“Cleaning Houses to Make Homes”
An ethnography of Brazilian domestic workers in north London

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER FOR THE DEGREE OF PHD IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY WITH VISUAL MEDIA 2018
ANA PAULA FIGUEIREDO
School of Social Sciences
In memory of my mother, Ana Maria de Figueiredo Oliveira

“Cleaning Houses to Make Homes: An ethnography of Brazilian domestic workers in north London”

Abstract

This thesis sheds light on what it is like to be a female Brazilian migrant domestic worker in London. I argue that for Brazilian women from a poorer background the reason for migration, while it is ostensibly to make money, is fundamentally to achieve personal and familial stability, the chance of a better life and, therefore, transformation. Based mainly on participant observation, life history and documentary film-making, this ethnography tells the story of a group of Brazilian women who were determined to make a living, or stabilise their lives, in a new place. They were pursuing moral and material projects against the odds, as part of their life as women who moved from different and sometimes remote corners of Brazil to clean and care for families that are not their own, in north London. However, these intentions were often complicated by the initial difficulties of the process of moving to greater stability, both practical and emotional. Crucial to this process is the impact of the recent political history of Brazil and the long history of the racialised Brazilian class system, in terms of both ideology and practice, on the women’s subjectivity, even in London. By drawing on the experiences of Brazilian migrant women, this thesis contributes to studies on class in Brazil and domestic work more generally. More specifically, I ask how Brazilian people from different class backgrounds perceive their lives in London, and how their class background influences their experiences and opportunities in London.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=487 ), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/ regulations) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.
Acknowledgements

I owe my first and biggest thanks to the Brazilian women, the tourist and professional cleaners, the current and former domestic workers, who shared their experiences with me. I am forever indebted to all the men and women who became my flatmates during the fieldwork. Thank you for the evening conversations, food and laughter and, most of all, for trusting me with your stories. My love and gratitude especially go to Marcilene and Rafael; just thinking of you two makes me smile. I would like to say thanks to all the people who helped me with childcare, especially Fabia, Ieda, Eliana, Manu and Simone.

I am extremely grateful to both my supervisors, Angela Torresan and Gillian Evans, for being with me all this time as a source of guidance and intellectual stimulation. Thanks especially to Gillian, for offering not just her insights and comments but also her encouragement and support.

Along the way I have been academically and emotionally supported by a long list of people. I am especially grateful to Lissant Bolton for letting me have the safe space of her house to work in, but mostly for her wisdom and friendship. Thanks to my Brazilian–Manchester friends, for the invaluable comments of Patricia Scalco, Flavia Kremer, Luciana Lang and Antonia Gama. To the four musketeers – Debie Huggests, Eliane Strogursky, Vania Mota and especially Karol Silva – who, in spite of living only twenty minutes away, would send colourful letters of encouragement. Thanks to the final proofreader, Liz Munslow, and to the generous women who read and commented on the earlier drafts of the thesis, Jean Mitchel, Marian Mitchel and Nthabiseng.

I am grateful to my grandmother, for having always been there for me. To my brother Fabiano and sister Natalia for your love and confidence in your big sister, and to my father who planted the interest in learning into my mind. Thanks also to the two little sunshines of my life, my sons Sebastian and Samuel.

My greatest debt goes to my love and life partner, Andreas Ksoll, whose patience, companionship and support made this PhD possible – thank you!
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPYRIGHT STATEMENT</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH: SITUATING BRAZILIANS IN LONDON</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZILIAN MIGRATION</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZILIANS IN LONDON: AN INVISIBLE COMMUNITY WHERE SOME ARE MORE INVISIBLE THAN OTHERS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BRAZILIAN ECONOMIC CONTEXT: HOW LOW-INCOME BRAZILIANS REACHED LONDON</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THESIS OVERVIEW</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMESTIC WORKERS IN LONDON AND EMPREGADAS DOMÉSTICAS IN BRAZIL: SOME</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEANERS OR DOMESTIC WORKERS?</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMESTIC WORKERS’ STIGMA AND THE EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP: “A MARRIAGE WITHOUT SEX”</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMESTIC WORKERS IN EUROPE</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE UK</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEANERS AND DOMESTIC WORKERS IN BRAZIL</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEANING MIGRATION AND MARGINALITY: A BRIEF COMPARISON BETWEEN BRAZIL AND LONDON</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSIDERATIONS OF SOCIAL CLASS IN BRAZIL AND BRITAIN</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART I</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS: SOMETIMES WE SEE IT, SOMETIMES WE DO NOT, BUT IT IS ALWAYS THERE</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVANGELICAL TESTIMONIAL PRACTICE: SHOWCASING LIFE PROGRESS</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORKING CLASS IN BRAZIL</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACIALISED POVERTY IN BRAZIL</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART II</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BRAZILIANS IN LONDON: RESTORING THE MORAL POOR AND THE MORAL MIDDLE CLASS</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAPPING THE DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF CLASS IN BRAZIL</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS AS LOCATION AND POSSESSIONS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART III</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS POSSIBILITIES FOR BRAZILIANS IN LONDON: “IMAGINE IF WE WERE IN BRAZIL”</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL CONSIDERATIONS</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULTIPLE PATHWAYS TO STABILITY: FROM UNDESIRABLE JOBS TO “ENGLISH HOUSES”</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hard work is easier to find: The most undesirable cleaning jobs and their multiple problems.

Problematic but not so bad jobs

Finding houses and gaining stability

Working for the rich

Conclusion

Chapter 7

Possibilities of being and becoming: Brazilian professional cleaners' subjectivities and practices

Introduction

Subjectivity and the aesthetic experience

London as an aesthetic experience: Impressions and possibilities for transformation

Conclusion

References
Chapter 1

Introduction

“London has always been a city of immigrants. It was once known as ‘the city of nations’, and in the mid-eighteenth century Addison remarked that ‘when I consider this great city in its several quarters, or divisions, I look upon it as an aggregation of various nations distinguished from each other by their respective customs, manners and interests’”

(Ackroyd, 2003: 208)

The English writer Peter Ackroyd (2003) describes London as a place where historically people from different parts of the world would come to trade and build a life for themselves. He portrays London’s immigrant attraction as “… a continuing and never-ending story” (2003: 208) where London appears as a place where the foreigner is more easily accepted in comparison with other great cities of the world. The secret to successful integration, for Ackroyd, would be to start thinking of oneself as a Londoner. The anthropologist Vertovec (2007) adds complexity to this idea, as he argues that acceptance and therefore success hinges on many different factors such as gender, legal status, country of origin, access to employment and so forth.

Throughout history, London has received many different groups of people, including Africans, South Asians, the Irish, and Jews from Eastern Europe, and this intensified during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, extending to Commonwealth countries such as India and the West Indies after the 1950s. In response to this inflow of migration, British policy-makers in the Labour government in the 1960s developed a series of measures to promote tolerance and respect for people of different ethnic identity, which became known as multiculturalism (Vertovec, 2007). This meant helping community associations with cultural activities, promoting positive images in the media and public spaces, including places of public services such as courts, hospitals and others. Although these policies were implemented in the 1960s, some are still in practice today.

Brazilians are a relatively new group of migrants to become part of the multicultural
jigsaw that is London (Vertovec, 2007; Kubal et al., 2011). Over the past fifty years, migrants from countries with no clear past connection to the UK, such as Brazil and other countries in Latin America, have started to arrive and settle in London. Furthermore, since 2004 with the gradual incorporation of an additional thirteen countries into the European Union there has been an increase in migration of people from these countries, especially Poland, which is now one of the largest and most visible communities in London (Burrell, 2016). As the European Union expanded, people coming from the “Accession 8” countries met the demand for semi-skilled and “unskilled” workers; Brazilians lost the rights to work legally in the UK. Permission to work became restricted to Brazilians with double citizenship or people on sponsored working visas. Even before the legal changes, a great number of Brazilians in London had started their migratory journey doing manual work, mostly cleaning work, mainly because of a lack of English language skills; as a result of the changes, some continued doing it this way.

This thesis looks at the experiences of Brazilian women, from different class backgrounds, who come to London and work as domestic workers. They arrive in London with expectations and hopes, built through pioneer migrant stories, as well as media and literary portraits. Many different factors will influence the women’s work and their life experiences in London, such as their expectations, their access through different networks, and the type of visa they hold. All of these aspects are woven into the different chapters, but there are two main strands that make up the focus of the thesis. First, it shows what it was like for this group of women, at the time of the fieldwork, to be a Brazilian domestic worker in London. Second, it explores how social class positioning and subjectivity become altered by the experience of mobility and

---

1 The expansion of the European Union in 2004, also called ‘Accession 8’ meant that people from Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia gained the right to live and work in the UK. In 2007 ‘Accession 2’ saw another two countries joining – Romania and Bulgaria (Migration Observatory: University of Oxford).

2 The most recent map of Brazilian occupation in London came from GEB (Group of Brazilian Studies in UK). In 2015 the group published a report based on data collected at Casa do Brasil em Londres. As the website states, “registered as a not for profit limited company, Centro Brasileiro provides services of legal advice and psychological counselling, social assistance and help for our community with searching for jobs, accommodation, teaching and general well being”. GEB did two rounds of research, one in 2009 and another in 2014. They surveyed 298 associates in 2009 and 557 associates in 2014. In relation to the occupation of Brazilians in London, they found that 18% of the respondents said they worked in cleaning in 2009 compared with 12% in 2014. However, they also reported that 27% of the respondents in 2009 and 39% of the respondents in 2014 declined to declare their occupation (Souza and Evans, 2015). This suggests that the number of people in cleaning jobs is much higher than the research shows.
domestic work as paid cleaning/caring gain new meanings through the relationships the women build. For example, in Chapter Four I set out the cleaners’ “pathways to success”, and in Chapter Five I show how caring for the employer and their household becomes an important part of cleaning work, arguing that “to clean is to care”. In Chapter Six, I illustrate how the physical and symbolic aspects of paid cleaning work are intertwined and re-signified by the domestic workers who see themselves as “doing a clean job”.

While all the Brazilians in my research group started their lives in London as domestic some of my informants stopped working in cleaning after a while. This is either because they changed to better or less stigmatised jobs, or because they went back to Brazil, or migrated to another country. Some have made a career out of their ability to care and clean, while others are still struggling in exploitative and undesirable cleaning jobs in spite of also having ambition, capacity to work and resilience. In this thesis I refer to the Brazilians who had never worked as domestic workers before arriving in London as "tourist cleaners". These are mainly middle or lower middle-class Brazilian women who tend to use the money from their work to reinvest in their migratory project, which is usually connected with education, travelling, enjoying Europe or fulfilling romantic aspirations. The professional cleaners, on the other hand, are the Brazilian women from a poorer background, who are mostly using the money to reinvest in a future in Brazil for themselves and their extended families. The main focus of this thesis is on the experiences of the professional cleaners. The tourist cleaners feature by way of contrast, to show the differences and similarities between different migratory experiences, depending on class background. While all of the tourist cleaners in my research group moved out of cleaning work, or back to Brazil, the professional cleaners are achieving their goals through and within their domestic work.

**Research framework**

This ethnography is a result of multi-method and extensive fieldwork. It included participant observation, focus groups, life history interviews and the production of a short documentary, as I show in detail in the methods session of this introduction. The participant observation involved two weeks cleaning alongside Marcilene who became
a friend and my main informant. I also lived for six months with a group of migrants, including a Brazilian cleaner and a nanny in a shared house. Based on the time spent with the domestic workers, I present two main arguments. The first is that for Brazilian domestic workers in London there is no one way to define sentiments towards cleaning work.

After having engaged with the literature on migrant domestic workers that focuses mostly on the negative aspects of a stigmatised occupation, I started my fieldwork prepared to hear stories of suffering, humiliation, loneliness and disgust. Some domestic and service work scholars acknowledge a certain level of balance between the "pains and pleasures" of service and manual work. McDowell's (2011) research on London hospitality workers, for example, looks at how class, ethnicity and gender interact to construct work identities. She states that some people:

“...find pleasure in their jobs, enjoying providing service, whether in a hotel, a hospital or a restaurant, a classroom or a high-street shop, in a child's home or an elderly care institution; but others do not”.

In her classic book, Doing the dirty work, which draws a comparison between the situation of domestic workers in the United States and Europe, Anderson (2000: 7) writes:

“...while some [domestic workers] feel their work is honourable, many more feel degraded and ashamed”.

Similarly, Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) looks at middle-class South American domestic workers in Europe and asserts:

“... (The household) is the place where the domestic worker is impressed with sensations of stress, servility, contempt and disgust. None of our research participants, employers or domestic workers alike, share positive sensations with regard to full-time household work.” (2010: 138)

While this body of literature is very important in bringing to the fore what is degrading
and problematic about cleaning work, most of which I can personally confirm as a result of my experience of participant observation among the women, what I found in this research was a somewhat different perspective, almost a reversal of the above quotes. I found that many domestic service workers disliked their work, but others did like it and were deeply invested in the work as a moral and material project of value and self-improvement through the provision of service to the employer and employer’s household. It is important to note, however, that neither feelings of liking nor disliking the jobs were a constant; they would change depending on the clients, their cleaning rota, particular problems that the cleaners were facing, or the boss, in the case of the ‘live ins’ and au pairs. Therefore, I depart in this thesis from the conventional literature, and show how the cleaners make sense of their experiences, and even find ways to enjoy their work, against all the odds and despite all the difficulties.

My second argument is related to how familiar Brazilian class boundaries became blurred through the experience of mobility. For instance, I show moments where the power balance within class relations is inverted, for instance, when a new middle-class arrival finds herself dependent on a working-class person for work contacts and friendship. When Brazilians from different corners of Brazil and with different socio-economic backgrounds meet in London, a different and, at times, conflicting class relationship is forged. Salazar and Smart (2011) argue that migration does not necessarily mean that people become more equal. The movement of people, they suggest can reinforce differences as well as “blending or erasing such differences” (2011: iii). The movement of class I noticed is related to change and permanence. The Brazilian cleaners’ pasts, their memories of romantic relationships, friendships, employment and family life have a great influence on the way they experience life in London, and most of their experiences, as I learned, are marked by their positionalities, for example of class, race and gender. Therefore, I argue that London has a potentially equalizing effect on poor and middle-class Brazilians, because it creates, through financial stability, a new sense of self-esteem and dignity for the poor. On the other hand, it can give a new perspective to the lower-middle-class and middle-class Brazilians, where they learn what goes into cleaning work and therefore question their class position. They “learn to be humble” as some participants put it.
To develop this argument, I draw on different reference points. I use the research of Jesse de Souza (2006, 2009, 2010, 2017) as a comparative base for my own ethnography. Jesse de Souza is a Brazilian sociologist who led a group of scholars during a five-year mixed method research study on Brazilian class structure. He and his team interviewed over 250 families over the course of five years and concluded that, in Brazil, there was no new middle class but rather a class which he called, provocatively, “ralé” (roughly translated as “the precarious”, or “underclass”). The “ralé” were divided into two groups, the “left out” or, to borrow Berlant’s (2011) expression, “the ones that fall into the cracks”, and the fighting poor. He understood the latter as people with no social, financial or cultural capital but with the discipline, self-control and prospective thought that enabled them to differentiate themselves from the absolutely excluded, even if they came from the same place, for example the favelas. Souza (ibid) is important because he maps the divisions among groups of people who are often understood just as the poor or those in need. Furthermore, he lays bare the daily forms of symbolic violence, which undermine various attempts at social mobility and the security that comes with it, and which also marked the lives and subjectivities of the domestic workers I worked with.

It will become evident throughout this thesis the importance of gender and race in informing subjectivities and practices, however the main focus of the thesis is class. Class became important as I noticed how classed experiences of poverty or privilege played out in the context of mobility, but also how it was reflected upon by the domestic workers and was reshaped by the experience of paid domestic work and migration.

As such, class here is viewed as structural and relational. One important reference point is the work of Bourdieu (1990). Bourdieu allows for an understanding of class which departs from a more Marxist view of class divided between those who exploit and who are the exploited, to a view of class understood as the possibility for particular kinds of social strategy resulting from a combination of capitals, habits and fields “as the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). Class, thus, is seen not as a discrete variable but as a fluid outcome of other mechanisms (Savage, 2016). Bourdieu focuses on how the dominant classes are able to build on and maintain their position. For him, power operates through the naturalisation of unequal social relations which in turn naturalise
inequality as the product of individuals who lack the motivation, skills or capacity to be socially mobile. To internalise this understanding results in “mis-recognition” of the effects of class power and class structure (Savage, 2016). Sayer (2005) acknowledges the importance and effects of mis-recognition but warns that this should not obscure the effects of lived and real inequalities – what Sennett (1977) calls the “hidden injuries of class”. These injuries, Sayer (ibid) argues, leave marks that do not disappear just by recognition, although it is one element of it. I pay close attention to the way that class socialities and subjectivities operate in the context of migration, through an analysis of ‘class on the move’, which will be further developed in Chapter Three and revisited in Chapter Seven.

Also important is the book, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject* by American anthropologist Sherry Ortner (2006). She highlights the importance of locating social relations analysis within broader historical contexts (2006: 10) and is critical of the way the middle class blame the working class for their own failure to achieve the middle-class ideals of the good life. This gives rise to two important themes that I address in the thesis, namely historical context and social mobility. For example, in Chapter Four I discuss the significance of and possibilities for aspiration and social progress within domestic work. This relates back to Bourdieu (1990) and the idea of strategy connected with the opportunities and limits of life’s possibilities such that progress, for Ortner, becomes an exploration of agency. Ortner warns that agency should not be seen as a natural desire, but rather “formed as desire and intentions within a certain matrix of subjectivity, of feelings constituted culturally, of thought and meanings” (Ortner, 2006: 110). Ortner’s approach allows for an understanding of subjectivity that is informed by historical and cultural contexts, but also highlights the “attempts of the subalterns to become subjects in the first place” (2006: 109) as she acknowledges people’s contextualised agency. In the case of my informants, their historical context informs their way of being, especially at the beginning of their lives in London. It also allows for questioning and resistance, and at times creates different forms of agency. However, it also generates different outcomes as people from the same historical and cultural context act differently in the face of similar problems. In other words, mobility more than the movement from one place to the next, is filled with meaning, which varies depending on person and social
circumstance (Adey, 2006 in Salazar and Smart, 2011). As such, not all my informants experience social mobility, even within the context of migration, in the same way in fact most tourist cleaners are engaging in a process of temporary downward social mobility. For the professional cleaners on the other hand, social mobility is connected with notions of progress, which is not necessarily linear. It is mostly associated with notions of struggle, as an uneven path of everyday survival and hope as well as setbacks. All these struggles are marked by daily relations which in turn influenced by the context of their past lives in Brazil and their present lives as a domestic worker in London.

Physical mobility, or migration, is often connected with ideals of social mobility, progress, for the migrant and their families (Salazar and Smart, 2011). In looking at localised historical contexts of place of origin and destination I adopt the mobility approach suggested by Salazar and Smart (2011), where the process of mobility is much more than movement from one place to another. Mobility, they argue, is filled with meaning and these meanings are different for different people in different circumstances. In addition, even before people travel they imagine the place they are going to, and this imagination is influenced by the global position and power of different countries, that is, global inequalities (Massey, 2005, Schiller and Salazar, 2013). As I contextualise the historical processes of class formation and consciousness, especially in Chapters Three and Seven, in comparative terms, I try to avoid the reinforcement of methodological nationalism, defined as “an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual national states” (Schiller and Salazar, 2013: 185). By taking domestic work and London as units of analysis, I contribute to a discussion of migration which enables the identification of new forms of sociabilities for new forms of understanding of the self and others which cross borders of space and identity differences, as proposed by Schiller and Salazar (2013).

**Background to the research: situating Brazilians in London.**
Brazilians migration

Traditionally Brazil has been on the receiving end of the migratory movement. Since the arrival of the Portuguese colonisers there has been a lot of international movement in and out of the colony, with mostly Portuguese, other Europeans and Africans who were forced to go to Brazil as slaves (Eltis and Richardson, 2008). From 1888 onwards, the period immediately after the end of slavery, the Brazilian government invited European immigrants to work on the plantations as well as in the industrialised areas of the country (Solé et al., 2011). This was the height of Brazilian inflow migration. European immigrants, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Polish and later Japanese, Syrian and Lebanese, among others, settled in the Brazilian southern states of Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul and the south-eastern states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and, predominantly, São Paulo (Levy, 1974). After the world economic crisis of 1929 and the subsequent Brazilian coffee plantation crisis, the Brazilian government developed measures to contain European migration into the country. During this time, until the 1970s, there was a decrease in international immigration and an increase in internal migration, as people from the rural areas and from the northern states of Brazil migrated to more industrialised states in the south and south-east, especially Sao Paulo (Patarra and Fernandes, 2011). Although there were still people arriving in the country, this period was marked by internal migration and the consequent urbanisation of the country.

From 1964 to 1985 Brazil entered a period of military dictatorship, which led to thousands of Brazilians who had fought against the regime being deported, tortured and killed. Artists were censored and, in some cases, exiled, as were the singers and composers Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil who were exiled in London from 1969 to 1970 (Kubal et al., 2011). It was not easy to leave the country during the dictatorship. Anyone who wished to leave had to ask for the authorities’ permission and pay a deposit, which would be returned upon the person’s re-entry into the country (Tonhati, 2017). At that time, and previously, the UK was a destination for the Brazilian elite who wanted to send their children abroad to learn English or study in one of its prestigious universities. Thus, the Brazil of the 1970s was marked by three aspects: internal migration, extreme state brutality in fighting insurgents against the dictatorial regime, and what has become known as the ‘economic miracle’ (Gaspari, 2014) where Brazil
experienced economic growth and low unemployment rates.

**Mapping the waves of Brazilian migration**

The 1980s in Brazil have become known as the 'lost decade' (Sales, 2003), because this was a time of great financial instability and unemployment. Consequently, Brazil experienced its first wave of mass emigration.³ After the re-democratisation in 1985, Brazil underwent several economic crises. Parts of the middle-class population started migrating, mainly to Portugal (Torresan, 2004), the United States (Margolis, 1994; Sales, 1999a; Martes, 1999) and Japan (Tsuda, 2003). In the face of such an outflow migration of young and educated people, Brazilian scholars during the 1990s feared that this would result in a 'brain drain'. As Martes and Cardoso put it, “in only three years (1985–1988) around 1,250,000 Brazilians left Brazil and never returned” (2000:21). These fears have not materialised. Torresan’s (2004) work on Brazilian professionals in Portugal notes that Brazilians became “fairly mobile within host countries and across international borders including circular returns to Brazil” (2004: 9) following the global tendency. In this section I give a brief overview of the first and second waves of Brazilian international migration, giving specific attention to the reasons for migration and the changes in the Brazilian migrant profile.

The above-mentioned studies pay great attention to the reasons for migration, with an emphasis on the economic aspects. Margolis’s (1994) book *Little Brazil*, a study of Brazilians in New York, has been considered the most complete research on Brazilian migration to date (Kubal et al., 2011). Margolis combines push/pull theories with macro structural factors, such as amplification of the middle class, to profile the Brazilian migrants in New York as “economic refugees fleeing from chaotic economy back home” (Margolis, 1994:20) Margolis is particularly interested in the experience of downward mobility of professional middle-class migrants working in low-end jobs such as domestic work, shoe shining and other manual jobs. She concludes that it was only possible because Brazilians saw themselves as sojourners. They constructed their

³ Earlier researchers claimed that Brazil had shifted from a receiving country to a sending country (Margolis, 1994; Sales, 1999a; Martes and Cardoso, 2000). In later research Patarra (2005) asserts that, in fact, there was no shift but rather a dual movement. At the same time that people were leaving the country Brazil was still receiving a great number of immigrants from other countries, such as Bolivians and Koreans who arrived in Brazil to work in the garment industry (Nguyen, 2009; McGrath, 2009).
experience as part of a temporary strategy to acquire financial stability and go back to Brazil. Similarly, Tsuda’s (2003) work on Brazilians who were descendants of the Japanese migrants who arrived in São Paulo a century earlier, describes how they moved to Japan to work on the ‘three D’ jobs – dirty, difficult and dangerous. These migrants, Tsuda notes, were attracted by the positive exchange rate and the possibility of saving money. In contrast, Torresan’s (2004) Brazilian research group in Portugal, while also young, middle-class and professional, had a different type of acceptance into the country, which was inclusion at the top. She notes that this was only possible, because the time of Brazilian migration coincided with Portugal’s economic boom, which demanded skilled workers. Thus, while migration to the US and Japan was framed as economically motivated, migration to Portugal was more complicated. Torresan (2004, 2012) asserts that Brazilian migration to Portugal was motivated by relative deprivation, understood as a lack of opportunities to maintain or improve one’s social status.

In her book Brazilians away from home, Sales (2003) also departs from purely economic reasons for migration. She describes the experiences of Brazilians in Framingham, in the United States, and highlights their search for equality (Sales, 1999a; Martes, 1999) and social mobility, which were denied them in times of crisis. Sales notes that Brazilians see themselves in a more equal society in the US, where one has “civil rights” and a strong sense of equal opportunities, whereas in Brazil, if you are not rich enough to navigate the corrupt system you are likely to fail in your project of social mobility. A particular feeling, she maintains, affects lower and higher classes alike, a sense that in the US “you are someone because you are equal, while the common experience in Brazil is to be someone because you are superior” (Sales, 1999a). Martes (1999), based on her study of Brazilians in Massachusetts, argues that Brazilian ideas of equality come from a view of the United States as a mixture of respect and citizenship. As she puts it:

“In Massachusetts, the prestige gives space to other values that are not only the ones connected to purchase power but to new ones close to new lifestyles and citizenship (equality)” (1999:7)

Martes (1999) asserts that this perception of the United States emerges from the migrants’ cultural memory of Brazil, which is not positive, and as also noted, affects the
lower and middle classes alike. This is also the case of domestic workers in London. However, I will add that while the Brazilian format of racialised social inequality affects both the middle class and the lower class they will be expressed differently and have different outcomes depending on class background.

If in the 1990s Brazilian migrants were more middle class (Torresan, 1994; Cwerner, 2001; Margolis, 1994) what is noticeable today is that there has been a shift to more working-class and lower-middle-class migrants (Patarra, 2005; Beserra, 2005; Sheringham, 2008; Marcus, 2009; Evans et al., 2007). This could be because of Brazilians’ recent new accessibility to credit (Padilla, 2006), the help of different churches established abroad (Sheringham, 2008), or the existence of established social networks (Goza, 2004; Kubal et al., 2011). All of these have led to what has been called the “proletarization of the Brazilian immigration fluxes” (Padilla, 2006), defined as a new wave of ‘economic migrants’ who have come to save money and invest it back home (Evans et al., 2007). Thus, migration became part of the life strategy for many low and medium income families in Brazil, with London becoming one of their major destinations.

**Brazilians in London: an invisible community where some are more invisible than others**

The UK, and London especially, became attractive to Brazilians after the US toughened its border controls in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 (Margolis, 2013). The UK hosts the largest Brazilian population in Europe (Margolis, 2013). The exact number of Brazilians living in London is impossible to know precisely, mainly because of the constant movement, but also because a great number of migrants are undocumented. According to research published by GEB (*Grupo de Estudos Brasileiros no Reino Unido*) there are estimated to be somewhere between 150,000 and 300,000 Brazilians living in the UK (Evans et al., 2011). Of these, approximately 130,000 to 160,000 are based in London. Perhaps because Brazilians are relative newcomers there is little published work on the subject and no comprehensive accounts of their situation in London at present.
During the 1980s and 1990s Brazilians tended to concentrate in the surroundings of Bayswater (Torresan, 1994), which was also known as ‘Brazilwater’ among Brazilians because of the number of bars, restaurants, hairdressers and food shops owned by and catering for Brazilians. Nowadays the Brazilian population is distributed throughout the city, especially in the areas of Willesden, Harlesden and Haringey (Evans et al., 2011).

The GEB survey produced 553 questionnaires, with 53 per cent distributed electronically and 47 per cent distributed in churches and institutions, such as Casa do Brazil, between June and September of 2010; it was the second research study of this kind to be made about Brazilians living in London. The results of the GEB survey are extensive and it is not my intention to discuss them in detail here; however, the survey confirmed the global tendency of feminisation of migration (Sales, 1999a; Beserra, 2005) as well as starting to show the heterogeneity of the group in terms of occupation, types of visa, and socio-economic background and education.

If we compare the results of the first survey on Brazilians in London carried out in September 2007 with the second survey published in 2011, we can see an interesting development. The first survey showed that: a) there were slightly more men than women, b) over 80 per cent of the Brazilian immigrants were between 18 and 40 years old, c) they were predominantly from a middle-class or lower-middle-class background, and well educated, d) over 70 per cent worked in the service industry and 32 per cent specifically mentioned working as cleaners, e) over 50 per cent of the sample had expired visas, and f) although many Brazilians wanted to stay for longer, the majority stayed for between two and five years, mainly because of their illegal status (Evans et al., 2007). In comparison, the second survey by GEB, mentioned above, illustrated little change with regard to the age of migration and level of education between 2007 and 2010. However, it showed that women outnumbered men by 12 per cent. It also showed that only 39 per cent, in comparison with 50 per cent in 2007, had expired visas and that 49 per cent of the Brazilians in London had a European passport. Another interesting difference between the two surveys was that although the majority of Brazilians worked in the service industry, the number had decreased slightly, giving way to health, education, administration and customer services sectors. This could indicate that there had been some kind of social mobility, which I can confirm. However, I found it to be more modest for the Brazilians who come from the Brazilian lower
classes. Both of the GEB reports as well as previous (Torresan, 1994; Cwerner, 2001) and more recent research has indicated that the profile of Brazilians in London is diverse, but nevertheless predominantly middle-class and lower-middle-class (Tonhati, 2017; Martins, 2017; Dias, 2016).

The second GEB report was presented in January 2011, at the III GEB Annual Seminar *Brazilians in London: Culture, Identity and Belonging*. After the presentation, Carlos Mellinger, the director of Casa do Brasil, stood up and said:

> “I do not agree that Brazilians in London are middle class, not even lower middle-class! There are a great number of Brazilians who are very poor, precarious and more invisible than ever! Your research failed to capture them.”

During my fieldwork I was able to confirm Mellinger’s view. There are indeed a number of Brazilians in London who come from an impoverished background in Brazil, and it is unlikely that surveys would reach this demographic as they attend small religious gatherings more than the well-known churches and none of my participants were registered with Casa do Brazil. Throughout the thesis I concentrate mainly on the experiences of the Brazilians who describe their Brazilian background as very poor, as they are often missed by researchers and demographic institutions. These case studies will, however, be brought into dialogue with the experiences of the middle and lower middle-classes by way of contrast and to show how class background influences their possibilities for progress and working lives of Brazilian cleaners in London.

The Brazilian economic context: how low-income Brazilians reached London

As the Brazilian middle-class students and professionals tried to differentiate
themselves from the poorer working Brazilians in London the question that always arose in conversations was: how are these people even here? How did they get into this country? As mentioned above, the 1980s and 1990s brought extreme instability and inflation to Brazil. As inflation increased there were a series of short-lived plans to try to contain it, but without success (Rocha, 2000). In 1993, at its peak, inflation reached 2,700 per cent, breaking all previous records (O’Dougherty, 2002:3). In my own experience, as a child during the 1980s I remember going to the supermarket with my mother in the morning, because the prices would be different by the afternoon. Sometimes, even while we were shopping there was a man with the marking machine right behind us. I can still hear the sound of the price being changed. It was a relief when, in 1994, the then president Itamar Franco launched the Plano Real, an economic plan based on reducing inflation, increasing the population’s consumption power and remodelling some of the country’s economic sectors (Sayad, 1997).

With Plano Real’s success, the Minister of Economy responsible for implementing it, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), was elected as president in 1995. With stable levels of absolute poverty at 34 per cent in 1995 (Rocha, 2000) FHC launched social programmes such as pro-moradia, which offered housing for the poorer of the population. There was also the bolsa alimentação, which helped with basic food provisions. These social plans were bureaucratic and had little scope, but they, nevertheless, paved the way for a more universal welfare system, which was implemented by the left-wing president from the Workers Party (PT) Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, popularly known as Lula.

In 2002, as an elected president, Lula expanded these above-mentioned benefits and created others such as the Bolsa Família (or family grant) programme and Minha casa minha vida (my house, my life). They were both part of a series of packages to reduce inequality in Brazil called the Fome Zero (zero hunger) programme.\footnote{Lindert et al.’s (2007) World Bank report gives a thorough explanation of what this benefit meant to the Brazilian poorer population as well as indicating places where it needed improvements.} Bolsa Família is a cash transfer programme, which gives the money directly to the mother so she can send her children to school. Each family receives up to the equivalent of £80 per month depending on how many children they have and whether they are attending school and
have their vaccinations up to date (Duffy, 2010). The programme has benefitted over 12 million families who use the money to supplement their income. It has been considered the largest scheme of its kind in the world (Lindert et al., 2007), lifting nearly 30 million families out of poverty. The *Minha Casa Minha Vida*, according to the Ministry of Cities, is a programme which subsidises the purchase of a house for families with an income of up to R$ 1,800 or £360 per month and it lends money at low interest rates to people who earn up to R$ 6,500 or £1,300 per month. Lula’s government launched other programmes, but these two were the most important for the women I worked with because they formed the basis on which they could strategise and buy their ticket to come to London. They could count on the security of having some income provided for their children through the *Bolsa família* but also, as in the case of at least one woman, could sell their government-subsidised house to buy their ticket to London.

In his overview of the country’s new social programmes, Kopper (2015), whose work researched low-income and first-time homeowners in the southern city of Porto Alegre, mapped the changes that were under way in Brazil during the 2000s. He showed that Brazil had experienced a decrease in social inequality, greater economic stability, a minimum wage increase, and the expansion of internal markets. The strengthening of the country’s economy, and high demand for manual labour to work in infrastructural projects, resulted in new flows of immigration and converted Brazil into a regional leading force (Da Silva, 2013 in Kopper, 2015). All of these changes influenced the confidence and strategies which enabled some Brazilians, some of whom had rarely left their small towns in the countryside, to come to London.

Towards the end of my thesis Brazil elected Jair Bolsonaro, a federal congressman and former Army official, as the 38th president of the country. He is a far-right politician whose campaign was based on regressive and repressive policies such as the reduction of workers’ rights, ending the culture and education ministries, the privatisation of public universities, environmental protection and the re-introduction of censorship. He and his supporters have shown a hostile attitude towards people from the LGBT and indigenous communities, black people, women and people from the north-east of Brazil, among others. It is hard to predict what will happen, but as this brief historical economic context shows, it is possible that once more migration will be restricted to
more middle-class migrants.

**Methodology**

I started my fieldwork in December 2011. As I was part-time it officially ended in December 2013. I started with the aim of exploring the transformative potential of migration by looking at the experience of Brazilian middle-class migrants who were in London working as cleaners. I proposed to work as an office cleaner in the hope of interacting with the young middle-class Brazilians who came to London to learn English. My main interest was whether attitudes towards domestic work in Brazil would be challenged by the students’ experiences of working as cleaners. However, as I started my fieldwork, I noticed that the situation I had found from my personal experiences of living in the UK since 2000 and doing an MA in anthropology, had changed. After 2010, the law concerning Brazilian migration changed; English language students can no longer work, and are only allowed one year in the country, with the possibility of extending this to two years on condition that they can prove their attendance and progress with their language skills. In addition, companies face more severe penalties if caught with undocumented workers, being liable for a fine of at least £5,000. These restrictions, which coincided with the Brazilians’ economic stability, discussed above, meant that the Brazilian middle-class students were no longer found in the workplaces they once occupied, such as offices, schools and sports venues, where they were part of the cleaning staff.

In January 2012 I started working for the Themis Project – Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems, which is part of the IMI Institute of the University of Oxford⁵. To use their own words, Themis is a project that investigates “what makes people decide to migrate, why some of those initial moves to Europe result in the formation of significant migration systems, and why some migration processes simply tail off or stagnate. This involves a comparative study of the evolution of migrant groups following different migration trajectories from several regions of three origin countries (Brazil, Morocco and Ukraine) to selected cities in four destination countries (the UK, Norway, the Netherlands and Portugal).” I worked on this project as a research assistant.

---

⁵ For more information please refer to the website: [http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/themis](http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/themis)
for the Brazilians and Moroccans, and latterly as a research coordinator for the Brazilians. The group I coordinated completed 240 questionnaires of which I conducted 83. Each questionnaire had 30 pages and took one to two hours to complete. The questionnaire was designed to access the Brazilian network, but some of the questions were related to work, migration status and intention to return. Whenever the question was related to work, I would ask the person to expand, and would write notes in my fieldwork diary, and, whenever permitted, I would use my phone to record their voices. I usually conducted the surveys in one of the McDonald’s restaurants in Haringey, but I also went to some of the informants’ houses, or we would agree on a meeting point. By meeting people in their houses I began to get a grasp of the diversity of their lifestyles, as well as their life stories, motives for migration and journeys in and through the city. Through this range of encounters mediated by the survey, I was able to observe how the more middle-class Brazilians used idioms of class to differentiate and/or distance themselves from the working-class Brazilians, which I explore further in Chapter Three. It was also in one of those home interviews that I met Marcilene who introduced me to her network of friends, and over the years became my cleaner, then my informant, my friend, and a godmother to my first child.

Through Marcilene I met and interviewed 22 domestic workers. Over the course of my fieldwork, four people from the network went back to Brazil voluntarily, one was deported, one passed away and one moved to another country in Europe. In my group of research there were people from different states, though all but three of them came from the rural areas or small towns in the countryside. Throughout the thesis I explain where the women are from, but the majority of them came from the states of Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. Only three of the women considered themselves black, although another five people mentioned having some black people in their close family, which I understood as their way of saying that they were not black or white. Apart from four women in their twenties, the women were all over thirty. Most of the women self-identified as poor, but others, as I show in Chapter Three, used idioms of class, which together with their life stories and my long-term participant observation, confirmed that they were from a lower-middle-class or middle-class background. I also filmed focus groups with two different groups of former Brazilian cleaners, who have now moved on to work in different non-manual work.
At the end of 2012, as a way of meeting the women more regularly, I started a free beginners’ English class for a group of Brazilian women who showed interest in learning. The word spread, and soon I had fifteen students. The classes went really well so we became more comfortable with each other, and from then on we used the class time to share our experiences of living and working in London and Brazil. As our relationships developed, the English classes allowed more space for informal conversations, which were usually followed by what resembled small parties. We usually had some food and drink while the women told me about their past experiences in Brazil, their lives in London and their hopes for the future. During these collective conversations, I also had the opportunity to note how class, race, legal status, age and regional differences appeared and were talked about, which is explored thoroughly in the thesis. Another way I found of interacting more often with my informants was to serve as a translator. I often assisted my participants with visits to the GP or the computer store and translated conversations with employers and prospective employers. The initial group of students are my primary informant group, but through them I met many different people, flatmates, partners and friends who I call my secondary group of informants. I attended birthday parties, leaving parties, church services and church gatherings, and I am still invited to such events.

I also volunteered for the trade union enrolment and seminar days for Unite the Union, which were dedicated for domestic workers and usually took place on Saturday mornings. This tactic to meet Brazilian cleaners proved unsuccessful, as on the four days I volunteered there I only met two Brazilians; the attendants were mainly from other countries in Latin America. The findings described and analysed in this thesis come mainly from participant observations, the documentary production and from life histories. I started every relationship in my fieldwork with a recorded life history interview. There I would ask the women to tell me their life story chronologically from the time of birth; that way I would also get a brief summary of their parents’ circumstances at the time of their birth. I found this particularly useful to give me an idea of their class background but also about how they reflected on their life experiences in Brazil, as they would usually expand and reason while telling me their stories. As I started with the surveys and then moved on to collect life histories for the
few who became my main collaborators, I noted how different methods gave different answers. For example, in the survey when asked about their reasons for coming to the UK people would say “to save money” or “to learn English”. Through the life stories and participant observations, however, it became clear that these answers often obscured important aspects of their decision-making, for instance bereavement in the family, broken or abusive relationships, the search for love, and others. Quick answers such as “to save money” and “to learn English” also gave the sense of a clear dichotomic class division between Brazilians in London and obscured the fact that people learning English might also be saving money and vice versa. Furthermore, as my engagement with the women has continued to the present, through my initial fieldwork I established friendships which are now over seven years old. In addition, I created a closed and secret Facebook group called “Karine Paula’s research”, which still has 23 members, with whom I would exchange jokes, photos, comments and ideas about cleaning, London, Brazil and beyond. Therefore, the life history analyses are not fixed in time; they are organic and growing, as I have been following how their lives have developed since the first interviews.

My participant observation involved two weeks of cleaning alongside Marcilene, and six months living in a multi-occupancy migrant house in Haringey. In 2014, I moved to that house which was five blocks away from my own house, also in Haringey, with my husband and then 3-month-old first son, Sebastian. We three shared a small room in the house with ten other migrants from different countries where five of them were Brazilians: three domestic work women, one single man who worked in construction and the husband of one of my participants who worked as a bike courier. It was here that I was able to get a deeper understanding of the contradictory feelings about cleaning work as well as the women’s experiences of reaching almost breaking point, followed by their recuperation through familiar domestic practices such as cooking Brazilian food and participating in the lives of their Brazilian relatives through phone calls and social media, as I discuss in Chapter Six.

My friendship with Marcilene developed beyond the fieldwork, as will become clear in

---

6 This analysis was presented at the THEMIS Conference in January 2014. The podcast is available at: http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/themis-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go-role-relationships-decision-migrate-stay-or-return
the thesis and the documentary. When Marcilene got upset at the betrayal by her friend Clara who was taking a big cut of her salary, I asked around and found work for her with my friends and neighbours. When I was six months pregnant, after three years of fertility treatment, which was really putting a strain on my body and mind, my mother passed away. When my son was born I was still trying to come to terms with the loss of my mother, and I became unwell. At that time, for the first three months of Sebastian’s life, she would come every day to ‘say hello’, but she usually helped me with cooking and cleaning for about an hour before going on to clean her houses. My day only started after she had come. When I asked her why she was coming to help me, she simply said that the birth of the first child is hard and I was alone. She added that someone had done the same for her previously and she was “paying forward”. From then on our relationship strengthened and I became more immersed in her network of friends and she in mine.

