DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN BRAZIL
Legacies and Horizons

Patricia de Santana Pinho
University at Albany, SUNY

Elizabeth B. Silva
Open University

Abstract: Grounded in literature review and an ethnographic study, this article examines contemporary Brazilian domestic life. Relations among women (employers and maids) and between women and men are analyzed with a focus on the home as a space in which gender, race, and class inequalities are constantly reproduced. The article argues that what happens in domestic life is constitutive of wider social divisions and that the domestic is a universe integral to the national social context. A case in point is the connection between the widespread use of paid domestic labor and the naturalization of black women as subservient, complementing the pairing of whiteness and class entitlement. Another case is the buffering role of maids in the development of gender conflicts in well-off homes, thus blurring gender hierarchies at a broader scale. Locating the domestic within the recent discussion on global domestic labor, the article compares particularities of Brazilian domestic life to those elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the domestic places women at the forefront, and this is also the case with this article. Domestic relations here invoke particularly the interplay of differences based on gender, class, and race. What are the specificities of domestic relations in Brazil? How have historical processes of entrenched social divisions shaped these? What are the evidences of current changes in domestic relations, and what directions do these take? We engage these questions by examining both the literature concerned and an ethnographic study.

The point of entry of studies about women in the 1970s in Brazil was female labor and capitalist relations of production (Saffioti 1969; Blay 1978; Rodrigues 1979; Pena 1981). Studies on social reproduction illuminated some aspects of the discussion on domestic labor (Madeira 1985), stressing its specificity for involving, in the private sphere, both market relations and relations of intimacy (Sarti 1985; Bruschini 1990). With a focus on economics and materialism, it took longer for cultural and symbolic issues to get into the women’s studies agenda. Domestic life and provisions in the home still remain largely ignored. A recent exception is the rich an-
DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN BRAZIL

A neglected field of study

The few existing scholarly analyses of domestic labor in Brazil contrast sharply with the commonness of the presence of maids in Brazilian...
homes, particularly in middle-class families. Why are there so few studies? What do the existing studies portray? How do these compare with the rapidly increasing scholarship on migrant women working as maids in North American and Western European countries?

Recent analyses in Latin America (Radcliffe 1999; Brites 2001, 2007; Goldstein 2003) reveal that the major characteristics of domestic work have remained predominantly unchanged since the publication in 1989 of Muchachas No More. The editors of that work, Elsa Chaney and Mary Castro, defined the characteristics of paid domestic service as including employment of poor women who are more often than not from poor areas of the various countries surveyed; the depreciation of domestic work and the devaluation of domestic workers; discrimination toward the gender, race, and class identities of the maids; and the insufficient professionalization and legislation of domestic work, as well as its subjection to personal agreements made within the sphere of the employer’s household, which frequently includes payment in-kind. These characteristics generally apply to the Brazilian context, but more detailed consideration of key aspects of domestic labor is needed.

The shortage of analyses of these issues is intimately connected to the very ubiquity of the presence of maids in Brazilian homes. The ordinariness of having a maid to do the everyday chores of cleaning, cooking, and looking after children renders invisible, and thus unspoken, the power relations between maids and the families for whom they work. Although it is problematic to refer to a generic legacy of slavery, and to mechanically associate that with the present situation of domestic workers, there are certainly issues to be investigated and explained regarding how three and a half centuries of slavery have affected Brazilian society and culture of home life. Among these are the everyday habits and attitudes of middle- and upper-class families with respect to giving orders, and the expectation that lower-class individuals, especially women, obey their commands and satisfy their needs. Although the pervasive authoritarianism that marks Brazilian society has received a significant amount of attention from scholars who have explained it in terms of class (Schwartz 1981; DaMatta 1997; Chauí 2000), extremely little connection has been made between authoritarianism and whiteness (McCallum, 2005; Pinho 2006, 2009). This link becomes especially relevant for the study of the domestic given that a racial pattern prevails in Brazil by which most employers are white and there is a predominance of black women employed as maids.

The association between whiteness and authority is visible in the daily interactions between maids and their employers. These are embedded in the performances of blackness validating the supremacy, command, and superiority of exercising whiteness. Analyzing mid-nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, Sandra Lauderdale Graham (1988) comments that the skin color of maids mattered because, though having a white servant was a
sign of status, the blacker and the younger a woman was, the lesser the threat she posed to the authority of her patrões. Thus, patrões relied more strongly on slaves and free black servants for care and comfort. This connects dark skin color to one of the qualities that patrões still highly value: obedience, a strong indicator of good conduct or good habits.

