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Abstract

Women and Paid Domestic Work in Mexico: Food, Sexuality and Motherhood

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This thesis explores women in paid domestic work in Mexico. The thesis draws on qualitative interviewing and observation involving the participation of women domestic workers and women who employ domestic workers. The thesis argues that racial difference in Mexico has been disguised for centuries by the myth of mestizaje (the notion of racial and cultural mixture) and racial homogenisation. The study of paid domestic work in Mexico makes visible the exclusionary discourses and practices that maintain the low status of this occupation by virtue of women’s gender, class and race. The institutionalised discrimination of domestic workers in Mexico is explained by their proximity to the middle class and therefore the perceived threat of bodily transgressions. Through the study of food, sexuality and motherhood this thesis demonstrates that, in the context of mestizaje, women in paid domestic work are imagined as ‘not so Other’.

The thesis looks into the racial history of food in Mexico and the parallels between human and culinary mestizaje. It argues that food distinctions in Mexico are still a powerful mechanism to mark class, gender and racial difference. This work demonstrates that both human and culinary mestizaje have never been neutral constructions and involved a silent but powerful hierarchy of imagined racial origins. Food and sexuality are said to be deeply linked, as both experiences manifest bodily boundaries and are perceived as necessary for social reproduction. This thesis looks at the sexualisation of paid domestic work in Mexico. It argues that women in this occupation are sexualised since their proximity to the middle class informs concerns over workers’ ambiguous place within an order of social classifications. The sexualisation of workers manifests not an individual fantasy but rather a collective one where female employers, the state, the media and education are also involved.

The thesis looks at women’s experiences around motherhood. It argues that paid domestic work constrains workers’ right both to become and to be mothers and enables female employers to follow middle class notions of ‘cool’ mothering. It looks at the role of the state in reproducing discourses that define working class women as unfit for childrearing and argues that this idea works to maintain the low status of this occupation while disempowering women workers, their families and communities. The thesis concludes that paid domestic work in Mexico is a living manifestation of racial difference in Mexico and of colonial forms of social organisation. Discrimination against women workers is often perpetrated in virtue of an imagined racial difference constituted in and through gender and class hierarchies. The racialisation of paid domestic workers in Mexico has persisted through notions of mestizaje and ‘true’ Mexicanness that have for centuries conditioned a national sense of belonging through the denial of race and racism.

30th September 2011
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Esta tesis se la dedico a mis hijas Manuela e Inés.
1. Introduction

‘they did not teach us that
to love the country
could be,
for example,
to be quiet as one who dies,
but no,
below this earth there is also country
and no one hears us
and we are frank
(because one is always frank when no one hears us)...
(EZLN,1994)’

This is an extract from a poem written by members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), an indigenous movement that on January 1st, 1994 declared war against the ‘Mexican state’. Writer Carlos Monsiváis (2001) argues that the EZLN was an historical movement because it illustrated so vividly a crucial but silenced problem: ‘It is evident: before the first of January of 1994, Mexico had never problematised the issues of indigenous peoples with the enthusiasm, the production of historical written texts, the multiple debates and the accumulation of knowledge’ that we witnessed after that day. It took five hundred years and an armed indigenous insurrection to put our eyes, minds and pens to the country’s south; its racialised marginalisation and the exploitation of its people. How many years would it take us to acknowledge the broader dimensions of racial thinking on the rest of the country? The poem above is one about the contradictions of national identity and belonging for those who are not seen and those who are not heard. As this thesis shows, such contradictions are not exclusive to indigenousness. Racial thinking shapes the lives of millions in Mexico, among them, women in paid domestic work.

A war is now compelling us to confront some disheartening facts regarding the country’s structural inequality and it’s far reaching implications: the ‘war on drugs’. The unprecedented level of violence that we are witnessing today has sparked countless academic and non academic debates regarding governmental corruption, impunity, marginalisation and social difference. Figures speak for themselves: up to 46.2 per cent of the population lives under poverty (CONEVAL, 2010) and the widening gap between rich and poor is such that the most privileged 10 per cent of the population dominates 42.2 per cent of the national
income while the poorest 10 per cent has only 1.3 per cent of the country’s wealth (UN.HABITAT, 2010). Poverty and inequality are not in themselves new or surprising; what is new is the way people, in everyday conversations, think about the weakening of the country’s social fabric as deeply linked to social resentment (Peñaloza, 2010).

The ‘war on drugs’ has taken its toll as never before; the number of casualties is not clear and many have accused the government of lack of transparency over the issue (La Jornada, 24 March, 2011). According to official statistics there have been more than 34 thousand deaths since President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006; however, some independent investigations account for up to 50 490 deaths (El Financiero, 2011). The violence is escalating and the dimensions of the conflict are changing. Between 2007 and 2009 the number of young people assassinated increased 147 per cent according to INEGI (El Universal, 12 Sep, 2011). The most renowned political and social analysts in the country seem to be asking the same question ‘what has caused the social decomposition that we are witnessing today? As historian Lorenzo Meyer (2010) argues: ‘drug cartels are not only armed criminal organisations but groups disputing the state’s monopoly on force, its control over important parts of the territory and the loyalty of its civil servants’. Lack of opportunities, structural inequality and marginalisation are common ground themes among the analyses of public opinion leaders. When looking at the increasing recruitment of young people to drug cartels and gangs, sociologist Lucrecia Lozano (2011) argues that these groups ‘constitute spaces that facilitate a sense of identity and social belonging. They provide acknowledgment and protection precisely where society and the government have failed to do so’. Between 25 and 30 thousand young people from 13 to 25 years of age collaborate, in some way, with organised crime, and some have highlighted the feminisation of the conflict as the number of women in prison for federal crimes has risen by 400 per cent in the last four years (Hernández, 2009; NYT, 2011).

The increasing involvement of women in crime should not be surprising since it is only a reflection of women’s increasing participation in the labour market. However, the feminisation of criminal organisations should also be analyzed in the context of social inequality, the labour conditions of women workers and increasing levels of unemployment. The physical violence of organised crime is said to be unprecedented but the symbolic violence that maintains the majority of
the population marginalised is not a new phenomenon. As defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1991:2010), symbolic violence is gentle and invisible but above all is exercised only ‘via the effect of misrecognition encouraged by denial’. The marginalisation of women in paid domestic work is maintained through symbolic violence, ‘for in the routine flow of day-to-day life, power is seldom exercised as overt physical force: instead, it is transmuted into a symbolic form, and thereby endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have (Bourdieu ,1991:23)’.

This thesis looks at women in paid domestic work in Mexico. It argues that racial marginalisation has been disguised for centuries under the myth of mestizaje and racial homogenisation. It contends that studying the social dimensions of paid domestic work in Mexico entails looking at the exclusionary discourses and practices that maintain the low status of this occupation. The institutionalised discrimination of domestic workers in Mexico is explained by their proximity to the middle class and therefore by a perceived threat of gender, class and racial transgressions. In the context of mestizaje and filtered by the vagueness of its ever changing meanings, women in paid domestic work are imagined as ‘not so Other’. In complicity with the state, employers produce and reproduce bodily boundaries to mark difference, to avoid transgressions of order and to maintain women workers ‘in their place’. The low status of this occupation and the state’s refusal to recognise women as workers illustrates that domestic and care work in Mexico are not only divided by gender but also by class and race.

Food distinctions, the sexualisation of women in this occupation and discourses and practices that constrain workers’ experiences as mothers serve to disempower not only the workers but also their families and communities. Addressing the appalling conditions of paid domestic work in Mexico is therefore addressing social inequality, poverty and a whole range of social reforms. Relations between employers and workers are more than individual affairs; these are the social interactions where the 10 per cent of the population who control almost half of the country’s wealth meet the rest within an intimate and powerful site: the home.

According to the latest National Survey of Employment and Occupation (2010) more than 1 800 000 women are domestic workers in Mexico. In early 2011, the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) included paid domestic workers as one of the twelve groups most vulnerable to discrimination
in Mexico. While the other groups are formed by a clearly defined disposition or condition (i.e. ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, ableness) the vulnerability of paid domestic workers seems difficult to explain. On what basis are domestic workers discriminated against according to the Council? Some hints are given by CONAPRED when it states that this is an occupation where ‘the majority of women are indigenous or poor’. Certainly, middle or upper class women are not found working as domestic workers by choice, so it’s really not one or the other. Similarly, at least in the case of the Bajío region (where this study is located) it is hard to think that the majority of women workers ascribe themselves to a particular ethnic group. Thus, it is possible to suggest that the institutionalised discrimination of workers in Mexico occurs by virtue of a particular articulation of class, gender and racial hierarchies.

According to the Council’s survey, a third of domestic workers believed that the main problem for women in this occupation was related to low wages. Yet, 19.3 per cent of participants felt that the main problem was the abuse, mistreatment, humiliation and discrimination that women workers often endured. According to the survey, up to 12.2 per cent of workers are not allowed to leave the house of an employer when they need to; 37.9 per cent cannot use the telephone at their workplace; up to 44.7 per cent of workers do not have a fixed working schedule; 46.5 per cent are not entitled to a Christmas bonus; 61.0 per cent are not given any annual leave to rest and up to 95 per cent of them lack access to medical services. The Council acknowledged that women in this occupation endured ‘working and life conditions [that] are invisible to society, to female and male employers and to the laws that protect the rights of workers’ (CONAPRED: 2). The Council’s statement on the ‘invisibility’ of workers resembles that of indigenous people’s plight back in 1994: ‘they didn't teach us that to love one's country/ can be/ for example/ to whistle like one who is leaving/ but/ behind that hill there is also part of the country/ and nobody can see us’.

Why is this particular occupation being identified by CONAPRED as a distinct vulnerable group and not other? Many other women work in low paid and insecure employment and are disadvantaged by similar social hierarchies such as street vendors, market women and street cleaners. As this thesis shows, the answer is perhaps partly explained by the intimate character of such occupation and the proximity that domestic workers have with the middle class. This proximity is what seems to require the deployment of complex rituals of
separation and the protection of social classifications that have long been hidden by national identity. I do not wish to undermine CONAPRED’s inclusion of domestic workers as a group vulnerable to discrimination. The Council’s acknowledgement of the problem is an important step for political action and transformation. However, the Council’s description of workers vulnerability is *in itself* significantly revealing of the way women in this occupation have been historically perceived by the public imagination.

What the government has just officially acknowledged has been part and parcel of other more popular modes of expression. Classic novels from the Mexican counterculture of the 1960s, such as José Agustín’s *De Perfil* (1966) and José Emilio Pacheco’s novel *Batallas en el Desierto* (1981) vividly portray the reality of women domestic workers. Numerous popular films such as *Maria Isabel* (1968) and *Anoche Soñé Contigo* (1992) are also illustrative of the discrimination that women in this occupation often endure. For many years governmental organisations ignored the lack of rights and appalling labour conditions of women in paid domestic work; in addition, academic institutions and researchers in Latin America have also neglected the issue even though sector that accounts for 14 per cent of women’s employment in the region (ILO 2009:70; for exceptions see Chaney and García, 1989; Goldsmith, 1993; Gill, 1994; Chávez and Buendía, 2005; Durin, 2008; Gutiérrez and Rosas, 2010).

In 2003, Bruno Lautier argued that the absence of academic interest in paid domestic work in Latin America was explained by the way women sociologists - most of them also employers - feel too guilty, and are therefore reluctant, to study the issue. Lautier (2003: 799) suggests that women sociologists found the issue ‘perturbing’ as they ‘would have great difficulties to talk about workers without going through the prism of their own relationship with a domestic worker’. The author (2003:810) acknowledges that men also benefit from this labour arrangement but argues that paid domestic work is mainly a relationship between women,

by wanting to liberate themselves from the domestic tasks imposed by a masculine order, women from the ‘middle classes’ participate in the perpetuation of another, more obscure and perverse, kind of reproduction of gendered social relations through the private sphere.
Lautier’s (2003:810) argument is at best misleading, as it obscures the fact that men are ultimately beneficiaries of this particular labour arrangement. He acknowledges that the exploitation of domestic workers benefits men the same way as it benefits women but that ‘oppression is mainly exercised by female employers’. Although women employers are involved in the exploitation of workers ‘it should always be borne in mind that ultimately it is men and capitalism that benefit’ from this labour arrangement (Anderson, 2000:7). Paid domestic work enables affluent men to avoid a ‘second shift’ and the negotiation of the gender division of housework as an increasing number of women are involved in paid work (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Anderson, 2000). Moreover, as this thesis shows, men are often directly involved in the sexual abuse and harassment of women workers. Discouragingly, Lautier’s argument is actually backed by a recent publication in a Mexican academic journal that is directed and written by the country’s leading academics and feminists (e.g., Elena Poniatowska, Martha Lamas and Rosario Castellanos). In 2000, Debate Feminista dedicated its 22nd volume to the issue of housework. Surprisingly, most of the articles included in the issue focus on unpaid domestic work even though, according to official estimations, there are up to two million female paid domestic workers in Mexico (ENEO, 2010). When reading the article by Hortensia Moreno (2000:27), I realised why paid domestic work was neglected, as she described the editorial committee’s meeting to discuss the content of the issue as ‘disastrous’. All contributors openly refused to write about paid domestic work expressing that it was a ‘shame to air your dirty laundry in public!’, The authors were offered the option of using a pseudonym but they still refused to write about an occupation that involved the exploitation of women by other women (and men). The editorial committee (Moreno, 2000:28) of one of the few and most important feminist journals in the country concluded that the issue of paid domestic work was, in the words of Moreno, ‘definitivamente una güeva’! (Definitely a drag!). Moreno’s vivid account shows the contradictions of denying difference among women through a journal dedicated to feminism.

With increasing levels of poverty in Mexico domestic and care services will probably continue to be one of the most important sources of female employment in the country and this is therefore an area of social life that we cannot afford to ignore. Whilst there are clearly complex problems of power for professional academics involved in such research, as Skeggs (2002:362) notes, doing research that involves subaltern groups ‘should be a matter of how we do
the research rather than abdicating completely’. The absence of academic engagement with the issue of paid domestic work in Mexico might be explained not only by ‘guilt’, lack of ‘distance’ or pure elitism but also by the way the issue entails a complex discussion of race in Mexico.

As I write these pages I read with great interest reviews and reactions to the novel and film versions of The Help in the United States. Briefly, the story is about a group of young white middle class women and their black domestic workers in 1960s Mississippi. The Help has provoked a widespread reaction from the black community condemning both the novel and the film for misrepresenting black life and giving a false idea of sisterhood where white and black women are both oppressed by gender but controlled by race and class. The Association of Black Women Historians condemns The Help as it ‘distorts, ignores, and trivialises the experiences of black domestic workers’ (ABWH, 2011). For many, what seems to be the centre of the controversy is the whiteness of the protagonist and that of the author of the story. ‘What gives her the right to tell this story in the first place?’, asks columnists Marty Mitchell (2011), although she later describes her surprise after finding a valuable depiction of ‘the complex relationships that must have developed between the white families and the black women who raised white children’.

Armond White from the New York Press suggests that The Help gives a false impression of post-racial America ‘where the anxieties of unequal yet mutually beneficial black-white relationships are conveniently, speciously, put behind us’ (White, 2011). White is right to suggest that the racialisation of domestic and care work is hardly a thing of the past and immigrant women from developing countries are increasingly joining (perhaps replacing) black women in the sector. Some professional black women in their 30s have said to identify more with the white women in The Help than with the black workers and one of them states ‘I’d hate to think some of our grandmothers survived that just for us to end up like little brown versions of the white women they used to work for’ (The Root, 2011).

Whether The Help is a ‘good’ story or not is for readers and viewers to decide. What is important to stress here is that the controversy that the story has provoked in the US is in itself important for the continuance of debates about racial thinking. The dichotomy of Western racial thought that divides ‘blacks from
whites’ seems to enable such a vibrant and easily identified response from those who feel (mis)represented by the story. Despite the caricatured representation of white women in *The Help*, it remains the case that some of the rituals of separation depicted in the story are still part of the everyday life of workers in countries such as Mexico. However, the myth of *mestizaje* has constrained important academic and political debates on race. It is difficult to imagine a similar debate to that which emerged in the US in response to *The Help* arising in contemporary Mexico.

While *The Help* looks at the American past with some sort of triumphalism over racial thinking, in Mexico, no one seems to notice a colour pattern among the low ranked sectors of the labour market. No one seems to be discussing if and how such a pattern affects women differently. This thesis aims to do so through the study of women in paid domestic work in Mexico. This work sets out to ask how the social hierarchies involved in the marginalisation of workers constitute and maintain one another. In order to answer such a question the thesis argues that it is necessary to interrogate notions of national identity that have depended on the denial of racism. In the context of paid domestic work, the task of deciphering difference among women meant exploring the mutual constitution of social hierarchies; race in Mexico could not be fully understood without gender and class as it is constituted through them.

The challenge of the work hereby presented was to examine race in the context of national discourses that have denied the conceptual possibility of it. As Moreno (2010:391) argues that the denial of racism along with its normalisation ‘allows Mexican people to express and be convinced by the commonly spread idea that in Mexico there is no racism because we are all ‘mixed’. *Mestizaje* entails the idea of a common racial origin, however, as this thesis shows such a notion is by no means neutral. The myth of *mestizaje* facilitates a common sense of belonging and a self collective identification that forcibly requires the denial of racial difference. The racial history of food and ideas about sexuality, morality and motherhood illustrate the way notions of *mestizaje* and Mexicanness privilege whiteness and the way gender and class are implicated in such process.

This work speaks of the unspeakable, illustrates the invisible and grasps some of the most intangible forms of exclusion in Mexico. The silenced discourses and practices that I investigated were revealed through the body; as Arthur Frank (1995:27) argues: ‘the body is not mute, but it is inarticulate; it does not use
speech, yet begets it’. Unintentionally or perhaps guided by my own embodiments women’s experiences lead me into ‘the subjectivities of the flesh’; they allowed me to understand ‘how bodies themselves hold an unspoken knowledge’ (Kosut and Moore, 2010:2). As Counihan (1999:62) argues, the study of bodily boundaries is useful for revealing the deep structures and meanings of social organization:

Particular attention to the role of food, sex and birth in crossing those boundaries, can reveal much about a society’s belief about men’s and women’s relationships, autonomy and vulnerability.

Food, sexuality and motherhood had a central stage in women’s (both employers and workers) experiences and this was not a coincidence. Those experiences were vividly illustrative of the way body boundaries were constructed and are maintained today, but they were also a manifestation of historical continuances and ruptures between past and present structures of thought. As we shall see throughout the thesis, colonial constructions around food, sexuality and motherhood have informed the structures of thought that maintain social boundaries today.

The theoretical framework used to explore women in paid domestic work in Mexico is discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. The various definitions of domestic and care work are exposed as well as some of the most important debates regarding women’s supposed suitability for housework. The chapter explores some of the debates around the imagined public and private spheres of life and follows relevant critiques of feminists’ approaches to women’s oppression. For instance, it is argued that explanations of a woman’s role in the house that give priority to gender have silenced the racial and class hierarchies that inform the process of outsourcing domestic and care work to less privileged women. Paid domestic work is one of the most visible ways to argue against the universalisation of women’s lives, needs, sources of oppression and ideas regarding, among other things, sexuality or motherhood. This chapter offers a brief examination of intersectionality because of the interesting way that its proponents have problematised the issue of differences among women and the multiple dimensions of marginalised subjects. In this chapter, the explanatory power of the intersectionality approach is discussed as well as its limitations and complexities.
Chapter 2 identifies recent academic literature on paid domestic work. It reviews some of the main approaches to the issue in international, national and regional scholarly work. The chapter argues that domestic workers or ‘servants’ have often been seen as a ‘guiding thread’ for the study of social organisation. Three influential works are explored in order to illustrate the centrality of ‘servants’ among colonial studies and theories that account for the construction of class, gender and racial selves. These are Michel Foucault and The History of Sexuality; Ann Laura Stoler and her work in Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things; and Imperial Leather by Anne McClintock. It is argued that the analytical presence of domestic ‘servants’ in such works is explained not by the women’s embodiment of difference but instead by their proximity to the ‘bourgeois’ family and therefore by their dangerous ambiguity. The seeming contradiction between distance and intimacy that this particular occupation entails has been managed, in various cultural, historical and spatial contexts, by complex rituals of separation that are coded by a gender, class and racial language. The chapter then looks at ambiguity in the context of mestizaje in Mexico and explores the historical transformation of the meanings, discourses and practices regarding miscegenation. Through a brief analysis of the India Bonita Contest in 1921 this chapter connects the complex meanings of mestizaje with the way domestic workers in Mexico and other parts of Latin America have been historically racialised as ‘not so Others’. Finally, the chapter explores the complex history of Guanajuato’s social composition highlighting the relevance of the black slave trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This chapter illustrates the extent to which blackness was abruptly excluded from the ‘chosen race’ that was meant to form the basis of Mexican national identity: the mestizo.

The main questions that guided this research are discussed in chapter 3; these questions represent the core of my enquiry or, as Mason (2006) puts it, the intellectual puzzle that has shaped this thesis. This chapter situates the site of the study and maps the spatial, economic and social context of the women participants. This research involves relations of power and difference between women in Mexico, and this chapter exposes the researcher’s location in order to make transparent who is speaking and why. Some of the debates around reflexive sociology and the telling of the self are identified; especially those that equate location to authority and legitimisation.
This research is based mainly on qualitative interviewing with women employers and workers and from observations made during the year 2008. The methods that were selected for the research are linked to the way I perceived the generation of knowledge but also upon my previous experience doing social research in the UK and Mexico. I believe that people’s experiences are meaningful properties of social reality and that knowledge could be generated through interaction and conversation. However, since not all experiences are articulated or easy to recount through an interview, observation was used to complement the interview process in interesting and valuable ways. The chapter includes a reflexive account of the process of recruiting the women for the study and of some experiences in the field during the interviewing and while conducting observations. Studying social reality is not a neutral exercise; therefore this chapter describes the ethical procedures followed throughout the research and explores issues regarding representation. This research was conducted in Mexico with the participation of Spanish speaking women; thus, the politics of translation are exposed as well as the way such issues of language were addressed.

Drawn from interviews and observations with women employers and domestic workers, this thesis explores three distinctively human experiences that are deeply connected to people’s conceptions of the individual and the social body: food, sexuality and motherhood. Chapter 4 looks at the racialised history of food in Mexico and the parallels between food and human mestizaje. Differences in consumption and preferences among different ethnic and class groups in Mexico are acknowledged by recent literature on food and eating. However, the construction of a national cuisine seems to reproduce, even today, ideas of culinary mestizaje that contain very similar hierarchies to those regarding human mestizaje. Culinary regional differences are frequently ignored and foodstuffs are differently positioned in the hierarchies of race, class and gender. The chapter explores the history of the construction of a national cuisine and the way diets and bodies in early colonial Spanish America were regarded as crucial to the colonial enterprise. Food and diet were used to construct ‘European’ selves and therefore to distinguish the social categories of ‘Indian’ and ‘Spaniard’. The racialisation of foodstuff and the preoccupation with ‘civilizing’ the indigenous population through a change of diet continued to be the focus of political discourses and public policies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By creating a national cuisine through an imagined ‘dual’ identity the historical racialisation of food and the hierarchies involved in the process were eventually
disguised by national discourses. Just as in the case of human mestizaje, the myth of a national cuisine worked to disguise social hierarchies that today inform taste and food consumption.

In the context of paid domestic work in Mexico, this chapter suggests that food and eating distinctions are still an important element in the negotiation of cultural and economic resources and of national belonging. Domestic workers are often subjected to humiliating food distinction practices and food deprivation. Food is still a powerful racial marker in Mexico and distinctions made through food and eating serve to visualise the rituals of separation that work to reproduce the devaluation of women’s work and maintain the status quo of this occupation.

This chapter looks at food distinction practices found not only at the intimate space of the home but also as elements of social display. The social meaning of feast food is analyzed through observation and women’s experiences regarding food for celebrations. It is argued that feast food can work to enhance group membership but also to set groups apart. Notions of disgust are also explored to illustrate the link between concerns regarding contamination and the construction of body boundaries between employers and workers.

Food and sex are associated in many cultures because of their relation to the body. Counihan (1999:9) argues that eating and intercourse share similar instinctive drives, ‘both involve passage across body boundaries of external substances that are then incorporated into the body. Both are essential to life and growth’. In addition, the symbolic association between food and sex is manifested through notions around contamination. Chapter 5 turns to the sexualisation of paid domestic workers in Mexico; approaches that have tried to explain the link between sex and race through psychoanalysis and the process of self formation are briefly explored. The chapter illustrates how the institutionalised violence against women in Mexico is coded by a racial and class hierarchy. It is then argued that there is a social context that seems to mediate the processes of self formation and Otherness that are deeply linked to sexuality. The chapter explores a particular genealogy that has been dismissed by many studies of sex and race: dirt.

Through the pre-Hispanic figure of Tlazolteotl, the ‘Filth Deity’, this chapter looks at pre-Hispanic notions of dirt, sex and fertility. It is argued that the colonial act of translation, interpretation and redirection of Nahua thought regarding the
*tlazolli* (dirt) complex might have informed and shaped concerns, meanings and practices around pollution. Through the work of Mary Douglas (1966) and other studies of body and dirt, the chapter suggests that dirt is not an isolated event but one involved in the maintenance of social classifications. The sexualisation of some women in Latin America seems to be connected with notions regarding ethnic and gender transgressions that are at the same time coded by class and by women’s work in the imagined public sphere.

Purity is deeply linked to concerns about ambiguity, thus, *mestizaje* and the hierarchies of racial origin become an important element in the negotiation of belonging and the reproduction of difference. Female employers engage in the reproduction of ideas that define workers’ sexuality as ‘wild’ and deviant and they do so by transforming a class and racial conflict into a moral one. A class and racial language is used to link the individual with the social body so that a workers’ lack of morality is linked to her family and whole community. The sexualisation of domestic workers is used to justify exploitation and to camouflage structural inequality through the need of workers to be ‘saved’ from their own individual and social body.

Sexuality and motherhood have more than the obvious link of human reproduction. Concerns over body boundaries are expressed through the regulation of sexuality but also manifested in notions of ‘good’ mothering and childrearing. Chapter 6 looks at how paid domestic work enables or constrains women’s experiences as mothers even though employers and workers construct and follow different notions of motherhood. In the Mexican context, motherhood seems to be informed or shaped by three maternal figures that were constructed through the colonial experience and that entail diverse and ever changing meanings and interpretations; The *Virgin of Guadalupe*, *La Malinche*, and *La Llorona* (the weeping mother). Middle and working class women might be informed differently by such maternal figures. For instance, middle class women who employ a domestic worker seem to follow a notion of ‘good’ mothering that entails a ‘cool’ and permissive attitude towards children. Released from the menial work of mothering (i.e. cleaning, feeding, washing) female employers construct different (although also demanding) gendered expectations around childrearing.

Paid domestic workers do follow different notions of ‘good’ mothering that are related to providing for their families and empowering their children through their
work. Othermothering, that is, the involvement of other women relatives (especially daughters) in childrearing is common within workers’ organisation of mother work. Although alternative notions of ‘good’ mothering could be understood as ways to confront middle class notions of motherhood, caution must be taken when romanticizing strategies that are shaped more by a lack of opportunities than by a conscious resistance to gender, class or racial hierarchies. This chapter examines how the state discourses and policies have worked to construct the idea of indigenous and working class women as ‘bad mothers’. Discourses and practices that have historically defined domestic workers as unfit for childrearing have fed employers’ preferences for childless workers. These notions have helped to justify the exploitation of women in this occupation, the devaluation of their experiences as mothers and their care work in the house of middle class families. Forced sterilisation and public assistance programs continuously define working class women as ‘bad mothers’ and by doing so reproduce marginalisation and a cheap labour source of women in domestic service.

Food, sexuality and motherhood are not merely ‘key themes’ in this work but rather points of departure from which to start to visualise the discrimination of women in paid domestic work. It is no coincidence that these three aspects of human life were important elements in women’s experiences. These resonances illustrate not only aspects of the relationship between employers and workers but also, and perhaps more importantly, aspects about women themselves and the way women relate to their own bodies.

This thesis concludes that the study of paid domestic work in Mexico contributes to the understanding of Mexico’s complex social history. The study of women in this occupation illustrates how exclusion and discrimination exist simultaneously with the denial of racism. This occupation can be regarded as a ‘social palimpsest’ since it enables us to visualise the changing meanings and hierarchies of mestizaje in everyday life and how these connect with the racialisation of women domestic workers.

The effective mechanisms of power in Mexico have partially depended on the misrecognition of racial thinking. Race is not only constituted in and through class and gender but also camouflaged by these categories of social organisation. In Mexico, racial difference has been disguised for centuries by class, as David T. Goldberg suggests (1993:106), understanding race as class is misleading:
Racist exclusions may cut across class divisions as much as they coincide with and carry forward class differentiation and exploitation. In some contexts, racist exclusions may enable class exploitation, just as class exploitation may (often) take the form of racist exclusion. Nevertheless, there are forms of racist exclusion that do not entail class exploitation, just as class exploitation need not require racist exclusivity.

Modern ideas of class are deeply linked to capitalist industrialism and the ‘two great classes’ identified by Marx and Engels; the bourgeoisie and the industrial working class or proletariat. The work of Max Weber has also shaped the way we understand and debate about class. As with Marx, Weber emphasized the economic dimension of class, but he included the possession of individual skills and qualifications for the formation of class differences (Turner, 2006; Williams, 1983). This thesis understands workers’ class as a formation that is constituted in and through workers’ gender and race. At the same time, as the following chapter shows, mestizaje and the racialisation that this process entails has historically been constituted through class and gender codes. For this reason, the vulnerability of women domestic workers in Mexico is explained by a particular articulation of social hierarchies and by the workers’ proximity to the middle class.

On 16 June 2011, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the convention and recommendation concerning decent work for domestic workers. This is the first time that the ILO included the informal economy in its standards system; women in this occupation were finally recognised as workers. However, the issue of paid domestic work is still undertheorised and there is still much to do regarding the rights of women workers across the world. The thesis hereby presented will hopefully assist creative forms of political action whereby workers are empowered to resist discrimination. In addition, the knowledge generated through workers’ and employers’ lived experiences could be an important contribution to race, class and gender studies in Mexico and to feminists’ methodologies and the study of difference among women.
**Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework: Paid Domestic Work and Ambiguity**

Domestic and care work are difficult to define without acknowledging first that ‘the actual doing of the work –who does it, when and where- is a crucial part of its meaning’ (Romero, 1992 in Anderson, 2000:14). Notions regarding the home have changed throughout time (Mallett, 2004) as well as ideas regarding the work that is done from or for the home. As Foucault (2004:4) suggests in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, the history of a concept is that of its transformations, ‘that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured’.

The aim of this chapter is to look at notions and definitions of domestic and care work. Some of the most important debates and theoretical approaches to women and unpaid work within the home are explored. It is argued that such approaches have informed the way tasks or processes involved in domestic and care work are understood when they are outsourced to less privileged women. This chapter exposes the analytical centrality of the figure of the domestic worker or ‘servant’ in colonial (and post-colonial) studies. It is argued that ‘servants’ are central to studies of social classification, not because these women embody difference, but rather because their proximity to the middle class entails ambiguity. With this in mind, the following connects concerns over ambiguity and the unstable and changing notions of mestizaje in Mexico from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

The first section of this chapter (2.1.) looks at possible definitions of domestic and care work and the complexities of disentangling one from the other. The section identifies debates on women’s oppression and the public and private divide. Questions regarding the adequacy of the public/private divide and patriarchy to explain women’s oppression are discussed since feminists are still struggling to conceptualise a category of women without universalizing their experiences. The project of intersectionality is included in this section as it has been an important attempt to problematise difference among women albeit not one without problems and limitations.

Sections 2.2 and 2.3 look at the recent literature of paid domestic work in Western Europe, the United States and Latin America. The section explores the analytical priorities that have been applied to the study of paid domestic
work and how these have shaped the way this occupation is understood today. Much of the international literature is centred on issues of globalisation, international female immigration, race and citizenship. Although regional literature is few, existing works point to the need for further study on the issue of paid domestic work.

Academic interest in paid domestic worker is not new; many studies have analysed and exposed the place of servants in the construction of gender, class and racial selves in and out of the colonies. Through the works of Michel Foucault, Ann Stoler and Anne McClintock, section (2.4) explores some possible explanations for the analytical centrality of domestic servants among colonial studies. Since the figure of the domestic servant seems to be deeply linked to concerns over ambiguity, section (2.5) looks at mestizaje and how indigenous and racialised women have been placed within this myth of national identity. This section also examines the way Guanajuato, the site of the study, has been historically perceived as a mestizo state while the relevance of blackness to the social composition of the region has been systematically denied. This chapter concludes that the meaning of housework cannot solely be explored though the lens of gender and women’s oppression within the home. The experiences of paid domestic workers illustrate that domestic labour is not only divided by gender but also by class and race. Both international and national academic work need to engage with the study of women in this occupation and the emerging debates and approaches on the conceptualisation of women’s differences.

2.1 Defining Housework through the Public/Private Debate and the Intersectional Experience

There seems to be a consensus among scholars regarding the difficulty of defining housework and the consequential lack of a precise job description within this occupation (Lutz and Shwalgin, 2005; Anderson, 2000). Rather than just a number of tasks, housework is a series of processes inextricably linked and often operating at the same time (Schwartz, 1983). The tasks and processes that make up household work (whether paid or unpaid) involve not only highly skilled manual work but also mental and emotional labour (Anderson, 2000, Lutz and Schwalgin, 2005; Marjorie L. DeVault, 1991; Oakley, 1974).
Housework has been defined as” The Three C’s” – Cooking, Cleaning and Caring; however, it is difficult to disentangle each of these tasks from the other as they are often done simultaneously (e.g., cooking while cleaning and caring). Glenn (1992:5) defines caring ‘as the relationships and activities involved in maintaining people on a daily basis and intergenerationally’. Studies of care labour have shown how caring (as emotion) and caring (as labour) are also intrinsically connected, as it would be impossible to care in the relational sense without involving the physical work of cleaning or cooking for the cared-for (Finch and Groves, 1983; Graham, 1983; Waerness, 1984; Himmelweit, 1999). In some countries, domestic and care services are, at least in theory, conceived as different jobs. In Mexico, the Federal Labour Law, article 331, defines a domestic worker as that person who ‘provides cleaning services, assistance and other [tasks] that are inherent to a household, a person or family’. Under this definition the law leaves the description of domestic work as discretionary.

The notion of housework is deeply entangled with feminism and twentieth century debates around the public and private spheres of life (see Clark, 1978; Fudge, 1987; Lacey, 1993; Olsen, 1985, 1983; Pateman, 1983 and Boyd, 1997). This divide denotes an imagined (gendered) construction of life into apparently opposing spheres of public and private activities and responsibilities. As Okin (1991) explains, ‘public and private’ refer both to the distinction between the state and society (as in public and private ownership), and to the distinction between non-domestic and domestic life (were the family is located). In such division women have been historically assumed as especially suitable for the private sphere of home and family (Olsen, 1985; Berk, 1985; Okin, 1991; Boyle, 1997). The relevance of the public-private divide for women’s oppression lies not only in the confinement of women within the private sphere but also on the way this side of the imagined dichotomy is supposedly ‘protected’ from state regulation (Olsen, 1985). As Boyle (1997) argues, drawing a line between state regulation (government), economic activity (market) and the family has historically worked against women. Not only has such division hindered efforts for labour equality among non-governmental organizations (as the state must not interfere with the

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1 Ley Federal del Trabajo, (emphasis in ‘inherent’ added)
market) it has maintained the undervaluation of unpaid and paid housework (as market and family are thought of as occupying different and unrelated spheres of life) and finally it has had a detrimental impact on state regulation on issues such as domestic violence. As Boyle (1997:10) argues:

This version of the divide has a detrimental impact on women’s ability to obtain compensation for their injuries or recognition of their work in the home...one example of this division is the state’s failure to deal with men’s violence against women in the ‘private’ sphere of family relations. This particular public/private boundary rests, therefore, on a ratification of unequal power relations between men and women in heterosexual families.

Throughout the public/private debate, attempts were made to conceptualise the material position of housewives and to establish the place of housework within capitalism and more specifically within Marxist value theory. A number of scholars argued that women’s oppression within the house benefited capital accumulation as this worked to reproduce the labour power of men (and the future labour power of children) on a daily and generational basis (Seccombe, 1974; Gardiner, 1975). It was also suggested that capitalism benefited from women’s oppression by helping to reproduce and perpetuate the notion of a privatised, consumption-centred family life (e.g. Zaretsky, 1976). However, because patriarchy predated capitalism it was soon clear that women’s oppression could not be solely explained as an effect of class relations (Walby, 1986; Barrett, 1980). Feminists started to question in its entirety the adequacy of Marxist’s categories for explaining women’s unpaid work in terms of the reproductive dimensions of human life (Okin, 1991; Anderson, 2000). Women’s work was not only involved in the reproduction of units of labour power but in the maintenance of social human beings. Social reproduction, defined as ‘the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally’ (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 383) became a more suitable term to describe women’s involvement in housework (Duffy, 2007; Anderson, 2000; Romero, 1992).

Feminists questioned the adequacy of the public/private debate when looking at women’s experiences, as for many women of colour, work and family were never really experienced as dichotomous spheres of life (Collins, 1994; Boyle,
The argument about the absence of state intervention into the ‘private’ family life was also unsustainable (Boyle, 1997) since welfare policies historically interfered (and often worked in detriment to) the families of poor, often racialised women (i.e. Blum, 2004; Sesia, 2002). Feminists also challenged the view that a gender hierarchy was the primary cause of women’s oppression (Collins, 1994; Boyle, 1997), as many women were and are still oppressed by other social hierarchies such as race, age, class, citizenship, disability etc. Defining gender is not a straightforward process, for some, gender refers to the social institutionalisation of sexual difference through ‘socially constructed and historically variable relationships, cultural meanings and identities’ (Laslett and Brenner, 1989: 382) or it is ‘a set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes’ (Connell, 2009:11). Making distinctions between bodies presupposes a gender hierarchy, that is, the sexualisation of inequality between men and women (MacKinnon, 1987). The work hereby presented uses this understanding of gender hierarchy, however, Butler’s (1988) argument about the extent to which gender hierarchy serves heterosexual normativity and hegemony must also be acknowledged.