As my relationship with Marcilene became stronger towards the end of my formal fieldwork, my friendship with her meant that I never left the field. My fieldwork and beyond was not confined to our friendship, as I interviewed and spent time with other participants who were not directly connected to her, and some she never met. Nevertheless, I took an approach in my fieldwork which is more closely described as “friendship as method”. Tillmann-Healy (2003) defines “friendship as method” as research which combines ethnographic methods such as participant observations, interviewing and fieldnotes with rigorous analysis at the same time as forms of engagement which are used to “build and sustain friendship: conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability” (p.734). Thus, the film “Making Homes” is a representation of our friendship, which exposes my vulnerabilities and my intimate space as well as hers. By doing this I do not mean to understate our class differences, but rather to show that compassion is not just one way; we are, as in good friendships, compassionate with one another even within the complexities of our working relationship.

This thesis is accompanied by the documentary film “Making Homes”. The title, which is similar to the thesis, for me is the best representation of what happens through domestic work. Through their jobs, by going to people’s houses once a week, as in the
case of Marcilene, who works full-time for one family, like others in the thesis, they are able to build a life for themselves in London. At the same time, they often buy a house for themselves in Brazil, or invest in the homes of family members. Furthermore, by cleaning other people’s homes they are helping those families, even if minimally, to make their own homes a more pleasant place.

My use of the audio-visual material aims to represent three aspects of this thesis. First, it works as a strong example of the kinds of complex relationships between the financial and affective, and between employer/employee throughout the thesis. It serves as ethnographic evidence of the various themes I cover in the thesis. The film is based on Marcilene but, as I show in my ethnographic chapter, her experience and opinions are by no means unique. Lastly, “Making Homes” works as a narrative of how Marcilene perceives her own trajectory as a migrant Brazilian domestic worker, as she takes pride in a job well done and in the relationships she is building through it.

Although I interviewed four of Marcilene’s employers and conducted two focus groups with employers of domestic workers, I cannot claim to understand the position of the employers in relation to the stories I heard during the fieldwork. Nevertheless, the consistency of different accounts from domestic workers of different ages, class backgrounds, race, places of origin and religious affiliation led me to trust my argument that relationships of care, reciprocity and professionalism are not only possible, they are more common than most previous research has allowed for. I will return to this point in Chapter Two.

**Situating myself in the field**

My research was also informed by my experience as a Brazilian migrant woman living in London since 2000. My analysis can offer a unique perspective for different reasons. First, I also started my migrant journey as a part-time tourist cleaner to be able to finance my English course and to continue living in London. I speak both languages involved in my fieldwork, English and Portuguese. Coming from a mixed class background, where my mother was from a middle-class background and my father from a working-class one, meant that I was able to transit in different social worlds as my personal life in Brazil had been marked by contrasting social experiences. Lastly, by
working as a cleaner in London at different times, once from 2000 to 2001, and returning to it as a researcher, I had two different perspectives, which I believe it is important to highlight here. In 2000, my experience was marked by necessity, because I wanted to stay in London, but also I hoped to pursue a Master’s degree, and I knew that with no English there was little I could do, I needed to learn it first. The second time, as a researcher, had a different meaning and I was more critical; I saw more dirt and I found it more difficult. This observation shows that positionality can alter one’s perceptions.

**Ethical considerations**

In this section, I briefly address the ethical considerations of this research. First and foremost, I have protected the confidentiality of my informants. Apart from Marcilene and Eliana, from whom I obtained recorded consent to reveal their identity through the presentation of the film, I have preserved the anonymity of all my informants. Extra care has been taken to disguise identities where topics of discussion may be sensitive, such as when the women were talking about employers, as I had to take care not to jeopardise their relationships with employers or prospective employers. I have followed the Association of Social Anthropology code of ethics, which requires of anthropologists that their ethnographic research does no harm to informants.7

The second main issue is the one of “illegality”. Although my thesis is not directly about illegal status, there was always a chance that I would meet people in this situation. It was impossible for me to predict the legal situation of every informant I encountered, and for that reason the documentary presented with the thesis shows only Marcilene and Eliana, two people who are documented migrants. Although most of the Brazilians I researched either had dual nationality or were married to a European, whenever people disclosed their legal status to me I took extra precautions during the filming, note-taking and the writing-up process to conceal their identity. I am fully aware of the vulnerable position that illegality poses for those who want to work in the UK and who are not legally allowed to do so. I was therefore mindful of the consequences that disclosure of their status would entail.

7 http://www.asanet.org/code-ethics assessed on 18/04/2018
Thesis overview

After the introduction, which I am calling Chapter One, in Chapter Two I summarise the different types of household employment, followed by a review of the literature on domestic work as well as a brief review of Brazilian migration theory. In Chapter Three I look at how domestic workers’ socio-economic background influences their experiences in London. In Chapter Four I explain the pathway towards achieving stability within the profession of cleaning and caring. In Chapter Five I show how Brazilian cleaners’ perceptions of their work challenge the idea of paid cleaning and caring work as “dirty work”. What I found was that even among the middle-class or “tourist cleaners” there was no shame in cleaning. Some would prefer to be doing something else, for sure, but there was a certain sense of pride in making money and choosing hard work as a way of achieving their goals.

In Chapter Six I map how the domestic workers build a set of mental tools which includes attaching the work to learned moral and spiritual ideals as well as body senses, such as "pleasure in the smell and visual feeling of a job well done". The ethnographic research shows how cleaning work gives, for those who want it, the possibility to build a meaningful relationship with their employer, which is reinforced by expressions of respect and appreciation. All of this takes place while earning money at a favourable exchange rate and away from their own sociocultural environment and its pressures. Unlike in Brazil, there is a chance in Britain for the working-class position of the cleaner to lend dignity and the possibility of a better life to people who have come from lives of inter-generation impoverishment in Brazil. Chapter Seven is a concluding chapter where I discuss the experience of migration and its possibilities for transformation.
Chapter 2

Domestic workers in London and empregadas domésticas in Brazil: some theoretical considerations

Introduction

In September 2016 the United Nations published a report stating that there were 67.1 million domestic workers in the world, 11.5 million of them being migrants and the majority being women. This number is likely to be understated if we take into account the domestic workers, au pairs, nannies and cleaners who are undocumented or on student and tourist visas, as noted by Anderson (2000) in her extensive study of domestic workers in Europe. In a more recent work, Anderson (2010) observes that Europe has become increasingly attractive to women who want to live and work abroad as domestic workers. One of the reasons for that demand, she argues, is the tendency, following a neoliberal logic, for shrinking the welfare state. The resulting scenario opens a gap filled by migrant domestic workers “taking on the privatised responsibilities of the welfare state” (Anderson, 2000: 5). In Britain, as in other Western countries, the end of the Second World War was accompanied by a series of inclusive social programmes which looked to assist its citizens throughout their lives independent of their income. Hamnett (2014), looking at the impact of the benefit cuts in Britain, notes the important moments in history that led to the model of the welfare state that we know today. Benefit cuts started to take place in the 1970s, continuing throughout the 1980s and, in 1997, under New Labour, there was a radical shift from the inclusive welfare system of the 1940s to what has been called a ‘workfare’ system, which caps the benefits and make it conditional to people who can demonstrate that they are in search of work or working (Hamnett, 2014). Following the world economic crisis of 2008, the UK formed, in 2010, a coalition government composed of the Conservative and the Liberal Democrat parties represented by David Cameron and Nick Clegg respectively. The pair took the cuts to social benefits further and faster, according to Hamnett, creating the most significant welfare restructuring since the 1940s.

The gradual welfare neo-liberalisation (Dyer et al., 2008), has had significant
consequences for the structuring of family life and consequently for the supply and demand of domestic help, from cleaning to the dedicated care of the elderly and children. For example, “the allowance for care”, which gives money for the beneficiary to arrange care for themselves rather than providing high quality public care, has been criticised for shaping the relationship of employer and employee in a more instrumental manner, ignoring the emotional side of this relationship (Anderson, 2007; Dyer et al., 2008). In the case of childcare specifically, Davis (2016) argues that policies have often been contradictory throughout history. Anderson (2007) points out that some “family friendly” measures have been put in place, however. Possibilities for part-time work, for example, have helped some women to take on employment. But, at the same time, pre-school state-funded daycare has not increased to the same extent. In 2015, when the state provided free pre-school for low-income families with two-year-old toddlers, this came at the expense of Sure Start day centre closures all over the country (Davis, 2016). Thus, at the core of the discussion on benefit cuts is the fact that provision for childcare does not adequately support dual-income families. Consequently, as I observed among the employers I interviewed, this either forces women out of work or creates a range of stressful situations as parents end up using a mixture of childcare solutions which include au pairs, mothers’ help, and nannies, depending on the budget. In addition, parents with higher earnings may prefer to contract a nanny to care for their pre-schoolers at home, as noted by Gregson and Lowe (1994) which could be confirmed by my research. These factors, combined with population ageing, changes in the social and economic roles of women, and the feminisation of the workforce has created a “care crisis” in the Western world (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003), boosting the need for the replacement of women’s former participation in unpaid labour in the home with paid domestic services.

The global proliferation of paid household work is not only connected with the necessities listed above. Anderson (1997), for example, observes that to employ a migrant domestic worker can also be a symbol of status for the employer, as the domestic worker helps to maintain a standard of cleanliness that would have been unattainable if household members shared the workload among themselves. Anderson’s

---

8 Sure Start was created in 1998 under the First National Childcare Strategy – an area-based strategy aimed at improving childcare, early education, health and family support.
example helps to clarify the situation; one of her interviewees had an employer from Athens who had three dogs and a huge house with a white wall-to-wall carpet, a combination that would not have been the homeowner’s choice were the family to clean the house themselves. Thus, employing a cleaner or a full-time domestic worker can raise the standard of cleanliness in a house as well as the status of some families, who are then able to dedicate more time to leisure and entertainment.

Even in countries where the number of women working outside the household is smaller than in the UK and the US, such as in the Middle East, demand for domestic workers has also increased. Although there seems to be a global increase on demand for paid household workers attitudes towards the workers vary from country to country. Gregson and Lowe (1994) point out that paid domestic help in contemporary Britain is a sensitive issue, especially where it concerns caring for children, as there is the idea that caring and cleaning are activities that should be done for love and not for money. This means that mothers can be made to feel guilty for employing domestic help and nannies in particular. In the US, Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) give two reasons why there is a measure of embarrassment in having maids and nannies. One is that American career women gain their status by showing that they ‘can do it all’ and therefore the help should not be seen. The second is what they call the Western culture of individualism, which “militates against acknowledging help or human interdependency of nearly any kind” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003: 4). The examples of the UK and the US indicate that having domestic help is not associated with status, and when it is necessary it is accompanied by guilt, which in turn contributes to the invisibility of the worker. In contrast, Ismail’s (1994) study on the migration of Muslim maids from Sri Lanka to the Middle East shows that having a domestic worker is considered a status symbol for middle-class and upper-class families. And in Brazil, whether the middle-class and upper-class women work outside the house or not, to maintain an “empregada doméstica” (literal translation: domestic employee) is a “signal and reassurance of her distance from poverty” (Goldstein, 2003 in Brites, 2007:93), a very similar situation has been observed also in India (Dickey, 2000). Furthermore, there is a certain naturalisation (Goldstein, 2013 [2003]) of low-paid domestic work, which has made this occupation part of the Brazilian national imagery (Roncador, 2008). Therefore, Brazilian domestic workers arrive in London in this context of a
shrinking but still existent welfare state and where, in spite of the increase of domestic
workers, having domestic help is still somewhat new and definitely not normalised.
They arrive, however, with memories of very little or no social security; some have
never had formal work. Therefore, limited opportunities for social mobility and
enduring social inequality in Brazil have locked the poor in poverty. At the same time
the middle class, in fear of losing its fragile status ends up distancing and segregating
itself from the poor. This class segregation in Brazil, and the consequent traumas and
privileges that it generates, plays out in the context of migration.

One way the Brazilian class segregation can be observed in London is through the
language they use to describe their behaviour and perceptions. This is done with the
view that class should not be seen as purely class. Most of the time, and perhaps even
more in the case of domestic workers, there are other elements which contribute to
their way of living and perceiving London, such as gender, race, nationality, age and
others. Signalling the importance of intersectionality in the literature on transnational
migration, Yeoh et al. (1999) rightly argue that “foreign maids qualify as the
quintessential ‘other’ seen through the refracted lenses of nationality, class, race and
gender” (1999: 124). Echoing Yeoh et al., Monsen (1999) adds that this ‘other’ is
subordinated first to their employers and, second, to the urban host society in general.
What I am most interested in here is how academic experts on women domestic worker
migrants to London have produced descriptions and analyses that deal with the
cleaners holistically – as people – and not just as degraded workers. Drawing on in-
depth ethnographic research, I explore throughout the thesis how the Brazilian women
I worked with in London feel about their position and relationship with the work they
do, their employers, the places they left and arrived in and finally with the people who
are significant in their lives. I suggest that subordination, stigmatisation and
discrimination are not a constant, and that there is not one feeling or situation that
characterises their experiences in London. Rather their lives are complex, and they are
actively engaged in making a home in London, and more often they perceive their work
and lives as empowering and as a means to create a dignified life. I will return to the
importance of the intersectional approach in Chapter Seven but I will be consistently
returning to class because of its overwhelming presence during my fieldwork.
Therefore, without negating the inseparability between class, gender, race and other
important identity-formation simultaneities, I will be mainly concentrating on ideas of subjectivity and personhood in relation to differentiated class backgrounds. I start this chapter by pointing out the differences in types of household employment. I follow this by looking at research on domestic workers in Europe and the UK, and continue by looking at domestic work in Brazil. I then present a brief overview of what has been said about Brazilians abroad. The aim of this review is to situate my research within the current literature.

**Cleaners or domestic workers?**

There are many types of cleaners, domestic workers, nannies and carers, and often, as I show throughout the thesis, they overlap. It is not the same to be a contract cleaner, cleaning offices for example, as being a house cleaner or a full-time domestic helper. I do not deal with office cleaners in my thesis, I call domestic workers household weekly cleaners, nannies, live-in and live-out full-time domestic cleaners, au pairs and mother’s help, all of which engage with cleaning on a regular basis. I will however differentiate them in specific examples, to give an idea of how work that is considered in general repetitive, simple and straightforward can be complicated and specific for each cleaning/caring job. In addition to the different types of domestic work, there are specificities of the contract or agreement that need to be negotiated between the parties, or through a supervisor, which makes every job somewhat unique and situational. It is a job that is confined to the private domain of the household where two or more people need to reach an agreement of what is expected. In addition, as mentioned above, different people have different attitudes about having paid household help.

The uncertainty about what is domestic work and what is expected from the worker is noted in the context of the UK (Anderson, 2000) and Brazil (Brites, 2003) as well as in the case of Moldovan migrants in Turkey (Kaska, 2009) and Indonesian domestic workers in Asia (Anggraeni, 2006). The International Labour Organization describes the work of domestic helpers as to “sweep, vacuum clean, wash and polish, take care of the household linen, purchase the household supplies, prepare food, serve meals and perform various other domestic duties” (Anderson, 2000: 15). The problem with the job
description and definition lies in the “various other domestic duties”. When Anderson asked her respondents what they actually did, they said ‘everything’, and what is rarely mentioned is that many of the women also do care work for the children and elderly of the family, especially if they are live-in or live-out full-time domestic workers employed by one family.

The position of live-in domestic workers is even more vulnerable once they are absorbed into the private reproductive sphere which at times offers neither social security nor a position as a member of the family (Yeoh et al., 1999). Research, to date, in the UK has focused on the experiences of live-in domestic workers and au pairs (Anderson, 2000; 2010a; 2013), or the situation of office cleaners (McDowell, 2011; Wills, 2008 McIlwaine et al., 2006), and much less about the situation of household weekly cleaners, who make up the majority of my study group. Although I do not focus on office cleaners, it is important to give just a brief overview of developments in London, to show the efforts of the workers, NGOs and unions in the fight for cleaners’ rights in London. I believe that their victories, although still modest, have contributed to a sense of respectability, reaching the house cleaners themselves.

Office cleaners often work in groups; there is a mixture of males and females as well as people from different nationalities (McIlwaine et al., 2006). The working conditions of night cleaners were first brought to mainstream attention in the 1970s with the help of the Women Action Group (Rowbotham, 2006). In her article analysing the impact of these first activists in the fight for office and business cleaners, Rowbotham notes that one of the biggest challenges was to get the cleaners organised and engaged politically. More recently, the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) together with London Citizens in the UK have been able to intervene in the labour market, organising cleaners at Canary Wharf and in the City of London (Wills, 2008). The campaign, according to Wills, brought together cleaners, contractors, clients and cardinals to challenge the injustice faced by migrants in the workplace but also relating to state-managed immigration control. Despite the hardships of contract cleaners, they are today better organised politically and therefore less prone to exploitation. As Wills (2008) reflects on the successes of the Canary Wharf campaign, she argues that it was only possible because it offered an opportunity for rethinking fixed social structures. She proposes a
“messy” view of class that involves people from different class positions and interests who are united under a common interest that is not restricted to the power relations between employer/employee. What Wills (2008) saw was that a wide range of people got together with interests that were related to the redistribution of wealth in the City of London, an example of class mobilisation beyond work identity.

In the case of household cleaners, my ethnography shows that there is no political engagement in the classical sense, for example they are not registered with a union, and do not participate in any collective political or solidarity acts in relation to domestic work. In 2012 I volunteered a few Saturdays at Unite the Union in the hope of meeting Brazilian domestic workers.9 Unite the Union had free English classes and other courses and seminars every Saturday for anyone interested and they did not ask for papers. On the registration day, for instance, while the place was full of other Latin American nationals I only met one Brazilian. I suspect that Brazilians did not know about the opportunity, but even when I told the women I met through my fieldwork about the Unite free classes, they were positively surprised at first but never showed any interest beyond that.

On 20th September 2017, the body of Sophie Lionnet, a 21-year-old French au pair, was found at her host family’s house in South London. She had been tortured and killed by her employer and her boyfriend. One of my informants, who was an administrator for the Brazilian WhatsApp group of au pairs in London, called me to tell me how everyone was shocked about this. She was surprised that it could happen in London and told me that they would be part of the demonstration in solidarity over her death. A few weeks later I called her and learned that she and the thirty members of her WhatsApp group had not gone. Both these events and others suggest a lack of political engagement among the Brazilian domestic workers in London. There could be different reasons for this, such as the lack of papers and the fear of public places or the desire to rest at weekends, but what is interesting is that while they do not engage publicly there is a kind of self-regulation that happens within their small community groups and through the Internet. My participants who made it into the cleaning profession, who have a fixed set of houses to clean that pay £10 or over, did so by building strategies outside the

---

9 Unite the Union is the second largest trade union in the UK
political and legal systems. For example, they teach each other the techniques to clean better and to be able to charge more, what they call 'elite cleaning', they pick and choose their employers. Most of the cleaners learn this through their social and church meetings; Marcilene gives a brief demonstration of these learned skills at the beginning of the documentary when she shows why she prefers one brand of vacuum cleaner to others. In the case of au pairs, as the example shows, they build a strong online community where they discuss how to act with the employers, how to engage with difficult toddlers, and what is 'off limits' in terms of treatment. According to Nara (the Whatsapp group administrator), if the

"French au pair had known that in London there are many different kinds of employers, that the au pair experience does not need to be that of misery, and, if it is, she can change employers, if she’d had us, she would be alive today."

Nara firmly believes that au pairs should not be isolated and she always helped promote events which enabled them to cook Brazilian food, enjoy the city and talk about their work experiences. Her group did all their exchange via WhatsApp, while the older generation of cleaners did it via private messaging individually and through social gatherings. Thus in spite of differences in types of work and contracts, the women I worked with were aware of their rights, even the ones without a contract, and did not stay for long in houses where they did not feel they were treated with respect or in houses where they felt ill-treated. I will show this in more detail in the chapter “To clean is to care”.

Domestic workers’ stigma and the employer/employee relationship: “a marriage without sex”

In spite of its undeniable value and necessity, domestic work is still stigmatised as being dirty and demeaning work. It is considered non-productive and devalued for being feminised and racialised work (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010). The reasons for the persistent stigmatisation of domestic work are historical as well as contemporaneous. Cleaning and caring has always been considered female work and therefore non-work, not considered a "real job" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). In addition, there is a discrepancy between what women have achieved in terms of entering the male-
dominant public sphere and what men have achieved in entering the classically female-dominated private domain of the household. Even though women are now competing with men in the labour market of professional work, most men are not interested in sharing responsibilities in the domestic sphere. In this way, as McDowell (2011) and others have argued, paid housework and care work is still considered female work that should be done for love.

Another reason for the devaluation of domestic work is that it has been mainly described as body work/ dirty work: it is work that is performed by using one’s own body and its aim is either the cleaning of body dirt of others or, in the case of cleaners who are also nannies and carers, it is performed on the bodies of others. Dyer et al. (2008) draw on the work of several authors to explain the nature of care work as body work and its classification as dirty. For them the problem lies with Western culture, which privileges the cerebral over the physical. Within this hierarchy ‘Body work’ is marked by what Wolkowitz (2002) calls “intimate messy contact”. Wolkowitz argues that to understand the structure of “body work” we must move beyond the division of mental and manual labour and broaden our understanding to include the structures of class, gender, race and nationality.

As migrants are increasingly doing these types of work, nationality is of extreme importance. Where the cleaners come from will dictate their migration status, which is important for access to rights and benefits (Anderson, 2000). Nationality also influences ways of seeing, which are, in turn, informed by national perceptions and lived experiences of a social structure, as domestic work is not only gendered and racialised but also defined by class. Throughout the thesis I suggest an understanding of the professional Brazilian migrant domestic workers’ bodies as bearers of hard work and stigma on the one hand and emancipation and satisfaction on the other, none of which are mutually exclusive. While the cleaners sometimes arrive so tired that they use the expression “arrebentada”, which means that their body is broken by work, their bodies are also insurance and vessels for the pleasures and satisfactions in their lives. The Brazilian cleaners rely on and put trust in their bodies and in their capacity to work, “to survive anywhere they go”, as they tell me.
A lot has been written about the role of race and gender in the stigmatising and exploitation of migrant domestic workers in the United States (Glenn, 1992; Dill, 1988; Romero, 2002). Glenn's (1992) historical analysis highlights the way that women of colour are disproportionately employed as cleaners and domestic workers, which reveals a worldwide and persistent trend not only in relation to migrant workers but also where cleaning is done by national workers, as is the case in Brazil. While this earlier research is very important to denounce the oppression based on gender and race, it puts class as secondary. Furthermore, while acknowledging the ways in which cleaners assert their dignity, Glenn and Romero emphasise the degrading aspects of the work as well as the unequal power relations it entails, without space for positive negotiation.

In the face of this reality some scholars have turned their attention to how women resist the stigma of their occupation and assert their self-worth. Glenn (1992) argues that domestic workers draw on their own families and communities, seeing their work as dignifying because they are doing it for their children to enable them to go to college. Romero's (2002) research on Chicanas in the United States and Dill’s (1988) work on African Americans in the United States also found that women's sense of self-worth was connected to their responsibilities as mothers. Dill (1988) shows how black female domestic workers assert their self-worth and personal dignity by negotiating their relationship with their employers. She points out that, while domestic workers are aware of the stigma attached to their occupation, they never present themselves as defeated by it. Instead they show ambivalence towards their occupation because while they do not find the work demeaning per se, it is perceived as such by other people. Likewise, in research on domestic workers in Vanuatu, Rodman (2007) has demonstrated that women simultaneously value their work and understand the conditions of it and develop forms of resistance, not against the system of domination of which domestic workers are a part, but in smaller “immediate struggles” which are part of their work relationships. For example, Dill noted that people were defensive with regard to the stigma that often translated into them being denied food or having to use a different entrance to the household where they worked. My research confirms the mental tools for fighting the stigma such as focusing on a better future for the family, their capacity to negotiate well with employers and the undefeated manner in which they embrace each day. It also confirms Rodman’s (2007) observation that resistance is
not against the systems of dominations but, in the Brazilian case, was more a project of progress within the system, where ideas of success through hard work prevail.

The idea that domestic workers are determined to make their work meaningful is not a new one. For instance, domestic workers in Dill’s (1988) research based their pride on three different aspects of their work “managing the employer-employee relationship, building a career, and utilising support within the Black community”. They, like my informants, have measures in place to avoid demeaning practices. These, Dill noted, were to do with increasing the opportunities for job flexibility, increasing pay and benefits, enforcing contracts specifying tasks, minimising contact with the employer, defining themselves as professional housekeepers, and creating a small business-like environment. While Rollins’ (1985) interviewees retained an outstanding sense of self-worth, they counterbalanced their employers’ attempts to diminish them with the detailed knowledge they had about their lives. Her interviewees relied on their own value systems, which Rollins identified as based less on material success and more on “the kind of person they were” which saw value in personal relationships and community life.

In addition, by using their personal relationships, workers can put pressure on employers, and educate potential employers on existing conditions and pay, they can set expectations and try to create a warmer, more human, work environment (Romero, 2002). As both researchers observed, these strategies have limitations, one of the most important being that they are performed at an individual level rather than the collective level, through a union for example. Also, as domestic work is part of the private domain, regulations are difficult to implement and enforce (Delap, 2012). Consequently, some workers at an individual level try to minimise the more hierarchical aspects of their work, the ones that threaten their sense of dignity, and try to establish a more client–customer focus and offer a labour service rather than labour power (Romero, 2002). As more recent research has shown, this more “business-like” idea of professionalism has been shown to work only if we take into account the intimacy and affect which are part of the household relationships which are part of care and cleaning work (Brites, 2007).

Almost all research on domestic work concentrates on or at least touches on the
relationship between employer and employee. During the 1970s household cleaning and care work was considered as “the great equaliser of women” in the US (Ehrenreich, 2003) and in the UK, as most women seemed to deal with their own household dirt (Anderson, 2000). As the demand for cleaners and carers increased, one of the main preoccupations within this work-based relationship was the reproduction of race, class and gender hierarchies, as briefly mentioned earlier. The assumption here is that the relationship is oppressive because middle-class women are only able to fulfil their professional and personal goals by passing their household duties on to a paid working class, usually black and migrant women (Anderson, 2000; Romero, 2002; Glenn, 1992). This approach creates another dichotomy: that of domestic workers as victims and employers as the perpetrators. It does so even when it points to men as the ones who really benefit from this arrangement. Such observations risk seeing both sets of actors as essentially victims or perpetrators, putting more pressure on an already fragile relationship. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that the domestic worker is also fulfilling their professional and personal goals.

To better understand the employer/employee relationship, Rollins (1985) worked as a domestic worker herself. She explored the social-psychological aspects of this relationship between middle-class women and their employees and concluded that the it is multidimensional and complex but, it is essentially a relationship of exploitation. For Rollins, what makes the relations more exploitative than other professions is the personal relationship, which she identified as based on psychological exploitation. This, she noted, was visible in the demands of deference towards the employer and the sense of invisibility within the household, with the domestic worker being made to feel like a “window of exotica” as the employer sees the domestic worker as a different ‘other’. The idea of maternalism was central to Rollins’ portrait of psychological exploitation, based on rituals of deference and accompanied by gift-giving and tolerance for misbehaving.

One of the contributions to this thesis is the fact that I worked as a cleaner alongside the women I write about. In addition, I worked as a cleaner when I first arrived in London as an English language student from 2000 to 2001, so I once was what I call today a “tourist cleaner”. As such, I can confirm what one of the employers I interviewed said, that “the relationship with the full-time domestic worker, be she a live-in or live-out
one, is similar to a marriage without sex”. Nothing is constant; you have bad days and
good days, days when you feel empowered and days when you feel oppressed. What
makes the difference is the relationships the domestic worker is able to establish and
her capacity to negotiate such relationships along the way, or to quit if it gets too
difficult or if it hurts her dignity.

My research, therefore, is more in line with Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (2001) study on Latina
domestic workers in LA. She used interviews and ethnographic observations to
understand the workers’ strategies to find and maintain work, combined with how
employers see their experience with the employee. She contextualised household paid
work in relation to globalisation and inequalities among nations, focusing on strategic
transnational motherhood. For this author, the inequality among nations transforms the
nature of migrant work. It favours female migration as it encourages women from
different social classes to work in countries that are economically more advanced, thus
developing an industry of domestic service. The women who travel to work for another
family have to create different forms of motherhood and strategies to cope with the
sometimes conflicting choice of leaving their family behind to improve the life of that
same family. What is important about this research is that Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001)
brings the domestic worker to a more autonomous place, as a person in her own right
and not as someone reacting to stigmatisation and devaluation. The Latina domestic
worker in Los Angeles that Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) portrays is not the poor migrant
who is abused by the middle-class employer. As she puts it, “problems of abuses arise
that harm both employer and employee, but especially the latter, primarily because paid
domestic work is not treated as employment” (2001: xii). In this way she breaks from
the conventional sociological analysis that portrays domestic workers mainly as women
from poor countries with no choice but to work as domestic workers doing the “dirty
work” for the white middle-class women in developed countries, as it is emphasised by

Another important debate concerning the relationship between the domestic worker
and her employer is the question of what professionalism would look like in such an
intimate relationship. As the above overview shows, the relationship between employer
and employee has been the most common topic among scholars of domestic work.
Research in the United States such as that of Rollins (1985) and Romero (2002) sees the proximity and personal relationships as part of the employers’ strategies of control and oppression. This line of thought suggests that when the employer positions herself as distant, in terms of maintaining markers of social hierarchy, and maternal, in terms of the treatment, she is expecting that the maid will become deferential and that reinforces the hierarchy of inequality (Parreñas, 2001; Anderson, 2000). This maternalism is potentially a mechanism through which the employers expect favours and extra working hours. It is

“...a relationship, defined primarily by the employer’s gestures of charity, unsolicited advice, assistance and gifts. The domestic employee is obligated to respond with extra hours of service, personal loyalty, and job commitment. Maternalism underlines the deep class inequalities between employers and employees” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001: 208).

Other research has argued that a close relationship between the boss and employee is not always a problem for the domestic workers, and that they could in fact feel empowered by such proximity as they have the possibility to negotiate better working conditions (Dill, 1988; Gutierrez-Garza, 2013). Furthermore, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) suggests that the way the employer and employee perceive their relationship will depend on the context of the work and the frame of mind of both parties. She notes that in contemporary LA, both the cleaners and their employers were new to the situation of working as and having a cleaner. This context brings its own set of problems, but what is interesting is that she notes, as I did in my research, that domestic workers prefer a more personal relationship with their employers. She defines “personalism” as a bilateral relationship that involves two people who recognise each other not only through their position in the occupational hierarchy, but as two individuals inserted in a unique set of social relations and with particular aspirations. Nevertheless, she states that while domestic workers prefer closeness and recognition of their personhood, some of their employers were reluctant to engage in these exchanges.
Domestic workers in Europe

On the situation of migrant domestic workers in Europe, there are three main contributors: Parreñas (2001), Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) and Anderson (2000). Parreñas’ book, *Servants of Globalization*, is an ethnographic account of Filipino domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles. In her new edition Parreñas (2015) adds Canada, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates as destinations for Filipino women looking for work, arguing that the place where the domestic worker migrates to makes a difference to their freedom and wellbeing. She concludes that in comparison with Italy, the United States and Canada, domestic workers in Singapore and in the United Arab Emirates have very limited freedom and autonomy regarding who they work for. The situation in Singapore and UAE, where the workers need to be released from their employers before they can change jobs, makes the employer/employee relationship more difficult for the domestic worker as it is even more prone to abuse.

Parreñas brings out two other concepts which are important here, partial citizenship and contradictory class mobilities. Parreñas (2015 [2001]) describes the process of contradictory class mobility as dual movement, which enables the worker to earn more than she would in her country of origin but at the same time she has to deal with the lowering of her occupational status. This is the case in most of the work on Brazilian migrants to the US (Margolis, 1994; Sales, 1999a; Martes, 1999) and the UK (Torresan, 1994; Evans et al., 2007; 2010). I also found this contradiction in my research in relation to the middle-class participants, but a great number of my informants were people from a background of unemployment or precarious cleaning and other manual work. For them, there was an idea of class mobility, as being a cleaner in Brazil paid less and, in their view, was more demeaning than cleaning in London. In London, they found another kind of mobility, that of dignity and value. As Martes (1999) also notes, they feel more included here (even if they are undocumented) than they feel in Brazil, where they have full citizenship rights.

Another important contributor is Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010). Her work draws on comparative ethnography of the experience of Latin American domestic workers, carried out in Germany, Spain, Austria and the UK. She looks mainly at middle-class
Latin American women working as live-in domestic workers to highlight the colonially of power in the private space of the home. She argues that as no one is willing to do the cleaning and caring work, women from former colonies take on that occupation, hence what she calls colonially of power. When she speaks of the relationship between employer and employee, she recognises that global and local inequalities are represented within the household when the homeowner and the cleaner enter into work relations. What is interesting is that she departs from a unilateral view of the relationship based on the exploitation of the domestic worker by their employer as in previous work such as that of Romero and Rollins outlined above. Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) sees that both parties in this relationship are affected by their arrangement in similar and different ways. This was also briefly noted by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), but the difference here is that Gutierrez-Rodriguez defines domestic work as affective labour, noting that “the vital character of this labor as living labor is sustained by the affects produced and absorbed within it” (2010: 2). It is this approach that I defend in this thesis. Some of my informants in North London were able to forge relationships of trust and appreciation which reassured them of their dignity, granting a level of stability for most, and prosperity for some. While these relationships, in most cases, are not friendships or relationships between equals, I argue that in the case of Brazilian cleaners and domestic workers in north London there is a mutual recognition of value and respect. Thus, the relevance of the work of Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) lies in the recognition that unequal relationships, even with all the complications, can be affective and professional.

Broadly, at different levels, these studies constitute arguments against global and internal inequality. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) observes, globalisation has created a new regime of inequality, in which the intersections of race, gender and class assume new forms and interpretations. This is reflected in private households, where migrant women from different parts of the globe, but mainly from the Global South, are taking over the household work, which is still expected to be done by women (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010). Most of the above-mentioned research focuses on the relationship between employer and employee as it reproduces global inequalities in the private space, highlighting inequalities among women (e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Constable, 2007; Anderson, 2000; Monsen, 1999; Parreñas, 2001). Other studies focus on the
complex affective relationships which constitute the work of cleaning and caring (Brites, 2007; Gutiérrez-Rodrígues, 2010); the importance of citizenship in shaping the lives of migrant workers (Anderson, 2010b); the possibilities to forge citizenship from below (Anderson, 2010a); the economic, social and political impact of migrant domestic workers in the city of settlement (Yeoh et al., 1999), and the formation of a diasporic identity. What is less researched is how class position in one country affects the perception and practice of cleaning and caring work in the context of migration, and hence on the negotiations of these relationships. My work seeks to contribute to understanding of this issue.

**Domestic workers in the UK**

Globally, domestic work is not described or treated as a respectable job and the situation is worse for undocumented workers. For this reason, research on cleaners and domestic workers in the UK has often focused on the experiences of undocumented migrant women, as researchers see fit to expose the experiences of the most vulnerable. As Gutierrez-Rodriguez puts it “her labor generates affective value, a value that is not recognized in society because her subjective contribution as ‘an undocumented migrant’ woman is constantly ignored, undermined and erased” (2010: 168). The UK, and especially London, attracts a growing number of migrants from different social backgrounds and from all corners of the world who arrive here on many different types of visa. Anderson’s (2010b) analysis of the UK law on domestic work shows that because domestic work is neither a standard category of employment nor a standard category of immigration entry, there are a number of domestic workers on a range of visas including student, spouse, tourist and post-study visas. In such cases, the migrants would not be illegal or undocumented. For instance, students who do not have the appropriate visa to work would be working in breach of their visa condition and people who stayed longer than their initial visa permitted would be overstayers (Anderson, 2010b). That is the case for some of the Brazilians in London who hold student and tourist visas, but the moment they overstay they will be classified as illegal or undocumented immigrants (Evans et al., 2010; Gutierrez, 2011). A great number of the people I worked with were working legally in London, and all the people featuring in the documentary are regular. They are Brazilians who have double nationality, either
British or European, or they hold a spouse visa.

Documentation has a central role in the lives of Brazilians in London. In her thesis about Brazilians in Portugal, Torresan (2004) compares their situation with that of the Brazilians she researched in London in the 1990s. She explains how perceptions of the city and the migrants’ relationship with work, as well as their possibility for social mobility, are shaped by the worker’s legal status. Talking about the middle-class migrants in Portugal she observes that because of the favourable political relationship between Brazil and Portugal, which granted visas to Brazilian migrants and the possibility to work, they were able to reproduce the same standards they had in their own countries and even improve their quality of life and job status. On the other hand, Brazilian middle-class migrants in London could only achieve that kind of status once they had lived in the capital for long enough to make their situation legal. Thus, in the one case the migrants experienced upward mobility, and in the other, downward mobility.

Other researchers have highlighted the strategies migrants use to cope and find a way around the frustration, fear and practical difficulties that the undocumented status entails. In a recent article Dias (2018) shows how some lower-middle-class Brazilians navigate their undocumented status in a creative way to forge a life for themselves in London. He observes that his informants were really attentive on the street and especially at bus stops, always on the look-out for the “man in black” as they called the Home Office agents. Gutierrez-Garza’s (2013) thesis on Latin American sex and domestic workers in London points to a strategy of invisibility, where the women become so anxious with fear of deportation while using public transport, for example, that they adopt a mental and physical posture of invisibility, trying to blend in with the crowds. One of the main problems that the lack of a permit to work generates for the cleaners, more specifically, is that by denying the migrant domestic workers the opportunity to acquire a legal status, governments are keeping these women in the position of vulnerable ‘other’, and that is reflected in the household relationship (Anderson, 2000; 2010b; Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010). It is important to remember that the employer–employee relationship is shaped by their legal status, but it also transcends the logic of rights. Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) notes her informants’
frustration with the impossibility of social mobility imposed by the visa regulations and the weight of stigmatisation on their personal integrity. Nevertheless, she argues that domestic workers resist “by not letting themselves conform with their employers’ expectations of them, emotionally distancing themselves and learning to juggle their work and education goals” (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010:125). One of her informants, for instance, quoted Marx when telling her that she did not see the possibility of friendship between employer and employee. Her distancing herself from her employer, according to the author, defied the expectation of a friendly “cleaning lady” and gave the domestic worker a sense of dignity. Distancing worked also for some of my informants who never became too close to their employers so they would not be asked about their status. Others, however, made sure they were clear from the start, as they felt honesty was the best policy.

Researchers have also paid attention to the specificities of legal status in London. Cox and Watt (2002), for example, look at London as a ‘global city’, comparable to New York and Tokyo. Their framework comes from Sassen (1991) who argues that ‘global cities’ attract specialists and high-level professionals, but at the same time also poorly paid service workers, such as cleaners, creating a polarisation of labour forces. Cox and Watt (2002) add the importance of accounting for illegal immigrants at the lower end of the pay spectrum. They observed a symbiotic relationship between higher and lower earners as “widening income differentials enable those at the top of the earnings spectrum to employ the labour of those at the bottom” (2002:46). In this way, there is indeed a polarisation whereby cleaners are usually invisible as workers but nevertheless crucial for the maintenance of the high earners’ lifestyle. As such I found London to have specific characteristics, which my participants found attractive, of a remarkably high demand for household paid work, in relation to less wealthy areas of Europe. As there are a greater number of high earners, the salaries are also higher. And lastly, a great number of foreign workers at different levels of income in the capital mean that the relationship between employer and employee can start from a place of recognised communality, as some of the women I worked with observed.

The question of invisibility within domestic work has also been raised and addressed in different ways. First there is the invisibility of the person in the household. Anderson
(2000) reported on how informants felt devalued and invisible when employers continued acting as if they did not have a worker in their house, for example, if they walked naked around the house. Rollins (1985) reported the same feeling when she was working as a domestic worker for her research. In fact, for her, invisibility was the most hurtful aspect of her participant observation as her presence, at times, was not acknowledged in the room. Gutierrez-Rodriguez’s (2010) informants associated their invisibility within the household with a lack of gratitude from their employer, as their presence was acknowledged, but the work and effort was not. At the institutional and community level, Anderson (2000) points to the fact that despite attempts by the government in the UK to make caring and cleaning more visible, such workers are still considered invisible in the popular imagination, as it is work done in the privacy of the household and associated with non-profitable occupations. Both Gutierrez-Rodriguez and Anderson agree that keeping non-EU domestic workers undocumented enhances their invisibility. Lastly, Latin Americans in the UK have been considered highly invisible workers, as well as a dispersed community (Mcllwaine, Cock and Linneker 2011; Evans et al., 2010). For Brazilians the situation is even worse. With the exception of Jean Charles de Menezes, who was killed by the police in London when he was mistaken for a terrorist in 2005, the Brazilian community in London has gained little attention. In my research I observed that if cleaners and domestic workers are invisible as workers, they can be visible as people once they enter into a verbal contract inside the household. As with the research by Dickey (2000) on the ambiguities of domestic work in India, my informants felt empowered by some of the relationships they forged with their employers. For the Brazilians what seems to remind them of their invisibility is the occasional encounter with another Brazilian of a better social status. I will discuss such encounters in my next chapter.

Household interactions within paid domestic work has been described as contact zones of different cultures (Monsen, 1999). Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) calls the household a centre for transcultural conviviality. She uses the term to define “processes deriving from survival strategies, emanating out of the contact zone and configured by different modes of production through which various social groups were forced to live together but also through which the human ability and creativity to connect and forge common lives was triggered” (2010: 9). She argues that because the women employ other
women they are forced by their work agreement to form a relationship where they “need to articulate and negotiate their desires, needs and moments of identification and dis-identification” (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2010: 9). However, she continues, “this common point of departure is interrupted by the social hierarchies structuring their encounter.” (2010: 10). Throughout the thesis, but particularly in Chapter Five “To Clean is to Care”, I consider the household or place of work as a place of cultural conviviality that allows for an understanding of the power relations and forms of segregation, as suggested by Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010). I will also explore how an understanding of the ‘other’ and of the self is constructed through this conviviality, which acknowledges differences but is also based on respect and recognition, part of the reason why the professional Brazilian domestic workers in north London feel empowered by their experiences as migrants and domestic workers.

Cleaners and domestic workers in Brazil

“I left Maragojipe, the state of Bahia Concave, with no record of birth and illiterate. What could I work on? This is the reality of a lot of women.”

Domestic work is the occupation of 5.9 million Brazilian women. According to a report by the World Trade Organisation published in 2016, research shows that Brazil is the country with the largest number of domestic workers in the world, followed by India, Indonesia and the Philippines. The Brazilian Ministry of Work and Pensions published a recent report on Brazilian domestic work, where the above quote comes from. The study, which showed statistics from 2004 to 2014 on working women and girls from the age of ten, confirmed the WTO numbers and also showed how precarious the profession was in Brazil.