Thus, the legacy of slavery in Brazilian domestic life can better be analyzed in connection to the study of whiteness. Whiteness is both a global and a local force that is necessarily connected to the history of slavery. The contours of gender and class affiliation also shape the contours of whiteness. Among the reasons as to why there are so few studies of whiteness in Brazil is the issue of the invisibility of whiteness: self-proclaimed whites have historically been subjects and not objects of the gaze that has racialized the world around us (Sovik 2004). Yet employers and maids alike recognize the overtones of whiteness and blackness that resonate within domestic life. Suely Kofes (2001) argues that among the many connections between slave labor and present-time domestic work are the ways in which maids themselves refer to images and metaphors of slavery to describe their jobs. They refer to having a trabalho de escravo (slave job), a metaphor that indicates both underappreciated and backbreaking labor. Another aspect of their enslavement discourse is that, as semi-illiterate and low-skilled women, they do not have many other employment options. Like slaves, they are obliged to do domestic work. In the case of live-in maids (still a significant category despite their decreasing numerical relevance), they have little time off and therefore feel that they dedicate their entire lives to the employer’s family. Whiteness operates in Brazilian homes in ways very similar to how it functions at the global level, that is, as a sign of superiority and a system that distinguishes those who are “born to rule” (Hewitt 2007, 2) as entitled to having rights and giving orders from those who should obey and, among other things, carry out the undesirable chores of housework. Yet the slavery experience brings out particular contours. In her study of union leaders of domestic workers in Brazil, Mary Garcia Castro (1993, 2) draws on Graham (1988) to observe that “since slavery . . . domestic workers have lived in the public and private spheres in a [very particular way] . . . neither restricted to the house nor . . . entitled to a private life.” The union distinguishes between housework as a private sphere and domestic service as part of the public sphere. This position is different from the 1970s feminist domestic labor debate in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Describing the increasing migration of women from the periphery of the world to work as maids and nannies in core countries, Arlie Hoch-
schild (2002, 27; 2007) argues that the material and emotional deprivation of the children left behind by their migrant mothers is contributing to create a “dark child’s burden.” At the same time, white children (i.e., children of families located in the core countries) are becoming increasingly accustomed to having a woman from the third world cleaning up after them. These children quickly learn that the dark-skinned women, from developing countries, exist to serve them. As Barbara Ehrenreich (2002, 102) notes: “what we risk as domestic work is taken over by immigrant workers is reproducing, within our own homes, the global inequalities that so painfully divide the world.”

A similar situation happens in Brazil in which poor mothers also leave their children in the care of other people, often relatives, to tend to the needs of middle- and upper-class children. Whether the maids’ children are left behind for a few hours a day or for months at a time—or in those extreme but not uncommon situations in which the children of the poor are the ones who leave their families behind to work as maids—the reproduction of inequalities of class, gender, and race continue to lie at the core of paid domestic work.

The transference of middle-class domestic labor to a paid-for woman is not exclusive to countries marked by slavery. It is becoming an ever-increasing practice in many countries. In virtually all contexts, paid domestic work is characterized by the facts that the workers are poor, female, and from racially marked groups (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002), that they work long hours and are frequently exploited (Williams and Gavanas 2008), that they do the dirty work of cleaning (Anderson 2000), and that they are many times referred to as fictive kin (Lan 2002). In these terms, domestic labor in Brazil has many more commonalities with domestic labor in other regions of the world than it has specificities. Hence, what is there left to say specifically about maids in Brazil? What are the features particular to Brazilian domestic life? There are at least three major specificities that distinguish the context of paid domestic labor in Brazil from that in the core industrialized countries. As in other Latin American countries, in Brazil, maids are native-born women and not immigrants; there is a much greater availability of cheap domestic labor; and the use of domestic technologies is much less embedded in homes, even in middle- and upper-class households.

In the following section, we discuss Brazilian domestic relations among husband, wife, children, and the female domestic worker in light of a wider literature review. Drawing on our ethnographic study, we identify commonalities and distinctions between Brazil and elsewhere.