Following Connell (2009:73), gender is always being constituted in everyday life, as such, ‘if we don’t bring it into being, gender does not exist’. Butler coincides with this view but argues for an understanding of gender as performative as it constitutes the identity that is purported to be. Butler (1990:34) argues that ‘there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’. For McNay (1999:178), Butler ‘fails to explain how the performative aspects of gender identity are lived by individuals in relation to the web of social practices in which they are enmeshed’.

However, as Judith Butler (1990:20) warned us, in the case of women, the challenge is to move beyond assuming ‘a category of ‘women’ that simply needed ‘to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity and sexuality in order to become complete’. This is what the project of intersectionality set out to resolve when, in 1989, Kimberley Crenshaw argued against treating race, class and gender as mutually exclusive realms of experience and analysis. For Crenshaw (1989:140), ‘because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism,’ any
analysis that dismissed intersectionality was unable to fully address the mechanism for the oppression of Black women. Intersectionality became a new, albeit widely debated, way to conceptualise difference (see Prins, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Davis, 2008; Verloo, 2006; Duffy, 2009).

Although the project of intersectionality has had significant implications for the study of women, this approach has proven to be more difficult than previously thought. Some have questioned the explanatory power of intersectionality due to its methodological vagueness. Intersectionality seems to provide enough evidence to support the need to subvert race/gender binaries (Collins, 1990) in the service of theorizing identity in a more complex fashion but has failed to explain how to do so (Chang and Culp, 2002; Nash, 2008; McCall, 2005). An important limitation of the project of intersectionality has been said to be the way different kinds of powers, discourses, subjectivities are not separable for analytical purposes,

Subjects of gender, class, nationality, race, sexuality, and so forth, are created through different histories, different mechanisms and sites of power, different discursive formations, and different regulatory schemes. On the other hand, we are not fabricated as subjects in discrete units by these various powers: they do not operate on and through us independently, or linearly, or cumulatively. Insofar as subject construction does not take place along discrete lines of nationality, race, sexuality, gender, caste, class, and so forth, these powers of subject formation are not separable in the subject itself (Brown, 1997:86).

The complexity of separating social categories for analytical purposes has been accompanied by questions regarding the dichotomous logic of domination-oppression for tending to simplify the complex nature of freedom and constraint in capitalist societies (Bourdieu, 1991). Nash (2008) argues that intersectionality seems to deny the agency of marginalised subjects as these might be both victimised by patriarchy and privileged by race (or other social categories) in a particular social, cultural, historical, and political moment. The concept of articulation has been often preferred for allowing a more flexible notion to think about social categories or 'vectors of power' (Clifford, 2001; Butler, 1993 in Wade, 2010) Wade (2010:26) explains the difference between intersection and articulation as follows:
The image of intersection seems to imply a static point or space delineated by intersecting vectors; the image of (re)articulation is more dynamic and flexible- and to my mind preferable- yet both capture the fact that the way race and sex (and other vectors) work together is more than just additive.

Finally, Nash criticises intersectionality for the tendency of many studies to use black women as the prototypical intersectional subjects, as this obscures other subject positions among black women (Nash, 2008). Certainly, some groups of women have been historically seen as special embodiments of difference in both experience and for analytical purpose, as is the case of paid domestic workers. As the next section shows, the increasing academic interest in this occupation illustrates that this, mainly informal, sector is still used as an important site of knowledge that seems to facilitate the study of the extensively diverse angles from which to study social organization.

2.2 Literature Review: International, Regional and National Studies on Paid Domestic Work

It comes as no surprise that recent academic interest on paid domestic work in Western Europe and America coincides with the increase in female immigration into developed countries and the development of a new ‘servant’ class in receiving countries, and many studies have focused on issues of citizenship and the oppression of immigrant women (See Anderson, 2000; Salazar Parreñas, 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2004; Mantouvalou, V. 2006; Herrera, G. 2005; Silvery, R. 2006; Sarti, R. 2005; Escrivá, A. 2005; Nyberg Sorensen N. 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007, Lutz, H. and Schwalgin, S. 2005; Chang, Grace, 2000; Cox, 2006). Rosie Cox (2006:4) defines the servant problem of today as the effect of unwelcome global trends:

Gender inequalities, income inequalities, racism, work practices that have become less rather than more family-friendly, and childcare provision that still basically expects women to stay at home and look after the kids.

One of the common arguments found in these works is that this occupation is deeply enmeshed in the reproduction of social hierarchies based on women’s class, race and citizenship. Judith Rollins (1985) looks at the relationship between black female workers and their employers in the greater Boston
area. She compares the modern arrangement of paid domestic work with slavery and describes the arduous and unfair conditions that many black and ethnic minority women are subjected to in the US. Rollins argues that domestic service works to absorb increasing numbers of immigrant women while maintaining racial/ethnic subordination. For Rollins (1985:55), the marginalisation of domestic workers is deeply entangled with racism ‘not only through the exclusion of these women from other jobs, but also by the prevention of men of color from obtaining wages sufficient to support their families’. Grace Chang (2000:15), in Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy looks at the policies and ideologies that have historically maintained immigrant women as ‘super-exploitable, low-wage labour’. She explores US immigration policies and argues that, along with media harassment, immigrant women have been portrayed as ‘welfare queens’ and dangerous. The state and employers benefit from these stereotypes by maintaining the exploitation of these women at minimum costs. By denying the right of citizenship, state policies construct an image of immigrants as ‘disposable workers.’

Looking at the Spanish labour market, Parella Rubio (2000) examines the concentration of non-EU immigrant women in caring jobs and argues that such jobs represent a triple labour discrimination based on social class, gender and ethnic group. Similarly, Bridget Anderson’s (2000) book, Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour, explores the living and working conditions of migrant domestic workers with a particular focus on Europe. She suggests that workers’ immigration status significantly impacts on domestic workers’ labour conditions by making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Anderson argues that, in this occupation, employers buy the worker’s ‘personhood’ and the power to command and not merely the workers’ labour power. Anderson notes that domestic service is defined by the workers’ dependency on the employer and this is often reinforced by immigration legislation.

Some studies have looked at the phenomenon of immigration and the consequential formation of transnational families whose core members are located in at least two nation-states. Studies have highlighted the impact of split-households on the relationship between parents and children left behind (Salazar Parreñas, 2001, 2003). Accounts of immigrant women separating
from their families to work in private households in host countries indicate that the pain of family separation is manifested through feelings of helplessness, regret, guilt, vulnerability and insecurity experienced among parents and children (See Nyberg Sorrensen, N. 2005; Salazar Parreñas, 2001; Silvery, R. 2006).

Arlie Russell Hochchild and Salazar Parreñas explore the issue of maternal separation and transnational families in the book *Global Women* (2003) edited by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild. This book offers a collection of essays that focus on immigration and the working conditions of women who travel from poor to rich countries in search of better life conditions. Many chapters in *Global Women* describe the exploitation and abuse that millions of immigrant women endure in developed countries working in the domestic and care services (see Ehrenreich, Anderson, Zarembka). Arlie Russel Hochschild compares the global trend of brain drain from poor to developed countries to that of care drain. She also suggests that the increase of immigrant domestic workers in developed countries is a direct result of the global polarisation between poor and rich countries. Also in this book Zarembka explores human trafficking and defines the conditions of some immigrant domestic workers as modern slavery.

Despite their focus on workers’ harsh labour conditions, some literature highlights the agency of women and their ability to resist unfair treatment. For Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), resistance among women workers is facilitated by the social networks they are able to acquire. She challenges the idea of domestic workers as static victims and argues that a worker’s conditions, improves as she gains experience, learns new strategies of negotiation and knows how to utilise the informational resources of her social networks. Through the concept of ‘boundary work’ some scholars have analyzed the micro-politics of hiring immigrant domestics (Pei-Chia Lan, 2003; Lutz and Schwalgin, 2005; Hau-nung Chan, 2005). Boundary work is an ‘intrinsic part of the process of constituting the self by defining who we are through the creation of inferences concerning our similarity to and differences from others (Lamont, 1992 cited in Pai-Chia Lan, 2003). Lutz and Schwalgin (2005) explore the professionalisation of paid domestic work in Germany. They argue that workers could benefit from the construction of a ‘boundary work’, that is, by detaching themselves from the emotional character of the
occupation. Hau-nung Chan (2005) looks at how female employers in Hong Kong redefine good parenting by ‘boundary work’, that is, by the professionalisation of domestic work through contract agreements.

Salazar Parreñas (2001) looks at migrant Filipina domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles and argues that the international migration of women could also be read as a process of rejecting gender constraints and; as a direct liberation from traditional duties and roles. While class-privileged women purchase the low-wage service of migrant Filipina domestic workers, these workers simultaneously, purchase the even lower wage services of poorer women left behind in the Philippines. This three-tier transfer of reproductive and household labour to less privileged women challenges the view of immigrant domestic workers only as victims of exploitation.

There are very few studies on paid domestic work in Latin America and Mexico. Nonetheless, interest in the subject is definitely increasing and recent international attention to the issue of domestic workers might prove crucial for further academic engagement with the issue. More than two decades ago, Chaney and García Castro’s book Muchachas No More (1989) represented a groundbreaking account of the work and life conditions of women in paid domestic work in the region. However, as the editors acknowledged back then, the book was a first step to understanding the social dynamics of this occupation since the majority of the articles included were, in their own words, ‘descriptive more than theoretical’. For Chaney and García Castro a further, more systematic research was needed to fully understand the place of domestic service in Latin America. Muchachas No More looks at the link between various economic crises in Latin America throughout the twentieth century and the steady increment of women in this occupation.

Flora Cornelia Butler (1989) looks at the representation of domestic workers in Latin American photo stories of the 1980s. She argues that these women are often portrayed as sexually available, as passive victims or, in the case of older workers (between 65 and 70 years old) as wise and protective women whose only aim in life is the development and well being of their younger employers. Duarte (1989) questions the notion of women’s ‘double shift’, that is, the double burden of waged labour and unpaid work at home. For Duarte, the concept of women’s ‘double shift’ is misleading as it silences the way that, for many ‘live in’ domestic workers, such ‘double shifts’ do not involve
their own families. Workers have a ‘double shift’ in terms of the long working schedules they are forced to comply with, and therefore, such a shift does not follow the original sense of the concept at hand. Kuznesof (1989:36) compares domestic service in Hispanic America and Europe and notes that the colonial experience meant that the occupation was conceived differently,

Partly because of the colonial circumstances of conquest and caste/race relations, domestic service in Spanish America became an aspect of race and class subordination rather than the ‘stage of life’ learning experience it had usually been in preindustrial Europe.

In her book *Precarious Dependencies*, Lesley Gill (1994) explores paid domestic work in Bolivia through the lens of race relations. She describes the vulnerability and racialisation of domestic workers without fixing them as passive victims of their mistresses. She looks at the lives of Aymara domestic workers and their white female employers in Bolivia and shows how the economic crisis of the 1980s and shifting beliefs about gender norms have meant the entrance of many white middle class women into the labour market and the increase of available immigrant women to work in domestic service. For Gill, as white women became more dependent on outsourced domestic service, workers have become more aware of their power to negotiate better working conditions with employers.

In Mexico, Laura Chavarría (2008) looks at the importance of social networks among indigenous domestic workers to negotiate working conditions and resist abuse and violence. Social networks not only facilitate indigenous women to find a good employer but also represent financial and emotional support for workers. Gutiérrez and Rosas’ (2010) book *Entre Muros* offers the autobiographies of four indigenous women (Mixe, Nahuatl, Mazateca and Cuicateca) in Mexico City. In this book, workers share emotional accounts of the difficulties they faced when inserting, as children, in the urban domestic service and the discrimination, violence and abuse they experienced at the hands of employers. However, workers also express feelings of pride and empowerment; they see themselves as independent women and acknowledge their learnt abilities for the job and for the negotiation of better working conditions.
Mary Goldsmith’s PhD thesis on *Female Household Workers in Mexico City* (1993) is based on the qualitative research of domestic workers’ experiences in Mexico City. Goldsmith explores the history of paid domestic work in Mexico and describes the working conditions of women in this occupation. Ann S. Blum article (2004:72) *Cleaning the Revolutionary Household 1900-1935* looks at state policies and welfare institution role in the reproduction of ideas that defined working class women as unfit for childrearing. Blum looks at public orphans and their role as ‘suppliers’ of domestic servants for urban employers through ‘loosely supervised, extra-legal adoption’ of young girls. Finally, the work of Julia del Carmen Chávez and Cecilia Buendía (2005) from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* provides with a descriptive account of the working conditions of 18 domestic workers in Mexico City.

In addition to scholarly work, there are also some examples of grey literature. In 2003, the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social* in Mexico (The UK equivalent for the Department of Work and Pensions) published a document called *‘Dale la mano a tus manos’* (give a hand to your hands) to promote a federal proposal to dignify paid domestic work. It is worth noticing that the title of this work suggests (perhaps unintentionally) a sense of ownership and transference. The *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* (Centre for the Study of Women) has also published a number of works on domestic work in Argentina (Zurutuza and Bercovich, 1986) and Chile (Todaro and Gálvez, 1985). However the Centre offers advocacy rather than academic literature on the issue of paid domestic work.

Many examples of international and regional studies seem to share the view that paid domestic work undermines feminists’ ideals and the possibility of a gender revolutionary change because it positions women as ‘mistresses and maids’ rather than allies (see Enhrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Anderson, 2000; Lautier, 2003; Chaney and García, 1989). As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the problem with such arguments is that conceiving the employment of a domestic or care worker as inherently immoral may have a contradictory effect on the study of such occupation and the recognition of women as workers. As Michelle Goldberg (2003) argues, this view may unintentionally fix the workers as passive victims and middle class women as ‘bitches’ while falling short of discussing policy changes that could actually improve working conditions for women. For Goldberg, it is elitist to
suggest that hiring a domestic worker is itself an immoral act since denying
work to immigrant women would have a detrimental effect on many workers
and their families.

An interest in paid domestic work is not a new phenomenon, what is new is
the focus of recent literature on the working and living conditions of women in
this occupation and the interesting and revealing ways international studies
are connecting the marginalisation of women with global economic and social
processes. However, as argued in the following section, although the current
focus on paid domestic work and female immigration represents an important
contribution to the study of this occupation, there are also limitations and
challenges that have been overlooked.

2.3 Looking at gender, race and class through the lenses of
immigration: the case of paid domestic work

As described above, the growing literature on paid domestic work and female
immigration represents an important contribution to the understanding of new
international networks of domestic and care work and the numerous effects of
global economic trends on the reproduction of social inequalities among
women. However, giving analytical privilege to the issue of citizenship could
also prove problematic when attempting to conceptualise difference among
women from a particular ethnic/racial or national group. For instance,
Margaret L. Hunter (2002:189) looks at African American and Mexican
American women in the United States. She analyses skin color as social
capital among these two groups of women and argues that lighter skinned
women are more privileged than darker skinned women in terms of income,
educational attainment and the likelihood of women marrying high-status
men. However, she finds significant differences within these groups and
explains these inconsistencies by the way Mexicans Americans are conceived
differently when it comes to race/ethnicity,

Mexican Americans are defined not usually as a racial group but
as an ethnic group within the larger Latino racial group or as an
ethnic group that crosses racial lines depending on phenotype,
where the lightest Mexican Americans may be considered racially
white and the darkest Mexican Americans may be considered
Indian.
Hunter’s work demonstrates the difficulties involved in examining how immigrant women should be conceptualised. It is also a good example of the problems and challenges posed by analyzing paid domestic work mainly in relation to immigration. One of these problems is the tendency to equate the immigrant status of women with their racial, ethnic or class status. As Pratt (1999:218) notes, ‘a central discursive struggle surrounds whether domestic workers are interpreted in racial/immigration or class terms’. For instance, Bakan and Stasiulis (1995:306) look at the industry of private domestic placement agencies in Canada. The authors show how agencies reproduce a highly racialised set of practices when recruiting female noncitizen domestic workers. However, as the authors note, their analysis is based on ‘a broader concept of citizenship that includes social, economic, and legal elements and presupposes intersecting racial, gender and class biases’. Treating citizenship as an "all encompassing" concept might not be as problematic as assuming that the workers’ immigration status is tantamount to exclusions in virtue of what the authors call an intersection of workers’ race, gender and class.

Literature that focuses on immigrant women workers in host countries and indigenous workers in sending ones might facilitate the analysis of race/ethnicity within the occupation. However, some works do so at the cost of obscuring important elements of the work itself and the experiences of women workers who are not so ‘neatly’ located in terms of a white/black Western/non-Western dichotomy. Radcliffe and Westwood’s (1996:29) study of place, identity and politics in Latin America illustrates the way race, in the context of paid domestic work, is often under-problematised as they make assumptions about workers lines of descent,

Domestic servants are of African or indigenous descent throughout Latin America. But, and it is a very large but, the racialization and feminization of domestic work is so much part of the commonsense reality of Latin America that it is 'invisible'.

Although the authors rightly identify the racialised and gendered discourses and practices around paid domestic work in the region, they appear to make assumptions about the workers’ own ethnic or racial ascriptions. In short, the authors seem to miss the complexity of mestizaje when considering the racialisation of paid domestic work in Latin America, ignoring the millions of
women who are not indigenous but are still racialised through the work they do.

The work of Pape (1993) on domestic workers in Zimbabwe is a good example of the way important changes in the racialised configurations of paid domestic work do not necessarily mitigate the devaluation of the occupation and the exploitation of workers. Pape looks at the effects of independence on domestic workers in Zimbabwe during the years 1980-1990, when white employers left the country and were suddenly replaced by a 'black petite bourgeoisie class'. He argues that black employers were able to afford a domestic servant but not able to reproduce some of the working conditions offered by white employers of the past (i.e. minimum wage). Not only did exploitative conditions remain unchallenged by the new 'racial' configuration, but the domestic and care sector became increasingly feminised after independence. In addition, cases of workers accusing (black) male employers of sexual harassment continued, alongside the jealously of (black) middle-class women employers.

As Pape’s work illustrates, looking at the social dynamics of paid domestic work requires not only making visible the workings of clear cut difference and distance but also of proximity and ambiguity. Constable (1997) explores the sexualisation of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. Her analytical focus seems to be placed not on the ‘foreignness’ of the workers or their neatly defined racial/ethnic differences but on a particular bodily experience: dress. Quoting Barnes and Eicher (1992:2 in Constable, 1997:541), the author notes that the way dress is implicated in the formation of selves,

social identity expressed in dress becomes not only an answer to who one is, but also how one is, and concerns the definition of the self in relation to a moral and religious value system. [italics in the original]

Looking at bodily experiences (in this case dress) and the way these work to define the self offers a unique route into exploring the complexities and contradictions of paid domestic work whether or not we are looking at women’s experiences within their own cultural, social or spatial contexts. Constable offers not only an analysis of racial/ethnic differences between women but also of the way class and gender ambiguity are implicated in the
sexualisation of Filipina workers. Regarding workers’ mode of dress, Constable (1997:540) notes that ‘some dress up and others dress “like men”’ – both practices being [a] cause for concern’. When exploring class, the author highlights the way that proximity, and not difference, feeds employers’ concerns:

To employers, the education and class background of some of the new domestic workers come too close for comfort. The ambiguous class identity of foreign domestic workers is one important factor that fuels anxiety, which is expressed in general terms as a concern over their morality and sexuality (1997:542).

Similarly, MacDonald (2010:70) looks at immigrant nannies in the US and argues that middle-class employers were ‘as likely to seek “otherness” in their nannies as they were to seek similarity” by attaching specific meanings to women’s ethnic background. Employers’ notions of proximity/distance are crucial to understanding the social dynamics of this occupation as well as the way these notions are constructed. In the context of paid domestic work, what are the notions, ideas and discourses that inform the construction of "otherness" and "similarity"? How do both groups of women, workers and employers, make sense of these processes? In addition, how do "otherness" and "similarity" work when looking at workers and employers who are not so neatly differentiated in terms of race/ethnicity or citizenship? For instance, MacDonald (2010:79) describes how, for many white parents selecting women to care for their children, whiteness was related to concepts of nurture, safety and shared culture. However, she notes that, for many employers, ‘there was whiteness and there was whiteness’ as women from the Midwest were imagined as better nannies, young girls, 'nice' and 'fresh-faced'.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001:35) explores the experiences of Latina domestic workers and argues that distinctions made through food symbolised the extent to which employers ‘draw the boundaries of exclusion or inclusion’. Hondagneu-Sotelo’s analysis of food distinctions or those of notions of motherhood and childrearing between workers and employers would have been enriched by a more extensive discursive or genealogical analysis. So, when a worker in her study states ‘I love my kids, they don’t’, it would be interesting to know what are the ideas, discourses and genealogies that inform the notions of ‘maternal love’ for Latina workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo,
Similarly, Aranda (2003:614) explores the experience of Puerto Rican immigrant care workers and highlights the importance of care networks of family and friends:

> When migrants felt they did not have these [care networks] in the host society, or could not re-create them or the feelings of belonging they produced, their process of adjustment and settlement was more emotionally challenging. [italics in the original]

As Aranda’s work shows, when analysing paid domestic work, one must look beyond individuals and explore the ideas that women embody, and carry with them, from sending to receiving countries. In Aranda’s study, workers’ subjectivities are key to fully understanding women’s experiences as well as the spatial, historical and social contexts in which these were formed. This work aims to illuminate the notions, discourses and practices that inform social stratification in the context of paid domestic work in Mexico. Distance is then not understood as a fixed or given but as an unstable element, always under threat by the inevitable proximity that paid domestic work entails. Through the study of bodily experiences (food, sexuality and motherhood) this work illuminates the way difference among women is maintained and reproduced and how concerns over ambiguity shape the experiences of women workers in this occupation. Moreover, the notions, discourse, genealogies and practices analysed throughout this thesis could be of great value to the works exploring the experiences of Mexican immigrant workers in host countries. As the next section demonstrates, in the context of paid domestic work, difference between employers and domestic workers should be understood as depending on the same proximity that threatens its production whether looking at women workers within sending countries or receiving ones.

2.4 Servants as ‘the guiding thread’ of social organisation; Michel Foucault, Ann Stoler and Anne McClintock

No other group of women has been so widely used as the prototype of difference than servants. As James Clifford notes ‘in western writing, servants have always performed the chore of representing ‘the people’ – lower classes and different races’ (Clifford, 1988 in Stoler, 1995:149). It could be argued
that servants are ‘the guiding thread’ of eighteenth century debates on an endless list of social problems (often depicted as ‘moral’) affecting the bourgeois family (Donzelot, 1979 in Stoler: 147; Collignon and Rodríguez, 2010). In Foucault’s History of Sexuality (1990:104), servants appear in the context of ‘the pedagogization of children’s sex’, one of the four ‘strategic entiies’ that worked as ‘specific mechanism of knowledge and power’. For Foucault, the precarious sexuality of children was part of the mechanisms used for the affirmation of classed selves as it worked to protect the bourgeois child’s ‘moral fibre’ and above all his ‘obligation to preserve a healthy line of descent for his family and his social class’ (1990: 121). Servants were part of that “tiny, sexually saturated, familial space” where the ‘seductive’ bodies of working class women were at once needed and feared. The care and protection that servants provided for the isolated bourgeois family became central for the maintenance of its ‘differential value’. However, this proximity was also perceived as a threat to its ‘physical and moral, individual and collective’ self (1990:123). Thus, the need for the education of desire was first directed not at the working class child but to that surrounded by servants. The sexual body of the child, its education and surveillance became a mechanism of biopower that made sex and blood indistinguishable and allowed the connection between the micro-management of the individual body to the macro-surveillance of the body politic.

Ann Laura Stoler’s (1995:5) book *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* draws on Foucault’s work but argues that ‘the discursive and practical field in which nineteenth-century bourgeois sexuality emerged was situated on an imperial landscape’ where racial configurations were not a result of bourgeois orderings, as Foucault seems to imply, but constitutive of them. Stoler argues that Foucault seems to dismiss the connection between eighteenth century discourses on children’s sexuality and the making of race and nation. Stoler (1995:137) contends that discourses on the education of what she calls ‘little selves in the making’ worked as a site ‘in which racial transgressions were evident and national identities [were] formed’. She suggests that Foucault’s view of the regulation of sexuality as productive of the bourgeois class obscures the way that sexuality was constructed around a stereotypic and racialised Other, not a distant Other, but an intimate and proximate one that
made colonial identities so dangerously ambiguous; the servant. For Stoler, domestic servants epitomised ‘the class against which the boundaries of the bourgeois self were drawn’ (1995:146). Stoler (1995:164) shows how these boundaries were not only about the potential sexual transgression between the ‘seductive’ servant and the child in her care but about the character, cultural longings, personal and political identifications of new generations:

Bourgeois white identities, both child and adult, were more vulnerable, unstable and susceptible to change. Protection from this fear demanded a rerouting of desires, a displacement of eroticism, an externalisation of arousal to a native or mixed-blood surrogate self. Servants could steal more than the sexual innocence of European children, but the sentiments that underwrote their identification as European.

Stoler (1995:97) rightly suggests that in Foucault’s history of sexuality he seems to assume that, in the affirmation of the bourgeois class, individuals were sure of exactly what they were affirming. She suggests that this was not the case and that servants’ place in such a process was crucial, not because they were the embodiment of clear-cut differences, but precisely because they were not. Their proximity and intimate relations with the bourgeois class entailed the need to regulate such ambiguity by rituals of separation where class and race became ‘dependent constructs in a unified field’

Similar to Stoler’s critique, Anne McClintock (1995:7) argues that Foucault’s privileging of sexuality is done at the cost of neglecting an ‘elaborate analogy between race and gender’ that was involved in the constitution of ‘other social forms.’ In her book, *Imperial Leather* McClintock (1995:5) looks into relations between servants and the bourgeois class and illustrates the way gender, class and race come ‘into existence in and through relations to each other’. By trying to reconcile psychoanalysis and social history, McClintock explores Freud’s work and life. She describes how Freud’s Oedipal theory was informed by his own relationship with a nanny who he later displaced by the mother figure. She argues that Freud’s life illustrates an important element of self formation at the time; the need for children to differentiate from two or more mothers – an element that is still relevant in many countries where reproductive work is outsourced to other, often racialised women.
For McClintock (1995:94) the gender contradiction that having two mother figures represents was managed during the eighteenth and nineteenth century through a social script of difference in which servitude was equated with femininity and ‘constructed through and by class’.

To illustrate this argument, McClintock looks at the life of Arthur Munby, a Victorian barrister who married his servant and was obsessed with working class women. Through Munby’s life and work she argues that ideas of degeneration and lineal progress shaped the way servants and other working-class women were racialised in and outside of the colonies. For McClintock (1995:42), working class women and the colonised were seen as ‘the prototypes of anachronistic humans; childlike, irrational, regressive and atavistic, existing in permanently anterior time within modernity’. She explains (1995:103) how, in the iconography of degeneration, white servants were often portrayed in the same way as black men of other races for ‘the more menial, paid work a woman did, the more she was manly and unsexed; the more she was a race apart’. McClintock argues that this is how gender contradiction was managed at the time, by projecting class and race onto the bodies of white working class women. In her book, McClintock focuses on European cult of domesticity to explore the link between marginalised female labour and imperial and capital relations. She skilfully exposes gender difference as always racialised through class and gender codes. In the context of paid domestic work in Mexico, McClintock’s work facilitates the possibility of identifying racial hierarchies within an imagined racial homogeneity.

Servants occupy a central stage in the work of Stoler, McClintock and many other studies of colonialism (See Bradley, 1981; Richard, 1984; Hecht, 1954; Benerjee, 2004; Bennet, 2003) not because they are the embodiment of difference but precisely because they are not. The ambiguous place of servants within the imperial divide illustrates the articulated and mutually dependent constitution of diverse realms of experience. Servants and the colonised were perceived as dangerous not only for potential sexual and racial transgression but also because possible contaminations of sentiments and immoral proclivities that threaten the very idea of a European self. The idea that some racialised groups were potential sources of contagion was constructed only by making reference to the body and whole structures of thought.
In her influential work on *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (1966:59) suggests that our ideas of pollution and dirt are deeply linked to a ‘total structure of thought whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation.’ Similarly, David T. Goldberg looks at the symbolic relation of corporeal properties and notions of pureness and impureness. He argues that the authority of racist expression is usually vested with power in bodily terms. The body is a direct human experience with a porous but impenetrable ‘skin’. As such, the body is a ‘bounded system’ that conceptually allows us to think of the body politic as a system of bordered criteria; a system of inclusion and exclusion, identities and separateness, corporeal properties have also furnished the metaphorical media for distinguishing the pure from the impure, the diseased from the clean and acceptable, the included from the excluded....impurity, dirt, disease, and pollution are expressed as functions of the transgression of classificatory categories, expressed, that is, in terms of laws, as also are danger and the breakdown of order (1993: 54).

If, as Carson (1990:158) suggests, ‘for many cultures with complex systems of pollution belief *impurity is mixture*’ then the meanings, practices and lived experience of *mestizaje* become an important element when looking at the marginalisation of some women in Mexico. Douglas (1966:184) suggests that ‘purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise’ and this is crucial to understanding why the bodies of women that are particularly conceived as racially ambiguous might represent unique concerns regarding social classification. Race is not ‘real’ in a scientific sense and for that reason it has been widely dismissed as a category to establish human difference. However, race is real as long as individuals persist on thinking racially and as long as it affects people at the level of experience and everyday life (Omi and Winant, 1993). Winant (2004: 155) defines race as ‘a concept that signifies and symbolises socio-political conflicts and interest in reference to different types of human bodies’. For Wade (1997:15), there is not a single meaning of what a ‘race’ is but only a series of ideas and meanings that have changed over time:
races, racial categories and racial ideologies are not simply those that elaborate social constructions on the basis of phenotypical variations – or ideas about innate difference- but those that do so using the particular aspects of phenotypical variation that were worked into vital signifiers of difference during European colonial encounters with others.

Bodily markers have often been assigned with specific cultural and social meanings, however, as Benedict (2000:113) notes, ‘a great deal of the confusion about race comes from confusing hereditary traits with traits which are socially acquired.’ Solomos and Back (2000) agree with this view and suggest that, in recent times, questions about race and racism have been refashioned in ways that emphasize cultural difference and not phenotypical variations. Since race is then an unstable set of social meanings in constant transformation, race will be looked at through a specific process of racialisation in Mexico; mestizaje. Omi and Winant (1986:64) define racialisation as ‘the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group. Racialisation is an ideological process; a historically specific one’.

Mestizaje has been defined as ‘essentially the notion of racial and cultural mixture’ (Wade,2005:239) and, in the Mexican context, as an idea of ‘a common descent as a result of the miscegenation of Spanish males and Indian females’ (Gutiérrez, 2007: 529). Gruzinski (2002:19) defines mestizaje as a vague notion and he states that:

Mixing, mingling, blending, crossbreeding, combining, superimposing, juxtaposing, interposing, imbricating, fusing, and merging are all terms associated with the mestizo process, swamping vague descriptions and fuzzy thinking in a profusion of terms.

Through the lived experiences of employers and domestic workers, this thesis explores how mestizaje enables racial hierarchies to coexist with the denial of racism (De la Cadena,2001 and 2005; Knight,1990 Moreno, 2010) Gruzinski (2002:19) warns that the term mestizo ‘should be avoided like the plague’ as it entails a notion of ‘homogenous bodies free from all ‘contamination’. However, the next section engages with the historical continuities and
ruptures of the notion of *mestizaje* since the purpose of this thesis is precisely to show the effects of Gruzinski’s argument; that is, the way some women have been historically positioned within the vagueness and uncertainties of *mestizaje*.

### 2.5 The ‘Cosmic Race’ and the construction of Mexico’s National Identity

Gutierrez Chong (2007:529) argues that, in Mexico, the figure of the mestizo conveys the idea of common origin and the Mexican as a product of miscegenation. She argues that the mestizo ‘is a combination of fact and fantasy’ that ‘from the twentieth century, the standardised education of the national state has imposed such a story on an ethnically diverse society as part of their collective imagination’. In the early colonial period, mestizo ‘impurity of blood’ did not refer to a common origin but to the unruly political position within the colonial administration (De la Cadena, 2005). At this point in history it was not necessarily superior to that of being indigenous and it referred to the simple fact of being of indigenous and Spanish parentage.

David T. Goldberg (1993) argues that medieval exclusions and discrimination were at root religious rather than racial, and that the shift from medieval pre-modernity to modernity is in part the shift from a religiously-defined to a racially-defined discourse of human identity and personhood. In the case of Mexico, the conquest of New Spain was at first religiously-defined; therefore purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) was central to the constitution of a caste society. For Spaniards, purity of blood ‘reflected the depth of a lineage’s loyalty to Christianity’ (Lomnitz, 1992: 264) and this shaped the view of the ‘newly’ converted as not trustworthy and therefore as legitimately subordinated (Moreno, 2006).

Lomnitz (1992: 264) argues that ‘the Hispanicisation of the Church through an ideology of racial purity was a key antecedent to the construction of a racial hierarchy in Mexico. Similarly, for De La Cadena (2005:267) racial hierarchy in Latin America: ‘accommodated and modified pre-existing regionally-idiosyncratic orders that followed faith-based idioms’. She contends that the notion of race in Latin America harboured two regimes of knowledge: faith and science and through this ‘epistemological hybrid’ the pull to define race tilted towards culture. The power of race to disqualify ‘is genealogically
instilled in a structure of feelings that intertwines beliefs in hierarchies of skin colour and beliefs in the natural superiority of ‘Western’ forms of knowledge, ruling and being’ (De la Cadena; 2005: 282).

Throughout the colonial period, *mestizaje* was understood to refer to an indigenous person with a ‘redeemable’ soul and blood. Within the caste system, anyone could be upwardly mobile in a trans-generational fashion through miscegenation, marriage and acculturation (Moreno, 2006). While indigenous blood was regarded as ‘redeemable’ African blood was not, thus, ‘national ideologies, anthropologies and histories have traditionally worked to exclude or ignore blackness’ (Lewis, 2000: 898). The caste system was not only highly flexible but naturally unstable (Lomnitz 2001; Seed 1982) and racial groups were established according to a mixture of physical appearance and economic position (Knight, 1990).

After two decades of Mexico’s independence war in 1810, the Sovereign Constituent Congress forbade classification of persons by race in official documents. The country started a process of social reconfiguration that severely condemned Spanish colonialism and revaluated Mexico’s Aztec past (González Navarro, 1970). This was a key moment for identity formation in Mexico as it marked the beginning of the process of displacement from racial markers to national ones (Moreno, 2006). Through eugenics, gender and race were tied to the politics of national identity as political and cultural elites of the time aimed to racially purify, unify and homogenise the social composition of the country. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the publication of key texts that engaged with the new national project. In 1909, Andres Molina Enriquez published *Great National Problems* which was very influential in the agrarian reform and the Constitution of 1917. Influenced by the work of Spencer, Darwin and Ernst Haeckel, Enríquez affirmed that the only possible true Mexicans were the mestizos.

In 1925 José Vasconcelos (1979), one of the most influential political and cultural figures in post-revolutionary Mexico, published the *Cosmic Race*. In his work he elaborated a grand theory of temporal progress with three stages; the material or military phase, the intellectual or political stage and the aesthetic or spiritual age. For Vasconcelos, Latin America was the site *par excellence* where this third stage could flourish. Animated by love and beauty, this spiritual age had the mestizo as its chosen race and Latin America as the
special continent in which “black, red, yellow, and white” races had already mixed. In the words of Vasconcelos (1979:34):

we have come to believe in the inferiority of the mestizo, in the unredeemability of the Indian, in the condemnation of the black, in the irreparable decadence of the oriental. The armed rebellion did not follow the consciousness rebellion.... but now that a new phase of History is beginning, it is necessary that we reconstitute our ideology and organise a new ethnic doctrine for our entire continental life. Let us begin, therefore, by making our own life and our own knowledge. If we do not liberate our spirit, we will never liberate the matter.

Cultural and political elites started the reconfiguration of mestiza identity, not only as the true Mexican but now also as the epitome of all possible ‘races’. For Brading, (1984:75), the idea of the Cosmic Race represents the end of race formation; basically because all the ‘races’ are fused in a new racial unity and therefore this new unity is ‘cosmic’. In theory, it was at this point in time when the racial ‘unity’ of a raceless Mexico lost its racial history even as in reality and practice was never detached from it. In the words of Moreno (2006:72),

The displacement of racial dynamics started to fit a new social configuration that was pulled in contradictory yet powerful directions: the prevalence of colonial stratification within the political discourse of the nation’s formation based on citizens free of racial markers, or rather with a racial marker supposedly free of its racial history.

The ‘chosen’ race and the creation of a ‘shared’ national culture implied a process where Indians were conceived by the state as a national problem that constrained the creation of a fully civilised nation. By the 1930s, indigenismo, a collection of actions designed to integrate - ‘mexicanise’- the indigenous peoples into national life, was consolidated through a system of rural education that started by forcing the implementation of Spanish as the official language (Barabas, 2000; Gutierrez, 1999). Multilingualism was rejected as it meant ‘small fatherlands’ that represented a threat to national unity (Brice, 1972:261). A physical punishment was meted out to those who spoke
indigenous languages or wore indigenous clothes to school while parents were urged to speak Spanish to their children (Barabas, 2000). As chapter 4 shows, dietary change was part of the ‘educational’ process for the transformation of Indians into gente de razón (people of reason) whose customs were seen as ‘unquestionably superior’ (Pilcher, 1998).

