



TIEMPO DE ESPERA EN LAS FRONTERAS
DEL MERCADO LABORAL: NUEVOS
AGENTES SOCIALES EN EL
ESPACIO SOCIAL

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FEMININE EXPERIENCE, DOMESTIC JOB, LOW QUALIFICATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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PRESENTING THE RESEARCH: BRIEF INTRODUCTION

We think about the domestic feminine job in a located perspective, qualifying the sociocultural profile of 3 different occupational groups in the town of Viçosa, Minas Gerais: 20 contracted workers, servants and subcontracted cleaners; 20 maidservants; 24 independent workers (artisans, experienced cooks and dressmakers).

The discussion articulates domestic space and laboral life, and the dynamics of reorganization, conflict and negotiation of the pertinent social relationships. We examined their forms of interaction and relation in specific atmospheres; the transit and mobility in different social domains - home, work, neighborhood.

The main theoretical references relapse on the qualitative distinctions, the generational accumulated experience and the gender readings that happen the dynamics of the families' relationships, the conditions and day by day of their work. We discussed habits, customs and life experiences demarcating the moral vicissitudes and the centrality of the laboral life in certain identity configurations. We problematized notions and cultural meanings about value-work apprehending unyielding domains to the maximizing logic of the social production, linked to the widest sphere of the social reproduction.

The methodological procedures sit on the ethnographic tradition, aiming for a potentially meaningful reality both for whom investigates and for the one who is investigated. We are ethnographing fairs, free markets, public squares, family houses, sociability nets, where the subjects-of-research circulate: ourselves and the referred women. We inquired how they would access another

social position, questioning if certain displacements would potentialize games and existential paradoxes. And, further, if they would be tuned in their trajectories of class and expectations of qualified social inclusion.

The preliminary results sketch reflexive clues. The raised data reveal levels of solidarity among certain given laboral experience and a complex blend of senses, feelings and meanings of social disaffiliation, indicating dimensions as: the vast heterogeneity of the laboral informal market; the strength of moral prerogatives that qualify a given experience of exclusion; the great inaccessibility of those workers to mechanisms of social protection; the centrality of class and gender markers in the dynamics of their social work relationships.

1. SETTING UP A DISCUSSION: THEORETICAL NOTES

The domestic job in Brazil represents the main form of feminine insertion in the laboral market. A great part of the discussion about it has been prioritizing economical indicators¹. On the contrary, we sought expressive dimensions of that occupational experience, turning our glance and listening to dynamics, devices and dispositions that contribute to the subjective disqualification of different domestic workers. Socially indispensable characters present in everyday life, though invisible in their singularities, demands and expectations.

We interpreted practices, senses and feelings of exclusion that manifest demands and underlying expectations, identifying a process of moral disqualification present in the dynamics and laboral relationships of women who work on it.

A lot of contradictions and conflicts. Forms of non-legitimacy and non-recognition, which operate generating devices of subalternity, inequality and discrimination and subjective disqualification that engenders a sinuous blend between inheritances of class and gender.

¹ There are in Brazil 6.658.627 domestic workers: 6.206.202 women between 25 and 60 years, 18% of active women.

Something unique among the poors, by the loss of purchasing power and productive place of them.

Issues of that nature qualify the referred laboral world. Matching class and gender, how would certain accumulated experience of vulnerability and exclusion promote different strategies of mobilization and organization, in the work? Recognizing relative elective affection between woman and domestic service, would there have been less or more feminine procedures in a specific work situation?

Finally, based on this we demarcated underlying domains to those women's forms of interaction and relation in their work atmospheres. Their reasons, complaints, demands and expectations of social inclusion (and not project²), related to the context and laboral dynamics, which embody a singular cultural logic, ruled by familialistic and cordial relationships.

2. DEMARCATING THE FIELD: SOCIOCULTURAL CHARACTERIZATION

We qualify sociodemographically the interviewees of the first cycle of the research³. We investigated a group of women-in-the-place that, even having migratory experience, are socio-spatially fastened, residents in outlying neighborhoods of Viçosa.

We utilized the direct observation, in different atmospheres, applying 75 open- questionnaire, 64 validated, in the patterns of an oriented-interview. Simultaneously, we began the reception of images and the accomplishment of the 3 Groups of Discussion, and of the 20 Deepened Interviews, in three groups of women that live and work in the city: 20 cleaners and servants, negotiated by a subcontracted company; 20 maidservants with the intermediation of nets of personal relationships; 24 independent workers, which manage a small business, in the circuit of domestic production (cookery, craft and clothing).

² To the discussion on project vs. expectations, see GOUVEIA, 2007.

