions and the like.” These processes are called by Foucault “objectification processes” (1975) which give rise to an individual that will operate accordingly to the set of norms established by disciplinary power. Marcio Fonseca (1995 p.73) states that the modern subject is constructed as an object and as an effect of power. In this way the emergence of the modern subject is connected to its political place within the normalizing society. Individuality is only obtained through the set of techniques that locate the subject in a determinate spatial occupation. The subject’s act of inhabiting in a specific place, in a specific position, will define its cellular individuality: the students in their desk, the sick in his/her hospital bed, the delinquent in his prison cell, the workers in their industrial machine etc. Therefore, the modern individual performs and works as a part of a productive complex system by following the set of norms proposed by the normative society. So, the modern individual would be the product and the effect itself of the rationality of disciplinary power. Individuality is only intelligible when it is included in the collective of the normalizing society, since it is only through this articulation

that the individual obtains meaning and significance within the social context. Disciplinary power individualizes, distinguishes bodies and individualities through objectification practices. According to Marcio Fonseca (1995 p.76) these power operations/relations are considered essential for the development of the capitalist model.

Judith Revel (2009 p.98) points out that combined with the objectification processes we have also the exercise of the “*rapport a soi*”, which allows the subject to constitute itself as a subject of its own existence even in a context of strong domination and objectification. This self reflexive practice also plays a very important role in the process of self constitution. Foucault argues (1994) “[le] travail éthique qu'on effectue sur soi-même...pour essayer de se transformer soi-même en sujet moral de sa conduite,”(p.87). According to Paul Rabinow (1984 p.85), the self is constituted through techniques of living, these “technologies of the self” produce a self reflection on modes of living on modes of being on choices of existence conducting and regulating one’s behavior to ends and means. The author claims: “Techniques of the self procedures which exists in every civilization suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity maintain it or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self mastery, of self knowledge (...) care of one self understood as an experience and thus also a technique elaborating and transforming that experience” (Paul Rabinow ,1984 p.87).

Deborah Cook (1995 p.3) states that these two distinct dimensions (discipline and *rapport a soi*) are inherent in the process of self-constitution. According to the author, on the one hand, we have the constitution of the self through practices of subjection and objectification; on the other hand, we have this constitution through practices of liberation allowing the subject to be constituted in a more autonomous way. In spite of this possibility Deborah Cook (1995) persuasively claims that these contingencies are only possible on the basis of a number of rules, inventions which are located in the cultural environment itself. Therefore, the set of possibilities of reinventing oneself by this self reflexive exercise is limited

to the conditions that one can create during one's life trajectory. Deborah Cook suggests (1995 p.5), "A subject is free to create itself outside of the power/knowledge apparatus, to redefine itself in its activity, also one which makes radical social and political change possible".

According to Foucault, (1984 p.11), the main strategy to escape from these practices and techniques of domination are resistance practices strategies which make possible new forms of subjectivity beyond objectification. These strategies according to Foucault's theory are only acquired through an ethical exercise that one can have with oneself by constituting a specific "*rapport a soi*". Deborah Cook (1995 p.123) clarifies this specific point; the author suggests that the "*rapport a soi*" determines how the individual is supposed to constitute herself/himself as a moral subject of his/her own actions. She states that "Ethics consists in practices, in various types of activities which an individual undertakes in order to constitute himself as a moral subject acting with reference to prescriptive elements that constitute the code" (Deborah Cook 1995 p 123). Foucault claims (1997 p.33) "*la manière dont on doit "se conduire," c'est-à-dire la manière dont on doit se constituer soi-même comme sujet moral agissant en référence aux éléments prescriptifs qui constituent le code.*" (p.33).

This link between the moral code and the way that the subject internalizes these norms (re)defines the way that one accepts or resists the prescriptive elements that constitute the moral code. Therefore, a subject that refuses to internalize these norms established by power/knowledge structures can recreate different moral codes or relate to the existing code in a different way. This whole process inaugurates a specific mode of subjectivation characterized by resistance and reinvention. As Deborah Cook (1995 p.142) suggests these new ways to relate to the code give rise to a model for emancipatory subjective practice. The exploitation mandate is inherent within the normalizing society proliferated by the premises of the disciplinary power that establishes docile and utile bodies. By accepting these norms the subject reinforces the model of capitalist exploitation. In this sense, we clearly see the immense scope for struggling against these practices of domination.

Foucault (1994) argues that it is at the microlevel of power that it is possible to reinvent and resist these widespread power dynamics. It is not by analyzing the state, macro relations, or forces of production that we can reveal the logic of power, but rather, we have to descend to the micro practices of exploitation and resistance in order to comprehend how power's rationality works on the subjective level. I think that the work and life trajectories of migrant domestic women are able to reveal important power struggles existing in our present global economy. Moreover, in this study, I aim to understand the micropolitics of power inherent in their processes of work and life in Paris, and how migrant domestic workers daily experience the so-called politics of domination. I will also highlight, within this context of extreme domination,<sup>34</sup> the everyday practices of resistance developed by these women within their labor context.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2 Producing subjectivity through work

In this section, I aim to emphasize the importance of work activity in the process of self-constitution. The work itself becomes a crucial element regarding the objectification and subjectivation processes within the normalizing society. Labor activity has historically emerged as an important element regarding the moral code (post protestant shift- Juergen Habermas, 2003) that distinguishes individuals based on their incorporation or non- incorporation into the work market. In this sense, work activity plays a very important role in the production of subjectivity, since it directly connects the subject to the social mandate<sup>36</sup> which stipulates the utility and docility of an individual via its work productivity.

Foucault (1994 p.65) claims that the modern worker is self-defined by a regime of truth that configures for him/herself a predominant way of being and of existing within the social context. In this sense, we can think the work as a relevant element which can (re)articulate the

<sup>34</sup> As I demonstrated in the second chapter through the slave like organization of reproductive work.

<sup>35</sup> Which Marc Bessin & Laurence Roulleau-Berger (2004 p.2003) calls *les armes du faible*.

<sup>36</sup> Developed by the set of state's regulations through a biopolitical rationality which stresses the need of state's economic growth through the control and proliferation of the population.



relationship dimensions between the subject and the set of regulatory elements (disciplinary techniques), thereby, producing not only specific modes of subjectivation, but also reinventing new life-stylistics, and new ways to deal with the moral code all by influencing the subject's *rapport a soi*.

Considering the premise that the work activity itself produces subjectivity, since it is strongly connected to the practices that produce the subject through a specific "*rapport a soi*", we see that this relation between work and production of subjectivity facilitates how subjects are subjectivated as workers, since work itself became an important element regarding subjects conforming to the existing moral code. Hence, the work activity influences the way that individuals can be, act and think accordingly to the moral code, which follows (or resists) a specific disciplinary regime within the working context (Henrique Nardi, 2001 p.121).

According to Márcio Fonseca (1995), the interconnection between work and the production of subjectivity can be understood based on the relation established between the subject and the moral code, the ways that the subjects are constrained to carry out, and at the same time, recognize themselves as connected to moral obligations and labor market impositions. Henrique Nardi (2001p.65) claims that in our contemporary world, work is understood as a complex field immersed in multiple conflicts, where subjectivity can be potentially renewed, modified or even crystallized. In this sense, it is possible to see the way by which productive activity is not only able to reproduce a specific set of prescriptive rules (responding to the disciplinary power's mandate), but can also potentially promote and recreate new ways for the subject to deals with norms.

Therefore, since modernity, productive activity constitutes itself as one of the most important social parameters concerning social cohesion; offering social recognition to the subject while workers, while utile and productive bodies. In this way, the work provides moral

achievements<sup>37</sup> (concerning the symbolic level) and material achievements (in a concrete level) for the subject. Moreover, we can also state that in the context of neoliberal society, to play “the game” of life consist, in being connected to the productive order’s demands (to have a job and to be salaried). Hence, the work itself offers to the subject the possibility of social recognition and intelligibility, producing, in this way a livable life, a life that deserves to be lived.

In this study, I will use these theoretical assumptions in order to reveal how Brazilian migrant domestic workers are subjectivated through transnational domestic work. As I argued before, domestic work can not be seen as a simple work, as it is also a way to produce gender, ethnicity, and class. In this sense, I am interested in revealing how migrant domestic workers see and value their working occupation, by tracing the way that they are socially and economically recognized (or not) as workers.

### 3.3 Migrant subjectivities

In this section, I will explore the migration framework on developed by Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996) in her studies on gender ethnicity and work in the lives of Jewish and Italian women in New York during 1870 to 1924. I have chosen this specific approach, as it integrates different perspectives on migration studies. On the one hand, the author analyses the macro structural factors that enabled women’s migration during the 19th century such as historical, economic and political conditions that surrounded migrant women. On the other hand, Kathie Friedman Kasaba explores the micro level of women’s narratives by highlighting the meaning of migration within individual life narratives. I strongly believe that this specific framework provides a multidimensional approach that is able to produce a holistic vision that goes beyond economic and social structural determinism or historical individualism.

---

<sup>37</sup> In french *garantie morale*

According to Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996, p.24), during the last decades, the specific analysis transnational migration is centered on individual explanations of the push-pull/human capital/assimilation perspectives and overemphasizes agency and cultural autonomy of the subjects involved in the migratory project. The migration scholar Anthony Leeds (1979 p. 69) states that “the emphasis on individual and internalized norms and personal motivations tends to obscure socially determined strategies within social-structural contexts”. For Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996, p.24), this was the obstacle that produced an emerging macro framework that had a strong impact on migration studies. The research framework shifted from the individual analyses to social and economic structures within global economic system. It was in this context that world-systems theories started to be developed. These new theories focus on the integration between distinct elements such as the global division of labor, the process of global capital accumulation and the consequent establishment of certain categories (development, underdevelopment, center and peripheries). This kind of approach, according to Kathie Friedman Kasaba, have been provided broader vision which overcame the limits of migration scholarship, since it provides a set of elements that explore large scale social changes. Kathie Friedman Kasaba ( 1996 p. 25) claims:

By interpreting population flow as a part of long term economic transformations within a single interdependent global division of labor, rather than as a transfer between two distinct and unrelated politic units, the world-systems approach managed to circumvent some of the more tenacious conceptual polarizations that traditionally characterized the study of immigration. (...) But most important of all, it made it possible to analyze the backgrounds or social origins of migrants as dynamic and flexible arrangements within a broader context of social relations and social change. (p. 25)

However, in spite of this approach that had corrected some stereotypes and enlarged the scope of migration studies, Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p.26) persuasively demonstrates that the world system framework founded on economic, historical and social structures had

introduced new limitations regarding migration scholarship. The author claims that this approach failed to provide the perspectives of migrating women themselves different and plural. In this sense, through structural world-systems approaches, it becomes difficult to understand women's perspective concerning the changing circumstances in their lives after the migratory fact. In addition, Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p.26) also points out that in the specific view provided by world-system analysis of migration might produce deterministic understandings about the migrant individual. Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996) stresses:

In short, the structural alternative may only have successfully countered the conventional, but inaccurate, depiction of the individual migrant as some sort of unimpeded free trader in labor power on the world market, by replacing it with an equally unsatisfactory portrayal of the migrant as an empty bottle tossed by the hand of capital into the migration stream and left to bob from shore to shore . (p. 27)

Taking this scenario into consideration, Kathie Kassaba proposes a new alternative approach able to connect broad structural relations with individual and collective agency. According to her, this is the only way that we have to understand the process involved in migration, as well as the actors and the consequences in this context. Therefore, as I also propose in this study, we should transcend the exclusive focus on either cultural or economic explanations, either individual/micro or structural/macro levels of analysis. For this, as Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p. 28) points out, we have to consider other factors that are embedded in the migratory decision, such as household structures, friendships, ethnic communities, social and political networks etc...

Based on Kathie Friedman Kasaba's approach, I will analyze the migratory experiences of ten Brazilian women working as baby sitters and/or domestic workers in Paris. With this aim in mind, I also included in the second chapter of this thesis a short overview on relevant historical facts that invariably influence Brazilian women's subjectivities. As Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p.29) suggests, there is a need to include more historically grounded

investigation in the analysis of women's international migration, as it is through historical narratives that we are able to understand how discourses and practices of gender/nationality/race/ethnicity and class can together organize and structure a population's flow and recompose individual and group identities within in a globalized context.

### 3.4 Migration as a rupture point in life trajectories

In order to integrate structural world-systems theories with women's perspectives on migration, I believe that we should highlight the relevance of specific approaches that are able to reveal life and work trajectories of migrant women. Assuming that the migratory strategy is a composition between macro-economic and political structures and women's agency, I will explore my field work through a perspective that can understand the particular effects of migratory processes for Brazilian migrant women. Combined with Kathie Friedman Kasaba's view on women's migration, I will also introduce the notion of life trajectories, which is able to provided sufficient insights on the way that immigration changes the lives of migrant women.

I will assume the migratory strategy as an *événement rupture* regarding the life and work trajectories of Brazilian women working in the reproductive sector in Paris. This migratory *événement* will able to potentially change their *rapport a soi*, producing in this way significant transformations concerning the manner by which these women are subjectivated as workers and as women in their receiving country. According to Marc Bessin (2010) the *événement* is a factor able to significantly change life trajectories, changing in some extent the reproduction of social and cultural structures. In this way the migratory *événement* will not only modify professional dimension's of women's lives (personal and family life), but also rearticulates citizenship ties and social intelligibility<sup>38</sup> - in a different manner in the sending and receiving country. Facing the migratory process as a rupture point in the life of migrant women,

<sup>38</sup> To be socially intelligible within the normalizing society, the subject has to be able to be integrated to the norms. For instance, I argued that through work and through a specific gender performance individuals can be recognized as human, as citizens within the social context.

we can understand how these women will begin new ways of relating to the moral code. Therefore, the migratory fact can be understood as a biographical bifurcation that will recreate the way by which the subject conducts their own life trajectory how these women will write and produce her own story in a way that before the migratory process was unthinkable.

According to Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p.31) it is vitally important to sociologically comprehend the impact of migration within individual women's lives and the meaning of women's agency regarding the migratory decision, while maintaining migrant women as neither an heroine nor victim. In this sense, the specific approach on life trajectories will provide us the right tools in order to see the specific conditions of each woman in a particular and individual context and thereby avoiding generalizations and simplifications. As Kathie Friedman Kasaba (1996 p.178) further points out, migrant women do not experience migration in a uniform way, since migration frequently has contradictory, if not paradoxical implications in women's life trajectories. According to the author, these consequences might be uniformly emancipating or might be uniformly disempowering. Regarding different context and circumstances we see that women's experiences within the migratory processes are significantly different from one another. They can be engaged as subjects of their own lives, reconciling and accommodating expectations and frustrations in different manners. Because of this pluralism, by utilizing a dual approach proposed by Kathie Friedman Kasaba, which combines individual agency and social economic structures, I will be able to reveal the way that migration shapes Brazilian women's subjectivity.

### **3.5Methods**

The research corpus consists of ten interviews conducted in Paris during the period of May and June 2011. In the texts I changed the informants' names. The interviews were set up in public spaces, such as parks and cafeterias. The interviews were done in Portuguese; they

were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated to English<sup>39</sup>. All the informants were Brazilian women<sup>40</sup> working in Paris as care workers and/or cleaning ladies. The questionnaire (having a biographical inspiration) focused on their labor trajectories and their migrant experiences in Paris. The interviews were structured in two parts. In the first part I asked closed questions related to their background, such as level of study, ethnicity, age (see appendix 2). In the second part I proposed open questions in order to explore the interconnections between migration, gender and work. The main focus of these questions was to establish elements that the informants consider oppressive in their labor routines as domestic workers. In addition, I also tried to find emancipatory and empowered dimensions that these women obtained through the work itself and through this international experience. The methodology used in these interviews was inspired by oral history and the comprehensive analysis proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (2003).

My main goal through the interviews was not a full understanding of my informant's biographical trajectory, as I had only had limited encounters with each one of my informants and my research aim was centered on their work lives.<sup>41</sup> As we can see, the centrality of work is quite evident in my research, however, their biographical narratives circulated through their most important biographical events and experiences as well. Therefore, I could to some extent analyze the events impacting their life trajectories.

According to Zuzana Kiczková (2006 p.52) the “analysis of narrative interviews, or narrated biographies, provide great opportunities to apply specific approaches to empirical gender research”. In this sense, there is a relevant aspect on this kind of approach, which is able to provide knowledge on the nature of gender relations in our socially constructed world. The narratives provided by women can offer the “perspective of the female subject” Zuzana Kiczková (2006 p.53). Taking my field work into consideration, I could fully comprehend

<sup>39</sup> all the quotes are my translations

<sup>40</sup> see more information about them in the appendix 1

<sup>41</sup> As you can see through my interview's guideline In the appendix 2

Kiczková's perspective as through the interviews I was able to apprehend, even if fragmented, an original and singular perspective from these women. Through the interview they could give testimony of the particularities of their lives.