In 2010 the Sistema PED (Institute for Research on Employment and Unemployment) launched a report on the characteristics of domestic work in the metropolis. The report confirmed some of my informants’ accounts which I summarise below. Domestic work in Brazil is characterised by low pay. For example, while a cleaner in London can earn

---

10 http://www.brasil.gov.br/cidadania-e-justica/2016/03/trabalho-domestico-e-a-ocupacao-de-5-9-milhoes-de-brasileiras
£10 to £15 per hour, in Brazil in a big city such as Belo Horizonte she will earn R$100 (£20) for the whole day from 8am to 5pm. In the countryside and smaller cities, the daily salary is no more than the equivalent of £16 for a day’s work. However, the majority of domestic workers work on a monthly contract with an average salary of R$700 per month (approximately £140), and up until 2015 more than 70 per cent had no formal contracts. Updated data published by the Ministry of Work and Pensions shows significant improvements for the category after 2015, when the then president Dilma Roussef sanctioned the provisory constitutional measure called ‘PEC das Domestics’. Among other benefits, it made it compulsory that domestic workers had lunch breaks, received overtime for night work, reduced hours on Saturdays, formal contracts and contributions to work pensions. Thus, domestic work gained some of the rights that were granted to other workers by the Brazilian Constitution. One of the results was that, in one year, the number of employers contributing to work pensions went from 187.7 thousand to over 1.3 million.

To highlight this sense of achievement, the Brazilian Ministry of Work and Pensions used the case of Marinalva Barbosa. This paper’s initial quote comes from Ms Barbosa, a domestic worker who migrated from the country to the city and started working at the age of 17. Now aged 48, she has graduated from law school and works at the Bahia Domestic Worker Association. Marinalva is a Brazilian internal migrant domestic worker who succeeded in her strategy. She is an example of how the Workers’ Party (PT) government has improved the lives of Brazilian working people who had ambitions but never had their working rights secured. The professional cleaners I worked with in London also explained how they, for the first time, could plan their lives, because they had guaranteed minimum social security. Glória, for example, used the money from her income and housing support to come to London. Glória’s strategy differed from Marinalva’s. Although she also finished secondary school as a mature student when she was nearly thirty, she decided not to go to University like Marinalva, but to accompany her then boyfriend to London, leaving a life as “empregada domestica” and becoming a domestic worker in London

In Brazil, the domestic worker is called an “empregada domestica” or simply “domestica” or “empregada”. When addressing the theme of domestic work in Brazil scholars often
connect the prevalence of informal, unskilled service work to colonial slavery times (Brites and Picanço, 2014) highlighting the continuity of it based on the exploitative nature of work relations in Brazil. Another reason is the style of Brazilian urbanisation (Souza, 2010), which fails to incorporate large numbers of people into the cities. In Brazil, domestic work is usually performed by poor women from outside the household and parental relationships; they occupy the most fragile and stigmatised positions within Brazilian society, suffering from political and social alienation (Brites, 2007). Brazilian domestic workers are such a part of the Brazilian middle-class way of life that they frequently feature in the telenovelas (or soap operas), comedy shows and literature. Sonia Roncador (2008), for example, analyses how domestic workers have been represented since the end of slavery in the literature, concluding that cleaners are seen as necessary but not welcome. “Since their appearance in Brazilian society cleaners have been seen as female declasse, potentially criminal, unfaithful, incompetent and morally corrupt” (Roncador, 2008: 192). While this may be the general situation for domestic workers in Brazil, it is important to remember that there are nuances, depending on the relationship with the employer (Ferreira, 2010). Nevertheless, as Brites and Picano (2014) argue, regardless of the quality of the relationship between the employer and employee this is a situation which is very hierarchical and not often reflected upon.

Within the social stratification which prevails in Brazil, domestic workers are at the bottom (Souza, 2010). Brites’ (2007) research on the ambivalence of the relationship between the children and the domestic workers asserts that the separation of the space is the result of the didactics of social distance where “from childhood children are introduced to a repertoire of the distance that should be kept between them and the domestic worker through small rituals of domination” (Brites, 2007:106). Brites describes the separate places where the maid sleeps, eats and spends her spare time within the household. This division of space, which is much more than physical space, according to Brites (2007), represents the naturalisation of the inequality which is encapsulated in a relationship based on affect and social distance. Silva (2010), drawing a parallel between the situation in Brazil and that in Europe and the US, argues that the availability of cheap domestic work enhances inequalities between men and women and, at the same time, slows the process of technological advances that could make the
housework easier. She characterises Brazilians’ current use of paid domestic labour as “careless and wasteful because it is cheap and abundant. Training is not provided, tasks are not made easier.” (Silva, 2010: 94). Similarly, Brites (2007) suggests that seemingly unchangeable social, racial and gendered patterns of inequality are due to the social morality prevailing in the country; where domestic life is centred around the men even if the women are the sole providers.

A recent article by Carneiro and Rocha (2010) also questions the Brazilian mentality towards paid domestic work as it depicts the lives of Brazilian domestic workers in the new Brazilian conjuncture. Carneiro and Rocha (2010) explain that, despite some improvements within the current situation for domestic workers, such as the compulsory minimum wage and guaranteed employment rights, or ‘carteira assinada’, the stigma attached to the occupation has not changed proportionally. For the authors, the reason for this is the ignorance of society as whole. They include sociologists and anthropologists, who they believe, in general, prioritise the economic poverty connected with the lack of work rights, over the misery felt by the marginalised people in Brazil. For Carneiro and Rocha the material misery cannot obfuscate the corporeal and embodied misery of the Brazilian lower classes. The work of Carneiro and Rocha mirrors Brites’ (2007) critique of the social morality prevailing in the country, which Silva (2010) summarises as, “for a group of privileged children a culture of expectation of being serviced by a lower class person (usually a woman) has been part of their growing up” (Silva 2010: 5). This is taken as a given by the majority of the middle and higher strata of society (and even the lower classes)(Souza, 2010). While my informants reported the difficulties of living in the Brazilian modes of a patriarchal, racialised and class-based society, they did not identify as miserable. Therefore, I depart from the language of misery and use the word poverty which is more in line with the accounts I heard. My ethnography shows how embodied poverty in the context of London has a chance to take on new forms. For my informants, to be a professional cleaner in London was to succeed financially in a kind of upward mobility, but it was also a chance to create a new form of subjectivity even when they were aware that they were still being stigmatised.
Cleaning migration and marginality: a brief comparison between Brazil and London

Both in Brazil and the UK, paid cleaning and care work is overwhelmingly performed by women and non-white people, usually migrants. While in Brazil this is part of an internal migration process, where people from the rural areas travel to the bigger cities, in London people from the Global South and the Eastern countries come to the capital. At the core of this movement is a desire for a better-paid and/or more fulfilling life. In Brazil, as in London, domestic work is seen as lower-class work, for people who have very limited options of work, and people with no education. My informants, however, do not find the work in London to be so demeaning as it is in Brazil, and this is a consensus across class among the cleaners I worked with. There are some possible reasons for this; London, as well as other countries in Europe, has the custom of contracting au pairs, who are young women, not necessarily of lower classes, who want to spend time in another country learning the language and culture of the place. Families who contract au pairs know that they are to be treated as equals, as part of the family (Anderson, 2000), although this is not always the case, and is a contentious subject. It is not uncommon for the employer, especially if they are older, to have worked as an au pair herself when she was younger, as Nara reported, and I confirmed during the focus groups with employers.

In addition, in London the employers I interviewed could not tell from the outset the socio-economic background of their cleaner. London employers I interviewed were used to the idea of skilled workers doing work which was considered low-skilled, but the ideas they had about their own cleaners varied. While some were aware that their cleaner had a degree and was here to save money for something, others just assumed they came from an impoverished background. Independently of what the employer was actually thinking, the domestic workers learned from other Brazilians that the work was not as looked down upon as it was in Brazil. They also witnessed that "even the sons of doctors and lawyers had come to London and worked as domestic workers before" as one of my informants told me. In Brazil, to be a maid is absolute proof that you are poor, lower-class and perhaps uneducated, while in London the Brazilians are seen by their family and friends in Brazil as "travelling", "fighting for a better future", or "learning". These are just some of the expressions the women used to describe their
work trajectories. Perhaps these are some of the reasons why Brazilian middle-class women find it easier to be a maid in England (Gutierrez-Garza, 2013) or in the US (Margolis, 1994, 2009), but would not consider doing it back in Brazil. At the same time, the lower-class Brazilian women find it empowering financially and emotionally.
Chapter 3

Considerations of Social Class in Brazil and Britain

A great number of Brazilians who live in London started their migratory journey doing manual work, mostly cleaning work (Themis survey, 2013). In this chapter I look at how the socio-economic background of the Brazilian women who are working as cleaners in north London might influence their lives in London. I do this through a discussion of the social inequalities both locally (in Brazil) and in the context of migration (London). I start by explaining how social class features as an important element for the women I worked with. Here, expressions and idioms of class are articulated to communicate self-definitions of morality attached to ideas of hard work and honesty, both of which are displayed through the practice of “testimonial” at the Pentecostal church services. This is followed by a historical overview of Brazilian understandings of ‘working class’ belonging. In the second part of this chapter, I draw on cleaners’ memories to explain the realities and stigma of poverty experienced in Brazil. In Brazil, where class and race are obviously and insidiously inseparable, manual workers such as domestic workers, are deprived of not only the possibility of social mobility, but also denied workers’ rights and dignity. In the third section of the chapter, I explore how migration to London facilitates new opportunities, rights, dignity and safety for these women, even though their experiences are coloured by considerable difficulties. I also observe how a comparison between my informants’ visions of Brazil and London allows for a particular analytical perspective of the cultural politics of social class in Britain, arguing that different pathways will open up for Brazilian women cleaners, depending on whether they are tourist or professional cleaners. I conclude with a discussion of how the differences in possible life paths may lead to the reinstatement of the inequalities of the class structure, formerly experienced in Brazil. However, I argue that in living and working in London, the poor Brazilian cleaners gain a sense of empowerment through their access to workers’ and other rights to dignity previously denied them; these rights enable some of the domestic workers to understand that they are “normal people”, that they are like “anybody else”, deserving of rights, dignity and safety. On the other hand, in this space where the notion of equality of all is the democratic premise (even if not always in actuality) relatively wealthy Brazilians learn an equally valuable lesson, as their former high-class status in Brazil is outweighed by their status as immigrants in
London, and their former class status is eroded, leading them “to be humble” and “to reflect on the cruelty of class, race and gender inequalities in Brazil”.

Part I

Class: sometimes we see it, sometimes we do not, but it is always there

This section presents an ethnographic reflection on discourses of social class, and the Brazilian domestic workers’ lived experiences of class on the move. Class matters here not just because it is an objective category of social inequality that structures a particular kind of hierarchy, but because it is important to the women themselves. Class as an ethnographic category provides a window into my informants’ understanding of their own lives.

As I tried to understand the influence of the previous class/race segregation in Brazil in the lives of the cleaners in London, I encountered a problem: how to talk about class when class was overtly absent from their conversations. Although at least half of the women did not use the language of class, markers of class background were present in almost every conversation. The “absence” of class categories, for example middle-class and working-class from the discourse is not a singularity of Brazilians. Ortner (2006) notes that to articulate class categories in conversations is taboo in the United States. She noted that Americans rarely described themselves or their society in terms of class categories, a finding that is reflected in American ethnography, which, she argues, privileges analysis of race or ethnicity or gender over class. The black American feminist, bell hooks, calls this refracted view of class analysis “the elephant in the room” where “race and gender are used as screen to deflect attention away from the rash realities that class politics exposes” (hooks, 2000: 7 in Skeggs, 2012: 279). In the British context Savage (2016) argues that while his respondents in the UK do not have a language of class identity, “class meant a great deal to them in terms of understanding social inequality” (2016: 66), what he calls “the paradox of class”. In her research Ortner (2006) particularly notes the lack of working-class language, as when class identity is articulated in conversations it is associated with middle-class identity. She concludes – and I concur with her – that class is a reality. Even if it is not, its language is
easily identified in folk discourse (see also Savage 2016).

Former and current Brazilian cleaners alongside whom I worked, and who I interviewed, used discourses of class, among other things, to describe where they came from in Brazil, to explain their current strategies and life progress, and to assert their difference from others. References to class are also articulated in relation to the historical context of family lives, as, for example, when the cleaners explain the choices they make and why, and when they clarify how they organise their daily lives. In short, their practices and understanding of what it means to be a worker, a woman or a migrant person of colour in Britain are very much marked by their socio-economic position in Brazil. It is as if their migrant lives are redesigned and reworked according to the individual blueprint of experiences of context and family history.

Therefore, class is understood throughout the thesis in terms of a historical process of coming to terms with the realities of structural disadvantage. The ethnography describes the strategies Brazilian women deploy according to the limitations or privileges of their social and economic position. Their heroic struggle is to confer upon themselves dignity, and an opportunity to make a better life for themselves and for their families. This is why my thesis focuses ethnographically on the tools women have at their disposal to resist and transform processes of class discrimination and disadvantage.

I will also show how a language of class appears as forms of differentiation and judgement regarding strategies for social mobility, as some tourist cleaners try to differentiate themselves from the professional cleaners. I will return to that in Chapter Seven. Within a range of contexts encompassing the sending and the receiving country I conceive of social class as both relational and structural, i.e. it is subjective but also marked by socio-economic positionality. Similarly, Torresan (2012) writing about Brazilian migrants in Portugal, understands the concept of class as resting on a combination of material economic conditions and subjective understanding of group belonging in relation to others of the same or different class in particular contexts. Looking at narratives of the British media and online forums, Lawler (2005) also takes a relational approach to class in Britain to explain the way the white middle classes create
discourses of differentiation among themselves, leading to the demonisation of the white working class. Thus the idea of class as relational is useful in understanding not just how people describe themselves in relation to others of different and similar class (Torresan, 2012), but also to understand the constant social process of making sense of categories of personhood and, through this, the structure of society (Lawler, 2005).

In conversation, Valéria and Glória who described themselves as being “very poor” shared similar biographies; both started working as live-in maids, or what they called working in a casa de família (family home), before they reached puberty. At the time of my fieldwork, they were both living together as flat-mates, in their mid-forties, and both were mothers of three young adult children. Valéria had all of her children in London with her, but Glória had left hers behind in Brazil. As children, and as young adults – and after becoming mothers – both women had been internal migrants before coming to London. Planning to introduce Gloria to me, Valéria said, “you need to meet her. She suffered so much, she was really, really poor, her story is beautiful.” Though they were both poor, Valeria saw Glória’s life story as more “beautiful” than hers, possibly because Glória had been able to save money and buy a house in Brazil. Valeria had invested her money into bringing her entire family, including her mother, to live with her in London. In a sense, describing themselves as poor enabled them to own their stories, turning stories of struggle into stories of success. This is closely influenced by the practice of testimony or testimonial in the Pentecostal church in London and Brazil.

**Evangelical testimonial practice: showcasing life progress**

The testimonial is a practice that happens often during or after the culto, the church service of the Pentecostal or Evangelical church. Congregants are pre-selected, or invited on the spot, to go up to the front of the church and relate their stories of success. These “testimonies” are usually given by people who have overcome alcoholism, or drug addiction, or may be related to overcoming a serious illness or getting out of poverty – in short, everyone who has “won a battle in life”. During my fieldwork I attended a few such services, and while none of the women I accompanied went on stage they felt deeply inspired by hearing other women’s testimonies, of what they called histórias de superação or “overcoming histories”; they would talk about them for days afterwards
and often urged me that I should interview these people instead of them.

I learned about the role of testimony in the life of Brazilian women through attending church – especially the Pentecostal church – with the women in my study. Through this practice of showcasing their trajectory through testimonials people used their background of poverty as a propeller to make life better in England. The social mobility the women were able to gain, however, was not the outcome of a critical analysis of their background in relation to a political and economic history, but through their endorsement of meritocracy, the notion that hard work would be well rewarded. Waged labour enabled the women to achieve a measure of stability and progress; hard work paid off. For the cleaners, participating in testimony allowed them to display to their community that they were creating their own pathways, and doing so successfully. Yet for all their public avowals of success, with every story I heard during interviews, conversations or church testimonials, I became increasingly aware of the degree of hardship, instability and vulnerability of these women’s situations, as well as their determination to overcome them.

But witnesses to the women’s testimonials rarely heard their full stories. They heard of the women’s hard work – because hard work is respectable, sanctified. It was through listening to their life stories during informal conversations that I learned of the harsh realities of their lives in Brazil. I heard, for instance, stories of abuse in all its varieties, including sexual abuse, that underpinned those success stories. These stories of pain and humiliation could not have been retold in their public testimonies. Valéria’s mother, for instance, had been sexually abused by her employer’s son, and Glória, who slept under the kitchen table because of the lack of beds, had to hide outside her house to protect herself from her mother's boyfriends. Child labour in slave-like conditions was a persistent narrative in the women’s stories. A number of the women had started working as young as eight years old, either for families in exchange for board and food, or to help their often-single mother. They reported going without food on a regular basis, with poverty being most often experienced as hunger.

The cleaners’ stories are windows into the cruelties of poverty in Brazil, especially for women of colour and/or women from the impoverished urban centres, or remote and
poor rural areas. Thus, class as a self-ascribed status can be relational, as for example when people talk about a poorer or richer friend. At the same time, class differences reflect an objective social structure that has real impact on the subjectivities and practices of people, even if people do not perceive class in operation. (Sayer, 2000: Lawler, 2005). Nevertheless, only a close ethnographic look at their socio-economic background can do justice to revealing the ambition, investment and strategic efforts to overcome the limitations imposed by their class.

The emergence of the working class in Brazil

The appearance of a Brazilian working class can be dated back to 1942, when Getulio Vargas, the then right-wing and populist president of Brazil, founded the CSN (Companhia Siderurgica Nacional), which today remains the largest steel mill in Latin America. In providing hundreds of jobs, companies such as the CSN in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais were a fertile ground for the emergence of a working class. As Mollona (2015:163–67) notes, Getulio Vargas founded the CSN and the structure of the steel mill city where the employees could live. Employees received good salaries and benefits, which also created a sense of family ties between the state and employees of the steel mine. With one of the most progressive labour law codes in the world, the CLT was then created by the Labour Ministry of the Vargas government "as a generous gift from the father-president to his children" (Mollona, 2015:167). As working rights were given as “gifts” by the state to certain kinds of people (i.e. miners), the Brazilian working classes gained prestige and dignified salaries tied to benefits, without much of a struggle for class-consciousness. Mollona’s (2015) historical ethnography compared the steel town of Volta Redonda in the state of Rio de Janeiro with Sheffield, another steel town, in England. He found that in Brazil, being working class is associated with having secure rights, recognised skills, dignity and a sense of self-worth, and importantly, stability, especially in the lower strata of society. Mollona argued that this represented one of the most significant differences between the Brazilian and the British working class; Brazilians achieved labour rights without a struggle, and in partnership with the state. In contrast the British working class emerged as the result of a long class struggle
against the state and the capitalist class.  

Fast-forward to 2002 when, as mentioned in the introduction, President Lula, the left-wing leader of Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), or the workers party, was elected. According to Mollona, as PT's policies and policies of inclusion were already under threat by the time he wrote his book, he describes it as "the past that eternally returns" (2015:172). He uses this expression to illustrate how processes reducing social inequality are made and unmade in Brazil. PT's success was based on ideas of inclusion and emancipation, especially for the most vulnerable members of society. Soon after, however, and especially towards the end of Lula's mandate in 2010 and during Dilma's term from 2011 to 2016, PT made alliances and created other forms of internal division. The government distanced itself from many of the black, ethnic and rural movements that had helped it to power (Mollona, 2015) and made alliances with old right-wing politicians such as Temer (Dilma's vice president, and current president of Brazil). I believe that this shift is not just a mirror of how the old right-wing elite keeps undermining true progress regarding social equality in Brazil, but also the beginning of the end of PT's government, and with them the inclusionary project that it represented. This political overview is important for two reasons. The first is to provide an idea of the opportunity Brazil had to make a real sustainable difference in reducing social inequality.

Even with its valid critiques, the PT government of Lula and Dilma made real difference in the lives of people, especially for those below the poverty line. For instance, one such commitment to reducing poverty was the introduction of child benefit. As Valéria and Glória told me in conversation, it was unprecedented for the state to provide child benefits. These were in the form of the *Bolsa Família*, and were granted to the women of the family. The second is that state welfare benefits, which included housing benefit,

---

11 Furthermore it is important to remember, as Mollona also notes, that this Brazilian working class originated during Getulio Vargas's term in office, 1930–1945, the so-called *Era Vargas*. It was a dictatorship that started out of fear of communism, a nationalist dictatorship "shaped by rigid racialized and essentialist colonial taxonomies" (Mollona, 2015:175), creating an anti-colonial resistance rather than class-consciousness. Despite being historically different, Mollona points to what Britain and Brazil have in common: "neither led to inclusive forms of livelihood for the working class or the nation as a whole" (2015:175). However, his analysis suggests that the main difference is that in Britain the rights of the working class were conquered through class union and class consciousness whereas in Brazil it was "given" by populist government and therefore never translated into class consciousness.
enabled women, and domestic workers especially, to strategise and plan their lives in Brazil, or, for others, the opportunity to plan a move to London.

Meanwhile, as Souza concludes, black Brazilians fare even worse, as skin colour is proportionally inverse to opportunities; they all inherited the stigmatisation and prejudice that was ascribed to their formerly enslaved ancestors. Therefore, they are not working class but, rather, poorer people who inhabit an almost unsurmountable position of informality and instability.

Racialised poverty in Brazil

In 2017 the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) published a report which stated that in Brazil 50 million people, or 25.4 per cent of the total population, lived on the poverty line, earning equivalent to €4.30 a day. Within that group the majority came from the north-east region of Brazil (43%), and 78.5 per cent were black or pardos (mixed-race)12. Poverty in Brazil, then, is closely correlated with racial group identity status, and Brazilians of African and mixed heritage are most likely to be impoverished.

The Brazilian sociologist Souza (2017) argues that the history of slavery in Brazil reverberates in every aspect of Brazilian sociability. He asserts that this historical background, "creates a [racialised] reality which is excluding and perverse" (2017:11). In a nutshell, when Brazil’s class system emerged just after the end of slavery, the newly freed black and mulatto (mixed-race) population were excluded from formal class relations and categories. This led to what Souza (2017) provocatively calls "ralé" – an underclass of abandoned and invisible people. The labour of formerly enslaved people was replaced by white Europeans, who knew how to work the land productively. Unprepared for, and not understanding the competitive labour system that now confronted them, the formerly enslaved now faced further disadvantage. Subjected to inhumane brutality under the slave regime, many among them – especially males – were still treated as "muscle traction" to provide labour for the stigmatised and heavy, dirty, low-waged jobs that few white Brazilians were prepared to take. Further, as

---

12 The north-east region is considered an impoverished region, where 58 per cent of its inhabitants live below the poverty line (Garmany, 2011)
Souza explains, black men were also expected to develop a work ethic and sense of work pride, a difficult feat, since the labour they were now performing was the same as that they had performed under enslavement only a few years before, albeit waged labour, but labour that had formerly represented the "symbol of their de-humanization and inferior condition" in the form of slavery.

Moreover, the precarious incorporation of former enslaved people into the Brazilian labour production system created an unplanned and not inclusive type of urbanisation. From the 1950s onwards, as cities such as São Paulo started to grow, large flows of migrants gravitated to these urban areas in search of work. These migrants included those who were black, mixed raced, and a small minority of white impoverished rural workers, all of whom settled in insecure and unskilled urban labour. Land owners and farmers remained at the top of the hierarchy, followed by skilled European workers helped by white Brazilian internal migrants. At the same time, the surplus populations of blacks and mulattos were pushed to the "favelas" and to the outskirts of large cities. This class configuration, according to Souza (2017), prevails in Brazil to this day. Whites dominate socio-economically and politically, while those of African and mixed heritage remain marginalised on the peripheries of Brazilian society.

Since the 1950s then, Brazil has suffered from an "anxiety for progress", which Souza argues has "created an atmosphere of intolerance towards any kind of behaviour that could be read as backward and provincial" (Souza, 2017:16). After four years of ethnographic research in different favelas and communities, Souza and Grillo (2009) noted continuities in the economic system of Brazil to this day. Alongside black and pardo Brazilians, there exists a group of white internal migrants, especially from the north-east, who are struggling to become part of the formal workforce in large and small cities alike. It is this contingent of people performing unskilled and unrecognised work who become the “enemies of progress”, having to fight every day, through underpaid service work, for their survival and their dignity. What Souza and Grillo (2009) draws our attention to, then, is an entire group of marginalised people who have not been integrated into the formal economy, and are, therefore, not considered part of the working class.
To conclude this section, I return to Souza’s (2017) analysis. What he calls "ralé" is not the working class. The Brazilian working class is associated with qualified workers; the miners of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais represent those who are also called the "classe operária" or industrial class, of which my father is part. The "ralé", on the other hand, are the descendants of the freed and forgotten enslaved black and pardo peoples. Among the "ralé" is a minority of poor whites who share the same history of abandonment and marginalisation (Souza, 2017). They are what are also known in Brazil as the popular classes (Fonseca, 2006). Their existence reveals the entanglement of class and race and the persistence of taxonomies and hierarchies of race in Brazil, as Souza notes, for even within the lower class, whites still have advantages.

With the ability to plan and the opportunity to migrate, many of the Brazilian poor were able to come to London, especially after 2004, a phenomenon that caused some uneasiness among some middle-class and lower-middle-class pioneer migrants. In 2007 during fieldwork for my MA, when I explored how Brazilians and non-Brazilians interacted inside a Brazilian-themed nightclub in central London, I noticed the animosity with which Brazilian middle-class pioneer immigrants spoke about the new wave of less economically privileged migrants. The latter were referred to as "pés vermelhos" or "red feet" (implying they came from the impoverished countryside where the roads are not paved, leaving the shoes a red, earth colour), "bugros" or "favelados" and so on; all names which imply countryside, provinciality and poverty. Class prejudice towards poorer class Brazilians was not a new feature of immigrant life, but had emerged within Brazilian society and been transported to London.

The ultimate cruelty of this class prejudice is that by the time a poor and marginalised Brazilian starts to understand their place in the world they have already learned to internalise that same prejudice, as Souza (2017: 26) notes. According to Souza (2017) and others such as Chaui (2013) who write about class in Brazil, this prejudice is so internalised that the poor themselves reproduce similar prejudices from their location on the lower rungs of a system of social differentiation. This factor explains why researchers have noted inter-group differentiation between the prosperous poor and those others – the drug dealers, prostitutes, addicts and the homeless – who fall through
Part II

The Brazilians in London: restoring the moral poor and the moral middle class.

It is against this background of historical class and race segregation in Brazil that the Brazilians come to London and enter the service industry. When I asked Marcilene, for instance, how she would describe her situation in Brazil she promptly replied “eu era muito pobre” (“I was very poor”). Glória also described her situation in economic terms: “Nós era pobre que nem um Jó” (“We were poor like Job”). The comparison with Job was not uncommon among the cleaners; it relates to ideas of honesty, hard work and faith that God will provide, and that they will achieve their dreams as in the Bible story. Glória further elaborated on how she progressed in life after divorce from the father of her three children while still in Brazil:

“The poverty in which I lived, how my life improved, how I slowly managed to get the things, you know? Because there were days when I thought ‘Oh my, we won’t have anything to eat’.”

As her statement shows, Glória recognises that she is now reaping the benefits of her strategic decision to come to London where her willingness and ability to work hard, and her faith are paying off. Maciel and Grillo’s (2009) research on the meaning of work for poor people in Brazil helps to clarify the morality attached to work. They observed that for people who had never been able to be part of the formal labour force, discipline and planning was hard to achieve. For people in unqualified service work, such as domestic workers, the daily fight was against delinquency; “the last place in the queue” (Maciel and Grillo, 2009: 249). For them, the only options were to take “the wrong way” (i.e. prostitution, crime or homelessness) or insecure and stigmatised forms of unskilled work.

---

13 This is made worse by ideas that were widespread for years, such as that there is no discrimination in Brazil, ideas of meritocracy, as well as aesthetic images produced by the media of what is good and desirable.

14 In the Catholic reading of the Bible, Job was a very honest, wealthy and faithful man. He had ten children, a happy family, properties and cattle. He lost all his money, his children and became ill but never lost his faith. For that reason God gave it all back to him and more.
service work. For Maciel and Grillo’s informants, for people like Glória, Valéria, Marcilene, Izabela and others who had inherited precarious positions in Brazil, morality is the legacy of families who managed to be minimally organised in such a hostile environment. In my fieldwork this family legacy is articulated with pride as hard work, faith and honesty. I will return to this in Chapter Six, where I discuss how domestic/cleaning work is part of that self-narrative of progress.

It is not only ‘the poor’ Brazilians who portray themselves as hard workers. Carol is a middle-class woman from Salvador, capital of Bahia in the north-east of Brazil. When she arrived in London in 2000, to study English, she worked as a cleaner, and now is married to an upper-middle-class English man. She is a PhD student and an art teacher. She is aware of her middle-class status but also very reflexive and critical of it. When she talks about her background, she always explains that her mother went from being poor to becoming a university professor:

“So, my parents are university professors, people who have what they have because they worked hard; my father worked for the army but my mother came from a poor family and all.”

This example of her mother’s upward mobility shows the importance of work and dignity in Brazil, in accordance with Western Christian ethics. Most Brazilians, as Maciel and Grillo (2009) also observe, believe that all work is dignifying. However, what this example also shows is that the possibility of social mobility is available for only some of Brazil’s population. Carol’s parents were young and starting their working life around the 1970s, during the military dictatorship also known as the "Brazilian miracle". It was seen as a “miracle” because of the economic growth and decrease in inflation indexes. It was, however, also a time when social inequality and income concentration increased. As Quadros (1991: 72) notes, this diversification and growth of the urban middle class did not absorb the popular classes in the periphery of the city, making the number of urban poor even larger. According to Quadros, this continued to happen because of a lack of social investment, and the belief that economic development alone would take care of people in the margins. Thus, it is possible to understand Carol’s explanation of why her parents’ hard work was rewarded, while their life-long maid who worked equally hard went unrewarded. Both her parents could take advantage of the "Brazilian
miracle” because her father was already in the army and her mother was a primary school teacher. They both had secure and skilled work and both were of a “respectable” mixed race, “almost white” background, in a predominantly black populated state, advantages that helped secure social mobility. On the other hand, for the poor domestic workers in Brazil, social mobility, or even just the ability to have a secure job, continued to be blocked by historical and contemporary social structures as outlined above. For professional cleaners, London represents a place where their hard work is recognised and rewarded.

As there is greater proximity in London between Brazilians from different classes, the conversations are full of class idioms, or ways to refer to class. These idioms are articulated to establish distinction between one another or clarify their socio-economic position, as with the example of Eliza, another woman. Eliza is a lower-middle-class woman in her early fifties who is working in London as a nanny/cleaner. She described her background to me:

“I am not middle class, I don’t own my house and I don’t have the means. In Brazil to be middle class is to have the means; I am poor.”

While the pride in hard work is a constant, the concept of working class is rarely articulated, and middle class, as a concept, is a complex and relative ethnographic category, as I will discuss later in the chapter. Eliana, who features in the documentary, is a case in point. In her dialogue with Marcilene she talks about having an “empregada” in Brazil, as a marker of class difference between herself and Marcilene. During my fieldwork I noticed that women such as Eliza and Eliana who were positioned in the lower middle-class, tended to describe their background sometimes with a middle-class emphasis, as when Eliana talked about her maid, and sometimes as poor, as Eliza reflected on in the example above.

Among my research participants there was no one direct language of class, instead the language would imply class background. In conversations, descriptions of lifestyle, for example, whether they flew or travelled by bus when going on holiday, or how they got to school, for example whether they walked or their parents drove them, and the
presence or absence of a nanny or a domestic worker; all of these indicators might be used as a way of signalling their own background or status, and/or to tease responses from the person they were communicating with. At such times, when recognition was intended, and at other times, such as in formal interviews, there were many different signifiers of class used.

There are two relative categories of economic and social distinction, which are often used to distinguish between people and their life trajectories at the point where hardship and opportunity intersect: the middle class and the poor. The category of middle class in Brazil is very complex. As shown in the introduction, the history of economic instability has created a fragile and insecure middle class. Perhaps as a result, people are often careful about calling themselves middle class. It is usually the elite or upper middle-class who call themselves middle class (Salata, 2015). On the other hand, the lower middle-class describes itself as poor, or *remediados* (meaning just able to get by), or middle class depending on with whom they are talking, as I noticed with my informants. That is one of the reasons why my informants from poorer backgrounds made sure I understood what they were talking about. They used expressions such as "really poor" or "very poor" or "going hungry kind of poor" or "from the favelas".

This need the women have, to define their background in economic terms, even when it changes, indicates that class is important to them; it is part of their identity and of who they are. Conversations about their class background serve to show how far they have progressed, often beyond anything they had ever hoped, and how well they are doing in relation to how they started. The idea of a poor person from a family of hard-working, honest people winning also helps at times when things are not going according to plan. For instance, when problems emerge with an employer, or with the landlord or a loved one, this self-image of a fighter, or “*batalhadora*”, is an important image that helps the women regain the strength to try again. Thus, inspired by their parents’ life histories and their trajectory from being poor Brazilians to “good cleaners” in London, the women are creating a class identity for themselves, that of a hard-working cleaner with a chance to improve their own and their families’ lives.
This particular class identity comes in different forms, for example, “batalhadora”, “elite cleaner”, “profissional”, or professional cleaner, and others. I will discuss throughout this thesis the importance of the professional cleaners viewing themselves as winners, as they achieve their life goals. Even at times of setbacks, they try to keep a positive attitude, often supported by their faith in God. Many female Brazilian cleaners in north London, when remembering the struggles of their Brazilian past, or their initial difficulties on arrival in London, also experience sadness about their social and affective history. At times, the weight of the past, compounded by present difficulties, is too great to bear, and this is especially the case if they are also weighed down by problems in their most intimate relationships with boyfriends, partners or husbands.

Mapping the different understandings of class in Brazil

Brazil’s social inequality has been central to the work of anthropologists and sociologists alike; issues of class, however, have been less so. In the case of anthropology, class as a category of analysis has been remarkably absent (Fonseca, 2006), and often diluted in the study of other themes such as identity and patterns of consumption (Kopper, 2015). As I have shown so far, one of the problems surrounding the study of social class is that of the classification itself, and that becomes attenuated when we review research addressing the situation of the lower classes. The anthropologist Claudia Fonseca (2006) raises the issue in her analysis of the terms that have been used to describe class stratification in Brazil. She discusses the use of terms such as subaltern classes, workers, or simply poor, or popular groups, and more recently, the “excluded”. For Fonseca (2006), classifications such as the "excluded", usually used to highlight the discriminatory treatment of the poor by the dominant classes, need to be used with caution. In her view, this taxonomy implies that the exclusion should not exist and therefore the excluded, or the very poor, should also not exist. This, she continues, can lead to a lack of interest in the lives of these people, justifying the negligence with which they are treated. This is especially important to consider in countries such as Brazil, where the gap between the rich and the poor is one of the largest in the world. The lack of adequate language from the media and academics reverberates into the self-understanding of people as well as understanding of others, which in turn can enhance discrimination, as shown in this chapter.
In Brazil, according to Fonseca (2006), at the end of the dictatorship, in the early 1980s, there was a substantial body of anthropological production about the dispossessed, under the term “popular”. Marxist terms such as working class, capitalism and means of production, which during the dictatorship meant the political stand associated with subversive groups, gave place to a discussion about the “popular” (for more on the use of the term, see Duarte et al. 1993). Fonseca (2006) highlights that the term “popular” became a euphemism for the term “poor”, associated with a certain kind of dignity during the “miracle” years, in the 1970s. She notes that replacing it with the term “excluded” meant it regained its negative connotation. During the 1990s, with the reconciliatory climate between the left and right in the country, alongside the availability of international research funds that privileged studies based on gender, ethnicity and other areas of “identity politics”, the question of class, and with it the “popular classes” went to a third plan, or lower priority. With a few exceptions, the emphasis on class disappeared.

The study of class has regained momentum recently in Brazil, as researchers have set out to understand the changes in the Brazilian class structure (Sell, 2016) arising from Lula’s new welfare policies, which also kept unemployment at very low levels. Scholarly interest has turned to emerging patterns of consumption and lifestyles of the “new class”. As Sell concludes: “in today’s Brazil, the sociology of classes has been converted into a sociology of the middle class” (2016: 351). In 2008, the Brazilian economist Marcelo Neri announced: “Brazil is now a middle-class country”. He looked at formal income, the progression into formal income, consumption power, the capacity to maintain consumption over time, and the education of over 40,000 families during the period 2001–2007. Using longitudinal surveys with the same individuals and their families over time, he concluded that the income of millions of individuals and families had substantially increased. These groups were now part of what he called the intermediary class, middle class, or class C. Neri (2008) divided the classes into A, B, C, D and E, with class C standing for 53 per cent of the Brazilian population with an income ranging from R$1064 to R$4561 (£340 to £1,303) per month at the time of the interviews. Neri’s conclusions were very popular with the media and the federal government, at the time represented by President Lula.
However, Neri’s results, and their appropriation by the government, were heavily criticised by sociologists who used ethnographic methods, for example Souza (2010), as well as by members of PT itself, such as the philosopher Marilena Chaui (2013) and the economist Pochmann (2012). Following the Marxist tradition, Chaui (2013) argues that to call “class C” the new middle class would be conceptually wrong and also a social tragedy. For this author, if people were employed and did not own the means of production, they should think of themselves as working class rather than middle class. Anything other than that would alienate people and give space to what she calls “the cruelty of individualism and meritocracy” that this theory creates. Pochmann (2012) argues that calling a social segment “middle class” solely because of an increase in consumption power is to negate the structural conditions of this segment, for example, their capacity to save. Therefore, this new class is not only working class, rather than middle class, but is also a fragile class, given its insecure forms of work and work relations.

Informed by Bourdieu’s typology of capital, Souza and Grillo (2009) adds that a definition of class based only on economic improvement would omit the “social, emotional, moral and cultural preconditions which constitute and perpetuate social inequality in Brazil” (2010: 23, my own translation). While I agree that what was created in Brazil was more of a fragile working class, the question that none of these authors answer is why the term “working class” is not being used. It seems to me that working class has become a category to be avoided, a kind of taboo, given that my informants describe themselves as poor, hard-working people, favelados and, on rare occasions, as a new class, but never working class.

There are different aspects related to this avoidance of the term “working class”. As mentioned above, Brazil is a country marked by informal work, especially among the poorer and more vulnerable sections of the social strata. In addition, “working class” in Brazil is specifically associated with what is known as classe operaria, meaning “industry workers”. The women I worked with sometimes used the term trabalho fichado, which translates as “registered worker”, that is, work with a pension and benefits. For my informants, this was a dream. Some of the women had had a secure job
for a few months and then lost it, as was the case for Valéria and Glória. Remembering losing their *trabalho fichado* in Brazil brought them to tears on two different occasions. For some of the women, like Marcilene, a secure, registered job has always been wishful thinking.

Thus, the definitions of working class and middle class in Brazil are fragmented. In some contexts they can mean exactly what they mean in Britain, for example when we talk about the *classe operaria*, a working class waging a struggle to retain their rights. At other times, however, the category stands for a more fluid interpretation defined in relation to other variables, which are not restricted to sociological categories based on economic and social capital. This leads to an abundance of terms, not only in trying to define what it means to be poor and working class in Brazil, but also to define what it means to be middle class. But, in accordance with Chaui (2013) and Souza (2010), what my ethnography shows is that people want a steady job that they can count on, and some form of social security in case they lose it. In short, it seems that what they want – and migration is partially a strategy to fulfil this desire – is to be working class, seen as a means to attain a degree of stability and social respect. For some of the women, this ambition has been met to some degree because they have a safe income and feel successful as cleaners, nannies or domestic workers in London. Nevertheless, as I will show more specifically in Chapter Four, this newly gained stability did not come easily, and is not easily maintained.

**Class as location and possessions**

"Antes não tinha o glamour de hoje, com a galera fazendo selfie e dizendo 'sou favelado pra caralho'. Eu me sentia arrasado, não me entendia favelado. Ficava puto."

("Before, there was no glamour in being from the favelas. Today people take selfies and say ‘I am totally a favelado’. I used to feel devastated; I did not see myself as a favelado. I used to get very pissed off‘.

[http://folhadiferenciada.blogspot.co.uk/2017/07/anderson-franca-dinho-virei-cronista.html](http://folhadiferenciada.blogspot.co.uk/2017/07/anderson-franca-dinho-virei-cronista.html)

The women I worked with mostly talked about “place” with regard to class – they equated specific geographical spaces with class inhabitation. Having left Brazil before
Lula’s government, my memories of the favelas were associated with poverty and danger, and this is the foremost association people outside of Brazil make between favelas and class. Through the people I lived with and worked with during my fieldwork, however, I gained a different impression of the favelas; they were often spoken of with a sense of pride, even when the speakers acknowledged the poverty and the violence that came from living there. The above quote is an example of the new “favela pride” that I noticed among my informants. It comes from an article by the Brazilian writer Anderson Franca, or ‘Dino’, who is from, and writes about, the favelas in Rio de Janeiro.

In Brazil a person’s home address has always been a marker of differentiation. One of the first questions people ask in conversations is “where do you live?”. People want to know if one lives in the South Zone (which is mainly the middle-class and upper-middle-class location of choice – it is known across Brazilian cities as the wealthiest areas) or in a different part of the city. If she lives in the South Zone the question is, is it in the favelas there? Is she from the capital or from the rural areas? From which state? Is she from a more "developed" state such as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo or from the west, north or north-east of Brazil? After skin colour, the address and type of housing is probably the most important mark of distinction and differentiation among the Brazilians I researched in London. There is a source of pride and shame associated with class belonging. One of the clearest housing-related markers in Rio, for example, is whether one is from the favelas or from “the asphalt”, a term used as distinction between the unpaved streets of the favelas and the paved streets of the nearby wealthier neighborhoods.