³ The second one is in-progress at Rio de Janeiro.

We demarcated their proximities and distinctions; because, even unique, the infinite vicissitudes that surround this experience end by admitting nuances among them.

Most of them are between 30 and 40 years, with larger incidence of young-adults and adults, and absolute absence of adolescents. A concentration of 10/20 among the contracted ones, in the range of 31-40 years. Similarly, 12/20 of the maids are in the same extract. This confirms data of the International Work Organization about a larger portion of maidservants between 25 and 39 years. Almost a half of the autonomous ones are above 46 years, 11/24. Maybe a possible reason of their withdrawal from the family houses. Though those reasons don't appear in the raised data.

In relation to the declared color, there is expressive presence of white women, 32/64. However, that doesn't reveal an objective reality. Besides the limits to the statistical representation, we researched in the circuit of our social nets of coexistence. Many called themselves mestizas, when the empiric observation indicated them to be black, confirming the normative dimension of the racial issue here in Brazil. After all, self-declaring oneself more or less black depends on the context of enunciation of the speech. Among 14 self-declared brown and brunet, seven were black.

Concerning the income and consumption pattern, the maids and those contracted got around a minimum wage (250 to 350 reais). The family medium income doesn't exceed two minimum wages. Among the autonomous ones we identified a larger level: 700 reais, individually, and the income of the family reaches 1500 reais (3/24).

In the first two groups, the houses didn't exceed five rooms, with basic domestic utensils. The autonomous ones had, on average, 6 to 10 rooms, two TVs with parabolic, refrigerator, DVD, computer, and access to leisure and cultural activities. However, those expenses seem less expressive, if compared to the medium segments.

We ethnograph those women in moments of recreation and leisure typical of the popular groups, their pieces⁴; therefore they participate

⁴ On relational nets formed by kinship, acquaintanceship and neighborhood, see José Magnani (2002).

and enjoy certain patterns of consumption present in other social groups, however in a differentiated way. Here, a distinction is the automobile, present in 19 of the autonomous ones, since the others don't possess such asset. However, the car seems to indicate less prestige and social position, her/his property is linked to the functional dynamics inside the work. In a certain way, the search for goods and services doesn't indicate just consumerism. It also manifests demand for social rights and will of accessing symbols which socially include them.

In terms of religious experience, 57/64 self-declared themselves Catholic. Only 5/64 said to be evangelical and spiritualists. We verified relative distinction from the great metropolises, where the presence of Pentecost cults is very significant. In contexts of dilution of the traditional family nucleus, usual in those segments - especially the ones with migration experience -, it increases the adhesion to the Pentecostal practices, as much for valuing aspects more intimate of the religious experience, as for strengthening bonds between a given religious community and a certain detached individual. Potentially, dimensions that contribute to the process of reconfiguration of ruined identities, marked by the experience of vulnerability and exclusion.

Many of them affirmed to having enlarged the coexistence circle and social recognition, through the conviviality inside the churches. One declared to participate in the group Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Lunge of certain authority, she told us that she assists and helps her boss; "a prestigious lawyer". In an interesting ritual of inversion, her speech indicates certain valorization of herself, through the other's status. Perhaps a self-valorization and recognition strategy influenced by the culture of the gift.

The migratory experience is present in their biographies. Some migrated and all revealed to have one or more relative that left in search of work, anchored in social nets built by the first migrants, that left between the 70's and 80's.

Those relatives moved leaving the family in the place of origin. After having established in the new city, they promoted the departure of

the relatives to the capital. Among the 21/24 cases of migration among the autonomous ones.

Some mentioned disenchantment in the search of work out of their hometown, by means of the situation of increase of criminality, exclusion, and informality in the job market that affects the great metropolises. Others report the return movement of their relatives to Viçosa and region.

That empiric evidence revealed an unyielding migratory expectation among them, taking us to define new issues, subjects and central atmospheres to the continuity of the research. We verified in those women, out of their houses and in family houses, a great deal of vicissitudes of a “migrating condition” that accompanies their itinerary. As a central event in the experience of the many involved in the migratory circuit, we are facing a life situation that involves problems of several levels, which deserve subsequent treatment (disterritorialization and reterritorialization, regulation and integration, ethnicization and substantivation of identities, invisibility and illegality, prejudices, exploration and violation of rights).