As Zuzana Kiczková (2006 p.56) further suggests, "the aim of [a] narrative interview is to offer an exhaustive analysis of a spacial phenomena laying special emphasis on the procedural nature of the manifested social reality". In this way, these personal stories represent the social reality from a very specific biographical viewpoint: they can not be generalized or taken as the "truth" about all Brazilian migrant domestic workers. Reflecting this idea, Zuzana Kiczková (2006) claims that biographical narrative must be interpreted only as individual and unique. The author argues: "the interpretations should represent a preservation of the uniqueness of authenticity of every narrated biography, in order to produce an understanding and perception of the variety and diversity of lives and applied strategies" (Zuzana Kiczková 2006 p 64). As Kiczková (2006) argues that we can not assume that collected narratives are the only form of social representation, but as a fragmented part of such reality, a manner by which we are able to interpret and construct ourselves and the world around us.

It is also important to explore some limitations and biases of this study. First of all, my research sample is not meant to be representative, because this is qualitative research, and I interviewed only ten women in specific situations. Moreover, as Kiczková suggests, biographical narratives represent a unique and singular point of view that can never be generalized. In addition, during the interviews the informants might interpret the questions using their own assumptions on the matter. This fact could promote omissions and resistance, which is often playing an important role in an interview situation. Margaret Storbell (2002 p.44) states that even when language it is not a problem, as it not in this research, cultural differences between the interviewer and the subject must be addressed. These differences have to be considered in the process of analyzing the data.



I personally felt during each interview that a certain resistance materialized on the subject of domestic work itself. All the informants of the first group strongly claim that they would not be doing this kind of work in Brazil, as they belong to a privileged social group there. As they said, “there I pay a person to do this for me”. The second group did not demonstrate resistance about the subject of the domestic work. These jobs emerged in their narratives as a way to obtain economic benefits. The moral values that are usually attached to this work were not as important to the second group. The informants that have previously worked as care and domestic workers in Brazil, generally speaking, did not complain about their status as “servants”: on the contrary, they are very happy to have this opportunity to gain more money in order to accomplish their future dreams.

Pierre Bourdieu (2003 p. 608) claims that an interview is always an unequal power relation which might produce symbolic violence for the informant. All information collected is embedded in this unequal relation. We can clearly see this through the interviews situation itself, since the researcher is who starts the game by setting up the norms. According to Bourdieu, the asymmetry is reinforced every time that the interviewer occupies a higher place in the social hierarchy (such as regarding social class, cultural capital, social capital etc...). The idea of a neutral, controlled and ideal interview situation in fact does not exist within a qualitative research process, as the “ research relationship” is always a social relationship embedded within power and symbolic unequal relations.

The nature of these interactions often has important effects on the results obtained, even if symbolic violence is reduced as much as possible during the interview. As Bourdieu suggests, these distortions promoted by the social relationship that constitutes the interview itself can not be avoided, but on the contrary have to be understood and incorporated in the analysis. For this Pierre Bourdieu (2003 p. 608) suggests: “ Only the reflexivity synonymous with method, but a *reflex reflexivity* based on a craft, on a sociological “feel” or “eye”, allows

one to perceive and to monitor *on the spot*, as the interviews is actually taking place, the effects of the social structure within which is occurring.” (Pierre Bourdieu, 2003 p. 608).

In order to interpret the data obtained through these interviews, I included in my analysis the potential distortions and all the elements mentioned above such as symbolic violence, unequal power relations and cultural and social differences by using the comprehensive analyses that captures all the elements able to produce these distortions. I fully included these potential distortions and also incorporated relevant aspects that contributed to my interaction with the informants, such as interview conditions, environment and power hierarchies. Nationality, gender and language played a very positive role regarding my interactions, as bonds based on these variables were present with all informants.

### **3.6 Exploring the Field**

Many different ways were used in order to explore and to reach this specific target group. The first attempt in establishing contact to the informants was made through an email group (APEB, Brazilians students living in Paris). An invitation message targeting domestic/reproductive workers was sent to this group. In this message, I briefly explained the aims and the conditions of my research. Few answers were received using this method. Only four Brazilian students responded to my invitation. These students are working in Paris in the domestic sector: two of them as au pairs and the other two were working as baby sitters and cleaning ladies. These were the four informants that constitute the first group of my research. This group is quite different that what is usually described by the literature on migrant domestic women, as they are not in Paris because of financial problems. Their migratory experience is based on their wish of having a better education or to learn a foreign language. So, they do not see the migratory opportunity as a survival strategy, but as a way to widen their horizons and improve their cultural capital. They are students either completing doing their

BAs, finishing their MAs in Paris. They generally come from a middle class background and are engaged as domestic or care workers in order to finance their studies and life in Paris.

With time, I realized that this tool (using the internet and the Brazilian email group) had a very limited scope, as it has many implicit biases (such as social, economic, class, and age). I could not presume that my potential sample would have internet access and the knowledge to deal with informatics. So, others strategies were built along the research's trajectory. Talking with Brazilian friends living in Paris I discovered a protestant Brazilian church in the heart of Paris. In Brazil we call this institution "The Universal church of God's Kingdom". This church is a result of a division between protestant churches in Brazil. They have huge economic and political power in Brazil. For instance, they have many representatives in the political sphere and they own two Tv channel. This same church had a affiliate in Paris. It also has four hours weekly meetings all Sundays.

I went there already knowing that my potential targeted informants could be there. The institution called "*Pão da vida*", in english "the bread of life" has a very meaningful sense for all Brazilian women who attend weekly. As I realized later on, it is not only religion or beliefs that bond all these women together in this specific church while singing religious Portuguese songs, but a common issue, a common personal drama.

These weekly masses, which take place in a fancy theater in front of the Republic square, are surprisingly crowded with Brazilian women searching for a religious relief for their hard labor journeys. Most part of them are women of color and their migratory experience is clearly part of a survival strategy. They are in Paris working in the informal care and domestic market in order to send remittances to their families in Brazil. It was in this church that I met my first informant who constitutes the second group of my research. After this first interview with her I could enter in the network of Brazilian women living and working illegally in Paris. This second group, which belongs to the global care circuit proposed by Sakia Sassen, is characterized by precariousness fear and hope for a better future.

### 3.7 Informants' general profile

This study explores two different groups of Brazilian women working in Paris. In spite of their common work activity, the goals that justify their migration experience are quite different between these two groups.

The first group has four informants. As all of them are students; they are working in the domestic sector in order to support their studies in Paris. It is important to point out that three of them are doing or already finished they BAs on feminized areas: such as psychology and pedagogy. These fields of knowledge might contribute for their incorporation in the care working sector, since not only psychology but also pedagogy have “care” and “educational” premises as a framework. However, as they claim, this education background is not taken into consideration in their work place, since it does not contributes to high salaries or even formal labor contracts. Two of them have contracts as *au pairs*, the others have informal contracts with their employers. All of them have a legal status in Europe, nonetheless they do not have a work visa, but instead a student visa that normally allows third world immigrants to work as interns in their specific field of knowledge, which is not the case of their work in the reproductive sector.

Reflecting this issue, we can see some inconsistencies even in the “protected” *au pair* contracts. They enter Europe having a student visa, as they need an official enrollment in a language school in order to receive the student visa. However, as the informants argue, this does not mean that their priority is connected to studies, since normally they have so much work to accomplish in their “families” that they often have to skip many classes. Other issues also emerged because of this stalemate. The two *au pairs* complained during the interviews of the quality of the French lessons in these language schools. As one of the informants states, usually in every language school there is one special class for *au pairs*. This special class is adjusted accordingly to primary school routines to “facilitate” the negotiation between work

and studies, however, as the informant claims, this special class has some disadvantages concerning high rotation of classmates and low educational quality.

Generally speaking, this first group is composed by relatively young informants, they are 26 years old in average. They are all single and they do not have any children. All of them come from a middle-upper middle class background, with their families often supporting financially their first steps in France. Three of them consider themselves as white women, descendent of white European immigrants; only one of them defines herself as a “mix” having Arabic, native Brazilian, Portuguese and African roots. All of them have had a prior knowledge in French; for two of them French is their second foreign language. Therefore, we can assume that for this highly educated group the experience in Paris is a way to acquire cultural capital improving in this way their chances in the Brazilian labor market by adding this experience in their CV’s. Moreover, it is important to highlight an emancipatory facet that the travel itself means to these young women, it represents an opportunity to obtain an individual experience, apart from their families.

The second group is composed by six informants. Most part of them has had a basic education in Brazil. They are relatively older compared to the first group. The youngest one is 32 and the oldest is 56 years old. They have migrated to Paris in different periods. Two of them are living in Paris since the eighties while, the others have migrated more recently within 6, 5 years ago (in average). Contrasting to the first group, almost all of them, with only one exception, have an illegal status in France. Five of these informants do have children, all living in Brazil. They all come from a working class background and contexts marked by extreme poverty. In addition, all of them send remittances to Brazil in order to support their children and/or their parents there. Therefore, the migratory experience is clearly based on economic need. Three of them have worked before in Brazil on clerical jobs. Because of the systematic economic crises that have hit Latin America during the eighties and nineties they became

unemployed. Therefore, the migratory strategy emerges as a way to provide resources in the desolate Brazilian economic scenario- during that times.

The other three informants were previously engaged with domestic work in Brazil as cleaning ladies and as baby sitters for Brazilian middle or upper middle class families. These three women consider the opportunity to work in Europe within the domestic sector as a way to improve their income and be able to comfortably support their families; for instance allowing their children to have a good basic and secondary education or to finish college degrees. Five of them consider themselves as women of color. Only one informant of this group claims to be white - she descend from a Polish family immigrated to Brazil during the 19th century. All of them arrived in Paris without speaking any French. Even though many of them are more then 7, 8 years in France, 4 of them are still not able to communicate well in French.

This second group can be characterized not only by their illegality in Europe (undocumented status) but also by informal labor contracts. None of them have a formal labor contract. The six informants have many working places per day. For instance, they work in five or six households per day. Their work journey is stressful and very hard. All of them were able to find a job by using a Brazilian network of illegal migrant women. This network of solidarity based on nationality plays a very important role in their daily life in Paris, it not only provides job opportunities, but strong emotional and social support for them.

## Chapter 4. Domination

There are two main dimensions concerning the production of subjectivity through transnational domestic work that my study will focus on: domination and resistance. How do these Brazilian women articulate these two dimensions in their daily life (working as baby-sitters, *au pairs* and maids)? Starting from the premise that the labor activity itself produces subjectivity. I aim to explore here how the informants experience oppression, subordination and exploitation in their daily (labor) life as domestic workers in Paris. The next chapter will focus on the aspect of resistance. However, in both chapters I will discuss the negotiation between resistance and domination.

### 4.1 Non-documented workers: “I know where my place is in Paris”

I have no doubts that the non-documented status of migrant domestic workers plays a fundamental role concerning unequal gender and labor regimes in the care and domestic sector in Europe. The problem of non-documented status is vividly present in the quotidian life of some of my informants; this condition is consequently able to strongly shape their entire experience in Paris. Taking the second group of this research into consideration, that is constituted mostly by non-documented Brazilian women, I could see how the burden of illegality affects in a radical way their working and living conditions in the French capital, as I observed through their narratives the “*sans papier*”<sup>42</sup> status is the “passport” of a precarious and unstable working arrangements; condition that is often combined with a non-citizenship status.

The undocumented status, according to my second group of research - which I have to stress is characterized by stigmatizing racial and ethnical variables-, is particularly problematic,

---

<sup>42</sup> In English: without papers

since being illegal in the country means always being in a very risky and vulnerable position. For all my “*sans papier*” informants the illegal status strongly negatively interferes their potential labor opportunities. So, these women have to engage themselves in occupations offered by the “black care and domestic market” that is frequently characterized by low income, flexibility, hardship unequal power relations between employer and employee and precariousness. In this context, it is important to stress that for many of these women, whom I interviewed, being a cleaning lady or a baby-sitter in this informal care market is the only labor occupation able to guarantee their survival in Paris and means to accomplish their final goal of saving money and/or sending remittances to their needy families in Brazil. Therefore, domestic or/and care work emerges in this fragile context as the only occupation available (excluding prostitution) that these women can have within the European labor market having a non-documented status.

Illustrating this deterministic view, Maria states: “Here I can not dream about an ideal work here, I have only these options, being a cleaning lady or a private manicurist. I perform both in the black market because I am illegal here. I know very well where my place is here in Paris” (07/05/2011). The informant also talks about an opportunity that she had as a manicurist in a beauty parlor in Paris. Unfortunately, in spite of her high ability in this *métier*<sup>43</sup>, the salon’s owner did not accept her as a worker because of her illegal status in the country. Adriana also argues in this direction, as for her life in Paris “without papers” represents huge restrictions regarding job opportunities. She dreams in the future to get the *séjour* permission, possessing these documents, she would be able to compete for better jobs in the formal sector.

Moreover, the vulnerable position occupied by these women does not only influence their job opportunities in the receiving country, but also imposes a set of rules and restrictions in their daily life that produce a specific kind of subjectivity characterized by fear, invisibility and submission. Maria states:

---

<sup>43</sup> Besides of being a domestic worker previously in Brazil, Maria used to work as manicurist in beauty parlor there. She has an specific formation as manicurist.



Here I have to be neutral, transparent, in my place you know... I was not invited to work here... This situation is difficult to me... I have to respect them. For example, I live in a building, so I am very calm and deferent there, I respect the rules, I am always quiet. I used to be always respectful in Brazil too, but here it is different... I do not go out during the night... At the beginning I was always afraid of the police. I could hear the noise of a police car and I would start to shake... But now after two years, I am used to it. (07/05/2011)

In this specific fragment of speech we are able to see how invisibility is also important for these women, since the fear of deportation is always playing an important role in their lives. In this sense, we see that invisibility and discretion are important elements that these women take into consideration in the process of their incorporation in the European labor market. Hence, private households emerge as a safe and invisible place to work and to make a living within the European context. Therefore, we can understand why informal domestic work in private households --that is *per se* already an invisible labor--becomes a good solution for these women as they are able to conciliate a rentable activity with an “undetectable” occupation.

Even though domestic work within European households emerge as a good and in some extent “safe” option for vulnerable and undocumented women of Third World countries, because of its expanding market in Paris, the context of privacy, isolation and invisibility of the private sphere where the work is done in addition to the informal and flexible verbal contracts established with the employers, we also might assume that this survival strategy has several risky factors that strongly impacts women’s subjectivity. For instance, Marta Kindler (2008 p.145) argues that the perception of and the responses to risk are crucial in shaping migration processes. For the author, the use of the risk terminology is especially appropriate in the context of transnational domestics migration, not only regarding the employment opportunities and working conditions that they might find in the receiving countries, but also regarding the European visas regimes that make obtaining visas difficult for Third World women.

As I observed through my field work, the whole financial and psychological investment of the travel itself,<sup>44</sup> in addition to the initial money that they have to bring in order to pay their first steps in Paris, corresponds to a huge risky investment that can sometimes fail. These women who are non-documented in Europe usually enter France on a tourist permission that is conceded for three months for all Brazilian citizens. After this time they remain illegal in the country, as a formal residence permit is only possible by previously having a work visa, a student visa or through marriage. This non-documented status generates a set of vicissitudes. So, these women constantly avoid any kind of contact with formal institutions (including institutions that might protect them), as well as formal labor regimes.

However, this apparent ease that Brazilian citizens have to enter in the European Community is contradictorily not available for all Brazilians. It is important to stress that not only formal requirements are checked in European migration offices, such as specific amount of money, health insurance, housing etc.. But also other variables such as skin color and gender play a fundamental role in these intermediary spaces. For instance, Cíntia a young woman of color narrates her first and failed attempt to enter in the European community four years ago:

The first time that I tried to enter I couldn't because I was with my sister-in-law, she was bringing another person that I did not know well (...), the immigration officer thought that we were participating in human traffic for prostitution, because we were young, black and Brazilian, so they did not let us enter (...) I wasted all my money with the ticket that time, after one year working in Brazil I could save all the money to come back. (25/06/2011)

Through this narrative, we can clearly see the risky and uncertain dimension that the travel and the enterprise itself has for these migrant women. The common stereotypes associated with ethnicity, nationality and gender regarding Brazilian women always play an important role within these contexts. The figure of the tropical, animalized and erotic women

<sup>44</sup> Because of the huge geographic distance between Brazil and France. The average price of a plane ticket from Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo to Paris is more or less 1000 euros. This money represents a real risky investments within the context of tied budget of these migrant Brazilian women.

that frequently shapes Brazilian stereotypes is present in all of my informant's narratives. They especially complained about the lack of respect that French men usually show towards them since being a Brazilian woman in Europe often means for European men to be easily available for sex if not for prostitution.<sup>45</sup> As we saw through Adriana's story, the burden of naturalized stereotypes can effectively complicate the life of Third World immigrants.