Mexican Anthropologists like Alonso Caso and Manuel Gamio (1916) redefined the notion of indigenous by making culture, not race, its central characteristic and policies were then designed to ‘persuade’ Indians to think of themselves as Mexicans rather than belonging to a particular indigenous group. Some have noticed the gendered elements of indigenismo and how indigenous women, even if mixed, were expected to maintain certain aspects of their indigenous culture that were usually ‘racialised’ or ‘naturalised’ in terms of tradition, maternity and femininity (Ruiz, 2001; Gall, 2004; Gutiérrez, 1999; 2008). For intellectuals of the time, the ‘greatness’ of the new nation was based on a ‘mestizo’ conceived by indigenous women who ‘had the supreme gift of love, and were able to aspire to the supreme glory of maternity while many white women were ridiculously (celibates) and therefore unfertile’ (Gamio, 1923: 70 quoted in Ruiz 2001:14). As Ruiz argues, women’s role was to give birth to the Mexican-Mestizo with one foot (the masculine) planted in change and modernity; and another (the feminine) set on tradition and indigenous identity.

Rick A. López’s (2002) analysis of the India Bonita Contest of 1921 serves as a unique example of how the racial, gendered and classed codes of mestizaje shaped the lives of domestic workers in Mexico as ‘white but not quite’ or, as López notes, ‘as not so Other’. The India Bonita Contest of 1921 was the first entirely racial contest in Mexico organised by a national newspaper that wanted to celebrate the Mexican Centennial. As the organisers of the contests encountered difficulties in recruiting Indian participants they looked for contestants within the city’s Indian barrios and searched for gatitas, a term often used (even today) by white middle and upper class urbanities to refer to young indigenous girls in the city working as domestic workers. The term also carried a sexual connotation since, as Lopez (2002:300) argues, for the organisers, ‘gatitas were sufficiently exotic for the purposes of the contest but not so ‘Other’ as to be inaccessible’. Thus, organisers urged employers of
domestic workers to send in a photo if they had an India Bonita working for them.

Readers seemed confused about the possibility of ‘Indians’ who were bonitas (pretty) and white mestizo women submitted photo entries wearing folkloric garb as a way to ‘incorporate Indianness’ into their bodies. The newspaper decided to ‘educate’ the public on how to recognise a legitimate Indian woman and explained to readers their notion of racialised beauty. Goldberg (1993:30) argues how, from the eighteenth century on, ‘beauty’ became a property possession that determined subjects’ ontological value, just as possession of economic goods, for classical economics, created utility. Goldberg argues that ‘to lack the ‘natural’ qualities of classical beauty was to be poor; and as with laissez faire economic theory, this was considered the subjects’ own responsibility’.

The newspaper published an article by a famous anthropologist, Manuel Gamio, to explain what organisers of the contest meant by a pretty Indian; ‘a young pleasant-looking girl of humble position, with dark skin, rounded facial features, heavy eye-lids, and with little or no formal education’. Later, the newspaper added some ‘character’ elements to the description such as: oval face; dark skin; braids; perfect teeth; and a ‘serene’ expression’. As Lopéz (2002:305) suggests, beauty was defined in the white and Indian contests in a clearly antagonistic manner and with visible class and racial language. In the white beauty contest, Miss Mexico’, celebrated during the same year the judges, praised the elegance of a pose or the impression of a smile. But in the Indian Bonita contest they talked about braids, pure race, passive attitudes, mispronounced Spanish, typical Indian clothes, innocence and awkwardness, prayers to the virgin of Guadalupe, grinding of corn and humble social stations.

During the white mestizo beauty contest ‘Miss Mexico’, celebrated during the same year and organised by the same sponsors, domestic workers were not sought after as potential participants and they certainly didn’t submit entries

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to the Miss Mexico contest (invoking their whiteness through dressing as such). The newspaper did not find it necessary to explain why white women were beautiful and did not find it necessary to ask employers to send in a photo of their domestic workers in case they had white pretty women in their employ.

Lopéz’s analysis supports the idea of mestizaje as an ‘all inclusive ideology of exclusion’ that has historically valued individuals’ progressive whiteness (Gall, 2004; Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Rosemblatt, 2003; Stutzman, 1981). Peter Wade (2005:240) argues, that the assumption that mestizaje is a ‘superficial mask’ of a privileged (white) racial origin is simplistic since mestizaje, in lived experience, entails the dynamics of homogenisation and differentiation that are lived simultaneously. For Wade (2005, 243), mestizaje is better understood as a mosaic of identities ‘at the level of the embodied persona and the family as well as the nation’.

Among other examples, Wade explores the lived experience of dancers of Costeño music from Colombia to demonstrate how the symbolics of origins are invoked within the notion of mestizaje. Wade uses the popular assertion that only those with a black heart are able to ‘feel’ Costeño music and argues that mestizos are able to invoke diverse racial origins within them (such as a black heart) and incorporate them accordingly. However, as David Theo Goldberg (1993) suggests, we need to distinguish between racialised reference or characterisation (self-imposed or from without) and racist expression, since, while the former in some cases may be more or less benign, the later involves promoting exclusions of people by virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups. Moreover, going back to the project of indigenismo in Mexico, the embodiment of mestizaje has historically required renouncement of certain racial origins (Indian and Black) rather than a ‘mosaic’ where sameness and difference coexist without conflict. The complex social history of Guanajuato illustrates how the project of mestizaje has entailed a denial of racial origins and has worked to hide racial hierarchies that are part of the everyday life of people in Mexico.

2.5.1 ‘On the way of losing their identity’: Guanajuato Mestizo

Guanajuato has been considered for a long time a mestizo/mixed population. Nahuas and Chichimecas are believed to have occupied the territory prior to
the Spanish conquest. However, by the time the first colonisers arrived, the indigenous population in the region was significantly low due to interethnic wars and immigration (Guevara Sanginés, 2001). Guanajuato became one of the most important destinations of black slaves brought from West Africa because of its mining industry, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Beltrán, 1972; Brading, 1983; Valdés, 1987). The military census of 1792 accounted for 72,281 mulattos\(^3\) in Guanajuato, 18.2 per cent of its total population (Guevara Sanginés, 2001). The same census estimated that Irapuato was one of the most important meeting points for Spanish settlers, mestizos, castizos and mulattos, although the census does not specify how many of them there were at the time.

Many have argued that the project of national formation in Mexico has historically ignored blackness by embracing a notion of *mestizaje* as based exclusively on the fusion of Spaniards and Indians (Wade 1997; Lewis, 2000; Valdés, 1987; Bonfil, 1990; Aguirre Beltrán, 1972). Lewis (2000) looks at a black community in the southern pacific coast of Mexico and argues that, even today, ‘morenos’\(^4\) merge their own identities with that of Indians as a strategy of national integration. For Lewis (2000:899), while this process could be read as resistance to their exclusion from Mexico’s social composition such ‘ritual simultaneously maintains the exclusion it subverts because it too effaces blackness while placing local moreno traditions squarely within the national ones that tie the Mexican past to an Indian foundation’. The way blackness has been denied by Mexico’s national ideologies has important implications for the study of paid domestic work in Mexico since it was within this sector where blacks and mulatto women were found both as slaves and as waged laborers during colonial times and after (Valdés, 1987; Guevara Sanginés, 2001).

Even if Guanajuato has been considered a racially ‘mixed’ population for a long time, the social history of the region suggests another history. For Brading (1983:306), by the end of eighteenth century, Guanajuato had achieved what other provinces did much later:

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\(^3\) There is not a single list of caste classification but Lomnitz (1992:271) explains this classification as follows: Spanish and indígena: Mestizo; Mestizo and Spanish: Castizo and Spanish and black: Mulatto (for a discussion of the imprecision and discriminatory qualities of such classifications during colonial times see Aguirre Beltrán, 1972).

\(^4\) For Lewis (2000:898) ‘morenos’ are blacks but this is ‘a term that signifies their common descent with Indians, whom they consider to be central to Mexicanness.’
The formation of a predominately *mestizo* population’ with a small indigenous population that was ‘considerably ‘hispanized’ and on the way to losing their identity as a separate cultural group.

Nowadays, only 0.3 per cent of Guanajuato’s population is officially considered indigenous, however, it would be wrong to assume racial homogeneity or the impossibility of racial thinking (INEGI 2011). Doing so would undermine the complexities of *mestizaje* that have been discussed above. The social composition of Guanajuato is not only difficult to define because of the complexities and contradictions of *mestizaje*, but also because of the historical migratory character of the region.

The region divided the territories of indigenous cultures during pre-Hispanic times and was later a frontier between the viceroyalties of New Spain and Galicia (Guevara Sanginés, 2001). The more recent social movements linked to immigration to the United States have also had a great impact on the social composition of the region. Thus, Guevara Sanginés suggests that ‘this characteristic of spatial mobility [in Guanajuato]...allowed the flexibility of social relations and the melding of ideas and costumes’. What might be seen a fusion of ‘races’, ideas and costumes is linked to the historical migration of indigenous women to the cities to work in the domestic and care work services, one that has represented an eventual loss of ethnic ties with communities of origin (Pescador, 1995). However, as this thesis shows, these processes have not, in any way, erased racial thinking, instead they have worked to constitute a particularly (urban) idea of who is considered an Indian. As Behar (1993:8) argues, Indianness in Mexico is nowadays ‘not based in an ethnic identity, but in race/class distinctions’.

### 2.6 Conclusions

In 2011, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the convention and recommendation concerning decent work for domestic workers. The ILO recommends that members should ensure domestic workers understand their terms and conditions of employment and, among other things, these should include a job description (ILO, 2011: 6. 2 (a)) In Mexico, the ILO convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers could have a great impact since, at the moment, the Federal Labour Law defines the occupation using broad and potentially misleading terms. However, as this chapter has shows, defining
paid domestic work is not a straightforward process because of the difficulty of accounting for and separating the intertwined mental or emotional aspects of the job with the more practical tasks involved.

The social meaning of housework seems to be deeply connected to those who do it. As feminists located women’s oppression within the home as mainly explained by patriarchy the issue of housework was often explained through the imagined public/private divide. However, such dichotomy was never really part of many, often racialised, working class women experiences. Debates on women’s supposed suitability for ‘the home’ gave analytical priority to gender and by doing so other subdivisions of the work by class and race were consequently ignored. Black feminists in the US started to interrogate the universalisation of women and suggested approaches that were able to look at the intersecting character of the various social hierarchies in which women were enmeshed. The project of intersectionality coincided with broader debates about the meanings of gender and the possibilities of looking at women as a ‘conceptual unity’. With all its conceptual or methodological limitations, the debates around intersectionality are an important point of departure for those that attempt to problematise women’s differences and the way social categories are constituted and maintained.

Recent international literature on paid domestic work coincides with globalisation and an increasing flow of female immigration to developed countries. The great contribution of such body of work is that scholars are engaging with the experiences of women workers that political and academic institutions in their country of origin seem to have chosen to ignore. Issues of racism, appalling work and life conditions and denied citizenship are not exclusive to immigrant women working ‘illegally’ in receiving countries. Although there are few exceptions, scholarly work in Latin America urgently needs to engage in these same issues especially because their colonial experience is still involved in the reproduction of the social hierarchies that affect the lives of millions of women domestic workers in the region.

Studies of colonialism have tended to give analytical attention to the figure of native women’s labour in the formations of the empire and the ‘bourgeois’ class. Although Foucault’s work has been criticised for paying little attention to race and colonialism, his History of Sexuality has certainly influenced those who argue that race was constitutive of European selves in the colonial
enterprise such as the work of Ann L. Stoler on *Race and the Education of Desire*. McClintock highlights Foucault’s dismissal of the way race and gender worked to constitute other social hierarchies *in and out* of the colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. These works have influenced the conceptual framework of this thesis as they facilitate the analysis of gender, class *and* racial selves and the complex ways in which these social forms are constituted *in and through each other* as McClintock suggests. It is argued that these works have paid attention to the figure of ‘servants’ not because these women are the embodiments of difference but instead because of their ambiguity that intimate contact with the bourgeois class entails.

Few occupations entail so much proximity between differentiated selves than paid domestic work. However, employers and workers are marked by the ambiguity of social difference and the blurriness of lines of separation. The complexities of *mestizaje* emerge as a mechanism of power where racial origins shape the myth of homogenisation and work to silence visible racist practices in Mexico. The history of the social composition of Guanajuato illustrates this well as its image of a *mestizo* state has been historically constructed at the cost of denying blackness and portraying indigenous identities as ‘integrated’ but always in need of being civilised. Throughout this thesis we shall see how the concepts, theoretical approaches and historical disruptions exposed in this chapter inform and shape the processes by which the protection of cherished classification and the surveillance of potential transgressions occur in the context of paid domestic work in Mexico.
Chapter 3: Methods: ’This is the best day of your life’

Glenn Firebaugh (2008:235) argues that one of the most important rules of social research is to ‘Let the Method be the Servant, not the Master’. The author advises that ‘methods should be designed to fit the research and not the other way around’. It was surprising to find that even when looking at methods the figure of ‘the’ Servant and ‘the’ Master are imagined as unproblematised dichotomies. Moreover, such a rule implies that methods and research are antagonistically positioned. This chapter looks at methods as important parts of the research process but not merely as ‘tools’. Research should also ‘serve’ the interest of the knowledge generation while respecting subjects and acknowledging issues of representation and politics. As Gould (1981:21) argues, science is ‘a gutsy, human enterprise, not the work of robots programmed to collect pure information’. Thus, the development of a story should be a collaborative process and this chapter is about such process; about the way this work translated narratives and observations into telling.

Section 3.1 lists the research questions that guided the research process of this thesis and how these questions were informed by a broader concern over the lived experiences of mestizaje and racism in Mexico in the context of paid domestic work. Section 3.2 provides a brief socio-economic and political map of the site of the study, Irapuato, Guanajuato, and a more detailed account of the living and social conditions of two neighbourhoods. Section 3.3 describes the methods chosen for this study, mainly qualitative interviewing and observation, the number of participants and some ethnographic data on women in the study. This section also includes a reflexive account of recruiting women for interviewing (3.3.1 and 3.3.2) and (3.3.3) experiences and reflections during observation and fieldwork. Here, an attempt is made to describe not only the usefulness and power of the methods selected for the study but also the filters and limitations encountered during interviews and observations. Section 3.4 provides a description of the ethical procedures followed throughout this research process, and discusses issues regarding representation, translation and politics. The chapter concludes that the methods selected for the study were the most suitable for addressing the research questions that guided this investigation and that the ‘political’ element of the study should not only be seen in relation to neutrality but calls
for a broader discussion on scholarly commitment.

3.1 Research Questions and Methods

Research questions are an expression of ‘the essence’ of my enquiry. They delineate what aspects of the social dynamic of paid domestic work in Mexico I set out to investigate. Questions also reflect what Manson (2006) calls my intellectual puzzle, that is the ontological position that the research encapsulates. According to Mason’s (2006) types of puzzle, this research could be located as mechanical as the research sets out to explain how social categories work or are constituted. The intellectual puzzle of this research can also be thought of as causal since the work of this thesis was also guided by questions regarding what causes the vulnerability of domestic workers to discrimination. Questions hereby presented were designed to be intellectually worthwhile but also researchable as time limitations had to be acknowledged. The following research questions were used to link my research with other academic scholarship not only on paid domestic work but also with other areas of research and work from other disciplines such as history.

Research questions should be clearly formulated even though the researchers modify them. As Bell (2005:34) notes, researchers might ‘make modifications to the questions as the study proceeds, but that does not obviate the necessity of identifying exactly what you plan to do at the outset’. In this case, my research questions started by giving priority to issues of gender and reflexive transformation, however, I later became more interested on issues regarding race and the way gender and class where involved in ideas about race and mestizaje in Mexico.

The questions that this thesis seeks to answer were:

1. How are inequalities between women contested and reproduced in the context of paid domestic work in Mexico?

   1.1. By what strategies (spoken and unspoken) do domestic workers and employers negotiate: working conditions and benefits (pay, hours of work, job description (tasks); health etc)?

   1.2. How are strategies of negotiation influenced by women’s subjective positions (i.e. class, race, gender)?
2. How does paid domestic work allow or constrain women from complying with norms regarding their gender dispositions as, for instance, mothers and wives?

3. What are the hierarchies, codes and practices that shape domestic workers’ institutionalised discrimination and how is the state and the media involved in such process?

4. In the context of paid domestic work, how is race coded by gender and class in the lived experiences of women employers and workers in Mexico?

3.2 Mapping the Site of the Study, Two Neighbourhoods and the Self

Guanajuato was selected as the site for the study because, as discussed in the previous chapter, its population has been historically considered as mixed or mestizo. Situated in the centre of Mexico, Guanajuato is one of the thirty-one states of the Mexican Republic and is itself divided into forty-six municipalities, among them Irapuato, where the study was conducted. In Guanajuato, 69.9 per cent of the population lives in urban areas, that is those with a population of more than 2 500 inhabitants. Up to 30.1 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, in comparison with 23 per cent in the country (INEGI, 2010).

In the state of Guanajuato 93 per cent of the population is catholic that is more than the national average (82 per cent). Educational attainment in Guanajuato increased from 5.3 years (fifth grade) in 1990 to 7.7 (two years of secondary school) in 2010, although there are significant differences between rural and urban population. The percentage of the population that were illiterate went from 17 per cent in 1990 to 8 per cent in 2010 (INEGI, 2010). Guanajuato is today the first most important source of international immigration and official estimates reported that there were 119,706 international immigrants between the years 2005 and 2010 (INEGI, 2010).

3.2.1 The Socioeconomic Mapping of Cuchicuato and Villas de Irapuato

Of the seventeen workers who participated in the study, ten were from Cuchicuato, a semi-rural locality that is part of the municipality of Irapuato,
Guanajuato. The rest of the workers were from low-income neighbourhoods in Irapuato (Santa María and Los Cobos). Two of the observations were also conducted in Cuchicuato. All the employers who participated in the study were from the neighbourhood of Villas de Irapuato, although not all of them were recruited within this area but rather in restaurants around the city. Details of the national and local economy, housing, poverty and education statistics from Cuchicuato and Villas de Irapuato are presented to map out the general economic and cultural framework in which some women in the study are located.

Cuchicuato is a semi-rural locality that, according to official estimates by INEGI in its II Conteo de Población y Vivienda 2005 (Population and Housing Census) had a total population of 2 255 habitants of whom, according to official statistics, 1 224 were men and 1 531 women. According to women’s accounts and my visit to Cuchicuato, this locality has a high rate of male emigration to the United States. The majority of people in Cuchicuato, (i.e. 89 per cent of its population), had no access to public health services. Almost 8 per cent of the houses had no access to water, only 62.2 per cent of houses had a toilet and 5.3 per cent had ‘dirt’ floor. Although there are no official statistics available regarding housing with a solid roof, I noticed that there are still many houses in Cuchicuato that have corrugated iron roofs. In 2005, education attainment among the population in Cuchicuato was also low as 10 per cent of its population was illiterate. The average time spent in education was 5.3 years (fifth grade).

Villas de Irapuato has 4 774 habitants and is considered one of the most privileged areas of the municipality. Although according to official statistics 39.2 per cent of people living in Villas do not have access to public health services, this could be explained by the use of private health services. As in the case of Cuchicuato, the standard of living in Villas is reflected in its housing. According to statistics, in 2005, 96.3 per cent of houses had a toilet and 96 per cent had access to water. Perhaps the most striking difference between these two areas is reflected in access to education. While only 1.6 per cent of the houses in Cuchicuato have a computer at home, in Villas 78.1 per cent of houses have a private computer at home. Only 0.54 of the population in Villas is illiterate (in comparison with 10 per cent in Cuchicuato). The average educational attainment among the population is 13.3 (finished
high school), which is more than double the level of educational attainment in Cuchicuato (fifth grade).

The map above shows the geographical location of two of the most important neighborhoods where the research took place: Cuchicuato and Villas de Irapuato. On the map, the first ‘pin’, looking from left to right, is Cuchicuato, which is where many domestic workers live. The second pin is San Javier, another small community where many women work in the domestic sector. The third pin is at Villas de Irapuato and the bus stop where the domestic workers have to get off since public transportation is not allowed to enter the residential area of Villas. The path marked in green is the old route that domestic workers used to take (passing through a golf course as a shortcut). The orange path is the one they follow now after the residents in Villas and golf players decided to fence in the golf course.

3.2.2 Mapping the self

Reflexive sociology calls for the acknowledgment of power and difference between knower and known and how these shape the narratives that we tell (see Alversoon and Skoldgert, 2000; Pels, 2000). The idea is to make transparent who is speaking in the social sciences and in whose interests. It is
generally seen as a way to generate not only ethical research but also ‘purer’ knowledge (Heaphy, 2007; Mosselson, 2010).

Critics of reflexivity have emphasized the politics involved in the telling of the self and the assumption that acknowledging the sociologists’ values, material and cultural resources would somehow neutralise social research and provide the researcher with authority and legitimisation (See Adkins, 2002 and Skeggs, 2002). Skeggs calls for a movement from self-telling to a focus on producing more ethical and responsible research. She argues that such research requires interrogating ‘one’s location, position and cultural resources, but not of the self’ (2002:357). This is more easily said than done as it seems impossible to interrogate one’s location within the research process (or any other experience) while leaving the self aside. Moreover, the particular debate over reflexive sociology could present a serious challenge to researchers trying to find the balance between self-positioning and self-promotion (Skeggs, 2002).

However, acknowledging that sociology is part of the politics of knowledge forcibly requires making visible the interests involved. Locating myself would not make ‘purer’ research but it would certainly provide the reader with an open account of the interests and knowable subjectivities that inform this work. As Heaphy (2007:180) suggests, ‘reflexivity does not aim to correct bias as such, but to investigate, make visible and problematise the procedures and assumptions that underpin sociological claims and interpretations’. Moreover, in the case of this study, the engagement with such process is even greater as I am trying to investigate difference among women in a particular occupation in which I am myself involved as a middle class employer.

The research hereby presented is informed by personal experience as an employer in Mexico and as a nanny and domestic worker in the United States. I grew up as a part of a middle class family in Monterrey, Mexico and for most of my childhood my family hired live-in domestic workers, some of them indigenous and one of them was as young as 14 years-old, the same age I was when she worked in our house. Like many people in Mexico I grew up with a strong national identity and with a very dichotomous idea of race as ‘black/white’. I was rarely conscious about my racial ‘self’ as I always thought of myself as mixed or as ‘Mexican’. In 1994 my family experienced the impacts of the economic crisis known as the ‘Tequila Effect’ for its severe
repercussions on Latin America’s economies. I was 19 years old and spent one year (1995) in America working as a live-out nanny for a family and a live-out cleaner in a couple of houses to pay for English courses and to save some money to pay my for university fees when I returned to Mexico. I returned to America on two occasions (during the summer) to work as a cleaner and keep paying the rest of my tuition.

As I crossed the border to work I became aware of my change of status, not only of my legal status but, as I later realised, my class and racial one. I was ‘interviewed’ by my future employers through the help of an American family friend as I was far from being a fluent English speaker. I remember that they asked if I knew how to use a stove and, before the interview took place and they had a chance to see me, if I had ‘good teeth’. At the time of the interview I wasn’t conscious about the racist (or class) implications of such questions. Perhaps my indifference to those comments could be explained because I had no previous personal experience of racism and, like the majority of people in Mexico, I was ‘colour blind’ and unaware of the impact of racism in my life and the life of others. With time, I started to become more conscious about my racial ambiguity, about the absence of previously imagined binaries and about the extent to which crossing a border had transformed my imagined ‘whiteness’. I remember someone saying back then that I was not white and I remember asking ‘what colour am I then?’ He answered ‘you are brown’ and then he enlisted some of the derogatory terms by which people like ‘us’ were often called. The way my legal, class and racial status affected my experience in the US became much more evident later during that year as I realised my lack of power to negotiate working conditions (i.e. I became aware that I was paid less than American nannies). However, my lack of power to negotiate conditions could have probably been fed by how grateful and lucky I felt for earning a wage that would help pay for my education and that I was not going to earn in Mexico doing the same job.

My work as a nanny and as a domestic worker eventually helped me to pay part of my university tuition and enabled me to finish college. I do not wish to suggest in any way that I embody some sort of ‘standpoint’ when looking at paid domestic work nor that my experience and conditions are similar to those encountered by the women workers who participated in this study. However, I do believe that the experience informed in a very personal and illustrative
manner the way in which social categories constitute one another. My experience as a nanny and as a domestic worker in the US was literally a transformative one in the sense that crossing a physical border changed the way my racial self was perceived by others and eventually by myself. Soon, the instability of my racial self became not only a matter of colour but of the classed and gendered job I was performing back then. Questions about my physical appearance (teeth) were accompanied and shaped by questions about my class, about my ability with ‘modern’ domestic appliances (stove).

My experience in the US made me realise the way notions of mestizaje worked to silence our own racial hierarchies back in Mexico. I realised how my own racial privilege back home was also constituted by and was maintained through other social hierarchies such as class. I started to wonder about how and why domestic workers were racialised in Mexico and about why so many visible discriminatory practices occurred while racism was constantly denied by the myth of racial homogenisation. I started wondering about how my previously imagined racial binaries were not only permeable but also hierarchical and about how my racial privileges back in Mexico were constituted, in part, by my class position.

In 2006, after a period of six years in England where I continued studying and working I went back to Mexico and employed a live-out domestic worker at home. From the beginning of the study I had to make a decision about my role as an employer and my own conceptions and experiences around paid domestic work. As temporary as it was, I never felt that the job I did in America was undignified in itself. I also remember preferring the job of cleaning the house of a female employer that was never there than doing the more emotionally and physically demanding job of caring for two boys (4 and 7 years-old) and the relationship with the children’s parents. I also thought that it was contradictory to terminate a labour arrangement so that I could claim the right to know about women and paid domestic work in Mexico.

The contradiction of finding women in the academia making their home someone’s workplace is not exclusive to Mexico and it is also not a new phenomena. To her surprise, Mary Romero (2002: 44) notes her colleagues’ defensive reaction to her work on paid domestic workers in the US as they expressed ‘overwhelming feelings of discomfort, guilt and resentment, which sometimes came out as hostility’. She notes how that the dilemma has
'haunted’ women in academia for many years and argues that domestic service must be studied as it raises a challenge to any feminist ideals of ‘sisterhood’. However, one page later, she turns to ‘Chicana voices’, that is the workers’ own arguments on their struggle for ‘developing new interactions with employers that eliminate aspects of hierarchy along the lines of gender, race, and class’ (Romero, 2002:45). Thus, when exploring the issue of paid domestic work, we need to hear the different voices involved, not only those from academics since views and expectations around the occupation might not necessarily coincide.

For instance, during an interview with Martha Patricia Vélez Tapia, the coordinator of a support center for domestic workers (CATDA) in Mexico, I realised the potential contrast of perceptions from those involved in advocacy and the workers. CATDA is a nongovernmental organisation founded in 1986 whose mission is to advocate for the rights of workers and offers workshop to women on this matter. However, CATDA also works as a job centre and offers training on skills (i.e. ironing and cleaning techniques) that would facilitate domestic workers’ jobs or help them to find employment. She described how the centre had faced criticism for assisting domestic workers to be ‘good’ workers instead of providing with other types of training (i.e. computing) that would facilitate workers’ vertical mobility into other ‘better’ jobs. Bourdieu (1990: 152) argues that speaking for others means assuming ‘a form of proximity with the dominated’ that happens only at the costs of a ‘break with ‘the people’.

3.3 Methods; Interviewing, Observation and the Women in the Study

This section outlines the number of women participants in the study and some ethnographic data regarding, age, marital status, children and, in the case of employers, participation in paid work. The methods selected are briefly analysed as well as a reflection on some fieldwork experiences, this in order to provide readers with some sense of the national, local and personal environment that shaped the context of this research.

3.3.1 Individual and Group Interviewing

In total, 26 women participated in study as interviewees: eighteen domestic workers and nine female employers. All interviews (both individual and group interviews) were tape recorded and later transcribed to be analysed.
Eleven face-to-face interviews were conducted with domestic workers and one group interview that involved seven domestic workers from Cuchicuato, Guanajuato. The age range of workers interviewed was from 22 to 72 years old. Three of the workers were married and six of them had children, while five had no children and were not married.

Nine female employers participated in the study, with six face-to-face interviews and one group interview involving three female employers. Although female employers were approached in various ways and at various points of the city, all the women lived in the area of Villas de Irapuato. The age range was from 27 years old to 80 years old and all employers were married and had children. None of the employers was in paid employment (though at the time of the interview one of them had just left her job to look after her daughter).

Qualitative interviewing has been often described as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess 1984:102) or as ‘a conversation between two engaged people’ (Gerson and Horowitz, 2003:210). For Jennifer Mason (2006:63) choosing interviewing as a method of research suggests ‘an ontological position where people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of social reality which your research questions are designed to explore’. This ontological position is especially relevant for this research project as it involves interviewing women, as Janet Wolff (1985:44) argues women’s invisibility is ‘not only detrimental to any understanding of the lives of the female sex; it obscures a crucial part of the interrelation of public and private spheres. For men inhabited both of these’. However, as Riessman (1987) shows, ‘gender congruence’ does not guarantees good qualitative research. For Gerson and Horowitz (2003) the success of interviewing depends on skills that are not only analytic but also emotional ‘including sympathy, support and intense concentration’.

There is still no consensus about the potential of interpretative research for meaningful knowledge construction. As Williams (2002) states, as sociologists, we are interested in knowing something of the social world beyond isolated and fragmented accounts of interactions, or individual biographies. The possibility of making generalisations through interpretative research is bound up with an old debate about whether sociology, as a discipline, is nomothetic (scientific) or ideographic (humanistic) in character. Following Weber (1975),
Williams advocates a methodological pluralism where ‘science’ is understood as requiring both a nomothetic and an ideographic approach to inquiry. For Williams, sociology has both dimensions and it is only after acknowledging such dualism that one is able to understand the possibility of making generalisations through interpretivism.

Williams distinguishes among different types of generalisations and argues that although interpretivists cannot do total or statistical generalisations, they do (and are right to do so) *moderatum* generalisations, ‘where aspects of S can be seen to be instances of a broader recognizable set of features’ (2002: 131). These forms of generalisations are according to Williams, the basis of inductive reasoning in everyday life. In this work, rather than a superficial analysis of comparability between accounts of large numbers of people, I wish to generate *moderatum* generalisations through a recognizable set of features that will be hopefully made visible by women’s experiences.

Williams (2002: 138) suggests that the possibility of using interpretative research for making generalisations lies in the extent that there is a cultural consistency in the social world. Thus, the existence of some shared norms, a common language and physical referents can allow at least some reciprocity of perspective between researcher and researched, as well as viable comparisons between places. Such consistency makes it possible to differentiate between the validity of statements since ‘realities’ as experienced are often the outcomes of processes, the evidence of structures existing beyond the individuals investigated.’

Interview data is ‘real’ in the sense that it allows us to look at how social structures exist on the grounds of their *perceivable effects* upon patterns of human behaviour (Silverman, 1985; Sam Poter, 2002). Choosing qualitative interviewing as a method is part of a theoretical project and reflects how my research locates the social phenomenon which is being investigated. As Mason (2002: 225) argues, ‘how we ask questions, what we assume is possible from asking questions and from listening to answers’ are forms of expressing our theoretical orientations. Interviewing means engaging with and privileging the accounts of individuals while assuming the centrality of talk and text in the way we understand the social world.
3.3.2 Recruiting and Interviewing Women Domestic Workers from Irapuato

Domestic workers were recruited to the study by approaching them on the street, at church, at a public assistance program meeting and three using a snowball technique. All women were informed first about the research and asked to participate in a voluntary manner. I started the recruitment by attending the monthly meeting of the public assistance program *Oportunidades*. Founded in 2002 this program was designed to target poverty by providing cash payments to families in exchange for regular school attendance, health clinic visits, and nutritional support.\(^2\) As of 2006, around one-quarter of Mexico's population were affiliated to the program. I tried to recruit participants with the help of the programme coordinator and, although most women at the meeting were or had been a domestic worker, they refused to talk to me about their experiences in the job. I later learned that the programme coordinator was widely mistrusted by beneficiaries and although I tried to approach women on an individual basis I was only able to arrange one interview in this manner.

Potential participants were also approached around an area where a poor neighbourhood and a middle class one meet (the later cordoned off by a wall and provided with private security). I decided to approach women there because I frequented a poultry butcher used by working class women and the butcher knew me well enough to ask some of her clients if they wanted to be interviewed. Only one woman was willing to participate and I then decided to approach women as they were passing by the shop. I asked one of the interviewees, Susana, if she wanted to participate in the study as she was walking by with her six month-old baby in her arms. She later told me that as I approached her she thought I wanted to steal her baby away, fear probably fed by the unprecedented levels of violence that Mexico is experiencing as part of the ‘war on drugs’ and other organised crime in Latin America (ILO and UNICEF, 2009).

Susana agreed to be interviewed but asked me to follow her to the house of her 16 year-old sister, who had a new baby and lived with her boyfriend. Susana complained about her sister’s boyfriend for being unemployed and, in Susana’s view, a ‘*huevón*’; a pejorative term that means lazy/slow. We arrived at her sister’s house, a one room house with earth floor and corrugated iron
roof. In the room there were two beds, various religious figures hanging on
the walls and a small TV. There, her sister and her new-born baby were lying
on one of the beds, where Susana and I were asked to sit, and the boyfriend
was lying on the other bed. As Susana started talking to me about her
experiences regarding domestic work I felt anxious about undertaking the
interview with the sister’s boyfriend there as he was watching a morning
program on TV and we were clearly interrupting. I suggested going out of the
room to talk but Susana insisted it was fine ‘don’t worry, he is a huevón, he
should be working anyway!’[1]. During the interview I realised that, even
though Susana was only 37 years old, she was a mother figure for her sister
and that explained the way she conducted herself around the house with
authority.

Susana introduced me to some of her friends and relatives that worked as
domestic workers and lived in Cuchicuato. I interviewed three women workers
and then went back to Cuchicuato next Sunday to recruit participants at
church. As I approached a group of women and asked them if they knew
someone employed as a domestic worker, they all laughed and one of them
said, ‘We all are!’ I invited the women in that group to be interviewed on an
individual basis and as they hesitated I proposed a group interview to which
they all promptly agreed. The group interview was done outside church; it was
friendly and relaxed. Three of the interviewees were sisters; Sofia, Elena and
Blanca (all single, childless and living with their parents) and they invited me
to celebrate with them at a town festival later during the summer, so I would
have the chance to talk to other domestic workers. Thanks to the relationship
with these three sisters who were domestic workers, I did two participant
observation exercises.

It is difficult to know how the domestic workers I interviewed perceived me or
my social position and to what extent this influenced their comments and
answers. I was certainly perceived as differently positioned because I was a
student, and probably thought of as younger due to my appearance. Domestic
workers interviewed were darker than me, and although it is difficult to
position myself on some sort of colour scale in Mexico I am often called
güerita 5 (fair-skinned) by street vendors and other people in informal settings.

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5 The term güerita is often use to refer to others in public spaces (such as the food market) similar to the use
of ‘love’ or ‘dear’ in Britain.
(especially in those that imply some sort of class hierarchy). During my field trip where I accompanied three domestic workers from their house to their place of work, we were accompanied by a friend (also a worker) who at first thought that I was the new doctor from the public health clinic. The worker was aware that I was not from the area and she identified me as a doctor perhaps through class codes (i.e. dress) or skin colour. When doing pilot interviews to ask questions about race, I asked a domestic worker how she perceived her ‘mixedness’ and mine as we were both Mexicans and not indigenous. She responded, ‘Well, I come from the mixture of Indians and Spanish and you are more *blanquita* (white); you have less indigenous blood in you than I do’[2]. As discussed in the previous chapter, even if notions of mixture are equated to Mexicanness, people are usually aware of *difference* within mixture.

I never mentioned the fact that I had worked as a domestic worker in America because I didn’t want to imply that my experience was similar to theirs. Moreover, by telling my story, I could influence workers answers even more and unintentionally suggest that the project was some sort of ‘us’ against ‘them’. Instead I opted for an open-ended question about good and bad experiences in paid domestic work and the advantages and disadvantages of the occupation. These two open questions were of course accompanied by others depending on the experiences and narratives of interviewees, but the others could be summarised as ‘Why? When did that happened? And, how did you feel about it?’ As Mason (2002) argues, most qualitative researchers try to minimise their own role in the process of structuring and in the sequencing of the dialogue.

The interviews were friendly and relaxed and most of them were conducted in the workers’ homes or at a place of their choosing (one in the street under a tree and the group interview outside church). Gerson and Horowitz (2003:10) argue that when researchers are able to create an impartial emotional space interviewees often use this exercise to ‘step back from their ordinary routines and reflect upon their lives.’ For instance, many domestic workers said that they had talked about emotional issues (i.e. sexual harassment) for the first time, as one of the workers said at the end of an interview ‘Oh, I got everything off my chest!’[3]. For Gerson and Horowitz (2003), when these
conversations take place most participants feel grateful for the attention of a supportive listener and energised by the insights they have gained. However, one of the problems with such conversations is that as researchers we are not trained to deal with sensitive and serious issues. For instance in one occasion a worker talked with a great level of detail about her experiences with domestic violence. The way I remember dealing with these situations when I worked in England was to provide interviewees with contact details of support groups or governmental organisation design to help victims of violence. In this case, I couldn’t find any support organisation for women in Mexico. Thus, although women were very open and happy to talk about intimate details of their lives, this represented both a great opportunity and a great ethical responsibility.

3.3.4 Recruiting and Interviewing Women who Employ Domestic Workers

Many studies of paid domestic work (Anderson, 2000; Chaney and García Castro, 1989; Chavéz and Buendía, 2005; Goldsmith, 1993, 2000; Durin, 2008) analyse only the lived experiences and accounts of workers. I decided to include female employers not as a way to ‘corroborate’ workers experiences but because this would allow me to explore the way women negotiate and construct a sense of ‘self’ within the different sets of power relations in which they are enmeshed and how the ‘self’ is constrained or facilitated by paid domestic work.