2. Fictive kin are “those who provide care like family and do what family does [and] are given the labor of kin with its attendant affection, rights, and obligations” (Karner 1998, qtd. in Lan 2002, 186–187).
THE DOMESTIC IN BRAZIL

The domestic in Brazil is a big sector, not simply confined to the private lives and homes of individuals but spanning a large proportion of the labor market. Its peculiarities are well illustrated by the significant proportion of the time, unpaid and paid, that the population dedicates to domestic activities. For instance, in couple households with or without children, on average, a Brazilian woman spends 33.5 hours per week, nearly 5 daily hours, cooking and cleaning, with men spending just more than 10 hours per week (less than 1.5 hours per day). This places the country second in the ranking of most time spent in domestic labor, behind only Chile, among thirty-four national contexts surveyed by the International Social Science Programme in 2002–2003 (Knudsen and Waerness 2008). The data refer to unpaid labor and exclude the labor of third persons. And the paid labor of third persons to keep Brazilian households, mainly middle-class ones, running is considerable. According to national statistics (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios [PNAD] 2006), 18 percent of total female employment is in domestic labor. This is equivalent to 6 million people, a proportion that has decreased overtime. In 1970, 25 percent of women worked as maids. Cristina Bruschini and Maria Rosa Lombardi (2002, 175) show that in their 1997 study, 47 percent of maids worked longer than forty-five hours per week and 28 percent longer than forty-nine hours. Only 12 percent had wages higher than two minimum wages.3

Domestic service is a female niche: more than 90 percent of workers are women. This is a precarious occupation with long hours, low wages, and little security. A recent study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), based on data from Brazilian national statistics (PNAD 2001), shows that the difference between black and white women employed as domestics is large: 24 percent of blacks compared with 14 percent of whites (ILO 2005). One in three Afro-Brazilian women works as a domestic servant. Occupying the highest positions in the labor market, white women are twice as likely as Afro-Brazilian women to be employed in the highest-paying administrative and professional occupations (Lovell 2006). This group constitutes the majority of employers of maids.4

These statistical data come to life in our qualitative exploration of domestic Brazilian life. We revisit data from an ethnographic study to explore qualitatively the relevance of domestic relations in the creation and transformation of social divisions. The study was carried out in 1997 in

3. In 1997, the monthly Brazilian minimum wage was R$120 (approximately US$111). In 2008, it was R$415, equivalent to approximately US$220.
4. Similar demographic trends are presented in Castro (1993), with the difference that greater income inequality and more blacks are found in her study focused on the northeast.
southeastern Brazil, in the affluent region of Greater Campinas, in the state of São Paulo. It focused on the differences between poor and middle-class homes regarding women’s work and the gendered domestic divisions of labor, with a particular concern over how paid domestic work affects the division of labor in households and the consumption of household technologies. There was no intention to produce a representative sample of the population in statistical terms. However, there was an aim to capture the relationships of women and men with respect to domestic labor. The approach was systematic but flexible, and families were selected from a pool generated using the typical snowball technique, in which one informant refers the researchers to friends and relatives to be interviewed. Our intention was to capture a wide range of social experiences, according to their significance for theory and concepts. We carried out participant observation and fifty-five semistructured interviews in thirty families, thirty with women and twenty-five with men. All families included dependent children, and twenty-two of them included children of school age (five to sixteen years old). Women defined themselves as housewives in nine households, and twenty-one families self-defined as white. At the time of the ethnography, four women had direct experience working as a maid, nanny, or cleaning lady. Three women had worked as hired domestic labor in the past, and three individuals (two men and one woman) had a mother who either worked or had worked as a maid, cleaning lady, or as laundress and ironing clothes. On the other side of the spectrum, sixteen of the households hired maids and/or cleaning ladies and/or nannies (see table 1). Thus, our sample contained a very diverse experience with paid domestic work. The consistency we found within this varied experience grounds our discussion on the topic.

Our findings from the ethnographic study contribute to a new wave of work, both in Brazil (Brites 2001, 2007; Goldstein 2003; Bruschini 2007; Sorj 2007; Silveira and Tito 2008) and internationally (Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; European Journal of Women’s Studies 2007), concerned with the significance of the intra- and inter-country flows of female energy. We reanalyze interviews and observation notes from our rich ethnographic material to investigate the contours of lived social divisions in the home and to reflect on these in light of new debates.