Connected to other uncertainties and obstacles that surround clandestine Brazilian immigrants, we see that the intense financial and psychological investment that a travel to Europe represents for these women. For instance, Suzana tells that she had to save for years and sell important things (such as her motorbike and some furniture) in order to accomplish her goal of coming to Europe. According to Suzana, her first months in Paris were very difficult. She arrived during the winter in Paris without any winter cloths and only two thousand euros in the pocket. In the first month she was living in a house with other Brazilians, this house was leaded by a Brazilian, which was know to her. On the day of her arrival she payed this man 800 euros of savings. She narrates:

I had to pay 200 for food, 200 for the rent in this horrible house, 200 euros for him give me jobs contacts and 200 more euros for my false ID as Portuguese citizen. Everything done in the black market. In this house were living more or less 30 persons (in one small three room house!), all Brazilian - women and men from all Brazilian's states. It was a kind of human traffic stop. I did not know about this before, but when I arrived there I realized. The house is called carandiru<sup>46</sup>. I spent there one month and 5 days and during that time I was thinking to give up everything and return to Brazil. I had never seen such thing! A lot of people were using drugs and many girls were prostituting themselves there. Fortunately, I found other people that helped me to leave that hell. (27/06/2011)

Suzana clearly illustrates the hardship and inhumane situations that migrants have to experience during the adaptation process in France. Each of my informants, including the first group made of documented students, narrated many of the difficulties that they faced during

<sup>45</sup> I myself, as a Brazilian living abroad, have many stories that corroborate this masculine european vision of Brazilian women's stereotypes.

<sup>46</sup> It is a name of one of the biggest and more dangerous prisons in Brazil.

their first months in Paris. The challenge is even worse for undocumented women, since they have to bear these kind of inhumane situations quietly, as they can not ask for any support from formal institutions such as au pair agencies and/or public services. Because of their irregular status in the country these women believe that they are not able to invoke any rights, even in difficult and abusive situations as this one described by Suzana. This conjecture demonstrates the less than human status conferred upon Third World immigrants in Europe, as it is in the shadows of illegality that they have to create new strategies of survival within this oppressing environment.

Lisa, another interviewee, expresses this subjective position of inferiority occupied by non-documented immigrants by using the term “sub”. She states that she is living in a subhuman condition as a foreigner in Paris. Curiously, this is not only a reality perceived by my informants. François Brum (2006 p.162) in his research on the topic within the French context suggests that non documented immigrants live in a zone of “no-rights” (non-droit) in Europe, having in this sense no juridical identity in the receiving country. The author persuasively describes how the *Droits de l’Homme* and the human status itself of undocumented people could be re-negated in the process of juridical (non)recognition of the *sans papier* in Europe. François Brum (2006 p.164) claims that through the specific case of undocumented migrants we can see the emergence of a zero degree citizenship status represented by the slavery paradigm, which supposes an attribution of a sub-human statute for undocumented people. Contributing to this discussion, Breyer Insa and Dumitru Speranta(2007 p.132) states that the recognition of the human person is only possible when this person has the right to have rights, which is not the case of undocumented migrants. Unfortunately, non documented immigrants do not have the right of having a legal existence in

Europe. According to her, the situation of non-documented immigrants can be juridically compared with the situation experienced by a slave's deathly social status<sup>47</sup>.

Breyer Insa and Dumitru Speranta(2007 p.127) also highlights the incoherency of the non-recognition of human rights for immigrants means within the European context. She claims: “ne serait-ce que parce que les États, même les plus « civilisés », se sont révélés capables de violer les droits fondamentaux”. François Brum (2006 p.167) emphasises the ineffectiveness of the international convention on the rights of migrant workers and their family members created by the UN in 1990. The convention was only adopted in 2003. In Europe the only country to sign and to ratify the document is Bosnia. (François Brum, 2006 p.167)

According to Brum, the status of the *sans papier* offers immigrants a status intermediary between the slave (that the civilization of the *Droits de l'Homme* had juridically abolished) and the *métèque*, the one who receives a resident permit - living with “us” but not being one of “us” as a citizen. According to the author, the *métèque* can live in the territory, make a living or fortune but she/he will not have access to a citizenship status. In this context does not only nationality play an important role regarding the rapport towards the foreign, but also ethnicity, class and gender.

It is within this less than human status that the majority of my informants search for ways to resist and to accomplish their final goal: to work and save money in Paris. However the whole organization and structure of the informal work brings important restrictions for these women. For instance, remuneration is not equal to a European citizen with the labor conditions being also worse. Therefore, having this vulnerable condition, non documented workers are especially chosen for occupying the most precarious jobs offered in the market. This fact, the precariousness of the work itself, produces labor interactions based on strong domination relationships that impact worker's subjectivities. The working norm of precarious, “unskilled”

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ils sont, comme les esclaves, « socialement morts »*

and socially unrecognized occupations offer for these undocumented women not only labor arrangements founded on inequalities and subordination, but also produces at the same time the self perception of lowliness: a second class kind of citizenship, a second class humanity.

The place of undocumented workers within the normalizing society is characterized by a lack of rights and restricted job opportunities. The set of norms that structure these underground domestic and care markets in Europe are based on racist and sexist premises that shape the non-citizenship status for those occupy these jobs. The invisibility of non-documented migrants is clearly translated in their work opportunities, which are marked by restrictions, low wages, precariousness and lack social recognition. The stigmatizing paradigm which has historically shaped manual work during the ancient times of slavery persists in these new configurations of the international organization of work. The place for Third World migrant women is the place of the subaltern; a place of diminished humanness. As Lisa, my informant pointed out, the subjective position offered in these circuits for migrant domestic women is the place of the sub: the subhuman.

#### **4.2 Informal labor contracts and working regimes in Paris**

As Helma Lutz (2008 p.47) claims, informality normally characterizes the work opportunities offered for Third World immigrants in the European care and domestic market. The informal labor contracts and lack of legislative protection and working rights is vividly present in the quotidian life of all my informants, since none of them have a formal status as workers, with the exception of Vitoria and Cristina who have contracts as *au pair* in Paris but do not have a work permit.<sup>48</sup> In spite of this reality marked by informality, the literature on migrant domestic workers suggests that France is one of the most well organized countries in Europe regarding domestic work regulations. Bridget Anderson (2001 p.69) explains that this

---

<sup>48</sup> These inconsistencies promoted by au pair contracts, I will discuss later in this section

specific labor sector has been organized in France since the 20th century by a socialist union CFDT. In 1982 reproductive work was officially regulated in France through the *Convention Collective Nationale des employeurs particuliers d' Employés de Maison*. However, as Anderson points out the well structured regulation on labor rights for domestic and care workers does not mean a real practice of these established rights.

Domestic and care work are the most important labor sector for undocumented women in France. This specific labor sector is predominately occupied by Third World women of a wide range of nationalities. The reproductive sector in Paris is particularly racialized not only because of non-documented immigrants coming from Third World countries but also because of naturalized<sup>49</sup> French citizens who are legally French but not French *d'origine*- that means non whites. As Anderson (2001 p.73) stresses, even when workers have a legal status in the country, with a resident permit or being naturalized as French, the formality and legality of their status is not translated into formal labor contracts.

Through my field work, I can conclude that domestic work within the French context is by definition/a priori understood as an undervalued and informal kind of work<sup>50</sup> occupied, in this sense, by “second class” women - following the ancient slavery system trends. The feminized and racialized patterns that are naturalized in this specific occupation defines care and domestic work as a segregated occupation that in practice does not need to be integrated into labor regulation, since it not socially recognized as a proper work. This complex equation that involves gender, ethnicity, nationality and work defines domestic work as being a second class occupation suitable only for second class people. Therefore, domestic care work's structured norms indicate a reinvention and to some extent a reproduction of the servant and subaltern paradigm transposed to the globalized era. For instance, Jussara illustrates very well how domestic and care work have been culturally constructed in France. She claims: “a French

<sup>49</sup> Here , we should highlight the presence of the second and third generations of migrants originate from former French colonies in Africa.

<sup>50</sup> As I previously discussed in this study, domestic work has been historically and culturally constructed as not proper work: an unproductive, socially unrecognized and second class kind of job.

citizen who was born here, who had studied, does not want to do this kind of work. They think that they had studied too much for doing this job that I do. They do prefer not having a job, being unemployed than doing domestic work” (09/05/2011).

Helma Lutz (2004 p.52) suggest that domestic workers in private households experience ambiguous and paradoxical situations. On the one hand, private households offer an environment that seems to offer the advantage of a protective space, mostly for undocumented women. On the other hand, the informality that characterizes their labor contracts generates a set of inherent dangers such as arbitrary reductions in wages or accidents and violence, which are out of any kind of social control. In this sense, we see the unsecured employment relations and unprotected conditions of existence established by these informal labor contracts.

According to my informants these informal relations of work play an important role in their daily labor lives, as they are not frequently able to invoke their labor rights and be independent to discuss the implicit labor “contract” with their employers. This situation is more explicit for the most vulnerable group that can not negotiate the terms of their work contract because of their precarious economic status, undocumented condition in the country and, in some extent, because of their lack of linguistic skills. For instance Maria argues:

I felt exploited in some moments... It is more related to the quantity of tasks ... It is not only about the money itself... Before starting I say what I can do in 3 hours for example... However, sometimes the client insists that I have to accomplish certain tasks in a determinate period that I am not able to... So, I can spend almost 4 hours working and I get paid only for 3... But it is difficult to say no, this money and the client are important to me. (07/05/2011)

In Maria’s words we can clearly see how the informality of the work itself contributes to unequal power relations between employers and employees that can obstruct transparent and decent labor agreements.

Although these informal labor contracts can highlight unequal and abusive working arrangement this fact did not always effect domestic workers wages. For instance, my



informants developed a set of strategies able to combat unequal labor relationships. Working as undocumented domestic workers and having informal verbal contracts they managed to negotiate with their employers higher<sup>51</sup> wages, since the employers are not making social tax or social payments. Jussara who has been living more than thirty years in Paris working with informal contracts argues in this direction:

Now that I know my employers well, I am able to stipulate my price. Generally speaking, my employers recognize the work that I accomplish and pay well for it. I needed to ask only once for a salary increase and the family agreed. Normally my employers realize when they need to give me a raise in my salary, if the life costs increase for them, it also will increase for me. I live in the same city, I have to shop, pay my bill exactly as they do.(09/05/2011)

Connected to this strategy, we have for the second group of this research, the emergence of flexible work arrangements. This form of work organization among many employers seems for them a good way to diminish the risks that a live in job represents. The modality of part time work often enables them to negotiate better working conditions and salaries. The majority of domestic workers that belong to my second sample group work intensively in four to five houses per day spread over six to seven days a week. As they work for several employers they are able to negotiate better employment arrangements since they are less dependent on a single employer. In addition, they are not trapped in the workplace and thus preserve their sense their privacy and autonomy. Moreover, they also have greater control of their work schedule and have a free will to decide the most convenient and suitable jobs. For all Brazilian women that used to work in the reproductive sector in Brazil, being in France represents a huge increase in monetary terms, as this activity is more profitable in Paris than in Brazilian cities. Antônia argues:

---

<sup>51</sup> For higher wages I mean a decent money, of course that is not the same as a documented worker, but not a wage or as we call in Portuguese a “hunger” wage.

In Brazil it was slavery, Brazilians pay a miserable money for your work. Sometimes only a meal and a small pocket money. And you know how the houses are big in Brazil. A real good cleaning job there takes the entire day. You start on the roof, floors and more floors, garden and end in the dog's house! I used to spend the entire day in one house to earn 30 reais. Here, I work less because it is per hour work and I earn much more. The average price in Paris for cleaning is 12 euros to 20 euros sometimes when I can negotiate. In one day I can earn what I used to earn the entire month in Brazil. This keeps me here. (09/05/2011)

Maria corroborates Antônia's impressions on the economic advantages of working as a part-time domestic in Paris. However she also introduces one of the disadvantages that flexible labor arrangements might produce in the daily life of part-time workers:

My salary in Paris is much better than in Brazil doing the same kind of job. The problem is that I waste a lot of time traveling between jobs. Sometimes I have to lunch in the metro. If I stay eight hours then earning the same amount that I gain per hour would be better. (07/05/2011)

This fragment of speech clearly illustrates some of the obstacles faced by part-time domestic workers in Paris. Their intense and long labor journeys strongly shape their labor and living experience abroad. According to my second group of informants, they work intensively for 3 or 4 hours in each household. For all of them this flexible modality of reproductive work in private households is particularly stressful and physically exhausting. For instance, Adriana, who has been working as a domestic worker in Paris for eight years, complains about stress, fatigue, and chronic health and mental problems caused by this very intensive work life. Antonia tells that she had to have an operation in her leg a result of work burden. She narrated a day work for me:

Yesterday for example, I woke up 5:30 am in the morning and at 6 am I am on my way for my first job. I spent 3 hours there working then I went to another house where I worked 4 more hours, then I took the metro again and reached my other job that I cleaned that house for only two hours. At 7 pm I was in another house working as *nounou* for two kids' till 10 pm. (09/05/2011)

We see that these workers have to manage their time schedule very well in order to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, many are overworked in order to guarantee a reasonable income at the end of the month. Suzana is also a good example of this:

There are people that are here in Paris more than 30 year, and they could not save enough money to return. Here I can save a good money, send to my kids in Brazil and support my self here. But my I really work a lot. Many times I reach home 11 pm, 12 pm. From monday to monday. In these 5 years I never had vacations. But it must be in this way otherwise I could not accomplish my goal. (27/06/2011)

Contrasting to these very intense working regimes, *au pairs* and students have “lighter” labor regimes, since they have other priorities than save or send money back to Brazil. Two of my informants belonging to this first group are live in *au pairs*. The other two are students that have their own flat and work for one or maximal, two families as *nounous* and cleaning ladies. Even though their final goal in the french capital is significantly different from the previous group described, they also face many restrictions and exploitative labor regimes in their working places.

For instance, for live in *au pairs* the most difficult challenge in their labor conditions is the weak division between their personal, private, and labor activities. The informants report some abuses regarding their labor journeys. Thus, it becomes difficult to establish the boundaries between personal life and work, since living with the family implies permanent availability. Marina narrates:

When I was as an *au pair*, these boundaries between the professional and the personal are blurred. For instance, during the Saturdays that I was supposed to have off, I could not avoid working. I heard from my room the mother with the five kids screaming and crying. I had this feeling that I should be there... helping her. (10/05/2011)

Generally speaking, *au pairs* contracts can not be seen as formal labor contracts because the main objective of the stay in the country is cultural not a financial interchange. In this sense, they are not seen as workers in the receiving countries but as students in a cultural experience. Therefore, they are not covered by regular security systems since they only have a student visa. *Au pair* contracts can sometimes be very unclear, as many of these young women usually have to work a lot for the well being of the host family. They are mostly young students who come to France in order to learn the language and live in a host family. They have to “help” their host family by taking care of kids in return for pocket money - and it is very small pocket money, for example Cristina told me that she earns only 150 euros per month.

According to them, the *au pair* labor contract is very tricky because they live with the family and often have to accomplish tasks that were not described in their *au pairs* contracts such as cleaning the house, ironing family’s cloths, washing dishes etc. Negotiating the quantity of tasks and hours of baby-sitting seems a real challenge for them, as they always have to manage their working schedule with their studies. Cristina states about her experience as *au pair* in Paris:

Being an *au pair* is OK. I do not need to worry about housing and food. But at the same time I am not one of the family, I am not a full time nanny or a cleaning lady. I am all these things and nothing at the same time. My role in the family is very confused but only for one year, it is OK. (11/05/2011)

In spite of being somehow legally protected by the labor and living *au pair* arrangements, this fact does not always assure decent labor conditions for these young students. Marina tells a personal experience that highlights how the exploitation dimension can be seen in the life of *au pairs*.

I remember one particular occasion that I had the same feeling as the protagonist of Dogville... Do you know?... We were in this completely isolated summer house. The night before I could barely sleep

because one of the twins was awake all night long<sup>52</sup>... I remember that we had a terrible day, I was with the five kids and they were particularly agitated that day. I prepared the dinner for the family, we ate and.... I have this very moment printed in my mind... the parents left the table without helping me...they did not even put the dishes and the glasses in the sink! I had to organize everything and do the dishes by my own... I was very tired and angry. I know that they did not intentionally want to exploit me.(10/05.2011)

Even for live out students, labor arrangements are difficult to deal with. The fear of losing the job (and salary) frequently plays an important role in the life of transnational domestic workers. The labor schedule within the context of reproductive work is frequently so flexible that it sometimes can negatively effect the way the life of these students. For instance Lisa persuasively demonstrates how tricky these informal verbal arrangements can be and how they do not always bring benefits to domestic workers. Lisa explains her specific situation as nounou of one French family.