Approaching employers was more difficult than I had previously anticipated, again, probably because of the environment of fear among the middle class generated by the increasing numbers of kidnapping in Mexico (Campos, 2003; Ortega, 2008; Padgett, 2010). The subject of the study is also a sensitive one because it inevitably involves asymmetrical working relationships and therefore employers might have felt vulnerable to ethical or moral judgments. For Gerson and Horowitz (2003) successful interviewing demands ‘putting moral judgments aside, at least temporarily, in order to take on the perspective or role of the other’. I decided to look for potential participants first at a sports club in the upper class residential area of Villas de Irapuato. However, I could only interview one woman there as all the other women I approached were unwilling to participate. I also approached groups of women having a late breakfast among various restaurants in Irapuato. Approaching
them as a group worked better, as three women accepted to be interviewed and provided me with personal contact details to arrange a date, time and venue that were most suitable for them. As I approached tables with groups of women I introduced myself and the research purpose. I explained that the research was about women and paid domestic workers and that their participation was voluntary. Many women said no and rejection was in some cases difficult to take, especially because it is difficult to avoid feeling judged or not worthy of people’s trust. However, as Gerson and Horowitz, (2003:2009) argue, this process is part of interviewing and ‘over and over again, the interviewer must contact and secure the help of others, travel to unknown places, engage in an intensive process whose goal is to reveal the intricacies of other lives and then say ‘good-bye’.

Since approaching domestic workers at church worked well, I decided to visit the local church at Villas de Irapuato to recruit potential female employers. I approached women after a prayer group and they all agreed to be interviewed but said that a group interview was more convenient for them. We arranged to meet at the house of Yolanda, an 80 year-old woman and mother of eight. According to a recent survey, up to 82.0 per cent people in Mexico go to church at least once a week, thus, recruiting women at church did not have many implications in terms of selecting criteria (Consulta Mitofsky, 2007).

Employers were relaxed during interviews but I believe that most of them thought that my study had a political purpose and this might have influenced the way they responded. For instance, employers often stressed what they believed were ‘good practices’ regarding working conditions or the way they tried to help and advise workers on various issues. When discussing ‘bad practices’ they talked about other people. For example, when an employer was asked about food distribution, she stressed that in her house the food was for everybody. She said that she knew a lot of employers that made humiliating food distinctions with their domestic workers, and added, ‘I get very angry, to be honest. I am not the best person to talk about that issue because I get very upset’ [4]. What this employer might have meant is that I was not getting the information or quote I was supposedly expecting as she was a good employer. She later told me stories about a ‘bad’ employer that she knew and suggested I interview her (I never did). Another employer explained to me that her domestic worker used the same shower as her...
youngest son and then added,

She is clean! A lot of people wouldn’t allow that. I mean, she has her own toilet. She also has her own shampoo and towel and I think; ‘She is a human being!’ maybe a lot of people would say, ‘How can you let that happen?’... but I don’t, I would never do that [5].

Employers’ denial of racism was in many cases more revealing than, perhaps, a straightforward acknowledgement of difference would have been. The way interviewees talked about domestic workers as ‘them’ illustrated how women participants in this group perceived my position. Employers often referred to workers and their communities as ‘those people’ perhaps implying that they were a separate group distanced from ‘us’ or our class or social hierarchy. However, domestic workers’ narratives also engaged with the same ‘them and us’ discourse. This might be explained by the way both groups perceived me as a neutral listener, or perhaps because both groups of women assumed I was not a domestic worker but were unsure about my employer status. Employers talked in an open and relaxed manner about their perceptions of domestic workers as if I was some sort of ‘confidant’. This is not to say that there were not any differences between me and the women interviewed. For instance, my career became a notable difference during interviews, especially when women discussed notions of ‘good’ mothering or housewifery and the difference between old and new generations of women in Mexico. As one of the women interviewed noted when talking about middle class women in paid employment,

Sometimes we want to be recognised not as housewives but as something different. Women look for recognition and feminist liberation from men. Many women have great achievements but they have sacrificed something else....the majority of women that have success in their careers have failed as wives and mothers [6].

Presenting myself as a PhD student and mother was in some cases put into contraposition with narratives that problematised women’s ambition and the possibility of ‘good’ housewifery or motherhood. At the same time, such differences might have affected the way in which I interpreted women’s
narratives and life experiences and the way these interpretations informed the story presented by this study.

### 3.3.5 Observations and Reflections from the Field

Observation was chosen as a research method for this study because it provides entry into a range of dimensions of the social. In this particular project, it allowed me to explore social interactions that usually/naturally occur behind closed doors at employers’ houses. For ethical reasons, I decided not to do observations at employers’ houses as my presence there as a researcher would have been uncomfortable for participants and would have certainly influenced behaviour. Moreover, I wanted to avoid placing workers in a potentially vulnerable position or affecting their jobs negatively.

Qualitative interviewing was combined with observation of domestic workers and their employers at three children’s parties in Irapuato, Guanajuato. Observation was also undertaken at a town festival as I accompanied the workers to church and then had lunch at the house of three domestic workers (sisters) who were also participants in the group interview. With the participation of these three workers and a friend, I did another observation that involved commuting from their house in Cuchicuato to their employer’s house in Villas de Irapuato.

I took notes during all observations; at children’s parties I took breaks approximately every two hours to make notes on observations and conversations taking place in the setting. In the case of observation made during the town festival and the ‘door to door’ trip from the workers’ house to the employers house I made use of a tape recorder that allowed me to later analyse conversations that took place during those exercises but also some important aspects of the experience (for example, songs at church). Apart from recording some of the things that happened during the observations I also took notes at the end of each experience to record not only what I observed but also how I felt, including other perceptions such as smell. In one of my notes I wrote: ‘all the streets at Chuchicuato smell of wood smoke in the morning’; later this made me realise that I needed to look into differences in housing between Villas and Cuchicuato (i.e. access to water, gas or electricity) in order to put the workers and employers’ living conditions in context.
Children’s parties, where female employers are often accompanied by their domestic workers, made an ideal setting to observe not only interactions among women but also some elements of social display. However, there were some issues around the ethics of ‘relationship work’. For this research project, I lived in Irapuato, Guanajuato for over a year. However, I was not alone but accompanied by my family, my husband and two daughters; at that time three and four years old. As Coffey argues in The Ethnographic Self ‘field work is personal, emotional and identity work’ (1999 in Mason 2006:87). Fieldwork she argues, involves the observance and analysis of the body as an embodiment of culture. Observation studies often involve the development of close relationships in the field and that also raises some specific issues (Mason 2006).

Mason argues that questions may arise from field relationships such as how close they should be and what form they should take. In this case, I was invited to the children parties that I observed and I went to all of them with my daughters. In Irapuato (not in other parts of the country) it is unusual, but acceptable, for husbands to accompany wives to children’s parties. My husband attended the parties observed to look after our children while I was doing observations. We were the ‘new ones in town’ but nonetheless children’s parties in Mexico can be an impersonal matter as many of the invitees are children from the school. For instance, in one of the parties observed the host invited every child from her son’s classroom and others from the same grade. That meant that around 80 children with their families were guests and many of them did not have a personal relationship with the host or among themselves.

Murphy and Dingwall observe that ‘participants may form close relationships with the observer and experience loss when the study is completed and the observer withdraws’ (2001:340). My concern was that, in the case of the present project, my field relationships may also involve my children’s real relationships with other children. Conscious about that issue I did not recruit women from my daughters’ class to be interviewed and in the case of observation at parties I felt that the setting was sufficiently impersonal due to the large numbers of attendees.

Observations were an important complement to this research because they allowed me to reflect about things that were said (and those that were not)
during interviews. For instance, many employers who I interviewed mentioned that domestic workers were an omnipresent theme of conversation among friends and family. On one occasion, a woman was complaining about not finding her domestic worker at the party and her peers were making sarcastic remarks about the worker hiding in the toilet having a manicure while the employer was struggling with the kids. Then, the women started talking in a more serious tone about their own decisions regarding bringing a domestic worker to a party:

Employer A: I used to take mine to parties. But then my daughter didn’t want to play with her, she [the girl] would say ‘go away, go away, I don’t want to play with you’...so I thought, why would I take her [the worker] with me? Also, I hate it when they constantly stand behind you, like sergeants!

[they all laugh]

Employer B: Yes, that’s why they get on your nerves sometimes, don’t you think? Because they only come for the gossip! [7]

Thus, observations made at children’s parties informed the research process in various ways. It confirmed some of the things said during interviews with employers and workers but it also gave me the opportunity to observe aspects of the job that were usually not possible to articulate, recount or construct during an interview. As the account above suggests, workers go to children’s parties to look after or entertain the children of their employers but, most importantly, workers seem to be an important part of the social setting. What I mean by this is that workers are taken to parties also to be looked at and discussed by the employers, as the account above shows. However, children’s parties also allow workers to interact as peers, to meet each other, create social networks and share spoken and unspoken information about their working conditions - as they were also observers of other workers’ interactions with employers. For an occupation where political organisation is said to be constantly hindered by the workers’ isolation, this process of group awareness is highly relevant. As Amelia, a 25 year-old domestic worker said during an interview, ‘All the muchachas were set apart, they [employers] would tell us ‘go and sit where all the muchachas are, then, the Señoras would ask us to sit apart. Why would they ask us to come and then ask us to
be apart?’ [8] Later in that interview Amelia talked to me about some of the conversations that took place among workers at children’s parties.

One observation involved accompanying some domestic workers to church and a town festivity. On that day, they were celebrating ‘The Lord of the Hospital’, an annual festival that pays tribute to a statue of a black Christ found in the nearby town of Salamanca, around 20 kilometers from Cuchicuato. It is widely believed that the Christ statue was originally a white figure from the sixteenth century that was turned black through a miracle (El Correo, 2008)\(^6\). The Christ statue was stolen from the friars by a converted Indian called Acualmeztli who decided to take the statue with him and join the war against the Spanish conquerors. A common belief is that the statue became black in order to be camouflaged at night and to protect the Indian from being caught. The connection between the high numbers of black slaves brought to the region during the sixteenth and seventeenth century and the devotion of a black Christ is hard to miss and yet it is absent from the ‘official’ story. This in turn is illustrative of the way blackness has been, and still is, consistently denied in the social and cultural history of the region.

A recent national survey estimated that 44.7 per cent of Mexican women and 37.3 of men attend church once a week and there are no significant differences among socioeconomic groups or rural and urban areas (Consulta Mitofsky, 2007). However, during an observation at church in Cuchicuato I noticed that the great majority of attendees were women. Through observation, I was able to visualise the impact of male immigration to the US and the importance of paid domestic work for the women of Cuchicuato who are heads of households. Although some of my observations are analysed later in the thesis, what I want to stress here is that observations allowed me to look at some issues that were not mentioned during interviews and were important to the analysis; for instance, issues surrounding motherhood or the preference for childless workers. Not only were the women’s accounts revealing but so was the priest’s discourse and the social environment of a celebration that was missing male participants. During lunch, the workers’ elderly mother told me about the poverty in which they lived before her three sons immigrated to the US and started to send money. She mentioned how an unemployment crisis in America was affecting the whole family back in

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Mexico, saying, ‘Sometimes they [her sons] don’t have money, not even for themselves to pay for food and housing’. The power of observation and its complementarily effect on other methods in social research is that it allows us to connect various dimensions of one particular phenomena (in this case immigration) and then make the links with individuals’ experiences.

During mass, I noticed how the priest’s message emphasized discourses that extolled servitude and poverty as virtuous. Women were asked to repeat the Virgin Mary’s phrase, ‘I am the slave of the Lord’ on several occasions and the main theme of the doctrine that day was about the poor being the first to enter through the gates of Heaven. Thus, observations gave me access to the wider discourse and meanings (i.e. about poverty or servitude) that were not accessible through an interview. They allowed me to look at the workers’ social world at home, at their role as providers, daughters, mothers and members of communities (in this case disempowered by emigration). Observations allowed me to make important connections between such contexts and the expectations and the requirements of paid domestic work.

The observation exercise that involved accompanying four domestic workers ‘door to door’ from their houses to their employers houses allowed me to look at processes of distance in a spatial and symbolic dimension. I was able to observe how workers started their day, at what time, how long it took them to commute to their workplace and why. To travel to their employers’ houses we took a dangerously overcrowded bus from Cuchicuato to Villas de Irapuato. Most of passengers – not surprisingly – were women and the front of the bus was covered with religious figures with messages such as a big and glossy one that spelled out in capitals, ‘THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE’. I wondered about the various possible meanings and interpretations given to that phrase by women inside the bus and how religion shaped the lived experiences of female employers and workers in such different ways. While employers during interviews often thanked God for having a good domestic worker, women from Cuchicuato were, on a daily basis, encouraged to resign themselves to God’s will and faced discourses that linked religiosity with the acceptance of poverty and social inequality.

Since Villas de Irapuato is an upper-class residential area, public transport is not allowed to enter. Thus, after arriving there in about 20 minutes, we then walked uphill for another 40 minutes to get to one of the employers’ houses.
The workers told me they used to take a ‘shortcut’ through a golf course but they were later denied access to this route ‘for their own security’, as they were told. Walking with the workers, I could see how taking the golf course shortcut would have saved us around 20 minutes of walking. As we walked on, one of the workers mentioned that they had raised a bank of earth to prevent them from going into the golf course. ‘It’s like crossing into the US,’ she said. ‘They treat us like criminals’ [9] she complained, citing the fact that the police would stop them and reprimand them if they saw them attempting to cross. The worker’s analogy illustrates her awareness of the symbolic and material difference between them and employers together with issues regarding citizenship.

The observational experience of the ‘door to door’ trip informed the analysis of data in many ways. For instance, the long walk gave me a sense of the importance of calorie intake that workers need in order to perform their job. When analysing food distinction practices, I realised that the physical burden of this occupation is not limited to the tasks or processes they perform inside the employers’ houses. The work starts beforehand and is shaped by the spatial and symbolic distance that exists between poor and upper class neighbourhoods in Mexico. Similarly, when exploring women’s perceptions of sexuality I remembered how, on our way to the employers’ houses, we were harassed by construction workers and one of the domestic workers noted, ‘This is way more dangerous than crossing a golf course’ [10]. Thus, in the middle of the interview process I had a sense of the possible contradictions regarding the perceived sexuality of workers and discourses about their ‘needs’.

That day, the three sisters said goodbye to their mother at home separately, each of them kissing her, slipping some money into her apron pocket and saying the same phrase while doing so: ‘Aquí le dejo mamá’ (There you go, Mom!) as the mother kissed them back and blessed them. Thus, when looking at motherhood, I realised the importance of looking at domestic workers as providers, as breadwinners for whole families and I also reflected on the bond between mothers and daughters but also about the implications of such emotional bonding. Even if it is impossible to include all that we observe in the analysis, what we see and hear during observation informs the research process in many ways that are not explicitly accounted for. The way
interviews were designed and conducted, the questions asked and the arguments exposed throughout the thesis were informed by observation.

3.4 Ethical Procedures, Representation and Politics

When writing about ethics in the research process, the question is not whether one should follow ethical procedures or not, but rather the meaning and forms of the codes the researcher engages with (see Galliher, 1982; Reiss, 1979; Warwick, 1982; Punch, 1986; O’Conno, 1979; Blumer 1982). For Punch (1986 p.37), ‘a professional code of ethics is beneficial as a guideline that alerts researchers to the ethical dimensions of their work, particularly prior to entry’ (my emphasis).

Participants were informed about the nature of the research and what I intended to do with the data generated from interviews. There are limits to how much you can inform participants and the level of detail, complexity and sophistication, but such limits mean that researchers need to take the issue of ethics more rather than less seriously (Mason, 2006). For instance, when women were informed of the research some of them asked, ‘Yes, but for what purpose?’ and the way I interpreted such a question was that they wanted to know more about my political position on the issue.

In both cases I explained that it was important to know more about women’s experiences and avoid leaving ‘history’ with a single male perspective of how ‘things were’. Some domestic workers wanted to know if research like mine would have any impact on their working conditions and my response was that I was not sure about that outcome but that knowing more about women in the occupation could assist policy change. In the case of women who employed domestic workers, I explained that the research was about domestic work and that because middle class women in Mexico often employed a domestic worker the interview was going to be about their perception and experiences of this occupation as employers. I informed women participants that both workers and employers were going to be interviewed for the research.

Participants were informed about the voluntary character of their participation and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The research followed procedures for (oral) informed consent; however no signed form was requested from participants. In Mexico, signatures are usually associated with our obligations towards others and not our rights. Moreover, when designing
the research I found that up to 10 per cent of the population in Guanajuato was illiterate so asking for signed consent would have been not practical in some of the cases and could have made the women interviewed feel insulted or uncomfortable. In the case of observation, the ethical matter of informed consent becomes even more complicated. According to Punch (1986), when doing observation, gaining consent is quite inappropriate because the activity that is taking place cannot be interrupted, or the number of people involved makes it impossible to inform and obtain consent from participants. It was therefore situationally inappropriate to identify myself and the purpose of the research during a Children’s party or at church in Cuchicuato.

My position on both unsigned (interviewing) and uninformed consent (during observation) implied that I had to make ethical choices about what I could count as data. For instance, my class position meant that I was often placed in contexts where employers and workers interacted, not only at parties but also at friends’ or relatives’ houses. As much as my observations kept inevitably informing my position and subjectivity I could not count as data everything I saw or heard within personal encounters. Moreover, from the beginning of the research process, careful attention was given to the issue of representation and the way my own location could affect the narrative co-generated through the study.

Riessman (1993) discusses five different levels of representation in the research process: attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading. For Riessman, each level contributes to the construction of meaning. Our ideas, subjectivities and interpretations filter the way we attend to experience and how we tell a story or an argument. For instance, when attending a child’s party prior to the commencement of the study I saw a young woman looking after a child and I assumed she was a domestic worker only to find out later, after we started up a conversation that she was not a worker but part of the host’s family. I realised that observations were going to be potentially filtered by my own hierarchical class and racial codes. To address this issue, I decided to look for other clues during observation, such as seating arrangements, before assuming women in the setting to be workers. During interviews, employers also had difficulties verbalising what seemed an ‘omnipresent’ racial difference in their narratives. For instance, when asked if her previous domestic was an indigenous woman, Gloria hesitates and replies,
M-hmm [she nods and hesitates], Well, she was one of those from Oaxaca, that live in Mexico City, like in communities, so they live in the city centre, oddly enough, well no, she did speak Spanish, I mean, she didn’t dress indigenous our anything, I mean, she was a girl, a normal kid. Not like an indigenous person or anything, but she was from Oaxaca [11].

In this account, unspoken racial codes are linked to space (Oaxaca) and ‘normality’ even though the race or ethnicity of the worker is never mentioned. The limitations of language go beyond the unspoken and so, for instance, the issue of translation has its own implications for the research process. Temple and Young (2004) argue that the discussion of epistemological and methodological issues around translation across languages has been neglected in cross-cultural social sciences research. The ‘politics of translation’ (Spivak, 1988) is always a political issue that involves the use of language to construct self and other (Alcoff, 1991; Back and Solomos, 1993; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996).

Temple and Young suggest that translation and how it is dealt with in our research is also closely connected to the way we engage with the research process. They argue that an epistemological challenge may arise as people using different languages may construct different ways of seeing social life. For instance, when a worker complained to her peers that the employer reprimanded them for eating rice, she said she asked herself, ‘How is that possible?’ ¡nos partimos la madre aquí!’. Although this could be translated as ‘we work our arses off here!’; it is impossible to find a word in English that would encapsulate the emotions that often accompany such expression in the Mexican context. To address issues of translation this thesis includes the quotes that were taken from women’s narratives in Spanish, the language of participants (see appendix 1).

Translation and how it is dealt with raises complex issues for those who acknowledge that the researcher’s subjectivities influence the way in which social reality is perceived. As Temple and Young (2004:164) argue, ‘There is no neutral position from which to translate and the power relationship within

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[7] Oaxaca is the state with the greatest number of indigenous people in Mexico; more than 30 per cent of its population speaks an indigenous language (INEGI, 2010)
research needs to be acknowledged’. Transcripts and translation are followed by the analysis of data, the fourth level of representation according to Riessman (1993), and it is here where a metastory about what happened is constructed. She argues that it is at this level where the researchers’ values, politics and theoretical commitments influence the construction of meaning.

Marshall and Rossman (2006: 158) put it quite simply: ‘Reading, rereading, and reading though the data once more forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with those data’ and this encapsulates the process I followed for the analysis. The number of interviews allowed me to become immersed in the data to the extent that connections, resonances and contradictions among narratives and observation data were later facilitated. I transcribed the interviews and analysed each of them individually in Spanish (translating only the quotes selected for the data chapters). I read my field notes from observations and transcribed them and included some analysis on the resonances and contradictions of such data with that generated through interviews. The process of deciding the number of interviews for the study depended on the time available for interviews and the challenges sometimes posed by recruiting women but also on the data itself. When a key theme emerged from interviews and observations I engaged with a literature review on the issue that was identified (for example the history of food in Mexico). I researched not only on the more theoretical work on the ‘key theme’ being investigated (i.e. the sociology of food) but I also looked for historical sources that would allow me to connect the theory, the data and also the context of the study (i.e. history of food relations in Mexico). I then stopped interviewing when I felt that there was a story to tell and that I had enough ‘evidence’ to support such a story through women’s stories, my observations of the field and the context that the literature was providing.

As Hammersley (1995) argues, power in the research process is not limited to that embodied by the researcher but can be also be found in research institutions and other interests in society. Influenced by the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) and her critique of the representation of ‘Third World women’ from the perspective of Western feminism, I did my utmost to give the women’s accounts and observations a spatial and historical context. I consciously engaged with Mexican literature to avoid analysing the lives of
women domestic workers and female employers only from Western perspectives on issues such as food, motherhood or sexuality.

3.5 Conclusion

The rest of this thesis presents the results and analysis drawn from the methods chosen for this study. Qualitative interviewing and observation were the most useful tools for addressing the questions set out at the beginning of this chapter. There are certain limitations due to my location and the inevitable issues of representation involved in qualitative social research. However, as Martyn Hammersley (1995:118) argues, whether or not social research is political involves more than ‘what side one is on’. Research should be ‘value relevant without being designed to serve a particular political cause’. Thus, this study is political in the sense that involves my own subjectivities and value judgements about the conditions of millions of women workers in Mexico. However, while the research was not designed to serve a political cause, there is certainly an element of scholarly commitment involved. As Pierre Bourdieu (2003:24) argues, researchers today must ‘break out of the academic microcosm’ and create links to the outside world.

As is shown throughout this thesis, the various systems of oppression in Mexico affect the lives of women domestic workers but also that of their families and communities. The silent and complex mechanism through which race in Mexico has historically operated allows visible racist exclusions to exist and be maintained by a widespread denial of difference. Invisible as they seem to be, these exclusions have perceivable effects on the lives of many. Thus, following Bourdieu (2003:20), scholarly commitment to collective politics in Mexico is not only a valid endeavour, but one ‘indispensable to social struggles’, whereby both old and novel forms of racial difference have silently denied millions of women recognition as workers and the rights that should come along with it.
Chapter 4: “Why should I not take an apple or a fruit if I wash her underwear?”: Food and Social Classification

In 2010, a national survey commissioned by the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) reported that up to 58 per cent of respondents acknowledged that most or some employers give domestic workers leftovers to eat (ENADIS, 2010). This chapter looks at food distinction practices in the context of paid domestic work in Mexico and argues that food and eating are still powerful social markers among people in Mexico. The chapter describes the racial history of food relations in Mexico and finds connections between the symbolism of food and the lived experiences of women in paid domestic work.

The following section (4.1) introduces some of the few studies on food relations in Latin America and Mexico, it highlights the issues and subjects of study that have been privileged by scholars and identifies further research that has yet to be done. The subsequent section (4.2) explores the racialised history of food in Mexico from colonial times to the present and discusses the parallels between ideas of food and human mestizaje and how such ideas still work to sustain notions of ‘true’ Mexicanness. The next section (4.3) links the racial and class history of food with women’s experiences. Discourses around food found among women’s narratives showed the way both employers and workers relate to their bodies and the bodies of others. This section looks at the symbolic of food and eating but also at the immediate and tangible effects of food deprivation on the well being of workers and their right to ‘meals of good quality and sufficient quantity’ (ILO, 2011: 15B/10). The link between food and nurturance is explored and the deployment of powerful emotions such as disgust and shame is analysed.

Section 4.4 looks at the double function of feast food to mark difference and to solidify group membership. This section first draws on observations made at children’s parties and argues that food distinctions can also take the form of social display. It also looks at how food distinction manifests in the context of celebrations, first through the experience of a worker on Christmas Eve and then through the experience of an employer; paid domestic work seems to shape both women’s narratives around feast foods and family, albeit in contrasting ways.
Finally, it concludes that exploring the social meanings of food in Mexico uncovers enduring racist practices that have been historically silenced by the myth of *mestizaje*. Certain foodstuffs that have been historically racialised are still found among the discourses of employers today and are used as powerful strategies of self affirmation and distance. The racialisation of domestic workers is manifested through emotions of shame and disgust that are deployed alongside food distinctions to maintain difference and justify exploitation.

### 4.1 Creative Dualities and Common Origins in the Construction the ‘true’ Mexican: culinary and human *mestizaje*

Contemporary scholarship on food and eating has built on exhaustive scholarly work that has for long proposed and debated theoretical approaches to understand the place of food in the social world (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Douglas, 1966; Goody, 1982; Mennell, 1985; Mintz, 1985; Simoons, 1994). For David Arnold ‘food was, and continues to be, power in a most basic tangible and inescapable form’ (1988:3), for that reason, the study of foodways enables a holistic approach to social organisation (Counihan, 1999). Studies of food and eating have crossed the world and cover multiple issues, among others, food and identity, culinary symbolism, food allocation and preferences, food and social memory (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002).

In Mexico, food research has flourished only during the last decade and it’s just beginning to appear on the agenda of well-respected academic institutions. The works of Jeffrey Pilcher (1998) in Mexico and Mary Weisman (1989) in Ecuador have influenced recent scholarly work in the region as both were groundbreaking in illuminating the interplay between the historicity of food, *mestizaje* and contemporary forms of social stratification. In Latin America, scholars have looked at how certain foods are used to affirm ethnic belonging or to mark distance from indigenousness and poverty (Vacas Mora, 2008; Katz, 2009; Tapia Morales, 2009). These studies demonstrate what Goody (1982:113) argues about food and difference when he states that ‘the hierarchy between ranks and classes takes a culinary form’.

Other scholarly work engages with the vindication of local or ‘traditional’ culinary knowledge showing the nutritional cost of industrialised food and dietary change among indigenous communities in Mexico (Messer, 2003;
Kemper, 2003; Bertran, 2005). In Mexico industrialised food and dietary change has affected not only indigenous groups but the whole of the population. According to official estimates around 70 per cent of people in the country are today overweight (INSP, 2006). However, there is an absence of sociological or anthropological studies of food and eating among non indigenous people. In Janet Long’s (2003) compilation of thirty academic works that explore the culinary history of Mexico only one engages with the study of food and social stratification among non indigenous people. José N. Iturriaga (2003: 407) argues that tacos that are divided, according to their filling, by region, race and social class. Thus, the upper classes generally avoid eating tacos with fillings that are not considered appropriate to their class or race. However, Iturriaga contradicts his own observations when he states that in matters of blood and food origins, mestizaje defines ‘true’ Mexicanness,

> Just as, on the question of bloodlines, true Mexicans cannot deny either their indigenous or their Spanish genealogies, nor make the mistake of being Indigenist or Hispanist without detriment to the other component, so on the question of food, our origin is dual and should give us cause for pride (My emphasis)\(^8\).

Iturriaga excludes blackness from Mexico’s national identity and cuisine (Lewis, 2000; Hoffmann and Pascal, 2006). He equates an imagined culinary and human "essence" while defining Mexicanness as necessarily dual. Iturriaga’s view of a Mexican national cuisine subordinates culinary regional differences. In his article *Regionalism and the Institution of the Yucatecan Gastronomic Field*, Ayora-Diaz (2010) argues that Yucatan’s gastronomy stands in opposition to a ‘Mexican’ cuisine. For Ayora-Diaz, regional cuisine helps to resists the monolithic imagination of the Mexican nation-state. The value of Ayora-Diaz’s argument is that it highlights the importance of looking at power dynamics within food aesthetics. In Mexico’s *gastropolitics* food is an important element in the negotiation of cultural and economic resources (Appadurai, 1981) but also of national belonging; a negotiation that certainly includes, but it’s not limited to, indigenuiosity and blackness. Iturriaga’s work shows how culinary and human mestizaje are still understood as indistinguishable dimensions of social life. Iturraga dismisses the fact that in

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\(^8\)Translated by John O'Shea, English editor of this thesis and professional translator.
Mexico, the construction of an imagined culinary (and human) ‘duality’ was never a neutral exercise; as the next section shows, foodstuffs have historically been constituted as differently positioned within a racial hierarchy of origins.

4.2 The People of Maize: the Racial History of Food in Mexico

In his book, *¡Que Vivan los tamales! Food and the construction of Mexican Identity*, Jeffery M. Pilcher (1998) shows that, although the conquest of America entailed a culinary hybridity of food from both sides of the Atlantic, maize and wheat remained mutually exclusive. Soon after the conqueror Hernán Cortés landed in Mayan territory, Spanish missionaries started to ‘educate’ the taste of Indians in order to convert them into Christians and therefore make them fully human. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (in Burkhart, 1989: 166), a Spanish Franciscan missionary to the Aztec people of Mexico, instructed Indians to eat:

> that which the Castilian people eat, because it is good food, that with which they are raised, they are strong and pure and wise. . . . You will become the same way if you eat their food, and if you are careful with your bodies as they are. Grow Castilian maize [wheat] so that you may eat Castilian tortillas [bread].

Rebecca Earle (2010) explores diets and bodies in early colonial Spanish America and argues that European food was crucial to the colonial enterprise because it was used to structure social categories of “Spaniard” and “Indian”. Earle argues that food was used to explain and create bodily differences between colonisers and colonised. The Christian belief in a common ancestor dismissed the notion of fixed physical differences among humans. Therefore, difference between peoples from the Old World and Europeans was explained by the effects of climate and food (Pilcher, 1998; Earle, 2010).

In Mexico, the *caste paintings* that were commissioned by the Spanish authorities during the eighteenth century are a good example of how food was used for racial categorisation. The series presents a progressive taxonomy of races where inscriptions and foods were used to identify the different castes of the New World (Carrera, 2003). Scott (2005) offers an interesting revaluation of the *casta paintings* in Mexico and argues that painters of the time might have focused upon local scene and foods to mark difference
between *themselves*, and the imperial power as a first step towards the production of a national identity. Whatever the intention of painters, food was clearly an important racial marker of the time.

The ‘evangelisation of appetite’ could be read as an attempt to transform Indians into humans; as Beardsworth and Keil (2002:55) suggest, ‘learning to be human involves learning what humans, as opposed to non-humans, eat’. However, the same process could be seen as a mechanism of self affirmation and the reproduction of difference and distance. For Earle (2010:707), the potential transformation of maize into bread parallels the larger question of the potential transformation of Indians into Christians and therefore fully human:

> Bread or not bread; men or not men? We wouldn’t be alone in positing a connection between these foods and the people who ate them, for colonial culture itself equated eaters and eaten. ‘Indians aren’t people and cassava isn’t bread’, runs an aphorism from colonial Venezuela.

For Spanish missionaries in America wheat was not merely a social necessity but a religious one, since it was recognised by the Roman Catholic Church as the only possible grain with the potential to be transformed into the body of Christ. Even after settlers acquired a taste for maize out of necessity the ambivalent attitude towards native food persisted and was reflected in cookbooks during the nineteenth century (Pilcher 1998). The beginning of the twentieth century saw the merging of discourses on food, modernity, national development and race. In 1899, Senator Francisco Bulnes, blamed maize for the underdevelopment of Mexico and the weakness of its indigenous population. Bulnes was a self-declared ‘scientist’ and believed that the new science of nutrition divided humanity into three races: the peoples of maize, wheat and rice. He wrote; ‘history teaches us that the wheat race is the only one truly progressive’ and ‘maize, has been the eternal pacifier of the indigenous races in America and the founder of their repulsion to civilisation’ (Bulnes, 1899:19). His numerous controversial publications gave Bulnes a widely known reputation as a racist (Trillo, 2010) but at the time his hypothesis became central to a national debate around the ‘poor diet of the poor’ (Pilcher, 1998).
During the 1930s and 1940s prominent proponents of indigenismo were visibly preoccupied with changing the food habits of the indigenous population. The indigenista movement entailed a series of political policies designed to instil a sense of a shared national culture among the diverse ethnic communities of Mexico. The idea was to integrate the indigenous population into national life; a process that was consolidated through a system of public education that, among other impositions, forced the implementation of Spanish as the official language and advised indigenous communities to change their foodways and eat as gente de razón (people of reason) (Barabas, 2000; Gutiérrez, 2008). Rafael Ramirez, director of rural education during the 1930s, advised indigenous people to change their diet,

So that your children won't only learn Spanish, but also acquired our costumes and forms of life that are without a doubt superior to yours. Is necessary that you know that Indians call us gente de razón, not only because we speak Spanish, but because we dress and eat differently (in Pilcher, 1998:91).

Until the mid twentieth century, food explicitly defined the racial ranking of Indians as opposed to gente de razón (rational people). As Mintz (1985:185) argues, some foods carry 'the complex idea that one could become different by consuming differently'. From the second half of the twentieth century food became an important part of discourses that reproduced the idea of the mestizo/a as a duality and as the iconic figure of Mexican nationalism (Molina Enríquez, 1909; Vasconcelos, 1925). In 1968, Salvador Novo, a well-respected historian and poet of the time wrote,

Once the Conquest had been consummated, there came a long period of adjustment and mutual exchange; of absorption, sharing, mestizaje.: maize, chili, tomatoes, beans, turkey, cocoa, quelites await, are offered. In the new creative Duality... they represent the apparently vanquished, passive, feminine side of contact. Rice arrives, along with wheat, cattle, sheep, pigs, milk, cheese, oil, garlic, wine, vinegar and sugar. In the Duality these represent the masculine element (1973:31).

As in other genealogies of imperialism (McClintock, 1995; Comaroff, 2010) Novo’s account feminises the colonised land and its people. Novo provides
with an elaborate conception of male and female foods (Counihan, 1999). The novelty of his analogy is the way he equates culinary and human mestizaje through gender and racial codes where indigenousness is defined as ‘vanquished, passive and feminine’. The notion of a national ‘dual’ identity eventually worked to silence the racial history of food.

From the second half of the twentieth century allusions to race/ethnicity disappeared and political discourses around food focused on ‘the diet of the poor’ (Aguilar, 2007). The concerns of middle class reformers for the under nutrition of the working class were reflected on new food policies for the poor. For instance, during the administration of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946) the Ministry of Public Health and Assistance MPHA opened family dining halls in Mexico City to serve the working class. Some families were reluctant at first to eat at the halls as they refused to be stigmatised as poor and needy, after all, the hall’s booklet portrayed diners as uneducated, messy, untidy and thieves. The application process to participate as a diner was difficult and required a proven ‘respectability’ (Sandra Aguilar, 2007:188). In the context of such discourses around who was considered a respectable citizen, domestic workers were excluded from the halls as it was only available for women that worked in factories or offices.

In the 40s scientists from the National Institute of Nutrition concluded that maize and wheat were equally nutritious. However, it was too late to reverse two processes that had enormous consequence for the diet of the average Mexican, as Pilcher (2005:235) argues, through food consumption, people in Mexico seem to be ‘entering and leaving modernity’ and in the process of doing so ‘many paid a high nutritional price, suspended between traditional and modern diets, eating the worst of both worlds’.

This section has demonstrated that meanings, practices and discourses around food have historically worked as a symbiosis between class materiality and racial signification. The ‘culinary mestizaje’ that began after the conquest of Mexico eventually meant the loss of indigenous foodways and the integration of indigenous communities into a diet that was far from being the nutritional formula against underdevelopment (Bertran, 2005). In the next section, food relations between female employers and domestic workers illustrate historical continuances of social stratification. Food distinctions are still powerful gender, class and racial markers that are often deployed for the
justification of workers’ exploitation and the self affirmation of female employers and their families.

4.3 ‘We had our plastic plates and plastic cups and theirs weren’t: theirs were pink’: Food, Disgust and Shame

The social stratification of paid domestic work precedes European colonisation and ‘servants’ were found among the lower classes of pre-Hispanic societies (Goldsmith, 1993). However, the Spaniards added the element of race to the social hierarchy of domestic work, either through slavery, forced or waged labour. Today, paid domestic workers in Mexico are racialised and an important manifestation of such process is illustrated by food distinction discourses and practices found among the narratives of women that were interviewed. Ana, a 46 years old female employer, highlights the workers’ unhealthy food preference to describe why workers and employers don’t eat the same food,

In my house they eat the same food as us. I have never told them that they can’t take this or the other. But there is something very funny; they don’t like to eat what we eat. They like to eat biscuits and sausages and now I have to buy more biscuits and sausages. And I think ‘well, they need to eat something!’ … they are not accustomed to eating vegetables and fruits. When I cook fish, shrimps and those kinds of things they don’t like it. They like meat. Lots of quesadillas [maize tortilla with melted cheese], they eat lots of quesadillas. [12]

Food preferences are not necessarily a matter of taste. In his work Distinction Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that the idea of the body and of the effect of food on the body differs from class to class and that food preferences are deeply linked to the value that people give to strength, health and beauty,

whereas the working classes are more concerned about the strength of the body than its shape, they tend to prefer products that are both cheap and nutritious. In contrast, middle and upper classes prefer products that are tasty, health-giving, light and not fattening.

Women in this occupation use their bodies as instruments of work; individuals involved in highly demanding physical work require more calorie intake than
those who don’t. Preference for high caloric or junk food might also be related to limited time given to eat or to signs of emotional distress. When discussing food addiction among black communities in the US bell hooks (1991:98) suggests that consumption on all levels, including junk food, could be explained by the need ‘to compensate feelings of wounded pride and self-esteem’ inflicted by racism.