Many factors have contributed to this sense of pride among favela dwellers. Perlman (2010), for instance, highlights how Marcelo Armstrong’s “favela tour” in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, which took tourists to visit Rocinha (one of the largest favelas in Brazil), was the beginning of a different perception of favelas in the world. Three years after the tours started, trendy bars called “Favela Chic” opened first in Paris, then in London and other capitals; and “the favela’s image of otherness, its authentic aesthetic, and its libidinal energy have captured the imagination of the global elite.” (Perlman 2010: 363). Artists’ representations of the favelas as well as consumer items related to them also
add to what Perlman (2010) calls “favela craze”. Perlman adds that “lyrics of local rap, hip-hop, funk, Afro Reggae, and samba songs spin the meaning of favela into a point of pride and insurgent identity” (2010: 365) and she connects that with “cross-fertilisation of Afro Brazilians and the Black Pride movement in the United States”.

McCann (2006) gives three other reasons for favela empowerment, or its demystification. He credits social scientists with being the initial mediators between the favelas and the asphalt, and between the inhabitants of the favelas, and the political, cultural and legal institutions in the cities. The expansion of university students coming from the favelas as well as non-governmental organisations training local people helped change this pattern. Dino sees himself as a product of Lula’s government and its policies of inclusion such as _bolsa família_ (which gave families a monthly benefit for every child attending school on a regular basis), as well as the relative economic stability that reigned during the period. Nevertheless, he is critical of the fact that “there was never a collective achievement for the masses”, as he states in his interview, and, as a favela inhabitant, he still doesn’t feel totally accepted in his city. His statement corroborates Perlman’s conclusion (2010) that in spite of improvements, the favela is still stigmatised and segregated compared with the rest of society. Favela, then, became for some of the working Brazilians in London a collective form of identification which brings pride and a sense of mobility, as some say jokingly “we came straight from the favela to London”.

Different idioms of class can also be related to possessions. “To have the means” or, in Portuguese, “ter condições”, is a common phrase that Brazilian women, especially the less privileged, use to describe their own and others socio-economic position. When I asked research participants what they meant by “having the means”, they explained it as being able to afford to buy a house and a car, and to enjoy regular holidays. It could also mean having a university degree, but that was not essential. In that sense, class is expressed and experienced in many different ways, but it is mostly related to financial success, through conspicuous consumption and independent of education or parents’ socio-economic background.

Research participants who viewed themselves as middle class often used the words ‘middle class’, ‘lower middle class’, ‘upper middle class’ and ‘rich’ to talk about or
describe their own, and others, social status. Rarely, if ever, did they use the term ‘working class’ to define their own or other people’s status. The lower classes are “the poor”, “simple people”, “humble people”, or the pejorative names I mentioned above, while the middle class is just the middle class. For my middle-class-identifying informants, in informal conversations with others they would make references to class by describing holidays, trips to Europe and so on. At times, their comments about other classes were underpinned with moral judgement, and again ideas of hard, honest work, as when Carol affirmed how hard her family had worked to earn their degrees and their comfortable lives.

During conversations, the women from middle-class backgrounds would be cautious when talking about their class background, because they were not sure about their interlocutor’s judgement, if they would be seen as a snob or pretentious. In a conversation with former cleaners who self-identified as middle class, Bruna, who now works as a lecturer in a London University, spoke about her childhood;

“I don’t know about you guys, but I studied in a private school and I took lots of different extra classes, like sports, swimming and music”.

Private school and extra classes are very clear class markers for Brazilians. Even if the classification “middle class” is not used, the fact that Bruna went to private school and did extracurricular activities no doubt registers in the minds of Brazilians that she had a middle-class life. Thus, in conversations, people revealed their social and economic background, and were curious about others. Class became central to my research as I noticed the importance of those markers in people’s lives; class is central to the way current and former Brazilian cleaners perceive themselves, and relate to their work, the employers and the city.
Part III

Class possibilities for Brazilians in London: "Imagine if we were in Brazil"

"...People define themselves with respect to people, places, situations, social standings, and activities that surround and embrace them" (Gamburd, 2000: 179)
"... It stands to reason that changes on social and economic contexts carry with them changing senses of self." (Gamburd, 2000:180)

Brazilian cleaners in north London perceive London as a place of more social equality, compared to Brazil. Their understanding of London and their social relations there have changed over time, but I can confidently say that for many, London is experienced as a place of dignity. This is not to say that they view London as free of hierarchies, but they see a different kind of social stratification. The difference seems to be that, in Brazil, inequality persists over time, as does the generational passing down of poverty. This aspect of inequality, that crushes people at the bottom, is visible and taken for granted by both the middle and lower classes (Souza e Grillo, 2009, 2017). Living and working in London gives the opportunity for reflection, and sometimes a change of perspective. This became evident with the frequent use of phrases such as “here I feel just like anybody else” or a variation of that, “I feel like a normal person”. The professional cleaners often used these phrases to talk about how they felt about their work relationships, but also regarding the use of institutions and, in some cases, about their romantic encounters. This idea of just “becoming normal” speaks, among other things, about what Fonseca (2006) also noted, which is the crushing effect of classification, and demonisation, on those being classified.

The segregation and stigmatisation of poor manual workers, including cleaners and domestic workers, hinges on some specificities of the realities of social life in Brazil. In the UK, although there is still a separation between employer and employee, the cleaners are aware of their class/status difference from their employers, yet nevertheless, feel respected – quite different from the sense of disrespect their
employment attracts. It is as if here, in London, they are viewed with a degree of kindness, or given "the benefit of the doubt" that they are not lazy, dishonest, in need, poor, from the favelas, immoral, dirty, dangerous and all the other stereotypes commonly associated with their condition of being poor in Brazil. In Brazil, they say, they have to prove themselves all the time, whereas here in London, they "can just be".

The idea that they can "just be" seems to be connected to different factors. First, Brazilian cleaners in London have left their place of origin where they were located within a stratified system with historical specificities (cited above), and are now living in a place with different signifiers in relation to class, race and gender. Another factor is the exchange rate; the pound is currently valued at almost five times that of the Brazilian Real and the work itself is paid at a higher rate proportionally. You can buy more here with your wage rate and have higher consumption power, which means that many can afford to eat and dress better.

In short, the main difference is that in Brazil, no matter how close they are to their employer they will always be the empregada and therefore poor (with all the signifiers attached to it). Whereas in London, if they do well as a cleaner, and establish a good relationship with their employer, the hard work pays off in terms of stability for the immediate and extended family. In some cases, they also manage to move out of cleaning, achieving occupational mobility; basically they feel recognised for their efforts as workers, and as human beings.

The continuity of Brazilian social and racial inequality has created the means through which people adopt a set of behaviours and ways of understanding themselves in the world, marked by a physical division of space – segregation – between the poor, the middle classes, and the elites. It is only through an understanding of the experiences of these women in Brazil that we can grasp the significance of their life trajectories in London.

**But how does class background operate in London?**

It was a cold and busy night. Suzana and I were walking towards Marcilene’s house which, at the time, was situated just off one of the main streets of Haringey. As we
walked I explained to her what my research was about. She seemed interested and particularly happy to learn English for free. After all, she had just arrived from Spain where she had been living for the past five years and working as a bartender. In London she was just starting to build her cleaning rota. She seemed proud of her achievements so far, but regretted not having the time to attend English classes. As usually happened, as soon as they met me, the women would tell me the saddest or funniest stories they knew. It could be about their own migration/work trajectory or somebody else's, who they thought had a more “beautiful” story. That day wasn't any different. Suzana started to tell me the story of her "craziest" friend.

“You need to meet this girl, then. She is the craziest person I've met here so far. You know, some of the cleaners like to try their 'patroas' perfume or face cream. I've never done it, but listen to this: this girl said that she cleaned the lady's house once a week, and every time she got there in the morning the woman was lying in bed with her robe on, having a cup of tea and reading the paper. One day she gets there and the boss is not in. The girl puts on the boss's robe, makes a cup of tea, gets the paper (that she cannot even read!! We laugh) and lies on the bed. As she is there, the boss arrives and sees that scene and laughs so much. My friend is scared at first, but then they just laugh together for a while, and she is still in the job. Now, imagine if that was in Brazil? Anything could happen, from immediate sacking to a huge scolding and humiliation, but I cannot see a scenario where they would be laughing together.”

When Brazilians I lived and worked with during my fieldwork and beyond talked about their experiences in London they often talked in comparative terms. These Brazilians, independently of their socio-economic background, described London as a more equal society. This was particularly true for people who had just arrived or were in their first year. The general belief is that people who do manual jobs (and especially cleaning jobs) are more recognised and less stigmatised than in Brazil. Comparisons, such as the one above, were constantly drawn between the relationship of employer and employee in London and in Brazil. While both the professional cleaners and tourist cleaners agreed
that the level of respect and gratitude here was positively different, they differed when talking about friendly and intimate relationships with their bosses. Almost all the professional cleaners said they enjoyed their relationship with their bosses here better, while some of the tourist cleaners spoke about it with some resentment.

Alessandra’s account is illustrative of the stories I heard, from people who were *empregadas* in Brazil. She is a professional cleaner who decided to go back to Brazil to be reunited with her former boyfriend. In a phone conversation, Alessandra told me her feelings about being back in São Paulo state and working as a live-in full-time domestic worker:

“Ana Paula, you won’t believe this woman, she comes back from work and always finds something to complain about. She rarely says thank you in an appreciative tone, it is more like ‘bye, thank you’. In London I could see the sparkle in the eyes of one of my bosses who would say ‘oh this is beautiful Alessandra, thank you’ and she, as well as others, rarely complained about what I did. This attitude here [in Brazil], on a bad day, makes you feel like shit, you know?”

The experiences of the lower-middle and middle classes, the tourist cleaners, are more varied. As shown in the film, when Eliana talks about the *empregada* she had when she was living in Brazil, she says how close she felt to her employee. Another person, Zuleica feels that she is treated with respect and politeness, but does not feel close to her employers, she feels somewhat invisible. In her words:

“People here, Ana Paula, do not have the same preoccupation with cleanliness; a clean house is at the bottom of their priorities. For that reason the cleaner is also not important. In some houses, when they are there, I sense some discomfort as if I am in their way. I never treated my maid like that in Brazil.”

Zuleica’s feelings of invisibility are similar to what Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010: 6) found when interviewing a Latin American live-in domestic worker in Germany. She
interpreted her participant's feelings of "invisibility and worthless" as a form of humiliation which is part of a broader process in which a "symbolic script" of class/nation superiority, illegality and othering are operating within this household encounter. In London, Gutierrez-Garza (2013) discusses invisibility in terms of illegality, as shown in the previous chapter, but also in relation to the loneliness of the work, as most houses are empty when the cleaner arrives to clean. In the case I show here, it is more related to a desire for conversation, for a kind of closeness, a personal relationship, as argued by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001). In addition, it seems these two "tourist cleaners", Zuleica and Eliana, wanted a relationship similar to the ones they remembered having with their maids in Brazil. However, the professional cleaners who were maids themselves in Brazil mostly interpret their relationships in London as positive compared with the ones they had in Brazil. In that sense, the "tourist cleaners" regret that they are thrown into a level of invisibility, while the "professional cleaners" feel that they are taken somewhat out of their previous invisibility through the experience of migration.

There is another layer of complexity which is that even among the professional cleaners, who are vocal about how much better and more "normal" they feel in London, there are at times contrasting stories. Marcilene, Valéria and Marta, for instance, reported good relationships with their employers. In the cases of Marcilene and Valéria, for example, their good relationship with their employer in Brazil facilitated their safe passage to the UK. For example, in the documentary, in a scene where Marcilene is sitting at the table in her house, she explains how her former employers sent her to London as a way of helping her out of the sadness she was feeling after her parents died. Both Marcilene and Valéria came to London with the help of their Brazilian employers. Valeria's help came in the form of a recommendation, while Marcilene's ticket was paid for; she worked part-time for a relative of the Brazilian boss's family for a fair wage. The family who hosted Marcilene at the beginning are still friends and they always attend each other's events. These examples show that the relationship of patroa and empregada in Brazil can be good or bad, and is always marked by contradictions. When asked a direct question, they speak of feelings of humiliation, and a sense of being treated as less than people. The most common points of comparison are "the work is harder", and there is "no sense of appreciation". But when we are talking about past
experiences in conversations, they talk about being lucky to have worked for some good people.

The Brazilian anthropologist Jurema Brites (2004) can illuminate that situation. She researched employers and employee family organisations for over ten years. She concluded that there is a ‘stratified complementarity’ which makes domestic work functional for both parties, adding that the reproduction of inequalities is largely sustained through affective ambiguity, where affective, symbolic and material exchanges take place. She noted, as I did, that domestic workers find advantages in the work and that the success of such employment depends on the relationships (and small acts of resistance) between the employer and employee. Therefore, by listening carefully to story after story, I noted similarities between London and Brazil regarding the levels of proximity and trust in the employer/employee relationship; the difference, I suggest, is how stratification is lived in each country. Brazilian singularity lies with the persistence of colonial modes of interaction which were permeated by slavery, social inequality and patriarchalism (Brites, 2004; Mori et al., 2011; Souza, 2017). The endurance of these three elements in their contemporary forms of discrimination on race, class and gender have blocked generations from social mobility, and this has been especially true in the case of empregadas domésticas, who are mostly poor, black and women.

As I will explain in the ethnographic chapters that follow, the class background of Brazilian cleaners can at times become a tool for strategic action in London. For example, when the Brazilian empregada domestica becomes a live-in cleaner/nanny, she seems to adapt to and become more familiar with the “different ways” to clean and be a cleaner in London. This means that these women are better equipped to understand the limits of a new kind of proximity between employer and employee that they had not experienced in Brazil. While the relations between employer and employee can be intimate in Brazil, they are likely to be marked by an embodied enactment of who is there to serve and who is there to be served. In contrast, here they experience their work relationship as one of respect rather as they are in a way “liberated” from historical specificity. In addition, it is their attitude of wanting to do a good job, and knowing how to do it well, that encourages good relationships with their employers and
in turn, good work.

At other times, however, the women’s past experiences in Brazil become a source of resentment, sadness and a constraining element in their path towards personal improvement. The history of extreme segregation between employers and impoverished cleaners in Brazil, and between poor people and wealthy people in Brazil more generally, means that the women who clean in London are often shy about being expected to talk to someone they think is “too rich”, or they might describe being “afraid to go to the post office” to post a letter. This is only partly to do with language barriers at the beginning and is everything to do with the subtle and gross humiliations that these women, especially those from poorer backgrounds, experienced while living and working in Brazil.

A brief consideration of class in Britain

Scholarly concern within contemporary Britain gravitates around broad issues of global inequalities; the various forms it takes and various responses it generates locally (Koch, 2018). More specifically, anthropological and sociological studies include interest in the post-industrial abandonment of the working classes (Smith, 2017), new forms of cultural nationalism (i.e. the rise of extreme right parties such as the UK Independence Party) (Evans, 2017) and “middle classification of Britain” (Skeggs, 2004; Edwards et al., 2012; Allen, 2004). The situation in Britain is not unique, as Evans (2017) states, it is part of a worldwide phenomenon which is driven by neo-liberal capitalism and has culminated in the re-signification of the working classes (Edwards et al., 2012; Evans, 2017). As mentioned in the introduction, the dignity that came with being working class in Britain started to change with the Thatcherite governments of the 1980s and 1990s, and it became increasingly taboo at the turn of the millennium with the New Labour governments. In other words, the working-class pride that inspired the Brazilian philosopher Chaui (2013), explained as part of the British post-war scenario up to the 1970s, has been corroded by the closing of industries and policies from both the Labour and Conservative parties which left out a great part of the industrial working class (Edwards et al., 2012; Evans, 2017). This has created a scenario of poverty and stigmatisation of the poor that is looking more and more similar to the Brazilian experience.
In response, there has been a lot of research on the situation of the working class in Britain, especially its stigmatisation and demonisation. The sociologists Skeggs and Loveday (2012) identified an intensification of and legitimation in the discourses on class distinction in contemporary Britain. Such discourses have affected white working-class women the most, as it ends up restricting their economic value and their sense of self-worth, leading to the necessity for a search in pursuit of value and affirmation (Allen, 2004). These women, however, are not passive victims of their class. They contest these inscriptions and generate alternative value systems for themselves, based on morality and respectability. In this way, Skeggs and Loveday observe, the white working-class women’s daily struggle for value “was central to their ability to operate in the world and their sense of subjectivity and self-worth” (2012:2).

This raises the question of who has the power to create and disseminate stigmatising discourses, and who benefits from them? Lawler (2005), looking at narratives of the British media and online forums, argues that expressions of disgust towards the working class tell us more about the motives of the middle class than about the reality of the working class that such discourse portrays. Here, the small but influential middle-class media creates a caricature of the working class as disgusting, which then gets repeated throughout the public and academic middle-class circles. These narratives position the working class as the repulsive and vulgar “other” in opposition to a desirable middle-class identity, thus furthering the gap between the classes and narrowing the possibilities to know one another. Lawler (2005) argues that the working class enter middle-class houses nowadays through reality TV and as domestic workers. Thus, she concludes, “they are held to be knowable through signifiers of their massification. At the same time this very massification renders them other and unknowable.” (2005:443).

What we see here, then, is a pattern whereby reality TV contributes to the caricaturing of the working class, so the encountering of a different class in person must generate another type of recognition. Skeggs (2012) engages with Bourdieu’s theory of capital typologies to argue that “affect and culture shape how class relations are made, known, lived in social encounters” (2012: 270) and concludes that the inherited and performed
class is a marker in every social encounter, and therefore “we should stop trying to pretend that inequality is just a matter of culture or subjectivity and understand how the very grounds for our constitution as persons are shaped always/already by class, constantly felt in the making”. From birth, Skeggs argues, class and other signifiers are attached to babies and children.

Within this demonisation of the working class and the underclasses also comes the preoccupation with what is happening and how it can be better explained and tackled. Evans (2017) proposes ethnography as a better way to understand and connect ideas of choice and individual differentiation with broader contexts of class inequalities. The argument that Evans postulates, and I concur with, is that only through an attentive ethnography of socialities and lived experiences of subjects, who are also part of a historical and structural context, are we able to critically evaluate the increasing social inequality under the advanced capitalist system. I believe my research to be a strong example of the importance of ethnography, as the cleaners find meaning and dignity in the supposedly most undignified profession/occupation. What is interesting here in relation to the methodology is that different methods can get different answers, and it was by living with my informants and working with them that I got to understand the movements of class.

As the Brazilian domestic workers arrive in London, there is a movement of class, as they bring their class background and enter a new class system. As I stated in my previous chapter, a lot of research has been done on the experiences of migrant domestic workers in different countries. These women are often seen as the perfect example, ‘the quintessential other’, to study global and local social inequalities (Yeoh et al., 1999), as they are often under subordination, firstly to their employers and secondly to the urban host society in general. My ethnography shows that the perceptions of some of my informants, especially the ones who self-identify as “very poor” and working-class Brazilians goes against the grain of the current literature on domestic workers. They do not find their work disgusting or dirty, and while they are aware of the stigmatisation surrounding their occupation, they do not find the prejudices against them to be that strong or upsetting in London, in comparison with what they have experienced in Brazil. For the Brazilian cleaners, the scrutinising judgement of other
Brazilian migrants can be more painful than that of the general population in London.\textsuperscript{15} 

\textbf{Final considerations} 

Thus, as explained, the most remarkable characteristic of Brazilian inequality is its continuity over time. As Barros, Henriques and Mendonça put it, Brazilian inequality “astonishes not only because of its intensity but mostly because of its stability” (2001: 23). The gap between the rich and the poor in Brazil is one of the biggest in the world and it is marked by class and racial segregation that has been compared to the apartheid in South Africa (Fonseca, 2006).\textsuperscript{16} During my fieldwork and beyond I had a chance to accompany Brazilians who had just arrived in London. On such occasions, I witnessed expressions of awe accompanied by phrases such as “here I can be like everybody else”, or “here there are black people in good jobs and with good cars”, “here I learned to be honest”, and “here I have learned to be humble”. 

As my fieldwork progressed, I noticed resentment, embarrassment, disgust and pride as they explained what they meant. With the phrase “here I can be like everybody else”, for example, comes also a sense of resentment regarding their position in Brazil, being relegated to poverty. It also conveys their sense of accomplishment regarding what they have achieved in London. As they become “people” through their newly acquired stability, new challenges emerge, and their class background, for better or worse, has a role to play. Thus, I argue that London has an equalising effect (even if provisional) because it creates new possibilities for social mobility and a sense of hope about the possibility of a different future with self-esteem and dignity. 

It is interesting to note that the lower-middle-class and middle-class migrants who worked, or were working before, as cleaners also saw the work as advantageous. They saw it as a cultural experience and a source of personal development – not unlike a

\textsuperscript{15} For an analysis of the Brazilian middle-class discourses of differentiation from the Brazilian working class see the doctorate thesis of Martins Junior (2017) See also Torresan (2012) for the Brazilian middle-class strategies to distance themselves from the Brazilian working classes in Portugal. 

\textsuperscript{16} In their book Atla\textsuperscript{s} du Exclusao Social - Os ricos no Brasil, Pochmann et al. (2005) show that the patterns of wealth distribution have changed very little since the eighteenth century. In addition, 38 per cent of the wealthiest families live in Sao Paulo, and 50 per cent of the richest Brazilian families are concentrated in only four cities: Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia and Belo Horizonte.
temporary rite of passage. Therefore, they describe themselves as "people who are living in London", people “who are learning English”, or “saving money for travelling”. The problem for middle-class Brazilians, as also shown in Martins Junior’s (2017) thesis, is that of closer proximity to the poor Brazilians, but also – in the minds of Londoners – to be equated with the economic migrants. In Brazil, one informant tells me, “a cleaner is a cleaner, no one is interested in your background or your ambitions. You are a Brazilian cleaner like many others”. The frustration that comes with the downward class mobility and with being referred to on the same terms as the professional cleaner is partially alleviated by their knowledge that their work is temporary. In addition, they are also proud of the money they are making. As long as they are working as cleaners, “for now” they are adding to a family history of “people who work hard” or “people from good families” who succeeded through strategic thinking and hard work.

Whether a tourist or professional cleaner, there is a consensus among the women that in Brazil the domestic worker is devalued and is treated badly. The feeling that there is “something cruel” (as Carol, a middle-class informant, says) happening in Brazil with the lower classes is shared by middle-class and poor Brazilians alike.

The importance of context in informing how people understand themselves is a well-developed idea in social science. Hall (1988), for example, reflecting about the time he first arrived in England, described how he became aware of the stories he was telling about himself, which were more in line with what people wanted to hear, than how he perceived the reality, at the time. Gamburd (2000) found that Sri Lankan women who moved back and forth between the Middle East, where they worked as maids, and home, where they were again mothers and wives, brought changes to both places. For her, Sri Lankan personal changes cascaded into social changes created by their new attitudes, and a type of working-class awareness both at home and abroad. In this part I have shown how Brazilians reflect on their experiences in London through a language of self-awareness and comparison. In the case of Brazil, we can see that the ways in which they think about themselves and others have changed, generally in more positive ways. There is also a sense of solidarity as they protect and teach each other "the way to do it", as well as teaching what is acceptable and what is not. It is, in fact, a form of informal
mentoring. It would, however, be difficult to call this new consciousness a working-class awareness, because the erosion of this classification made it wishful thinking for some and a "swear word" for others. It will remain to be seen how their new understandings and experiences of class develop and are navigated when back in Brazil.
Chapter 4

Multiple pathways to stability: from undesirable jobs to “English houses”

“I worked for two years in all sorts of jobs, then I acquired my houses, I worked only around eight hours a day, had Saturday and Sunday off and I was okay, I was like that for three years when they deported me.” (Marta, tourist cleaner)

Introduction

Cleaning is not a static occupation. The Brazilian cleaners who I worked with in north London developed different strategies to achieve progress in their own career in cleaning. Their notion of progress is tied up with achieving stability. Stability means having a set of fixed houses to clean periodically, which pay at least £10 an hour and where cleaners feel they have the recognition and trust of their employers. Once they have achieved such stability the houses that are on their schedule are referred to as “my houses” or “minhas casas”. Building up a set of houses and, therefore “feeling okay”, demands a lot of hard work and personal skill. In this chapter, I explain how this stability is achieved and how it relies on the building and management of relationships. To be successful a cleaner not only requires a network through which one can meet someone who will provide at least the first house, but also the ability to maintain a balanced relationship with her employers.

Studies of domestic work rarely associate it with ideas of progress, achievement and success. Constable (2007), for instance, while researching Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, noted that two of her participants had managed, through negotiations with their employers, to redefine their work positively. They organised their time to fit in personal projects as well as participate in the wider Filipino community and a migrant workers organisation. She points out that those two women were an "exception to the rule" (2007:157) of dissatisfaction and negative feelings toward the occupation.
Therefore, Constable attributes their success solely to their ability to communicate. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) found that her research interlocutor was successful because she managed, through expert cleaning and her approach of never refusing a job, to get a surplus of houses to clean, but the researcher adds that this was "almost unheard-of" (p. 73). While Hondagneu-Sotelo notes that housecleaners took great pride in their work, she concludes that there are "no ladders of upward mobility leading out of paid domestic work today, as there were for European immigrant women in the early twentieth century" (p. 240). Success in both cases is construed as an exception, and in the second case, success would only be possible if domestic workers were able to move out of the service. In Hondagneu-Sotelo's case, she argues that there is an element of ethnicity blocking the progress of the cleaners, which was previously open to European migrant women to the United States. While ethnicity does have a role to play in the difficulties Latin Americans have in moving out of service, I argue that we also need to consider class background in that situation.

In the case of Latin Americans in Europe, Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) frames the difficulty of social mobility on the dual positionality of domestic work. She argues that at the same time that domestic workers are expected to work in accordance with modern capitalist attitudes such as self-governance and autonomy, she is maintained in a colonial form of work relations, which is particularly true in the case of undocumented migrants. In these cases, migration policies dictate not only who enters the country and how long they can stay but also the kind work they are relegated to. Obstacles to social mobility are also due to unsatisfactory work agreements, often based on oral contracts, non-regulation, precarious work conditions and dependence on employers. While the constraints on mobility in domestic work, especially for undocumented migrants, are a real and important issue, what I argue in this chapter is that we need to move beyond a limiting focus on a normative notion of social mobility to an exploration of the role of class background to people’s perceptions of achievement, success, and progress. For example, the participants in Gutierrez-Rodriguez’s study were mainly middle class and educated though undocumented migrants, therefore their expectations of social mobility were more closely aligned with those of their employers. The professional cleaners I researched, however, measured success and achievement in relation to their friends and family of the same class both in Brazil and in London. This shift in
perception makes a difference to expectations and views of the job and means that a focus on ethnicity and gender that neglects class leads to an incomplete analysis.

My ethnography confirms what Evans et al. (2011) found in their survey, that middle-class Brazilians in London were mostly upwardly mobile. Former tourist cleaners I interviewed had either "moved up or moved back" to Brazil or to other countries. The question here is what does it mean to be upward mobile for the professional cleaners who come from an informal working-class background? My argument is that it does not mean achieving a middle-class status, however that may be defined. Their sense of achievement is related to finding good work conditions within the cleaning work. However, mobility within or outside of domestic work is not easy, as I will show throughout the chapter, particularly for the Brazilian lower classes because they have to plan their actions very carefully while having the courage to face situations outside their control; they have a lot to lose if sent back to Brazil for example. Their sense of achievement is attached to the kind of stability that will enable them to plan for their future and that of their families. In this chapter I will outline this process. I start with a brief account of Marcilene's trajectory from undesirable cleaning jobs to successful cleaning jobs.

Although Marcilene has complex and at times contradictory feelings about her experiences, she has been able to buy a house and a small farm (sítio) in Brazil and help her brothers and sister there while building her life in London. She is proud that through cleaning houses she has made a home for her and her son, Raphael, in London, where she rents a one-bedroom apartment with her husband. At the same time she works as cleaner for various houses in London, and for some of these people, myself included, her weekly work helps make our homes. Marcilene's story which I show in the documentary is illustrative of the way most of my informants have made strategic decisions that helped them achieve their goals.

After a brief account of Marcilene's trajectory, I move on to describe what are considered to be undesirable jobs, not so good jobs, and ideal jobs. The chapter aims to attend to the importance and paradoxical challenges of personalism, in the relationship between employer and employee. The term personalism is used by Hondagneu-Sotelo
(2001) to explain Latin American domestic workers’ preference for employers who interact with them in a personal way, as mentioned in Chapter Two. Hondagneu-Sotelo describes the clash between the needs of the employer, who is not necessarily interested in this personalism, and the employee who seeks it. In this thesis I see personalism as important for both parties in this work relationship, whether they look for it or not. While some employers keep a strict professional, which the cleaners describe as respectful and appreciative, but more distant than they would like, other employers look for a closer connection with their domestic workers. The challenge lies in managing the boundaries of these work-based intimacies, as getting it wrong can lead to a loss of the hard-won stability. However, none of the women I worked with continued to clean houses of employers who they thought were not treating them right. Therefore, they have a set of criteria according to which some employers are more deserving of the care than others, and certain employers are not deserving at all.

**Marcilene**

I met Marcilene and Clara when they were cleaning one of Roberto’s multi-occupancy houses in South Tottenham in 2011. I was there interviewing Brazilian English language students for the THEMIS Project. Marcilene is a tall, slim black woman from Diamante do Norte, a village in Parana in the south of Brazil with 3,000 inhabitants. Clara is strong and white, primary school teacher from a medium town in Minas Gerais in the south-east region. Both women were in their early thirties and always worked together, but the houses “belonged” to Clara. Marcilene told me she wanted to leave that job, which she described as too strenuous and poorly paid, at just £6 per hour. At the time, Clara had the contract with Roberto who paid £10 per hour each. But Clara only gave £6 to Marcilene. It is a common practice among the cleaners to invite someone to work alongside them or to cover for them when they have too many houses. The owner of the contract usually takes a cut of £2 per hour from the friend’s salary. Clara however was taking £4 for Marcilene’s hour of work. When Marcilene found out that the contract was actually £10 per hour and not £6 as Clara claimed, she was heartbroken and decided to look for another job. They are no longer friends.

I suggested she came and worked for my neighbour whose cleaner had just gone back to
Brazil. Marcilene took that job, and after a while she came to work for me too as Joyce, who had been cleaning my house, moved to north-west London. In 2012, Marcilene had these two houses she cleaned on her own, so had to keep working for Roberto. Then another neighbour asked for a cleaner and she started at that house for two hours a week. A friend of mine in Holloway also needed a cleaner two days a week and she took that too. Marcilene kept those four houses plus some of Roberto’s houses from 2012 until the beginning of 2014, earning in total between £700 and £1,000 a month.

In 2014 two episodes helped Marcilene: the first concerned Marcilene’s former boss, a woman in her mid-forties from Minas Gerais, called Mag. Mag, herself a former tourist cleaner in London, had two small children and she paid for Marcilene to come to London to work specifically for her. After a while Marcilene got pregnant and went to live with her partner, a Brazilian/Italian white man called Antonio from Rio Grande do Sul in the extreme south of Brazil. Even though Marcilene left Mag’s house, they continued to be the best of friends. Mag introduced Marcilene to another Brazilian woman called Antonia from Rio de Janeiro. Antonia was married to a wealthy English man who had a big house near Kings Cross. After just a few months, Antonia introduced Marcilene to another wealthy English woman. So, now Marcilene could stop working for Roberto and concentrate on finding more houses which paid £10/h or more, to fill her entire week schedule.

The second event that helped Marcilene was when she met a young Italian Erasmus student called Giovanna. At the time Giovanna was living as a lodger in one of Marcilene’s “houses” and they had occasional conversations. She was doing an unpaid internship at an English Language school where they needed a last-minute cleaner, and she invited Marcilene. As Marcilene could not speak English I negotiated her salary at £10/h, knowing that was more than the rate for a school cleaner. They needed one badly so they accepted the set price. It turned out that the school owner liked Marcilene’s work and introduced her to his other friends. In addition, she did his private house and his mother’s house, so that by the end of 2015 she was earning over £2,000 a month. She told me:
“Now I am settled. I know what I earn and I can even try to rent something just for us (her, her son and her husband), and leave the room where I live, and I am going to Brazil for the first time in eight years this year” (Marcilene, 2015)

Marcilene had been in London for eight years. However, since 2015 she feels she has found the stability she had been aiming for. Working as a cleaner in London she has been able to buy two houses in her home town. At the end of 2016 Marcilene managed to visit Brazil for the first time since arriving in London. Prior to going she received an invitation to tell her success story on her town's local radio station. She was happy that people were recognising her achievement, but she declined, saying, “Only I know how many toilets I had to clean to get where I am today.” “But you told me you don't have a problem, and that you even like cleaning toilets” I said. Her reply was, "I don’t want to go there and talk about this because when I lived there nobody ever noticed me, they never looked at my face, only my street friends, my friends from the favelas, so why would I go there now to talk about myself?"

Marcilene’s success was achieved through a combination of good cleaning skills and interpersonal relationships. Even without speaking English she was able to overcome setbacks and continue working. She felt Clara took advantage of her when she earned £6 per hour, and felt particularly bad about being ignored by more upper-class Brazilians, but she does not describe her story in London in terms of humiliation, discrimination or racism. Marcilene learned this attitude from her father who was a chef, described by his friends as preto metido (a black person who dressed well and knew how to hold himself). She learned from him to “rise above it”. Yet, Brazil is still seen as a hostile environment even after everything she has managed to conquer.
Hard work is easier to find: the most undesirable cleaning jobs and their multiple problems.

“Since I arrived in London I have not gone a day without work” (Glória, interview 2013)

Glória, in her early forties, is very proud to have been working since she arrived in London in 2006, coming from the rural area of Goias in Brazil where there were times when she had nothing to feed her children. She, along with others, took the opportunity of the easily available menial jobs to kick-start her life in London. They soon discovered the highly exploitative, low-paid and soul-crushing nature of these jobs and left. Nevertheless, while they were keen to leave these jobs, they spent years working in others which seemed to offer little economic improvement. The difference was the relationships they could form while working, as well as having work security. As their lives in Brazil were marked by hardship, discrimination, segregation and instability, here they did their best to keep jobs that were considered undesirable by most of their peers.

Cleaning cars

There are different levels and types of housecleaning in London, and, according to the women I worked with, Brazilians can be found in every cleaning sector. One type cited as particularly undesirable was “cleaning cars”. To work in a “cleaning car” meant working for someone with more houses than they were able to clean themselves. The person with the houses, usually another Brazilian, would employ a number of other cleaners and drive them from house to house to work with her or under her supervision. She was “the owner of the houses” - a dona das casas. When they arrived each woman was allocated a different task; one cleaned the kitchen, another scrubbed the toilets, while others dealt with the dusting and hoovering. That way a house that might take five or six hours to clean was finished in two hours. They then drove to the next house and did the same thing again. With this arrangement a group of cleaners can do five to ten houses a day. Marcus (2008), when discussing social mobility of Brazilians in the US, observations of how the “housecleaning business owners” find their also Brazilian employees is revealing:
"The profile of the typical housecleaner that a Brazilian cleaning business wants is the woman from the interior, you know the pe-de-boi type ["bull's-feet"]... the type that really knows how to work, clean, but doesn't know how to speak English, or Portuguese." (Marcus, 2008:192)

They are looking for women from the lower classes and an assumed subjectivity connected with what the business owner in Marcus's ethnography remembers from Brazil. The profile of women from impoverished rural areas as being the most suitable for live-in domestic work in the cities has also been noted by Radcliffe (2003). She studied domestic worker internal migrants from Ecuador's countryside to the capital Quito. Radcliffe found that "in paid, home working employment, rural populations are identified as more gullible and therefore appropriate for the power relations involved in domestic service" (2003:75). Her observation is valid here, because first-wave Brazilian migrants, now established and documented, recruit newly arrived, often poorer and undocumented country women to work for lower wages in highly exploitative work cleaning work. This is often disguised as generosity, as the women expect gratitude for finding work for the newly arrived migrants. The complexities of pioneer migrant networks of solidarity and also exploitation is explored in Goza's (2004) research on Brazilians in the US. He found that access to social networks was restricted to some migrants based on gender, age, socio-economic background and place of origin. He looked at the difficulties encountered by Brazilians who arrived without family and friends already in the United States as well as those with reduced economic capital in accessing the pioneer networks. In my research, the Brazilian women who arrived in London without previous connections then relied on "making friends". They look to meet other Brazilians and choose to live in areas with a high concentration of Brazilians, such as Haringey, in order to do so. When they rent a room in a multi-occupancy house they usually meet other Brazilians. They also can try to make friends in Brazilian beauty salons, coffee places and bars. This initial vulnerability is fertile soil for exploitation among co-nationals.
Connected to different access to the network is the aesthetic recognition of class, race and place of origin within the context of migration, which renders the person looking for work more susceptible to exploitation. Bourdieu’s (1984) analysis of class and taste distinction in France is pertinent here. He argues that different access to economic, cultural and social forms of capital leads to a hierarchy of aesthetic taste which favours the people with more capital, the elite, and therefore helps them to maintain their power over the less privileged classes. Drawing on Bourdieu, Goldstein (2013) looks at the aesthetic of domination which operates in Brazil and helps to keep the poor Afro-Brazilian women confined to domestic work. She shows how the daughters of the domestic workers in her study found it difficult to find "adequate pay because of their observable racial and class characteristics, a combination that works against them" (Goldstein, 2013: 109). Most jobs advertise for those of "good appearance", which often makes it difficult for dark-skinned and poor people to apply. Cecilia McCallum’s (2005) cross-class ethnography of processes of racialisation in Salvador, one of the biggest capitals of Brazil, is also helpful here. She argues that the unspoken knowledge of people’s class and race marked the intersubjective encounters in Brazil through the embodiment of class and race signs. These signs, she notes, are marked by spacial class and race segregation as well as hegemonic aesthetic ideals which elevate whiteness. This is perpetuated by the media, which is at the centre of most Brazilian households, as McCallum was able to observe.

These memories of cultural recognition operate in London in various ways. Martins Junior (2017), for instance, shows how Brazilian middle-class workers in London use their knowledge of class markers, such as place of origin, accent and way of dressing to differentiate themselves from the Brazilian economic migrants in London. Thus, the pioneer Brazilian cleaning bosses see the newly arrived women, with no English language skills, often without working papers, and from the countryside, racialised and classed bodies as an opportunity for exploitation. In addition, new economic migrants are often in debt with family members, or have children to support back in Brazil, which adds a layer of vulnerability that does not go unnoticed by these bosses. Thus, the cleaning car business owner thrives not only on people’s necessities as migrants, but also on aesthetic recognition of what a *pe-de-boi* type of worker is like.
The problem in both cases is that the person who owns the houses usually takes a good cut; with the cleaning cars, there were cases where they charged the employer £14 per hour and paid the cleaner £6 per hour. As the "owner" of the houses gets paid for productivity, she puts a lot of pressure on the women to clean well and fast, so they can move on to the next house, sometimes with no breaks, and the women are told to eat a sandwich in the car because they need to get to the next house. All the cleaning car problems reported by the cleaners I worked with were related to other Brazilians.

Glória commented on her experience of working in a cleaning car:

“I worked non-stop and at the end the woman who had the houses got all the Christmas bonus for herself, we were not supposed to speak with the house owner either…. And as a lot of people left the job every day, there were always new people who were not properly trained... it made us work harder... just horrible”.

Marcilene also commented on working in a cleaning car:

“We worked outside London, I think it was near Heathrow, this Brazilian woman owned the houses (managed the houses) and I worked with her for three months when she decided to go to Brazil and leave me in charge of paying the other girls and organising the work... I paid the girls twice before I realised she wasn’t transferring money to my account. In short, she was in Brazil receiving the money in her account from the house owners and not paying me back, so we all left the job and I never heard from her again... I am not sure if she lost her cleaning car business, but I lost my money”

As Glória said, the turnover is huge, because in London Brazilians who were part of my research, but also my personal experience, we do like to “stick together” as Glória remarks. Despite these early disadvantages, Brazilians enjoyed spending time with other Brazilians and attending events; they met at various Catholic and Pentecostal churches as well as friends’ houses, or Brazilian food shops and cafes. They learned very quickly through these networks of social solidarity that they did not need to stay in any
job that was too exploitative, this word of mouth reassurance and often, recommendations, is what gave Glória, Marcilene and others the confidence to leave the cleaning cars as soon as they could.

**Cleaning agencies**

Unlike cleaning cars, cleaning agencies allocate the cleaner a particular job, which can be in an office, a shop, a school, a pub or a private house. The agency also takes a cut of the cleaners’ wages. In this thesis I refer to two types: domestic cleaning agencies, usually owned by Brazilians, and office cleaning agencies, owned by private companies with diverse national backgrounds. The main problem is that the cleaners are often sent to different places, which prevents them from establishing a relationship with the bosses or house owners.

For example, Joyce, a professional cleaner in her mid-thirties from the rural area of Para, explained:

> “it is always a different house and it can be a bit tiring because the house is never yours, you can’t find a routine and do things your way. I went to one house three times and there were two little girls in there, they were always around, asking me questions, curious, you know? On the fourth day I went there the little one ran to me and said ‘I love you’. My heart melted. Then the mother called them, I think she was disgusted by me and I felt sad. Maybe if I was going there regularly she would get to know me... who knows ...I was never sent there again.”

Although Joyce interpreted the mother's reaction as a form of disgust, which would imply some kind of prejudice, which was followed by the fact that she has no longer sent to the same house, what bothered her was not a possible situation of discrimination. What mattered to Joyce was the fact that she did not have the opportunity to get herself known to the family. Closeness would most probably overcome prejudice in her view.

However, not all the cleaners disliked agencies. Maria, a nanny in her early fifties from Goiania, found it easier to find a job through an agency. She believed it was a good
option, as the people who looked for nannies through agencies were richer and could pay more.

Cleaning hotels

Another type of cleaning is fast-paced work as chambermaids in hotels, where the cleaner usually earns the minimum wage. When I was living in the cleaners’ house in Turnpike Lane, Marta, a lady in her early fifties, also from rural Minas Gerais, arrived home every day complaining about her work as a cleaner of an Airbnb style hotel chain in north-west London. Her main complaint was about the supervisor, another Brazilian, called Karine. She said that the bosses and customers were nice enough, but she was not allowed to have much to do with them as Karine mediated every interaction. She told me:

“This woman is such a bad person… I don’t know how the bosses trust her so much…she pushes me so hard that most of the time I feel stretched to my limits… sometimes we do 16 flats in one day and she does nothing – she puts it all on us! She spends a lot of time on the phone while we are cleaning, she is like us, and she is supposed to clean as well. Say, if she invites us to go out, and I can’t go for some reason, the next day, or for a week, she will give me the most difficult flats and the ones which are furthest apart to clean, it is like hell then.”

What makes these cleaning jobs so undesirable is the middle person or agent, who maximises their profits at the expense of the cleaners. It is the lack of personal or direct contact with the client, or even the business owner, which is identified as making the work impersonal and more difficult, in addition to the low pay.