Sometimes the mother of the kids asks for me a full time availability. I do not have a fixed work time she calls me and I have to manage my time-schedule according to her will. This situation is very stressful for me because I do not have a defined work schedule and I have to be available for her all week, sometimes including weekends. Once she called me on sunday evening to take care of the two babies! This whole uncertainty is very difficult to deal with, I spend a lot of energy thinking about it... it leaves me very confused. She is only interested in her well being and the well being of the kids. She does not think about my needs. That I have to study, that I have papers to submit. (30/06/2011)

Flexibility and mobility are the most important characteristics of the reproductive work within the Parisian context for these women, and informal and verbal contracts help to create these flexible and malleable labor arrangements. Sometimes these contracts can benefit these women, while sometimes it can contribute to their burden within the work context. The intensive labor journeys of women in vulnerable condition and the specific confusion between professional and personal roles caused by *au pair* arrangements can promote precariousness

---

<sup>52</sup> When Marina worked as an au pair she eventually to slept with the twins.

and unequal relationship between employer and employee and thus have a strong impact on women's subjectivity.

#### **4.3 Power relations between employers and employees**

In this section, I aim to introduce some aspects that strongly influence the lives and the subjectivity of migrant domestic work: the relationship established between the employed and their employers. I will emphasize some elements that were very present in my informants' narratives such as the undervaluation of the domestic work, the unequal power relations between employer and employee and the specific gendered and ethnic performances constructed through domestic work.

According to Judith Rollins (1985 p.5) the relationship - social and cultural - constructed between domestic workers and their employers is an extraordinarily multi-dimensional and complex one, which has an exploitative paradigm as a pillar. For the author, domestics are not only exploited in the economic sense, but also have to face a level of psychological exploitation that is unknown in other kinds of occupations. As I could observe through my field work, there are implicit social and psychological levels of domination established within the reproductive work that are introduced by strong unequal social hierarchies, which are mainly founded and established through gender, class and ethnicity. The employer extracts not only labor force from the worker but also a labor performance in which the personality and the attitudes of the worker play a fundamental role. Corroborating with this idea, David Katzmann (1978 p.475) states that in the specific case of domestic work a personal relationship is part of the job and the worker is hired not for her labor force but also for her personality traits. To have a domestic worker validates the employer's superiority, the life style of a specific social class (Judith Rollins 1985 & Bridget Anderson 2001). Domestic work, to some extent, reproduces the ancient modes of servitude, which define and distinguish clean and

white mistresses in contrast to dirty colored servants. As I previously defined it, domestic work itself is historically and culturally naturalized as being a kind of degrading work, performed exclusively by oppressed people such as women and people of color. This fact strongly influences the identity and the subjectivity of transnational domestic workers, since their self-perception is strongly affected by the demeaning social status of their work. Therefore, as I will demonstrate in this section, a constant feeling of inferiority and frustration are involved in their labor identity as domestics, since not only the work itself but also their employers often confer lesser social status to the domestic worker. Expressing these feelings, we have Adriana's impressions about her work. She states:

The work that I do here, at my age, is extremely frustrating for me... it is a undervalued kind of job, it is very repetitive and has no creativity. I do both *nounou* and cleaning, I see that from the other's point of view that my job is inferior, they think that my job is degrading.(06/05/2011)

Mariana also persuasively demonstrates her aversion regarding these unequal labor arrangements. According to her she will never contract in her life a domestic worker because of the emerging tensions that this kind of labor contract promotes. Mariana says:

You will feel exploited even though you know that the family does not want to exploit you. We all have already felt exploited in some point. I felt this and they are people who I really love and care about. But I felt very angry as well. I do know that I can not have a domestic or a baby sitter in my house all day long, because I know that in some point she will feel exploited by me. Even if I do not want it... the relationship is itself problematic. It is built on exploitation. Because people see domestic work as invisible, that it is not important.(07/05/2011)

Suzana has a very similar view of her work and the difficult relationships established with her employer:

My work is not recognized at all. On the contrary it is humiliating. For instance I have a client that is always complaining about my price and she has all the best cloths, all from the best labels, she even

has a true Chanel purse...And she is always complaining for paying 20 euros for 2 hours a week of hard cleaning. This is humiliating! I feel that I am very undervalued. When I arrive in Brazil I do not want to think about doing this again, this job will no longer be an option for me.(27/06/2011)

In these fragments of speech we see how the undervaluation of domestic work affects domestic's self-esteem and their perception of their work. The domineering elements that are implied in their labor arrangements become more explicit within their interactions with employers. Illustrating this point Suzana states:

It is the undervaluation of my work that gives me this low status, this thing of being a servant for the others. Because I can feel the difference, they are in an other position, quite different than mine... they are French, white, they had a good education. They see the other people with different eyes, as inferior people. I can feel this every day. It is a kind of rejection towards me.

The subjective place of the servant is often narrated as being a difficult place to occupy, since it involves a set of rules that connect domestic work to deferent performances and submissive roles in the household. Rhacel Parrenas (2001p.148) points out that the labor arrangements within the reproductive sector are characterized by a strong unequal distribution of power in which the employers concentrate the power in their hands. For instance, the employer is the one who has authority and control over the employee, who says the rules, who establish the tasks, domestic's duties and attitudes. In this way, it is up to the employer to supervise their own authority, as there is no hierarchical power above the employer. As Parrenas highlights, generally speaking, the attitudes of the employer towards the domestic can determine working conditions for domestic workers, as the last word about labor standards, quantity of tasks and salary are given by the employer. For instance, Lisa illustrates how these difficult to negotiate unequal power games can be harmful for domestic workers.

My initial arrangement with the mother of the house (Laurence) is that I am contracted only for taking care of the kids in a specific period that she defines every week. It turns out that in one afternoon when



the kids were sleeping she kindly asked me if I could ironing some cloths for her in the meanwhile. I did. In the beginning, I was a little confused, because I also thought that I could not be paid per hour for doing nothing, since the kids were sleeping. So, I started to iron. Now I am the official iron lady for the family. I also started to do the dishes. And these new tasks were not incorporated in my final salary. What really pisses me off about this situation is that it turns out that here the French *nounous* are only *nounous*. If the kids are sleeping, they sleep with the kids as well. This fact drives me mad! I feel exploited only for being a foreign. I tried to talk to Laurence about this but it generated a discomfort between us. The thing is that I could not leave this place of sub, of submission. I could not negotiate these new tasks with her because I was afraid of losing my job. I was the one who let them enslave me (...) But my work, this work as *nounou* works through this thing, this thing of being docile. (30/06/2011)

As we can see through Lisa's situation the power of negotiation is very limited for migrant domestic workers, since their power of bargain is centered almost exclusively in the employer's hands. Moreover, regarding the specific case of Lisa we can identify how the historical discourses on slavery, and the figure of the servant reverberates in her point view of being a *nounou*, - the performance that she must have in her work is connected to deference and docility. Lisa's preconceptions about domestic work do not enable her to confront and negotiate the new demands and tasks that her employer incorporated in her labor quotidian without paying for it!

In this specific fragment of speech we are able to clearly see the way in which the power rationality stated by Pei-Chia Lan (2006) and Linda Boisniak (2009) work in the private context. According to Linda Bosniak (2009), the system of transnational care work reflects a systemic inequality by which Western women take more benefits than Third World domestic workers. The author states that the citizenship of a group of women - Western women who are incorporated into productive labor - could be only acquired at the expense of the citizenship of their Third World domestic workers, who perform their vital reproductive work. Pei-Chia Lan (2006) highlights this unequal relationship by stressing the asymmetrical power relations between women established by these labor interactions. The author states that it is not a bond

of sisterhood that characterizes the relationship between employer (white Western women) and employee (Third World women), but a bond of exploitation. Thus, we can also argue that transnational domestic work produces a specific kind of subjectivity for the workers involved in it, as it imposes a set of rules connected to the performance of deference, kindness and submission (Pei-Chia Lan 2006).

Deference is one of the most important emotional characteristics that a domestic worker performs. The term “emotional labor” coined by Arlie Russel Horchschild (1983) is a useful concept that highlights an important dimension of reproductive working the private sphere. The mask of deference and submission is an important ingredient that all domestic and care workers are expected to have. It is a part of an important prescriptive rule that normalizes domestic and care work. In this sense, deferent emotions and docile bodies are constructed through these unequal labor interactions (see also Rachel Parnas, 2001 p.170). The implicit script of deference that domestic have to perform promotes an inferior status for reproductive workers. These emotional performances, characterized by submission and inferiority, enable employers to control and constantly supervise domestics. In fact most of my informants have this feeling of being constantly controlled and supervised, as they could not self define how the work must be done. Therefore, employers usually infantilize and disregard the experience and capabilities of domestic workers, denigrating their intellectual abilities as well.

According to Judith Rollins (1985 p. 155) maternalism is another characteristic of labor interactions between domestic workers and their employers. For the author, employer and employee dynamics within the reproductive sector is pivoted by maternalism. Judith Rollins (1985 p. 162) states: “maternalism is a basic characteristic of the female employer-female domestic relationship regardless the situation.” The author also suggests that the maternalist characteristic of these interactions has its roots connected to historically paternalist structure of domestic servitude. It is founded in the patriarchal authority that imposes “piety towards tradition and towards the master”. So, these labor relations inherit the ancient patterns of

servitude which stress employers' obligation of protection and guidance towards the servants, in return for the servant's obedience. We see that this specific aspect of the work relationship is able to emphasize the greater authority of employers over domestic workers. Moreover, Rollins also points out the importance of the employer being a female in this context, as according to her the concept of maternalism is related to "supportive interfamilial roles of nurturing, loving and attending affective needs" (Judith Rollins, 1985 p. 157). Therefore, employers highlight their superiority by incorporating maternalist ways of protection/control, often producing an artificial intimacy with domestics workers and/or infantilizing them.

A good example of this unequal power operation can be seen in the experience of Vitoria that is called by her family *ma puce*,<sup>53</sup> that in French language has familial and an infantile connotations. The incorporation of intimate and familial linguistic terms stresses not only this infantilizing process towards domestic workers but also this idea of domestics being "one of the family." This strategy, as Rachel Parrenas (2001 p. 171) claims, is applied over domestic workers in order to increase employer's authority and superiority. There is a consensus in the literature on domestic work about this perception of domestic workers as being one of the family. According to this literature this position stresses and reinforces unequal relations of power between employer and employee. I strongly believe that this illusion of intimacy is a operation of power that directly shapes labor interactions, since for the worker their labor tasks and duties become conflated with family obligation. According to Parrenas (2001 p. 179) the work itself becomes constructed as a labor of love towards the family because of this close relationship established with the employers. In this sense, the labor itself is converted into a pure moral activity that highlights employer's superiority over domestics.

For instance Jussara clearly illustrates this issue. She claims that it is very hard to negotiate labor boundaries with the family, since this emotional element is always playing an important role within these labor arrangements. As she demonstrates, there are implicit

---

<sup>53</sup> Literally in english "ma puce" means my flea.

strategies through the “being one of the family” mandate that compromise her personal freedom within these labor interactions. Therefore, domestics have to establish emotional boundaries in order to preserve her status as workers. She says:

The problem is when the clients think that I am part of the family, they can not count me as one of them... I am getting paid for accomplishing my tasks, it is not for love that I am there working, but for money: it is a labor relationship.(09/05/2011)

We can see here how implicit rules is able to contribute to the veiled hardship that these women face daily. In this sense, it is also important to stress how a specific kind of gender performance is produced through the work. The implicit gender norm that regulates these labor interactions usually establishes a work performance that follows the rules of a specific kind of femininity that connect women to submission, kindness and deference towards the family. Another component that is always playing an important role regarding these strict labor hierarchies promoted by domestic work are race, appearance and ethnicity. There is a prescriptive rules based on the division between, who is more “suitable” for manual work and who is not, within domestic service sector. By employing less educated, poor and women of color employers can reinforce racial and class differentiation (Rachel Parrenas 2001 p. 168). In this sense, as the author suggests, employers expect that these women would be more deferent and submissive, since by hiring this specific group of women employers can easily validate their social status, strengthening in the same way their self-identity of white person. This sense of otherness is very important in this complex power operation, as it corroborates ancient traditions of servitude, in which, as we previously saw, the “colored foreign” becomes more suitable for manual and undervalued kind of work.

Although these elements play a very important role, some of my interviewees also contrasted these conceptions stressed by Parrenas. Some of them argue that being white and pretty might affect in a good way their job opportunities within the French context. Suzana

claims: “color and beauty influence these jobs, I have no doubt that here people trust you more if you are white”. Jussara brings another important component that enables her, a woman of color, to differentiate herself from other black women.

Here a person who is less educated and African or Arabic suffers more than we Brazilians for finding a job. The reaction of the employers is completely different when you say that you come from an occidental<sup>54</sup> country than from an oriental country. They know that we Brazilians, we have a similar mentality as they do, we also have the same religion. They can share more things with you in this way. My employers can see me as a friend. (09/05/2011)

Here we can also see the defense mechanisms that these women produce in order to resist and to diminish this feeling of inferiority. It is by denigrating other ethnic groups that they can build an identity that is “more decent”, “more human” within the European context - of course using occidental and colonial scripts in doing so. There is another “Other” who is more exotic, more foreign and “inferior” than them. In this sense, through this operation that highlights racist and ethics prejudices, they are able to construct a better qualification for themselves, as Parrenas (2001 p.167) suggests “a classification better than low quality workers”. In this complex conjecture, we can clearly see the features of the colonial discourse that still in our day strongly impacts women’s subjectivities. It is through the ancient colonial production of truth, which established an hierarchical division between races and ethnicities, that these women identify themselves in a less negative way within these already unequal power games.

It is important to highlight that the distinction between the idea of oneself and the inferior “Other” does not emerge exclusively within transnational relations. From my point of view, it is also interesting to bring some elements that can challenge this geopolitical

---

<sup>54</sup> Generally speaking, we Brazilians believe that we belong to the occidental world. For instance, only through my experience in Europe that I could realize that Brazil is not considered an occidental country.

subordination, since it is not always that the employer is a Western white woman. Expressing this idea we have Antonia's experience:

Well, I felt exploited here when I was working in a house headed by a Brazilian woman. It was the only place since I arrived that I felt bad. The problem is that Brazilian people will always see us as subaltern, as a worthless person... They got stuck in slavery...I know this because I worked there as domestic servant too. In Brazil we are the "empregadas"<sup>55</sup>and we are treated like dogs... They do not value our work, even though they need us. I would like that Brazilian people change their minds about domestic work... In Brazil it is a slavery, you work hard and receive very little money... sometimes only a meal. (09/05/2011)

Through Antonia's narrative, we can observe that it is not only nationality and/or cultural differences that play an important role in these labor interactions. The unequal power relationships can also emerge from the same national group that uses not only class difference as a differential tool, but also cultural prejudices anchored in a past marked by slavery and racism.

Domination over domestic workers is an important, if not fundamental, characteristic of domestic and care work, which uses many power operations to introduce these distinctions in these peculiar labor relationships. However, it is important to point out that the construction of a superior position is only possible in relation to another, who can not be considered a passive victim. As Michael Foucault (1997) suggests in his studies on power and its techniques, a power relation can never be a totalitarian and/or a fixed one. The power relationship itself is always a relational one, which always has an intrinsic productive element and is always open for different strategies of resistance. Power does not exist without resistance. There is no person who has power over other person, but a person who exercises power over another. Power relations are inherent in human practices, since every human interaction is a power relation, having a complex set of rules and strategies. This operative power is intrinsic in all

---

<sup>55</sup> Maid, domestic servant.

social relationships. In this sense, the figure of the superior employer only exists in relation to another. Moreover, we must always take into consideration the power that domestics might exercise in their labor context. For instance, employers can be extremely vulnerable in specific situations such as property violation and/or child neglect. In this sense, we can understand as Parrenas suggests, why employers usually invest in more harmonic relations with domestics treating them as “one of the family”. As Bridget Anderson (2001 p. 108) states “while states and capitalists want workers, what they get is people!”. Therefore, this emerging tension between labor power and personhood is particularly complex with reference of domestic workers.

#### **4.4 Emotions in the work**

For a large part of my informants, the burden of emotional labor is one of the most difficult aspects of care and domestic work. The concept of emotional labor as I argued, deals with the inherent emotional performance that workers in many areas have to display within their labor contexts (Arlie Russel Hochschild, 1983 p.7). According to the author, emotions became important commodities in our capitalist system, since feelings, which used to be private, became a relevant currency able to be transmuted in the public market. In this section, I aim to explore how emotions are managed by transnational workers. I selected two main dimensions that emerged in my field work: one is the care activity itself that figures as very emotional demanding activity, including the challenge that represents for these women to maintain a certain degree of emotional distance for the family for the kids, the second is the mask of deference illustrated by my informants through the mandate of good humor and constant smiles.