Whether food preferences are related to calories or wounded pride our taste for particular foods is not a neutral experience. As Stephen Mennell argues, ‘likes and dislikes are never socially neutral, but always entangled with people’s affiliations to class and other social groups’ (1985, 331-32). As Stoler (1995) shows, servants in the colonial home were seen as a threat to children in their care not only because of their imagined ‘deviant’ sexuality but also because servants could influence European children’s taste and cravings.

Almost five hundred years after Father Bernardino Sahagún instructed Indians to eat what Castilian people did to become like them, certain foods are still powerful racial and class signifiers. The racial history of food and eating is still part of the everyday discourses in paid domestic work. Rosario, one of the domestic workers interviewed, described her experiences of food deprivation with an employer that expected her to work for ten hours nonstop,

She [the mistress] told me ‘it’s because we don’t know beans here, we are on a diet; you have to eat before you come to work’...she used to say, ‘we don’t even have tortillas, you can see yourself that we don’t even eat tortillas’. I used to feel dizzy, I got a terrible pain in my bones, horrible, until I went to the doctor and he told me I had osteoporosis [13].

When the employer asserts that they don’t know beans and tortillas she engages in a class and racial distancing from the worker. The employer’s assertion closely resembles Thomas Gage’s observation of seventeenth-century Chiapas of Creoles standing in their doorways every afternoon ‘to see and to be seen’ eating bread and meat (Gage, 1981 in Pilcher, 1998:38). Food deprivation affects workers’ lives not only in a symbolic manner but, as the account above suggests, has immediate and concrete effects on their well-being. Núñez and Holper (2005) offer a valuable analysis of food practices among Peruvian domestic workers in Chile. The authors argue that domestic
workers suffer from health related problems due to food deprivation at work. Food deprivation is perceived by Peruvian workers as a mechanism of symbolic violence that limits their autonomy undermining their health and personhood. As Lappé and Collins argue ‘there is no more absolute sign of powerlessness than hunger’ (1986 in Counihan, 1999:7).

Female employers who participated in this study felt reluctant to let their domestic workers cook for their families. Through cooking, middle-class women comply with and reproduce gendered expectations at home. As 80-year-old female employer, Yolanda, notes, ‘I always cooked, darling, my husband ‘kept me in line.’ However, employers’ insistence on cooking is also based on prejudices about the workers’ cooking skills, or rather lack of them. Yolanda contends, to the amusement of her fellow churchgoers, that ‘they [domestic workers] don’t know how to cook; they only know how to eat’ [14]. Lévi Strauss (1966) argues that cooking is what transforms nature (raw ingredients) into culture (acceptable food for humans). The distinction between cooking and eating is linked to that of culture and nature, and some employers situated themselves within the former and the workers within the later. Female employers engage with discourses about the unskilled worker, in contrast to the skilled and devoted wife, in order to reaffirm their own sense of gendered and classed self. A female employer explains the perception of cooking as a cultural resource,

I thought ‘what is my part I must do it right’. For me, it was something pleasant to be in the kitchen. Maybe because I felt that it was a way to develop myself; I don’t know. I think cooking is an art. [15]

Pleasure could be seen as a form of productive power since it is difficult to notice the oppressive features of any practice from which pleasure can be gained (Skeggs, 1997). While an employer describes’ making breakfast on Sundays ‘as if we were in a hotel, with fruit and little pancake figures for the kids’ [16] many domestic workers described leaving their own children unattended or locked in a room during their work shifts. Claudia, a domestic worker and mother of three recalls leaving her children alone ‘I would leave them little pots of beans or soup and some money for tortillas’ [17]. Some workers felt that one of the major emotional burdens of the occupation was the impediment of properly feeding their own children because of long
working hours and lack of access to child care facilities. Children - often girls - as young as six years old are often expected to feed younger siblings. The act of feeding seems to be deeply entangled with notions around nurturance and ‘maternal’ love. Counihan (1999:63) argues that there is a general association between women, food, sex and reproduction: ‘women are food to the fetus and infant, and the breasts can be sources of both sexual pleasure and food’. Similarly, De Vault (1991:112) found that mothering work reinforced women’s involvement in feeding work:

Many of the women I talked with remembered their pregnancies as times when they became more conscious of food and nutrition and committed themselves to better feeding. Several learned more about food in formal pregnancy preparation courses, but they saw their new knowledge as generalizable beyond pregnancy.

Domestic workers who participated in this study didn’t perceive any ‘pleasure’ from cooking for the employers’ family and they often preferred not to cook, as this task requires hard work and is usually time consuming. Theo Goldberg (1993) suggests that social hierarchies need not be about domination so much as they are about exclusion. None of the workers interviewed complained about being excluded from cooking for the employers’ family (in contrast with other practices around food) this might be explained by the relational character of cooking since its meaning and relevance depend on those who we cook for. Excluding workers from cooking was often expressed through feelings of disgust and fear of contamination. Ana explains why she never leaves cooking to the domestic worker,

I always cooked because I had always been lucky enough to have good muchachas....At first I did it [cook] because I needed to feed the babies and I felt that the muchacha didn’t have the hygiene, they don’t take much care about having their nails short and clean.

They might sneeze on the food and you don’t even notice [18].

In the account above, the employer fixes the corporeal properties of domestic workers as dirty and contagious. As Mary Douglas (1966) argues, concerns over dirt and pollution express individuals’ anxieties about the protection of social classification and the maintenance of boundaries. Similarly, Martha C. Nussbaum (2006) argues that disgust has a specific cognitive content that
takes the form of a desire to be non-animal. For Nussbaum, disgust is about rejecting everything that reminds us of our animal condition, such as bodily fluids, dirt and disease. Not surprisingly, disgust has been historically projected onto groups of people that have been equated to animals because of their degree of deviance from the male, white, middle class, heterosexual norm (Skeggs, 1997; Anderson, 2000; Collins, 1990). Otherness, in this case, works to deny our own animal nature, in Nussbaum’s (2006:107) words we need a group of humans to bind ourselves against, who will come to exemplify the boundary line between the truly human and the basely animal.

Nussbaum (2006) suggests that women have been considered as the classic subject of disgust, as giving birth is often taken as a reminder of animal life and the mortality of the body. Because the core idea of disgust is fear of contamination, animal bodily secretions and those who have regular contact with them, are felt to be sources of contamination. Imagining workers as contaminating could be explained by a particular articulation between the type of job they do, the historical racialisation of this occupation and workers’ womanhood. Since food is a physiological and psychological matter, it is not surprising that those regarded as contaminating would be kept at a distance from the food we plan to consume. The distance between food for the family and the worker is achieved by assuring that only the ‘clean’ hand of the female employer touches the food the family eats. But there are other more drastic measures such as that of dividing the kitchenware that the family and the worker use. Amelia, a 35 year old domestic worker, explains her experiences with food distinction,

One of my mistresses used to divide everything for me, she gave me a different plate, spoon, glass, if they would drink juice I wasn’t given any. One day, that I remember very well, they ate shrimp soup, with big and tasty shrimps, I remember. And then, when it was my time to eat, they left a plate of soup served for me, but it was only the stock, without any shrimps! And I had such a craving for the shrimps! That day they made fruit juice but they gave me only plain water. And I put up with a lot there because at that time my mother was unemployed and I thought; 'I need to work because I need to help my mother' [19].
As this account shows, food distinction practices are expressed in spatial, bodily and/or social terms and through practice, interaction and/or material signification. Livia Barbosa (2007) looks at domestic workers in Brazil and argues that concepts of pollution shape the segregation of women workers and are manifested through practices such as requiring workers to use different cutlery and crockery. As the account above shows, domestic workers are aware about food distinctions and about the contradictions of an occupation that seems to require, at once, high levels of intimacy and distance; as Amelia noticed, ‘I thought; why should I not take an apple or a fruit if I wash her underwear?’ Such paradox could be explained by the need to have Others near enough to protect the bourgeois self from its own dirt but far enough away to contain the risk of contamination (Stoler, 1995).

Workers are aware of the spatial and time order of eating at their employers’ house. Such temporal distinction facilitates food deprivation and the invisibility of such practice. Employers engage with a domestic ‘economy of exclusion’ to justify and camouflage food distinctions or deprivation. Workers usually eat leftovers and the purchase of food is mostly done by an employer with enough experience to know about portions. Not surprisingly, there is usually not enough food to include the worker in the everyday diet of the employer. Amelia is a 25 years-old worker and she talked about food distinctions at work,

People see them in the street but at home they have another face. I am sometimes hungry and the mistress is out but there is nothing to eat! They were not rich rich but I think they have money to eat...she used to left me 20 pesos [the equivalent of three pounds!] and I would go to the corner’s shop and from those 20 pesos I bought six chicken wings, two or three tomatoes and rice and from there I had to cook for them (pause) and she [the mistress] would tell me to eat soup but it wasn’t soup because it didn’t have any vegetables nothing, nothing. ....so, I only cooked for them because there was never something left for me...I used to leave around five in the afternoon. From nine to five and I didn’t have any food all day. Domestic workers are usually given only eggs and tortillas...in some houses they don’t allow you to eat [20].
Workers usually felt ashamed of cooking something for themselves, as Rosario notes: 'I would be ashamed. I don’t know why I would be ashamed to cook something for myself'. Her description of feelings of shame is followed by an account of her mistress reprimanding her and her fellow workers for eating rice,

The mistress would say how much food to cook and Rosa [the cook] would cook half a cup more [of rice] so that we could eat and when Rosa said to the mistress "We have run out of rice," the mistress would say: “What do you mean we have run out?, I told you that one kilogram of rice has to last four days!” [21].

Humiliation is about publicly exposing someone to shame and to mark the subject as low status (Nussbaum, 2006). Rosario said to feel ‘shame’ and not ‘guilt’ when asked about considering eating the employers’ food. Nussbaum notes that guilt is a reaction to the perception that one has acted badly and caused harm to others while shame is about defect and therefore focuses on the person who experiences it. By inscribing shame onto the workers’ bodies a form of self-control is achieved and distance assured. The account of Adriana, a 27-year-old female employer also describes how shame is used as a strategy of self-control,

I have an open storeroom (food) for them. They can eat whatever they want. And none of them has come out as abusive. My mother guides me. My mother is very frank; I think she is very good at commanding people. She used to tell me, ‘You just tell her (the domestic worker) not to abuse what you are offering, the food is there and everything but, for example, if there is very little cheese left and the Señor is about to arrive, they should think that he might ask for quesadillas and they will get you in trouble (if they have eaten the cheese)[22].

The mother’s advice serves to reinforce (through guidance) a gender order that both her daughter and the worker are expected to follow, that is, women should not eat what men might need or want (Bourdieu, 1984). This order is ensured by expecting the workers’ self control since otherwise she would be shamefully exposed as ‘abusive’.

For Pierre Bordieu (1984:190) eating involves ‘choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically’. Thus, when it comes to feast food the issue of social display becomes central to the protection of body boundaries. Feasts are *par excellence* contexts of luxury food consumption and they are often used either to enhance social relationships or to set groups apart. Hayden (1996:137) identifies as feast foods those foods that are the rarest, the most difficult to procure or the most-labour intensive to produce. Feasts and celebrations have two principal characteristics: the communal consumption of food and the social component of display (usually of success, social status or power) (Dietler, 1996; Dietler and Hayden, 2001). As van der Veen (2003:420) argues the value of food is socially and culturally determined: ‘each society determines which foods are social necessities and which are luxuries and this distinction reflects the ‘social grammar’ of a society, its moral and political make-up.’

According to Dielter, some feasts serve to naturalise or reify differences in social status. Drawing on observations it is possible to suggest that children parties served as what Dietler’s (1996) calls *empowering* and *diacritical* feasts. *Empowering* feasts work to acquire social power by offering feast foods for guests and implicitly expecting these to give something in return such as deference. *Diacritical* feasts work to reify differences in social status, the emphasis here is on the offering (or deprivation) of foods that would help to symbolise exclusivity. As the presence of paid domestic workers at children’s parties shows some celebrations could be seen, simultaneously, as *empowering* and *diacritical* feasts. Whether behind doors or in public, through humiliating division practices or straight deprivation, food distinctions seem to inform the lived experiences of female employers and workers as members of a political order that allows and reproduces racism while denying difference.

During parties workers were usually looking after the children of employers and fed them while their mothers entertained. Workers were not given any food during all afternoon or a chair to sit. Some of the workers had a drink
while standing, walking after the kids or sitting on the floor. Angela, a 27 year old worker, described how domestic workers are treated at children’s parties,

> When the party was over, sometimes, if they would get us something, they said to us ‘we brought you a glass of water or soda, is just that we forgot!’ And we used to say between us ‘as she [the mistress] already ate and we haven’t eaten anything!’ [23].

It appeared that the only time when mothers were fully involved in the celebration with their children was during the birthday song –*mañanitas*- which was followed by the offering of the birthday cake. During that time domestic workers stayed behind, apart from the guests, they don’t have contact with children or female employers. The cake is luxurious food *par excellence*; it takes central stage during birthday’s celebration. As Mintz (1986) demonstrated in Sweetness and Power, the social meanings of sugar are not neutral as they have been historically linked to European expansion, luxury and power. The moment when the sweet cake is offered to guests excludes the workers and demands from guests, employers, to interrupt conversation, stand up and participate along with their children in honouring the child host.

Understanding paid domestic work through children’s parties was very illustrative of the place of luxury food to mark distance. However, workers’ experiences around their own feast foods and celebrations were also very revealing. Marta, a domestic worker, mother of five and the head of the household, described her lived experiences at work and she decided to focus on one particular experience during one of the most important celebrations of the year; Christmas Eve. A day before this important celebration Marta asked her employers permission for an early leave the next day as she, as almost every other Mexican family, cooks *tamales* for her four daughters and a son on Christmas Eve.

*Tamales* (Spanish *tamal*, from Nahuatl *tamlli*) is a traditional Mexican dish from the Aztec empire made by steam-cooked corn dough inside a husk with a variety of fillings. Tamales were the hallmark of celebrations in Mesoamerica and are still today considered as luxury food for family celebrations. Even if the reputation of these little husks of maize has varied across time they have
always been considered as feast food perhaps because of their complex and time consuming elaboration. Marta’s mistresses, two single teachers from a local elementary school who are sisters, denied her permission for an early leave on Christmas Eve as they ‘needed’ her that day to cook a great number of tamales for their own family celebration. Marta recalls with anger her employers’ advice about negotiating more "democratic" relationships at home,

They said "you have daughters, get your daughters to do them for you, you shouldn’t be working so hard" (pause) I thought "hija de su madre" how can you say that if I am working here, with the misery of money you give me...and you are asking me not to work in my own house? For my own daughters who are my obligation? "...Do you know at what time they let me go that day? Until 7.00 at night! On Christmas Eve!

I cleaned the house; did laundry; cooked them lunch; cleaned everything; served them lunch; cleaned the kitchen and when I was done one of the mistresses said: "now Señora, let’s go to the parking lot so you can start to cook the tamales" (pause) She told me the day before "bring one of your girls so she can help you because who knows at what time you are going to finish"...They didn’t pay me any extra money or pay any money to my girl. [24]

The employers and the worker’s families planned to eat tamales for Christmas but tamales are labour intensive and time consuming and one of the families had to run the risk to go without them. As Van der Veen (2003:408) argues, the focus of luxury or feast food ‘is not on the inherent characteristics of what is consumed, but on the signal it gives to those who cannot consume it’. Not surprisingly, Marta arrived too late for the elaboration of tamales for her own family celebration. The maize was there, her daughters and son (aged from 12 to 17 years old) had prepared the dough but the filling was a problem,

I had previously order some maize and my girls did the dough (pause) and then when I got home I said "daughters; let’s start now doing the tamales! " and one of them said "mom, but where are we
going to buy the filling to do them now?" And one of my daughters said "let’s bring some cheese and we can fill them only with chillie peppers because we are not going to find cheap meat at this time of the day" [25]

‘Meat, the nourishing food *par excellence*’ (Bourdieu, 1984:192), has been linked with ‘the white Western world’s enactment of racism’ (Adams, 1990:30 in Cuninhan, 1999) and with male domination. For Bourdieu (1984), meat is a men’s dish and this relates to the image of the male body as a sort of labour power. However, nourishing food is deeply related to the maintenance of life and therefore with reproduction and, in the case of women, with notions of motherhood. There was certainly a link between food and nurturance found among women’s narratives and, as chapter 6 explores in detail, paid domestic work seems to constrain workers’ rights to become or follow their own particular conceptions around ‘good’ mothering. In this case, the mistresses questioned Marta’s own notions of mothering work and neglected the worker’s emotional investments. Marta attempts to resist and she seems aware of the contradictions that the mistresses’ expectation to ‘liberate’ herself from her own family life entails,

And after all that they [the employers] criticised me! Next day they said ‘the tamales were not even good, they were tasteless because you cooked them in a rush’ and I said ‘why would you think I won’t be in a rush? I have *my* daughters, I have to look after *my* daughters!’ and they said ‘they are grownups now!’ and I said ‘for me they are *my* daughters, they can be using a stick [to walk, meaning they could be old] and they would still be *my* daughters! [26]

Marta’s account is a tale of power that illustrates how workers are expected to renounce their own personal life and be exclusively loyal to the mistresses’ call and ‘needs’. The worker’s resistance is constrained by her class; in this case Marta was the head of the household and had no choice but to obey the mistresses’ commands. Employers neglect Marta’s family life and they are clearly more committed with the reproduction of their own power over the
worker than with a process of 'reflexive transformation' of Marta’s gender dispositions at home. Food as nurturance was also found in female employers’ narratives around motherhood. However, in the case of employers, feeding the family in the context of a celebration often depends on the work of others. Yolanda, an 80 years-old employer and mother of eight, experienced in a very personal way the effects of constructing notions of motherhood and nurturance that ultimately depend on the outsourced work of another woman,

I see people...for example my daughters’ mother in law, she has a muchacha. And she has the luxury to invite her family because the muchacha cooks for them...She buys the food for them, she buys [fresh] food every day. She has like 20 years working for them (pause). I used to organise family lunches here with my sons and daughters but I can’t anymore. Because before I had help, I had help from a woman named Consuelo...that Señora carried her anafre with her, she used to make gorditas. That woman was so good and she would clean the kitchen, wash the dishes and everything. But one day she disappeared (pause). Sundays, during the strawberry fair, we used to have huge casseroles (pots) of rice, mole and chicken. I would do cream caramel; she would do it. There were huge casseroles (pause). I looked for her but she disappeared. I sigh so much for Consuelo, because if I had that help (pause) how much I would like my sons and daughters to come! [27]

Yolanda’s eight sons and daughters are all married and each has, on average, four children of their own, thus, it is not hard to imagine the amount of work that the feast required. It is difficult to miss the contradiction between her experience and the implied invisibility of the worker’s own family life and sacrifices. Yolanda’s narrative, the confusion implied in the phrase ‘I would do cream caramel; She would do it’ demonstrates the widespread denial of workers’ personhood and the employers’ idea that what the workers’ labour and caring work is somehow an extension of their own role as mothers and

9 A portable furnace or stove.
10 A gordita is a food which is characterized by a small, thick tortilla made with maize flour with various kinds of fillings.
wives. It is important to note that this is the same employer that during the same interview stated that ‘they [domestic workers] don’t know how to cook; they only know how to eat’. Yolanda made this statement during the first part of the interview, when the tone of the conversation was relaxed and impersonal. When Yolanda neglects workers’ cooking skills she engages in narratives of present times and describes the problems she is having to find a good domestic worker willing to care for women of her age. When the conversation turns into issues regarding motherhood she seems to take a different stand when it comes to describing workers’ cooking or care skills. Riessman (1987) argues that women organise narratives in different ways. In her analysis, she describes an Anglo woman that tells her story temporally and a Puerto Rican woman that gives her accounts episodically. Both employers and domestic workers that participated in the study organised their narratives episodically, thus, what would appear to be a contradiction might be explained by the way different events in women’s lives shape the interviewees’ perceptions of particular issues in different ways. This doesn’t mean that the interviewee is lying or contradicting herself rather that they are speaking about different experiences from significantly different moments of their life. In this case, Yolanda seems to travel, several times during the interview, from her experiences as an employer when she was a married woman with children to her current experiences as an 80 years-old widow.

The issue of ‘undeserving’ motherhood is discussed in detail in chapter 6 but what it is important to note in Yolanda’s case is the centrality of food in women’s experiences around motherhood. Consuelo, the worker, left without notice and Yolanda, the employer, was disposed from the ‘luxury’ of family celebrations at home. In the context of paid domestic work in Mexico, Marta’s and Yolanda’s accounts illustrate the way women’s positions within various ‘fields of social action’ -to use a Bourdieuan term- seem to shape women’s power to negotiate conditions, mark and resist difference.

4.5 Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have discussed the historical articulation between food, cuisine and a national formation project that understood mestizaje as the only way to built commonality among such a diverse population. In the context of Mexico, both culinary and human mestizaje have never entailed
neutral processes of cultural and biological miscegenation. *Mestizaje*, the idea of a common dual origin, has worked to subordinate diversity and deny difference. Since the moment I started interviewing women I noticed how for domestic workers food took central stage in the negotiation of working conditions with employers and in the narratives of women. The fact that food was privileged by workers over many other labour benefits that are systematically denied (i.e. sick leave, health benefits; paid holidays) might be related not only to the physiological need of calorie intake but also to the psychological need of self-respect and empowerment. Workers did not link food distinction practices with racism but they were well aware of how such practices were used to mark and maintain distance and difference between them and their employers.

Foucault (1978:123) argues that a political ordering of life is formed ‘not through the enslavement of others, but through an affirmation of self’. It was thereby important to explore the lived experiences of female employers regarding food practices to understand their role in the maintenance of a political order that allows the systematic racialisation and exploitation of paid domestic workers in Mexico. The affirmation of self takes many forms; through cooking female employers define the worker as unskilled and unhygienic contrasting such characteristics with their clean and cultural selves. Certain foodstuffs that have been historically racialised and used to mark Otherness, such as maize or beans, are still found in the discourses of employers as powerful strategies of self affirmation. The racialisation of domestic workers is manifested through emotions such as disgust and shame that are deployed alongside food distinctions to maintain difference and justify exploitation.

Food and sexuality are associated in many cultures as both involve body boundaries and intimacy (Counihan, 1999) The next chapter looks at sexuality in the context of paid domestic work to illustrate the way notions around sex and dirt might have shaped the way women in this occupation are perceived. The chapter pays attention at the role of sexuality in the maintenance of bodily boundaries that have been historically marginalised women in close contact with what is considered dirty.
Chapter 5: 'the black woman for cleaning, the mulatto woman for bedding and the white woman for marrying': Sexuality and Paid Domestic Work

According to a recent national survey one in three domestic workers perceived the main problem with their occupation to be abuse, mistreatment and humiliation in the workplace (ENADIS, 2010). In 2009, an article from a national newspaper announced that approximately 60% of domestic workers in Mexico suffered from verbal, physical or sexual abuse at the hands of their employers (El Universal, 2nd March 2009). Some international literature on paid domestic work illustrates the high rate of sexual harassment in the lived experiences of workers (see Anderson, 2000; Rollins, 1985; Chang, 2000; Colen, 1989, Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2004, Glenn, 2010, Pratt, 1999). However, in Mexico and Latin America the extent of the problem is still unknown as the issue of paid domestic work is still a highly neglected subject in academic literature (For exceptions see Chaney and García Castro, 1989; Goldsmith, 1993; Durin, 2008).

As Counihan says (1999), 'food and sex are metaphorically overlapping’ as both are bodily experiences linked to the reproduction of life and both imply relations of intimacy. While the previous chapter showed the role of food as a marker of social distance this chapter explores how sexuality is involved in the maintenance of bodily boundaries.

The chapter argues that the sexualisation of paid domestic workers is deeply entangled with a social context of institutionalised violence against women. However, some women are more vulnerable to sexual violence than others and this illustrates the way sex is constituted by and through other social hierarchies apart from gender, such as race and class. The chapter argues that pre-Hispanic and colonial notions around dirt and morality might represent important clues when explaining the imagined sexuality of women that clean.

Through the example of Tlazolteotl, the ‘Filth Deity’ section (5.1) looks at pre-Hispanic links between dirt and sex. The section argues that Nahua’s thought regarding pollution, morality and fertility was eventually transformed by a colonizing act of translation and that such a process might inform current
preoccupations with bodily transgressions. In the context of paid domestic work, concerns over racial and spatial classifications seem to be deployed through sexuality. Section (5.2) analyses workers’ experiences around sexual harassment and the strategies that women use to resist the violence involved. The section identifies the social context in which the sexualisation of workers occurs; a context marked by institutionalised violence against women. It is argued that sexual harassment works to inscribe shame onto the workers’ bodies and by doing so justifies their exploitation.

Section (5.3) looks at female employers perceptions of domestic workers’ sexuality. The sexualisation of women in this occupation must be seen not as an individual but rather as a group fantasy. This process involves not only male domination but also female employers’ engagement in discourses that reproduce ideas of workers’ sexuality as ‘deviant’, media portrayals of domestic workers and state policies. Female employers often transform issues regarding class/race conflicts into moral ones. Through this process employers are able to maintain a status quo that allows the exploitation women (and often children) workers. Moreover, by transforming a class/race conflict into a moral one, female employers disguise exploitation as a social mission designed to save workers from a deviant sexuality and a corrupted community.

This chapter concludes that the sexualisation of paid domestic workers is mediated by a social context of institutionalised violence against women but that such context affects women in the country differently, according to their position within various systems of oppression. Although there is certainly a link between sex and race the sexualisation of paid domestic workers in Mexico should be analysed through a broader context where pre-Hispanic notions are included and the possible effects of their colonial transformations.

5.1 ‘Goddess of loves and sensualities, what can she be but a dirty, filthy and stained goddess?’  
Tlazolteotl: Pollution and Sexuality in Pre-Hispanic Mexico

The particular sexualisation of some women has been extensively explained through issues of power, domination, the constitution of class, racial and gendered selves or the intersection/articulation of ‘all of the above’ (Foucault, 1999; Bastide, 1961; Nagel, 2003; hooks, 1991; McClintock, 1995; Stoler,
In his book *Sex and Race in Latin America* Peter Wade (2010) rightly argues that the ‘elective affinity’ between sex and race could not be explained solely as an effect of the management of power and difference. For Wade (2010:53), ‘it is unconvincing to say that the sexualisation of black men and women in the Americas and the related sexual imagery around whites does not include some aspects of the workings of desire’. Wade (2010:53) calls to reconcile psychoanalysis and anthropology because of its explanatory power when making looking at self formation and Otherness, he argues:

In a situation of social hierarchy, the categories that are defined as subordinate and inferior (women, working classes, non-whites) come to occupy the position of other and become the subject of ambivalent emotions which are deeply entangled with sexuality.

Stoler (1995) notes that colonial studies have had an ambivalent relation with psychoanalysis since many have often implicitly subscribed to Freudian theories and ‘the psychodynamics of empire’. The power of these theories to explain the sexualisation of racialised women has been linked to the way reproductive work is socially allocated. Often racialised women in domestic and care work, become ‘second mothers’ of middle class children. Thus, their reproductive work mediates processes of self formation and the reproduction of sexualised Otherness (Walton, 1995; Wade, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 2, Freud’s own theory of self formation is founded upon his own childhood relationship with a nanny who was replaced by a mother figure. However, when reading Roger Bastide’s reflection on why ‘the question race always provoked the answer sex’ I thought about the temporal character of his famous assertion. What I want to suggest here is that the sexualisation of racialised women in domestic work could be explained by another important genealogy; dirt. As Rosie Cox argues (2006:7), in the case of paid domestic work ‘the status of the worker becomes inseparable from the status of the work and it is impossible to improve dramatically the standing of either without challenging deep-stated feelings about dirt’.

Tlazolteolt was a deity of Huaxtec origin that was eventually adopted by the Aztec empire (Cabada Izquierdo, 1992). The ‘Filth Deity’ (López A., 1989) was represented by a woman carrying a broom, as a symbol of dirt- *tlazolli*- and its removal, and wore unspun cotton in her headdress, something that carried...
a sexual connotation because its association with spinning and weaving (McCafferty, 1991; Brumfiel, 2001). This goddess was the patroness of dust and filth, adulterers and promiscuous women. For this reason Spanish missionaries such as Sahagún and Torquemada described Tlazolteolt as ‘another Venus’ (Sahagún de, 1999) and asked ‘what can she be but a dirty, filthy and stained goddess?’ (Burkhart, 1989: 93).

In her book, The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico (1989), Burkhart explores concepts of purity and pollution in the Nahua’s culture. She looks at the moral discourses around the concept of dirt – *tlazolli* - and its connection with the deity Tlazolteotl. The ‘Filth Deity’ represented the embodiment of complex symbols of dirt, sexuality and fertility and she had the power to provoke lust but also to forgive the moral faults that came with it (Burkhart, 1989; Cabada Izquierdo, 1992). Tlazolteotl was also a deity to be feared, for instance, one of the personifications of *tlazolli*-dirt was the Cuitlapanton - a naked female figure that would creep along the ground hunting people near refuse deposits and places where people urinated and causing death to anyone who saw her. As Burkhart (1989:95) suggests *tlazolli* carried more than one meaning and the effects of her powers were many,

> Death, cosmic disturbance, filth, and immorality were intermingled in such a way that harmful forces, once unleashed could affect anyone or anything in their path. Brooms had to be kept outside the house and away from children because of the *tlazolli* they carried; a man could seduce an unwilling woman if he collected the straws that fell from her broom when she swept.

Burkhart (1989) shows that Nahua notions of dirt and immorality preceded colonial idiosyncrasies. However, these notions were eventually used and transformed by Spanish missionaries as they facilitated Christian education. As Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1989:199) described during the mid sixteenth-century, a compilation of descriptions from the New World needed to include ‘everything useful for the doctrine, the culture and the maintenance of the Christianity of these natives of New Spain and for the aid of the workers and ministers that teach them.’

Burkhart argues that in the case of pre-Hispanic notions of dirt and sexuality missionaries’ interpretations of the *tlazolli* complex ignored crucial differences
between Nahua and Christian thought. For instance, for Christians, sin caused spiritual filth but this was a metonymic expression while for Nahuas an immoral act that entailed contact with *tlazolli* justified its prohibition (Burkhart, 1989). Christianity understood the body and the soul as coming from two separate domains while the Nahuas understood these as parts of a single reality. Burkhart (1989:102) argues that the Spaniards’ ‘reduction and redirection’ of *tlazolli complex* meant a loss of ‘richness, a failure to exploit the full expressive (and hence persuasive) capacity of Nahuatl.’

The conceptual hybrid of Nahua and Christian thought regarding sex and dirt could have meant more than a loss of persuasive power for the colonial enterprise. Most of what we know about pre-Hispanic ideas of sexuality is the production of (male) Spanish conquers and friars whose interpretations and translations were colonizing acts, often biased and filtered by their own structures of thought (Brumfiel, 2001; Sigal, 2007). Peter Sigal (2007) looks at cross-dressing individuals and gender inversions in Nahua’s culture at the time of the Spanish conquest. For Sigal, misinterpretations of pre-Hispanic culture have worked to promote particular psychological notions that differentiate normalcy from perversion and sexual identities that did not have any place in Nahua discourse. The very notion of *mestizo* is said to be the result of the mixture between two classificatory regimes, one based on scientific knowledge and the other on faith (De la Cadena, 2005). What I want to suggests here is that the ideas that link sex and dirt today might be deeply connected with pre-Hispanic notions that were disrupted to fit colonial ideas of sexuality and morality. As Young suggests, the colonial enterprise required the cultural space of indigenous societies to be ‘disrupted, dissolved and then reinscribed according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power (Young, R., 1995:170)’.

In her influential work *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas (1996:53) argues that ‘our ideas of dirt also express symbolic systems’ where cherished social classifications are maintained by rituals of separation. For Douglas, concerns over bodily margins and morality are deeply linked to ‘separating that which should be separated’ and avoiding transgressions of order that are perceived as threats to the social collectivity. Notions that linked sex and dirt were not a colonial invention but were transformed to absorb race into the equation. Using Collins (1994) terms, sexuality worked to ‘glue’ racial hierarchies with
pre and post colonial ideas of sex and dirt. Thus, it is possible to suggest that
the sexualisation of paid domestic workers in Mexico entails a mutually
constituted construction of hierarchies of gender, race and class and that this
process is deeply linked to notions of dirt and concerns about contamination.

Wolkowitz (2007:16) argues that we should look beyond the symbolic and
discursive aspects of ‘dirtiness’ and ‘cleanliness’. She explores domestic labour
and prostitution as ‘dirty works’ since both involve people ‘whose paid work
involves contact with disgusting substances’. However, it is surprising that
Wolkowitz (2007:23) seems to fall short when explaining the link between the
two,

it makes it possible to consider similarities between sex work and
paid domestic labour, for instance, wherein some employers may
also seek ‘a person who is not a person’ to do work they consider
too dirty or humiliating to do themselves, that is where the
connections between dirt, dirty work and power are also central to
the work relationship.

However, there is more to the link between domestic and sex work than an
asymmetrical working relationship, denied personhood or contact with ‘real’
dirt. For instance, there is an element of intimacy found in both occupations
and this could be closely linked to social concerns about the permeability of
the individual and the social body. As Douglas (1966:184) argues, ‘purity is
the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise’. Gutierrez Chong
(2007:530) argues that the mestizo is based on a myth based on ethnic and
racial elements reorganised through the control of sexuality. She suggests
that the ‘maternal basis’ of the Mexican nation has its origin in the different
castes from which the mestizo is conceived along with the degrading use of
stereotypes such as ‘the black woman for cleaning, the mulatto woman for
bedding and the white woman for marrying’. Gutiérrez Chong (2007) notes
the absence of Indian women from this stereotypical segmentation and argues
that this indicates that they are imagined differently and as not viable for
matrimony or exogenous contact. It is worth noticing that in such
segmentation the woman that is sexualised is the one who is racially placed
as ‘in-between’ two racial origins that are imagined as dichotomous. It seems
to be the ambiguity of the mulatto what makes her ‘desirable’ for bedding.
Jelke Boesten’s (2008:206) work on the sexual violence of women in Peru during the internal conflict of the 1980s illustrates how concerns over transgressions of order are deeply entangled with sexuality. She shows that women that were considered *cholas were more* sexualised (and abused) than indigenous and white women since their image trespassed ethnic and spatial boundaries. As indigenous women were out of the private realm of ethnic communities and entered into the public realm of the city they were imagined as dirty/ambiguous and sexually available. Weismantel (2001:90) looks at various definitions of the term *Cholas* among academic literature and argues that the racial identity of the *Chola* is often described as ‘an Indian who approaches – but never achieves – whiteness.’ Boesten argues that the intersection of gender, class and race seemed to ‘legitimise’ sexual violence especially among women that were considered ‘cholas’ (my emphasis). Just as *gatas* in Mexico (López, 2002), *cholas* are regarded as synonyms of ‘servants’ in some parts of Central America (Flores Galindo, 1999).

As shown by the following sections and the analysis of women’s narratives, our ideas around pollution serve to link concerns over individual boundaries with social ones. The sexualisation of women in domestic and care work is not only a product of an individual fantasy but instead the ‘libidinal unconscious of political economy’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972 in Young, 1995:160) whereby the exploitation of some women is maintained with the complicity of the state and its refusal to regulate this occupation but also with the symbolic power that is exercised by many male and female employers and transferred to the young men of the house.

5.2 ‘You better not tell my mother!’: Domestic Workers’ Experiences of Sexual Harassment

Wives and servants have often been seen as the antagonistic pair *par excellence* where a woman draws her identity from her opposite and is divided into ‘pure/dirty’ ‘Madonna/whore’ and so on (Davidoff, 1974; Anderson, 2000; Rollins, 1985; Castro 1989). When studying relations between domestic workers and employers Rollins (1985) suggests that the presence of black servants strengthened the employers’ self-esteem, alleviated gender resentment as a woman and, where appropriate, enhanced whiteness. As discussed in previous chapters, the problem with this argument is that it might paradoxically work to fix the identities of workers, denying them any
form of agency in their highly scripted biographies (Mohanty Talpade, 1991). However, the power of this argument is that it has something to say about gender contradiction, especially between two women whose domestic and reproductive work are performed for the benefit of the same man and children and therefore might be perceived as overlapping. A domestic worker interviewed describes how she sometimes feels as she is being asked to literally replace the female employer as a mother and wife,

I said to myself, if I was like them [female employers] I would have ten children, why not? With three muchachas to look after them, to do the housework, to do the laundry, to iron, everything short of saying ‘sleep with my husband’….you end up being the mother of the children [28].

As Ann Stoler (1995) suggests, racial thinking was produced not to confront distant others but to manage intimacy with them. Thus, the more ambiguous the roles of the worker and the wife, the more rituals of separation are needed to reaffirm bodily boundaries. Amelia is a 25 years-old domestic worker who describes the consequences of the Mistress’ jealousy as she was not allowed to stay at home alone with the Master and was obligated to accompany the female employer everywhere she went. This meant that the worker had to work overtime to finish the housework of the day,

she was very jealous of me. She would asked me lots of questions (when left alone with the mistress’ boyfriend) … she used to say ‘surely you have something with him’ and I would say ‘Señora, how could you believe that?’ and then she would go upstairs and fight with him…that is something I don’t like in some houses, mistresses would be very untrusting towards me even if I treated them with nothing but respect. And then, the mistress would take me with her everywhere she went, she would say ‘come on Susana11, let’s go’ and I would go with her [as if giving an opinion of accompanying the mistress everywhere] ‘If you want me to go then you need to do some washing or cleaning because you don’t help me or wash anything’ [29].