The factors that make it bearable are a combination of higher salary, autonomy and the possibility to relate to the boss. In the absence of a person mediating the interaction such as in the above cases of the cleaning car and the agency work, there is a certain degree of ownership and autonomy and the capacity to build relations which stops the women from being just migrant workers, or whatever description deprives them of their personhood. Working autonomously, the cleaners have the opportunity to be seen
as people, even if the communication is limited, as in cases where the employer is out working most of the time, or when they do not like to talk a lot, or don’t want to make an effort to speak with someone with limited language skills. Even then, if they can relate directly they will be the ones receiving the praise or complaints giving them ownership of their work, which can translate into benefits in the form of gifts, favours and recommendations. The difficulties of working under a tyrannical supervisor can be alleviated by the solidarity of work colleagues, or if the job involves working in brothels, the cleaners can relate to the sex workers, or garotas, as they say. Working in pairs with a friend makes the work more bearable and enables them to keep working to achieve their goals.

**Problematic but not so bad jobs**

**Cleaning brothels**

Cleaning private (often illegal) brothels, (or casas de garotas) although well paid, provoked mixed feelings among the women. On the one hand they seemed to be curious and, to a certain extent, fascinated by the lives of the sex workers, or garotas, (translated\(^\text{17}\) as girls). At times, the cleaners felt responsible for the garota and developed dependent relationships with them. Marta, for example, says:

> “I like them you know? They are really lonely so if they ask you to cook something nice for them, they pay you good money... but it is hard... there is this girl Caroline, who arrived here really pretty and now she is just skin and bones, it’s drugs, a lot of drugs! My heart breaks because I also have three daughters. I feel for the mothers...but they are sweet, I tried to help this girl and we were friends, but she disappeared without telling me, I think she went back to Brazil or changed houses... who knows... ”

Valéria tells me:

> “I like to work for the garotas, they pay for everything they want you to do...once one of them found out that I was also a massage therapist,

\(^{17}\) This is short for garotas de programa. Roughly translated this means the girl for one night, or for one event.
This attempt to lure the cleaners into prostitution, by praising their specific beauty often amused them and made them wonder "what if..." Marcilene was told how men loved slim black women like her. Marta was happy to learn that there was no age limit to being a prostitute and that some men would go for a pretty petite 45-year-old woman like her. With a cheeky smile she told me she could still make some money if needed.

However, despite the benefits, all three cleaners expressed strong opinions about the reality of this occupation. Marcilene told me that she saw the girls cleaning themselves with baby wipes after disgusting men left their room. They also knew that if the police busted the house, they would be interrogated and that could lead to deportation. The danger was not just from the police, but also the clients, as often there were no bodyguards, or bouncers, in these houses. One of the most disturbing accounts in my fieldwork was a story told among the cleaners, which Valéria told me one night.

Although extra money can be earned by helping the garotas, this is a very hazardous job. Both the work and the new friendships can vanish the moment the police find out about the brothel. Rochane, a woman in her early thirties from Minas Gerais, reported that she often receives messages not to go to certain houses, because they will be closed for a while. She said that she does not know her employer; all contacts and addresses are given via text message and she is often mistaken for a prostitute by clients who walk around the house in their underwear. But it was better than working for cleaning cars, hotels or agencies as here they were paid more, had a level of autonomy and could be in contact with people who had more money to spend. In fact, nowadays Valéria rarely works as a cleaner, she mainly works as a masseur for sex workers and other members of the Brazilian community.

Multi-occupancy migrant houses

Another form of undesirable cleaning work is in multi-occupancy migrant houses, which
are rented mostly through word of mouth or Internet sites, rather than through agencies. The houses have an administrator (usually of the same nationality as the occupants), who reports to the house owner. My research focused on Brazilian houses, but they exist for other nationalities too. They are common in Haringey but exist all over London. For example, in one street in Haringey, there is a multi-occupancy house run by an Italian man with only Italian occupants. Two doors down is a house of Hungarians and other Eastern Europeans, run by a Hungarian. I will discuss this house business in more detail in the next chapter, outlining the problems for both the cleaners and the occupants.

As mentioned earlier, when I met Marcilene she was working at one of these houses for Roberto who is one of the most well-known managers among the Brazilians in Haringey. Clara told me that Roberto had thirty houses catering for Latin American and Brazilian English language students, who paid between £80 and £120 a week for a bed in a house with nine or ten other occupants. The rent covered the cost of a cleaner, the Internet and all the bills. He also provided clean bed sheets once a week. Claudio, a Brazilian/Italian from Santa Catarina, in his late thirties, was Roberto’s handy man. He told me:

“I would not want to live in these houses, it is very rare that you find a nice group of people... they are all students and quite young. These guys don’t even wash their plates or know how to put the rubbish out, these girls (he looks at Marcilene and Clara) are heroes! I told the lodgers that they were not supposed to leave all the plates and rubbish and things in the kitchen for the girls to clean, but they still do! They are not easy and there are too many people, but the good thing for them is that they don’t need to go to an agency, or pay a big deposit, it is all a bit informal here. They have their houses cleaned every week. The Internet and all the appliances in the kitchen are provided for them, in a way it is good for them.”

Claudio was often angry at the way the students kept the houses. One time he broke all the dirty plates left in the sink. He said, “guys if you can’t appreciate and respect your roommates and the people who provide everything in this house you may as well go
and buy your own plates”. As I worked in these houses alongside Marcilene, I sensed that at every house I was cleaning up after a huge party; there were dirty plates left on tables, cans of beer around, ashtrays, sticky floors and greasy kitchen counters. At the time we were working for £6 an hour and had to do it really fast to finish all the houses assigned for that day. Clara recounted:

“I was doing thirty houses on my own, I was almost dead! Then I asked Roberto if I could bring Marcilene to work with me and he said yes... but it is still a lot of work because these students are like animals. They make such a mess, and at £6 per hour, it is just too little! We clean thirty houses and take all the laundry to wash once a week for each house. It all needs to be very fast so we can finish everything and get the full pay for the week.”

As I mentioned before, later we found out that Clara was lying; she was getting paid £10 per hour, so keeping the rest for herself. We did not know that at the time of this account, so sometimes when we’d finished work we would all go to Marcilene’s house for something to eat and a beer. There I met Kátia, a Brazilian in her early twenties who had just arrived in London after living for five years in Portugal. She’d moved to London to follow her husband who could not find work in Portugal; she had been working as a nurse there. She shared her feelings about her work:

“I’m so tired, I’m grateful that I have work at the moment, because we’ve just arrived, but it is a never-ending job. We need to go from house to house, sometimes by bus just to do one or two hours really fast in each house. Sometimes I stop working at ten at night... at least people are nice and Arnaldo (the house administrator) is also nice”

While Kátia found the people in the multiple-occupancy houses nice, most people working in such houses did not think so. There are many problems with them: the never-ending party atmosphere and dirtiness, the fast pace, long hours and so on. For the professional cleaners the indifference of some of these students towards them took a lot of mental energy to deal with. Marcilene and Clara recount:
“... these Brazilians are quite weird and they sometimes make us feel bad. Imagine, we come to clean and all the others say hello to us while many Brazilians absolutely ignore that we are there. That is why we sometimes don’t like doing the student houses”.

Valéria and Adriana also mentioned that some Brazilians could be indifferent to others working in manual jobs. Valéria said that when she was cleaning an English school all the students said hello to her when they saw her around, but not the Brazilians. Adriana, a Brazilian in her late thirties who works in a university canteen, said: “...it is nice when another Brazilian talks to me, they rarely do... the others want to talk but I can’t talk much English so the conversation is short.”

Brazilian middle-class people tended to differentiate themselves from the Brazilian workers, but the workers themselves did not make such distinctions. During my fieldwork I noted the comments made about prejudice and discrimination suffered but generally, when I asked the professional cleaners if they were hurt by it, they would say no, “these people are ridiculous” and then change the subject.

Despite the attitudes of some Brazilians, especially in the student houses, some of the immigrant house cleaners stayed longer than they wanted to. There were several reasons for this. The most obvious one was money (no one will work at those houses for less than £10 an hour now) as well as the lack of language skills, contacts and sometimes the right to work legally in the UK. But they also valued the human contact, the possibility of working together with another cleaner. Sometimes friendships developed as was the case with Marcilene and Clara, of course that only lasted until Marcilene found out that Clara was taking four pounds for each of hour of her work. Both women took almost two years to leave the job that they complained about so often.

**Cleaning the houses of Hasidic Jews**

Many newly arrived Brazilians ended up living in the area between Stamford Hill and Seven Sisters as there are a great number of Brazilians already living there and there is a widespread belief that they can count on the orthodox Jewish community to provide jobs and, more indirectly, accommodation. Brazilian migrant men can get paid work
loading goods in Jewish warehouses or working in their restaurants and bakeries. Hasidic families own a great number of houses in the neighbourhood as well as estate agencies, which are more accepting of cash in hand. The cleaners help the women in the households of large Jewish families. It is common to work for houses with up to ten children, but Jewish women will mostly only pay a maximum of £7 per hour. These are readily available, but busy and demanding jobs. Glória explains:

“... they paid me for many years only £5/h until I, realising that some of them were really mean to me, I started leaving some of the houses and the others raised my salary to £6/h”.

Daniela, a 20-year-old woman from rural Minas Gerais, arrived towards the end of my fieldwork, in 2015. Through a friend recommendation started working immediately for two Orthodox Jewish families. After less than a month she was ready to leave one of the families. She told me:

“I don’t like to complain, I say thank God I have this job, but this woman pays me £6/h. The house is a super mess and after three hours she starts walking behind me asking ‘not finished Daniela?’, so I am going to leave her and stay with the other one.”

For Daniela, the close supervision and pressure to finish quickly was too much, and she soon left that house. Glória, however, does not find it so easy to change employers. Unless there is a situation where she feels mistreated or humiliated, she will think and plan carefully before leaving, because she has been working for “her Jewish”, for over nine years. Glória is older than Daniela and has three children back in Brazil who depend on her, while Daniela has no children and therefore fewer responsibilities. Back in Brazil, Glória always dreamed of having a steady income she could count on. She is therefore grateful to the Jewish women who gave her work, and she fills her weekly schedule with “good” Jewish houses. Once she had gained the trust of a number of employers she liked, she demanded better payment and managed an increase of an extra pound per hour. She knew she could get more money working for non-Jewish English clients, but she felt that the arrangement she had would give her security for a while. The hardship of being a poor woman from a generation of domestic workers in
Brazil, as well as her responsibilities as a mother, made it more difficult for Glória to leave a difficult low-paid or demeaning job in England. Being a cleaner in Brazil is so difficult in terms of low pay, job demands, stigma and low recognition that sometimes it is hard for the women to gather the courage to find better clients in England, even when they have their papers, as in Glória’s case.

The cleaners will often develop strategies to help them stay in a particularly difficult or low-paid job. One such strategy is to find reasons to like the employer and then develop affection for the house owner, so the cleaners learn to care for both the person and the house. Glória, for example, when talking about her employers in general uses phrases such as “os Judeus judia” (“the Jewish are mean”). In Portuguese this is a pun relating to how clean the Hasidic women want everything and how they want it cleaned, usually on hands and knees. At other times, however, Glória will speak fondly of them as “my Jewish”, and often highlights good things that make her stay with a particular employer, such as food offering, expressions of gratitude and the sense that they trust her with their keys. So each house has a “point of affection” she holds on to, to help her persevere and stay.

**Finding houses and gaining stability**

While Glória and Marta stayed with less-than-ideal employers, for the majority of the cleaners it was just a matter of time before they found good houses, or what they called “casas de Ingleses” or English houses. This means a group of houses belonging to someone of any nationality (usually white European), but usually a professional they classed as rich, who is able and willing to pay £10 to £15 an hour. While some cleaners such as Marcilene and Marta had enough knowledge of English to perceive when someone was not from the UK, others took a long time to find out where their employers were from, which is another reason for the generalisation of the term “English houses”. To get those houses required strategy, networks, self-confidence and sometimes sufficient savings to cover the rent and food while they waited for their schedule to fill up. So, for some, the transition to a more independent style of cleaning was wishful thinking.
They often had to use their own initiative, for example putting a flyer or card through the letterbox with their contact number offering their cleaning services. The problem with this strategy is that few people trust communications via their letterbox. But even if they did receive a response, the prospective employer might be suspicious if the cleaner did not speak English, and getting a friend to discuss the details of the job with them might not work because the employer is now dealing with two strangers on the phone. So this is rarely a successful strategy due to the language difficulties.

If the cleaner can gain the trust of a few employers, or one employer in the case of the live-ins and nannies, this seems to override the languages barrier. All but three of the women from the professional cleaner group could speak more than basic English. The basic level here means being able to greet people and understand the language of cleaning, for example the names of different rooms in the house and cleaning utensils. With limited English skills, the best way to find English houses is either through a friend or an employer’s recommendation. So reputation is really important as well as making good first impressions, especially when cleaning a house for the first time. Thus, cleaners work at being a ‘good cleaner’ as a good reputation leads to good work or, better still, the ability to choose who they work for. After a while, a successful cleaner will develop a clientele, a group of houses, to which she has the keys, which proves that she is trusted. The houses are now hers.

**Working for the rich**

Most of the cleaners were cleaning houses of “normal people”, mostly professionals with or without children. These people had terraced houses which were comfortable but not particularly luxurious. A few, however, worked for people they described as millionaires. In this section I introduce with more details the experience of the nannies, as it is the most rewarding of the domestic workers jobs in London. To gain the trust of a millionaire could lead the cleaner, nanny or domestic worker beyond stability, to “a comfortable life” in Britain. This meant leaving the multi-occupancy houses they lived in and renting a house on their own, buying better clothes and food, as well as travelling abroad and going home to Brazil more often. Some had cars and others, like Sônia, were able to help their children, which in Sônia’s case meant enabling her daughter to
graduate as a nurse in London. To be a nanny or a live-in domestic worker (housekeeper) in such houses, in most cases, can guarantee a contract and benefits. The highest paying contract I learned of was for £36,000 a year, but the average was around £24,000 a year. To get to that level a nanny has to speak good English, have the right to work in the UK, have attended first aid courses and sometimes have a valid driver’s licence. However, there are exceptions, such as the case of Nara, a 26-year-old woman from the state of Bahia, who explained that her bosses – a model and a fashion executive from south-west London – have two nannies and two cleaners, but prefer to pay under the table and work with foreigners as, according to Nara, they are more likely to be reliable. For the cleaners or live-in domestic workers, proficiency in the English language is desirable but not essential.

Sônia, a woman in her mid-fifties from Sao Paulo, also works for a very wealthy family and is proud of her relationship with her employers:

“my bosses are millionaires; he is a businessman and she is well-known in her field of work in the UK. You are not going to believe this, but as part of her job she had to research the Brazilian salary system, and she discovered that in Brazil they pay a 13th salary. So since then, she has paid me the 13th salary, can you believe it? When would this happen in Brazil?”

It is common for nannies to find themselves either without a job or considerably reduced hours when the children they looked after start school, but not Sônia. She was able to keep her main job even after the children had grown up:

“I have been with them for fifteen years, I helped raise their children, for a long time now they haven’t needed me that much, but they are so rich

---

18 In Brazil the 13th salary is an extra month's salary that all formal employees who have worked for the whole year receive at the end of the year. If someone hasn’t worked for 12 months of the year, they get the 13th salary proportionate to the months worked.
that they still pay me full-time! If they travel, they leave their dog with me in my house, if she needs something while she is away she puts the money into my account and I buy it for her. It is like that... but they have so much money, they change their furniture like it is nothing. If something has a little scratch they don’t fix it they change it and tell me to get rid of it! Usually I end up with a lot of nice stuff”.

Silmara’s case is another example where the relationship with wealthy employees has worked out. She makes a point of only working for people she recognises as very rich. Currently she is working for a family who have three children and three nannies and a cleaner, all on formal contracts. She works from Monday to Thursday from nine to five, and then there is an evening nanny and a weekend nanny, who works from Friday to Sunday. The house also has a full-time cleaner. Her employers both have really demanding jobs, work hectic hours, and travel often, therefore she finds that she has autonomy with the children and prides herself on being "better than a mother to them". Silmara’s case is interesting because the kids she used to take of are all at school now, but she often goes to visit them even though she and the mother do not get along. This is a case where the mother recognises the importance of the nanny in the children's lives and chose to maintain contact.

However, there can be downsides to working in a wealthy household and sometimes being a nanny in a rich house can have devastating consequences. For Sandra, a woman in her early thirties from Santa Catarina in the South of Brazil, her experience with the very rich was different. She does not now work for people she recognises as super-rich, as she explains:

"I left all my jobs to go with this one family to Monaco, as they lived between Monaco and UK. After a few weeks the stay-at-home mother of four became very unstable and rude. The kids did not
have a routine and she demanded that I implement one, but at the same time she would not allow me to make my own rules. After just two months, one day she woke up, bought a ticket to London and sent me home, she dismissed me on the spot. I lost everything. I will never work for people who are so rich again, they did not see me as a human being."

Even with all the strategic thinking every nanny knows that when caring for children there is no guarantee that the family will still give her hours after “their babies” have gone to school. Sônia, for instance, believes that she is lucky because, so far, she has been kept on, although for just a few hours a week, caring for “her children” some of whom were now becoming teenagers. That is not the norm, however. For most nannies, separation happens when the children go to school, giving a work span of just four years. After that she either loses her job or there is a considerable reduction in hours, which can mean great financial and emotional loss.

These examples show that while it can be a good experience to work for the super wealthy, this is not always the case. As mentioned, most of the domestic workers in my group were working for lower-middle-class and middle-class professionals. An established professional cleaner could clean ten to fifteen houses a week, and earn £800 to £2,000 per month, sometimes more if they earn extras and gifts. Some of the cleaners pay taxes, but most are paid cash-in-hand. They usually have the keys to those houses and have been working for those families for a long time, some as long as fifteen years. Nevertheless, the whole system is very unstable, especially for live-in nannies and domestic workers or those who work for just one or two clients, because if they lose that one client those years of emotional and physical investment collapse and they "lose everything".

**Conclusion**
In this chapter I have outlined the pathways for what my informants call success in building a life as a domestic worker, be it as a cleaner or a nanny, in London. Success here means the possibility of stability which in turn enables the women to plan for their future and that of their families in Brazil. This is achieved by finding a number of different clients who are able to pay a minimum of £10 per hour, which they call "the English houses". I have examined the difficulties of arriving in London for those with poor or no network connections. Having to form their connections upon arrival renders the women vulnerable to extra strenuous and undesirable cleaning work, such as the "cleaning cars" and agencies. These are businesses run by Brazilians who look for workers who match their stereotypical ideas of what it means to be from the impoverished countryside or urban periphery. They assume that the vulnerability that comes with the migrants’ history of hardship in Brazil will make them more docile and therefore easier to exploit. My research shows, however, that through networking with other Brazilians the cleaners soon find that they do not need to stay long in an exploitative job, as jobs are passed to one another fairly easily.

Multi-occupancy Brazilian migrant houses, brothels and Hasidic Jewish households and businesses offer the next step towards better cleaning work. Here, however, some Brazilians will stay longer because these jobs offer more opportunity to relate to the employers on a personal level, as well as offering less managerial pressure, and therefore more autonomy and opportunities for personalised human contact. In spite of their exploitative and demanding characteristics, these jobs offer the newly arrived migrants the chance to earn money directly upon arrival as well as time to build their networks and gain confidence with the different cleaning appliances, products and ways of being a cleaner in London. Therefore, most cleaners I spoke to often expressed gratitude for these jobs, even though they would not do them again.

To conclude, I return to the idea of social mobility, a career path and gratitude. It would be a mistake to read into the job satisfaction and gratitude of the domestic workers who are on their pathway to achieving their ideal of success that they are in some way ‘grateful slaves’. Hakim (1991), in her work on women’s labour preferences, identified what she called the ‘grateful slave paradox’ which is connected to her finding that women at the lower and less-skilled end of the job market report more satisfaction with
their jobs. A minority of women, she notes, would be "committed to work as a central life goal of achieving jobs at higher levels of status and earnings" (1991: 101). Therefore, Hakim divides women's labour choices in Western countries into being either associated with homemaking or career oriented. In her later work, Hakim (2000) added the category of 'adaptive', as women's commitment to work-lifestyle would change through the course of their lives. McDowell et al. (2005) criticise Hakim's vision as restrictive and instead offer an analysis of women's work choices, in relation to moral economies, as a combination of an ideological inclination towards caring with women's evaluation of their options in relation to resources and assets. What this chapter shows is more in line with McDowell et al.'s analysis but, as my examples show, even when constrained by all their past socio-economic difficulties as well as those of migration, the women show great ambition and work commitment to achieve success on their own terms.
Chapter 5

To Clean is to Care

Care is an essential part of domestic work, which can include caring for children and the elderly, but it is also part of domestic cleaning processes and relationships themselves. Care is a difficult concept to pin down. Practices of care are fuelled with ambiguity as well as historical and cultural specificities (Nguyen et al., 2017). Care can refer to the physical activities of caring for others as well as feelings towards others, such as empathy and love or even negative emotions such as anxiety (Folbre and Nelson, 2000). Duffy (2015) divides paid care work into nurturing and non-nurturing, the latter being performed by janitors, cafeteria workers and others who are in a supporting role for nurturing carers who take care of the vulnerable groups in society. The anthropologist Lane (2017) calls for a broader understanding of care, arguing that it is not only the vulnerable or people in need who are the recipients of care work. Professional organisers, she notes, are contracted not because the home owners are unable to organise their homes themselves, but because they may find it emotionally and technically difficult as well as time-consuming. While nannies and au pairs might clearly come into a discussion about care, weekly cleaners would be seen more as support workers rather than carers. In accordance with Lane (2017), I argue that a more inclusive understanding of care can help us think about the different ways care features within our contemporary neoliberal and global capitalism, and might steer us away from a dualistic view of care, as either professional (paid for) or based on kinship obligation (done for love). This is important because to keep a polarised view of domestic work as either professional or for love can contribute to its further devaluation; such a view ignores the care and attention that goes into a job well done. It can serve to devalue the work as just physical labour, maintaining the worker in a subordinate position and thus enhancing the prejudice and stigma attached to the role.

Researchers have observed the ways in which different forms and interactions of care can work as a window on the different manifestations of global neoliberalism (Cox, 2010; Lane, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2017). Neoliberalism, however, is not a fixed or
straightforward concept. David Harvey, for instance, defines neoliberalism as a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (2005:5). Nguyen et al. (2017) add that neoliberalism is sustained by hegemonic ideas of property rights, market efficiency and personal autonomy as well as creating moral subjects. Scholars who look at neoliberalism from a governability point of view tend to understand it as a "global rationality" which permeates not only the government but also the governed and it reverberates in many other institutions such as families and education (Larner, 2000 in Wacquant, 2012). For Wacquant (2012: 505) neoliberalism is an articulation between the state, the market and citizenship. Here the state is equipped to imprint the interests of the market onto citizenship. This arrangement creates a "centaur-state" which has two modes for the extremes of the class structure: liberated at the top and restrictive and punitive at the bottom. In this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole, I do not propose a single approach to neoliberalism, but rather view it as a "chaotic concept" (Jessop, 2013) that needs to be looked at and questioned, as Golsteing (2013) proposes, within the context of study. More specifically, following Lane (2017), this chapter seeks to demonstrate how aspects of neoliberalism such as its ideals of self-reliance and autonomy can obscure the interdependence of people within the system, especially in global cities such as London.

Within domestic work this interdependence of care has been framed around the concepts of a 'care deficit' and 'care chain' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Parreñas, 2001) or transnational motherhood (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). These concepts highlight how women from the poor Global South leave their children and elderly behind to care for families of the rich Global North. This framework focuses on the nurturing aspects of care, leaving cleaning aside, or as a secondary feature of care. For most of the women I worked with, and certainly for the professional cleaners, to clean is to care. They need to demonstrate that they care about their work, and about their clients, and they therefore learn ways to show this, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four. Eventually, in time, they find that they have come to really care about the work and at least some of their employers.

---

19 For a complete discussion on the concept of neoliberalism in anthropology, see Jessop (2013).
In London, the experienced and successful cleaners have learned the techniques necessary to show that they care, such as taking time for additional touches, like nicely folded (hotel-style) toilet paper, or a special way to fold the tea towels. Some spend time learning different cleaning and caring techniques. They do this through personal exchanges with more experienced friends but also by looking at YouTube videos on cleaning tricks and the best cleaning products. They also exchange information about how to improve their relationship with their employer. All of this information exchange is essential to the development of caring and cleaning competence. While the cleaning standards and time commitment seem to be the same for all clients, because it is important to keep everyone in the schedule happy, not all employers are cared for in the same way. My informants create a mental/emotional hierarchy of their clients, which arises in relation to how long they have been working with any particular client, and the connection, or ‘chemistry’ as one of the cleaners put it, describing how much better it is to work for someone you “click with”.

The most fulfilling cleaning schedules are the ones where relationships of mutual obligation are formed with at least one or two of the clients. In short, to clean is also to care, and caring takes many different forms. Caring is not, however, without its problems. It necessarily requires some negotiation, as my ethnography demonstrates. Most important, however, is an understanding of domestic work as much more than ‘dirty work’. There is an impressive amount of thinking and dedication put into these work-based relationships as well as the cleaning and caring tasks. Relations of mutual obligation are constituted in some cases, and it is this that makes the work highly valued by cleaners and clients alike.

This chapter will be divided into two parts. In the first part I will demonstrate some of the ways in which domestic workers learn to care. I will begin by showing Brazilian women's initial confidence in their cleaning abilities, which is related to their view of themselves as warm, caring and clean. As they are confronted with different ways of cleaning houses and caring for children, tensions and ruptures arise. I will then explain the learning procedure that is part of the process of becoming a successful domestic worker, “an elite cleaner”. This includes learning different ways to do their job as well as negotiating time, tasks and boundaries with the employers. After this initial learning
Curve, trust is established and confirmed through the handing over of the keys. Through gestures of appreciation, such as food offerings, hugs, notes of thanks, special gifts, together with fair pay, the domestic workers feel that, on some level their investment is being reciprocated. In the second part, I will map the circumstances in which both employer and employee articulate how they are helping one another. I will start by showing how a sense of responsibility can emerge between the domestic workers and their employers. When successful, this interaction can become a long-lasting work relationship, which is familiar and professional at the same time. I will follow this with ethnographic examples of how the bosses help their employees and how the opposite also happens. Going further I show how this relationship is fragile as it needs constant management of emotions, expectations and boundaries. I conclude with a brief discussion on the relevance of the concept of reciprocity in anthropology to reinforce the importance of an inclusive understanding of care.

Part I
Pathways to caring: learning the London ways
Among my informants there is a common belief that they can clean and care well for others, be it paying clients or their family and friends. The cleaners I worked with see their ways of relating to others as warmer in comparison with the people they live with and work for in London. This belief is a doubled-edged sword. On the one hand, for the cleaners, it can serve as a source of security, making them feel confident in their abilities when comparing themselves to others such as clients, colleagues and supervisors. As Marta puts it: "Within the Brazilian community, the people I know, they clean with carinho". Carinho in Portuguese means cuddles or extra care. On the other hand, this belief can create a sense of loss and frustration when they need to adapt to their employer's or supervisor's way of cleaning and raising children. If they are cleaning with a lot of care and attention it can be a source of frustration if the supervisor, in the case of Marta, or other employers arrive and say that they want it done in a different way. Some experienced cleaners such as Zuleica, for example, tend not to return to such houses. She explains:

"I am very particular with my schedule and who I keep. The English have this habit of writing notes 'next time could you
please do it this way’... now if it is something that I find reasonable, I accept it, but if it is something that will make me work more, or outside of what we initially agreed, or ineffectively, I leave the employer. I guarantee my work. I know how to do this and I have been doing it too long to be bothered"

While both Marta and Zuleica trusted that they did their work very well and with care, Marta often felt hurt and unappreciated in her work where her supervisor Karine was always demanding more of her. Zuleica, however, judged the type of criticism she received and made sure not to keep the bosses she thought were unreasonable. What is interesting here is that both women have the right to work in the UK, they are both in their fifties, with grown-up children, and are both consider themselves white. At first glance they have very similar profiles but their attitudes towards employers and their ability to move on from less-than-ideal situations were related, among other things, to their levels of stability in both Brazil and London. Zuleica comes from a lower-middle-class farming family in the rural part of Minas Gerais. The whole family had migrated when she was a child to the state of Para in the north of Brazil and they had settled there as farmers. She had an administration degree and used to be the manager of her father’s business. Marta, on the other hand, had always been a domestic worker in Brazil and her father had always worked on someone else’s farm. In addition, in London, Zuleica had a daughter and a husband who was also working; Marta had broken up with her husband and shared a room with her teenage daughter, who she was solely responsible for. Her ability to negotiate or quit was constrained by her past experience (see more on this in the Chapter Seven), as well as her more vulnerable position in London as a single mother. What these two women have in common is the confidence that they are good cleaners and that they can do it well, which is why, when challenged, they both feel offended and hurt, though their reactions are different; one leaves such bosses, and the other complains to friends but does not challenge the boss or supervisor.
It is also really hard for the Brazilian women to understand the way their bosses raise their children, and this can be a major reason for clashes and broken contracts. As mentioned before, Sônia works for a 'millionaire' English couple, who she describes as "millionaire older parents". This means that they are wealthy and had children later in life. In Brazil it is not so common for women over the age of forty to have children, unlike the UK. Sônia is really proud of having helped to raise the couple's two children – now teenage boys. In many conversations with Sônia I could sense that she was considered to be a trustworthy person for this couple, as she had a joint credit card with the female employer. Regarding the boys, however, she sees herself as partially responsible for how they have turned out: “disciplined, intelligent and lovely” as she puts it:

"People, darling, they want to have children, but they don't want to look after them. It’s not everyone is it? But there is my woman, she had children really old, I think forty-five, but had no patience with the boys, nothing ... even with parents who are nice, they are not Brazilian, there is no silliness and hugs. It’s more like routine, routine, routine. But the routine is the job of the nanny, because when the nanny goes and the kids are with the parents then it’s iPad iPad iPad”.

As Sônia’s words show, she has a good, trusting relationship with her employers who she seems to admire. Nevertheless, she takes ownership of the boys’ good qualities and associates it with what she describes as the Brazilian way of being playful and affectionate. This is an example of a relationship that went well, as Sônia also managed to follow the routine that was imposed on her, but the experiences vary. Carol, mentioned in the previous chapter, also had strong opinions about her wealthy boss’s parenting style, in contrast to what she thought was her warmth.

“the woman was very beautiful and sophisticated, but lifeless. She rarely played with her children, and did no birthday parties for them, but when I was there I did! With my own money! At the end I left the house, but she found another
Brazilian who is still with her. Do you think she wants to change nationalities? It is the warmth, darling, it is the warmth.”

Another woman, Izabela, admires her employer very much, and she believes that they work together, “she does her part and I do my part,” she tells me. And yet, when it comes to the way her employer’s toddler is dressed she believes she could do better:

“Ok right, Emma has beautiful clothes and she is always looking expensive and impeccable, but the way she dresses her daughter is not nice, the girl never looks good. I found two ways to help Ariel; one is whenever I have to dress her I put on the best stuff she has, Emma doesn’t like that very much (she smiles mischievously). The other way is whenever I get there and Ariel is looking good I say, how beautiful, you are wearing a dress, wow!! I think this technique works”.

For Izabela, while she and Emma worked “in sync” in the household, in that Emma was also a tidy person, and therefore in line with Izabela’s ideals of femininity and domesticity, she was not attentive to the way Ariel dressed. The “class markers” of the mother, who looked impeccable and elegant, were not transferred to the child, something Izabela did not find appropriate. It is hard to know the reason for the mother not having birthday parties, or putting the best dress on her daughter, because I did not interview them. But it was the belief that Brazilians were essentially warmer, as well as expectations of what it means to be upper-middle-class or rich in Brazil that the nannies were trying to transfer to London. Sometimes that transference was not expressed, as in the case of Sônia, or was expressed and led to dismissal, as in the case of Carol, but sometimes it was negotiated quite successfully, as in the case of Izabela.
Becoming an elite cleaner

“Well, the way to go is this, you do not do too much, just so they do not think that you can do a lot and therefore give you more work, and you do not do too little either, just so you don’t get sacked.”

The above quote is the advice that an upper-middle-class Brazilian mother gave to her daughter before she came to London to learn English. As mentioned in Chapter Three, class is a fluid category. Here, however, I am calling them upper middle-class because in London they were staying in an apartment in Holland Park, one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods in London. The mother is a well-known Brazilian architect and the daughter was starting out as an architect herself. Although she had a comfortable life in Brazil, and good connections in both London and Brazil, the daughter was expecting to do some cleaning while learning English. However, learning the right balance of how to clean in London is not easy at first and can cause a lot of upset, especially when most people start with the idea that they can do it, and do it well. Even when there are no children involved, tourist and professional cleaners arrive in London thinking that they know how to clean. The professional cleaners “are not scared of work”, because they were cleaners in Brazil, and some have been working for family homes (casas de familia) since the age of 8. If some of them lack the initial confidence and contacts to get a better cleaning job in London, they start off eager to work and save money.

On the other hand, the experience of the tourist cleaners is more varied. The lower middle-class here means people with degrees, most small business owners, or people who hold blue-collar jobs. They may or may not have experienced cleaning before, it depends on whether the mother invested in teaching them, or did everything for them. It also is not uncommon for lower-middle-class families to employ a full-time domestic worker in Brazil. The more established, professional middle class are used to having a full-time domestic worker in Brazil and some were raised with the help of a nanny as well. Thus, most of the middle-class people I interviewed and interacted with learned how to do their own cleaning after arriving in London, but surprisingly they also thought they knew how to clean as they assumed it was easy. The adaptation process
can cause a great deal of distress, and a cleaner, or nanny, can be dismissed from many different jobs before she learns what it takes to make a living as a domestic worker in London, where the pace of work, standards and personal relations are different. The complaints and frustrations of this initial period as well as the contentment and stability that comes afterwards, are all reflected upon in terms of comparisons. For the tourist cleaner it is compared with what they saw their mother and/or the maid doing and the family relations with their maid, while the professional cleaner compares it with her experience as an empregada domestica in Brazil.

The problem with cleaning is that everyone seems to assume it is easy and that it does not need much explanation. One of the most well-known cases among my group of participants was a person who had recently arrived who went to work as a porter for a famous French chef. The story goes that the Brazilian porter was so eager to do a good job that he started to clean the pots and pans with a metal scrubber in the way that is the norm in Brazil, in order to make the pots shine. When the chef saw his pots he fired the porter on the spot shouting that his pots were ruined, and about the importance of never washing frying pans and skillets. There was also confusion for one worker with a Hasidic Jewish employer. The woman, Galba, told me of a friend who had just started working for this Jewish person. She could not tell me why, but the woman in the family used to leave a red fabric on the bed to signal to the husband that she was willing to have sex that night. The cleaner made the bed and took the sign away three times, creating confusion for the husband and wife. In this case the cleaner was just taken aside for a talk and an explanation of Jewish customs. While these two are more extreme cases, there are many other day-to-day adaptations, which can take a while and cost the cleaners their jobs and tears as in the first example, or just an explanation and some laughter, as in the second.

The best thing that can happen for a new cleaner is to find the right kind of guidance. Valéria, for instance, likes to teach the newcomers. She encourages them to leave marks in the house that show that they clean with care and attention to detail. Her house is always full of people, as she likes to throw parties. At one of these gatherings she tells everybody that it is important to fold the towels nicely and the toilet paper needs to be folded as in a hotel. She also teaches people what to clean first, how not to leave marks
on the mirror, how to clean hard water marks and leave the taps shining. According to Valéria, what makes a house look cared for is a clean unmarked mirror, shining taps, and the smell of wood polish around the house and toilet sanitiser in the toilets. She calls her friends, and the people she gives advice to, the “Elite Cleaners”. This has a double meaning. It has a literal meaning, which suggests that they are top-quality cleaners, but it is also a reference to the Brazilian Elite army troops. The Elite troops (similar to the American SWAT), or “tropa de elite”, became famous after the release of the semi-fiction film, the “Elite Squad”. The film depicts how this special force “cleaned up the slums in Rio” prior to the Pope’s visit in 1997. As the elite squad police force became famous for exterminating criminals, the elite cleaners congratulate themselves on eliminating dirt.

The ‘Elite Cleaner’ is just one of the expressions used to enhance this idea of professionalism and method. While most people agree on what makes a house look clean even if you have just two hours to do it, some people think and do more than that. Marcilene, for instance, takes all the hair out of the drains and keeps an eye on the filters in the kitchen extractor as well as cleaning inside fridges. She is the only one I saw doing that, as most cleaners keep to their cleaning tasks and only do extras if asked. As seen in the documentary that accompanies the thesis, Marcilene believes people should not need to ask her to do it, she does it because she thinks it is part of her job. Marta and Marcilene also share a special way of making the beds, which resembles the hotel style; it is well-stretched and crisp. This shared belief that they are skilled professional cleaners serves as a mental tool even when they do not have the best of cleaning jobs, but it can also hurt when their work is not recognised, or when the employer sees that they did their best, but asks for even more, as sometimes seems to happen. That is when some cleaners, like Zuleica, leave their employer, some negotiate and others just do it, resentfully, like Marta.
Educating the bosses

During the period of my fieldwork everyone looked forward to Valéria’s dinner parties. At the parties the set-up was that while the men stood outside drinking beers and, when the weather permitted, barbecuing, the women would be together in the small narrow kitchen, talking and laughing. One day there were five of us, drinking beer, and cutting onions, peppers and garlic to add to the Brazilian food being prepared. Suzana, a woman in her early thirties from the state of Manus in the north of Brazil, started telling us about this new house she had taken on:

Suzana: I started at this house, but I am not sure if I will keep it because it is quite far away and the woman leaves all her clothes on the floor. It takes almost an hour just to pick up the mess in the kitchen, toilet and bedroom.

Valéria: And what do you do with the clothes on the floor?

Suzana: I put everything in the laundry basket.

Mirian: When I have that situation I fold them and leave them on top of the bed… (to which Marcilene agrees)

Valéria: What?! Do you think I’m going to fold stuff for new people… that is why they abuse!! If it is on the floor it is dirty, if they don’t want it in the basket they should put it away before you come… now you think!! Maybe if it is someone you have been working with for a long time… but if you do it they get used to it. We need to watch otherwise next thing you know we will be smelling their clothes to separate them like we do for our own family”

Everybody laughs.

That conversation, and others I participated in, showed me that this group of cleaners understand there to be a kind of hierarchy of care. They value their work and are grateful for it. They care about doing a good job and are willing to learn new ways of doing it and even to learn new methods from friends and on the Internet. It is important
for them to have attention to detail, the capacity to prioritise the work, and to know in what order to do the different tasks. For example, not to dust the house after you have mopped, or to remember to put all the dirty clothes into the washing machine first when you arrive so they are ready by the time you leave. Equally important are the interpersonal skills, which are essential if you want to be able to set boundaries and educate your employer about what are appropriate demands to make of a cleaner. In relation to these practices and relational aspects of the work, a hierarchy of clients is also created.

**It may be easier than in Brazil, but not easy to clean in London**

While there are advantages for the women in having the confidence to know how to clean and in knowing that their standards are better, it can make it difficult to do the tasks the way other people want, and within the time frame that the other person wants. As I explain in Chapter Four, at the beginning of their trajectory as a professional cleaner, negotiating the tasks in the time frame is very difficult. Most domestic workers arrive with few or no contacts, sometimes without papers and almost always without English language proficiency. They start by taking and accepting the lowest paid and more difficult jobs. In the case of people working under supervision, boundary-setting and negotiations about expectations of their role are almost impossible, as Kátia and Bernardo reported. Kátia and Bernardo, a middle-class Brazilian couple who met and married while living in Portugal, are both from the countryside, but she’s from the south of Brazil, Parana, and he’s from the state of Rio de Janeiro. They are a good example that cleaning is not as easy as it seems. Kátia left her job as a nurse in Portugal to live in London, where she thought Bernardo would have a better chance of finding a job in his profession, as a film editor. With the financial crisis of 2008 he had lost his job in Lisbon, and was not able to find a new one, so the couple decided to migrate. He was working as a school cleaner in London when I met them, and Kátia was working as a cleaner for two private houses and in a chain of multi-occupancy houses. As mentioned previously, there are many multi-occupancy houses in Haringey which cater for Brazilians. When I met Kátia it was because she was cleaning the house where Marcilene lived. She was there with four other cleaners who wanted to learn English. After Kátia had finished her
cleaning she joined the class and later Bernardo arrived. We all cooked dinner together and had a long conversation. Bernardo told me what he thought about cleaning:

“People think the work is easy and everyone can do it, but it is not like that... how can I say... it is difficult to get the standard and time right... yes... but the worst part is the human relations; it is how to deal with the supervisors. They are always finding more things for you to do, and somehow what you do is never good enough.”

Kátia had a similar view:

“When you understand that you need to clean well but fast, and not as if you were cleaning your own house, you don’t have time to ‘cuddle’ the house (meaning take time to clean every corner), but you cannot simply do a half-arsed job either, because people notice if you do that. We learned that here people do not care about cleaning, but they can be very particular, so you think you know how to clean, but actually, by the time you’ve really learned it you have already cried a lot.”

Among the people who came to London after graduating were Adriana and her husband. Adriana, a journalist in her early twenties from Para in the north of Brazil, tells me that it is not easy to be a cleaner. She came because she said that in the state she is from, outside the axis of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, the salary for a young journalist is really low. She arrived in London with the hope of finding a job, and two months later her husband, also in his early twenties – a computer programmer – would join her. She had thought it was going to be easier, but she was struggling to learn to clean, and had already been asked to stop going to two different houses:

“When you are in Brazil you think you know everything, you think you know how to clean. When you arrive here you learn very quickly to be humble, because you need to listen and learn
in a language that you don’t know, you need to be quick and on
time, it is difficult, it is like God is testing you.”

The differences between cleaning in Brazil and cleaning in London were always points of discussion among the women, the most common being the use of water. The way people in London wash the dishes with a bowl in the sink, reusing the water, causes surprise and disgust in most Brazilians I spent time with. Also, cleaning the bathroom by throwing water on the shower cubicle or on the floor, as it is customary in Brazil, has caused people to lose their jobs. Thus, it is invaluable for them to have what I witnessed as a sense of solidarity and camaraderie, for example in Valéria’s house where the women get together and learn from each other, avoiding a lot of unpleasant conflict with their employers. This is an interesting moment where the Brazilian class hierarchy gets reshuffled and the middle-class tourist cleaners "learn to be humble" or to respect others, as some of them told me. An established professional cleaner has more prestige, contacts and know-how than a newly arrived middle-class tourist cleaner. These are times when cross-class friendships and romantic relationships can happen.