Many of my informants stressed the emotional difficulties that surround care work. For instance, Adriana argues that she prefers to perform services as a cleaning lady (which deals

with things) than as a baby-sitter (which deals with people), as she has some personal difficulties concerning the task of looking after other people's children. She said that in her labor trajectory as a baby-sitter she always felt bad, since she couldn't impose her own values in the process of educating those kids. Reflecting a very similar opinion, we have Maria, who whenever she can, seeks to avoid working with kids. She states that particularly for her is particularly difficult, very demanding and it requires a high level of responsibility. Besides, Maria also thinks that the emotional bond that is established with the baby or children is difficult to negotiate as it implies real affection. So, she claims that it is very difficult to break off these ties when the work ends. According to Cíntia, this is the most difficult dimension of care work. She argues "I always become upset and sad when I have to leave the children that I looked after... I usually cry a lot... because for some periods they are like my family too" (25/05/2011).

For most interviewees this emotional dimension of the labor care is very complicated, since it is difficult to accomplish care tasks without a deep involvement with the kids and with the family in general. Lisa claims that it is very hard to negotiate boundaries with the family regarding this emotional element that is always playing an important role within these labor arrangements. For her the emotional dimension is one of the factors that catches her in this job as *nounou*. She says:

I can say that this affection that I have towards these kids catch me in this job. I saw them born . This is a little harmful to me because I could find another job that will pay me better. I have to fight against this but I can not. I feel weak. But it so good to hang out with the kids ... I have so much affection for them.(30/06/2011)

Regarding Lisa's specific case we see here that she feels guilty of quitting the job because these emotional ties. In this sense, it is also important to stress how a specific kind of gender performance is produced through the work. The implicit gender norms that regulate



these labor interactions usually establish a work performance that follows the rules of a specific kind of femininity that connected women to kindness, emotionality and a naturalized maternal instinct. These specific performances are built through the gender norm that also stipulates care work as being a kind of labor of love that every woman has to know and identify with.

Mariana thinks that working with children is particularly stressful, as she often has to impose limits on them and has to perform a side of her personality that she does not like, such as being angry or strict with the children. Hence, Marina is very convinced that she will never ask for some other woman to take care of her children:

I can not ask other women to look after my children because I have experienced this and I do know that at some point this person will feel exploited, you will feel bad about taking care of a child that belongs to another person. My kids will spend the whole day at school. I do not want to have a baby-sitter because I really think that it is too much to ask for someone to take care of other person's kids. There are so many emotions involved.... we can not pay for this. (10/05/2011)

Cristina also thinks that the burden of the emotional work is the most difficult element that she has to deal with daily. According to her, who is an *au pair* in a french family, she does not consider herself exploited as labor force, as she does not have many domestic tasks besides taking care of one twelve year old. However, she strongly believes that in her work she is being emotionally exploited. Cristina tells that the first duty that the parents of the family asked to her was to be the “elder sister” of the teenager; that is, to take care of her by talking to her, looking out for her (regarding love relationships, drugs, sex) and helping her with homework. So, we can clearly see the emotional premise that supports Cristina's work. Cristina says that this task is very difficult to accomplish, as she is always worried about the teenager. She often feels an emotional exhaustion by the end of the day. Cristina states:

I am the scapegoat of the family, everything that happens with the teenager is my fault. For instance, if the teenager has bad grades in school it is my fault because I did not study sufficiently with her in

order to prepare for a good exam. Every time that she has an exam I feel very nervous and anxious... You know, it would be my responsibility(...). (11/05/2011)

Another important aspect that all informants describe as very emotionally exhausting is the servant performance itself, as it is built in a way that they can not complain or be unsatisfied with their employers. Cristina persuasively demonstrates this dissatisfaction about have to wear this heavy emotional mask. She claims:

Being a live-in worker is very difficult. Sometimes I have nothing to do but I must be there available for the family, waiting to give some help. This is horrible for me. Often the grandmother of the house complains, it rude with me. Actually, I think that she hates me. So, I spend the whole evening receiving her complains... I can not do this, I can not do that... Then when the mother of the family arrives from work she wants to see me smiling as a good Brazilian she says... She asks me why I am not in a good mood... and I can not say that her mother spent the entire evening pissing me off... it is horrible. (11/05/2011)

Cristina's story clearly shows the burden of the emotional scripts conferred for care and domestic workers, as well as the implicit rules of controlling all emotional activities of domestic workers. They are unable to complain, or to confront an employer's authority. Moreover, we see that Cristina has to bear everything smiling. According to Rachel Parrenas (2001 p.171), smiling intensifies labor demands and in some extent can reinforce emotional tensions. In addition, in the specific case of Brazilian somatic workers, who always are connected to the stereotypes of being extremely happy regardless the kind of situation. Therefore, being a good Brazilian *au pair*, is being happy and smiling permanently. So, in this example we can clearly see how this mask of deference is constantly asked by their employers, since common human reactions are not allowed to be showed in these labor interactions.

Taking all these emotional elements into consideration, most of my informants state that the remuneration that they receive as care or domestic workers does not compensate the emotional vicissitudes of the labor. For instance, they persuasively claim that the money they

get as baby sitters is not sufficient, considering the affections and the sentiments involved in this kind of labor activity.

#### **4.5Chapter's conclusion**

In this chapter, I demonstrated how Brazilian transnational domestic and care workers experienced oppression, subordination and exploitation within their labor contexts in Paris. I explored how power relations based on domination could generate important consequences for Brazilian domestic workers' production of subjectivity. Firstly, I observed the negative impact produced on these women's subjectivities due to their status of non-documented migrants in Europe. As I demonstrated, their place within the normalized society is characterized by a lack of rights and restricted job opportunities. Secondly, I explored the specific labor regimes promoted by the reproductive sector in Paris. These labor regimes are anchored in informal labor contracts, flexibility and hardship for these women. Thirdly, I observed how the relationship between employer and employee can be very hierarchical within the household sphere and showed how domination and an employer's authority can negatively affect the work experience of Brazilian domestics and care workers. Finally, I pointed out the burden of emotional work within these labor contexts. Emotional labor is narrated as an important aspect of care and domestic work, and as we could see, the internal negotiation between feelings and work represents a real challenge for these women, manifest itself as hardship and burden for these women.

## Chapter 5 Reinvention, Re-articulations and Resistance

In this part of my analysis, I would like to explore the positive elements that these migrant domestic workers can obtain through the work itself and through the experience of living abroad. Starting from the Foucauldian premises on subjectivity that establish that the subject is produced not only through a set of disciplinary rules characterized by domination and objectification, but also through permeable spaces in which it is possible to resist and to reinvent distinct *rapport- a soi*, a part from the normalized society. I aim in this chapter to track how these women are able to reinvent themselves through the migratory event, producing life styles that are not only connected to domination and oppression, but also to reinvention and resistance. Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich (2004) argue that migration might have positive and emancipatory outcomes for transnational domestic workers, and with this in mind I will explore how Brazilian migrant domestic workers can reverse the subordination diagram by changing in some ways the politics of domination and subordination.

Regarding the second group of my research, characterized by women living in economic and social vulnerability, I would like to demonstrate how the “subaltern” position can be reversed and/or overcome through migration. How can the migratory experience break their poverty cycle? How can the work itself and the benefits acquired through it enable the alteration of power positions either in France or in Brazil? How can these changes contribute to new modes of subjectivation characterized by empowerment and independence? How could social and gender hierarchies could be changed or be reproduced through the migrant experience?

In the case of the first group of informants, characterized by middle class students, I would like to explore how the experience of working as care and domestic workers is able to redefine for the informants some power positions regarding their production of subjectivity.

How do they feel about this experience of being subjectivated as domestic worker abroad? How have these experiences contributed to a change in their perception about reproductive work? Could this experience deconstruct their previous “servant” stereotypes?

Moreover, I would like also to explore how the informants can take cultural benefits from this experience. Can the fact of living in another culture, in other context and speaking another language contribute to cultural and educational gains? Are the relationships with French families and employers important for their personal growth? Did these relationships affect their subjectivation processes?

Furthermore, I also included in this analysis the set of creative and potent resistance strategies that enable these women to overcome difficult experiences abroad. How do these women organize protective networks in order to bear and resist an oppressive and normalizing context? How does inventiveness and improvisation become important personal competences which enable these women to keep on working and existing in different ways, constructing new ways to relate with the moral code?

### **5.1 Servant subjectivities? Not only: Reversing subordination’s mandate**

. Economic goals justify the whole process of Brazilian women’s migration. Through my field work I could clearly understand that this main goal represents to these women the opportunity to provide for them and for their families as well a “better future” in Brazil. In this sense, I argue that this economic accomplishment is able to re-articulate their social position within the Brazilian context, impacting, in this sense, their social class in their home country. This outcome plays a very important role regarding their ways of being subjectivated, since it represents a real and concrete opportunity to overcome a hopeless, subordinate condition, particularly in their native contexts. On the other hand, it is important to highlight that this social rise becomes possible only in their home country, since a sub-human condition is still

very difficult to overcome in Paris. Actually, it is a paradox: being a subaltern in Europe is at the same time being someone who has economic and social power in their native context. This fact is able to change to some extent the diagram of subordination and poverty, as we can clearly see that the subaltern condition abroad is always followed by the hope of one day being economic and socially empowered in their home country.

In this context, I strongly believe in the relevance of the theoretical framework that deals particularly with life changes (ruptures, turning points) in order to explain how these dramatic changes, such as international migration, are able to restructure migrant women's subjectivity. As Marc Bessin, Claire Bidart and Michel Grossetti (2010 p.12 ) argue, the *événement et de bifurcation* regarding life trajectories is able to re-articulate important subjective and emotional dimensions concerning the way that the subject conduct her/his life, since it can be comprehended as a turning point in a specific life trajectory. According to the authors, *la bifurcation de vie* has a productive aspect in the sense that it is a result of an active individual pursuit of a life change. Of course those exterior demands also play an important role in these processes - as we will see regarding the vulnerable experienced by my informants. However, the *événement rupture* can not be reduced as subject's passive acceptance of the vicissitudes enforced by the exterior environment, as the *événement* is only possible through the subject's agency. Marc Bessin (2010 p. 307) suggests that the bifurcation produces "*un avant et un après*" concerning the life trajectory of an individual, since the life after this *événement* can not be the same anymore: it is real subjective rupture.

In order to support this specific point, I will illustrate through my informants narratives how their lives and their subjectivities were altered through the migratory experience. Moreover, I would like to introduce in this analysis the paradoxical condition that they are experiencing through migration. I will explore these nuances that involve not only their production of subjectivity by the migratory fact but also the potential intersectional components

that might be re-articulated and re-signified in this experience such as race, nationality, class and gender .

Authors such as Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich (2004) and Saskia Sassen (2008) argue that the migratory process normally emerges in a context of poverty, violence and/or lack of job opportunities in Third World countries. Transnational domestic work becomes a survival strategy able to guarantee subsistence and (in the long term) financial benefits for these Third World women in vulnerable conditions. In fact, the informants of my analysis characterized by economic and social precariousness in Brazil argue that the dream of a better life starts in Brazil by seeing people who had migrated and then returned to their home cities having enough money to rebuild their lives. In this sense, these successful narratives and examples play an important role in this decision. Moreover, it is also important to stress their previous precarious status in Brazil that literally pulled these women out of the country. Expressing these circumstances Jussara states:

I had to come here, to travel... I had simply nothing to do in Brazil, I was with this thing for years in my head... this thing of going abroad. But I remember that women used to migrate to do prostitution by that time and would not have traveled for doing this. You know I am a single mother, I have four kids, but I am not a prostitute. I remember that was in the beginning of the nineties when I lost my job in Brazil, I was a receptionist in a Hotel in Santos but the Hotel dismissed me. I had lost my job because of Collor <sup>56</sup>, because of the huge crisis. Those were difficult times, I had no food to give to my children. I would have loved to have the opportunity to study but I did not have enough money to do. And I had four kids to support, alone. So, in Brazil I met people who had returned and then afforded houses, cars. So, this possibility was always reinforced by these examples of having a much better life after this “sacrifice. (09/05/2011)

In this fragment of speech, Jussara persuasively demonstrates the complex situation that influenced her to make the decision of going abroad and searching other ways to guarantee her survival and the survival of her kids. In Jussara’s specific case, we can clearly see the impact of

---

<sup>56</sup> The Brazilian president at that time.

the economic models implanted in Latin America during the eighties and nineties that strongly affected in a negative way the poorest social strata in Brazil. The migratory strategy becomes completely understandable in the context of vulnerability, because of the lack of material, educational and financial resources, which are also caused by the non-existence of social public policies and a decent welfare state in Brazil. Therefore, these women do not only become vulnerable during their stay in Paris, because of their undocumented status, precarious and/or flexible jobs, but as Jussara's case clearly shows they had already experienced hardship and difficulties in their home-country. Suzana also indicates similar situations with her experience during these hard times:

I started to work when my first child was born, I was 15 years old I worked as a manicurist after this I always have worked (....). In 2007 I made this decision of coming, I was eight months unemployed in Brazil. I lost my job because government changes... and I have two kids, I do not have husband. So I am the only one who had to support them. And I have people from my town who did this travel, and it worked very well for them... they could have a better life after the travel.(27/06/2011)

It is clear that this migratory strategy is basically anchored in an economic goal that in the medium-long term will enable these women to have a better future in a country marked by the unequal distribution of resources. Most of them send remittances for their families- parents and children- who are mainly supported by this money that is generated abroad. The hostile situations regarding their past characterized by precariousness are negatively remembered in their narratives. At this point, it is interesting to stress their relative "happiness" in Paris, as compared to their social and economic conditions in Brazil. Their French life seems much better in some cases. Illustrating this previous hardship in Brazil we have Cíntia's biography marked by child and slave labor. Cíntia started to work as a domestic worker in Brazil when she was eleven years old. As she claims, she had to leave her mother's house because she could not support her basic necessities anymore. She moved to the capital with a cousin in order to seek a better future:



I started to work when I was eleven years old, I worked in this household in Rio [de Janeiro] as a maid for a daily meal and a place to sleep (...) It was good because this family allowed me to go to school and once a year they used to give me a notebook, some pencils and erasers... for studying (25/07/2011)

As we can see through these narratives, the sacrifice of living abroad, working in devalued occupation is not so huge comparing with their previous experience in Brazil characterized by the lack of opportunities, precariousness and no hope. Antônia illustrates these premises when she thinks about her previous conditions in Brazil. She claims:

I have overcome so many difficult situations in my country that I can barely remember... This feeling of not being able to give a decent life for your children kills a mother's heart. I ask myself why my country did this to me? The Brazilian society did not offer the possibility for me to be growing up among my kids. I was compelled to search for a better life here. In five years I have and I give to them everything that before would not be possible. In only one day of hard work here I can gain as much money as I used to gain monthly, doing the same kind of job. (09/07/2011)

In addition, , we also can see how these financial benefits alter their life perspective by including new dreams and new goals which are able to change their social and economic status in Brazil. It is also important to point out that for many of them the changes have already started. Surprisingly, Suzana talks about her experience as a cattle investor:

With my work here in Paris I am able to support my kids in Brazil, provide them a very good education. Moreover, I am building my house there... Being here for a while I could save a good amount of money. So, last year I decided to invest some money in a cattle business. You know, I am learning a lot of things about this specific market that is very expressive and profitable in Brazil. I think that in the future I can take a good profit from this business. (27/06/2011)

Taking all these changes into consideration, we can see a significant modification in her “subaltern” position, since even though Suzana is accomplishing a kind of work that is economically devalued and receives low social prestige; at the same time she is also able to

change the circuit of servitude and the reproduction of poverty in her life. Suzana became an investor, someone who has developed knowledge and ways to potentially economically expand the cattle business in her region. She is not only the “passive” cleaning lady in Paris, but an empowered woman who is developing other abilities and learning how to deal with new challenges. Therefore, we see how this reversion of power dynamics can work in the context of migrant domestic workers, altering in this sense the reproduction of poverty and subordinate roles in their lives. This reversion of subordination’s mandate indicates how the migrant experience can simultaneously produce distinct subjectivation processes that enable the subject to reinvent their own life stylistically.. On the one hand, Suzana is the hardworking cleaning lady that work more than 10 hours a day in different households assuming partially the subordination mandate that her work and her undocumented condition impose. On the other hand, she is a woman that is reinventing her life through migration. This *événement* strongly impacted the way that she conducts her life itself, her kids, her new house in Brazil and this new investment on cattle as well.

Jussara also stresses the way that economic emancipation through transnational domestic work promoted strong changes in her life perspectives.