11 Real names were replaced.
The sexualisation of domestic workers in Mexico happens within a social context of institutionalised violence against women. In Mexico, according to the most recent study of the National Institute of Women in Mexico (2003), up to 35.4 per cent of women in the country are victims of emotional violence at home; 27.3 per cent suffer from economic violence; 9.3 per cent of physical violence and 7.8 per cent of sexual violence. This context is aggravated by the reluctance of legislators to acknowledge women’s rights at home. For example, it was not until the year 2005 that the Supreme Court in Mexico decreed rape within marriage to be a crime and it was not until 2007 that President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa passed the first law proclaiming women’s right to a life free from violence. However, Guanajuato, the site of the study, was the only state in the country that refused to ratify the law. In 2010, after numerous social protests and a recommendation from the United Nations, the state approved the enactment of the law that, in theory, protects women from domestic violence.

As the extraordinary number of femicides in Mexico illustrates how some women are more vulnerable to sexual and physical violence than others. In Ciudad Juárez, the femicide of more than 1,000 women since 1993 occurred with the complicity of the state (Atencio, 2010; Monárrez Fragoso, 2002; Olivera and Furio, 2006). Julia Monárrez Fragoso (2002:6) argues that the profile of victims has clearly race, class and age-related overtones. Monárrez describes how as she arrived to Ciudad Juárez she was assured by colleagues; she was safe since she didn’t have the victims’ profile; ‘you are not young, you are not seventeen years old and you are not dark’, she was told. This is the social context that seems to mediate the process of self and otherness that works to reproduce the sexualisation of some women in Mexico; a context marked by male domination and difference among women. Amelia, a worker, describes an experience of sexual harassment by the young man of the house:

He was eleven or twelve. I was two years older than him ...I was going up the stairs and then he pinned me against the wall, I mean, I couldn’t even move....he wanted to grab me and I said ‘Don’t, you’ll see, I will tell your mother’ and he said ‘No, she is not going to believe you’. Sometimes I used to get away and would run down the stairs and one day the mistress saw me running and asked me
‘What is the matter with you?’ and he would threaten me ‘You’d better not tell my mother’, It wasn’t just the one time, there were many times [30].

The domestic worker is not to be trusted ‘she is not going to believe you’ as the meaning and experience of ‘trust’ is deeply linked to a processes of inclusion/exclusion and the negotiation of membership. As Piotr Sztompka (1999:5) notes, the very notion of ‘us’ is defined by moral obligations regarding trusts ‘Us’ means those whom we trust, toward whom we are loyal, and for whose problems we care in the spirit of solidarity’. The physical and symbolic violence of this account manifests the intergenerational transference of symbolic power from parents to the children of the house. Pierre Bourdieu(1999:49) defines as symbolic power that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subjected to it or even that they themselves exercise it’. Even if parents are unaware of the incident, both the child and the worker seem assured that the mother would never believe such an accusation.

Not only are middle class employers involved in the reproduction of symbolic power that maintains the exploitation of millions of women in Latin America. Media portrayals of domestic workers often engage with discourses that define workers’ sexuality as deviant. Adal Ramones is probably one of the most popular Mexican comedians in recent years. He hosted the most widely watched variety and comedy program in Mexico from 1999-2007. During this time, he once came out dressed as a female character he had created specifically for his shows -- a middle-class, middle-aged woman with poor taste and ‘reprehensible manners’. In one episode, he dedicated twenty minutes of national television space (prime time) to talk about domestic workers; making jokes that portrayed them as stupid, demanding, abusive, ignorant and unable to speak proper Spanish. Moreover, Ramones engaged in a discourse around their sexuality. There is an episode where the character described her attempts to teach workers English where she asked the class to ‘Put-a/attention’, making allusion to the word in Spanish Put-a/whore. Other times, Ramones’ character has also shared her thoughts and ‘concerns’ about the domestic helps drinking habits and states ‘I have explained to her [the worker] several times that the number one rule of this house is not to suck the Master’s bottle’ (alluding to the Master’s penis). At the end of the sketch,
Ramones’ character advises the public to treat workers well suggesting the difficulties in finding someone willing to ‘scramble your oldest son’s eggs.’ The Spanish word for egg is slang for testicles, thus, the phrase insinuates that part of the domestic worker duties are to have sexual relations with the young men of the house. No governmental or nongovernmental organisation has ever complained about Ramones’ remarks, about the race, class and gender discrimination that this particular show entails. Instead, his ‘monologue’ on ‘servants’ is still celebrated and distributed through You Tube’s web page and has more than 98 thousand views.\(^\text{12}\)

Fed by media involvement in the sexualisation of domestic workers, experiences like the one described by Susana are not only socially tolerated but encouraged. Susana was only 16 years-old when she experienced the violence of sexual harassment,

I was cooking and washing dishes and his son tried to abuse me and I threatened him with a knife, I resisted, I was really scared and never went back because I was afraid. I was washing the dishes and he came to me, he put his hand like this [around her waist] and then he said ‘has anyone ever told you that you are very pretty? And I said ‘yes, but get off of me!’ and then he grabbed me and I was very angry and I said ‘get off of me, get off of me or I will tell your father!’….and then I grabbed a knife and I said ‘get off of me or else!’ and I screamed for his dad, but nothing. [days later] the Master called me and he paid me for the week. But he was very cynical, shameless. Instead of saying ‘I am so sorry’ nothing, he was smiling, he didn’t say anything to me. Maybe he did it on purpose so that he wouldn’t have to give me a Christmas bonus [31].

Susana, like many other workers, neither denounced the aggressor to the authorities nor told any close relative or friend about the incident because of her sense of shame. As Nussbaum argues (2006) humiliation is about publicly exposing someone to shame and marking the subject as low status. By inscribing shame onto the workers’ bodies their labour conditions can be

\(^{12}\) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jH00vEZVMHc&feature=related
conveniently ignored and the exploitation maintained. As this account shows, many domestic workers are forced to leave a job because of sexual harassment and this entails a financial burden for themselves and their families. It seems that part of the occupation is to find a ‘good’ home to work in by learning to identify potential aggressors. As Rose description of her ‘journey’ to find the ‘right’ job shows, women’s right to work is often constrained by sexual harassment,

I was twelve or thirteen years old, the Señora was very good but her brother lived with her and he tried to abuse me and I got very scared and I never came back...And after that I once I worked for a Señora as a live-in worker, I was about 15 years-old and then I didn’t want to work there because the Señor was always going about around the house in trousers and I was afraid, I was ashamed; instead of him being ashamed I felt ashamed! And then, after that I worked in another neighborhood and the Señor would stay at home sometimes. But I left, I became nervous because the Señor would constantly pick me around my waist and would say things like ‘did I scare you little Rose?’ so I left [32].

As Lisa Adkins (1995) argues, sexual harassment is not an outcome of a gender division of labour but it is instead involved in its production. However, in the case of paid domestic work, the gender division of housework is further subdivided by race and class (Glenn, 1994). During a group interview, Elena, a 37-year-old domestic worker, describes how, on the first night of her first job as a domestic worker she was approached by her male employer, who offered her to ‘save’ her family in exchange for sexual favours,

It was my first job and my worst experience. I started as a live-in and the woman that worked there before advised me to ask a room with a lock, so I did. He called me into the living room, he started to ask me about my family, how my parents were and what they did and then he said: ‘Wouldn’t you like to sleep with me? I am alone’. And I said ‘no’ and I didn’t know what to do. I prayed to God to help me remember my cousin’s phone number and I did and then I called her crying and asked her to pick me up, I was crying. I was 18 years-old.
They see us coming from the ranch and think ‘this poor girl’, he actually told me ‘Don’t worry, I would help you and I would give you money for your family’. If I had been another type of woman I would have accepted because my family was in great financial need, I was the oldest and the only one working. I asked myself how many girls in my position actually accept because of need [33].

As Elena described her experience her sister replies ‘there are dangers everywhere, not only in domestic work, but it’s the same in every job’. McClintock (1995:99) argues that there is something ‘intrinsically sexual’ about the act of paying. She suggests that during nineteenth century Europe ‘sexual memory became shaped around a bodily language of dirt and cleanliness and entered an iconographic affinity in which sex and work became intractable’. Others have showed the way money seems to work as a masculine attribute since ‘like the act of sex, the act of monetary exchange is an inherently gendered exchange in which ‘he’ buys ‘her’ but not the other way around’ (Weismantel, 1989: 173). For instance, while domestic workers in the Philippines are perceived as ‘husband stealers’ by jealous female employers, they are simultaneously perceived as manly because of their role as breadwinners and their perceived transgression of gender norms in the home (Pratt, 1999).

This section has looked into domestic workers’ experiences of sexual harassment by “Masters” and younger male members of households. It has exposed the social context that mediates a process of self formation deeply entangled with the sexualisation of women in Mexico and, in the case of femicides, how such process affects women differently. The physical and symbolic violence involved in the sexualisation of paid domestic worker involves state policies and the media, both institutions are deeply involved in the reproduction of discourses that define paid domestic workers as ‘promiscuous’ and sexually available. As Deleuze and Guattari (1972 in Young, R., 1995: 168) argue, ‘desire is a social rather than an individual product; it permeates the infrastructure of society’. As the next section demonstrates, female employers are also deeply involved in the sexualisation of domestic workers and the continuous reaffirmation of bodily margins that work to maintain unchallenged the status quo and the exploitation of working class women.
5.3 ‘There is no way to help them, as women they don’t value themselves’: Female Employers, Gender Contradiction and Deviant Sexualities

There is an ample literature on the role of white women in the exploitation and mistreatment of domestic workers (Davidoff, 1974; Stoler, 1995; Reilly, 1989; Schlegel, 1983, Anderson 2000; Rollins, 1985, Kwok Pui-lan, 2002). In the case of paid domestic work in Mexico such exploitation often entails the reproduction of ideas that link the workers’ imagined ‘race’ with a supposedly ‘deviant’ sexuality. The following account illustrates how, through ideas that link morality with pollution, female employers reaffirm individual and national margins,

If you find yourself a *wild* girl, like many of them are out there in the ranch, a lot of them now pick up things from people who’ve gone to the US then come back. They come back with addictions and gang tricks, and all that stuff *spreads* [around]. I have to *scold* her when she tells me things like she got in a car with young married men [34].

The female employer makes a spatial reference to the workers’ world; wild and rural. The term “wild” carries a sexual connotation that throughout history has been associated with racial difference (Collins, 2004). Similarly, as Alonso (2004:469) suggests, ‘space is a boundary marker of ethnoracial identity in Mexico. The South and the rural are coded as “Indian,” whereas the North and the urban are coded as “Mexican.”’ This account illustrates how ideas around sexuality and morality are shaped by concerns regarding pollution. As the employer suggests, immorality has an outside source, and like dirt, it ‘spreads’ throughout the workers’ community and ultimately into the workers’ body. As the worker is contaminated bodily margins are deployed to avoid transgressions of order.

In the account above, the regulation of the workers’ sexuality also demarcates national boundaries and this might be linked to the way America’s society is perceived as immoral (DeFleur, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter 3 Guanajuato is today the third highest source of economic emigration in Mexico (INEGI, 2000). The employer dismisses the emotional and financial burden that emigration represents for the women left behind, their families and
communities (see Durand and Massey, 2004; Montes de Oca, Molina and Avalos, 2008). Instead, she engages with discourses that define those who have transgressed national boundaries as dangerous. Female employers often engage in transforming class/racialised problems into a moral ones, conveniently ignoring their own role in the reproduction of a status quo that allows the exploitation of workers. For Skeggs (1997:44), a concern with sexuality has historically served to provide the framework for considering the ‘problem’ of the working class as one of morality rather than class conflict:

By transferring the debate from one of revolutionary threat onto questions of familial and moral responsibility the structural and social relations of class conflict could conveniently be ignored and attention could be shifted onto specific aspects of working-class organisation.

Collignon and Rodríguez (2010) look at Love, Sexuality and Youth in Mexico during the XX Century. The authors show how poverty and lack of education were equated to moral degeneration. In 1908, a book on Mexican prostitution affirmed that most servants in Mexico City were also the prostitutes of their Masters ‘where it was very probable they developed the practice of vice that led them to the brothels’ (Collignon and Rodríguez, 2010: 105) Thus, "scientific" productions that equated poverty with immorality and decadence fed stereotypes of working class women as bad/lost women. The account of this employer shows how class and racial conflicts are described through a language of morality and backwardness,

Their situation is very difficult but there is no way to help them. In cultural terms they are shockingly backward: they don’t value themselves as women. They are very as advanced for their age with fashions like tattoos and piercing. Mine had a tongue piercing and I said to her ‘In my house you have to take it out because my children don’t have any and I don’t want them to have any!

However much they see of real life, living with their boyfriend, the boyfriend getting them pregnant and after… and I think, “It’s amazing! Generation after generation and they don’t learn! The one I have now is 16 and my daughter is 15, and of course the maid looks older and I think, “Imagine my daughter doing all the work she does!” I can’t get my head around it. She talks non-stop… tells
When talking about a supposedly generational cycle of sexual deviance, the employer dismisses the fact that Guanajuato has one of the poorest levels of sexual education in the country and instead concludes that the problem is a moral one where “they don’t value themselves as women” and are unable to learn from experience. The employers’ fear regarding the workers’ body piercing illustrates how moral concerns over the potential contamination of children are not confined to sexual transgression but involve other ‘cultural longings’ (Stoler, 1995) that constitute racial and classed selves in Mexico.

The perceived need to correct workers seems to contradict the perception of their sexuality as irremediably deviant. Bhabha (1983:34) notes that to depict the colonial Other as the embodiment of a rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child is to dramatise ‘a separation - between the races, cultures, histories, within histories - a separation between before and after that repeats obsessively the mythical moment of disjunction.’ In the account above, the distance between the employers’ daughter and the worker is assured by such disjunction. Employers often scold workers and advise them on ‘good’ moral values, however, scolding is not a neutral exercise as it involves power relations. Foucault (1990) sees advice as ‘productive power’ deployed through disciplining, reward and manipulation of the conscience. Below is the account of a female employer that wavers between guilt, fear and pride when reflecting on a past experience with a child worker:

The worst experience with her is that I felt guilty because she was of a very young age [the worker was 12 years old] and I felt bad because she worked a lot....She used palabras de rancho (folk/rural words?); she used to say ‘se me afigura una víbora’ and I thought, ‘How scary this girl is!’ and I think it was a reflection of all she lived through. Her father was a drunk; he would rape her mother in front of them...I started to be afraid of her because I would sometimes go out and leave her with my sleeping baby and I used to think, ‘She is

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13 Guanajuato has one of the poorest levels of sex education in the country. It is the only state in the country that rejected the Biology textbook designed, written and distributed by the SEP (Department of Public Education), instead distributing one that promoted abstinence and rejected the use of contraceptives among teenagers. (El Universal, 13 Feb 2010)
going to do something to him!’ I tried to be very patient with her because she had never worked before and she asked me to give her work. But she stayed with me for a long time [36].

The exploitation of young workers is justified by the ‘need’ of the child/worker to be morally educated, the virtuousness of a patient employer that is willing to ‘save’ the worker in spite of the potential threat that the child represents. Kwok Pui-Lan (2002:64) explores how ‘saving brown women’ was used to hide the violence and brutality of colonialism. She argues that:

Under the pretext of saving brown women, colonial desire and imperialistic advances have been masked and collectively reconstituted in a blatant reversal as ‘social mission’. The perceived backwardness, illiteracy, and promiscuity of native women were contrasted with the Victorian ideals of womanhood, such as education, hygiene and sexual restraint.

In the account above the employer engages in a detailed representation of the workers’ world as poor, rural and immoral just after she states feelings of guilt for employing a child to do a highly demanding job. Child labour is common in Mexico; some estimates suggest that the majority of domestic workers in Mexico enter the occupation at between 12 and 14 years of age (La Jornada, 2010). This data coincides with the average age that the workers interviewed reported as their age of entry into the occupation and it also coincides with female employers’ accounts. One of the employers interviewed talked about her experience with another child worker:

When I had my first baby, a boy, I hired a chamaquita (little girl) that was 12 years old to help me with the boy while I did housework. One day I found her in the hammock with the boy and I saw that she was caressing the baby on his stomach, but it was his penis! She was caressing his penis!...After that I was always mistrustful every time I had a new servant. I was always alert; I never liked to leave my children with them [37].

This account closely resembles Freud’s observations of the mother/nurse as a seducer: ‘it is well known that unscrupulous nurses put crying children to sleep by stroking their genitals’ (McClures Magazine, 1899 in McClintock, 1995:85) Looking at Domestic Subversions and Children’s Sexuality, Stoler
(1995:137) shows how discourses on children’s sexuality are one of the main sites where the bourgeois defines its interests, where racial hierarchies are reaffirmed and national identities formed. Stoler also argues that the discourse on children’s sexuality was one ‘in which the distribution and education of desire was lodged in that "tinny, sexually saturated, familial space" (1995:137). As the account above shows this experience fed the employers’ perception of domestic workers as threats and, as we shall discuss in the next chapter on motherhood, this view is also shaped by social discourses that define workers as mentally disturbed and dangerous to middle class children and families. In the following account an employer talks about a 19-year-old worker who had, what the employer believed was a self-induced abortion, in the service room and then left,

The neighbour told me that she drank some kind of tea because she was pregnant but she was going to go off with another boyfriend that wasn’t the father of the child….she is one of those who run off with men and that [In Mexico, women that are not married by the Roman Church are said to be ‘stolen’ or ‘taken’ by the male partner] [38].

In the account above the employer describes finding a room full of blood and cleaning it as one of her worst experiences in paid domestic work. Bodily fluids are then linked to ideas of morality and reproduction and the workers caring skills are therefore dismissed, as the employer later states: ‘She was very good with the children, very good...we would never have thought it’ [39]. Nussbaum (2006:111) argues that ‘women have often been imagined as soft, sticky, fluid, smelly, their bodies as filthy zones of pollution’. Similarly, Lamb’s (2005:219) study of women in India describes a widespread view of women as more exposed to pollution than men due to ‘the flowing of things into and out of the body.’ Thus, bodily fluids seem to be linked to notions about the workers’ sexuality, morality and therefore (lack of) caring skills.

The employer chooses to ignore the lack of sexual education and access to contraceptive methods in Mexico (Juarez et. al.,2008). In Guanajuato, abortion is heavily penalised and socially stigmatised, for instance, during the last ten years more than 40 women have been prosecuted for abortion and some of these women have been sentenced to up to 30 years in prison (El Universal, 2010; Correo,2010). According to the last survey by the National
Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (ENADIS, 2010) up to 87 per cent of domestic workers have no access to any kind of health insurance from their employers and this is relevant in the context of health-related problems associated with unsafe abortion procedures (Shah and Ahman, 2010; Juarez et al., 2008).

The employer was forced to deal with the demystification of workers’ imagined or expected asexuality (Adkins, 1995; Collins, 1998). For Collins (1998:349), ‘the mammy image is one of an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface devoted to the development of a white family’. Following a moral logic that links ‘good’ caring with asexuality, the more deviant the sexual behaviour of a worker is, the more dangerous the perceived transgression of order becomes. In the following account, a domestic worker shows not only an active sexuality but one with a ‘degree of deviance’ that automatically classed her as a threat to the child and as a potential thief. In this case the employer found her female worker with another woman in the service room and she fired her. According to the employer, both women were fully clothed but were lying in bed one hugging the other.

I am not judgmental; she can go out with whoever she wants to go out with, I have no problem with that, although I would think twice leaving my baby girl with her. Anyway, I was frozen and I told her ‘I don’t want you to get someone (raro) weirdo in my house again’ [she laughs and hesitates] ‘weirdo’ that’s an ugly word. No, I actually said ‘stranger’ in my house. And I left and when I went back to work that day my boss told me ‘how do you leave two women there, you might go back to your house and find it empty!’ [40]

From the beginning of the working relationship, the employer thought that the worker looked masculine, so she decided to hire the worker but keep her under observation. Beverly Skeggs (1997) argues that for working-class women, femininity is never a given: ‘appearing to be is different from appearing as; there is a fine line between embodying and displaying dispositions’ (1997; 102). Again, the seeming oscillation between judging or not the worker’s sexuality is framed by the fear of contamination from worker to child when the employer says ‘although I would think twice to leave my baby girl with her’. Studies have linked the stigmatisation of particular groups
(i.e. gays and prostitutes) to their association with disease and contamination (Anderson, 2007; Jane, 2007). As moral discourses are deeply entangled with ideas of purity the worker’s imagined ‘deviant’ sexuality seems to define her as a threat to the moral and even the physical integrity of the home. Collins (2002) argues that for racism and heterosexism the point of deviance is created by a *normalised white heterosexuality* whose meaning depends on a deviant black (in this case non-white) sexuality. Racism and heterosexism both share a common set of practices that are designed to discipline the population into accepting the *status quo* that. In the context of paid domestic work in Mexico this is deeply involved with the racialisation of women in this occupation and their exploitation for the benefit of the privileged classes.

**5.4 Conclusion**

Psychoanalytic theories offer interesting ways to explain the sexualisation of paid domestic workers in Mexico as this process occurs within a social context of racial hierarchy and institutionalised violence against women. Roger Bastide (1972:187) was right to suggest that ‘the question race always provoked the answer sex’. However, as the figure of Tlazolteolt and the *tlazolli* (dirt) complex suggest, the question sex has historically provoked the answer dirt and in the case of paid domestic work the symbolic of dirt and pollution should not be dismissed.

Female employers’ involvement in the reproduction of workers’ sexuality as ‘deviant’ could be understood as another ritual of separation that works to mark distance and differentiate the ambiguous roles of both women within the house. The sexualisation of workers is part of various strategies deployed for the protection of social margins. This chapter argues that a social context of institutionalised violence against women informs the sexualisation of domestic workers, however, such violence affects women differently and depends on the particular set of social hierarchies in which women are enmeshed.

Men as young as 12 years old are involved in the sexual harassment of workers, this shows that there is an implicit transference of symbolic power from parents to children and that through such process racial, gender and class hierarchies are reproduced. The sexualisation of workers is also informed by ideas that define workers bodies and their communities as contaminating and transform class conflicts into moral ones. Employers seem to justify
exploitation by establishing a link between the supposedly ‘deviant’ sexuality of workers with an imagined ‘need’ to ‘save’ them.

Finally, women’s experiences illustrate how good caring skills seem to be deeply linked with images of workers’ bodies as asexual. Thus, the more deviant the sexual behavior of a worker is perceived by employers the less adequate she is considered for care work. Just as with racism and heterosexism, the sexualisation of workers entails a set of practices designed to maintain and reproduce the status quo regarding the exploitation of women in this occupation. The sexualisation of domestic workers is not only about men’s appropriation of the workers’ bodies or female employers’ self affirmation but also a question of a collective construction that involves the complicity of other institutions such as the media and the state and even the educational system.

The collective sexualisation of domestic workers maintains the status quo of a social, racial and a political order from which the middle classes benefit significantly. As this chapter shows ideas that define workers’ sexuality as ‘deviant’ are deeply entangled with concerns over ambiguity and the permeability of the individual and the social body. In the context of paid domestic work in Mexico, anxieties concerning body margins are what seem to connect women’s experiences around food, sex and motherhood. For Counihan (1999:63) symbolic associations between eating, intercourse, and reproduction are explained by the contribution of these activities ‘to life and growth, their passing through body boundaries, and their mingling of discrete individuals.’ The next chapter explores the way in which notions around motherhood and childrearing shape the experiences of women involved in this occupation as employers, workers and mothers.
Chapter 6: Between *Malinche, Guadalupe* and *La Llorona*: Paid Domestic Work and Motherhood in Mexico

In 2010, a national survey estimated that up to 23.9 per cent of domestic workers are childless, ‘something that could be explained by the high percentage of single domestic workers and because of the low or absent acceptance of children in their place of work’ (CONAPRED, 2010). This chapter argues that paid domestic work in Mexico enables and constrains employers and domestic workers to be and become mothers and to comply with particular notions of ‘good’ mothering defined by each group of women.

Notions of motherhood are ever changing as they originate in social sources rather than biological ones (Oakley, 1981 Dinnerstain, 1976; Ruddick, 1989). Feminists have argued against universalizing women’s experiences and ideas around motherhood as these are shaped by the diverse social hierarchies in which women are enmeshed (Glenn, 1992; Collins, 1994; Arendell, 2000). However, as May (2008:473) argues, although motherhood is experienced differently among women ‘what unites mothers is their tendency to discuss their own motherhood in relation to social norms’ whatever those might be for each particular context.

Exploring motherhood in the context of paid domestic work is relevant since this is a powerful experience for both female employers and workers but also because of the reproductive work of women workers who care for middle class children. Blanca is a 35 years-old worker, she is single and (at the time of the interview) childless. She described how in the past she decided to leave an employer because she felt too vulnerable for the deep emotional attachment to the mistresses’ child,

> I quit because I was practically the mother of that girl, for me that was unfair. The girl was even calling me ‘mom’...I bonded with her, I cried [when she left] because I had her since she was one year old because she [the mistress] would just go out all the time. I bonded with her [the child] but then I realised she was not my daughter. I loved a girl that was not my daughter [41].

Female employers and domestic workers do not share the same models or ideals of ‘good’ mothering but what both groups of women have in common is the centrality of such experience in their lives. In Mexico, the meaning of a
'good’ mothering is deeply entangled with ideas of childrearing. The first section (6.1) of this chapter provides with a national and historical context from which to look at social constructions of mothering in the country. The section looks at three maternal figures that have historically shaped what means to be a ‘good’ mother in Mexico. The section also looks at the role of the state and public policies in the configuration of ideas that define working class women as unfit for childrearing. It is argued that these ideas have worked to maintain the low status, and lack of decent labour conditions for women involved in paid care work.

Section (6.2) explores the link between notions of childrearing and motherhood. It is argued that paid domestic work enables female employers to follow a particular notion of ‘cool’ mothering; that is, an emotionally-connected, permissive and unstressed one. But notions of childrearing also shape expectations around the child/nanny relationship. Domestic workers/nannies are expected to be ‘surrogate mothers’ of middle class children even when they are constantly portrayed as dangerous or unskilled for childrearing. This apparent contradiction has worked to reproduce the marginalisation of women in this occupation; their families and communities.

Domestic workers/nannies are expected to neglect their own experiences as mothers in order to provide exclusive attention to the development and well being of the employers’ family. Employers’ preference for childless workers is discussed in section (6.3) of this chapter. The role of the state in the reproduction of ideas that define working class (often indigenous) women as ‘bad’ mothers is linked to employers’ preference for childless workers and their willingness to employ workers who are children. Issues of public health and forced sterilisation are identified as well as their connection with the state refusal to guarantee women workers’ right to become and be mothers, for instance, by acknowledging these women as workers. The apparent contradiction of fearing workers and expecting them to care for children could also be explained by the simultaneous relationships of interdependence and difference that paid domestic/care work seems to entail. Emotional bonding between workers and middle class children and workers’ awareness of employers’ dependence on their care work sometimes become tools for the negotiation of working conditions and resistance.
The last section of the chapter (6.4) looks at how the experiences of workers as mothers are conditioned by the intersection of a gender order with other systems of oppression such as class and race. It is argued that the current conditions of paid domestic work constrain women workers experiences around motherhood and that this occurs with the complicity of a state that refuses to guarantee workers rights (i.e. maternity leave, day care facilities and a fixed working schedule). To the contrary, the state, through public assistance programs, undermines working women’s childrearing skills and reproduces the *low status* of their paid care work. This section looks at the way experiences around motherhood empowers workers and facilitates resistance. Through their children (especially daughters) education workers engage with strategies for change and intergenerational transformation.

This chapter concludes that motherhood is a useful framework for understanding the social dynamics of paid domestic work. Women’s experiences as mothers illuminate important elements of gender contradiction; how each group of women (employers and workers) define and follow their own particular notions of ‘good’ mothering. The current unregulated status of paid domestic and care work in Mexico enables female employers to follow elite notions of ‘cool’ mothering and childrearing while constraining workers experiences as mothers.

### 6.1 ‘Our three mothers’: Mexican Motherhood

National formation in Mexico intermingled with gender in important ways (Gall, 2004; Gutiérrez Chong, 2008; Ruiz, 2001). Women’s bodies were appropriated and made responsible for ‘moulding’ a supposedly homogenous and modern Mexican race (Gamio, 1960:130 cited in Ruiz, 2001). The appropriation of women was a heavily racialised and sexualised process framed by discourses about indigenous women as able to ‘aspire to the supreme glory of maternity’ (Gamio 1923:70, citado por Ruiz, 2001:14).

Malinche or Marina is said to be ‘the mother of the mestizos’; some sort of ‘Mexican Eve’ who betrayed her race while acting as the interpreter and mistress of Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conqueror who led the fall of the Aztec Empire in the early sixteenth century. Malinche was an Aztec woman who, it is believed, was given to Cortés as a salve; she later became Cortés mistress and then married another conquistador called Juan Jaramillo (González,
Malinche’s reputation has traveled over the years; during the colony she was seen as a great interpreter for the Spanish conquistadors and later, especially after the Revolution of 1910, as the embodiment of betrayal, as a victim or simply the symbolic mother of Mexico (Romero and Harris, 2005). In his influential book, The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings, Octavio Paz (1985:86) describes Malinche as one of the representations of Mexican maternity and argues that Malinche symbolises the violated Mother; La Chingada.

If La Chingada is a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is doña Malinche, the mistress of Cortés.

Taylor suggests that Paz, along with other historians, was partly responsible for the reproduction of ideas that define Malinche as a traitor. However, what is interesting about Paz’s depiction of Malinche is the way he implicitly connects the notions around this figure with bodily and national boundaries. He argues (1985:87) that Malinche ‘embodies the open, the chingado, to our closed, stoic, impassive Indians’. He then defines the malinchistas as ‘the true sons of La Malinche’. In Mexico malinchista is a popular term that is still used to describe people that disdain what is Mexican in favor of that which is foreign. For Paz (1985:86), just as Malinche is the Indian that opened herself (sexually) to Spaniards, within the notion of malinchista ‘we see the opposition of the closed and the open’ (my emphasis). La Malinche is depicted as the ‘Mexican Eve’ and the sexualised Indian woman who betrayed her race through notions of ambiguity of racial and national boundaries. La Malinche is the personification of transgressions of order and a potential threat to social classifications and bodily boundaries.

At the same time, when La Malinche is seen as a victim, the traits of her character are described as passive and obedient. Gutierrez Chong (2007:534) looks at nineteenth century discourses around the figure of Malinche and argues that these were deeply entangled with social constructions of national identity and motherhood:
Malinche was to subdue her sexual passion [allegedly for Cortés] to preserve the established order and, thus, embody the ideal of Mexican womanhood. Her obedience and passivity became legitimized. Her attributed virtues modeled a strong idealisation of motherhood: Catholic, self-sacrificing and chaste.

Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona represent a ‘Maternal Trinity’ that has worked to shape Mexican notions of motherhood. La Llorona, a female figure that is still current in some parts of Mexico, is the weeping mother who wanders around the streets at night, crying out loud for her lost children. This weeping mother is said to derive from the pre-Hispanic goddess Cihuacóatl. Gloria Anzaldúa (1999:53) highlights the ambiguous nature of these “Three Mothers” and how the true identity of all three has been subverted:

\textit{Guadalupe} to make us docile and enduring, \textit{La Chingada [Malinche]} to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and \textit{La Llorona} to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the virgin-whore dichotomy.

As Anzaldúa argues, not everyone has embraced such dichotomy. In Latin America, Marianism - devotion to the Virgin Mary - has been also perceived as a figure that was manipulated for political purposes giving certain social power to women (Sanders, 2009; Steven, 1973). For Stevens (1973) marianism could be seen as the cult of women moral and spiritual superiority. However, Chaney (1979) argues that maternal politics have ultimately limited the role of women as ‘mothers’ of their constituents; as those responsible for raising a modern, civilised society. Skeggs (1997:43) notes that the view of women’s obligation to “civilise” the nation means that they can also be blamed for the failures and problems of society at large. Giving women the task to ‘mother’ good citizens means expecting from them self-discipline and their involvement in the social control of husbands and sons.

Constant reinterpretations of the meanings, discourses and practices around Mexican’s three maternal figures – Malinche, the Virgin and La Llorona - illustrate how different social, political and temporal contexts shape social constructions of motherhood. Moreover, women’s individual trajectory among these figures is also informed by their position within the social hierarchies that form those contexts. Ann Blum (2004) explores post revolutionary
discourses around the modern Mexican family and the constitution of a
gendered domestic work sector. She illustrates the extent to which domestic
servants, at the beginning of the twentieth century, were forced to leave their
children at public orphanages. Low wages and employers’ preferences for
childless workers meant that many working class women were constrained to
form and sustain their own families and children. At the same time,
public orphanages were involved in the training of thousands of girls who were given
in adoption to elite families to work as servants. Blum argues that Mexico’s
system of public assistance rested on a widespread assumption that the poor
owed their benefactors and should pay with labour according to the recipient’s
class, race and gender. This practice was not particular to the Americas since
in Europe, at the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘family placements’
allocated young working-class women into middle-class homes to do unpaid
domestic service as a form of apprenticeship (Skeggs, 1997). Skeggs argues
that these practices aimed to inculcate bourgeois domestic standards among
the working class while responding to the increasing demand for domestic
servants among the middle classes.

Blum (2004) shows how scientific notions of childrearing in Mexico
transformed care work into a profession and excluded uncertified or
uneducated women from working in public institutions such as nurseries or
day care centres. This in turn led many working-class women to the informal
sector of paid domestic and care work, serving middle class families that
demanded childless women or exclusive loyalties. ‘Scientific’ notions
childrearing worked to shape and reproduce the low status of this occupation
and women’s paid and unpaid reproductive work. Ideas around motherhood
have always followed those of childrearing. In the American context, Thurer
(1994:247) shows that the scientific techniques of the decades before World
War II were suddenly transformed in favour of ‘cuddly, twenty-four-hour
‘permissiveness’. For Thurer, this gentle childrearing philosophy was in part a
consequence of a world attempting to distance from totalitarian regimes.
Thurer suggests that social expectations around the figure of the ‘emphatic
mother’ persist today and that this has meant that ‘mother has become
baby’s servant’ (1994:258). As the following section shows, in Mexico, the
figure of the ‘emphatic’ or ‘cool’ mother seems to define middle class women’s
notions of ‘good’ mothering. However, in contrast to Thurer’s insight, paid
domestic work in Mexico seems to facilitate middle class women to comply
with demanding notions around childrearing however, in this case, mother has not become the baby’s servant but she instead relies on one.

6.2 ‘Cool mothers’, Happy Children and Loyal Nannies: Mediating M/Othering Through Paid Domestic Work

Notions around motherhood and childrearing are both interdependent constructions and one cannot be fully understood without the other (Glenn, 1994). The history of childhood is a relatively new field in Latin America but historians in the region have long been writing indirectly about children through studies of family and gender. Premo (2008) argues that the seeming ‘lateness’ of the field could be explained by the difficulty of writing about the history of childhood in the region using ‘Western’ ideologies associated with children. Premo (2008:71) notes that in today’s experience of childrearing in Latin America, there is an interplay of "traditional" and "modern" ideologies:

What is becoming obvious is that one of the most unusual features of growing up in Latin America is precisely the fluctuating interplay, at different historical moments, between "traditional" and popular modes of childrearing and "modern", often elite, ideologies that attempt to universalize the definition of childhood.

Female employers interviewed seem to follow modern/western notions of childhood as a special period of life and see children as in need of prolonged protection and constant care. However, instead of feeling overwhelmed by feelings of guilt due to unmet demands as mothers many middle class women seem to manage the prescriptions of Western child "experts" through paid domestic and care work. Employers felt that, as domestic workers released them from the burden of housework, they could fulfil the corresponding expectation of ‘good mothering’ that their children deserved. The perceived need to subcontract domestic work is deeply entangled with employers’ notion of a ‘good’ mother as emotionally-connected, permissive and unstressed. When asked about a Mexican popular phrase that says 'the maid is the key to a happy household' most employers highlighted the fact that domestic workers allowed them to have ‘quality time’ with their children and saved men and children from a distressed, ‘hysterical’ wife/mother. Monica, a 37-year-old female employer, explained that, in the absence of a domestic worker 'you are a different mother':
A friend of mine just moved to the US and she realised that. She has two girls, one is two years old and the other one is five. The oldest girl told my friend the other day 'you are like another mom - different from the one we had when we were in Mexico. Here you are all about 'Pick it up, clean it up!' and in Mexico you were never like that, why have you become a different mom?'...it's like when you have a muchacha you are a 'cooler' mom (buena onda) [42].

Paid domestic work enables female employers to enjoy the emotional benefits and social status of being mothers while being released from the menial work involved (Glenn, 1994). Glenn suggests that the figure of the 'mother-manager' makes middle class women too comfortable to challenge an 'arrangement that ultimately oppresses them'. Anna, a 47-year-old female employer, defined happiness as the avoidance of a "hysterical" mother/wife,

She is the happiness of the house, because when you don't have one you try hard to do everything they do and when someone uses the bathroom and makes a mess you get hysterical and get angry because it was a whole working day. But when you have a muchacha it is not important if they destroy everything, because they clean every day, every day [43].

It was precisely the figure of the 'mother/nervous women' what Foucault (1990:127) describes as 'the most visible form of the hysterisation of women’s bodies'; a mechanism used to mark the feminine body as, by nature, responsible for the production, care and education of children. Even though middle class women are 'freed' from housework they are nevertheless expected to comply with enhanced gender norms around motherhood; norms that were designed in such a way that are impossible to fulfil. A quick search through Gandhi.com the most important book retailer in the country shows that middle class notions of motherhood are often the product of child 'experts' from America and Europe. While the work of child advisors from developed countries is translated into Spanish for the Latin American market the social, political and economic context of the places that they are writing from seems to get lost in translation.

Focusing on notions of childhood allow us to visualise the corresponding social norms of motherhood but also the elements of difference that are considered
necessary to teach and why (Stoler, 2002). In the context of paid domestic work, the child-worker relationship is a key element in the reproduction of social inequalities. For Anderson (2000:156), through the child-worker relationship, ‘notions of what is deemed appropriate in terms of gender and ‘race’ are played out, and the identities of workers and employers are confirmed’. A female employer in Mexico City described that her nine-year-old daughter was giving away old toys, among them, her collection of Disney princesses. However, the girl insisted on keeping Pocahontas on the basis that her Barbie needed a maid. As discussed in the case of sexuality, a particular set of hierarchies seem to mediate processes of self formation and the construction of Otherness (Wade, 2010). In the context of paid domestic and care work in Mexico, such mediation is facilitated by the intergenerational transference of symbolic power from parents to children (Bourdieu, 1999).