The keepers

As the domestic workers' confidence grows, they become more aware of their value, and that is when they start identifying which employers are worth keeping. Domestic workers have different ideas of what constitutes a good employer, or good houses to clean. Some will prefer the house owners not to be at home when they are cleaning, while others prefer them to be there, so they can say hello and have a little casual conversation. Even for the ones who prefer company, not all days are the same. There are days when they want to clean alone, having as a companion just the playlists on their headphones. With regard to the employers, some make sure they are out of the house when “the cleaning lady is coming”. Some bosses prefer to be at home to give instructions, while others are at home but like to be out of the way. The approaches and relationships are varied and seem to hinge on how long they have known the cleaner and how much they trust her. Some people prefer to find a cleaner through an agency, so they have someone that is accountable if something goes missing or if a problem arises. Most of my informants, working independently, usually found their houses
through recommendations, but more recently, since 2016, I have noticed a tendency to find work via internet apps. What seems to be a constant, however, is the sense of ownership that comes with a gesture of trust, symbolised by the handing over of keys.

The handing over of a key initiates an attachment to the house, from key to key the cleaner will construct their schedule, beginning their pathway to stability; they can plan their lives, because they know where they have to be and how much money they will make. The aim, as mentioned before, is to secure a key for at least eight houses a week, each providing from three to six hours (or more) of cleaning a week. When that schedule is built, the cleaner starts going to that same house once, twice and sometimes even four times a week. That is when a sense of ownership arises and the client’s house becomes “their house”. Not every key represents an attachment to the house owner. That can come over time, and sometimes the cleaner does not even like a particular client, but still does the house to a good standard. Some of the cleaners have never met their employers, but all the cleaners reported that a good schedule has at least two or three employers that they like and have a closer relationship with – relationships where they are acknowledged as a person even if that means there will sometimes be disagreements. In fact, disagreements are also part of acknowledgement of their personhood because that means they are having a debate and not just being told off or sacked on the spot. A disagreement demands negotiation and acknowledgement of the other’s capability to have an opinion, and the boss doesn't always win.

**From houses to names to nicknames**

Paola is an 18-year-old college drop-out living in the UK. She is the daughter of a Brazilian beautician, from Minas Gerais. She said she did not feel any good at school and wanted to make money instead. Her mother found her work with her Hasidic Jewish clients at the hair salon. Once, Paola asked me to call one of her Jewish bosses to change her working hours for the next day. When she gave me the phone I observed that I needed to call the “judia 5”, or Jewish 5, just below that was written in her contact list, the judia 65, judia 96 and so on. I asked her why she wrote them that way. She told me, “this means Jewish house number 5, Jewish house number 65 and so on...(laughs)... I don’t know their names, I will leave them all before I learn how to say them (a nervous smile)”.


Glória, in contrast, who has been with the *judias*, as she calls them, for over nine years, gives them kind nicknames or uses their own names. One employer is called “the doctor” (where the house owner is a doctor) and another “the pretty one” (because she thinks she is the prettiest), or she calls them by their own names. When I was cleaning the multi-occupancy houses with Marcilene, she would say “now we are going to the 80 or to the 22”. Meaning, again, house number 80 or 22. Nowadays she tells me “from here I am going to Leticia’s or to Mary’s or to Fernanda’s house”. They don't just clean houses anymore they clean for a person; the attachment is no longer to the house, with the money and stability that it represents, it is attachment to the person. It can, at times, go even further, where they start using sweet nicknames such as “my little old lady” or “my little slim lady” and so on. These nicknames usually come with greater involvement with the employers’ lives. At home they often talk about how worried they are that an employer's son is having a problem finding work, or how the fertility treatment of another is not working, or another is travelling too much and maybe is not eating properly. Often they will include some of the bosses in their prayers. The extent to which the employers reciprocate is impossible to know for certain. I do not think they are even aware that they are being prayed for, but from the way my informants speak about the good bosses, they make gestures of appreciation, which gain the mutual appreciation of some cleaners.

Not all nicknames are good though. Glória told me of some of her friends who say “the cow”, “the pig”, "the dirty bitch" or "the mean one" and so on. What I noted, however, is that the experienced cleaners would not keep a house where they were not enjoying the work. No interaction is fine, good interaction is ideal but bad interaction is not accepted in normal circumstances.

**Food offerings**

Food offerings and food sharing is probably the most important way in which people judge each other and decide who they want to be associated with. Sheila, a 28-year-old middle-class former cleaner, told me about when she went to help clean up after a party for a catering company. After they had worked hard and cleaned up everything the boss said that no one should eat anything and he took a tray of food and put it in the bin.
Sheila was so upset that she never went back to work for that company. When the cleaners are talking about the bosses they want to keep, they highlight how nice it was that from the first day of work the person offered them something to drink or eat. Glória tells me:

“This woman she has seven kids, you should see the size of her house, and how clean it is... it is amazing! She has a newborn baby right now, and this is the newest house I have (that means her most recently acquired cleaning job). I didn’t even have any more time slots, but I put her on Sundays. Now I am thinking of leaving most of my Jewish ones, but she is one I will keep. English people don’t take a cleaner on Sundays anyway... She is super nice; while the other Jewish ones just offer me tea and coffee she always gives me lunch, dinner or both, depending on the hours I am doing. She never lets me leave without eating, even if this is a little thing, she will give it to me. This week she gave me home-made ice cream. It was hot outside and she gave me ice cream that she had made herself. So delicious! She is a good cook!”

Daniela tells me a similar story:

“... the Jewish always ask me ‘drink? drink?’ (They probably ask like that because they know she doesn’t speak English) and I always say no. But there is this woman, she is a cool one, I find it hard to say no to her. I go there if I can even when she asks me at the last minute because I find her nice... the other day I finished my work and she put on the table a sandwich with avocado and peppers and a glass of juice! I found it so nice that I ate a bit, but then I said I wasn’t hungry. You know, in Brazil we don’t eat avocado like that! There it is a fruit that we eat with lime and sugar or mixed in a banana smoothie!”

While food or a drink offering is highly appreciated by the cleaners, not everyone
accepts it, as Daniela's example shows. There are many reasons for not accepting food; some people just do not like the food habits of their employers. Another reason is that to stop and eat means time, and as they are paid by the hour they would rather get on with their work. If the employer is a new one, some will feel embarrassed to accept food and make conversation. Thus, offering food is a must but acceptance will depend on the approach of the cleaners. Even with the live-in domestic workers and au pairs, whose contract often includes having their food provided by their employers, some will prefer to keep their own food and eat at separate times. Nara, while working as an au pair for a family with two children, made sure she bought her own food and had most of her meals alone or with the children. She said that she didn’t like what they cooked, but also she liked having something that was independent from them. She was not explicit, but I suspect there was an element of also not having to help to tidy up the kitchen, the chance to just be in her room after her shift. Older live-in domestic workers, such as Eliane and Fabia, both in their early fifties, ate most of their food from the employer, but also found it important to have some of their own separate food and to cook and offer their own to the employers sometimes. On the other hand, Simone, another live-in, made a point of only eating the employer’s food, as it was stated on the contract, “because she needed to save money” she told me.

Therefore, attitudes towards food vary and it is important to remember that a great number of houses are empty when they are there, therefore they do not eat, or will just grab some toast and a cup of tea or coffee. In fact, they find it interesting that most of the houses have no food whatsoever. There is also the question of food habits, which are different, as when Daniela was not impressed with the avocado sandwich. But while it is very important that there is a polite offer of food, a cleaner will not automatically accept it. It is interesting here because buying and offering food signify equality and it is usually a celebration of communality and friendship. On the other hand, not accepting implies distance, so as to maintain a professional relationship. While accepting or not is at the discretion of the domestic worker, the offering of food and drink is an indication that they are being acknowledged as people, and as workers, so it implies appreciation.
Appreciation

In 2013, two of the houses I went to in order to conduct my research were raided by the immigration authorities. One of these was Luiza’s house where they deported almost everyone. The next day she was really upset, and particularly concerned about a man called Roberto. He had told her that his boss kept telling him how much he appreciated his work. Roberto, according to Luiza, was doing many washing up shifts at the restaurant. He often arrived home with some food from the restaurant saying that his boss had told him that English people were too slow and that Roberto worked harder and faster. For Luiza, Roberto had a promising future in London, and she could not believe he had been sent away.

To be appreciated by one’s employers is invaluable. It gives a sense of pride and self-esteem that is also appreciated by family and friends. The same year, 2013, I went to Marcilene’s house to say goodbye to Seu Miguel, a man in his early fifties who was going back to Brazil. His wife had gone a year earlier after working five years here for the English as a cleaner. He said:

“I'm going home because I'm getting old and London is for the young... also my wife left before me and I have to follow her. She earned a lot of money here! Okay it is bad to say this in front of Marcilene, but I think she was the best cleaner that has passed through this city, the woman she worked for gave her a lot of things and they hugged sometimes, hugs! (laughter).”

Seu Miguel’s decision to go back to Brazil was based on his age. He thought the work was getting too hard, as he mostly worked cleaning offices. In addition, he was undocumented, which added to his decision.

Some employers, while polite and appreciative of the work, can take advantage if they believe that the domestic worker is illegal. Usually, employers adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy with regard to their cleaners and live-out domestic workers. Izabela, for instance, told me that she worked for the same woman for ten years, but the woman
never paid her holidays, or gave her anything. She had always been nice enough, but Izabela sensed that something wasn’t right. Izabela believed that her boss suspected she was illegal, and would therefore be stuck, so she never feared losing Izabela. After a break-up with her husband, Izabela decided to just pack her stuff and go back to Brazil. She stayed there for four months and her ‘patroa’ wrote to her several times asking her when she was coming back and telling her that her children missed her very much. When Izabela managed to come back after four months she went back to work for this woman. From that time on, the employer raised the salary and started paying holidays. On Izabela’s first day back she presented her with a silver necklace with three birds on it, representing the employer’s three children, which Izabela wore with pride. Izabela’s attitude towards her work and her bosses was about distance and professionalism. At the time, she said she was finding this new proximity to her employer a little too much, though I suspect she secretly liked it.

Expressions of gratitude touch the Brazilian cleaners, especially the professional cleaners. This is, for them, a great source of comparison with Brazil. Izabela says, when asked about going back to Brazil:

“Brazil?! To do what?! To work as an empregada domestica?! People who never appreciate what you do? Who say thank you without looking at you? To work from 8am to 6pm earning 700 reais? Ok in Belo Horizonte in the South Zone you can earn more, but still... No, and more, you work and when you go home they don’t even look at your face... no way! Here the English (this could be any nationality, including Brazilians who have been here for a long time) are used to saying thank you for everything and you see on their face when they are grateful, they say hello when you arrive... some are not very open, that is their personality. But here, if you are on time and do your job, there is respect, you are a worker doing a job. In Brazil you are the empregada domestica (domestic worker), it is something else. I think sometimes that even I didn’t know how to say thank you for everything. We don’t do that in general in Brazil, but with the
domestica it is worse because the work never stops and it is never enough. They think that only we need them, they don’t need us”.

Nilza, a professional cleaner in her early thirties from rural Parana in south Brazil, told me about her experience in Brazil:

“I arrive at her house at 8:00 am, she has already had breakfast by this time. I get there and she has a big face (meaning she doesn’t smile and doesn’t look interested) I clean the house until 11:00 then I cook lunch. Between 12:00 and 12:30 people arrive and have lunch, then I have my lunch. From 1:30 onwards I wash clothes, iron, clean windows outside and inside, wash the front patio and water the plants in the backyard. Between 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm I go home. When I go home she has the same big face, if not bigger... that is what I find difficult, nothing is good enough for her.”

I asked her if her boss ever said that something was nice, or said thank you. She replied: “why would she say that? This is my job. She pays me RS 800 and it is all registered (meaning she pays her national insurance)”. The salary of RS 800.00 is the equivalent of £138.38 per month; in Brazil this was the minimum wage at the time of my research. Thus the salary was low, and the job was hard, but when I spoke to her it was the lack of interaction and the demands of her boss that really bothered her. It was the idea that nothing she did was good enough.

Gestures of appreciation are important when the women are deciding if they should leave a certain job or not. It also reassures the domestic worker that they are doing a good job. Being honest and hard-working gives them a sense of self-worth. When they explained this to me it was often in relation to their parents.

There were several examples of how the women were proud of their parents for working hard and for passing on good values. In London, however, it finds a new
meaning, because their work is paid better and because they are entering a new system. Marta, for instance, told me her grandfather was a ‘capataz’ or ‘maintenance man’ on the farm of one of the richest people in her town. Her grandfather was well loved by the owner’s family, and the children played together, so her father was a friend of the farm owner’s son. They went to school together and as Marta’s father was a great student and always had good marks, he helped the farmer’s son with his studies. She said her father helped the boy to pass his tests, especially the maths ones. When they grew up, the man became the mayor of the city. Marta told me very proudly of the day she was with her father and he decided to pop into the City Hall to say hello to his friend. The secretary told him he had to have an appointment, but Marta’s dad said “just tell him it’s me and ask if he wants to have a ‘cafezinho’ (a little coffee)”. The secretary did, and the man came out immediately, so they had a long chat over coffee.

On the way home Marta’s father told her that honesty pays in more ways than just money. Marta said: “so I have always been proud of being honest and proud of what I do”. Marta never articulated, during our conversations, any frustration or anger at the fact that although her father was better at school, he stayed at the farm all his life while the boss’s son went on to become the mayor. For her what was important was that her father was an honest and respected man, and she has tried to follow in his footsteps, but she had no intention of going back to Brazil. Marta, as well as most of the participants in this research, knew they were being exploited and stigmatised, but it was only after being here in the UK that they really questioned their position as maids in Brazil. Here, they realised that their work in Brazil had been taken for granted. This also goes for the people who never did cleaning in Brazil and had to do it here. For them also it was a shock when they perceived how perverse this situation was in Brazil. Thus, becoming a cleaner in London, whether as a tourist, or a professional cleaner, is an opportunity to learn. This may be understanding that the cleaners in Brazil are exploited and badly treated, or that the work of cleaning requires an education that only other cleaners can impart, including learning how to care about cleaning as a central and cultural part of the profession.
Part II

Care and reciprocity: "I help her and she helps me"

“The measure of your success is not how much you earn, but what difference you make on [to] the life of others”.

(Michele Obama’s quote on Marta’s Facebook profile page)

Marta’s Facebook timeline is not unique. In the film, for example, Marcilene says "I helped her and she helped me, and that way we go on making the world a better place". Both Marta and Marcilene, and others, believe that through their work ethic they are also building relationships of reciprocity. What the cleaners mean by this is that cleaning jobs create and sustain opportunities for the give and take of caring relationships and supportive benefits for both client and cleaner. Once the initial contact has been established and the cleaner is trusted with the keys, opportunities for solidarity and reciprocity between the employer and employee can appear. As mentioned in part I of this chapter, the type of interaction between the domestic workers and their employers depends on individual personalities as well as on how much they interact. There are cases where the cleaner has never met her employer, or where they have met only once, or they may meet from time to time, depending on their schedules. For others, the boss is often at home. The more contact a cleaner has, the more chances for close interaction, but also more chances for disagreements and misunderstandings, as I will show in part III of this chapter. This section focuses on how domestic workers and their employers show reciprocity in terms of a sense of responsibility, mutual obligation and helping one another.

An improbable relationship can come about from the interaction of the cleaner and employer based on reciprocity where both sides think they are helping the other and therefore gaining personal satisfaction. Considering that the person doing the household work in London is usually an immigrant and has less money and status than their employers, it is easy to imagine that some employers would be in a better position to help their employees. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) calls this one-sided type of help maternalism, where the employers use favours as a tool to demand more work from
their employees. While some employers do help their employees, the opposite is also true. For example, some cleaners end up assisting and supporting their boss far more in the relationship than the other way round. Some domestic workers help their clients in ways that go beyond what they are paid for, indicating an unequal form of reciprocity in which the cleaner subverts the assumption that it is the relatively wealthy employer who has the most to give.

Reciprocity

In the context of migrant domestic work, the theme of reciprocity has been researched in relation to migrant solidarity (Brettel, 2013). This has been particularly noted in the case of lower-income migrants trying to improve their conditions and those of their family, economic migrants (Portes and Bach, 1985). Goza’s (2004) research on the importance of social networks for Brazilian migrants in the United States points to two strands of the migrant’s social network web of trust: solidarity and reciprocity. These relationships can include, but are not restricted to, family and kin, and usually span national boundaries. Pande’s (2015) research on domestic workers in Lebanon highlights the strategies that domestic workers use to deal with multiple exclusion, including the formation of “weekend families”. She observes that domestic workers form weekend bonds, which cross national boundaries and are based on their shared experiences as migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. As most of her research participants lived in their place of employment, they formed relationships based on reciprocity and mutual obligation which were mostly temporary but could also become permanent connections.

Another aspect of the migrant network is the family household and kin, as migrants would put together financial resources to aid the journey of a family member from Brazil to the US. Family relationships of reciprocity are not just related to financial help but also to the practical provision of care, as family members look after the children (Parreñas, 2001). As Ryan’s (2009) comparative research on women migrants from Poland and Ireland to Britain shows, reciprocity is not fixed at the point of migration but can change form and direction during the lives of the family members. The families’ expectations of reciprocity can also vary according to the city people come from, even
within the same country. Pine’s (2014) comparative ethnography shows how three different cities in Poland experienced generational relations of mutual obligation and reciprocity. The differences between young migrants from the Podhale region and Lublin, for instance, show that while in the first case young migrants were expected to send remittances, in Lublin the investment in the children’s future did not require monetary repayment, but there might be a future expectation of care, for example in old age.

Scholars on domestic work have highlighted the aspect of unequal or negative reciprocities as the main characteristic of the employer–employee relationship. This is particularly notable in the use of the “family member” metaphor. The problems that can arise when the domestic worker is described as or understood as ‘part of the family’ have been detailed in Chapter Three but it is worth returning to here. Considering the worker as “one of the family” can be seen as a sign of respect and appreciation for the domestic worker, as it implies that they will be treated as kin and therefore share in the family ideal of balanced reciprocity. However, this “proximity” often works against the domestic worker because it serves to disguise exploitative practices such as extra hours, out-of-contract tasks and so on. For instance, Kontos (2013) found, while researching domestic workers in Cyprus, that to be part of the family meant the domestic worker had to care for the employer’s family on a daily basis. However, the reciprocal care towards the employee was in the form of a promise, that the domestic worker would be taken care of in the future, should she need anything.

The “family member” metaphor can have different interpretations and consequences. Um’s (2015) ethnography of Chinese institutional care workers in South Korea shows how the carers are in a legal limbo. They are denied employee legal status because they are considered as one of the family. At the same time, they do not have the privileges of family members. Um (2015) adds that the incorporation of the family/private worker idea means the denial of legal status, therefore releasing the employer from any legal responsibility over the employee (see also Anderson, 2000).

Closely connected with the “family member” notion can come a maternalist attitude towards the cleaners. This practice of giving the domestic worker unsolicited advice,
gifts and assistance has been identified as infantilisation of the domestic worker (Lan, 2003; Romero, 2002; Anderson, 2000). Lan (2003), looking at the situation of domestic workers in Spain, noted that the employers who took a more maternalistic approach to the relationship gave more gifts. They also saw themselves as taking care of their live-in employee, positioning themselves as the generous, altruistic and caring employer. A relationship based on maternalism, as shown in Chapter Two, often comes with extra work demands. However, this proximity can also, as pointed out by Dill (1988) and Gutierrez-Gaza (2013) be strategically used by the domestic worker to negotiate her work conditions, as well as get extra gifts.

The gift exchange notion is therefore embedded in ideas, acts and expectations of reciprocity. It is seen as more balanced when involving people from the same group or with similar social standards. As the relationship of boss/cleaner is hierarchical, gift-giving can be seen as part of a strategy of exploitation, or maternalism. Gutierrez-Gaza (2013) gives a more nuanced analysis of gift exchange between the domestic worker and their employer in London. For her, gifts are not always reciprocal, but are rather part of a charitable chain. The transference of second-hand items, for example, would go to the cleaner, but through the cleaner would continue on to charity shops, friends and family, and could even be sent on to Brazil. As she puts it, "... these items were not perceived as gifts or signs of affection or gratitude from her employers, but part of a wider trade off and flow of goods, more like the impersonality of aid" (Gutierrez-Gaza 2013:178). Gaza notes that gift-giving is hierarchical and a representation of economic and moral positionality. Gift exchanges are also, she suggests, interpreted differently and have different effects depending on the proximity between the employer and employee, what kind of gift was being given and in what context.

While my ethnography confirms Gaza''s analysis of gift exchange, I would add, however, that we need to consider what the domestic worker believes she is contributing to the relationship, as she also has something to give, in terms of care and a job well done. For my informants, more often than not, a gift meant acknowledgement and appreciation of their work, for the way they had been working. It did not make them work harder, but was an incentive to continue the good work. Take, for example, the ‘cleaning car’ business as explained by Glória, one of my informants, in the previous chapter. In this
business there is the middle woman/man who deals with the clients. As the client only deals with the middle person, the presents, acknowledgements and tips never reach the domestic worker. This disconnection, as Glória put it, “made the job unbearable”, especially because no matter how well she did her job, her boss would be the one rewarded for it. She ended up leaving this job, even though she needed it to survive at the time.

While it is true that gift-giving can partly be a self-interested act it is, first and foremost, a way to build and maintain relationships, as many anthropologists have argued in various contexts (Graeber, 2001; Laidlaw, 2000; Kolm and Ythier, 2006). In my fieldwork, care and reciprocity were articulated as a moral project of helping others through caring and/or a sense of responsibility, as well as an acknowledgement of being helped. Even though Gloria and other informants were paid in money for their work, and they participated, therefore, in a market for cleaning work, the case study is interesting and provoking, because the women perceive their work, in part, as a gift to their employer. And, furthermore, they also perceive their work, when most meaningful, in terms of a range of transactions with their employer which leads towards the creation of intimacy through the giving of gifts by the employer to the domestic worker. And so, the social relationships created through domestic work make up a mixed economy of both gifts and commodity transactions. Therefore, we cannot lose sight of the many aspects of gift-giving as the work of Gregory demonstrates in descriptions of the domestication of commodities through transformation into gifts (1982). In my own case study, the women ascribe moral value and a sense of responsibility to their work in ‘taking care’ of their employers and their households.

**A sense of responsibility**

Domestic workers tend to keep a house if they feel that a particular house owner needs them. This usually happens if there is a child or an old person involved. Marcilene, for example, tells me:

“Ana Paula I am doing Ted’s mother’s house, but it is far away. It is in Finchley and it is only two hours, but I dare not leave her. Every
time I get there she is waiting for me, I think nobody talks to her... she calls me Marcilina, she offers me food, asks about Rafael (her 5-year-old son). I get really cross, because they own the whole building and she is on the second floor. As she can’t walk properly it is like she is stuck there, poor thing.”

Conceição, a 50-year-old woman from the south of Brazil, who has been living in London for almost thirty years, recounts a similar story:

“I have been working for this woman in Chelsea for four years, basically for four years. She had depression and would not even touch her child, so I had to be there twenty-four hours, helping in every aspect. It was so sad, but now I just love the girl. I want to see her grow up.”

As the above examples show, cleaners and nannies can feel a level of responsibility towards a certain employer. This is either because they have been there for a long time, or because the employer did something for them a while ago (e.g. wrote a letter or went with them to the GP). In those cases there is a sense of loyalty, which can only be broken by a strong disagreement. Their gratitude for these “ajudas” our actas of helping out is one reason for them keeping a certain house over others with better pay. Izabela’s schedule is a case in point. At the time she was working for Emma for almost a year looking after Ariel, Emma’s 18-month-old daughter, but also cleaning the house when the little girl napped. She worked for them three days a week from nine to five for £80 a day. The other two days were divided between two other families for whom she had been working for almost ten years. One of her bosses had an 8-year-old son, called Giovanna, and the other had three daughters aged between 10 and 16. On Saturdays she did two cleaning jobs in the morning, both of three hours and both paying £12/h. On Saturday afternoons she cleaned her own room and did some cake decorations for parties. She is very talented and made beautiful cakes. Her Sundays were spent at the Evangelical church events or relaxing at home. She had been a domestic worker in Brazil and her family had always lived in the favela da Serra in Belo Horizonte. She considered herself a ”hard-working poor person whom God was helping to succeed”.

143
Her earnings at the time amounted to around £500/week. Her salary, combined with what her husband earned as a courier, enabled them to buy an apartment in an established middle-class neighbourhood of Belo Horizonte, which they now rent out. She also helped out with her family’s carpentry business in Brazil. When we shared accommodation, in 2014, she and her husband were saving money to move to a studio flat or one-bedroomed flat where they could live, just the two of them. In 2017, they were still living in the same place because they decided to invest the money in her husband’s education. He is now in his third year of a university degree in Mathematics. Izabela has a baby of her own now, and they are living in a lovely two-bedroom apartment nearby. She feels secure now. Emma and her husband had three kids, and Izabela still their nanny. She was able to take her maternity leave because she had a contract, and she takes he son to work with her. She has chosen to only work for Emma, but that decision did not come easily. Money for her was not the most important factor when making a decision. In fact, she was angry when she was put in a position where she had to choose. The money offer was good, but she would lose important connections and at the same time her strategy for stability was disrupted. She said:

“I am so fed up with Emma, did I tell you she is pregnant again? Well she has been telling me that she wants me five days a week now. I told her that I have the other two families for whom I have been working for ages. She tried one person to cover for me the other two days and it didn’t work. The stupid girl, I think she was Polish, left Ariel crying in her cot on the second day and Emma didn’t like it. Now, she has tried another person and told me that if I cannot be there for the five days she will find someone else who can! So I am like, what?! I am furious! I told her that £80 a day is too little for two babies and she said she will raise it to £100 but I will have to work the five days! I will need to talk to Giovanna ... argh!!”

Two days later she told me that Giovanna, who also lived in Haringey, advised her that it would be a good move for her to go to Emma. She said that babysitting was a profession that she could invest in and become a childminder, especially now that she was working
for someone in Notting Hill. So it was decided, she would work for Emma five days a week and leave one hour earlier on two of those days to pick up Giovanna’s boy from his after-school club. She would then spend tea-time with him, and keep the two Saturday cleaning jobs, but she still wasn’t happy that she had been cornered into stopping working for Giovanna, and she was going to leave the family with three daughters altogether. I sensed she would have been willing to leave Emma altogether if Giovanna hadn’t encouraged her otherwise. Her gratitude towards Giovanna has increased, but she has always spoken highly of her: “she’s always appreciated my work and said thank you, and asked how I was doing, she is a good woman”. Her relationship with Giovanna, and with her other employers was not trouble-free, as I will explain in the next chapter, but Izabela’s previous job experiences in Brazil helped her to deal with misunderstandings in a less confrontational and more professional way. Her approach to work is a distant one; she does not like to accept food and does not reveal too much of her private life to her employers, but paradoxically this has drawn her closer to Giovanna than a more intrusive interaction might have done.

The example above shows that the cleaners cherish their long-term employers and are reluctant to let those relationships go, even more so if they are working for people who they believe are in vulnerable situations, or if they believe they are indebted to them.

**Ways in which employers help their domestic worker**

The simplest way that a boss helps her cleaner is by recommending her employee to her friends; all of my respondents found their network of employers through one of their bosses. There are also other simple ways in which employers can help their employees. One of the cleaners, for example, told me how pleased she was when her employer took the time to get pen and paper to explain the meaning of the word ‘should’. An understanding of English is so important to some employers that some have paid for courses for their cleaners. Rachel, an American writer I interviewed about her relationship with her cleaner, told me that she once paid for a speaking course for her cleaner, to improve her accent. At the time she was Rachel’s nanny. When the children were grown-up she became the weekly cleaner. She considered her employee a close friend and has included her in her will: “it is not much, but she will know I thought of her
and it is something for her”. Likewise, the owner of a school that Marcilene cleans has given her a free English course, although she has not found the time to attend it yet. There are also cases of bosses paying for tickets for their cleaners to go to Brazil, as was the case with Tania who is a tourist cleaner in her mid-fifties from the capital of Sao Paulo.

Employers can also come through for their employees at extreme times. Mirian, one of my main research participants, passed away in December 2013. She was in her early fifties and from rural São Paulo. She suffered a stroke, on Christmas day, and was on a life support machine for four days. As none of her best friends or relatives spoke English I stayed there to translate for them what the doctors were saying. In the midst of a really sad situation there was great solidarity; there were many people visiting, taking turns to be with her. I was happy to see that some of her English bosses and Brazilian bosses also came to visit her. When the time came to turn off the life-support machine, it was they who, together with friends, paid the majority of the £3000 ticket to transport her body to be buried in Brazil. I heard that the amount of money received also covered the costs for the £1200 last-minute ticket for her daughter to come and say her last goodbye before the doctors turned off the machine.

**When cleaners help their employers: helping beyond the help**

To have a caring cleaner, nanny or domestic worker can be a source of great support for the employer, which goes beyond the specific tasks the cleaner is contracted to do. The mothers and professionals I interviewed were happy to have a good caring cleaner. They were grateful to be able to come home to a clean and tidy house, at least once a week. It is important to remember that most of the cleaners worked for people who worked themselves, including a university professor, a primary school teacher, a physiotherapist, people in the film and television industry, photographers, lawyers, a magazine editor and corporation project managers. Only four of my informants worked for what they called rich people and, of these, only one worked for people who did not work professionally. According to this cleaner, the couple had four children and lived half of the time in Monaco. She knew they had a business, but she never saw them leaving the house to go to work, just to events. It is also important to note that the
majority of the employers did not have family nearby. They were either foreigners or English people whose parents and relatives were in other cities in the UK or in the suburbs, and many had small children.

I interviewed collectively a number of mothers and professionals who employed cleaners in Haringey. There was one group of five working mothers with children under the age of 5. One of the mothers, a 35-year-old, was complaining that her cleaner had left her. In response to that, another mother, a 36-year-old corporate project manager, said

“I can recommend my Brazilian cleaner, Amelia, she is fast and amazing, when I get home the house is clean and nice like magic! When she comes I just feel relieved that at least one task is out of my way!”

I also had the opportunity to interview most of Marcilene’s employers. One of these, a 60-year-old university professor from France, called Laura, sent me a text commenting on Marcilene’s three weeks’ holiday leave:

Laura: “If you see Marcilene please tell her how very privileged I feel to have her back”
Me: “I will, I am feeling the same”
Laura: “I realised how much she does for me when she went away. It isn’t just the cleaning; it is the care she takes of the house and also of me…”
Me: “I will tell her”

Although Marcilene left Daniela to cover for her three-week trip to Brazil, what was missed by Laura was the care of someone who had been working in her house for three years and knew how things worked and what needed to be done, and also someone who knew her as a person and not just as a boss. Marcilene later told me that Laura had raised her salary from £10 to £12.50 an hour and had left a card with a £20 note in as a late Christmas present. Marcilene and Laura almost never saw each other, they spoke mainly through messages that I translated, but there was a sense of caring in the relationship.
Some of the cleaners really come through for the home-owners at times of illness and great sadness. Izabela went out of her way to assist one of her employers, for whom she had been working for over ten years. Her employer’s husband was battling terminal cancer while she was having to take care of her 5-year-old son. Izabela was so close to the mother and child during this difficult time, by 2017 when the boy was 8 years old and much more independent, she was still working two hours twice a week just so they do not lose contact. Later, when she had a personal problem with her husband and went to Brazil “without even saying goodbye to anyone”, her three better bosses took her back. For her, this was confirmation of her value as a worker but also represented reciprocity of the attention she had given them before.

There are numerous other stories of gratitude and reciprocity, as well as conflicts. For that reason some cleaners keep the development of intimacy with their clients under control, because of potential problems and conflict it can cause, as I show in the last section.

**Part III**

**Managing clashes, managing employers**

In this last section I discuss conflict in the light of class differences as I explore the professional cleaners’ ability to deal with such conflicts, especially in comparison with the tourist cleaners. The professional cleaners seemed to handle the relationship with their employers better precisely because, to use their own words, “they do not take liberties” and they “know that there are limits” even for those who call their employer a friend. Gorban and Tizziani (2014), discussing the differences between domestic workers and their bosses in Argentina, argue that the employers expect their employees to “know their place”. This means, they observed, showing inferiority and deferential behavior; the cleaner had to do their job without threatening the superiority of their boss. In London there is also expectation of some distance and respect, at least at the beginning but I have not heard of expectation of deferential behavior. As shown by the examples below, especially with living-out domestic workers, the way of dealing with
the relationship and what was expected of it, varied.

Relationships need respect and boundaries to work, and it is the same for such an intimate work relationship. However, it is marked by family and historical contexts, and is constantly renegotiated in the light of what each party brings to the table. The most experienced cleaners are careful not to overstep the mark with, for example, unsolicited advice or too many requests for help, such as trips to the GP or letter translations and so on. While this is a relationship of respect and, at times, reciprocity, it does not necessarily mean that the cleaner and the employer will become “best friends”.

The Brazilian professional cleaners arrive in London more equipped to deal with this complex relationship. They do not expect to be recognised as equals but appreciate being treated with respect and acknowledged as a person. Such appreciation increases the employer’s chances of keeping a good domestic worker, and also maintaining a relationship from which both can benefit. The tourist cleaners, on the other hand, seem to confuse the proximity, gratitude and sometimes over-sharing of their bosses with friendship, and with the boss’s recognition of their middle-class-ness. Wanting the boss’s recognition of their similarities can result in hurtful ruptures in many cases. In one interview Carol told me:

“After six months in London studying English my money ended, but I didn’t want to go back home, so I thought, I will work now! I will be a cleaner or a domestic worker; and I did. I did everything, ironing and hoovering a four-floor house... but I tell you one thing: nothing taught me more than working as a maid in this city! Imagine, I came from an era (she meant the dictatorship) where people who worked for army forces in Brazil had money and were powerful. We had a private driver and maids. My father, an army ‘colonel’ at the time, was always a wonderfully human person, but even he shouted at the maid, and he, by Brazilian standards, was a good boss. After I had done cleaning in London I could not accept some of the things my father did to Justina, our long-term domestic worker. She got up at five in the morning to work for us, she didn’t
earn a lot, and my father during breakfast would start telling me how much he paid at the restaurant the night before... I wouldn't accept it! I would tell him off and remind him of his lack of humanity, but he wouldn't get it, for him it was natural. At the beginning here in London I had a lot of conflict, because at the first house I went to work I was both a cleaner and nanny and I had conflicts with the woman. First because I wanted to interfere in her life as if I was a friend, so I would give her advice, what she should do with the children and what not... but we talked, she had studied a bit of philosophy and me too so we had a lot in common. But at the same time I was a maid for her... so she had orders to give and she had expectations about my work... I stayed with her for two years. I worked really hard there."

She continued:

“As I said, we had nice conversations and a few times she even invited me to go out for some wine, imagine! This would never happen in Brazil! But I took it too literally as a friendship... when I had been there for one month it was her husband’s birthday and I told her I was going to give her a night of free babysitting, so she could go out with her husband to celebrate. When I saw her coming down the stairs I said ‘omg! You are going to wear the same clothes you had on all day, and not even lipstick? Go and get changed!’ She found it funny and went. But after a while those types of things annoyed her ... I would cook dinner and leave two glasses and sometimes candles on the table, so she and her husband could have dinner. One day she wrote me a two-page letter apologising, saying she could not keep me in the house anymore... I cried so much, I loved the younger boy, I had started taking care of him when he was only 3 months old, and now I would have to leave. My boyfriend at the time went back to give her the keys because I didn’t have the
strength to go there. When he got there he told her: ‘you are losing the only bit of light your house has’ (she laughs). She now employs a woman who was a maid in Brazil, someone who knows how to behave. The boss brought the maid’s daughter and cousin to work for her as well. It is as if she created a feudal system around herself, as she takes care of this woman’s family and helps them a lot, and they are all loyal to her. Of course, she wanted a maid that behaved like a maid, I was raised to be a master. These maids bring with them the same submission, they get more money and more respect, but they still have a submissive attitude... I was devastated”

Most of the Brazilian English Language students who arrived here around the year 2000 knew they would extend their student visas. To do that, depending on their English level, they would work as a waiter or waitress, or as a cleaner if their English were still poor. It was a common practice to travel and enjoy the city while you had money and then, when that finished, to find any job and stay for another year or two. The excuse given to the parents was that this was to learn English. People who were already here gave the newcomers tips and the necessary networks to find work and enjoy the city at the same time. Most parents didn’t mind their children working as cleaners in London. According to the tourist cleaners “that was how they would become adults”; it was considered a rite of passage. Two messages came out very clearly from the middle-class cleaners. One was “I learned to be humble” and the other was “I learned to respect their cleaners back in Brazil”.

A number of these students, like Carol, had never made their own bed in Brazil and usually woke to find breakfast on the table, and washed and ironed clothes in their drawers ready for them to start the day; ‘masters’, as she put it. Historical analogies of masters and slaves are common among Brazilians and tell us a lot about the legacies of our colonial past, especially the sense of entitlement of the rich white Brazilian upper classes (See Brites, 2007).

In Brazil there is an unspoken acceptance of who should serve and be served, who
should be the master and who the servant. Nobody is embarrassed to have someone to help them. In England, in contrast, a number of employers I interviewed confirmed that they felt awkward having someone cleaning their houses for them. In Brazil the work of the maid is often supervised carefully because the standards of cleanliness are very high and there is always a lot of cheap labour to do it. It is all taken for granted, a thank you is rarely expected. I never heard of thank you notes or cards, and definitely no going out for a drink with the cleaner, or writing a letter apologising for the dismissal. Thus, coming from this environment in Brazil, the tourist cleaners see themselves more aligned with their bosses here than their maids in Brazil and they long for the same understanding from their employers. The employers, on the other hand, while they may occasionally grow closer to their cleaner or nanny and even invite them for a drink, they expect the personal boundaries to be the same afterwards, which is why experienced cleaners tend to avoid such encounters. This is a strategic decision rather than submission.

For Mariana it was a similar story of misunderstanding. She thought the lady she worked for understood that it was provisory for her and assumed they were quite close:

“Well I was working for this woman and we’d been talking about different things, and I assumed that she knew I wanted to work as a designer because of the many conversations we’d had. One day, after loads of interviews I finally got a job at an agency to temporarily work in a bank and I told her I was going to have to leave the job. She went crazy and started shouting at me and saying how could I be so irresponsible and ungrateful! I answered that I had told her that I was a designer. To my surprise she said, why didn’t you tell me you wanted to be a designer, I could have helped! And I thought... but I did say... well we never saw each other again and I am still doing the same kind of thing at the bank.”

For Renata, the situation became so bad that she decided to go back to Brazil:

“Well this couple I was working for, for almost a year. I was
contracted to be some kind of au pair, but I did everything. They were both in the film/tv production industry, so they worked unpredictable and very long hours some of the time, and other times they were home a lot; I had to adapt to that. I didn’t mind because I felt they were nice people and they paid me really well for an au pair. I got £150 a week plus board. For me that was a good deal, but I worked from morning till late non-stop, cleaning and caring for their two kids. I became friends with my boss, sometimes we would have some wine together and we had a laugh, I felt she liked me. When it was time for my holiday, I told her I was going for two weeks. There was some confusion about the dates and I had to return to her house two days later than the date I had told her...I know I was wrong, but she sacked me, just like that. When I arrived she was so upset and shouting so much that her husband had to step in. I went upstairs crying, and I think while I was packing her husband spoke to her... When I was leaving the house she came, cried as well, and apologised that she had overreacted. At that point I had no money and I was homeless but I didn’t want to be with her any longer. I went to sleep at a friend’s house for two weeks, then I changed the date of my ticket and I am going to Brazil in two days. I am hurt and tired, I need a rest.”

It is here that the skills and experience the professional cleaners bring from Brazil help them. They have a skeptical view of their friendship with their bosses, and they know they are there as a worker, and what is expected of them. That is not to say there are no conflicts, but when conflict arises they either suffer quietly, waiting for the best chance to leave, or respond to their bosses in a subtle way.

Izabela is a good example of this; she has developed ways to keep the relationship with her boss on track even when she’s hurt or upset or does not agree with an aspect of her boss’s life. While she admires and respects the woman, Emma, and loves the little girl she has some difficulties with the husband:
“I am so cross, Ana Paula, can you believe it? He gave me five pounds so I could take Ariel to the playgroup, which cost only two pounds. I gave him the change and he forgot about it. Later that day he asked me again for the money – aaargghh! I get mad at how tight he is! I said ‘I have already given it to you’! Then another day I made sure he saw I was buying croissants so Ariel and her playmate would have something to eat. Emma and her husband don’t eat in the house, and they don’t buy food for those little events, often I need to do it myself... but this time I made sure he saw me buying it!”

Izabela, like the other cleaners, is used to the situation in Brazil where the cleaners are more distant from their employers. They inhabit two different worlds that never, or very rarely, overlap outside the household. They describe this world as a world of underpayment, little recognition and subservience. The professional cleaners were unanimous in recounting at least some of their experiences in Brazil as subservience, especially in comparison to London. The word subservience here again is used with caution. As Brites (2007) explains, even in Brazil the relationship is not straightforward subservience, and there is constant negotiation. Brites notes that small thefts, a common practice among her domestic worker informants, can be a form of resistance. The employer deals with it in a non-confrontational way, meaning that the patroa looks for what went missing to show that she is aware an item has gone, and sometimes it reappears. This is a technique to keep the employee and avoid confrontation. Likewise, Marcilene also avoids direct confrontation. In London, Marcilene’s work strategy is to say yes to most requests and if it goes over her time she leaves a note that she needs an extra ‘x’ amount. She has created an effective code of conduct for herself, which is basically “no sitting on the beds and sofas, not accepting food or party invitations unless it is to work, and no telephone during work”. Back in 2014 she believed that through this technique she gained respect and peace of mind. Nowadays, having been with all her employers for over four years, this code has changed; she is godmother to two of her employers’ sons, she accepts some wedding and anniversary invitations, and she now sits and eats with some of them occasionally.
Chapter 6
Doing the Cleaning Work

In 2012, I accompanied Marcilene on some of her cleaning jobs. At that time she was just starting to develop her cleaning schedule, so most of her houses were still multi-occupancy houses for migrant workers and English language students. One morning we went to clean one such house. This was a Victorian terraced house, which had three bedrooms and two reception rooms converted into bedrooms, making a total of five bedrooms. The house was inhabited by eleven young Brazilians, most of whom were English language students. They’d had a party the night before and the administrator had warned us that it was a mess. When we arrived there, Marcilene took the toilets and corridors while I started with the kitchen. I opened a big black bin bag and started to throw away all the empty bottles, cans and cigarette butts. After that, I scraped the plates, emptied the glasses and made a huge pile in the sink, which was dirty and blocked. I wanted to run away from cleaning up other people’s mess, but I persevered and cleaned everything as quickly as I could. Marcilene was cleaning dutifully while talking to Claudio, a Brazilian “handyman” or right-hand man for the house administrator, Roberto. I was mentally cursing the students for being so messy and inconsiderate. I was disgusted. As explained in Chapter One, this house, as with other multi-occupancy houses, presented rare opportunities to value the work and to feel appreciated. In this case, there were two elements that made the work less difficult – the fact that we were cleaning in pairs and the presence of Claudio who kept telling jokes about the Brazilian middle-class students in the house. He usually mocked their middle-class background, calling them “inconsiderate, spoilt piglets and nannies’ sons and so on”. The notion that they had no mothers was the one that always generated laughter.