I consider myself privileged here. As I am more than 20 years in this metier in Paris I can choose my clients. Now I work only for upper middle class and rich people here. I can make good money. For example, a French clerical worker here earns more or less 800, 900 euros<sup>57</sup> per month. Me, myself I have a monthly income of 2500, 3000 euros doing domestic work. I do know that is a kind of job that has no recognition, but regarding this financial aspect I can not change my occupation. I bought a flat here in Paris with this money! And my work is good, now with my clients I do not have a fixed labor journey, I have their keys and I go there in flexible periods, of course that I do have my tasks... I do have a great relationship with the people that I work for... (09/05/2011)

---

<sup>57</sup> Regarding Jussara’s points of view we might be surprised why she thinks that 800 euros is a low salary, However we have to take into consideration that first, the cost of life in Paris is very expensive, second, most part of these women have to send money back home, support themselves and save money for their future businesses. In this sense 800 euros becomes an insufficient amount of money to survive above poverty line.

Here we are able to understand how migration itself produced a strong impact on Jussara's self evaluation. There is this dual subjective space occupied by her. For instance, she recognizes her occupation as being a socially unrecognized job, but this fact does not mean that she feels only disempowered by it. On the contrary, she strongly believes that in spite of the social undervaluation of her job, she is able to negotiate good and profitable work arrangements, which provide for her a good quality of life. Before the migration fact, her life was characterized by poverty and a lack of perspectives, now we see a woman able to confront and re-articulate domination's mandate, having in this sense more opportunities to deal with difficult and hard situations. In this specific case, we see that not only the financial aspect allows her a certain level of freedom, but also her flexible labor arrangements that enable her to have a certain level of autonomy and good income

Contributing to the discussion, I would like also to explore other interesting nuances that emerged in my analysis. One important fact is that two of my informants from this second group reported that her ethnic status as a woman of color in Paris is relatively easily accepted compared to the Brazilian context. They think that suffer less prejudice here because of their ethnic group than in their home country. Cíntia argues " I think that people here are not so racist as in Rio, their are better educated. In Rio people are much more racist" (25/05/2011). Antônia also supports Cíntia's impressions, comparing with her previous experiences as domestic workers in Brazil, where the impact of the legacy of slavery still persists, she thinks that being a woman of color and a domestic workers in Paris is much better than in Brazil. She stresses her previously inhuman conditions as a live in domestic worker in Brazil:

I always had my meal separately, after the family, and in my very tiny room, without windows and located behind the house. That room, that bed not even a dog sleeps here in Paris... here I am a human being. (09/05/2011)

The migratory experience thus changed her status and her self perception as a woman of color. In spite of not having a status as citizen, lives illegally in the country, they strongly believe that their labor conditions and social recognition are much better than in Brazil. Surprisingly, they can reverse, in some extent, their subordinate status as women of color and domestic workers abroad. As I argued before, that Brazilian social context is still marked by colonialist and racist discourses that provide for these women a subhuman status even for legal Brazilian citizens. In this sense, we see how race and ethnicity might change its meaning within a foreign context. For them being a woman of color in Paris is less problematic and stigmatizing than in their native context.

Another important point that I would like to critically discuss is the impact of gender in the context of migrant experience. I could observe regarding my informants narrative that a specific gender performance emerged as a way to justify their migratory strategy. The figure of a protector mother able to do any kind of “sacrifice” for their needy children and/or parents is usually produced in their narratives in order to explain their migratory process. This normative operation connected to the gender norms appears as a justification of their migratory processes. These gender norms as Judith Butler (2006 p.37) suggests connect women to gender performances characterized by emotionality, passivity and reproduction. These specific characteristics will define a normalized way of subjectivity defined by these disciplinary conduct norms. In the specific case of domestic migrant workers these moral mandates that trap women in these performances will be translated in the paradigm of sacrifice. In this sense, these women will be ready for all kinds of hardship and precariousness abroad by having as a justification the well being of their families. For instance Maria and Suzana clearly illustrate this specific point:

During the first three months it was very difficult to be apart from my family, I remember myself staring for hours the return plane ticket, it was a temptation... but now I can handle it ... I have to pay the college for the kids. Maria (07/05/2011)

My life continues... but my first thought is to work, work to give a good future for my kids. Now its the only thing that I have in my head: it to give this better future... I have to improve their live's opportunities. Suzana (27/06/2011)

These two fragments of speech highlight the sacrifice paradigm that reiterates gender-based traps. These women would “save” the whole family through this “renunciation” of their own lives in favor of the others. From my point of view, they are active subjects having complete agency over their lives. However, they use these discourses about sacrifice in order to protect themselves from social prejudices. I fully understand, within a strong catholic context existing in Brazil, that women doing this kind of enterprise alone could be only become socially intelligible through the sacrificial discourse. In this context, we see a particular production of subjectivity constructed by a juxtaposition of different and sometimes conflicting normalizing discourses. On the one hand, we see a full example of agency is power over one's life, recreating new strategies and perspectives. This fact, as we see through these women's examples, is able to reorganize and confront the reproduction of poverty cycles. On the other hand, we still observe the set of norms that socially regulate this kind of decision, which will connect these women in gender based traps reducing women and femininity into sacrificial and maternal performances.

## **5.2 Changing mentalities through domestic and care work practices**

In this section, I would like to introduce a very interesting discussion that emerges in my field work regarding specifically my first group of informants. As I argued before this group is mainly composed by Brazilian young student women, who are engaged in the European domestic and care sector as *au pairs*, cleaning ladies and baby-sitters in order to support their studies abroad. Taking this specific group into consideration, I will explore the

way that these four middle-class predominately<sup>58</sup> white young women changed their mentalities and prejudices concerning reproductive work. Most part of the informants of this group had previously the experience of having maids and baby-sitter in their houses in Brazil. For them, it is a real a way to be subjectived in a different manner, this experience of being a reproductive worker abroad, since this event strongly problematizes their social status and pre-established prejudices of this specific occupation. As I observed, this fact strongly impacted their way of seeing this kind of labor, since now as protagonists in this role, they could rethink the stereotypes that are attached to this specific occupation, modifying in this sense their mentalities: reshaping their subjectivities through domestic and care work practices. For instance, Vitoria claims:

Being in this position made me remember and modify many things. I was raised with a baby-sitter and maids in Brazil. All of them were young women from the countryside, I don't know how my mom used to get them... They worked at my house and studied at the same time. It is the exact thing that I am doing here in France. I could only realize it being here. I can say that only in this position that I am occupying now that I am able to give a great valuation for this job. Of course that I feel this cultural and social mark that this job gives to me... but in a way I could reinvent it. Now I value care work because it was through this work that I could travel and accomplish this dream of being in France. (27/05/2011)

Cristina also has a similar opinion:

When I started to do this kind of work, I rethought my relationship with my mother who did these things for me in Brazil. For instance, I remember that sometimes I used to frown at the dinner that she cooked... Now I see how this work is important... and is very tiring for who does it. (11/05/2011)

The dual position that Vitoria and Cristina are occupying in their jobs as *au pairs* is clear here. We can say that through this experience, that was not possible in their native context, they could rethink and reevaluate reproductive work in general. It is comparing their

---

<sup>58</sup> Only Mariana is a woman of color

situation with their previous baby-sitter, maids and in Cristina's specific case her mother that they could understand the nuances that paid and unpaid care and domestic work have in a transnational context. These narratives and those below are a good example of the impact that the migratory experience has on Brazilian women's subjectivities, as these young women could reshape their opinions and feelings about this labor by doing it abroad. This dual position of receiving and accomplishing care and domestic work emerges as a relevant element able to demystify her previous prejudices and undervaluation regarding reproductive labor.

Moreover, another important element that emerged in their narratives is that by accomplishing these tasks and playing this role as cleaning ladies and baby-sitters some of my informants could be very critical regarding the Brazilian reality that still perpetuates slave like modes of interpreting domestic and care work. For instance, Mariana compares the difference between reproductive work in France and in Brazil.

In Brazil we have this strong social inequality. My family has a maid there, actually every middle class family has a maid in Brazil. I can say that they are very undervalued. The work that these women accomplish is completely invisible. There a maid can be sweeping the floor and the owner of the house would ask her to bring a glass of water, as she is her servant you know?! It is horrible, it seems that she is not doing something important (...) I never did this kind of job in Brazil, never. Here I must do. Actually I always was very sensitive in respect to domestics, but everything changes when you have this experience in your own skin. Now that I do know, I would never have a maid again in Brazil, this is completely unnecessary. (...) But compared with Brazil here is better... everything is more humanized... when I come back to Brazil this thing will be difficult and painful, this thing of facing this strong inequalities again(...). (10/05/2011)

As I argued before in the historical review on domestic labor in Brazil, reproductive work still has classist and racist connotations, as Maria explicitly shows. In this way we can see the set power operations that still reproduce servant performances that are pretty close to a quasi-slavery working regime. Reflecting a similar point of view Lisa illustrates the inhuman

conditions that domestic workers in Brazil have to bear, by contrasting and reflecting in the same way her own experience as a *nounou*; Lisa says:

Being a “*empregada*” it is very difficult to me... but if I want to be here studying this is my condition. I thought that the fact of being in first world country this would be different, but it is not. It is a little bit different of course, it is not so slave like labor as it is Brazil... but this thing of subemployment is difficult here because we are sub. In Brazil this work is invisible. Being here I could realize the absurdity that we do with domestics there. Actually there we enslave them... this work becomes invisible because the house is always clean, if we had a contrast we would know... there we have a full time maid cleaning everything always...we also have this high cleansing standard in Brazil that is irrational... everything must be shining... and we do pay less for it, we do not feel this money in the familial budget. Here we can get more money doing this, it is more financial valued than in Brazil. This thing is so bizarre in Brazil that I can take my mother’s example: she has a normal maid every day and once a week she has another one that is hired only for cleaning windows! How we can have this! It is an exaggeration. The premises of this work is per se already exploitative. And people do really exploit them. For instance, I remember that once I was in my brother’s house having a familial lunch and I saw my niece asking for the maid to take her hair brush. The maid was cooking the lunch for us, she had to stop her important work, climb the houses’s stairs and take the “*merda*” of the hair brush for her... and the whole family was consenting with this kind of behavior, and she is only eight years old! She already knows how things work... My grandma for instance used to have a little bell to call the maids. For me this time is over, but in Brazil people really do enjoy this, but for me it is very sad! (30/06/2011)

Lisa’s narrative reveals a real tension between their previous conceptions, based on familial, class and cultural backgrounds, and their own experience as a reproductive worker abroad. As we see this self-reflection enables Lisa to track colonialist and slaverist discourses existing in her home-country. Through this exercise, now she is able to establish a distance from her previous cultural and familial background, having in this way a critical opinion on the Brazilian prejudices and naturalized norms that guide Brazilian conceptions on domestic workers. In context, it is important to stress the relevance of the migratory fact, as without this experience abroad they would probably reproduce the set of discourse that establish domestic paid work as being undervalued and invisible work.



This self-reflexive activity brought a new dimension about reproductive work for all my informants belonging to this group. Therefore, we can argue that the migratory experience, sponsored by reproductive work dramatically changes her view over this specific issue, not only regarding the work itself, which now emerges as meaningful kind of occupation, but also regarding their critical appropriation that this experience brought to them. Now they are able to identify and reevaluate Brazilians values on domestic work, denaturalizing, at the same time, the set of prejudices that surrounds domestic work in their native context.

### 5.3 Cultural Capital and migration

In order to expand other nuances that are inherent in the migratory experience, I would like to explore through the notion of cultural capital - stated by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron(1997)- how migrant domestic workers can obtain cultural advantages through work and this transnational experience. In this way, I aim to demonstrate how this international experience mediated by domestic work can produce cultural capital for these women.

It is important to stress that this attribute is particularly sought by Brazilian women of my first group of informants, as the main goal of their migration consists of this cultural and educational experience. However, as I could also observe regarding the second group of informants that even though the focus of the migratory act is not limited to acquiring new educational and cultural skills for themselves, they can at the same time take cultural advantages from this experience abroad. Therefore, I argue that the subjectivity of these women would be strongly impacted by confronting new challenges in a new culture, and/or pursuing cultural benefits through their migratory experience.

According to Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1997), the notion of cultural capital is related to education, skills and knowledge that individuals can acquire through their personal experiences (family, networks) or through institutions (education, work); these elements might give them a higher cultural status in society. In this point, it is important to highlight that this specific kind of capital will be very relevant within the labor market, as it can be easily translated to human capital. Moreover, this value can also circulate between generations, as many informants from my second group claimed that the main goal that founded their migratory strategy is that they want to pay for good schools and/or a college education for their children. In this way, cultural and human capital for this second group also emerge as a important values since most of them explain their migratory decision based on the

acquisition of these specific kinds of capital for their kids - even though it is through the mother's sacrificial discourse. Having this in mind, cultural capital circulates as an important element able to justify for all women their migratory project, not only regarding the first group of this research but also the second group of informants.

A crucial element in this context is the opportunity to learn a foreign language. Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) stress the fundamental role played by the linguistic capital in our society. In this sense, the advantages that these women are able to take through a high exposure to a foreign language and to a foreign culture are meaningful. How can these two groups be connected through the benefits that they take from this international experience? Moreover, besides the language how does this new culture affect their way of existing and living? How can this new environment impact their *rapport a soi* in a different way, by re-articulating foreign cultural elements in their *rapport a soi*?

For instance, we can clearly see these final linguistic and cultural goals regarding the first group of women from this study. All students that I interviewed have inserted this international experience as a cultural and educational project able to promote better labor opportunities in the long term for them in their home country. Mariana claims:

When I finished my studies in Brazil I felt that my education was not enough in order to get a good labor position or even to develop good work... you do know that the psychology degree in Brazil does not provide all the tools that we need in the real practice. I realized that if I wanted to be a good psychologist I will need to search other options abroad. You do know that France is a good place to study social psychology... I wanted to have an experience in the so successful "french republic". I realized that the option of studying abroad was the best thing that I could do at that moment. (10/05/2011)

The project of studying abroad fits a long term educational plan, which will enable these women to have a better education in order to compete for better job opportunities in the Brazilian labor market. In addition, I also observed that the engagement in the domestic work

has a positive outcome, as it helps these women achieve these cultural and linguistic goals.

Cristina states:

I always knew that I will spend some time here in Paris... I started French language in college (...) In my work I learn so much French... and so much of the French culture, my family is highly educated, in this sense I can breath this cultural richness... I am deeply inserted in the French culture... now because of them I do know how things work here (...) (11/05/2011)

We see here through Cristina's eyes that her work as baby-sitter configures itself as a bridge between her and the French culture. The same situation we see in Lisa's experience that have already changed her diet because of the French influence exercised by the family she work for s as baby sitter. In this sense, the insertion in the culture through domestic work, according to Cristina and Lisa has relevant aspects, since by this intensive experience they can have full contact not only with the language but also with the white French elite. As a journalist Cristina argues that this opportunity will bring her important labor benefits in the future such as networks, language skills, and cultural knowledge. In addition, according to Lisa this cultural environment gives her the condition to improve her French and to receive some help when she needs some corrections for her papers for the university. Lisa states:

The mother of the family really supports me, she helped me so many times by correcting my grammar mistakes in my works, in my letters etc. I really appreciate this contact with the French culture, in special with her... I have been learning so much.(30/06/2011)

Regarding Lisa's specific case, we understand that there is a transformation, a reinvention in the complex relationship between employer and employee, as her employer does not only emerge as the figure of a "boss", who organizes Lisa's work and Lisa's conduct in the household, but also as the person who mediates Lisa's insertion in the new land. In this sense, we can clearly see the recreation of the relationship between employer and domestic worker within the private context, since Lisa is able to take cultural advantages that are strongly

helpful in her process of adaptation in France. Therefore, again we see this dual production of subjectivity. On the one hand, Lisa's employer is seen as the authority able to exploit, in some extent, Lisa's labor force (as we saw previously through Lisa's work narratives). On the other hand, Lisa's employer emerges as a important figure that culturally impacts Lisa's experience in Paris.

Contrasting with Cristina's and Lisa's points of view, Mariana's domestic work is only a way to support her studies in Paris, so it does not provide many cultural advantages *per se*: she says

I always was in this battle, working in order to build a better future... I only work to support my studies, my dreams. I see the domestic work as a way to accomplish this final goal. I do not invest in my career as *nounou* (baby-sitter) I do this only for keeping on studying here. This work is the price of my freedom. I feel emancipated in this way, the feeling of being emancipated is bigger than the feeling of being exploited... I love my life here in Paris. (10/05/2011)

According to Adriana who has a similar point of view, the work itself is interesting only if we consider the contact with people that she is able to establish through this labor activity. Adriana claims: "Even though the work itself is frustrating, I feel that it gives me the opportunity to meet interesting people and share experiences with them." In this way, we are able to understand the way that socialization and cultural contrasts are able to promote meaningful experiences for these women that, before their travel, this kind of interaction and personal growth was unthinkable.