Ana, a 47 years old female employer interviewed describes how she used to car pool with a child from a wealthy family,

Every time we arrived at his house, the first thing he would do when the servant went out to meet him was to throw the backpack to the floor, very far away. He used to kick it so the muchacha would have to go to wherever the backpack landed and pick it up off the floor. Sometimes the backpack would open and she had to pick up all the mess. I would hear the boy saying ‘that is what they pay you for!’ as she asked him to stop [44].

Domestic workers who care for middle class children feel limited by the symbolic power of the Master/child. For example, during an observation exercise at a child’s birthday party, a female employer talked about her child’s toilet training ‘problems’. The employer forced the domestic worker to be interviewed by the child’s psychologist who concluded that the worker’s permissive attitude towards the child was to blame for the ‘potty accidents’. The employer described how the worker ‘confessed’ to the therapists that she was afraid to discipline the child owing to the risk of later being accused of being a child abuser. Thurer (1994) shows that since the 1940s Western "child experts" have portrayed mothers as the locus of blame for any psychopathology suffered by children. However, it seems that paid domestic and care workers are also expected to absorb the "guilt" for the ills of employers’ children! Consuelo, a domestic worker who is mother of five,
learned the consequences of resisting the contradictions often found in care work when she confronted an abusive child that used to hit and spit on her continuously,

I slapped his hand and I said (to the child) ‘that is enough! You can’t hit me every time you feel like it’ and she (the mistress) saw me and said ‘I don’t like you hitting my boy,’ and I said ‘I don’t like when he hits me either, look at me!’ I was all bruised everywhere. She said to me, ‘he has a mother to reprimand him, plus he is a child you need to understand that’ and I said ‘you are watching him doing this to me and you don’t say anything to him, he is a child alright, but he is going to grow up and stay like that. Do you think your child can do anything to a servant because he is the Master? Well, let me tell you that he can’t.’ After three days of that she fired me and told me that she had lost a ring [45].

Female employers’ neglect workers’ motherhood and at the same time infantilise them by adopting a maternal role around them. Anderson (2000:144) defines maternalism as a practice ‘based on the superordinate-subordinate relationship, with the female employer caring for the worker as she would for a child.’ For Rollins (1985) and Anderson (2000) maternalism is an expression of an absent of respect for workers who are often call ‘girls’. In Mexico, workers are often called muchachas, (young girls) regardless of workers’ age or the age difference between a young employer and an older worker. However, even if there are clear contradictions found in employers’ attitudes towards workers, the development of close personal and emotional connections between child and worker is often genuine. Himmelweit (1999:27) argues that because of the relationship that tends to develop during caring labour, this occupation ‘should be seen as part of a whole class of occupations that are not fully commodified, in which workers have motivations that are not purely monetary’. This was the case for some domestic workers, particularly those few that were live-in workers and that were deeply involved in the care of children. Inés, a 28 years-old domestic worker, said that she loved her mistress’ children as if they were her own; ‘I saw him when he was in my mistress’ womb and ever since I have cared for him’[46].
Scholars have noticed the recent centrality given to the embryo in everyday culture and the law through claims of ‘fetal rights’. Feminists’ concerns have centered on public representations of fetuses as entities in their own right as this trend shapes an image of the mother figure as a mere ‘fetal container’ and marginalises mothers in favor of their embryos (Thurer, 1994: Copelon et. al., 2005). However, what seems to be missing from such discussion is the link between public discourses around embryos and workers’ experiences (and employers’ expectations) regarding paid care work. Inés’ account shows the emotional vulnerability that care work might pose for women workers, for some workers, the emotional bonding with the mistress’ child might start even before they are born, and yet they have no control over the lasting of that relationship.

Female employers who described a close relationship with a nanny/domestic worker during infancy noted that the fact that the workers’ was childless might have worked to build the bond between them. As studies of domestic work suggest, it is common for employers to take advantage of close and loving relationships between children and workers to justify poor pay or ask for unpaid ‘favours’, just like they would with a member of their family, (Anderson, 2000; Togrul Keklik, 2006; Nelson, 1998; Salazar, 2001). It seems that, when it suits them, employers can alter their conception of the child-carer relationship as a contractual arrangement to a status duty to care on the basis of an imagined kinship (Glenn, 1992). For instance, one employer interviewed used to give her domestic worker a present on mothers’ day and told the worker she was like a mother to her and her child. However, there came a day when the worker threatened to leave because she said she felt tired. Subsequently, she said she regretted her decision, but the employer refused to take her back, noting ‘it is not healthy when they (workers) feel indispensable’. As discussed in following sections workers also use middle class children emotional attachment to them to negotiate working conditions.

Many female employers thanked God when describing having found a good domestic worker. When asked about her selection criteria when hiring a domestic worker, Yolanda, an 80-year-old employer answered ‘I didn’t choose her, she was sent to me by the Lord of Mercy’ [47] I asked again, explaining what I meant by ‘selection criteria’, but she insisted the worker was sent by God. Perceiving domestic workers as a ‘gift’ from God is a manifested
continuity of colonial ideas of Natural/God’s Law in which domination of the racial Other is considered a natural condition driven by a moral imperative. As Goldberg (1993:26) suggests, in the case of Spanish America,

Christian humanism seemed necessary for exploiting the natural resources offered by the new territories. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that slavery turned also fundamentally on the conception of indigenous peoples as a natural resource.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the exploitation of working class and racialised women has been historically justified by the subaltern ‘need’ to be saved, civilised or educated on issues around food, sexuality and motherhood. While God was frequently mentioned during employers’ interviews, so was the view that workers should feel ‘thankful’ for the opportunity of looking after their children. Andrea, a female employer noted the ‘advantages’ of domestic work as a great opportunity to nurture (middle class) children,

It is a very attractive occupation. It’s a very big opportunity to have a family opening its doors for you and leaving you the most important thing for them; the children [48].

This account reproduces the idea of domestic workers as ‘mammies’. Collins (1998:349) argues that black women have been historically imagined as ‘surrogate mothers’ whose loyalties are exclusively directed to the development of the white family. For Collins, in the case of black communities in America the ‘mammy’ figure has worked as a symbol of Otherness where ‘oppositional difference between mind/body and culture/nature’ are made. In the case of Mexico, employers’ perception of paid domestic work as a great opportunity is linked to the widespread preference for childless workers who seem not only expected to neglect their own personal life for that of the mistress but also to be thankful for such an opportunity. Most female employers interviewed stated that one of the differences between domestic workers in the past and the ones they have now is that they used to be more ‘humble’ and more ‘grateful’. Employers’ nostalgia could be read as a clear sign of women workers’ resistance. However, as discuss in the next section ideas regarding working class women as unfit to care have worked to keep the low status of paid and care work and to keep middle class women in ‘their place’. A female employer in her 40s and mother of five noticed,
We have fought for feminine liberation, but we have gone to the other extreme. We have abandoned our children’s education, something that is our obligation. Yes, the father has responsibilities but dad has to work, his first obligation is to be the breadwinner. But women, I think women’s priority should still be the children and that is why there is a huge loss of moral values now...if children grow up educated by the servant, what sort of values can they have?[49]

The next section argues that the contradiction of notions of care workers as unfit for childrearing and the exploitation of their reproductive work around middle class families could be explained by issues regarding simultaneous difference and interdependence between women.

6.3 Unfit/dangerous mothers as Indispensable Nannies: Difference and Interdependence Between Women.

In México, women devote four times more time than men to domestic and care work and the gender gap in time use is widest for the lowest income groups (ILO 2009: figure 1). At the same time 42.5 per cent of women are involved in paid work and up to 25 per cent of households in the country are headed by women (ENOE, 2010). However, changes in family structures have not been accompanied by a cultural transformation and instead new women’s identities are still regarded as transgressions of a gendered order (Bárcenas, 2010).

For Thurer (1994) scientific notions of childrearing persist in failing to come to terms with the transformation of motherhood and family structures and this has worked to aggravate feelings of maternal guilt among women in paid work. In Mexico, as shown in the previous section, middle class women seem to achieve ‘emphatic mothering’ through paid domestic and care work. In contrast, middle class notions of ‘good’ mothering have worked to reproduce ideas that define working class women as unfit for childrearing and by doing so the low status of domestic and care work is maintained and justified. The view of workers as ‘undeserving’ mothers is a widespread idea among employers and this often affects the negotiation of working conditions and fair wages. Consuelo confronted a female employer who paid her only 30 pesos (£1.50) after a day of work. Her experience confirms the link between her class and notions of deserved and underserved motherhood,
I asked her, ‘What are my children going to eat today?’ and she said to me ‘I am not to blame for you having children darling. You people get pregnant because you want to, because you are fools,’ and I said, ‘Well, then you must have gotten pregnant for the same reason because you have children too,’ and then she said to me, ‘Well, I have children because I have a good social position’ and I said, ‘Sure, you have a good position thanks to idiots [pendejas] like me’… when I arrived home I cried and cried [50].

Domestic and care workers in Mexico are part of broader discourses that define working class women as ‘bad’ mothers and therefore more suitable to fulfill the demands for cheap labour (Glenn, 1994; Collins, 1994; Abramovitz, 1996; Anderson, 2000; Chang, 2000). The paradox is that employers’ preference for childless workers and exclusive loyalties is sometimes disguised as moral concerns regarding the workers’ well-being and her compliance with ‘good’ mothering. Consuelo a domestic worker and mother of five lost her job after her teenage daughter suffered from anorexia. She had to take some (unpaid) days off work and she was told by employers that she was fired so she could be a ‘good’ mother. She responded that she was doing everything expected of her, and the employers did not contradict her:

‘We know’ they said, ‘Everything is fine, we are not complaining, but look, if one day, God forbid, if something happens to your daughter we are going to feel guilty for not supporting you. It is better if you take some time off’…I cried and cried as I was going home [51].

They never called her again and after seven years of work, Consuelo was not given any pay or compensation. Similarly, Susana’s employers fired her when they learnt she was pregnant: ‘The mistress said that if something happened to me they were going to feel bad about it.’ During twentieth century Mexico poverty and lack of education were equated to moral degeneration and working-class women to ‘promiscuous, women that aborted their children, killed them or abandoned them’ (Rocha, 1901:100-101). Ana, a 27-year-old female employer seems to transform a class conflict into a moral one while defining the worker and her community as unfit for childrearing,

They [workers] are hit by parents so hard, because those are people that don’t know how to raise children…and there are more stories
worse than that one out in the countryside [ranch]. Do you think you would find someone to bring up your children there? Those girls are used to another kind of upbringing [52].

This employer connects a spatial difference (urban/rural) with a moral and racial one (Alonso, 2004). Distance is marked and the notion of undeserved reproducer is used to define not only the worker but also her family and community. In this context, for working class (often racialised) women in Mexico the act of becoming mothers is in itself a symbolic challenge to institutionalised discrimination. As Collins (1994:53) suggests in the case of black women in America,

For many women of colour, choosing to become a mother challenges institutional policies that encourage white middle class women to reproduce and discourage and even penalise low-income racial ethnic women from doing so.

In Mexico, forced sterilisation is a procedure mainly performed by public health services and experienced mainly by indigenous women living in poverty (Menéndez, 2009). Since the 1980s, the issue of forced sterilisation among poor, indigenous women has been uncovered and denounced both nationally and internationally. In 1993 the Mexican League for the Defence of Human Rights denounced that from the 2,300,000 people that were sterilised in Mexico one million did not sign a consent form and one in six did not receive health information before the procedure (Menéndez, 2009). In 2004, the ILO received complaints from a number of Mexican NGOs that accused public welfare programs such as Progresa (now Oportunidades) for conditioning public assistance to (mainly indigenous) women giving benefits only to those that agreed to sterilisation. In 2006, the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination highlighted forced sterilisation as a systematic practice among indigenous populations in the country. Menéndez argues that public health workers declared not being aware of the racist implications of forced sterilisation and instead understood this procedure as part of a public program of national birth control.

Forced sterilisation in Mexico has clearly class, racial and gender overtones but the issue has been widely neglected by academic institutions across the country (Cardaci, 2004). It is impossible for this project to investigate
whether some women working in domestic service might have been subjected to this procedure. However, what is important to stress here is the state’s involvement not only in discourses but also in policies and practices that reproduce the idea of working class women as unfit for childrearing and reproduction. Forced sterilisation is only one (and extreme) factor affecting the possibilities of workers to exercise their right to chose having a family and being mothers. For instance, during an observation visit to Cuchicuato the workers complained about the annual town fair and they warned me: ‘this fair is not going to be as fun as they usually are because there are no men around!...the one celebrated in December is much better as they all come back from the US’ [53]. Due to international immigration many young workers engage in a long distance relationship over the telephone and with a partner they have never meet face to face. Such is the case of Elena, 32 years-old and live-in domestic worker who had a boyfriend that she never met personally and only over by phone ‘I came to know him well’ she says ‘I even knew how to make him angry at me and sometimes I did it on purpose’ [54]. A long distance relationship might be highly convenient for Elena’s employers who often leave their children to her up for to two weeks to go on holidays.

Paid domestic work seems to constrain workers’ rights to become or be mothers not only by employers’ preferences for childless workers but also because the state’s refusal to regularise this sector and guarantee workers’ access to childcare facilities. Both the state and employers are then complicit in the denial of workers’ right to mothering. Carmen, a 60 year-old employer was going to ‘help’ her domestic worker to give her child in ‘adoption’,

One arrived pregnant and her parents didn’t know about it. She was a great servant. I found her a woman who accommodated children that were not wanted or could not be educated by their parents. I asked her several times if the woman that was going to help her give the child in adoption had called her, until one day she said to me, ‘Don’t you worry Señora, why are you worrying so much? One day I got home and she had disappeared with my husband’s finest watch’ [55].

While childless workers are preferred, employers seem to have no problem employing children who in turn would be less likely to be or get pregnant and also less likely to have resources for resistance. According to employers’ own
accounts, girls as young as 10 years-old have worked for them at a various points in time and one of the workers interviewed said she started to work in the sector when she was only six years old. Going back to Blum’s (2004) analysis of the role of public orphans in the generation of a gendered (I would add racialised) domestic labour in Mexico, it is possible to suggest that a similar process persists as employers keep demanding childless workers while accepting child labour. Many female employers were partly raised by domestic workers but as mothers they seem to undermine or fear the workers’ reproductive labour. Perhaps this change of attitude towards the care skills of women workers is fed by a public discourse that constantly portrayals workers as dangerous. An advertisement for an agency that helps employers to find the ‘right’ worker clearly defines workers as mentally disturbed and as potential threats as it reads:

We have qualified staff such as: certified psychologists and detectives. We guarantee that our staff is prepared and has all the knowledge needed for this responsibility, we guarantee quality and security for the care of the most valued thing we have ¡¡¡¡¡Our Children¡¡¡¡¡’


It is interesting to note that the agency mentions ‘our children’ instead of ‘your children’ placing itself as white and middle class in the ‘us/them’ dichotomy. This is later confirmed when comparing the silhouette of the manager (Figure 1.) to the domestic worker, nanny and carer (Figure 2). The first one seems white, middle class and ‘modern’ while the later, the workers;
seem to be caricaturised contours of women of colour. This agency offers to undertake physiological tests on potential domestic workers so as to guarantee the integrity ‘of your family and house’ for prospective employers.

If domestic workers and their communities are perceived as dangerous why would employers allow these women into their homes to care for their children? As the following account shows, in some cases employers seem to be willing to turn a blind eye to serious faults because of what it seems a relation of interdependence. Nakano Glenn (1994) suggests that racial and class hierarchies are involved in the simultaneous reproduction of interdependence and difference between female employers and workers. In the case of paid domestic workers in Mexico, such interdependence is fed by the need to comply with expectations around the ‘cool’ and emphatic mother. Yolanda, an 80-year-old female employer, talks about her daughter’s experience of what is clearly a relation of interdependence and difference,

My daughter had a muchacha for many years. She raised her children, she would tape family reunions, she would set up the Christmas tree, she would prepare everyone’s holiday luggage. My daughter has a very big, beautiful house and a lot of servants. When my daughter was not there Lupita [the worker] would use her underwear, steal my son-in-law’s wines, stuff would just disappear. But my daughter wouldn’t say anything, she would stay quiet, she would cover for her. Until one day my Lawson had enough and fired her... One day my daughter had an accident and hurt her knee skiing in the US and needed Lupita back and I had to beg to my Lawson to let Lupita back. I said to him crying, ‘Let her back, she is the only one that knows how to run this house. What is my daughter going to do?’ [56].

In this account the elderly mother aligns with her daughter to convince the man of the house to accept the domestic worker back. After being fired for some time Lupita (the worker), showed up at one of the children’s birthday party with a little fishbowl for Yolanda’s grandson. In Yolanda’s words, that day she arrived ‘providentially...because she loved those children very much, she raised them’ [57]. Lupita, the worker, was offered her job back. As this account shows domestic workers might also use emotional relationships with the children of the house as strategies for negotiation.
This section has looked at how domestic workers are expected to be childless and fully available for employers needs. Such preference is deeply entangled with notions of working class women as unfit, undeserving mothers that might pose a danger to their own children and the children of others. The seemingly contradiction of domestic workers as unfit mothers and perfect mammies has historically worked to reproduce the marginalisation of (often racialised) women and their occupation. However, there seems to be an element of interdependence between female employer and worker that, although certainly asymmetrical, might also work as tools for the negotiation of working conditions. The next section would explore the strategies that domestic workers follow for transformation within a social context where institutionalised discrimination constrains their right to become and be mothers.

6.4 ‘You break your soul working, Mom’: Domestic Workers, Motherhood, Resistance and the Limits of Transformation

Both female employers and domestic workers’ experiences of motherhood is shaped by a particular gendered order. However, the experience of female employers and domestic workers as mothers is differentiated by the intersection of such order with other social hierarchies like class, ethnicity or race. Patricia Hills Collins (1994) suggests that the locus of conflict for many women is not found in patriarchy but in the interlocking structures of oppression where motherhood occurs. However, patriarchy is still an important element in both employers and workers’ experiences around motherhood that must not be overlooked. Claudia is a 37 year-old domestic worker and mother of four, and her account shows how her experience of motherhood is informed by a particular gender hierarchy:

Men want boys; I gave my husband four boys. When I was pregnant the first time he told me, ‘If you don’t have a boy, if you have girl, from the hospital I will send you back to your parents’ home,’ and I cried and cried and I prayed, ‘Please, my beloved Virgin, send me a boy.’ I was sixteen years old, I wasn’t that young, I was old enough...‘I don’t want girls, I don’t like girls,’ he would say, and I used to say ‘Then who are you married to? Who brought you into this world?’ [58]
As Foucault argues notions of motherhood are deeply entangled with those of sexuality as this is the element in power relations with the greatest instrumentality (Foucault, 1990). While Claudia is ‘forced’ to have boys by her husband, her friends accused her of having a ‘wild’ sexuality:

People here say that women that have only boys are whores. ‘All these boys!’ my friends would laugh, ‘Give your hubby a break!’ they said... I asked the doctor and he said that it is men who give you a boy or a girl...I did feel ashamed because I thought ‘oh my god, another boy! Lord, am I a whore?’ [59]

Claudia, in common with other women in Mexico, seems to travel around a mosaic of mother figures; the Virgin, Malinche or La Chingada (the whore) and La Llorona (the weeping mother). As Anzaldúa notes (1999), the ambiguity of such figures works as a form of social control that perpetuates women’s marginalisation and subjugation to male domination. In this account and for something she has no control over; Claudia seems trapped between submissively ‘complying’ with her husband gendered predilection for boys and appearing as a whore. However, Claudia had a notion of ‘good’ mothering that was clearly related to her role as breadwinner. She proudly describes how one day, as she was watching a TV program that depicted a man’s hard work for his family, her son looks at her and says ‘that’s like you mom, you break your soul working Mom’.

Many domestic workers interviewed were forced to be othermothers during infancy, that is women, often family members, that share mothering responsibilities with blood mothers (Collins, 2000) As mothers, some domestic workers also expected their oldest daughters (or son in case of not having any) to look after siblings. Collins (1994:56) notes that working class mothers and their children empower themselves by bonding, understanding each other and relying on each other. Referring to African American communities in the US she notes that, for women of colour, Othermothering is highly valued and that ‘in many cases, children, especially daughters, bond with their mothers instead of railing against them as symbols of patriarchal power’. However, it is important not to romanticise ‘alternative’ ways of mothering and read as ‘resistance’ some practices that are merely a result of a lack of options.
Many domestic workers interviewed were de facto mothers (of their siblings) from a very early age. Cristina started working when she was eight years old and on top of that she looked after her eight sisters, As she says: ‘my mom would leave them all to me, I got tired of looking after so many children and my mother would never let me out’ [60]. During one participant observations at Cuchicuato the elderly mother of three domestic workers described how her oldest daughter often complains about her Othermothering responsibilities as a child: "you never let me play, Mom" she says to me all the time’[61]. The experience of Othermothering amounts to child labour and girls as young as five experience the burden of domestic/mothering responsibilities that should not be their own.

Domestic workers interviewed felt empowered not by othermothering but by providing the means for the education of their children, especially their daughters. As Rosario noted ‘I suffered a lot for my children, but mostly for my girls...I didn’t want them to end up like me’. Workers were often empowered through mothering by equipping children, especially daughters, to resist oppression. Rosario is a 52 years old domestic worker who started to work when she was 6 years-old; she was a victim of domestic violence both in infancy and adulthood. It seems that through her daughters Rosario was able to reflect and resist gender and class oppression and aspire to generational change,

If I hadn’t worked, my children would have ended up just like me. Because that was one problem I had with my husband, he would say ‘why do you send them to school? the women are going to end up providing for a bunch of tramps (huevones) ’ and I would say ‘you mean like me? no, my daughters must get an education!’ you won’t believe it but I would cry every night [62].

Rosario’s daughters went to school, none of them works in the domestic sector and according to Rosario they have much better working conditions than those she had to endure. Collins (2000:194) notes that although ‘mother politics’ have been accused as immature ‘viewing motherhood as a symbol of power can catalyze Black women to take action that they otherwise might not have considered’. The possibility of generational transformation through mothering is highly complex in the context of paid domestic work because of the lack of access to working benefits such as child care facilities. Many
domestic workers leave their children alone, sometimes locked in a room. These are conditions that certainly constrain workers experiences as mothers and the right of children to adequate care. As Thurer (1994:292) rightly suggests, research has failed to demonstrate the negative effects of day care on children but, most importantly, ‘it has also failed to demonstrate the deleterious effects of no day care because it did not set out to find them’. As is the case of Rosario, a patriarchal order combined with lack of resources and access to childcare facilities and a demanding employer means that many children of domestic workers grow up neglected,

My children suffered a lot; you can’t not imagine. Too much they suffered. I always (pause and she start crying) left them locked in a room. I used to live in a tenement house (vecindad). I would leave the little ones locked because they were all one after the other. I would go back to work fifteen days after giving birth. There was no way out of that.

Did employers pay you maternity leave or give you some days off after giving birth?

No, they were very cruel. I would leave my children alone. My girl, my children suffered a lot, the oldest one was five and she would feed the next in line, it broke my soul (pause) and then my husband it was hell with my husband. I would arrive home. Can you imagine my hands all hot? I would find my little one in a mess. I would arrive to pour some water to bath them, I would cry. I would pour the water and bath my children crying...there was a moment when I wanted to end my life. I couldn’t endure anymore [63].

As this account shows, the state turns a blind eye to serious structural constraint that work to hinder workers’ mothering and children’s rights to adequate care and education. Maternal separation is a significant emotional distress for workers who do not have relatives, friends or child care facilities to leave their children. A study of transnational Mexican families in the US found that mothers who are separated from their children still felt responsible for maintaining emotional intimacy and regular contact with them (Dreby, 2006). In contrast, transnational fathers often interrupt contact with their children if they were unable to send money home. Dreby (2006:52) found
that although gender expectations within marital relations do change among transnational families notions of motherhood and fatherhood are sustained so that ‘if transnational fathers fail when they do not send money, transnational mothers fail when their emotional attentions are diverted elsewhere’. Moreover, what Drevy’s study shows is that as working class women develop their own notions of ‘good’ mothering and these are often linked to the figure of mothers as providers such notions do not lessen the emotional burden of maternal separation.

During one participant observation at church in Cuchicuato I noticed that the communion’s song was about Virgin Mary waiting for a lost or distant son; she waits for him with warm food and open arms and the chorus of the song repeats ‘a mother is never tired of waiting’. Blanca, one of the domestic workers, told me that this song was her favorite one. Later in the day I realised that all her brothers, who she raised as she was the oldest daughter, had immigrated to the US and that they had not see them for over three years. Thus, workers experiences around motherhood and family life are constrained not only by unfair working conditions but also by a broader context of social inequality that economic immigration and maternal separation implies.

The case of public orphanages giving girls for adoption to be domestic workers at the beginning of the twentieth century (Blum, 2004) shows how maternal separation often happens with the complicity of the state. Today, public welfare policies are still involved in the reproduction of ideas about subaltern groups as ‘passive and powerless victims’ that owe their benefactors. Many domestic workers who were also mothers were beneficiaries of Oportunidades (Opportunities) a governmental program of social assistance whose beneficiaries must be women and mothers. Studies of Oportunidades -and its predecessor Progresa- have found many problems and contradictions in the program social policies (Vizcarra y Guadarrama, 2006; Sesia, 2002). The money given to women has conditions attached and these groups are required to attend a series of workshops on health and nutrition. These obligations intrude upon the already limited time they have in order to balance work and family life (ILO, UNPU, 2009). Some domestic workers interviewed argued that they often had problems getting permission from employers to leave in order to attend workshops and collect the money from the program.
*Oportunidades* designates a voluntary community ‘promoter’ (a woman) who is in charge of organizing the meetings and making sure the money given to the beneficiaries is well spent. Women in the program are expected to provide surveillance on each other and denounce any personal issues (from domestic violence to visits to a beauty shop) that might be linked to money misuse. It has been shown how such practice has created mistrust among working class women; weakening much needed collective ties and community organisation. Moreover, *Oportunidades* is a national program that does not takes into consideration the regional differences within the country. For instance, Guanajuato has one of the highest number of male immigration to the US (INEGI, 2000) and this condition significantly affects women who are left alone with all domestic and extra domestic responsibilities such as looking after field crops, family business and cattle (Vizcarra, 2002).

The program is often politically charged and it is often misused by administrators and health officials. Benefits are sometimes used for political or personal agendas and are in some cases even ‘sold’ to the women (i.e. the money is given in exchange for some goods or services). Workshops on health and nutrition are often not designed to meet women’s knowledge or economic possibilities. For instance, when Paola Sesia (2002) asked the health community worker what were the issues discussed at one of the workshops she responded ‘about garbage disposal and boiling water’ and when Sesia asked ‘you mean to say the women don’t know how to boil water?’ The worker noted,

> well some of them do, but they don't listen. Now they have to come to me for their forms to get stamped so maybe they will pay attention.

This quote shows the way public assistance programmes are often misused by health staff. Instead of making law reforms that would benefit workers’ experience as mothers the state designs public assistance programs that feed the stereotype of working class women as inadequate mothers who need to be taught about childrearing. Embedded in the notion of the ‘welfare queens’ are ideologies of race, class and gender that blame working class mothers for their children’s poverty and their own (Collins, 1998; McCormack; 2005). The state therefore becomes complicit in the reproduction of a *status quo* that provides cheap domestic and care labour to the more privileged classes while
alleviating, at the cost of women’s working conditions, high rates of unemployment that reached 5.42 per cent in 2010 (INEGI). Certainly, female employers and domestic workers experience motherhood differently but for both the experience of being mothers is closely connected to a moral self, that is, to their ability to follow social norms that define what is to be a ‘good’ mother in their own particular context. Therefore, when arguing against the universalisation of notions around ‘good’ mothering one must not forget that every woman should have the right to become or be mothers if they wish to do so.

6.5 Conclusion

Motherhood as a frame for thinking about domestic employment has worked to illuminate the importance of certain maternal figures in Mexico and how such figures might have been differently interpreted, used and embodied according to women’s social position. Notions of childrearing illuminate the corresponding social norms around ideas of ‘good’ mothering and, in the case of middle class families, the elements of social difference that are perceived as important to reproduce intergenerationally. In a similar way, notions of childrearing, in this case especially around daughters, might empower workers as mothers to find strategies of transformation and resistance.

The dynamics of paid domestic work help us visualise why womanhood cannot be universalised not only because experiences such as motherhood are differently lived but because the very meaning (although not the centrality) of such experience is differentiated by employers and workers. Looking at paid domestic work through the experience of women as mothers allows us to understand the endurance of certain aspect of this particular occupation. The image of the worker as a ‘mammy’ reproduces the marginalisation of women in this occupation by imagining them as asexual, expecting them to be childless and therefore fully loyal to the development of the middle class family.

Paid domestic work seems to enable female employers to follow their own particular social norms around childrearing and ‘good’ mothering and the construction of what Vanessa May (2008) calls a ‘moral self’. In contrast, domestic workers’ experiences as mothers are constrained by this particular occupation, by the refusal of the state to regulate working rights for women
workers (i.e. childcare facilities) and by public policies that shape notions of working class women as unfit mothers. Looking at paid domestic work through the lenses of motherhood allow us to visualise how patriarchy alone cannot explain the marginalisation of women and male domination. Women’s lives are enmeshed with other social realities and such intersection does not only enable or constrain the experiences of motherhood but also shapes the way in which women define, negotiate and transform the social meaning of such experience for them and their children.
7. Conclusion

Globalisation and increasing levels of poverty around the world have forced millions of women to immigrate and search for ‘a better life’. At the same time, paid domestic work represents one of the most important sources of labour in developing countries and the living and working conditions of women in this occupation have not received enough attention by academic and gray literature.

For many years, the analytical priority that feminism gave to the gender division of housework happened at the cost of ignoring further subdivisions of class and race. In the case of Mexico, this has not been an academic or an analytical slip but an openly acknowledged refusal to engage with the issue. Some have explained such negligence by feelings of ‘guilt’ as scholars or ‘women sociologists’ employ a domestic worker themselves. However, there seems to be more than discomfort involved in the academic negligence regarding the study of paid domestic work in Mexico. There is a broader dismissal of issues of racial difference among the general population and this might be explained by the complexity of thinking about issues of race in a country that has been for centuries imagined as racially homogenous.

‘White guilt has lost its currency as an instrument of change’ states an article that discusses Obama’s blackness and the illusion of a post-racial America (Walters, 2007:9); I believe that the same argument could be made about Mexico. However ‘our’ Obama, and the illusion of a post-racial era, started more than a century ago, in 1858 when a farmer and a male domestic servant as a child became the first (and possibly the last) indigenous President of Mexico. Benito Juárez was an indigenous national of Zapotec origin who served as President from 1858 to 1872, he was educated with the help of a Franciscan, Antonio Salanueva, and eventually became a lawyer. There is no other political figure in the country more celebrated than Juárez. Numberless cities, towns, streets, academic institutions and the like are named after him, and there is a national holiday to mark the day that he was born. His legacy has been mainly identified with democracy, secularism and a series of liberal political changes known as La Reforma. However, there is another silent ‘legacy’ that could be attributed to Benito Juárez, and that is the political instrumentality of his figure and the way his indigenous origins have been used for centuries to reproduce the idea of a country free from racial thinking.
As this thesis has shown, *mestizaje* has historically entailed beliefs in hierarchies of skin colour and the privilege of ‘white’ forms of being. After the Spanish colony, the *mestizo* identity came to be broadly understood as an achieved as well as an ascribed status; coded not only by race but also by gender and class. The independence of Mexico came with two powerful and yet contradictory processes. The new government forbade classification of persons by race in official documents, but by doing so, denied any possibility to articulate, visualise and therefore contest racisms. The official denial of racism came, paradoxically, accompanied by national discourses around the mestizo as the new ‘chosen’ race that defined Mexico’s indigenous population as in a need to be ‘civilised’ to be integrated into national life.

Rick A. López’s (2002) analysis of the India Bonita Contest of 1921 served as a unique example of how the racial, gender and class codes of *mestizaje* have mediated the image of domestic workers ‘as not so Other’. This ambiguity might partly explain the racialisation of domestic workers and their inclusion as one of the most vulnerable groups to discrimination (CONAPRED, 2010). Because of the absences of dichotomous categories (black/white) within Mexican thought, there is no straightforward way to conceptualise race when doing qualitative research. However, this does not mean that there is an absence of racial thinking but only that its complex and silent ways are more difficult to grasp. For this reason, the study of paid domestic work in Mexico and the analysis of women that are not indigenous but are yet racialised is a good way to start questioning the construction of Mexico’s national identity and the concrete and symbolic consequences of this process.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990:555) once noticed that due to the dichotomous character of Western thought ‘persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identity constantly battle with questions such as ‘what are you, anyway?’ In the context of *mestizaje* this individual battle is linked to a social one. Foucault’s notion of ‘bio-power’ comes to mind here as a racist ideology in Mexico seems to bind the individual body to that of society. As Ann L. Stoler (1995:206) suggests, ‘racism is not only a ‘visual ideology’ where the visible and somatic confirms the ‘truth’ of the ‘self’’. In Mexico, racism works to link the visible (colorism) with the intangible, the ‘physiological attributes of national, class, and sexual Others’.
Domestic workers’ experiences of discrimination and abuse are not exclusive of the spatial or time context of this study. There is an astonishing similitude between the experiences of paid domestic workers around the world from Hong Kong (Constable, 1996) to Israel (Raijman, et. all, 2003), India (Appadurai, 1981) or the United States (Romero, 2002). Domestic workers across the world experience similar rituals of separation that evolve around food, sexuality and women’s right to become or be mothers. However, for as many parallels that we might find regarding the living and working conditions of women workers their experiences are not the same. The rituals of separation that inform workers’ experiences are mediated by different structures of thought, historical discourses and disruptions. The echoes of workers’ experiences could be explained by how food, sexuality and motherhood are all experiences concerning the body. The common element of these experiences is the ‘instrumentality’ of the body; the way it works to bind the individual body to the social one. As Ann Stoler (1995:197) argues regarding Foucault’s notion of biopower, that is, the connection between the micro-management of the individual body to the macro-surveillance of the body politic, has as much to do with class as it was to do with gender and race,

Foucault’s implicit historical strategies and reading [of race] might prompt us to review our own analytic frame and reassess what sorts of genealogies of racism might speak to a history of the present...a deeper engagement with his specific genealogies of race and sexuality might help us rethink our own.

The work hereby presented represents an effort to look into the genealogies of racism that speak to Mexico’s history of the present, to the way racial thinking was not only constituted but also maintained and silenced. This was done by identifying the discourses and practices that are used to mark distance between workers and employers. What I believe is the novelty of this work, and therefore its contribution to the field, is the way in which experiences around food, sexuality and motherhood are problematised in the context of Mexico’s history and ideas of mestizaje and Mexicanness. Food and eating are one the most visible ways in which class, gender and race hierarchies are reproduced. As the history of food relations in Mexico illustrates, diets and bodies in colonial Spanish America were crucial elements
for the colonial enterprise since food was used to structure social categories of "Spaniard" and "Indian". Bodily differences between colonisers and colonised were constructed through food consumption and some of the symbolisms of food remain unchallenged. There is nothing more illustrative of the social hierarchies inherited by the colonial experience than the parallels between culinary and human mestizaje. Foodstuffs, as well as racial selves, from both sides of the Atlantic have been historically classified; privileging white/male bodies and diets. Just as in the case of people, the ‘true’ Mexican cuisine is defined as that representing the mixture of Indian and Spanish foodstuffs. For domestic workers interviewed, food deprivation or humiliating food distinction practices were among the most common negative experiences in the occupation. Food provision was privileged by workers over many other labour benefits and this is explained by the physiological need of calorie intake but also by workers’ legitimate demand of respect and dignified treatment. Food and eating are a crucial element on individuals’ sense of self and therefore exclusions made through food and eating were, when possible, contested by workers.

Food was also central to employers’ narrative due to the symbolic power that food has to mark distance with workers while enhancing ties among family members. In most cases, female employers cooked for their families to comply with the gendered norms that link cooking to nurturance. However, notion of contamination and disgust also worked were also manifested through the exclusion of domestic workers from cooking. Eating rituals (i.e. use of separate eating utensils) illustrate how disgust was used to mark boundaries between workers and employers. Ideas of disgust are racist at the core since they are shaped by a specific cognitive content linked to a desire to be non-animal (Nussbaum, 2006). Thus, concerns over dirt and contamination are also closely related to concerns over social transgressions and the permeability of the individual and the social body (Douglas, 1966). Food distinctions are then one of the most important ‘rituals of separation’ in the maintenance of social classification in Mexico. These rituals must be understood not as isolated events but as linked to the reproduction of racial, gender and class hierarchies. As Bourdieu (1984:193) argues: ‘tastes in food cannot be considered in complete independence of the other dimensions of the relationship to the world, to others and to one’s own body.’
In the case of sexuality, the rituals that work to reproduce racial thinking have often been understood as linked to Otherness and self-formation. Some have explained the link between sex and race through the way both constitute hierarchy and inequality and reproduce power relations among differentiated selves (Collins, 1994, Stolcke, 1989; Nagel, 2003; Foucault, 1999). Others have privileged the racial element of such links; looking at its productive power in national formation processes (Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995). For Collins (2000:135), sexuality is the ‘conceptual glue that binds intersecting oppressions together’ however, Peter Wade (2010) warns against assuming that the sexualisation of (racialised) women is only an issue of power and difference. Theories of self-formation and Otherness are certainly valuable as they display the importance of the social context that mediates the formation of selves and the production of Otherness. However, there is another important connection that until now has gone unnoticed by studies of paid domestic work; that between sex and dirt. As the influential work of Mary Douglas (1966:53) suggests ‘dirt is never a unique, isolated event’, thus, social concerns over pollution are deeply linked to social classification and the threat of transgression of order.