My experience, after two years of fieldwork with a group of Brazilian cleaners in north London, confounded most academic descriptions and popular perceptions, as well as my own feelings, that paid cleaning work was dirty and disgusting. Most of the terms used to describe cleaning and migrant cleaning work have a moral weight attached to them. Cleaning work is associated with migration, and migration is associated with
marginality, which in turn is associated with a lack of opportunity and inequality. As domestic cleaning work is described as dirty work, people doing that work become stigmatised as being dirty themselves. In this chapter I aim to show that despite the cleaners’ understanding of the stigma and marginalisation attached to their migrant domestic worker status they assert that their work is clean, honourable and professional work. In other words, although this work may be considered undesirable in some respects, it is nevertheless rendered honourable because of the way in which it is transformed as a material and moral project with spiritual implications. Based on more than eight years spent with the Brazilian cleaners in North London, I suggest that the work is clean because it becomes attached symbolically to positive moral and spiritual (religious) values as well as financial rewards, and the opportunity to get ahead with one’s life projects. It is considered an honourable job that leads potentially to stability and social mobility. As I have shown in Chapter Four, it paves the women’s pathway to progress as well as securing their stay in London where they have hopes for a better life. In Chapter Five I explained how domestic workers invest in their relationships with their work, the houses and the bosses, to the extent that they sometimes become part of a rewarding relationship of reciprocity. Furthermore, although the work is hard on the body and on the mind, it can also be rewarding as it offers the instant gratification of "cash in hand", and of a sensorial experience of a job well done, aspects I will develop in this chapter.

**The sensorial in domestic work**

Sensorial here does not mean just in relation to the senses of touch, smell, vision and other senses involved in the task of getting rid of the dirt, but also as a way of creating meaning, as Classen (1997) emphasizes:

"When we examine the meanings associated with various sensory faculties and sensations in different cultures we find a cornucopia of potent sensory symbolism. Sight may be linked to reason or to witchcraft, taste may be used as a metaphor for aesthetic discrimination or for sexual experience, an odour may signify sanctity or sin, political power or social exclusion. Together, these
sensory meanings and values form the sensory model espoused by a society, according to which the members of that society ‘make sense’ of the world, or translate sensory perceptions and concepts into a particular ‘worldview’. There will likely be challenges to this model from within the society, persons and groups who differ on certain sensory values, yet this model will provide the basic perceptual paradigm to be followed or resisted.” (Classen, 1997: 402 in Howes, 2006).

In spite of being linked to physical work the sensorial experiences of domestic workers are rarely explored within the study of domestic work. One of the few exceptions is Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010) who frames sensorial corporeality as part of a discussion on power relations. For her, paid cleaning work creates experiences of wellbeing and happiness for the employers and sensations of disgust and anger for the employee. In the field of home care workers, Buch (2013) argues that carers in Chicago are part of a relationship marked by embodied inequalities, where the employees incorporate the sensorial historical experiences of their elderly patients into their own bodies and reproduce them in everyday care practices. She gives the example of carers having to adapt to the very high set temperatures of their employers’ households even when the temperature is too hot for them. These practices of giving up or adapting one’s own sensorial needs for the benefit of the employers, Bush argues, reproduces and reinforces inequality as well as creating different kinds of subjectivity based on social hierarchy. In this study, based on the cleaners’ constant celebration of how well they cleaned and how that could be deemed satisfactory, I defend the view of cleaning work as care work which, while it does embody social hierarchy, cannot be reduced to it. In accord with the medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (2009), who writes about becoming the primary carer for his wife, I suggest that care-giving can make both parties, the giver and the receiver, more fully human.

Of course, Kleinman’s relationship with his wife was not marked by the same hierarchies present in a work relationship between a paid carer and patients. He writes: “It is all the little concrete things I described in caring for my wife that taken together and over time constitute my caregiving, that make me a caregiver” (2009: 293). What
struck me as similar to the accounts I heard during my own research was his affirmation that he became a caregiver through practising concrete, necessary and material acts of care.

Although the cleaners were not in a long-term loving relationship with their employers, as Kleinman was with his wife, through their commitment to their work and their daily practices of cleaning in London, they learned to care about their work and some of their clients, as I have shown in Chapter Five.

The domestic workers I researched are in London now, but their commitment, practices and caring attitudes, as their life stories suggest, started back in Brazil. Following the logic that Classen suggests at the beginning of this section, cleaning work embodies moral, cultural and personal ideals of what it means, in the case of the Brazilian cleaners in London, to be hard working, to make the right choices and to help others. Here I want to refer back to Chapter Three (54-81), where I showed how both middle class and poor Brazilians use the idea of hard work and honesty to talk about themselves and their trajectory. Carol, for instance, understands her family wealth as coming from hard work, and uses her family example to explain why she tries to do everything well and never stops working. When Glória wanted to illustrate how poor she was, she used the biblical example of Job. This is an apt example, as Job endured extreme poverty and misfortune but continued to work and serve God, and for that he was rewarded. By working hard they are honouring their own understanding of family values. At the same time some are doing it with the belief that God is seeing their efforts and will reward them, and therefore by cleaning they are becoming ‘clean’ themselves.

In Brazil, there is a popular saying, “we are poor but we are clean”, the cleaners would often say it on their regional accent joking “nós é pobre mas nós é limpinho”. To come from a clean house and wearing clean clothes meant that they come from a respectable/trustworthy family. This affirmation of self-respect is closely related to the idea of respectability put forward by Skeggs (1997) who noted that respectability, and “making it” through work, was “always an issue” when interviewing white working-class women in north-west England. In another article Skeggs (2012) discusses the affective and cultural aspects of class relations, returning to this idea of working-class respectability.
She argues that, to be respectable, the working class needs to adopt a self-narrative of redemption and dignity through work. This, Skeggs observes, is an instrumental self-narrative which helps the working class to be included in the government welfare programs. In Brazil, to be clean is to be respectable and therefore further from delinquency (Maciel and Grillo, 2009). As, historically, Brazil had no (or very little) welfare system in place, this separation from criminality, prostitution or homelessness tends to be highly dependent on insecure, unskilled, low paid and stigmatised service work. Furthermore, many families who have been in this marginalised position for generations teach young women from an early age to be ‘clean’ and be clean, honest and hard work as to guarantee that they will always have a job. To better understand how “dirty” is “made clean” by the Brazilian cleaners we need to unpack the concept of dirt itself.

In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (2002) questions the existence of dirt outside a classificatory system, a cultural symbolic meaning of dirt. She writes, “there is no such thing as absolute dirt, it exists in the eye of the beholder” (2002: 2). Here it is the culturally learned symbolic system of classification of the person that will determine if something is dirt or not for her/him.

Other scholars have criticised this idea. The work of Dant and Bowles (2003) on the meaning of dirt for car repair technicians is a case in point. They argue that the workers deal with dirt in a pragmatic way. For them “dealing with dirt is a practical matter which is not prescribed by ritual or cultural significance” (2003: 1). They observe that the reason the technicians maintained a clean garage was because of the risks to their health and to avoid accidents. While they point to some individual variations, depending on the attitude of the garage manager, they completely ignore what might motivate the technician to do a good job, the meaning they attach to their work.

In a more recent ethnographic study of rubbish collectors, Hughes et al. (2017) argue that the symbolic and material aspects of dirt are intertwined. In other words, the material condition of dealing with dirt, that is, disgust at its physical aspects, works together with the symbolic notion of what constitutes dirt, the different meanings others and the cleaners attach to the work. Despite these two aspects being intertwined
Hughes et al. (2017) argue that the materiality of dirt undermines the collectors’ attempts at enhancing their self-esteem. For them there is the external social stigmatisation of the work, that is, the way in which people who do paid cleaning work are perceived negatively. Another point which undermines self-esteem, they suggest, is how the physical body experiences the work: "body exhaustion and the enduring repulsion felt towards some forms of waste, can destabilize and disrupt attempts to positively reframe its significance" (Hughes et al., 2017: 31). Here, again, the materiality of dealing with dirt, in the form of exhaustion and repulsion, undermines people's attempts to enhancing their self-esteem.

There are so many layers and so many different experiences within cleaning work that I do not believe it is possible to fix the analysis on either the material or the symbolic aspects of dirt in domestic work. The understanding of dirt I got from my fieldwork is closely related to the notion of Hughes et al. (2017) that we cannot ignore the materiality of dirt and that stigma is inescapable. Nevertheless, I return to Douglas's argument about the “eye of the beholder” (dirt is part of a cultural value system) which is extremely important if we want to honour the cleaners’ fight for acknowledgement and dignity.

Positionality is also important, as it is one thing to look at an experience from within and another from the outside. To illustrate my point I discuss a sequence from the documentary I Bought a Rainforest20. In the film, the main protagonist, James, is a middle-class, well-known wildlife photographer who bought 100 acres of the Amazon. As he goes to visit his newly acquired land he encounters a set of problems, one of which is illegal mining. As he gets to know the miners, he starts working with them in extremely dirty and dangerous conditions. The water they are immersed in is brown and poisoned with mercury, and yet he perseveres until he finds a tiny amount of gold. At the end he reflects on the fact that he knows what goes on there, that it is dangerous, dirty and illegal, but when he was immersed in it with the miners, all he wanted was to get the job done. Likewise, when the domestic workers build their schedules, find trusting and appreciative clients, and are able to plan for their lives through their work, they are immersed in it and little energy is put into enhancing their self-esteem.

20 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0465vqh
Nevertheless, encounters with some upper-class Brazilians, situations of humiliations, not yet having a schedule and therefore security, that is what was considered dirty, or self-esteem crushing.

In addition to the positionality of both the observer and the observed, there are symbolic systems (Douglas 2003). As I mention in the Introduction, family life is always at the forefront of their minds, and it was largely drawn upon when both the middle-class and working-class Brazilians spoke about the way they cleaned and what cleaning/caring meant for them. One clear example of the significance of family traditions is when, in the film, Marcilene talks about how important a clean well-made bed is. She then demonstrates her pride in making a perfect bed, with the connection to the pride her mother used to take in it. Although Marcilene’s mother hadn't specifically shown her how to make a bed, Marcilene explained how, because it was important for her mother, it became important to her.

My observation from this research is that while cleaning work is hard on the body, it is not considered dirty. It is connected to different symbolic meanings, as Douglas suggests, but also material rewards. Through cleaning work they are constructing their pathway to progress. While choosing hard work, they are, at the same time, building relationships. Furthermore, it became clear that what undermined attempts to get a positive self-image were humiliating encounters. It would be a mistake, however, to think that dirt wasn’t a big part of cleaning work. The cleaners I worked with sometimes complained about a specific house because it was dirty, or difficult to clean, but it was the house or the client that was dirty, in the worst cases, and not the work itself. In fact, the cleaners told me that there is some cleaning work that is easy, such as when the employer is organised and likes keeping the house clean and tidy. On the other hand, for my surprise, some found it more rewarding to take a dirty house and leave it “sparkly clean”. Different cleaners dealt with the physical dirt in different ways, but most of the cleaners were not squeamish or disgusted by any cleaning task. Some employers would make the work harder – and therefore ‘dirty’ – by trying to humiliate their domestic workers. But any attempt at humiliation, as I will show later in this chapter, was a sure way to lose a cleaner no matter how good the wage was, or how much the cleaner needed the job.
The Work is Clean: "Nothing will continue dirty to be after I have cleaned it"

Once, Marcilene received a call from one of her clients, Marie, saying that a friend was desperately in need of a cleaner for a last-minute job. This was an 80-year-old widower from Cyprus who was about to receive visitors from his home town. As Marcilene did not speak English, she asked if I could come along to translate. I agreed. The man lived in a big house in Haringey. As soon as we entered it, I wanted to leave immediately. I waited to see her reaction. The man was a hoarder. There were piles of everything imaginable. There were books, notebooks, clothes, old tapes, bottles and papers, lots of papers. Everything was pushed close to the wall and there was a narrow passage within the corridor to give access to the different rooms in the house. Only the kitchen window was open and that added to the darkness and dampness of the house. The carpet, a brown and yellow flowery pattern, was old and dusty. The kitchen was narrow and had dark green tiles on the wall above the work surfaces and stove, which were covered in grease. The prospective client shared his house with one of his grandsons whose bedroom was very similar to the rest of the house: very dusty, messy and smelly.

When I noticed that Marcilene was not giving up on the house, I immediately set the expectations by telling the man that it was going to take a long time to properly clean his house, maybe the whole day. I was hoping he would cancel the job, but instead he told me he only wanted to pay £20.00. I replied that, in that case, she could only do 2 hours, and that he should choose which part of the house he wanted cleaned. He then said the toilet, the kitchen and his grandson’s bedroom. I explained that to Marcilene and left. Walking towards the man’s front door I felt disgusted, and I thought that I should have advised her not to clean that house. However, as I was leaving the house she already had the products in her hands and was ready to start working. After just over two hours she arrived back at my house. She kept repeating “Oh my God, what a dirty house!” followed by “He did not have the hot water on”. I told her that I had wanted to tell her not to do it, but as she seemed to be ready to do it, I stayed quiet. She told me:

“... if he’d had hot water it would have been easier, but the man is
ok, he kept talking to me, telling me where he was from, that he was a widow. He then tried to speak in Italian with me, he would not stop talking”.

I asked her if she would take that house, and to my surprise she said, “Yes of course”. I asked her if she was disgusted, and she explained:

“You know Ana Paula, once you start cleaning it gets better. Once it is your house you just need to give it good maintenance”.

Later that day I received a text message from Marie, the physiotherapist, telling me that the Cypriot was impressed and grateful for the cleaning, but he would not be contracting her, as he believed he was doing it well himself. Both Marie and Marcilene thought that the Cypriot would benefit from regular cleaning, which did not align with the man's own views as he did not contract her. Instead of running away from such a messy contract Marcilene felt that if she took on the house she would own it and transform it by cleaning it. Marcilene was not the only one who felt good about the transformation of dirt into cleanliness. Most of the domestic workers reported that one of the best parts of their job was leaving a clean house behind. Valéria told me:

“What I like about my work is to get a house which is really dirty and leave it spotless; it is even better when the owner of this house appreciates it”

As I showed in the literature review, domestic work is not associated with work satisfaction and ownership; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Anderson (2000), highlighting the "role of female employers in exploiting and oppressing 'their' domestic workers", argues that when an employer contracts a domestic worker, she is also attempting to buy the worker's personhood. While it is true that some employers do try, and some succeed, in exploiting and humiliating their cleaners and domestic workers, what the above examples show, and other examples in Chapter Five, is that there is a sense of ownership on behalf of the domestic worker. In the previous chapter I showed how the employees use expressions such as “my Jewish”, “my Old Lady” or “my
children” (in the case of nannies) to establish that they care about those employers. In this example, however, it is to do with ownership of the house, almost as if they will own it in order to transform it, even if they do not yet care about the owner. I suggest that this is partially related to the sensorial satisfaction of turning something dirty into something clean. Although I could not find any literature on this sensorial satisfaction of cleaning, my informants’ experiences confirm that this does exist and there are a considerable amount of images and Buzzfeed publications on the satisfaction that is supposed to arise from taking something dirty and making it clean\(^\text{21}\). Marcilene talks about this idea in the film, in a scene where she is cleaning a toilet and saying that she likes it when she finishes and everything is clean, represented in the film by an image of a clean shiny toilet, after she has finished it. There is a sensorial aspect of cleaning which has been overlooked by the literature, which tends rather to focus on how cleaners and people doing manual stigmatised work find strategies to fight this stigma.

“**I am Not Dirty, I Clean**”

The question of how people doing work that is considered to be stigmatised find meaning and job satisfaction has been addressed in different ways. Nash (1993) while researching miners in Bolivia writes, “the impressive thing to me is that they have transformed their hard and often bitter experience into a meaningful and rewarding life” (p.14). She found an answer in elements of the miners’ lives including the fact that the mine itself had elements of danger and mystery that the workers found enhanced their self-image. In addition, they enjoyed the friendship and solidarity in the work. In his classic book *Men and Their Work*, Hughes (1958) looked at people's understanding of their place within the division of labour. He found that men are judged and judge themselves mainly through their occupation. His book came at a time when occupations were becoming professionalised. Nursing, for example, was being consolidated from an occupation to a profession. As the status of an occupation is raised, the people doing it relegate its least desirable tasks to aids and maids. At this time, one of the tasks they stopped doing was dealing with soiled bedsheets. Hughes coined the term “dirty worker” to describe people whose work involves tasks which are perceived as

---

disgusting and degrading – not professional. In this way, Hughes continues, society delegates its “dirty work” to certain groups, but then stigmatises these same groups for doing this work, as if they chose to become “dirty” themselves. As Hughes’ studies were based on the premise that people’s identity comes from their occupation, the question for him was how people doing dirty work found dignity. He, like Nash with the miners, wanted to explain how people doing “dirty work” found ways to assert their personal dignity and find job satisfaction.

Drawing on Hughes’ research, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), after looking at previous qualitative research, wrote: “Dirty workers do not tend to suffer from low occupational self-esteem, creating a puzzle” (1999:11). In order to solve that puzzle they looked first at the different ways in which stigma was expressed. For example, it could be communicated directly through put-downs, reduced deference and respect, or the expression of stigmatising questions, such as “How could you do it?”

Gorban and Tizziani (2014), looking at expressions used to devaluate and diminish domestic workers in Argentina, found that words such as “maid” and “the girl who helps” were used to describe the paid domestic worker, which helped to keep the worker “in their place”. By doing that, the authors argue, they are denying a professional status and keeping the social hierarchy in place. In Argentina, as well as in Brazil (Brites, 2007), the very role of the domestic worker presupposes that they will act deferentially towards their employers and will “know their place” both in the household and in the relationship with the employer, as I note in Chapter Three. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) also point out more discreet ways of projecting stigma onto the worker, such as through avoidance and discrimination. Here they cite Sudnow’s (1967) description of how hospital employees viewed the morgue attendant as symbolising death and so tended to avoid him. Thus, workers not having an occupational status to protect themselves must find ways to deal with open and covert stigmatisation and put-downs.

How can people without occupational status see themselves as good people doing good work? Hughes (1958) found that the answer lay in the kind of relationships formed with co-workers and that self-definition, positive or negative, was partly grounded in the
positive or negative perceptions of others. Therefore, people doing “dirty work” would tend to socialise with people in the same line of work or with people who were sympathetic to their lifestyle and occupation. In London these were situations that the domestic workers had to confront at times, either with a particular employer, other Brazilians, such as in the student’s house in Chapter Four, or when interacting with the sex workers, also described in Chapter Four. Despite experiencing some discrimination in London, the Brazilians I worked and lived with insisted that it was in Brazil and in being in contact with Brazilians in London that they felt the need “to protect” themselves.

This does not mean that they thought discrimination and stigmatisation of work considered as low-skilled was absent in London. My research participants, in accordance with other qualitative research on domestic workers (Rollins, 1985; Dill, 1988), were very much aware of the stigma attached to their occupation. They also knew that their job was usually described as dirty work. What is interesting in the case of Brazilians in London is that, perhaps because they had been through so much direct discrimination in Brazil, the professional cleaners particularly, but also some of the tourist cleaners, believed that there was no, or very little, discrimination in the UK. They said they did not feel the need to explain what they did to any non-Brazilians; they told me that they generally felt respected in their search for progression.

The experience of the tourist cleaner

I asked Renata how she felt when she had to clean houses to be able to continue in London. She told me with a smile: “I had a plan!” She told me how her two years’ experience of cleaning for a liberal Jewish family in northwest London enabled her to achieve her plan. And that the best part of her day was when she was cleaning this house in the morning:

“I would put my music on and I would dream away, while I was cleaning... I loved this lady’s house and I thought she was a very pretty 60-year-old rich lady. When I was in her house I knew I was also building my future, so I tried to enjoy it! I would dream
and pray that all my family would be happy, because I was going to help them as much as I could. Now, twelve years later, I am a receptionist in a company in the city, I have a decent salary and a good life..."

At different times and in different ways, I asked the domestic workers what their feelings were about their work. I also paid close attention to how they spoke informally about the work they did, and I can confidently say that they did not feel the work to be a stain on their self-esteem and dignity. Contrary to Gutierrez-Rodriguez’ (2010) study on middle-class Latin American workers in Europe, which states that none of her informants liked being a domestic worker, none of my informants found cleaning work disgusting or dirty, whether they were tourist or professional cleaners. Most tourist cleaners would associate their work with aspirations of bridging occupations, as Luana, a tourist from Minas Gerais put it: "This is the door that opened for me here and I took it". Complementary to this, there are associations made with family values of hard work, as shown in Chapter Three, such as, "... in my family we do everything well, honest work is good work". The cleaners saw their work as provisory, a chance not just to learn English, but to be in England and save money to enjoy it. As found by Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2010), Brazilian tourist cleaners tend to have university degrees or professional qualifications, which made it obvious that they would rather work in their professions in London. As that possibility was not available to them, "... they were cleaning the best way they could, giving their best", as Carol puts it.

Not all Brazilian middle-class students would consider working as cleaners. While doing the THEMIS survey I met two English language students, Talita and Mariana, who were sharing a room in a multi-occupancy house. They were cousins of similar age, and middle class, around twenty years old, and both were going to start at medical school in six months' time in Brazil. I told Mariana that I was also researching Brazilian cleaners and domestic workers in London and she went to pick up a business card somebody had given her on the street. Then Talita start telling me a story. She said that they were in a pub in Chelsea, one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in London, and a middle-aged English woman approached them asking if they were Brazilians and if they were looking for work. She then said that she had a cleaning agency, which only dealt with wealthy
customers from the area, and that she enjoyed working with Brazilians. While Mariana was excited, saying she was going to call and try to get work, Talita was annoyed and offended at being confused with a domestic worker. She said, “now Brazilians are the cleaners of the world! Do I look like a domestic worker?” But Mariana responded, “oh lighten up, so many people do it when they travel, I could make money while I am travelling, I do not see why not!”

This dialogue between the two cousins reflects the different views I encountered during my fieldwork. While some of the middle-class students would not consider working as cleaners, others thought the job would be an opportunity to make some money. For the ones who decided to take up cleaning work, this was associated with being in London and it was framed as an opportunity to grow as a person – a kind of rite of passage.

Other Brazilians from all kinds of backgrounds come to London and consider cleaning as part of the experience of “doing London”. In 2012, as part of the London Festival of Photography, the Artist Andre Penteado’s project “Brazilian Maids” presented photographic and video work exploring this “maid problem”. This exhibition is important for two reasons: first, the artist reflects on how the realities of domestic work in Brazil are normalised; in an interview Penteado explained that he became interested in the life of Brazilian maids after living and working in London and comparing the differences in treatment. Second, the video presented was an eye-opener to the way that, for some middle-class Brazilians, to have worked in manual jobs in London can be worn as some kind of badge of honour. In this video, Penteado shows a programme of Raul Gil in which they were presenting a competition of “The Best Maid”, something like a Miss World competition of cleaners. One of the judges, a blonde model, introduces herself to the camera, claiming that she can be a judge because she used to be a cleaner in London. This idea that cleaning in London is something that also middle-class Brazilians do, helps the professional cleaner sense social improvement.

On the other hand, tourist cleaners find different metaphors to make sense of their downward social mobility. I asked Marcelo, a graduate of medicine in his mid-thirties, how he felt about working as a cleaner in London, he explained that he was on his “Karate Kid” path. He compared the cleaning work that he was doing to where Mr.
Miyagi was teaching Daniel Son in the film Karate Kid. In the film Mr. Miyagi teaches Daniel martial arts but for the boy to succeed he first has to go through a series of cleaning exercises, such as polishing tile by tile, so that his pride and patience are put to test and he learns the humility necessary for personal strength and growth. Throughout my fieldwork and beyond, I heard it said that London has taught Brazilian middle-class people who are working as cleaners, and in other service-related jobs, how to be humble.

**The experiences of the professional cleaner**

In contrast, when the professional cleaners explained their feelings towards their job, they emphasised a quality, or an aspect of the work they liked, and often used words such as, "I loved it" or "I like it". Although the professional cleaners did not have university degrees as the majority of the tourist cleaners did, they were interested in other activities. They had different talents that they hoped could help generate extra income in the future. They wanted to become small entrepreneurs (in Portuguese, *micro empresario*). Valéria, for example, was a masseuse, Izabela could decorate beautiful cakes, Silvia made decorative fruit plates, Solange made decorative sweets, which she sculpted in the form of different fruits, and Gabriela worked as a manicurist. Marcilene and Marta believed that they could be successful as restauranteurs, or private chefs. Some cleaners had other jobs on the side, which allowed them to express their creative side and to dream of one day having a small profitable business.

Despite expressing a desire to leave cleaning work at some point, the professionals were never *entirely* negative about their jobs and definitely did not refer to them as disgusting. Sometimes I pressed the point and asked the women if they saw their work as dirty work, as I did when Marcilene came back from the Cypriot’s house and we met with Marta who said:

“No because it is done with care (com carinho). I think dirty work is prostitution. There are a lot of prostitutes I have worked for who are embarrassed of the work they do. They usually try to hide it and say: “Are you going to keep cleaning toilets?” When
they say this I think: “What about you? Cleaning is not disgusting; disgusting is to be with these men!”

Marta explained further:

“In the Brazilian community I don’t know anyone who doesn’t like the work, I think we do it better because we care! I cleaned a federal building for many years when I was in Brazil, then the wife of one of the big lawyers there invited me to work on her house; she cried when I left... then, when I needed a favour for my ex-husband I called her and she sorted it all out for me, so I didn’t have to go through the government bureaucracy. So I know I did a good job!”

Marta’s quote shows how proud she is that she is persevering as a cleaner and has not ventured into prostitution. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the women, such as Marta, who had previously cleaned brothels or casa de garotas developed, through proximity, a paradoxical view of the occupation. On the one hand, they were curious about the idea of having more money faster, on the other hand they had feelings of disgust attached to what they saw as dirty, immoral and dangerous work. Marta felt she was making a moral, cleaner and safer choice, despite the lower pay in comparison with prostitution. As I will show in Chapter Seven, the cleaners articulated lessons from their parents’ lives and teachings when justifying their choices. Marta, for example, tells me that she learned from her father that honest work pays. She believes that being honest and working hard can generate a relationship that is sometimes close to friendship, that in many cases translates into useful favours, gifts and even extra cash.

Izabela, always more sceptical and practical about her work, adds:

“What am I going to do Ana Paula? Just now I am applying for my European spouse visa, after more than ten years living here, can you imagine? What would I do? Cleaning is what I know, it is what I have always done, let’s see how it is going to change when
I get my visa... but you see, I bought my house from doing cleaning. Is it good? No, but it is my profession and I like the bosses I have now.”

The above quotes are just some examples of the many ways the cleaners explained their choices. Marta claims that, among her group of close friends, cleaning is done for love. In addition, she brings in her Brazilian socio-economic background in the form of her father who taught her that "to be poor is not a problem, to be dishonest is". Izabela justified her dedication to her work as occupational knowledge as well as a lack of options associated with her having no papers at the time. Five years have passed since the above interview. Since then Izabela has regulated her situation through her Italian/Brazilian husband, and through working for the same family. The couple are now investing in her husband’s university degree. Marta has left London and followed her husband who found a better-paid job in a British company based in Spain.

Doing the same thing from a different class position

Here I go back to the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) to think through how people come to think of themselves as “good people doing good work” when they are in London doing cleaning work. One of the suggestions they put forward was that attributions of dirtiness are usually not attached to a person but rather to an occupation. Therefore, the label is not on the individual, but for the whole group of people doing that job. While the stigma attached to "dirty work" undermines the status of certain occupations, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) noted, it creates strong occupational cultures. This analysis helps to explain the tendency of Brazilian professional cleaners in north London to create friendship groups among themselves, where they create a self-identity of good cleaners or "elite cleaners", but it is more complicated than that.

In the case of Brazilians, this is particularly interesting, because the group comprises by people from different class backgrounds, which enhances the self-esteem of the professional cleaners and diminishes that of the tourist cleaners. It creates different movements within the tourist cleaner group; for some, there are attempts to separate themselves from the professional cleaners, they make friends and draw their self-
identity from the church of the English language classes or other tourist cleaners, but avoid the poorer Brazilians, as also shown by Martins Junior (2016). For others, such as Marcelo who was quoted above and Carol, mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a sense of learning to be humble, and an acknowledgement of the similarities between the two groups with the precarious condition of domestic workers’ lives especially when they compare Brazil and London. In those instances, friendship can occur; one example is the friendship between Eliana and Maricilene. We get a glimpse of it in the film scene where Eliana is talking in the kitchen. Here Eliana recounts her relationship with her empregada as she calls her, from the perspective of “the good and friendly employer” and Maricilene is listening.

The above examples are not just related to the Brazilians in London. As outlined in Chapter Two, with previous research on domestic work, I have highlighted some of the ways in which domestic workers in different parts of the world fight stigmatisation and assert their dignity. Domestic worker migrant women resist stigma by focusing on their family and friends (Glenn, 1992), and by highlighting their responsibilities as mothers (Romero, 2002; Dill, 1988), but still find it hard to convey their choices to people outside their inner circle. For that reason, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) note, for people doing low-prestige jobs, relating to those outside their circle can be a problem. They argue that, in these instances, individuals begin to view the world in terms of “us versus them” creating a psychological boundary, which increases the sense of separation from others (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999:18).

Once the group is formed its members manage to maintain a sense of self-worth by developing certain techniques. First, they “condemn the condemners”. In other words, they dismiss the opinions of people who try to diminish them. This follows Rollins’ (1985) research, which found that domestic workers often pass judgement on their bosses, believing that some of their wealthy employers are lonely and unfulfilled. In my own research I also found such examples. Maricilene told me about the time she was cleaning the house of a sex worker who asked her how she could do such dirty work. She later told me:

“Hahaha she is upset about the work she does and tries to put it
on me, but I don’t take it because I cleaned the brothel I know how dirty and dangerous it is”

Another of my informants, Carol, told me how she could not believe how boring the life of her employer was. She said:

“Ana, they are married and they don’t even have sex, they don’t give nice parties for their children! All that money for nothing, they are like zombies”

A second technique is to try to get closer to people who they feel support or at least understand them. Lastly, they make downward comparisons (they compare themselves with situations they see as worse than theirs), the most common of these being the comparison with sex workers, as noted above.

But it is also common for the cleaners to compare themselves with people who live on welfare benefits. They refer to it as “vive do benefice”. One surprise element of my fieldwork was the realisation of how meritocracy-driven the majority of my informants were. For them, a Brazilian person who, through European citizenship, lives totally on benefits does not come across as clever, but as someone who has “stopped fighting” or improving in life and will pay a big price in the future, when they eventually go back to Brazil. While housing and child benefits are the dream of most Brazilian mothers in my group, to live completely on benefits is considered to be cheating, and the sign of a lack of ambition. Another common comparison is with people who are involved in various types of dishonest activity, such as borrowing money from the bank with fake documents, stealing, or trafficking drugs. In their eyes, the domestic workers have made the difficult, but morally rewarding, choice of working hard.

In short, the main point of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) is that people in low-prestige jobs, such as domestic workers, create occupational ideologies, which are based on reframing, recalibrating and refocusing their train of thought so as to “transform the meaning of the stigmatized work by simultaneously negating and devaluing negative attributions and creating or revaluing positive ones” (1999:20). The problem for the
domestic workers, however, is to convince outsiders of that ideology. If the ideology has a greater impact on the insiders than on the outsiders, the stigma continues but the insiders survive this through mutual recognition of the value of their work among themselves. And through relationships they build with their long-term employers.

In more recent work, Stacey (2005), building on the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), adds that workers (in her case home care workers) are proud “of their willingness and ability to perform dirty and mundane tasks that others avoid, knowing that their efforts improve the lives of their clients”. Her second argument is that for those workers who were in an alienating service job before landing care work, the work can actually “become an important point of connection to their labor, rather than a source of alienation” (2005: 838). This is an interesting idea, which supports my argument that the majority of my group’s views were informed by comparison and in contrast with their situation in Brazil. In London they feel that the moral values that they attach to their work are recognised, valued and sometimes reciprocated.

The moral economy of cleaning

The ethnographic data presented in this thesis leads me to suggest that two further aspects of the positive valuation given by workers to work that others consider to be demeaning, or “dirty”, have been overlooked. One is family value; the other, and the theme of this section, is the role of religion in shaping people’s perception of their work as honest, honourable and therefore clean. This perception in turn shapes how they experience their work. Most of the domestic workers, independent of class or socio-economic background, had some kind of spiritual belief. In my group of study there were people from different religious backgrounds – practising or non-practising Catholics, evangelical Protestants (or Pentecostal), Spiritists22 and Umbandists.23 I also encountered people who classed themselves as spiritual, meaning that they believed in God or in a higher being, even Nature, but are not affiliated with any particular religion.

22 Spiritism is a spiritualistic philosophy and religion which was initiated in the 19th century by the French educator Allan Kardec; it looks at human moral improvement through teachings which are transmitted via spirits who communicate with living people through a medium (a person with special faculties).

23 Umbanda is an Afro-Brazilian religion which mixes African traditions with Catholicism, Spiritism and Indigenous American beliefs.
No one in my group self-identified as atheist. Most of the professional cleaners articulated their choice of cleaning as the right choice in the eyes of God, meaning that they could rest assured that God would bring good things to them, or protect their children back in Brazil or here, because they were working hard, doing good work, or God’s work, and taking care of people’s houses and children.

But it was not just the poor Brazilians who used religious narrative to justify their choices, and their religious beliefs and practices to alleviate the difficulties of life as a migrant domestic worker in London. Raquel, for instance, was a middle-class woman in her early fifties from the capital Sao Paulo. She left Brazil after her marriage broke down, and she became emotionally unstable after that. She ended up losing her job as an account manager in a bank. In London, she was trying to learn English and at the same time working as a cleaner in different private houses as well as some immigrant multi-occupancy houses in north-west London. I accompanied her to different Evangelical church services, as well as church events. Raquel believed that God had sent her to London and she was here doing the work of God, as she put it:

“Amada (or loved), God told me to come here and I am helping these people, I think it is a challenge, God sent me to do this. You see here, in the house where I live, for example, there are ten Italian kids in their early twenties. They make it dirty and I clean for them, it is my compromise to God, to give an example, I don’t get paid for all the hours I clean here.”

On different occasions Raquel told me that she felt herself to be like a missionary; she was here to attend church and to be a good example, not to make money. Her firm belief that she was part of a higher purpose also helped her to cope with her downward mobility and the solitude she felt at being separated from her husband and her three children who had stayed with their father.

Religious beliefs help the women when the rationality of their employment choice is questioned and they are confronted with the material and emotional challenges of cleaning. Religious narratives are most common among the poorer Brazilians, but also,
on some occasions, are found among the middle-class ones. People who did not do any
cleaning when they were in Brazil, such as Raquel, use religious reasoning to help them
through difficult times, such as downward mobility and separation.

A common metaphor used is the desert from Bible stories. Raquel, for example, drew on
the biblical story of the Israelites wandering for 40 years in the desert before they could
find the Promised Land. Another biblical story related to the desert is the one that tells
of the 40 days Jesus wandered in the desert, and was tested by God, but did not give up,
fulfilling his destiny, which led Raquel to explain, “Ana, my love, here is the desert, God is
testing us”. While Raquel talks about cleaning as “a test”, others such as Glória, Valéria,
Marcilene and other professional cleaners, see their cleaning experience in London, and
especially being in London, as an act of God. Here, God is not testing them but helping
them get ahead in life.

My observations about religiosity among Brazilians concur with the work of Olivia
Sheringham (2011). Based on her ethnography of Brazilians’ transnational religious
lives in London and back in Brazil, she argues that religion is crucial to the lives of many
Brazilian immigrants and it influences all phases of the migration process. She has
researched mainly Brazilian economic migrants from working class and lower middle
class backgrounds and concludes that even for those not practising their religion at a
church, their acts and beliefs are led by religious faith, which she calls faith-motivated

Cleaning work is hard work

The act of cleaning makes the women feel moral, independently of their class
background. Wealthy people, even if they are rich, but have dirty habits or are cruel in
the treatment of their employees, can be immoral. There is a consensus among my
research participants that what makes the work hard is not so much the physicality of
it, although there is an aspect of that as well, but people’s attempts to humiliate them. In
this section I show that, in spite of their positive outlook and genuine care for their
work and their relationships, the professional cleaners recognised that cleaning work is
hard work.
Gabriela’s case is illustrative. She brought her two teenage children from Brazil, but now having two extra people to feed, shelter and clothe, and with all the debt she had incurred by bringing them here she was desperate. She told me that there were days when she was scared she would not have anything to eat. She started working almost round the clock for Hasidic Jewish families at the time of the Passover. After the holiday finished some of the Jewish women asked if she wanted to continue. She happily said yes. She managed to negotiate her salary at £8 per hour, a salary considered high for the Hasidic community. She told me that one day she was cleaning the bath of one of her employers, when this happened:

"Ana Paula, I was cleaning with my heart and mind, being really careful to make it shine. When I had just finished, the woman came to the toilet with her baby. She threw the dirty poo diaper into the bath and asked me to clean it up. The bin was next to her... I thought to myself, God do I need that? And after a few seconds I thought, of course I do need it at the moment, why not? And I cleaned it. The next day I found another cleaner for her and never went back."

In this case, for Gabriela it was not the hard work that made her question "why she was there", but rather the humiliation, which was harder on the mind than on the body, and she would not take it. Although cleaning work is strenuous on the body, it is the combination of hard work with bad treatment that, in the end, challenges their determination.

One of the expressions that encapsulate that sense of tiredness is "arrebentada", or “snapping”. This expression is hard to translate, but it is like having a strong string holding a necklace together and, at times, because of pressure, it snaps. In fact, while I was living with Izabela and Marta in north London, this was one of the most remarkable expressions. At seven o’clock all the women would start arriving home from work. Often both Izabela and Marta would come home, give me a look, and say ‘Nossa estou arrebentada’ (I snapped or broke today). They would say that and stand at the door
waiting their turn to only bathroom in the house, they would have a shower and come back down to start cooking their dinner. I thought of that practice as a process of reconstruction, as they could relax and talk about their day and vent the reasons why they felt at snapping point.

Marta was more often like that. She would say, “I've cleaned sixteen flats today Ana Paula, can you imagine? My legs are going to explode!” One day, Marta showed me footage on her smartphone, to show how dirty a particular flat was. She did this as she thought I wouldn’t believe her, but having seen such things for myself, I believed it and understood why she was so tired. I could see that the flat was really dirty and Marta was upset about this, and about the fact that her supervisor had made her clean it mostly on her own. What I found interesting, however, was that Marta did not complain about the dirt – she was used to that – but she knew that they needed to work in pairs as she worked with three other Brazilians. Marta believed that Karine, her supervisor, was punishing her for not going out with her when she wanted. In Marta’s opinion, she always had to say yes to Karine otherwise Karine would distribute the work unfairly: “If it wasn’t for Karine everybody would be much better at work”. Marta case took two years to leave that job, despite the unfair treatment she received. As she responsible for her daughter the regular and registered payment were invaluable to her. She also hanged on to the fact that had the other colleagues to laugh and spend time with.

In Chapter Four I explained the difficulties of work in a “cleaning car” and how it also hinged on the quality of the supervisor. This is a person who is usually another Brazilian who has gained the trust of the house owner. I return to it here to explain how people who very much needed to work, such as the newly arrived Glória, also walked away from it when they could not bear the humiliation. She told me that the ‘patroa’ had given her three envelopes as a Christmas bonus and that the supervisor had taken all of them. When Glória challenged her about the contents of the envelopes, the cleaning rota owner said, “the houses are mine, so everything they give me belongs to me, and nothing is yours”. Later, she found out that the ‘patroa’ had put £100 in each envelope. After learning that, Glória was really upset:

“I will turn off my phone and stop working, I am not going on
Monday, I will turn off my phone. When I turned my phone back on it was 9am and she called me straight away, as if she had been calling me non-stop since 5am. Our conversation went like this:

She said to me on the phone: ‘you could have told me that you were not coming’, Then I said: ‘why would I let you know? I am not obliged to give you any notice’. She then said: ‘that is why I need to hold a deposit’.

Lastly I told her: ‘you were a fool not to hold a deposit; if you had, you would have kept it as spare change because I am sure you are in need! If you like money that much why don’t you do your houses alone? Isn’t everything yours? I will never work for you again, don’t even look at me in the street, forget my number!’

Glória told me proudly that she only stayed one day without a job, and then started to work for the Jewish women. She still works for the same group of Orthodox Jewish women in Stamford Hill, and has become close and fond of them, even when almost everybody else seems to avoid them altogether.