3. QUALIFYING EXPERIENCES: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the investigated cultural context, we identified different feminine experiences in the world of the domestic work, though approximated by an accumulated experience of exclusion, strongly resignified in this institutional atmosphere. When compared to the two other groups — maids and contracted — the autonomous ones stand out; something that contributes to the relative imprecision in defining them (i)⁵. In spite of sharing characteristics, they are kind of distinct. More heterogeneous, they have more educational and cultural capital. Many said to be working out; however they relied on the companions for the family sustenance, far from the most conventional domestic

⁵ According to the Dictionary: somebody capable to determine the own norms of conduct, without impositions; that enjoys of administrative and political freedom governing according to their laws and habits; a perfect group, and no a part in the sequential development of an organism; who exerts, not permanent, and without job contract, any paid professional activity.

profile (low remuneration, without a structured family net, responsible for the domestic group).

Half of the autonomous ones completed the primary education and 11/24 have a high school diploma and college degree. That relative distinction is confirmed in their search by qualification courses. Maybe, more due to a work necessity -crafts, confectioners, bakers, dressmakers, embroiderers - , and less discontinuity in relation to the family trajectory. However, that indicates an expectation of laboral qualified insertion that the others didn't manifest.

Living together with the attainment ideal of "contracted work", this training contributes to their subjective valorization; whether through more integral formation of the subject; opportunities of work and income; distinction in relation to other maidservants, and even to the owner of the house.

They count on distinctive attributes, as independence, non-heteronomy, ability of recruitment, unification of capital and work, ownership of a small management system, informality, flexibility and precariousness in the process and in the work relationships. Most have fixed place, defined clientele; but absolute informality invigorates still. They work in their own home, with family capital and a domestic administration of it. None mentioned investing in retirement, or other plans of social insurance (as well as the other ones).

In the investigated context, another differential relapses on the collective experience that culminates in an accumulated trajectory of exclusion and lack of social opportunities (ii). Among all them, we verified continuity and updating of a precarious habitus Souza (2003) a trajectory marked by the disqualification and disaffiliation, by generational experience of exclusion, confirming limits to let a given social position Bourdieu (1998).

Small farmers' daughters (sharecroppers, renters), construction workers and non-specialized carpenters, whose mothers were housewives (46/64), worked in domestic job, or similar occupations (17/64).

Here, also, the educational capital becomes elucidating. According to IWO, most of the maidservants of the metropolitan areas have not finished middle school, less than 8 years of study. Our interviewees confirm it, 38/64 interrupted study between 5th and 8th series and 23/60 studied until 8th grade. A larger number of the youngest finished high school. Among those above 40 years, many did not even complete the elementary school.

They go out to guarantee the subsistence of the family, differing from those that search for personal accomplishment Sarti (2003). Most began to work between 10 to 15 years, participating in the income of the family. Even with predominant objective justifications, we found expressive reasons: 29 reported to have had conditions to study, but they don't recognize in education possibilities of life improvement, alleging, inclusively, not to have incentive of the belonging group.⁶

All of them wish to study; but only 8/64 followed preparatory courses, looking for a way to get into the public university, expecting the elevation of both educational and family capital, to get another position in the social pyramid. The Federal University of Viçosa exerts material and symbolic influence in their lives and in other local segments. Among them, the institution represents a dream; whether for work or for a possibility for their children.

Six said explicitly that the poor have difficulties to study, affirming that studying is something for the rich. In spite of that bitter conscience, they dream about the day when their children will be able to surpass the field of possibilities, given by the class position. One of them received us in her house, proud of having two children who had graduated from the university. She demonstrated her satisfaction, showing us pictures of their graduation. In the background, a picture of her children holding their diplomas had a privileged place on the wall of the living room.

Another distinction refers to the peculiarity of the laboral dynamics and relationships, in the domain of the domestic job (iii). Including

⁶ As: lack of incentive and the parents' education, 35/64, 10 subcontracted, 12 domestic maids and 13 autonomous); 10/64 for not having incentive; 9/64 for lack of the parents' insistence; 10/64 because of pregnancy or to take care of children, indicating the impact of the reproductive events.

the educational sphere, the work that they exert influences in less objective dimensions, linked to the identity projection and the strategies of symbolic ascension. In the ideal plan they value work as life improvement; however, a practical conscience doubts that.

All said to be working. Due to the local specificity, the unemployment was not constituted as a threat for them (different from the companions and children). However, the precarity/informality degree reaches dramatic proportions, like knocking on the door looking for work, and, even, to work for tips, in an unequal negotiation in the game capital vs. work. A great part has a social net for work contacts and they accumulate service in more than one place, exceeding ten working hours/day.

In the field of the labor laws, besides the material vicissitudes, the insert inequality in the laboral market produces unequal individuals and citizenship. A few demonstrated larger formal knowledge about their rights. All mentioned to have conscience of the functions of the consumer defense organ, shopkeepers associations. Among the autonomous ones, this is linked to the demands of their work, such as knowing how to proceed in cases of debts and customers in debit.