Through the figure of Tlazolteotl, ‘the filth deity’, Burkhart (1989) explores the links between dirt, sexuality and fertility within Nahua culture and how these connections were eventually transformed by the colonial experience. Patroness of dust and filth, adulterers and promiscuous women Tlazolteotl was seen by Spanish friars as a ‘stained goodess’. Notions of dirt (tlazolli) and immorality were seen as a convenient mechanism to ‘translate’ Christian teachings; however, cultural differences between Nahua and Christian thought were ignored. For instance, the ‘tlazolli/dirt complex’ was as much about immorality, lust and contamination that it was about fertility and power. It is possible to suggest that there might be ‘conceptual hybrids’ (De la Cadena, 2005) formed by European and pre-Hispanic notions of sex and dirt and that these hybrids still inform the way we imagine women whose work entails daily contact with dirty substances. After all, it would be too Eurocentric to explain our social hierarchies (or the notions that inform them) solely in relation to colonial ideas around sex and race. As the figure of Tlazolteotl shows, ideas
that link sex and dirt existed before any Spanish conqueror had put a foot in the territory.

The sexualisation of workers in Mexico occurs through two parallel processes; workers are often sexually harassed by the Master or the young man of the house whilst female employers reproduce ideas that define workers’ sexuality as deviant. A process of intergenerational transference of symbolic power was manifested through the sexualisation of workers by the ‘young man of the house’. As Wade (2010) argues, there is certainly an element of erotic desire involved in the violent sexualisation of women who are also racialised. However, in the context of paid domestic work in Mexico, this cannot solely be seen as an individual fantasy but as a group one. The sexualisation of domestic workers is not only about men’s appropriation of workers’ bodies but also a collective construction that involves the media, the state and even the educational system by neglecting the issue. The collective sexualisation of domestic workers maintains the status quo of a social, racial and a political order from which the middle classes and the state benefit. The sexualisation of workers occurs in a context of institutionalised violence against women in Mexico. Femicides across the country and the lack of effective legislation to protect women from domestic violence aggravate workers’ vulnerability to be abused in someone else’s home. The sexualisation of women workers who are also poor and racialised seems to be mediated by a context of gendered violence that affects women differently.

Female employers often disguised issues of class conflict as moral ones and this worked to justify the exploitation of workers as young as 12 years-old. By perceiving young female workers as ‘in need’ of being morally educated female employers affirmed their own virtuousness; justifying exploitation as a form of social mission. The caring skills of workers seemed to depend on an imagined asexuality and lack of personal life. Moreover, one of the paradoxes of this occupation is the way domestic workers are expected to be involved in the social reproduction of middle-class children but are simultaneously feared by employers. This fear is fed by media discourses and state policies that have historically defined working class women as ‘unfit’ for childrearing.
As discussed throughout this thesis, the myth of mestizaje was a key element on the national formation project where indigenous women were seen as in charge of giving birth to a new ‘cosmic race’. Because of the centrality of motherhood to women’s experiences this study looked at paid domestic work through women’s notions and experiences as mothers.

Three maternal figures in Mexico: The Virgin of Guadalupe, La Malinche and La Llorona (the weeping mother) inform Mexican notions of motherhood. Women’s interpretation and experiences around these motherly figures, in particular, and around notions of motherhood, in general, differ from class to class. As this thesis shows, the lack of adequate labour conditions for paid domestic workers in Mexico constrains women’s right to become and be mothers. However, motherhood is still seen by some workers as a strategy for intergenerational change through the care and education of their own children. At the same time, paid domestic work in Mexico enables female employers to follow middle class notions of ‘good’ mothering; these notions often define a ‘cool’ mother as permissive and unstressed one. Female employers are released from the menial work involved in childrearing, however, their role as mothers is also enhanced to meet the prescriptions of Western experts on childrearing. Thus, destabilizing conventional gender norms at one level can work to enhance gender norms on another.

Looking at paid domestic work through motherhood illustrates important aspects of workers’ reproductive work when caring for employers’ children. The image of the worker as a ‘mammy’ works to marginalise women in this occupation and shapes ideas that define workers as asexual and childless. Thus, the worker/nanny is often expected to be ‘grateful’ for the ‘opportunity’ of providing full loyalty to the development of the middle class family even though such experience neglects her own family life. Maternal separation is a significant emotional distress for workers and their children and this burden disempowers not only women but their families and communities. Workers’ experiences as mothers are constrained not only by employers’ preference for childless workers but also by the state refusal to regulate the working rights of women workers (i.e. childcare facilities) and by public policies that reproduce ideas that define workers as undeserved reproducers; such as that of forced sterilisation.
Further research is needed on child labour since the average age of workers going into the occupation is around 11 years of age and one woman described becoming a worker since she was six years-old. Also, more research is needed on the issue of maternal separation and the (lack) of provision of child-care facilities for the children of domestic workers. A ritual of separation that could illuminate important aspects of this occupation is that of the ‘service’ room and the way that space is used to mark distance. For instance, one of the employers described how she caught the worker stealing as she went into ‘her room’ to look for Christmas decorations; the employer supposedly found some personal items in a bag that belonged to the worker. The employer description illustrates how the space allocated for the worker also serves as a storage room. Finally, as Peter Wade (2010) argues when looking at sex and race in Latin America, many studies tend to focus on ‘white’ men’s sexuality and this has worked to reproduce the idea of women’s sexuality as passive. It would be interesting to know more about workers’ own feelings of ambivalence towards male and female employers.

During the final stage of this thesis I was swinging one of my girls at a playground when a little girl approached me and said: ‘muchacha, would you swing me?’ I could hear her mother in the background, calling the girl, reprimanding her and saying: ‘she is not a muchacha!’ The mother looked at me, ashamed and mortified; she said ‘sorry’. There she was, that little girl telling me the title of a potential new chapter for this thesis; reminding me of other possible angles from which to look at women workers’ experiences. How are children involved in the reproduction of social hierarchies? What are the codes they read and follow when they relate to women in paid domestic work? Why this little girl thought that I was a domestic worker? What where the signs or codes involved? That question was partly addressed by this thesis, but there are many others that remain and that need to be further investigated. The little girl’s confusion was a powerful reminder that in Mexico, our national identity and sense of belonging has been for centuries conditioned by a myth of racial homogenisation. Thus, as racial thinking shapes and informs our everyday social interactions we feel obliged to believe and to defend the idea that in Mexico there is no racism, that we were conceived by a ‘cosmic’ and neutral duality formed by Indian and Spanish origins.
On 16 June 2011, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the convention and recommendation concerning *decent work for domestic workers*. This is the first time that the ILO included a sector from the informal economy into its standards system. Women in this occupation were finally recognised as workers and the Committee’s recommendations included, among other issues, the provision of ‘meals of good quality and sufficient quantity’ (ILO, 2011: 15B/10); the establishment of ‘mechanisms to protect domestic workers from abuse, harassment and violence’ (ILO, 2011: 15B/6); and rights that would facilitate workers to reconcile work and family responsibilities (ILO, 2011: 15B/14).

This breakthrough was achieved with the collaboration of workers’ organisations around the world including *The Latin American Confederation of House Workers* (CONACTRAHO). The dialogue between international and national organisations, governments, advocates and legislators was an important tool for the achievement of this milestone. The ILO Convention was a collective effort and, as Pierre Bourdieu (2003:24) argues, researchers can (and must) become part of this effort through ‘a collective politics of intervention in the political field that follows, as much as possible, the rules that govern the scientific field’. He argues that commitment must not be understood as a sacrifice of scholarship, to the contrary, commitment is most greatly needed in places such as Latin America where neoliberal discourses and policies have worked to retreat into academia critical thought ‘without ever being in a position to really threaten anyone about anything’(2003:21).

The work hereby presented forms part of a personal and an academic commitment to the creation and dissemination of ‘instruments of defense’ against the institutionalised discrimination of domestic workers in Mexico and Latin America.
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Appendix 1. Quotes in Spanish

Note: All interviews and quotes were translated by me and all the emphasis in quotes (words marked in *Italic* font) were also my production.

[1] ¡No se preocupe, es un *huevón* debería de estar trabajando como quiera!

[2] Bueno, yo vengo de la mezcla del indígena y el español y usted no (¿y yo?) pues usted es más blanquita, usted tiene menos sangre indígena que yo.

[3] ’(suspira) ay, ya me desahogue!

[4] Aquí, mucho, de que compran un jamón para ellas y otro para las muchachas. Y eso hasta me da coraje, la verdad, no soy la más indicada para hablar de ese tema porque me da mucho coraje.

[5] Yo digo, es limpia!. Mucha gente a lo mejor no lo permitiría, pero bueno, tiene su baño, su shampoo, su toalla y dices ‘ies que es un ser humano!’ A lo mejor mucha gente diría ‘cómo permites que se bañe...yo no, jamás en mi vida he hecho eso.

[6] A veces buscamos un reconocimiento por la lucha y liberación femenina, por la lucha en contra de ellos. Muchas mujeres lo han logrado pero han sacrificado la otra parte. Yo siento que sí. Porque si tú ves, a fin de cuentas, la mayoría de las mujeres que tienen éxito en su trabajo terminan fracasadas en su matrimonio y en la relación con sus hijos igual.

[7] Patrona A: Yo antes me traía a la mía pero después mi hija no quería jugar con ella y mi niña ‘¡vete, no quiero jugar contigo, vete!. Entonces pues pensé, ¿para qué me la traigo? Además me choca cuando te persiguen, todo el tiempo atrás de ti, atrás de ti, como sargentos! (las mujeres en la mesa se ríen)
Patrona B: Sí, ¿por eso a veces te ponen de mal humor no? Nada más vienen al puro chisme.

[8] No más arrimaban (comida) para las niñas y ya nosotros nos quedábamos allá retiradas de ellas.....retiradas de las mesas de los invitados, osea que todas las muchachas éramos muy aparte ‘nos decían váyanse a donde están todas las muchachas’. Porque a lo mejor. Entonces las señoras nos echan a todas para acá, ¿cómo nos dicen que vengamos y quieren que todas estemos acá a parte nomas aquí cuidando a los niños?


[10]. Esto es mucho más inseguro que pasar por un campo de golf (después de que unos albañiles nos gritaron Cleopatra!)

[11] Sí, pues no (pausa) pues era de esas de Oaxaca, que viven en México como que tienen comunidades así que viven en el centro, como raro, osea no, hablaba español, osea no se vestía de indígena ni nada, osea era una chava, una muchacha normal. No así como indígena ni nada pero venía de Oaxaca.

[12]En mi casa comen lo mismo que comemos nosotros. Yo nunca les he dicho esto no lo pueden agarrar, esto sí lo pueden agarrar. Pero pasa algo
muy chistoso, que a ellas no les gustan comer lo que uno come. A ella le gusta comer galletas, salchichas...Y dices 'pues es que algo tienen que comer'. ...

... por ejemplo, verduras y frutas no están acostumbradas a comerlo. Cuando hago pescado, camarones, ese tipo de cosas no les gusta comer, la carne sí. Muchas quesadillas, comen muchas quesadillas.

[13] No me daba la señora... Ella lo que me dijo 'es que aquí no conocemos los frijoles Señora, estamos a dieta, vénghase almorzada de allá' Comían comida de dieta...Decía: ‘ni tortilla usted misma ve que ni tortilla’ y ahí pensaba yo ‘ini quién la va aguantar así!’, no ya me sentía mareada, me agarró un dolor horrible de huesos, va a ser dos meses, pero horrible de huesos, se me empezaron a hinchar los pies, hasta que fui al doctor y tengo osteoporosis.


[15] Yo decía ‘pues lo que me toca hacer hacerlo bien’. Para mí era algo agradable estar en la cocina, a lo mejor porque sentía porque esa era mi forma de realizarme. No sé. Yo siento que la cocina es un arte.

[16]Yo me levantaba y les hacía un desayuno casi como de hotel, con fruta, y hotcakes y figurita de hotcakes.

[17]Ellos solitos se cuidaban ahí, con el más grande, ya les dejaba su comida unos frijolitos o su sopita y les dejaba dinero para las tortillas.

[18] Yo cociné siempre. Porque he tenido la suerte de tener buenas muchachas. Yo al principio porque... tenía bebes y tenía que hacerles su comida especial para eso y yo sentía que la muchacha no tenía la higiene, no les interesa tanto tener las uñas limpias, cortaditas. Que a lo mejor estornudan encima de la comida y tú ni te das cuenta.

[19] Luego otra, me apartaba todo, por ejemplo almorzaban pero me apartaba mi plato, mi cuchara y mi vaso y si ellos tomaban jugo a mi no me daban jugo....y luego un día, esa señora si comían por ejemplo, bistec...y luego una vez se me quedó bien grabado que comieron caldo de camarón, unos camarones...yo bien saboreada con los camarones, ¿cuál tu? que no me dan...igual hicieron agua de frutas y a mi nomas me dejaron agua....era bien fijada, yo le aguantaba mucho porque en ese tiempo mi mamá estaba sin trabajar y yo decía 'yo tengo que trabajar porque le tengo que ayudar a mi mamá.

[20] La gente las conoce en la calle pero ya en su casa ponen otra cara’ Yo a veces traigo hambre y la señora se sale pero ahí no encontraba nada de comer, osea no eran ricos ricos pero pues yo creo que si tenían para comer. De vez en cuando, yo les hacía de comer....lo único que yo hacía no era comida de diario diferente. Casi nomas, me dejaba 20 pesos la señora y ya yo iba a la tiendita de la esquina y de ahí de esos 20 pesos yo compraba seis alitas, dos o tres jitomates y arroz y yo de ahí les tenía que hacer la comida y ella decía me comiera caldo, pero no era caldo porque no llevaba ni verduras ni nada de nada. Osea que yo nomas les hacía para ellos porque ya después yo no alcanzaba.....como a las 5 de la tarde salía, de 9 a 5. No comía nada, a la empleada doméstica casi nomas lo que le arriman es huevo o tortillas, en
algunas casas no permiten que tomemos alimento.

[21] La señora Rocío decía cuánto se hacía, y ella [Rosa, la cocinera] le echaba media tacita más para alcanzar nosotros y cuando Rosenda le decía ‘señora ya se acabo el arroz’ la señora decía ‘¿pero cómo que ya se acabó? ¡ya te dije que un kilo debe de durar cuatro días!’

[22] Yo les tengo despensa abierta, que coman que desayunen lo que quieran. Y ninguna me ha tocado abusona ni nada...Mi mamá me orienta más. Mi mamá es muy claridosa, yo creo que es muy buena para mandar. Ella me decía ‘tu nomás dile que sin abusar, que ahí está la comida y todo pero que por ejemplo si ven que hay poquito queso y va a llegar el señor que piensen que a lo mejor va a pedir quesadillas y te meten en problemas.

[23] Bueno siempre las cuidábamos a las niñas.....ya cuando ya se acababa casi toda la fiesta a veces, si acaso nos llevaban algo y nos decían ‘les trajimos un vasito de agua o de refresco, hay es que se me pasó’ y nosotros decíamos ‘como ella ya comió y nosotros no hemos comido nada’ si nos arrimaban pero ya para las últimas...nomás arrimaban para las niñas y ya nosotros nos quedábamos allá retiradas de ellas, retiradas de las mesas de los invitados.

[24] Y me dijo ‘usted tiene hijas, ponga a sus hijas a que se los hagan, es que usted no tiene porqué trabajar tanto’ y yo dije ‘hija de su madre, cómo, pues si estoy trabajando aquí, con su miseria que me da y que no trabaje yo en mi casa, con mis hijas que son mi obligación’ ¿sabe a qué hora me dejaron de salir ese día? Hasta las 7.00 de la noche. El mero 24! Me puse a ser el aseo, a lavar, a hacerles la comida, a recoger todo, les di de comer, recogí la cocina, terminé y me dijo ‘ahora si señora vámonos al estacionamiento para que nos haga los tamales’. A porque me dice ‘tráigase a una de sus niñas para que le ayude porque quién sabe hasta qué hora ira a acabar’ Ni un cinco me dieron de más ni a mí ni a mi niña.

[25] Yo ya había encargado el maíz y mis niñas se encargaron de poner el nixtamal...y luego ya cuando llegué les dije ‘hijas pues ahora sí hay que ponerlos a hacerlos’ y yo volví a decir a mí niña ‘¿mami pues ahora en dónde vamos a comprar las cosas para hacerlo?’ ¿Entonces cómo le hacemos? Y me dijo ‘no pues manda traer queso, me dijo, y los hacemos con puro chile’ ¿En dónde vas a encontrar ahorita carne barata?

[26]Y todavía así me criticaron. El 26 que fui me criticaron y me dijeron ‘los tamales ni le quedaron buenos, le quedaron desabridos, todo por andar a las carreras’ Le dije ‘usted cree que no voy a andar a las carreras, es que yo tengo mis hijas, yo tengo que ver a mis niñas’ Me dijeron ‘ino es que ya están grandes!’ Y yo les dije, ‘para mí son mis niñas, aunque anden con bastón van a ser mis hijas’.

[27]Yo veo personas, que por ejemplo mi consuegra y ella tiene una muchacha, se llama Maríla y ella tiene el lujo de invitar a su familia a comer porque ella hace la comida. Y yo que quisiera tener esa ayuda de una señora de años. Y que le hace las compras, y Maríla le trae del diario. Tiene unos 20 años con ella. Yo antes organizaba comidas aquí con mis hijos, pero ya no puedo. Porque antes tenía ayuda, tenía una señora que se llamaba Consuelo...y esa señora venía hasta con su anafre porque hacía gorditas. Era tan buena esa mujer, y me alzaba la cocina y me lavaba trastes y todo. Pero
se me desapareció. Los domingos en la feria de las fresas, eran sendas cazuelas de arroz, mole y el pollo. Y hacía flanes, ella me lo hacía. Eran sendas cazuelotas. La busqué pero se desapareció de repente. Y le suspiro tanto a Consuelo, porque si tuviera esa ayuda pues ¡cómo quisiera que mis hijos vinieran!

[28] No yo si digo, si yo fuera así pues entonces yo me traería diez niños, porque diría yo tengo tres muchachas que me los cuiden, me hacen el quehacer, me lavan me planchan casi me dicen ve y acuéstate con mi marido...porque osea no, pero si de verdad, uno termina siendo mamá de los niños

[29] La señora era muy celosa conmigo porque cuando la señora se salía ya cuando ella llegaba el señor ya estaba en la casa y ya después ella llegaba a la cocina y me hacía bien hartas preguntas. ¿A qué horas llego el señor?... me decía ‘de seguro traes algo con él o él contigo’ y le decía yo ‘¿ay señora, pues cómo va a creer?’ y ya después se subía a pelear nomas, y ya después ya seguían discutiendo. Eso fue lo que no me gusté en algunas partes que las señoritas desconfiaban de mí cuando yo les tenía mucho respeto...ella ya casi no me dejaba sola en la casa, y no me dejaba a mí, me decía vámmonos Amelia y yo iba con ella y yo pensaba: ‘si usted quiere que yo vaya entonces usted se debía de poner a lavar o recoger porque usted no me ayuda ni lava ni nada’.

[30] Ahí había un muchacho más o menos un niño, el tendría unos 11 o 12 años y yo tenía dos años más de él, mas grandecita... yo iba subiendo las escaleras o bajaba y me arrojaba a la pared, osea yo no me podía ni mover...como que me quería agarrar y yo le decía ‘no, vas a ver le voy a decir a tu mamá’ y me decía ‘no, me decía, ni te va a creer’ a veces yo si le sacaba y me bajaba corriendo y ya después una vez me encontró la señora que yo venía corriendo y me preguntó que traes? Y él me amenazaba y me decía ‘nomás le dices a mi mamá’ y no fue una vez sino que fueron varias veces.

[31] Un día yo estaba haciendo la comida y estaba lavando los trastes y su hijo un día quiso abusar de mí y lo amenace con un cuchillo, no me dejé, y me espanté y ya no fui...porque me dio miedo. Yo estaba lavando los trastes y se me arrimó y puso su mano así y me dijo ‘¿Susy no te han dicho que estas bien boinita? ’si, le dije yo, si pero quitate’ y me dijo ‘no le vas a platicar a tu papá pero quiero platicar contigo’ y me agarro de la cintura y me dio mucho coraje y lo aventé y le dije ‘quitate, quitate porque le voy a decir a tu papá’...y ya después yo agarre un cuchillo y le dije ‘quitate o no respondo y yo le gritaba al señor y nada’...Y ya después el señor me mandó a hablar y él me dio lo de mi semana. Pero bien cínico el señor bien sin vergüenza, en lugar de decirmme ‘Susy discúlpame’ nada, bien sonriente no me dijo nada....igual lo hacen adrede para no darme aguinaldo.

[32] Cuando tenía unos doce o trece años...en esa casa, la señora era bien buena gente pero vivía con ella su hermano, y su hermano quiso abusar de mí y yo me espanté muchísimo. Entonces me fui. La Señora se molestó mucho con él y él lo negó. Hasta yo le dije, estaba en la cocina y salí para el patio y en ese momento el salió para el patio y él me quiso agarrar y yo lo rasguñé y salí corriendo....también trabajé en la deportiva, todo el tiempo he trabajado en casa de entrada por salida, siempre. Una vez trabajé con una señora que
me quedaba a dormir, yo tenía como quince años y ya después ya no quise porque el señor se andaba paseando por toda la casa con puro calzón y a mí me daba miedo. Me daba vergüenza, en vez de darle vergüenza a él me daba a mí. Y ya después trabajé en la deportiva y la señora trabajaba y el señor ahí se quedaba. Y me ponía de nervios porque cada rato me picaba mis costillas y me decía ‘te espanté Rosita’ y ya luego tampoco fui.

[33] Fue mi primer trabajo, la peor experiencia, me tenía que quedar...Fue y me dijo, me llamó a la salita y me dijo ven, me empezó a preguntar qué hacían mis papas, cómo era, porque estaba trabajando yo y de a rato me dijo ‘no te quieras ir a dormir conmigo’ yo estoy solo, me echó su rollazo. Y me dijo ‘no’ y yo no sabía qué hacer...y en ese momento él se fue y me dijo ‘si te decides te espero’ y yo no sabía qué hacer....y le pedí tanto a dios que me ayudara a acordarme del teléfono de mi prima y le llamé y le dije ‘ven por mí’ yo llorando....Tenía yo 18 años...como ven que somos de rancho creen que ‘ay pobrecita’ y me dijo ‘no te preocupes yo te voy a ayudar, voy a darte dinero, voy a ayudar a tu familia’ y si yo hubiera sido otra en ese momento yo hubiera aceptado porque mis papas estaban económicamente muy mal en ese momento. Nada más trabajaba yo, era la mayor y nada más yo trabajaba. Y yo me puse a pensar ¿cuántas muchachas no caen en eso?

[34] Si te consigues una muchacha silvestre como las hay muchas en el rancho. Que ahorita les ha llegado mucho la moda de que los que se van a EU y que regresan. Que regrean muchos más con adicciones, de mañas de pandilleros. Y todo eso se riega. Yo con la muchacha que tengo....es una buena muchacha. Sin embargo luego la tengo que estar regañando en cuestión que me platica cosas como que se sube a la camión...y en ese momento él se fue y me dijo ‘si te decides te espero’ y yo no sabía qué hacer...y le pedí tanto a dios que me ayudara a acordarme del teléfono de mi prima y le llamé y le dije ‘ven por mí’ yo llorando....Tenía yo 18 años...como ven que somos de rancho creen que ‘ay pobrecita’ y me dijo ‘no te preocupes yo te voy a ayudar, voy a darte dinero, voy a ayudar a tu familia’ y si yo hubiera sido otra en ese momento yo hubiera aceptado porque mis papas estaban económicamente muy mal en ese momento. Nada más trabajaba yo, era la mayor y nada más yo trabajaba. Y yo me puse a pensar ¿cuántas muchachas no caen en eso?

[35] Su situación es muy difícil pero ni cómo ayudarlos. En cuestión cultural tienen un retraso impresionante, como mujeres no se valoran. En muchas cosas están adelantados como las modas, el tatuaje, el piercing etc. la mía tenía un arete en la lengua y yo le dije ‘aquí en mi casa no te pones un arete en la lengua porque mis hijos no tienen y no quiero que se pongan’ y en muchas cosas. Por más que ven la realidad /(que se van con el novio, que el muchacho las embaraza .../) y al rato ellas andan rodando. Y digo ‘íqué impresión!’ y generación y generación y generación y no lo aprenden. La que yo tengo ahorita tiene 16 años y mi hija tiene 15, claro que la muchacha se ve mucho más grande y yo digo ‘imáginate mi hija haciendo todo el trabajo que hace ella!’ no me cabe en la cabeza. Platica hasta por los codos, me cuenta toda su vida y yo me la paso regañándola.

[36] La peor fue experiencia fue con ella porque yo me sentía culpable porque a la corta edad que tenía (se quedaba a dormir) y yo me sentía muy mal porque trabajaba mucho. Y aparte te digo, que con loqueras. Usaba palabras así del rancho ‘se me afigura una víbora’ y yo decía ‘íqué miedo con esta niñai’ ...A mi me empezó a dar miedo porque de repente me salía y le dejaba al niño dormido, y decía ‘pues esta me la va a hacer algo’ le traté de tener mucha paciencia porque ella nunca había trabajado y ella me pedía que le diera trabajo. y yo creo que era un reflejo de todo lo que vivía...pero si duró mucho conmigo

[37] Una vez me encontré, tenía yo mi primer bebé, era un niño... Tenía una chamaquita de doce años para que me ayudara a cuidar al niño mientras yo
hacía los trabajos de la casa y me la encontré en la hamaca con el niño y yo veía que le hacía cariñitos como en el estomago y cuál era en su pene. y le estaba acariciando el pene al niño! Y ya después cada que yo tenía una sirvienta yo me sentía desconfiada. Siempre estaba al pendiente, no me gustaba dejarles a los niños solos.

[38] De repente se fue de mi casa y entró a su cuarto y había abortado en su cuarto, en mi casa. Y estaba así la cama....Y la vecina de al lado me dijo que se había tomado un té que porque estaba embarazada pero que se iba a ir con otro novio que no era el papá del niño entonces que por eso tenía que abortar. El sangrero en el cuarto de servicio. Si, se llevó todas sus cosas. Tenía como 19 años, nunca me dijo nada...quitó las sabanas, y tiré todo a la basura. Resulta que el papá del niño no era el novio y se iba a ir con el novio, de esos que se las roban y no sé qué.

[39] Y con los niños se llevaba bien: super bien, osea me iba mucho a visitar a mis papás en ese inter y siempre me la llevaba osea y en mi casa la adoraban decían ‘¡qué buena, que buena muchacha!’ nunca nos lo imaginamos.

[40] Yo no la juzgo, a lo mejor anduviera con quien anduviera no tengo ningún problema, y lo dudaría porque es mi niña. Total que me quedé fría. Y le dije ‘ya me voy’ y me llevé a la niña. Le dije ‘no quiero que vuelvas a meter a nadie raro a mi casa’ (se rió) ‘raro’ que fea, no, le dije extraño a mi casa. Por favor cuando vuelva no la quiero ver aquí’ y me dijo ‘si, si señora’ y mi jefe ‘¿cómo dejas a dos mujeres ahí? igual y llegas y ya te vaciaron la casa!’

[41] Yo me salí porque prácticamente yo era la mamá de la niña.....para mí era injusto. Ya las niñas nos decían mamá....yo me encariñe, pues lloré la tuve desde que tenía un año porque ella se salía. Yo me encariñe con ella...después ya me di cuenta de que no es mi hija. Yo me estoy encariñando con una niña que no es mi hija.

[42] ‘Porque eres como otra mamá’ ...una amiga mía se acaba de ir a Estados Unidos y ella misma se dio cuenta. Tiene dos niñas, una de cinco y una de dos. Y la niña de cinco le dijo ‘mamá es que pareces otra mamá a la que yo tenía yo en Irapuato. Aquí en Estados Unidos nada más estas ‘¡recoge, levanta esto, recoge!’ y en México nunca me decías eso. ¿Porqué eres como otra mamá? Como que aquí no te agobias de estar pensando en eso. ... Entonces con tus hijos eres más buena onda, yo digo.

[43] Es la felicidad del hogar. Porque yo creo porque cuando no hay muchacha te esmeras en querer hacer todo lo que la muchacha hace...y cuando llega alguien y te ensucian el baño y te desatienden la casa te pones como histérica y te enojas y te lo destruyan en un ratito y porque fue el trabajo de todo el día. Pero cuando la muchacha lo hace pues no importa que lo destruyan, a fin de cuenta como ellas lo están haciendo todos los días, todos los días.

[44] Cuando llegábamos a la casa del niño, él lo primero que hacía cuando la sirvienta salía a recibirlo le aventaba la mochila al suelo, lejos y la pateaba, para que muchacha tuviera que ir a donde cayera la mochila para recogerla, a veces se abriría y ella tenía que recoger todo lo que traía adentro. Y agarrar al chiquillo para bajarlo y a veces el chiquillo la pateaba y lo llegué a escuchar
decirle ‘para eso te pagan’ porque la muchacha le decía ‘no avientes las cosas’ y él le decía ‘ípara eso te pagan!’.

[45] Le di un manazo y le dije ‘es que ya estuvo bueno que cada que te da tu gana me andes levantando la mano’ y ella vio y dijo ‘ay señora no me gusta que le ande pegando’ y le dije ‘pues a mí tampoco me gusta que me ande pegando mire como ando. y andaba traía moretones donde quiera... y me dijo ‘tiene su madre y quien le dé una mano (corregir)... no me parece que le ande diciendo cosas a mi niño, ies que es un niño entiéndalo!’ y le dije, ‘usted misma me está viendo y no le dice nada, sí es un niño el cual va a crecer y así se va a quedar impuesto...¿ustedes se cree con el derecho de que su hijo puede hacer lo que le dé la gana con la sirvienta porque es el patrón? Fíjese que no...Al tercer día me corrió ‘sabe que señora nomás que le iba a decir que se me perdió un anillo y aquí la única que entra es usted’.

[46] Sí, como si fueran mis hijos [empieza a llorar] el más chiquito bueno pues yo lo miré desde que estaba en la panza de la señora y yo lo cuidé, bueno sería a él que yo extrañaría más.

[47] Fue un milagro del señor de la misericordia, porque ahí la encontré sentada en la iglesia, ahí la encontré sentada.

[48] Es tan atractivo. Porque es una oportunidad muy grande de que una familia te abra sus puertas de sus casas. Te deje lo más importante para ellos: sus hijos.

[49] Sí, yo siento que hemos peleado mucho por la liberación femenina, por quitarnos el yugo de la presión del marido, etcétera. Pero nos hemos ido a otro extremo. Hemos dejado la educación de nuestros hijos, que es nuestra primera. Sí tiene obligación el papá pero el papá tiene que trabajar, su obligación primera es llevar el sustento a la casa. Pero lo de la mujer yo digo que sigue siendo la educación de los hijos y por eso se han perdido valores y se han perdido muchas cosas. Si son niños que crecen educados por la sirvienta ¿pues qué valores pueden tener?

[50] ¿Y mis hijos qué se van a quedar sin comer? Y me dice ‘yo no tengo la culpa de que tengan hijos mi hijita, es que ustedes se embarazan porque quieren, por tontas’ y le dije ‘a pues usted se hade haber embarazado por lo mismo porque ¿no me diga que usted no tiene hijos?’ y entonces me dijo ‘yo tengo hijos porque tengo una buena posición’ y yo le contesté ‘pues sí, los tiene pero a base de pendejas como uno’ Llegué aquí lloro y lloro...después me mandó a hablando...era una altilla. Guerilla...y yo le dije ‘nombre, que se vaya a la jodida’

[51] ‘Ya sé, todo está muy bien hecho, no me quejo, pero mire, si un día Dios no lo quiera le llega a pasar algo a su hija nosotros nos vamos a sentir culpables por no apoyarla, mejor tómese unos días’.

[52] Les ponen unas cuerizas los papás aparte de todo, porque es gente que no sabe educar. ... Y como esas hay peores ahí en el rancho. Y como que dices ‘¿tú crees que ahí vas a encontrar a una persona para que te eduque a tus hijos?’ ellas están acostumbradas a otra educación.

[53] La fiesta no va a estar muy prendida, que la del 8 de diciembre sí que es
cuando vienen todos los hombres de Estados Unidos.

[54] ‘Sabía que le enojaba y cómo hacerlo enojar, y hasta a veces lo hacía enojar a propósito, porque sabía qué le enojaba y eso’ (se ríe).

[55] Una llegó embarazada que porque sus papas no sabían. Olvidate, buenísima sirvienta. Yo le conseguí una persona que se dedicaba a acomodar criaturas que no las querían sus o no podían educarlas. Entonces yo platicaba con la señora y entonces, que amarga experiencia. Y yo le preguntaba de la señora que le iba a conseguir una familia para que adopten a tu criatura y pasaba una semana ahí y le decía ¿no te hablado la señora? Y un día me dijo ‘usted no se preocupe señora, porque se está pre ocupando?’ un día me salgo y llegué y se desapareció con un reloj de mi marido finísimo y se fue la mujer

[56] Mi hija, ella tenía una muchacha de muchos años, ella le crió a sus hijos. Ellos se van a comer fuera los sábados. Hace como un año fue ese robo. Esta muchacha lupita casi le crió a los hijos. Ya tenía como ella 15 años..ella le tomaba película, ella le ponía el árbol de navidad, ella le hacía maletas, todo le hacía Lupita. ... mi hija tiene su casa muy grande y después ella salía, sale mucho y creo que hasta se ponía su ropa interior de mi hija cuando ella no estaba. Se llevaba los vinos de mi yerno y desaparecían cosas. Y ella decía ‘pues dónde consigo otra?’ y mi hija callada, y así le tapaba. Y pues ya no la quiso mi yerno....mi hija tiene hasta tres y tiene chofer y tiene velador y bueno, tiene mucha servidumbre. Y Lupita se fue. Se van a Bailey a esquiar y mi hija tuvo un accidente y se tronó la rodilla... providencialmente, el día del cumpleaños del niño llegó Lupita con una pecerita para el niño de 4 o 5 años. Porque quiere mucho a los niños, pues ella los crió. Y entonces yo voy con el yerno, hasta le lloré y le dije ‘mira, no hay más que se vuelva Lupita, porque es la única que sabe el manejo de la casa, y ¿qué va a hacer mi hija?

[57] Pues providencialmente, el día del cumpleaños del niño llegó Lupita con una pecerita para el niño de 4 o 5 años. Porque quiere mucho a los niños, pues ella los crió.

[58] Y los hombres lo que quieren un niño. Yo a mi esposo le di cuatro hombres. Cuando me embarace del primero me dijo él ‘sabes que si no me crece un niño, si me crece una niña de ahí de donde te vas a aliviar te vas tu casa’ y estaba allí llore y llore y le decía ‘ahí Virgencita, mándame un niño’ yo tenía diecisiete años, no estaba tan chica, ya estaba yo grande. No quiero niñas, no me gustan las niñas y entonces yo le decía ‘¿qué va a hacer mi hija?’

[59] Dicen que las mujeres que tienen puros hijos son putas. Puro hombre, no la jodas, déjale tantito a tu viejito. Yo le pregunté al doctor y me dijo que no, que los hombres ponen el niño o niña....Si me daba pena porque decía yo ‘otro niño’ ‘¿Padre Dios seré yo muy acá?’.

[60] Y ya después me enfadé de cuidar tanta cría y mi mamá ino me dejaba salir!’

[61] La señora me platicó de sus partos y de la partera. ‘sin suero y sin anestesia ni nada. Los tenía en su casa, año tras año’ Blanca le ayudaba con los niños y siempre le decía ‘ay mamá usted nunca me dejo jugar’
Si yo no hubiera trabajado? (pausa). Siento que si no hubiera trabajado yo mis hijos se hubieran quedado igual que yo. Porque yo me acuerdo que ese era un problema que tenía con mi marido. ¿no pos a qué los mandas a la escuela, pos estas (con permiso de usted) de pendeja mandándolos, para qué gastas, yo no estudié hasta segundo’ ....nooo, le decía yo ‘yo no estudié ni primero de primaria pero yo no quiero que mis hijas el día de mañana anden igual que yo’ … ese era un problema (el marido decía) ‘las mujeres, al rato van a mantener a los pinches huevones’ …si le decía yo, ‘¿como estoy yo aquí?’ … No, le decía yo ‘¡es que mis hijas tienen que estudiar!’ …y no me va a creer pero yo lloraba en la noche.

Mis hijos sufrieron no se imagina. Demasiado. Yo siempre mis hijos (hace pausa y se le quiebra la voz) los dejaba encerrados en un cuarto. Yo vivía en una vecindad. Los dejaba encerrados mis hijos porque se me juntaron (ruído). Me aliviaba y yo me iba a los quince días a trabajar. Pos no había de otra… Dejaba a mis hijos encerrados…La niña, sufrieron mucho mis hijos. La más grande tenía 5 años, le daba a la que le seguía. ..se me partía el alma….Nooo, me salieron muy crueles. Dejaba a mis hijos encerrados. La niña…sufrieron mucho mis hijos. La más grande tenía 5 años, le daba a la que le seguía. ..se me partía el alma. No sé, yo remataba con mi esposo, yo, fue un infierno con mi esposo. Yo me peleaba. Muere mi madre y ya no tuve a dónde recobrar, más que aguantar y aguantar. Bueno pues. Ya llegaba yo a su pobre casa. Y encontraba a mis hijos. ¿Se imagina yo bien caliente de mis manos? Y encontraba al más chiquito todo batido. ¡Aich no! Yo llegaba a poner agua, yo lloraba. Ponía el agua, bañaba a mis hijos y era puro llorar….decía yo ‘¿dios mío qué hago?’…yo llegó el momento en el que yo me quería quitar la vida. Ya no aguantaba más.