Thus, even though there were some situations of profound humiliation, my observation was that the cleaners did not stay with the bosses who tried to humiliate them. Even the cleaners who needed the work the most would not stay with a house where they felt they were not treated right. When there are challenging moments, where their dignity is put to the test, they rely on their faith, their family values of hard work, and their certainty that they are making the honorable choice. In addition, for some of them, there is also the pride of having the houses that they have bought in Brazil, and of having helped family members with the money earned through cleaning. For other women, there is a sense of pride in having gained consumer power as “here in England they can buy clothes, go to expensive parties, drink Prosecco, eat salmon” and other things that in Brazil are the privilege of a select group of people, the upper classes. Here they feel they belong to a more egalitarian society. The money, although earned through hard work, makes them more equal to other people working in London, and it is the self-
worth and strong sense of morality that they have kept along the way, that differentiates their pride in their work from what they imagine it would be like to be working in the red-light districts.
Chapter 7

Possibilities of being and becoming: Brazilian professional cleaners’ subjectivities and practices

Introduction

“I was eight years old, yes. I was eight years old when I started working for a family. I started washing dishes and taking care of the little girl, but then the woman thought I could also wash the clothes as well, but she was supposed to give me things and she was not giving me anything so my mum took me out of there. I worked there one year. Then I found a job where I could study and work but then I preferred just to work. I even tried at the beginning, but I thought it was dangerous because I had to go alone at night, so I stopped. At the fifth grade, I did not want it anymore. I slept at the job, I did everything, I learned how to sew so I could do some clothes for myself, I stayed in that house for a long time. At that time I learned, as I said I gained practice, the practice of house work. Then I found a job where I could earn more, because these people you live with, they give us whatever they want, and I kept working like that until I was twelve years old, when I met the father of my children.”

(Glória, female, 45-year-old ‘professional cleaner’, May 2013)

“Every day it looks like I have more, every day I win another battle, every day I jump another obstacle, I pass one more, but I have been poor like Job. Sometimes I had more, sometimes I had less, but now I am the best I have ever been.”

(Glória talking about her life in London)

Glória is one of the many Brazilians who work and live in London. These are people who, as my research participants informed me, come to the UK mainly to work and save money with the prospects of a better future in Brazil. These are the “working Brazilians”. Many of the earlier, more established Brazilians migrants, as well as the middle-class English language students I interviewed, referred to this later group of migrants in a pejorative tone: “These people who came here to work” – “esse pessoal que
vem pra trabalhar” or “These people who come from the handle of the hoe” – “esse pessoa do cabo de enxada”. Some among this group of “better off” Brazilians were very clear about how they differentiate themselves from the “working Brazilians”. For them, Brazilians who came here to work were uneducated, lacked capacity to plan, looked ‘ugly’ and were sometimes vulgar in their manners, did not learn English and only made friends with other working Brazilians. What is interesting here is that in some cases the two groups were co-workers, and some were even introduced to me as friends, but that did not prevent them from attempting to differentiate their status from that of ‘lower’ class rural and/or poorer country women. While working for the Themis Project, I often heard this deprecative tone in which middle class Brazilians spoke of the “working Brazilians”, indicative that the class segregation experienced in Brazil (see Souza, 2006, 2010) is transported to the context of migration. Being in London, however, complicates that segregation as it entails a level of proximity between social classes rarely experienced in Brazil.

As outlined in previous chapters, middle-class Brazilians, whom I refer to as “tourist cleaners”, also hold strong opinions about how the lower-class Brazilians, the professional cleaners, conduct their lives and work in London. To give an example, Juliana, a 38-year-old middle-class woman from a small town in Minas Gerais, tells me with some indignation why she thinks some Brazilians “do not progress”.

“People who do not progress, for example, people who stay longer working for low wages or working for the Jewish people. Some people do not leave the undesirable jobs because they cannot work by themselves, they don’t try to get better, they are afraid of the new! They prefer to be comfortable! They probably think ‘I don’t know what is ahead of me and I need to pay my bills every month!’ Also because the rooms are super expensive here (she says in a side note), they lack the initiative to change! They lack knowledge! They are ignorant! They lack education! The role is on education! All comes down to education!”

Juliana graduated with a degree in psychology in Brazil, and later worked as head of human resources in one of the major mining companies in Minas Gerais. She came to
London and started working as a cleaner, and now works as a nanny for a family in Holland Park. Glória, on the other hand, as earlier explained, has been working for Hasidic Jewish employers for over ten years. In Brazil she started working as an “empregada domestica” (domestic worker) and “babá” (nanny) from the age of eight, and only completed her education in her late twenties. Her mother is dependent on her financial help. Their backgrounds could not be more different. In London they do not know each other but, as Juliana tells me, she knows many people like Glória; she tries to help them, but does not want to be associated with them. Contrary to Juliana’s perception, however, I argue that migrant professional cleaners do not lack the drive and discipline to make a better life for themselves. Rather, they are self-motivated, industrious, and strategic planners; migration to London in search of waged labour is a rational response to their situation in Brazil and is part of their strategic project to achieve personal and financial growth. What they did lack, in Brazil, was family and state financial support in their lives as poor domestic workers. In addition, as reported by my informants and confirmed by a number of researchers cited in this thesis, Brazilian society is failing its poorer countrymen and women. The Brazilian upper classes’ lack of empathy for the poor, coupled with their expectations that poorer rural citizens will have the same notions of what constitutes a good life, and that they should be able to progress the same as other more affluent people who have had affective and financial support throughout their lives, is partly what crushes their self-esteem. Yet the notion that poor class women are lacking in qualities that will enable them to achieve and grow persists, and not only in Brazil. As Skeggs (1997) showed in Formations of Class and Gender, her study of British working-class women, such women “were constantly misrecognised as pathological”, or as lacking in some way. In response to these misrepresentations, however, the British working-class women put their energy and efforts into becoming respected or showing respectability. These, at times unsuccessful, attempts at gaining value have a deep impact on the women’s subjectivity.

**Subjectivity**

“I have always seen my mother, grandmother and aunties working, as maids and in our house too, they never stopped. I always thought, why do they work so much and have nothing? Aren’t we supposed to work hard to improve our lives?”
The quote above comes from a talk given by Conceicao Evaristo when she came to speak at a seminar called "Brazilian literature: other voices – Conceição Evaristo and the racial and sexist question" at Kings College London, in March 2015.

Conceiao is a 70-year-old strongly built black woman with a very soft voice and kind eyes. She is a professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), but explained that she comes from one of the favelas of Belo Horizonte, from a family where most of the women worked as domestic workers in Brazil, as she herself did in order to finance her studies. During her talk she spoke about the legacy of slavery in Brazil, and the importance of oral history when she was growing up among her illiterate extended family in Belo Horizonte.

Talking to her afterwards, she spoke about how difficult it is to fight your own subjective belief that you cannot accomplish anything that is not within your sense of normality. That encouraged me to reveal to her that I was frustrated about working with a group of Brazilian cleaners who were “not interested” in learning English when that was probably the safest path for financial progress and integration in London. Of course, I had experienced how the work was physically demanding and how the working hours were long, but I wanted to know how she found the energy and motivation to pursue a dream that was not directly connected to short-term financial stability. Her answer was simple: “one thing is to find the means to improve financially, especially if they are here. The other is to be able to change one’s subjectivity, that is a completely different matter”, and she winked. She continued, “the effects of contexts of hardship and generations of poverty are too deep to be overcome just by a change of place,” she said with an open smile.

From that conversation I realised that I had been reproducing a critique of the Brazilian middle class. As I had been able to go through English school, and as most of my middle-class acquaintances had left manual work or gone back to Brazil or elsewhere, I had assumed that this was a goal commonly shared by the cleaners. I had assumed that they were also eager to learn English and move away from cleaning work. What I had not understood was that in fact, the women saw their cleaning work as an end in itself – the
means to self-improvement, and hence they invested in their work, and strove to establish relationships with employers that would improve their jobs and, by extension, their stability. I understood from then the importance of paying attention to the way they talked about their Brazilian pasts and how that shaped their experiences in London. The question I had to resolve was how could I understand these women’s subjectivities? How did their situation and lived experiences in Brazil influence their lives in London? And, more importantly, how, if at all, had the experience of migration changed the way they perceived their past, current lives and selves?

Within Western nineteenth-century philosophy, subjectivity was understood as the consciousness of one’s perceived state, it was also seen in connection with the field of creative arts, in contrast to objectivity (Biehl et al., 2007). Current anthropological studies of subjectivity have broken away from fixed ideas of the subject as either fully conscious or unaware of the forces which shape their lives (Ortner, 2006) to a broader relational and interrogative approach, which is linked with an understanding of human nature, social control, agency and culture (Biehl et al., 2007). I use the term subjectivity to mean the way people perceive and react to the events around them, as informed by their historical and cultural contexts (Ortner, 2006), but yet are never totally controlled by hegemonic domination. For my informants, just the fact of leaving their families and friends in Brazil to try something new in London would seem to indicate a level of resistance again a life determined by history. Subjectivity is also to be understood as a semiotic construct, or a complex accumulation of signs (Leone, 2013), which can be, in this case, the aesthetic or sensorial experience of leaving one place and making sense of what it means to enter into a life in London.

The work of art historian, O’Sullivan (2012), On the production of subjectivity: five diagrams of the finite–infinite relation is relevant here to reflect on migration as an aesthetic experience. O’Sullivan analyses the work of Guattari and Deleuze as well as Foucault, Lacan and others to come to a theory of subjectivity that defends, in accordance with Deleuze, subjectivity not as fixed, but an ongoing process of making

24 Anthropological research on subjectivity has ranged from questions of collective diasporic subjective formation (Brodwin, 2003); violence and gender (Das, 2008), which highlights the importance of the intersubjective character of the experience to an understanding of the phenomenon of violence; the Palestinian subjectivity during the Intifada (Jean-Klein, 2001), but also how subjectivity can be thought of as a semiotic construct (Leone, 2013).
and becoming, “a work in progress” (2011: 1). It would be impossible to adequately summarise the book's different arguments here; instead I highlight a few relevant points of interest. O'Sullivan draws a picture of subjectivity as geared towards the future, but the future is already present in the current time as well as in the past. Pine (2014) clarifies this idea of the simultaneity of time in her analysis of hope in migration as she argues that “the future is imagined in the present through reference to both “good” and “bad” pasts” (2014: 596) as well as hopes of what the future might be. A change of place can challenge those references and therefore situate the person in movement out of their comfort zone.

Brazilians who decide to live and work in London are confronted with many different sensorial and practical new experiences, which add to their ways of being in, and of understanding the world. An example here is their response to the physical appearance of the city, which in appearance has a different architectural landscape than they are familiar with in Brazil. Even the homes are different – the houses of poor Brazilians at home are often more spacious than their rented rooms in London – and there is greater diversity in terms of the people they share the house with; their housemates could be a middle-class Brazilian, or a European. All of these different scenarios they need to navigate as part of becoming a Brazilian in London, even before they start working as cleaners. The capacity to capture everything the city has to offer is limited by their initial lack of the English language, and contacts beyond the Brazilian community, elements that can heighten the experience of being out of one's comfort zone.

Subjectivity and the aesthetic experience

Marcilene once told me a story which is illustrative. She took Lêda to work with her for a new client to show her how to clean. Lêda had recently arrived in London and that was their first job together. As they boarded the train at Waterloo, a lot of people going to the Royal Ascot Races got on the train too. Marcilene called me that afternoon to tell me what had happened.

“Ana Paula, you would not believe Lêda. We got
on the train and saw these beautifully dressed people, almost like coming from the movies, very elegant and rich-looking people – never in Brazil had I seen anything like that. I think it was the amount of blonde people and their hats! And the men, OMG! Lêda looked at this and said: 'Ma, are you seeing what I am seeing or is that an illusion? I am scared that we have just died and are now entering heaven. I think we made it to heaven Ma, only we are poor here. Now, can you believe these people just arriving from Brazil? I told her, 'I do not know what is going on, but this is not heaven, if it was, I would have more chance of being there than these people Lêda.'"

This dialogue indicates how the professional cleaners’ initial enchantment changes over time, as they decode the signs of the city, and as they gain confidence, and at least a little language understanding. Marcilene also didn’t know exactly what was going on, but she was confident enough not to judge her value in relation to being rich, white and therefore deserving.

Place is not the only component in this process. Time is also an important dimension, as the longer the women stay in London the more they understand it and navigate it better. Their initial awe is informed by a sense that they are in the “first world”, where “everything works”, there is “no corruption”, where black people are “equal and sometimes even arrogant”, where people “are beautiful”, where they are treated “like everybody else”. These are just a few of the impressions I heard the women expressing. These initial impressions change over time to varying degrees, but it nevertheless puts pressure on the cleaners to behave in accordance with new ways of being.

Their new environment can be hostile and difficult to decode, especially when they start working. The places they are going to live, often multi-occupancy migrant houses, have little resemblance to the “glamorous” London they see and imagine. When they arrive home at night, their way of cooking, interacting with their flatmates and the people they call in Brazil, helps them to return to the “known”. This is not from a desire to return to Brazil, but rather a slow daily process of becoming, of reinforcing old impressions but also digesting new ones.
Living in London is a life experience that impacts on how the cleaners perceive themselves as well as their possibilities for advancement, and of becoming a different version of themselves. Indeed, the fact that they had left everything to come to London, even if that was not carefully planned, was part of breaking one spiral of life. Despite the “reconstruction” techniques, of which cooking their evening meals was the most constant, there were times when they snapped beyond repair, meaning that they “fall into the cracks” of the morally unacceptable work, or they move out of London. In my research group, of the 22 professional cleaners I spent time with, two left cleaning work to carry drugs, one became a sex worker, one moved to Italy following her husband, and one died suddenly. For those who stayed and survived, it was through this daily process of working hard to the point of almost self-destruction, and then returning home for the process of self-reconstruction, that they built and continue to build their own path of progress. The path tends to move spirally, sometimes with satisfactory forward movement, sometimes stagnating and at other times seemingly going backwards.

**London as an aesthetic experience: impressions and possibilities for transformation**

**The arrival**

As I became more and more involved with my informants, I also became a sort of information hotline, a translator for different events such as court appearances, GP appointments, hospital admissions, children’s school admissions and information for newly arrived immigrants. Throughout the time of my fieldwork, their friends and family came to stay and work as well as visit. Although I never went to the airport to pick up anyone, it became common for me to talk to new arrivals and give them an initial sense of what to expect and how to behave at the beginning. The new migrants arrived in London with the “knowledge” that here people were serious, that here things worked, that there was no corruption, and that people were honest. This belief convinced them that they should behave accordingly, and that they themselves needed to be honest, polite and hardworking. They also had the impression that everybody was white, and they seemed to expect the whole of London to look like Kensington, with public spaces that were clean and tidy. One aspect that really struck me was the
immediate sense of surprise when they saw commonalities and differences between their experiences of Brazil and London, some of the latter they found hard to decode.

**Race - first impressions**

An example of this concerned Marcos and Neide, who had been in London for just a week when they came to my house with Marcilene. She asked me to show them around the neighbourhood and show them how to buy groceries at the supermarket. Marcos was a black man in his mid-thirties who worked in construction in Brazil, and Neide was a white woman, also in her mid-thirties, who worked as a nursing assistant in a small hospital. Both were from a town in the rural part of Minas Gerais. As we were walking around West Green Road, Marcos remarked, "There are a lot of black people on the streets, and also driving... and driving BMWs!" I said, "But we have a lot of black people in Brazil too" and he responded, "Yes we do, but not like that. Not driving cars, with nice clothes, on the streets like normal people". For him, black people in Brazil were not seen everywhere. For instance, he told me later that he was proud of being respected in his office and everywhere he went in Brazil, but he knew that was not the usual case. Black and dark-skinned Brazilian people were more often seen in less prestigious jobs, and often lived in the more peripheral neighbourhoods. For him to see black and white people sharing the streets of Haringey was a pleasant surprise. Not everyone found the multiculturalism of Haringey pleasing though. Once, on a trip to the Wood Green Shopping Mall, Elizana, referring to the black people also out shopping, said to me "I do not know what I am doing in this neighbourhood, if I had wanted to see ugly people I would have stayed in Brazil." Simone’s reactions were rather more ambiguous: "I really like that in the park everybody is together, black, white and Muslim people, something you would not see in Brazil. I am not racist, but I would not like to date one of these men." It is interesting that Elizana and Simone were also not white, but what is considered in Brazil *parda* (mixed race of darker skin). Perhaps being in the middle of the Brazilian colour spectrum made some like Simone want to be associated with whiteness and the cultural and socioeconomic privileges attached to it. Also interesting is that after a while in London, both started to adopt a "more black" pride as they started allowing their hair to find its natural curl, and therefore changed, even if in a slight aesthetic sense.
Class – first impressions

The idea that the houses looked similar or “they look all the same”, or questions such as “where do the poor people live?” were common among the new arrivals. Glória told me that the day she arrived, she showed the immigration officer all her hotel bookings for the fabricated European trip she was going to do, her money and the return ticket. The officer stamped her passport and she thought she was being sent back, but the man politely showed her the way into the country, “I could not believe it” she said. She took a taxi to the hotel where she was going to spend one night near Victoria Station. On the way she had a moment to observe the city; she did not even know England was part of Europe, or where Europe was. She was just feeling lucky to be here, she said. She told me how she was thinking: “Jesus, this place is so beautiful, all the houses look the same, there are no poor people”. Another informant, Irma, a 26-year-old tourist cleaner, told me when we were waiting for the tube to go to her first job interview, “Everybody dresses well here, it’s amazing!”. These two comments reveal the first women’s impressions of what it is like to be in a society in which there is greater equality than exists in Brazil. Of course, the architecture in London is remarkable, and it has important historical and colonial contexts, which escaped Glória’s initial attention. But apart from its beauty that makes London one of the world’s top tourist destinations, Glória was talking about the sense of inclusiveness. In every city in Brazil the very poor have their place, and it is very clear, they live in the favelas or on the most peripheral areas. In London, they had a sense that the middle class and working class shared the same neighbourhoods, as seemed to be the case in Haringey. Similarly, Irma did not recognise the “look” of poverty, as she later explained. There is no clear way to define the “look” of poverty, but its meanings are inflected with race and class as discussed in Chapter Four. It is often associated, for instance, with strong or calloused rough hands, poor dental care, unbranded cheap clothing, and so on.

As they live and work in London, the women’s sense of greater class equality is reinforced. Middle-class people can have a hard time adapting to their loss of aesthetic /cultural status, in that they are not given preferential treatment or treated differently for “looking richer”. Juliana’s experience is a case in point. She took the bus one day because she had her English textbooks with her and did not want to walk the short distance from her house to her friend’s house, where they were going to study. On the
bus, she realised that she did not have her Oyster travel card with her, and as she was planning to leave the bus, the inspector asked for her ticket which she said she didn’t have.\textsuperscript{25} She said that he took her address and in doing so, humiliated her. Her words were: “he treated me as if I was a criminal, or I don’t know what, I was well dressed, I am so upset”. This is a clear example not only of how middle-class privilege in Brazil gets challenged in London, but also how middle-class people learn the hard way “to be humble” as their Brazilian privilege is not recognized and counts for nothing in London.

Jaqueline, a 29-year-old tourist cleaner, sees her “invisibility” in a different way. She explains:

“here in London, we work as cleaners, for example I have three different jobs, start working at five in the morning cleaning the hospital, and on the weekends I work at the hairdresser. It is hard, it is a lot of work, but here you work as a cleaner and can pay your bills like anybody else. You can buy clothes and perfume, you are just like anybody else”.

What becomes part of their daily life, however, is the employer’s recognition of their work, in the form of appreciation, payment, gifts and “even hugs”. This recognition of their worth gives the cleaner a sense of professionalism and stability – knowing that their labour is valued, that they are in demand and can easily find more work if necessary, and that they are able to save for their future – makes them unwilling to give up their London lives to return to Brazil. The reality that Jaqueline had to work at three jobs points to an element of the precarity of her life in London. Yet, in comparison with her memory of the cleaners’ experiences in Brazil, it is in fact humanising. The fact that it can take some of them several years before they really understand how inequality works in London suggests that they are seeing London through their past references, They are not versed enough in either the language or the culture to recognise class nuances and (in)equality in London at the beginning, where everyone appears to be of equal, middle-class status. Thus, their experience of equalisation, of being ‘normal’, of being equal to everyone else unfolding through a process of comparison and contrast, invariably changes over time.

\textsuperscript{25} Oyster cards looks like credit cards but are a form of travel pass to pay for public transport in London.
Class, race and gender memories

It was a Sunday afternoon when I went to visit Valéria and Glória to interview them. They lived in a five-bedroomed multi-occupancy house with another nine people, all Brazilians. As she was ready to start I asked her to tell me her history from the day she was born, who her parents were and what they did and so on.

“I was born in Juiz de Fora, a medium-sized city in the state of Minas Gerais, and my mother was a single mother. I know who my father is, he is a retired policeman. My mother was the maid in my grandmother’s house... one day there was a party there and my father stuffed my mother’s face with “cachaca”, and he messed about with her. Then my mother got pregnant with me. My mother told my father, who said she should terminate the pregnancy because he could not help her in any way. At the time he said he could not help us, or have anything to do with my mum, because it would damage his promising career as a policeman. As my mother was about to deliver, my grandmother, the mother of my father and my mum's former employer, became aware of the pregnancy, but she did nothing. At that time my mother had already moved to Rio de Janeiro to work with another family, hiding her pregnancy from them. If I was a boy they would have kept us, my mother never forgave me for being a girl... I have two brothers from my father's legit marriage, but they don't know I exist.”

As Valéria paused to think, she seemed a bit sad about her start in life. She knew something unfair had taken place because, as she told me later, she felt the consequences of her mother and father’s encounter her whole life. She believed that her mother resented her and never really loved her. Nevertheless, she does not explain it in terms of the cruel class, race and gender relations that operate in Brazil. For her it is a gender problem; she is to be blamed for not being a boy, her grandmother is to be blamed for not caring, her mother is to be blamed for being naive at first and bitter later. In this gender-based circle of blame, her father did what men do, they look after their careers, sleep with women, and they love their sons. Thus, she believes that her life started by her being a mistake because her mother was naive, whereas in fact her life started through somewhat common Brazilian class, gender and race violence.

---

26 Cachaça is a strong sugar cane spirit. Its alcohol concentration can be as high as 80 per cent.
The anthropologist Corossacz’s (2012) ethnography of a group of upper-middle-class white men from Rio de Janeiro exposes their sexual access to their domestic workers’ bodies. She shows how it is accepted and even encouraged for the upper-class adolescents to have sexual encounters with their lower-class, and usually black, maids. Her work, as well as Valéria’s quote, portrays the endurance of class, race and gender inequalities and violence that permeate upper class-lower class relationships in Brazil. Corassacz (2012) contextualises her informants’ sexual experiences with their maids within the framework of the colonial slave-owning past. These men, she writes, “describe a condition that is outside of time, eternal, already generated by history and therefore outside historical relationships” (2012: 172). In short, the upper classes describe their position as inevitable, as an inherited privilege to use the lower classes, in this case the domestic workers, in whichever way they please. Corossacz (2012) concludes that in her informants’ view this reality cannot be changed. In Valéria’s explanation, however, I think that while the position of the men was forgiven, and perhaps unchangeable, the women could and should have done something. In fact, her mother did; she left and moved to Rio, all she could do at that time. Valéria herself moved to London partially to escape her “lazy and cheating” husband. Moving to London for her was an act of resistance, of survival, as was moving to Rio for her mother.

These three sessions together represent how class, gender and race are intersectional, as discussed in Chapter Two, and simultaneous in people’s experiences. They also speak about the way class differences are more difficult to talk about. No one can escape being a woman or being black but, through hard work, you can escape your assigned class position. Failure to “improve” one’s class position is understood in our neoliberal, “meritocracy-driven” world of entrepreneurship, as individual failure.
Conclusion

London offers Brazilian immigrant women working as cleaners the possibilities of social and personal transformation that goes beyond money – although that is a big part of it too. Here they are ‘fixing’ their past through the remittances they send back home, money that will support their families to buy or construct big houses in established middle-class neighbourhoods in Brazil. Their remittances are also paying for the education of their younger family members. In short, they are becoming ‘deserving people’ and moreover, are raising the family with them.

Subjective transformation is a contentious topic. Brodwin’s (2003) ethnography on the Haitians’ diasporic subjectivities argues that it is impossible to talk about subjective transformations without doing multi-sided ethnography. For him, people from the same country of origin develop different types of collective subjectivity depending on the country they migrate to. Conceicao Beltrao (2010) is a Brazilian Jungian psychoanalyst who writes on the subjectivity of women, based on the work of the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. In one interview about her book, she argues that it is naive to defend subjective transformation without going back to Brazil and looking at how these new subjective forms play out in the old context. And Souza (2010) argues that there can be no subjective transformation until the lower classes become politically active and defend their rights in terms of class; for Souza, the only viable transformation comes through class struggle. As a researcher, it would have been interesting for me to return to Brazil to observe how the women’s experiences in London translated into the Brazilian context. I also agree with Souza (2010) that only collective large-scale political organisation could really transform the lives of poor people in Brazil, and this is not happening at present. What I have argued in this chapter, however, is that there is a sense of empowerment and transformation derived from the experience of living in London, even if it is temporary, and is lost on return to Brazil. It is a positive change to the sense of self, which comes from the experience of moving to and surviving well a different social and economic context (Gamburd, 2000). This is largely connected to the fact that, even with all the problems they encounter in London, the women still consider themselves successful in comparison with their former lives in Brazil. This however is not class-consciousness, as in class-based organising to defend workers’ rights; it is associated with a personal, spiritual project of life improvement, which reinforces
neoliberal ideals of meritocracy. In the last Brazilian election, in 2018, a record number of Brazilians living in London registered to vote in their country’s elections. Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right ultra-liberal president was elected, winning with over 60 per cent of the votes. Since taking office, Bolsonaro has consistently reduced workers’ rights in Brazil. According to Santos (2019), poor women of colour will be the workers most affected by the suppression of workers’ rights.
Chapter 8

Conclusions

“Every day it looks like I have more, every day I win another battle, every day I jump another obstacle, I pass one more, but I have been poor like Job. Sometimes I had more, sometimes I had less, but now I am the best I have ever been.”

(Glória talking about her life in London)

In this thesis I have examined the lived realities and perceptions of a group of extraordinary migrant women in London. These Brazilian women left behind their families and friends, homes and communities to come to the UK in search of a sustainable livelihood as a precursor to building a stable future for themselves and their families. The women came from all corners of Brazilian society, an admixture of social class, race and ethnic backgrounds, representing the rich cultural melting pot that is Brazilian society. They made their way to London – a migratory move that was not always straightforward – filled with hopes and aspirations. It was here that they found the entry paths to new meaningful lives, new subjectivities, for which they had risked exchanging certainty in life – albeit, for some of them, a precarious life on the margins of Brazilian society – for the uncertainties of an entirely unfamiliar, unknown western society thousands of miles across the Atlantic. However, for each of these women, those paths initially involved employment in one of the most stigmatised and exploitative UK service sectors.

Domestic work, whether cleaning for oneself, or cleaning in the context of waged employment carries with it, almost everywhere, negative connotations. For many feminist scholars, domestic work and women’s responsibility for domestic work lie at the root of women’s oppression. Indeed, in 1963 Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* kickstarted a second-wave western feminist movement, arguing that it was women’s domestic responsibilities that kept women in the private sphere, and in dependency on their husbands. Never, she claimed, had a single woman ever achieved fulfilment from their domestic work. Since Friedan’s time, women’s participation in the labour market has been radically transformed, nonetheless the responsibility for domestic work still
rests in their hands.

As women's participation in the labour force has been changing, a confluence of other demographic trends in recent years, both local and global, have helped to create a service sector filled overwhelmingly with poor, seemingly unskilled migrant workers from all corners of the world/global south. The women in this study who gave so generously of their time and their thoughts, as well as their friendship, and patience with my questions, are among an army of so-called unskilled labour. For them, however, domestic work, with all its inherent difficulties, had a different meaning in that it represented a way out of poverty, providing recognition, dignity, self-worth and new forms of consciousness. Thus, paid domestic work was not merely their source of livelihood, but part of a wider long-term strategic plan. For all its problems, cleaning and/or working as a nanny signified a means to a particular end, that of their own social mobility. In this thesis, I have gone against the grain of some of the existing scholarship to argue that migration as a domestic worker can offer the opportunity to renew oneself and create new subjectivities. The thesis opens up new understandings of complex social relations encoded within social class, gender and ethnicity.

Living and working in London among my research participants, listening to their life histories, observing but also working with them, going to church with them and attending their social gatherings, it became clear to me how a life of struggle in Brazil shaped their perceptions and practices in London. When they arrive in the capital they need to adapt to a new complex terrain where all is not always as it seems. Research on paid migrant domestic work seeks to uncover the exploitative meaning and nature of such work. The more I read and the more I learned, it became difficult not to feel anger about the situation of women's migrant labour and to want to campaign against the shoddy conditions that support this sector. It was with this feeling that I entered my fieldwork. Yet the more time I spent working, living and interacting socially with my informants, the more I understood that the point of campaign activism was not to curb such forms of labour, but to work towards improving the conditions under which the migrant women laboured. As discussed in Chapter Seven, I entered the field expecting to find that my potential participants would be sad, scared, desperate women, living on the edge of precarity. While I did witness some moments of desperation as well as
periods of uncertainty and precarity, I also witnessed women celebrating successes (and planning for more and even greater successes), women who remained hopeful about their future, and women for whom doing cleaning work had helped them achieve their dreams, recognition, status, respect and dignity.

It is this finding that justifies the worth and claims to significance of my thesis. My research sheds new light on migrant women’s self-perceptions of their labour in a devalued and exploitative service sector renowned for poor working conditions, and the mistreatment and exploitation of migrant workers. Not only can domestic work be a pathway to social mobility, but the migrant women in this study redefined the meanings attached to domestic work. As one of the participants said, “my work is clean”. It wasn’t that they did not see the grime or become bored by the repetitiveness of their labour. Rather, they saw their labour as essential care work and a source of pride. They also took pride in keeping another person’s house clean, appreciated their employer’s acknowledgement of their hard work (expressed in words or deeds), their pleasure in coming home to a newly and freshly cleaned home. They also used their self-evaluation as a ‘good cleaner’ to comment about differences of social class, and transnational attitudes towards social class, gender and labour.

In Brazil, the women felt that their labour was not valued, and because it was not valued, they themselves felt devalued, looked down upon, and made to feel invisible. To some extent, these differences can be explained by cultural attitudes towards unqualified and informal work that is taken for granted and is classed, gendered and racialised work. Women of the poorer classes in Brazil often begin housework from an early age – but not from choice or as a career option – and often under difficult conditions. For the tourist cleaners, they would often go from having a domestic worker to becoming one themselves. In the UK both the professional cleaner and the tourist cleaner take the most morally acceptable work that is available to them. The difference is that, for the professional cleaners, this is the work they were familiar with and skilled in, that enabled them to find a familiar space (people’s homes) inside an unfamiliar one (London). In their comparisons of social equality in Brazil and the UK they were able to reflect critically on the class and racial structures and hierarchies of their homeland. For many, London was their first experience of seeing black people treated – on the face of it
– as equals, as free beings with disposable incomes, able to participate in the life of their city without the rigid structures found in Brazil. Many, for instance, did not recognise the ‘signifiers of poverty’ in London, and at first believed themselves to be living in a society where all individuals enjoyed equality of status and opportunity. As they settled into London life, the women came to realise that poverty wears many different faces; what would be considered poor in the UK might be considered richness at home. They also came to understand the spatial and cultural contingency of social class, as middle-class Brazilians doing cleaning and other labour that at home would have been beneath them. Furthermore, the middle-class Brazilians had to become humbler in UK society; as migrants from a formerly colonised society, especially when their claims to whiteness were questioned, their right to middle-class status was not secure. One other aspect worthy of note is that their lives in London positioned the Brazilian women as transnational women, as people who had travelled, and navigated their way successfully through often difficult foreign terrain.

Domestic work is a messy phenomenon to research as it is infused with the intersections of various levels of inequality. It is work that is highly gendered, stigmatised and racialised. Migrant domestic workers have been considered ‘the quintessential other’ in studying global and local social inequalities and their intersections, as the migrant women are often under subordination, firstly to their employers and secondly to the urban host society in general (Yeoh et al., 1999).

In Chapter Two I showed, through a review of previous research on domestic work, the necessity for a complementary view of domestic work. I argue that it is important to attend to the idiosyncrasies of the employer/employee relationship rather than viewing it as a rigid division informed by class and ethnic differences. I also showed how other anthropologists attended to this non-polarising view of domestic workers. Brites (2003) argues that for the live-in domestic workers in Brazil, elements of domination and subordination coexisted with strategies the workers developed in response to domination. This included learning workers’ rights legislation to negotiate better contracts for themselves, therefore, she argues, putting themselves in a more equal position in relation to their employers.
In a contribution to this dialogue I have argued that cleaning work in London is not a static occupation. In Chapter Four I showed the different types of cleaning/caring work as well as the amount of interpersonal skills and cleaning proficiency needed to become a successful domestic worker in London. Success here is understood as a personal, spiritual and material project which starts to materialise the moment the women manage to get a full weekly schedule of houses to clean for which they receive the minimum wage of ten pounds an hour. In addition, the women viewed success as their ability to develop a mutually satisfactory relationship of obligation between the employer and themselves. For the professional cleaners, this imagined “better life” is associated with notions of struggle, a daily battle. Never a linear path, a “better future” is rather perceived as an uneven road, with symbols of everyday survival and dignity in the face of past experiences, present difficulties and their hopes for the future.

In Chapter Five I argued that the women migrant cleaners did not see their work as derogatory. Rather, they saw it as care work, with the notion that to clean is to care. Care in this sense is not understood as the natural quality of the migrant worker, but a social quality learned from other cleaners and from their experiences in Brazil and their new lives in London. In the second part of the chapter I explored how relationships of mutual obligation can arise from the employer/employee relationship, which is articulated not as the cleaner being “part of the family”, as previous researchers have observed, but as providing mutual help and support. When successful, this interaction can develop into a long-lasting work relationship, which is both familiar and professional at the same time. In the third part of the chapter I showed the fragility of this relationship and how it needs constant management of emotions, expectations and boundaries. I argue that an understanding of cleaning work as care work can humanise the relationship between employer and employee at the same time as being part of a working contract. Such a view values the interdependence of our lives (McDowell and at the same time challenges neoliberal ideas of self-reliance and individualism (Cox, 2010). This is important because, as Cox (2010) argues, it is only by understanding care within structural inequalities, but also as a challenge to the neoliberalism ethic of personal responsibility and individual achievement, that we can begin to dismantle the stigmatisation of low-status work such as domestic work. That my research participants embodied and enacted these same values is indicative of their agency and ability to
resist powerful structures in order to create a better future for themselves, and this, I believe, adds to the significance of this work.

Chapter Six discussed the symbolic and material meaning of dirt (Douglas, 2003). I argue that domestic work is ‘clean work’, as it is connected to ideas of honest hard work, material reward in the form of payment, personal reward in terms of building and maintaining long-lasting working relationships of reciprocity, as well as the sensorial experience of a job well done. This is closely connected with the moral economy of religious beliefs; most of the professional cleaners articulated their choice of cleaning work as the right choice in the eyes of God. This means that God would reward them for their hard work, or protect their children back in Brazil or in the UK, because they were working hard, doing good work, or God's work, taking care of people's houses and children. Their understandings and rationalisations echo those of Liebelt's study (2011) which noted that Filipino Christians in Israel constructed themselves as “meaningful Christian carers”, taking care of “God's own people”. At the same time, they could participate in customs and traditions and rituals seen as available only to wealthy Filipinos, that is, making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Through becoming pilgrims, Liebelt argues, the women are rejecting an imposed subject position, and constructing themselves through their imaginations and practices of care, with a new subjectivity anchored in Christian spirituality. Liebelt concludes that the emancipatory potential of such subjectivity is “limited at best”. I would suggest that such subjectivity is paradoxical because while, for my informants, being secure in their religious beliefs was invaluable, being involved in their church group may have contributed to their lack of political engagement. Political engagement, I believe, could have further enhanced their subjective and material emancipation, both for those wanting to leave domestic work, as well as those continuing to invest in their work as professional cleaners.

Chapter Seven addressed the theme of subjective transformation, where I argue that the process of migration and domestic work has a transformative effect on the migrants as they learn new forms of being in the world. Also, through the aesthetic experience of moving from one place (Brazil) to another (London), they come to question the enduring and radicalised inequalities. This, however, is not class-consciousness, as in
class-based organisation to defend workers’ rights; it is associated with a personal, spiritual project of life improvement, reinforcing neoliberal ideals of meritocracy, which in turn has an effect on the way they vote. This thesis enables reflection on why, in London as well as in Brazil, a considerable number of the most impoverished voted against their own interests.

Class and social mobility
Thus, being in London, even if through an experience of downward social mobility, as in the case of the tourist cleaners, there are transformative consequences, as the domestic workers question their subjective understandings of themselves as classed, gendered and racialised. This questioning is partly due to the proximity between Brazilians from different social economic backgrounds and regions at home in Brazil. As such, opportunities for close relationships arise. What was striking was how the conversation was marked by language that would imply higher or lower social status. An analysis of class became central to my research as I noticed how important it was for the women I worked with. Class is important because it marked how the women experienced their lives in Brazil and how they understood and planned their lives in London as well as their hopes for the future.

Another important contribution of my research is the focus on where migration and class intersect, as research on migration has often overlooked the impact of class background on the changing experiences in the new country (McDowell, 2013). Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013), in their article about the regimes of mobility across the globe, called attention to the importance of bringing class analysis into the study of migration. This is important, they argue, because the ability to freely travel and the legal right to travel become the very definition of class status and class privilege. As the poor Brazilians arrived in London they entered a world of Brazilian privilege – even if they were working as cleaners – in that it is a form of symbolic social mobility that precedes the financial advancement, which can come later.

However, it is important to remember that the lives of these domestic workers were not easy and not perfect. My observations suggest that despite their sense of self-worth through work recognition and financial reward that allowed them to send remittances
back to Brazil (see Chapter Three), for most of these women it was still very difficult to overcome the feelings of insecurity and fear that at some point something would go wrong. These feelings were connected to what they learnt and observed in their lives in Brazil, with phrases such as “if it was in Brazil...”, and what they learned from their family, friends and work network. Of particular importance here was the ever-present voice of their parents in phrases such as “my mother or father always told me...”. Such expressions were usually attached to the belief that through hard work, honesty and the help of God they would get a house and “better conditions” in this life. There were numerous accounts of growing up without anything to eat, of working as a live-in domestic help in exchange for food and shelter, of living to pay debts. In addition, there were accounts of living with violence, of rape, even murder and close connections with criminals. In short, for a lot of my informants, in Brazil their faith and hard work had not paid off the way they were expecting.

This ethnography is also important as a reflection of what happens if security and possibilities for improvement are taken out of people’s lives and replaced with judgement and consequent segregation. It also highlights the contrasts between the Brazilian and British situations. Brazil, as I have shown, has a history of low class mobility in comparison with the UK, and is also marked by racialised class segregation. This means that for some of the women the only possibility for improvement, after everything had failed in Brazil, even education, was migration. They had to come to London to reaffirm their dignity and have their work recognised, to be able to plan and make a living not only for themselves but also for their families in Brazil. However, the segregation and the symbolic and real violence they suffered in Brazil as poor, domestic workers and, for some, as black people, tells us what damage years of insecurity, judgement and the consequent segregation can do to a person.

This study also raises other important questions as to how the Brazilians are able to feel and become successful in building their lives when one of the main problems today is a sense of diminished possibilities for social mobility in Britain (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). Based on her ethnographic research in the post-industrial Docklands of south-east London, Evans (2012) shows how the British white working class is struggling to find their place and define the "kind of people they can become in a globalised service
economy”. As she rightly notes, it is an economy that “requires different kinds of skills, [and] undermines the stability and conditions of working-class employment”. Herein lies the main difference between Brazil and Britain. While Britain is coming to terms with the progressive loss of stability for working class people over the last thirty years, this same instability has been part of Brazilian history from the beginning, as explained in the introduction. In such an unequal and insecure society, domestic work, rather than industry, has helped to make a living for a great number of poor women for generations. They have learned to trust in themselves, they have learned to clean and care for others for a living. It is useful at this point to return to Adams and Dickey’s (2000) argument that domestic workers’ identity is less influenced by whether they are working in manual and demeaning jobs, but rather if they are doing it in their own country or abroad. This helps with understanding why Brazilians, both tourist and professional, do not feel diminished or disrespected doing cleaning work in London. It is because the signifiers of discrimination are different and less harsh. Furthermore, the act of migration is an act of determination that requires financial and subjective investment; it requires planning and budgeting, but most of all, courage. That is, already, for the cleaner, a great step on their path of progress.

I argue, then, that this study offers a contribution to several related fields and research areas. It addresses current local and global issues such as migration; gender and migration; migration and labour; social class; gender and race structures and relations at a time when so much appears to be in a state of flux. Throughout, it demands that we pay attention to intersectionality, that is, the ways in which we embody different modalities of oppression, and how they exist and conflict with each other. As such, my reason for continually bringing class to the fore is in large part due to the conclusion that class signifiers feature strongly in my informants’ ways of talking about their lives.

I have come to appreciate that, by its very nature, a thesis is always a work in progress. As researchers and writers, we are confronted by various limitations and there is a necessity to choose what goes in, what stays out, what to highlight and pay attention to, and what to set aside, perhaps for later research. I would have liked, for instance, to expand the scope of this research to focus on the experiences, perceptions and moral economies of the employers. I would have liked also to include the experiences of male
migrants as husbands or partners of domestic workers and as employers but also as domestic workers themselves. How, if at all, does doing ‘women's work’ in London impact on men’s understanding of themselves as men, on their understandings of masculinity especially having been raised in a society where maschismo rests on the rejection of areas associated with femininity? How does living and working abroad redefine gender relationships and class and race relationships, and how sustainable are these redefined relationships once back home? In the British context, in the era of Brexit angst, what will happen to migrant domestic workers after Brexit, considering that so much of the political propaganda for leaving the EU was based on the demonisation of low-skilled migrants? In the Brazilian context, in the era of far-right, Pentecostal, ultra-neoliberal and military government, what will it mean especially for the poor working people as they lose their work and social rights and, with that, the possibility to escape their conditions? While frustrated by the limitations of producing a thesis, I am nevertheless excited, for the questions I raise above, and more, point to myriad possibilities and opportunities for increasing understanding of the lives, experiences and perspectives of Brazilian women migrant workers in the UK.
References


Evans, G. (2017). Social class and the cultural turn: anthropology, sociology and the


Glenn, E.N. (1992). From servitude to service work: historical continuities in the racial division of paid reproductive labor. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and
Society, 18(1), pp.1–43.


Ismail, F.M. (1994). The migration of Muslim women from Sri Lanka to the Middle East. University of California, Davis.


case of Moldovan domestic workers. Migration Research Program at the Koc University Istanbul.


Lan, P.C. (2003)."They have more money but I speak better English!" Transnational encounters between Filipina domestics and Taiwanese employers. Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 10(2), pp.133-161.


pp.472–490.


Online sources:


www.cidades.gov.br (Accessed 23/10/18)


https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk (Accessed 29/10/18)