Concerning the participation in social movements, or knowledge about organs to complain about their rights, they declared not to know and never participate, except in religious groups. Those associative practices differ of the manners of operating created by the classic justice - the complaint of rights and imposition of duties -, exceeding an exalted alienation stigma.

They manifest association forms and social recruitment demarcated by a specific culture, seated in their class experiences, color, hierarchy and asymmetrical positions.

Many revealed to work beyond the settled with their bosses; six manifested emphatically satisfaction in the job. They declared to work for "love" and for considering themselves as the children's "second mother". In relative terms, they express obsequious and grateful attitude in relation to them. However, that is reverted in certain authority in the examined spaces of the work house,

generating a power of control and fiscalization of the children and, *mutatis mutandis*, of the family house. A revealing inversion.

Some sought legal mediation, or complained to be humiliated/insulted by the bosses, but not for “law issues”, appealing to moral dimensions, and not to positive laws. At the limit, we verified ignorance of rights, but not properly behavior considered alienated. Here, the cultural variable allows relativize prerogatives of the classic politics.

For instance, four went to the court against their bosses. They told to win the cause and to lose all the money right after. One attributed it to the curse asked by the boss; other to the divine punishment. Another diarist revealed the joy of being well treated and to have the satisfaction of prolonging her time of work, getting to take clothes and shoes of the bosses to mend and to repair at her home.

What to think of those reports? Maybe the punishment and the curses manifest certain interior discomfort; a feeling of non-recognition of the gift grant by the bosses? Or do they express a diffuse conscience about class position and its reproduction, in their work trajectories?

Many seem to act more for the against-talent, before the gift of those that offered them job. An awareness of conscience of inverted class Thompson (2000). In them, the work promotes recruitment to the reverse, showing the active participation of the worker in the plot of asymmetry, personality and cordiality, that regulates our interclass relationships; and above all the universe of the domestic job.

These accomplishment and autonomy don't free. As we know, countless mechanisms of disciplinarization of their bodies exist, typical of the dynamics inside the spaces examined in the houses and institutions where they work Foucault (1979). Here, the maid's room, the residence in the work place, the control of the time of arrival and exit, of the weekend, visitations, represent elements of negative disciplinment.

The domestic work is a heavy activity, inappropriate to those that don't have good health. According to specialists, the muscular force decreases after the 35 years. However, that service needs, above all, physical disposition; a heavy, repetitive and tiresome work. Beyond

the physical-biological aspect, this mechanical routine disqualify/undervalue the experience and the functional knowledge of who carries marks of the negative classification; whether for the lack of studies, or for the relatively low symbolic capital; a paradox among light work vs. strong body, since it demands force and ability of a supposed strong body - a machine.

The domestic job has its own rules and dynamics, singled out by its likeness with the feminine universe and by the frequency of people socially detached, out of their belonging nets. In fact, a last one qualitative relapses exactly about gender configurations, in matter in the domain of the conjugability and in the family circuit.

We verified the ambiguity of a social atmosphere (the domestic) paradigmatic to the feminine experience, where the force and presence of matrimonial bonds and the centrality of the familiar nucleus exceed the dynamics of the relationships work (iv).

Most have two children, without the presence of attachés, stepsons, uncles or other relative. Something relatively different from other experiences in the big cities. Another research in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro indicates, in the family dynamics of the popular groups, impermanence of the matrimonial bonds, strong disciplinment and social control exert by the kinsfolk and neighborhood, close to the manipulation of survival strategies, through family circuits that goes beyond the mononuclear model.

Some declare to want to be less concerned with the children and with the family in general - 25/64. In relative terms, we identified certain tension among different moral logics. In their speeches, we recognized an appeal to the existence more self-refereed, in the search of happiness, characteristic of the epicure speech of men and the contemporary culture. In the limit, that can be shocked with the inheritance and cultural experience of them.

Many recognized the work is made for men (48/64)⁷, while women have qualities as companionship, affection, dedication (47/64).

⁷ 48 declared as essential characteristic of the partner to be good worker and good character.

Perhaps, they are not self-represented while workers, at least in the classic patterns of the theory of the work.

Even participating in the expenses of the house, 42/64 said to be the partner the boss of the family. Only 11/64 declared to be themselves, probably because they were separate. The “autonomous” they told that the companion receives 1,5 on average to 2 wages, while the one that they make seems not to enter in the accountancy of the family income. Some told that the largest bonus is to be able to go out, out of the domestic confinement, marking not to be only the lack of money that takes them to seek work.