In addition, it is also important to highlight that all my informants from the two groups intensively reported the advantages provided by the urban particularities offered in Paris. According to Adriana the city itself offers to her welfare and happiness. From her point of view, everybody can have access to many cultural activities for a very affordable price (often for free), such as cinema, theater, museums, historical buildings etc. As she argues these

cultural opportunities are very restricted and expensive in Brazil, since the access to culture is extremely elitist there. Cristina and Jussara also support Adriana's perceptions:

Here the access to culture is so easy and so cheap compared with Brazil... here we can see art everywhere... we can do so many things for free here! Moreover, the social segmentation is not so huge as in Brazil... people does not see as a problem being a student and a baby-sitter at the same time, in Brazil we can not imagine this kind of situation(...). Cristina-first group of informants (11/05/2011)

In the cultural sense this decision of coming here was incredible! My relationship with the French culture is very good. I have assimilated very fast the french language and the french habits. Here in Europe we can go to the theater to a classic music concert that in Brazil is only for rich people. Moreover, we have so many movie theaters here, and they are so affordable.(...) Three years ago I did an english language course for free because it was sponsored by Paris's city hall... this in Brazil is unthinkable! Here I can pay for a pocket book having only 3 euros! In this sense, this travel changed my life in a very positive way. Jussara- second group of informants. (09/05/2011)

Contributing to this view Mariana believes that the city itself is a special place to be and to "consume" because of its cosmopolitan air: "I feel here as I were in the center of the world! We can have contact with so many different cultures, languages, people..." Reinforcing this idea Adriana argues "This cultural richness that we are able to find here in Paris fascinates me, during my work for example... sometimes I am in the park with the kids and I can meet a mother from Algeria a baby-sitter from Cyprus or a Turkish grandmother... I love this experience". Regarding these narratives, we are able to understand the premises famed by Arlie Hochschild and Barbara Ehrenreich (2004). The authors argue the migratory process can potentially empower these migrant domestic workers, since it offers different opportunities and life experiences that they would not have in their home country.

In the specific case of my second group of informants, the notion of cultural capital emerges more as intergenerational advantage in the sense of providing high quality education for their kids in their home country than as personal and individual accomplishments. In spite of not pursuing this goal of having their own improvement in this cultural sense, they feel very

satisfied by the victory of providing these opportunities for their children in their home land.

Here, we have clear examples through Maria's and Antonia's narratives:

Look at my case! I never had the material conditions to give anything to my kids, not even a pencil, a notebook.... My sister helped to support them for years. And my dream was seeing them going to the university. And I knew that one day I could give this opportunity for them and now this is a dream that became true. Working here I could pay the colleges for my two boys. One has a degree in hotelry and the other one is finishing economy. I send every month money for them, for paying their studies. This thing for me is a glory, a victory! It is an honor that pays all this sacrifice. This thing justifies my distance, my tears, my loneliness, but I can construct a better future for them. Because in five years here I could accomplish many things that in Brazil would not be possible. If I had stayed there I will never see my kids with universities' degree. Antonia (09/05/2011)

When my sister came here in order to work I had a "click". I was already thinking about my kid's future, how they would manage to finish their studies because they were arriving in this age of starting the university. My daughter is now in the law school with the money from here. My son in some years will be an engineer. This gives strength to keep on working here. Maria (07/05/2011)

Through these narratives, we can clearly see the way by which the sacrificial discourses support these women's migration strategy. The notion of providing financial possibilities for their children to have cultural and human capital in their home country justifies their sacrifices of being abroad in a vulnerable condition. In this context, we see the relevance in their discourses of transmitting educational and cultural benefits for their children. It is interesting to understand that this fact became an essential element of their performance as mothers. In this process they negated other factors that we identify as being a mother's performance such as proximity, face-to-face care, love affection and direct supervision by virtue of giving to them cultural and educational skills. Therefore, we understand how cultural capital emerges for these women as an important element regarding their identities as mothers, since the act of giving cultural and educational tools for their children became, in their opinion, also a mother's role. In their specific case they show that this element is able to modify their way to be mothers, by

redefining roles and identities. Hence, we realize that other ways of being a mother were incorporated in the set of premises that regulate their subjectivities as mothers, as workers, as women.

Even though this second group of informants is characterized by not pursuing *per se* cultural and educational goals for themselves, through their experience abroad they are able to perceive that the new challenges in a foreign land brought to them elements and difficulties. For instance, Antonia admits that her French is not as good as she would like, but she is working on this aspect by trying to interact more with French speakers. Adriana and Jussara are good examples of a successful insertion in the French language since both of them are already fluent in French. Suzana is another good example of personal cultural improvement who through her cattle businesses was forced to study more about this specific kind of investment in Brazil and to manage this business from distance. All these examples show how the migratory experience can enlarge human and cultural outcome for transnational domestic workers, as they are forced to acquire new skills and abilities within the foreign context. These processes are able to re-articulate their subjectivities in a singular way, since as they have to confront unknown power structures they are forced to obtain new cultural and linguistic tools for negotiate their status in France and in their home country.

The migratory process, supported by the domestic work, could promote considerable changes in these women's lives. So, it is important to point out the positive outcomes of this hard but emancipatory experience, since it can be seen as a real way to acquire empowerment regarding the complex interaction between their identities; as women, as workers, as mothers, as Brazilians.

#### **5.4 Being Brazilian woman abroad: particular resistance strategies.**



In this section, I would like to explore some resistance strategies developed by my informants in order to overcome a set of difficult situations that characterize their lives in Paris. First of all, I will put light on the resistance strategies that these women were able to construct within some oppressive contexts. For this, I will investigate the way by which they construct and benefit from a solidarity network organized among Brazilians in Paris.

Marc Bessin and Laurence Roulleau-Berger (2002 p.6) in their article “*Les armes du faible sont-elles de faibles armes?*” suggest that the growing social inequalities in our contemporary world, where oppressed and dominate populations seem to be “frozen” in a apparent state of social apathy, motivates, at the same time, these populations to create new strategies able to respond in a creative way the hardship and the obstacles created by the social fragmented organization. The authors claim that oppressed people usually encountered individual or collective forms to deal with structural problems, by redefining roles and identities. Here, we can clearly see that the migratory fact represents *per se* an individual way to hold back the cycle of poverty reproduction as I demonstrated above. However, in this section I would like to introduce micro individual/collective strategies that also correspond to the set of strategies that the subject create in order to produce a bearable level of freedom/domination.

The tensions faced by migrant women as I pointed out in this study are many. They come in very plural and multifaceted way. In this context, I would like to explore how solidarity and social networks are able to play a fundamental role in their insertion in Paris, as these kind of collective organizations emerge as a important resistance strategies in their daily life abroad. It is important to stress that these networks made of people from the same nationality becomes crucial in their process of finding jobs. In addition, in some cases these networks are so relevant that they are able to support and motivate their migratory strategy itself. Maria’s, Suzana’s and Adriana’s examples reflect this specific point:

When I was in Porto Alegre I met a woman who was living in Paris. I spend two months in her house when I arrived here, without her this dream of coming here would not be possible. Then I met a group of Brazilian women who were living here. I spent seven months searching for jobs, so I remember that I had lived for a while in their houses, like a gipsy, one month in each house (...) These people helped me a lot. It was through this group of Brazilians that I found my first job as cleaning lady here (...) I was emotionally supported by them. Adriana (06/05/2011)

My sister came and after two years she invited me to live with her in Paris. My sister already knew a lot of people here. I arrived and I did not need to search for a job. The day after the arrival I started to work by her help. Here I do know wonderful people, Brazilians, they protect me and give a lot of affection. Maria (07/05/2011)

“Arriving here, I meet a Brazilian girl that became a very good friend of mine here.. she helped to get jobs. In one week, with her help, I got my first job. In this job I worked for one year and five months. It was with this job that my dream started. I could pay my bills in Brazil.” Suzana (27/06/2011)

In these fragments, we can clearly see the significant role played by these solidarity networks, as these people helped these women not only by indicating job opportunities, but also constructing emotional ties which are essential in a foreign context. In this sense, we see how the relationships not only exclusively based on blood but also on friendship construct a safe network for transitional domestic workers. Therefore, we see how supportive relations characterized by solidarity are able to reshape their social interactions by constructing collective ways to live, neutralizing, in some extent, the contemporary individualism mandate. These collective strategies explicitly demonstrate the way by which vulnerable people can construct several artifices in order to deal with difficult contexts, by creating other ways to be socially structured such as relaying in emotional ties based on solidarity and friendship. By these new strategies created through solidarity and friendship, we can understand the way that transnational domestic workers are able to reinvent a new stylistic of life through the migratory event characterized by invention and collective action. The potential resistance is highlighted

by their feelings and emotions, which are strongly embedded in these new forms of being and existing.

It is important to point out some elements that usually characterize these kind of networks. For instance, as I could observe in my field work, nationality and gender strongly shape these solidarity networks. Often women from the same country in this similar vulnerable condition construct these supportive spaces that are able to sustain emotionally and logistically migrant domestic workers. The effect of these interactions regarding women's subjectivity is neither the nuclear family as an institution, nor the state that emotionally and financially protects these women, but this sisterhood founded in shared life stories and common problematics. Therefore, their social and economic *désaffiliation* is substituted by solidarity, friendship and creativity. Suzana says:

You know I am very worried about a friend of mine, who is also Brazilian. She is darker as me, so for her it is more difficult to find jobs, people do not trust her because of her skin color... she really needs money. But I am sure that I will find something for her during the next weeks. (...) here, we have to support each other, we created this little Brazil here, so everybody must be fine in here. (27/06/2011)

Cíntia for instance found her supportive network in the protestant church, she claims:

"Here I go every weekend to this evangelic church, there I find a lot of Brazilian women in the same situation as me. I have really good friends there, they also helped me to find job contacts" (25/05/2011)

Surprisingly, other support networks can also be found in their labor context. Suzana tells her story when she was seasonally working at a *chantier*<sup>59</sup> as a cook and cleaning lady.

These people from this *chantier* really helped me in the moment that I needed most. They accepted me even though I was illegal in the country, I cooked for them and I also cleaned everything. By that time

---

<sup>59</sup> building site

I could not speak even a *Bonjour*, nothing even a word in french. They used to protect me in this work, you know french people! when the police would come, for doing their inspection they used to hide me. I remember that once one worker died during his labor journey, well that week was a hell because the police was there during a whole week. they gave me the entire week of holidays for preventing me to be deported. the whole building site had to eat in restaurants during this week, every thing done for protecting me. They really saw me as a human being! (27/06/2011)

Through this example we can clearly see now of these solidarity networks, which were built through their personal competences, enable migrant workers to literally survive in these difficult and risky situations. Here, through these examples we are able to understand the way that migration impacts women's subjectivity. On the one hand, the trap represented by the set of objectivation's practices condemns these women to a social and economic vulnerability. On the other hand, we see how these women, in spite of their precarious status, manage to negotiate new ways not only of resisting and surviving, but also of existing.

Other individual/collective strategies can also be understood as being "*des armes du faible*" for confronting other oppressive situations. Here, I point out the set of creative strategies created by these women in order to fight against normalization and domination. A good example of this is their strategies of coming back to Brazil- in order to see their families - and return to France while being illegal immigrants. From my point of view, this operation emerges as a clear way to track the modes that transnational domestic workers can play "different games" within the moral code, having to some extent, space for resistance strategies: producing through this new *esthétique de l'existence*. For instance Maria and Suzana once did this risky and adventurous trip. Maria says:

Here, we Brazilians know how to proceed in a situation like this. I bought my ticket in order to spend two month in Brazil. Here in France, in this immigration office in the airport I received the stamp of deportation, this thing that says that you can not come back here for 5 years. Well arriving in Brazil I did a new passport; they not even check anything there. So with a new passport I could enter as a tourist again... I don't know how many times we can do this procedure but I will probably try this again.(07/05/2011)

Suzana used the same procedure as Maria, following the same rules presented by Maria. Through these strategies, we can clearly see the way that vulnerable and oppressed people develop ingenious ways to confront their low status, playing in this sense with the existing norms. Regarding Maria's and Suzana's examples, we understand how these women are able to literally play with the deficiencies of the system, taking individual and collective benefits from this. It is important to point out that these "arms" which are disseminated by their supportive networks made of Brazilian domestic workers living in Paris, teach step by step all the procedures that have to be accomplished in order to do this travel in a safe way. In this context, we explicitly see the resistance strategies created by these women, who play with the rules develop personal competences based on creativity, improvisation, and solidarity. This specific example shows us how new strategies to deal with the moral code and to the so established disciplinary power operations can emerge within a precarious and vulnerable context. Therefore, when Foucault argues that in every power relation, even the most domineering ones, there are always ways to escape from objectification traps, since resistance strategies are inherent characteristics of every and any oppressive and domineering condition. These women, by reversing their economic status in their home country, construct different social structures based on solidarity and friendship, create ingenious ways of dealing with rules and thereby demonstrate for us how resistance and subjective reinvention can be created even in oppressive and normalized contexts.

### **5.5Chapter's conclusion**

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the migration experience could re-articulate Brazilian women's subjectivities, by including a set of resistance strategies that before the migratory fact was unthinkable.

Firstly I explored the way that vulnerable transnational workers were able to reverse their diagram of subordination by creating new strategies that enable them to stop reproducing poverty. As I claimed there is a dual subjectivity position that is occupied by these women. On the one hand, they respond to the passive and subordinate positions that their transnational work as domestics and their undocumented status impose on them. On the other hand, they create other identities and subjective positions by negotiating better working status and/or investing in their own business in their home-countries. In this context, I also stressed some interesting discourses that appeared in their narratives such as their impression of experiencing less racial prejudice within the French context than in Brazil. Another important aspect that emerged within these women's narratives is the specific gender performance created by the migratory fact, since these women, who are mothers trying to pay for their children education in their native country, constructed their subjectivities by including a kind of sacrificial motherhood performance, reshaping, in a sense, their maternal role.

Secondly, I explored how my first group of informants could reformulate their identities and subjectivities by accomplishing domestic work by rethinking and reevaluating reproductive work in general. I stressed how these women could demystify their previous prejudices and undervaluation regarding reproductive labor. In the third section of this chapter, I highlighted the way by which this international experience could create cultural capital for all my informants, by imposing new situations that involved high abilities and cultural skills.

Finally, I demonstrated how these women could create a set of resistance strategies that enable them to literally survive in a context marked by strong oppression and normalization and highlighted the relevance of support networks in their daily life. As I claimed, solidarity, creativity, and sisterhood represent important pillars able to protect and defend these women within a foreign context.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to comprehend how Brazilian transnational domestic workers are subjectivated through migration, gender and reproductive work. It was in attempts to address this question that I elaborated a vision/version of the subjective effects of migration for ten Brazilian women working in the reproductive sector in Paris. As I indicated through my hypothesis, the migratory *événement* can be characterized by a multifaceted set of experiences and elaborations that respond not only to oppressive and ~~an~~ exploitative regimes but also provides domestics, to some extent, with limited resistance spaces, which enable them to recreate their lives through the migration in an empowering and emancipatory way. In my first hypothesis I stated that the migratory *événement* highlights potential oppression and exploitation regarding life's trajectories for transnational domestic workers. I demonstrated how elements such as undocumented statuses, informal labor contracts and the relationship between employer and employee contribute to the domineering trap. In my second hypothesis, I state that in spite of these strong oppressing elements these women could at the same time develop resistance strategies. As I explored transnational domestic workers could reshape their subjectivity by introducing new strategies of living/existing, characterized by solidarity, communal sharing and creativity.

In the first chapter of this study, I explored the current literature on transnational domestic work. Through this literature review, I established the most relevant scholarly discourses on this issue, which often stressed the set of mechanisms that play an important role within the international division of reproductive work. As I pointed out, domestic workers' migration is the result of a complex combination of social, macro-economic and cultural factors that include elements such as: the propagation of gender inequalities within the household (as even with women's incorporation into the productive sector, men have not taken up their part

in the household tasks), the decline of welfare services in Western countries, the massive incorporation of women into paid employment, and the misery and lack of opportunities for Third World women. I showed how the combination of these elements have been crucial in generating the growing migratory flows of Third World women searching for survival strategies in Europe. I then demonstrated how reproductive work has incorporated and reproduced in its logic a specific set of norms. Gender, ethnicity, race class and nationality emerged as important elements able to control and organize the international division of reproductive work.

In order to understand the specific migration of Brazilian women to Paris, in the second chapter I developed a historical review able to problematize the conjuncture that promoted this flow of Brazilian domestic workers. I would like to point out the relevance of this historical perspective in my research, since few studies regarding transnational domestic work address the importance of historical events in their approach. First, I analyzed the servant figures in colonial Brazil with the aim of detecting existing colonial discourses within care and domestic activity. As I demonstrated, this colonial and slaverist past strongly impact the production of subjectivity of Brazilian transnational domestic workers. The historical review also highlighted the impact of structural adjustment policies (initiated in the eighties and still enforced) on Brazilian women. Through this chapter I aimed to show how macro-economic and political structural aspects were able to influence Brazilian women's migratory decisions. Therefore, I aimed to stress the importance of history in understanding their status and subjectivity.