Funding sources such as the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) have actively encouraged the reuse of research data, with

5. The study, Technology and Home Life in Brazil, was originally funded by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior–Brasil. Elizabeth Silva (principal investigator) was responsible for the overall direction and coordination of the project. Patricia Pinho participated fully in the investigation, sharing the fieldwork, and in the current reanalysis of the material as coinvestigator for a British Academy–funded project in 2008 (see Silva 1998a, 1998b, forthcoming).
researchers being required to declare that they have searched existing archives to ascertain whether data already exist that can be reused before new rounds of data collection. Although reusing data has for a long time been quite routine among social scientists, and indeed is the very basis of other disciplines such as history (Silva 2007), reuse in social sciences is advocated under certain conditions. But there is consensus about the need to recontextualize the original data (Bishop 2007). This recognizes that researchers play a fundamental role in interpreting and theorizing data as well as in the process of data construction (see Mauthner, Parry, and Backett-Milburn 1998). Thus, it is important to consider both the original context in which the data were generated and the current context of reuse. Often this depends on the availability of good sets of archived material about the original study and an understanding of the prevailing historical conditions of the time, as well as on a dialogical process through which temporal dimensions and the dynamics of research relationships are seen.

The study we draw from is one of the few carried out in Brazilian homes and concerned with the exploration of the domestic. We did not fully explore the wealth of material generated in fieldwork, and the study can still illuminate many aspects relevant to current debates. With our reuse, we came to occupy a privileged position of having carried out the original investigation: not only did we have access to the research material but we also had memories of that joint research process and our own dialogue to draw from, strengthening our ability to check on the accuracy and validity of the arguments.

Our study shows that, in terms of levels of wealth, color of skin, and employment in domestic labor, there is a striking picture of inequality and subordination in the home. As the income level increases, skin color grows whiter and the domestic help is paid more. Table 1 indicates that the place of individuals in society and their access to the labor of others appear firmly based on income, which we take here as a measure of social class. All the paid domestic help are females.

The majority of women (twenty-one) in these thirty households had employment outside of the home. Seven women had no earnings, and two

6. In this study, the proportion of families in each level of income is not statistically representative. There is a deliberately greater intake of higher incomes because of a concern with the effects of paid domestic service on the gender division of labor and inequalities in the home. For Brazil as a whole, in the mid-1990s, more than 50 percent of the population earned less than minimum wages (only one of the families studied had this low income), and just 5 percent earned more than ten minimum wages (twenty-four of the families in this study earned more than ten minimum wage equivalents). The region investigated is one of the most affluent in Brazil, with a population that has much higher relative incomes than for the country as a whole. Thus, it is to be expected that a statistical representation of these variables would show a staggering disparity of what is here qualitatively represented.
earned only very small amounts, one from child minding and another from architectural design. All of them were mothers of small children, and five of them were lone mothers. They mostly had busy daily schedules. Women contributed half or more of the household income in more than one-third of the families. There were only four women who were sole household earners (two of these were lone mothers), and these were all in the low-income group. Three of the women in the low-income group worked as maids in wealthier households. These were the only three maids we observed in their own home contexts. Women’s income was absolutely significant for the economy of their households in the low-income group, but it was also important for the family budget in the middle-high and upper-low-income households. Despite this, the woman’s income appeared not to change her status in the home. This corroborates Cynthia Sarti’s (1996) study of poor families in São Paulo; she argues that the distribution of authority in the family was based on the different, and traditional, roles of men and women.

In the families we studied, it was often the woman’s income that allowed the positioning of the household in a higher income category. However, it was only in the middle-income (both low and high) households that there were women who did not earn any income. This was particularly significant in the middle-low-income group, where a more conservative household strategy of having a sole earner accounted for lower wealth. Although women earned fairly well in the upper-high-income group, their income did not make a great difference to the wealth of their homes. Men earned sufficiently high incomes by themselves in this group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of income</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Middle-low</th>
<th>Middle-high</th>
<th>Upper-low</th>
<th>Upper-high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of families and ethnicity</td>
<td>3 B</td>
<td>1B</td>
<td>1 B/P</td>
<td>1 B</td>
<td>4 W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock of paid domestic help</td>
<td>2 W</td>
<td>5 W</td>
<td>4 W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of nonwhites to whites</td>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>0/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: LI = living in, B = black, P = pardo, and W = white.
Overall, the significant participation of women in the labor market did not reflect an equally important contribution to the financial resources of the household: women’s earnings were most important when hardship was greatest, but it made no significant impact on overall wealth levels within the best-off group.