According to Sarti (1997), the poor women’s work doesn’t constitute a new situation that threatens the patriarchal foundations of the family; the legitimated place of the masculine authority continues being maintained. This marks continuity of hegemonic socially values in the context of gender differentiation; once all participate in some form of the expenses of the house.

The consumption items under their responsibility are clothing, leisure, children’s education (school materials, recreation) and small expenses with useful objects to the house, considered, for the companions, not essential expenses. The gender markers are present also in the division of the family expenses.

All revealed the disposition and sacrifice to the family in granting study for the children. In relation to the profession wanted for men and women, they point lawyer, engineer, doctor vs. teacher and psychologist.

Among the maids, we verified larger indetermination for the project of the children’s future, but they “would like that they were graduated”. A relative indetermination, close to the precarious and unstable work conditions, exerted by those families. Further more, a certain ignorance of the necessary steps to reach positions, whose visible signs of their bodies and appearance reveal not to belong to them.

Concerning the children’s future, they answered that it was enough they were formed in an university. In spite of not having project, they manifest ascension expectation through them. Due to so much

impediment, inadequacy and subjective disqualification, we noticed a potential, virtual expectation of transposing the limits of the gate of entrance of the university; the four-pillars, a place that is not exactly for them, but, perhaps, for their children.

Finally, some dispositional mechanisms contribute to arrest those workers in domains that reproduce dissimulated feelings of low self-esteem, indetermination and subjective disqualification, even if they access better objective conditions (more economical capital).

4. FINISHING UP ISSUES: A CONCLUSION

We aim to consolidate our investigative proposal, raising reflexive, academic, technician-scientific, and political-cultural arsenal on personal and collective experiences of delinquency and social exclusion, qualifying those events beyond their objective, instrumental and pragmatic characteristics.

Present sociodemographic variables on the light of a sociocultural perspective, we intend to draw a social and sociological understanding of those many and invisible domestic workers, submitted to the poverty and vicissitudes of the informality condition, anonymous of and in the city. The raised data indicate more precise outlines on those characters of the scene and the local day-by-day. Further, they allow disubstantialize them, revealing relative fragmentation among them.

From this first ethnographic material, we qualified practices and representations, we characterized workers, testimonies, occupations and different cultural maps; close to the systemization and analysis of those indicators. We organized contents and social images on those “characters”, composing an inventory of situations, comparing cases and regional experiences, rural and urban life manners, sociocultural diversity. We emphasized the academic promotion of the Post-graduation Program and their investigative proposals, particularly our Research Group. We detached the applicability of the reflection in the thematic field of the moral experience of the inequality and exclusion to the reflexive critic in the academic extent and in the political-social arena.

This exercise lights important dimensions, around the production, reproduction and updating of certain given class conditions, and of the potentialization of the feeling of disaffiliation common in the moral experience of those, and of many others, domestic workers.

In a reflexive comparison between conceptual map and empiric data, we verified that the informal insert in the non-qualified work contributes to produce unequal and deficient citizens. Whether for the apprenticeship of right knowledge; the access to the consumption patterns, with strong appeal inside the capitalist society; the class markers and gender; or even, for the indetermination feeling and subjective disqualification that accompanies the experience of those individuals.

We underlined a series of episodes to show part of the live-in-the-city, falling back upon the many anonymous types that embody our urban experience. As a virtual scenery, they were transformed in a way to discuss certain sinuosities of the urban condition. Images that make possible to think the access and use of the city, and even (re)think a number of forms of inequality and social disaffiliation that frame the contemporary Brazilian society.

We identified certain cultural variations in the obtaining strategy of recognition and social ascension, centered not in the recognition of the classic rights; but in a moral economy, especially focused in their work relationships, and in the investment in the future (study) of the children. In many of the interviewees, the participation in religious groups would fill out the necessity of recognition and self-appreciation.

We seek to examine part of an illegitimated social experience in the feminine world of the non-qualified work, in the singular and complex field of the domestic relationships, and in the specificity of the experience of many separated of their belonging nets. A task that has been allowing the participants of our Group different conversion levels: the thematic domain, the empiric context and the social field.

Comparing class and gender readings, we problematized different forms of manifestation of the moral experience of vulnerability and exclusion, manifested in the world of the non-qualified feminine

work. So, we examined central characteristics to our cultural experience, marked by asymmetries, wealth concentration, social inequalities, patrimonialism, violation of rights and subjective disqualification of individuals and socially marginalized groups. Finally, a brief reflexive effort that helps the understanding around the dramatic daily existence of those workers; and that bounds the specificity of the experience of the domestic job.

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