In Chapter 3, my theoretical framework, I incorporated a dual vision on migration. By using Kathie Kasaba's perspective I could integrate a macro structural perspective with an individual and singular view provided by the life narratives from my ten informants. Exploring these particularities in the life trajectories represents the main aim of this research, which deals with the production of subjectivity. Through Foucault's elaborations on the production of subjectivities, I stressed the relevance of the objectivation and subjectivation procedures within



our normalizing society. I addressed the importance of domination mechanisms imposed by the set of regulations that inflict oppressive and exploitative regimes on transnational domestic workers. I also highlighted the potential resistance points that coexist within power relations and power games.

As I introduced through my hypothesis, the migratory experience is able to produce distinct effects on women's subjectivities. In the fourth chapter, by exploring my first hypothesis I demonstrated how Brazilian transnational domestic and care workers have experienced subordination and exploitation within their labor contexts in Paris. Through their experiences, I stressed some oppressive characteristics such as their lack of rights and restricted job opportunities. Regarding their labor regimes, I demonstrated how informal labor contracts, flexibility and hardship contributed to their sub-human condition within the Parisian context. Connected to this less human status, we have the unequal relationship between employer and employee, which is largely characterized by strong hierarchies.

In the fifth chapter of my study, in order to explore the second hypothesis, I focused on the resistance strategies developed by these women within oppressive and exploitative regimes. I explored how women in precarious situations were able to reverse diagrams of subordination through migration and the ensuing end of the reproduction of poverty. So, as we could see the migratory *événement* had a strong impact regarding their social and economic classes, as through migration they were able to reverse poverty and their lack of opportunities. Moreover, I also highlighted the dual subjective space occupied by these women. On the one hand, they occupy these passive and subordinate positions that their work as domestics and their undocumented status impose on them. On the other hand, they are able to create and reinvent other identities and subjective positions, thereby negotiating a better working status and/or investing in their own business in their home-country. Furthermore, I analyzed the set of resistance strategies developed by Brazilian transnational domestic workers, "*des armes du faible*". I pointed out the importance of support networks in their daily life. As I argued,

creative solidarity and sisterhood represent fundamental elements in their lives that are able to protect and defend these women within a foreign context. Connected to these strategies, we could see how solidarity networks highlight the shared and communal ways of living and existing. These supportive networks stress the agency of these women by promoting new social organizations that clearly engender new “*esthétiques de l'existence*” able to confront the individualistic social mandate. Therefore, we have to observe the importance of both their individual forms of resistance and their solidarity networks in surviving and coping the migratory experience.

In this context, it is important to stress the diversity of these migrant domestic workers, as we could see in my findings each life's trajectory is unique and particular. We could observe that in order to understand the diversity of transnational domestic workers, we can not reduce them to a monolithic and stable group. As Chandra Mohanty (1984) highlights, Third World women are diverse and can not be seen as a uniform group.

Having all these elements in mind, I am convinced that this research is only one of the many possible narratives about Brazilian transnational domestic worker's production of subjectivity. My analysis cannot be generalized or taken as the truth regarding the experiences of these women. Further comparative research addressing and problematizing the impact of the migratory experience on transnational domestic workers has to be developed in order to broaden the understanding of this *événement* in the lives of migrant women as well as to highlight its underlying structural and global connections.

## Appendix 1

### **Adriana**

Age: 53 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: Porto Alegre

Level of study: Bachelor degree, Biologist

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? No

### **Mariana**

Age: 26 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: Recife

Level of study: Bachelor degree, Psychologist

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? No

### **Cristina**

Age: 22 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: Assis, São Paulo

Level of study: Bachelor degree, Journalist

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? No

### **Antônia**

Age: 56 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: Brasília

Level of study: Elementary school

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? Yes, Two

**Maria**

Age: 40 years

Civil State: married

Place of birth: Piracajara, Goiás

Level of study: High school

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? Yes, Two

**Cíntia**

Age: 30 years

Civil State: married

Place of birth: countryside, Maranhão

Level of study: Elementary school

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? Yes, one.

**Jussara**

Age: 52 years

Civil State: divorced

Place of birth: Santos, São Paulo

Level of study: elementary school

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? Yes, four.

**Suzana**

Age: 28 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: countryside, Tocantins

Level of study: Elementary school.

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? Yes, Two

**Lisa**

Age: 33 years

Civil State: married

Place of birth: Belo Horizonte

Level of study: Bachelor degree, Pedagogue

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? No

**Vitória**

Age: 28 years

Civil State: single

Place of birth: Porto Alegre

Level of study: studying BA

Do you have kids? If yes: How many? No.

## Appendix 2

### Closed questions:

Age:

Civil State:

Parent's profession:

Religion:

Place of birth:

Level of study:

Do you have kids? If yes: How many?

When did you start to work?

How many jobs did you have? (approximately)

In which occupation did you work longer?

Are you descended of immigrants? ( ) Italians ( ) Africans ( ) Germans ( ) Japanese ( ) Native Brazilians ( ) Others

When did you arrive in Europe?

### Open questions:

1. How was the process of making the decision to travel to Europe? Which factors contributed to this decision?
2. How was your last day in Brazil? What kind of expectations, dreams did you have before coming?
3. During your first week in Europe, what kind of feelings did you have? How was the reception?
4. Is the work itself an important dimension of your life?
5. How was the process of searching jobs here? Was it easy, hard? Did you chose your first job or did you work in the first opportunity that appears? The job was as you expected?(*explore the dimension of the ideal and real* )

6. Can you describe the ideal work?
7. Do you think that care work is well valued here, and in Brazil? Why? (*Explore the differences between the Brazilian context and the European context*)
8. Do you think that care work is exclusively a women's work? Why? (*If yes, explore the aspects that women's work differs from men's work*)
9. Can you describe/ narrate a work day?
10. What kinds of aspects do you enjoy about your work routine and which aspects do you dislike?
11. What kind of benefits, accomplishments do you think that your work bring to you?
12. What kind of activities do you have in your free time?
14. What are the pros and contras of living in Europe? And what are the pros and contras of living in Brazil?
15. How do you see yourself in 10 years? What do you think that you will be doing? Where?

## Bibliography

- Anderson, B. (2000). *Doing the dirty work?* The global Politics of domestic labor. London: Zed Books.
- Antrobus, P.(2004). *The Global Women's Movement: Origins Issues and strategies*, London: Zed Books .
- Arendt, H. (1998). *La condición humana*, Buenos Aires: Periods.
- Baer, M. (1993). *A crise fiscal e financeira do estado brasileiro*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Bessin, M., & Bidart, C., & Grosetti, M. (2010). *Bifurcations*. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement. Paris: La Découverte, Coll. Recherches.
- Bessin, M.,& Roulleau-Berger,L.(2002). Les armes du faible sont-elles de faibles armes ? *L'Homme et la société*, n. 143-144, 3-11.
- Bosniak L. (2009) Migrations and Mobilities: Citizenship, Borders and Gender. In Seyla Behabib and Judith Resnik (eds). *Citizenship non-citizenship and transnationalization of domestic work* 127-156 New York: New York University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2003). *The weight of the world* : social suffering in contemporary society. Stanford, Cal: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.(1997). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Braidotti, R.(2000). *Sujetos nómades*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2000.
- Brenner, J. , & Laslett, B. (1991) Gender, social reproduction and women's self organization considering the U.S welfare state. *Gender and society*. v.5, n.3, p. 311-332.
- Brun , F. (2006). Immigrés, sans-papiers, des travailleurs en deçà de la citoyenneté » , *L'Homme et la Société*.v.2, 161-175
- Buarque de Holanda, S. (1973) *Raízes do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: livraria José Olympio Editora.
- Burlandy, L., & Renato Maluf, R. (2007). *Working Paper for the Action Aid International Middle Income Countries Initiative*. Rio de Janeiro. Retrieved from [:http://www.ufrj.br/cpda/ceresan/docs/tx\\_disc\\_vs\\_ingles.pdf](http://www.ufrj.br/cpda/ceresan/docs/tx_disc_vs_ingles.pdf)
- Butler, J.(2006) *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J.(2004) *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Carrasco, C. (2001) La sostenibilidad de la vida humana: ¿un asunto de mujeres? *Mientras Tanto*, 82, (otoño-inverno). Barcelona: Icaria Editorial.
- Carvalho Eduardo, C. (2006). As origens e a gênese do Plano Collor. *Nova Economia*.Belo Horizonte. v.16 n.1101-134
- Castro, M.(2001) Gênero e poder: leituras transculturais - quando o sertão é mar, mas o olhar estranha, encalha em recifes. *Cad. Pagu*, Campinas, n. 16. Retrieved from [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0104-83332001000100004&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-83332001000100004&lng=en&nrm=iso).
- Cook, D. (1993) *The subject finds a Voice*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Costa, A. (2005). *O Movimento feminista no Brasil: Dinâmicas de uma intervenção política*. Niterói, v. 5, n. 2, p. 9-35. <http://www.ieg.ufsc.br/admin/downloads/artigos/01112009-115122costa.pdf>
- Costa, N. (2009) Social protection in Brazil: universalism and targeting in



- the FHC and Lula administrations. *Ciência e Saúde Coletiva*. Retrieved from: <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/pdf/630/63013535002.pdf>
- Costa, A & Sardenberg, C. (1994). Feminismos, feministas e movimentos sociais. In. Brandao, Maria Luiza e Bingermer, Maria Clara (org). *Mulher e relações de gênero*. São Paulo: Loyola.
- Crittenden, A. (2002) *The Price of Motherhood*. Holt Paper backs.
- Daly, M., & Lewis J. (2000) The concept of social care and the analysis of contemporary welfare states. *British Journal of Sociology*, v. 51 n.2, 281-298
- Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. (2003). *Global woman : nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new ecónomo*. New York : Metropolitan Books,
- Expilly, C. (2000). *Mulheres e costumes do Brasil*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia.
- Farah, M. (2004) Gênero e políticas públicas. *Rev. Estud. Fem.*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 1 . Available from <[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0104-026X2004000100004&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-026X2004000100004&lng=en&nrm=iso)>. access on 03 May 2011. doi: 10.1590/S0104-026X2004000100004.
- Fonseca, M.(1995) *Michel Foucault e a constituição do sujeito*. São Paulo: EDUC.
- Foucault, Michel. (1994) A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: Un aperçu du travail en cours. In *Dits et écrits* (v. 4, p. 383-411) Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, M.(1975) *Surveiller et Punir*. Paris, Gallimard.
- Foucault, M.(1997) L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté. In: Foucault, M. *Dits et Écrits*, v. IV, 708-729. Paris: Gallimard.
- Freire, G. (1980). *Casa Grande e senzala*. Rio de Janeiro: Jose Olympio.
- Gorender, J. (1980) *O escravismo colonial*. São Paulo: Editora Ática.
- Gorfinkel Díaz, M. (2008) El mercado de trabajo de los cuidados y la creación de las cadenas globales de cuidado: ¿cómo concilian las cuidadoras? Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales, v.26, n. 2 71-89.
- Gregg, M. (2008) The normalization of flexible female Labour in Information Economy. *Feminist Media Studies*.v. 8 n.3, 285-299.
- Gutiérrez Rodríguez, E. (2007). The "Hidden Side" of the New Economy: On Transnational Migration, Domestic Work, and Unprecedented Intimacy *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, v. 28, n.3, 60-83.
- Habermas, J. (2003). *The future of the Human Nature*. Cambridge : Polity.
- Hawkesworth, M. (2006) "Intersectionality," in her *Feminist Inquiry: From Political Conviction to Methodological Innovation*. 207-248. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Hirata, H. (2002). Globalização e divisão sexual do trabalho. *Cad. Pagu*, Campinas, n. 17-18, Retrieved from <[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0104-83332002000100006&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-83332002000100006&lng=en&nrm=iso)>.
- Hochschild, A (1983). *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A.R. (2000) 'Global care chains and emotional surplus value' In W. Hutton & A. Giddens (Eds). *On the Edge. Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Jonathan Cape, 130-146.
- Insa B., & Speranta, D. (2007) Les sans-papiers et leur droit d'avoir des droits. Une approche par l'éthique de la discussion, *Raisons politiques*, v.2 n. 26, 125-147.
- Kasaba, Friedman K. (1996). *Memories of Migration: Gender Ethnicity and Work in the lives of Jewish and Italian women in New York 1870-1924*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York.

- Katzmann, D. (1978). *Seven days a week: women and domestic service in industrializing America*. New York: Oxford University press
- Kiczková, Z. (2006). *Women's memory : the experience of self-shaping in biographical interviews*. Bratislava : IRIS, 2006.
- Lan,P.(2006). *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domestic and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*. London: Duke University Press.
- Lavina, L. (2001). *Empregabilidade no Brasil:inflexões de gênero e diferenciais femininos*. Instituto de Pesquisa Economica Aplicada. Retrieved from:[http://www.ipea.gov.br/pub/td/td\\_2001/Td0826.pdf](http://www.ipea.gov.br/pub/td/td_2001/Td0826.pdf)
- Leeds, A. (1976). Women in the migratory process: a reductionist outlook. *Anthropological Quarterly*.v. 49. 69-76.
- Lyon, D. (2006) The Organization of Care Work in Italy: Gender and Migrant Labor in the New Economy. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, v.13, n1, 207-224.
- Lutz, H. (1997). At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service. *Feminist Review*, n. 70, 89-104.
- Lutz, H. (2004). Life in the Twilight Zone: Migration, Transnationality and Gender in the Private Household *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, v.12 n.1, 47-55
- Lutz, H. (2008). *Migration and domestic work: a European perspective on a global theme*. Aldershot,Hants, England: Ashgate.
- Mohanty Talpade, C. (1984).Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses *boundary* v.2 n. 3. 333-358.
- Nardi, H.(2002). A genealogia do indivíduo moderno e os suportes sociais da existência. *Psicol. Soc.*, Belo Horizonte, v. 14, n. 1 . Retrieved from <[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0102-71822002000100009&lng=en&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-71822002000100009&lng=en&nrm=iso)>.
- Ong, A. (1987) The modern corporation: Manufacturing Gender Hierarchy In *spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*. Factory Women in Malasya. Albany, NY: SUNY press.
- Pardini Bicudo Vêras, M. (2003). *Sociedade Urbana: desigualdade e exclusão sociais*. CRH, Salvador, n. 38, 79-114.
- Parrenas, R. (2001) *Servants of globalization: women, migration and domestic work*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Pereira de Melo, H. (2005). Gênero e Pobreza no Brasil. *Relatório Final do Projeto Governabilidade Democrática de Género en America Latina y el Caribe*.Brazilia retrived from:[http://200.130.7.5/spmu/docs/GEneroPobreza\\_Brasil04.pdf](http://200.130.7.5/spmu/docs/GEneroPobreza_Brasil04.pdf)
- Rabinow, P. (1984). *Aesthetics, method, and Epistemology*. New York:New Press.
- Revel, J. (2009). *Le vocabulaire de Foucault*.Paris: Elipses.
- Rollins, J.(1985). *Between Women: domestics and their empyers*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press.
- Sassen, S.(2008) Two stops in today's new global Geographies: Shaping Novel Labor Supply and Employment Regimes. *American Behavior Scientist*, v.52, n. 3, 457-496.
- Sassen, S. (2003). Global cities and survival circuits. In Barbara Ehrenreich & Arlie Hochschild (Eds), *Global Women: nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*.New York: metropolitan Books.
- Scott, J. (1986). Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.*The American Historical Review* v. 91, n. 5, 1053-1074.Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Seguino, S., & Berik, G., & Van der Mullen, Y. (2010) *An Investment that pays off: Promoting Gender equality as a Means to Finance Development*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung-working papers.
- Storbell, M. (2002). *Doing Oral History as an Outsider*. In *Women's Oral History*. Armitage, S. & Weathermon, Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press
- Revel, J. (2009). *Le vocabulaire de Foucault*. Paris: Elipses.
- Yeates, N. (2005) Global care chains: a critical introduction. *Global Migration Perspectives*. n. 44
- Yeates, N. (2009). *Globalizing care economies and migrant workers: Explorations in global care chains*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Vilhena dos Santos, L. (1969). *A Bahia no século 18*. Salvador: Editora Itapuá.
- Vitti da Costa, E. (1966) *Da Senzala à Colônia*. São Paulo: Difusão Europeia do livro.
- Zontini, E. (2004) Immigrant Women in Barcelona: Coping with the Consequences of Transnational Lives. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* v. 30, n. 6, 1113-1144.
- Zontini, E. (2010). Enabling and constraining aspects of social capital in migrant families: ethnicity, gender and generation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, v.33, n.5, 816-831.
- Zontini, E. (2008). Resisting Fortress Europe: The everyday politics of female transnational migrants. *Focal European Journal of Anthropology*. v 51, 13–27.