The everyday routines of the women in the wealthier households (upper-low and upper-high-income levels) that employ domestic labor appeared fairly disengaged from their children’s routines (see figures 1 and 2 herein). Well-off mothers’ child-care activities involved taking children to school and picking them up, feeding them in the evening, and putting them to bed. Nannies or maids predominantly got children out of bed and fed them breakfast and lunch. In one of the homes, the maid had to spoon-feed a pampered four-year-old, but the mother did not count this among the household caring activities. It did not concern her time or effort; she ordered the maid to do it. Children in upper-low- and upper-high-income households ordered maids to do things for them as well and expected their whims to be fully attended to—or they would tell off the maid. For a group of privileged children, a culture of expectation of being serviced by a lower-class person (usually a woman) has been part of their growing up, echoing the comments of Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) to which we referred earlier.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS AMONG WOMEN

Having a maid to carry out housework chores is a ubiquitous and unquestioned practice in most middle- and upper-class Brazilian homes. Even among academics, leftists, and feminists, there is little interrogation of the widespread phenomenon of paid domestic service and of the home as a place where inequalities of class, race, and gender are reproduced. We found a revealing example of this attitude in one of our interviewees, Nicolas, a university tutor and graduate student in history and a member of the Communist Party. Nicolas stated that, though he was aware that maids are frequently abused and exploited, he was very comfortable having a maid and in fact wished he could afford one. Comparing the availability of cheap labor in his home state in northeastern Brazil with the higher level of employment of domestic workers in the southeastern state of São Paulo, he mentioned that middle-class families “don’t live without a maid” and that when maids quit, they leave a “void” because everyone gets used to their doing all the work.

Little concern among feminists with the rising employment of paid domestic service is also prevalent in Europe and North America, as Helma Lutz (2007) argues in the introduction to the special issue on domestic work of European Journal of Women’s Studies. Commenting on the rise of
paid domestic work in European homes, she contends that the 1970s feminists’ demand for a “salary for domestic work” has returned with a critical twist, because the desire to transform the gender codes of society has lost its meaning and finds in paid domestic work its greatest expression of accommodation (Lutz 2007, 188).

Disputes that take place in the home are usually greater among women—patroa and female domestic worker. Men, whether husbands or sons, are frequently exempted from involvement with housework, as our data in the following section shows, and consequently have little involvement with maids. The patroa frequently acts as a mediator between her family’s needs, standards, and desires and the maid’s ability to deliver the service. Among the men interviewed, those who have maids rarely deal with them because their wives are the ones in charge of giving the maids orders and instructions about what needs to be done in the home. If they are unhappy with the maid’s work, they prefer to discuss this with their wives, who then pass it on to the maid, re instructing her on how to do the work to the satisfaction of the patrão. Lineu, the owner of a car-repair shop, married to a principal, father of a one-year-old girl, explained why he did not deal with the maid: “It’s awkward to give the maid a hard time. The relationship is a bit personal.” Curiously, this same man complained that his maid was not “sufficiently emotionally involved” with his daughter. His statement reveals the notion that emotions are women’s business and that the social distance from the maid heightens the patrão’s authority, because it positions men in the supposedly superior realm of rationality and above the nitty-gritty material and emotional aspects of everyday domestic life.

Besides mediating between the family’s needs and the maid’s service, the patroa is often a mediator of emotions. In this case, she mediates not between two individuals and their different, often conflicting interests, but rather in the sense of finding the right balance between being a good patroa while remaining a figure of authority. She must know which tone of voice is appropriate to speak with the maid, and she is the one in charge of adapting the maid not only to the rules of how she should carry out housework but also, and above all, to the sensitive norms pertaining to the very presence of the maid in the household. The patroa is the one who establishes and polices the boundaries of the maid’s presence in the household, managing it as one takes care of what is considered out of place. Coming from a very different class background to that of the family she works for, the maid is considered in constant need of management. The constant supervision of the maid takes place even when she has worked for the family for a long period of time. Nina, a medical doctor, explained that, though her maid has worked for the family for sixteen years, she still needs to be supervised when it comes to the hygiene of the house and the hygiene of food. The patroa argued that the reason her maid needs supervision is because both the maid and herself come from “distinct worlds.”
In her view, the maid’s lack of education and hygiene comes “from birth” (vem de berço). Although in these respects the maid’s standards are undesirable, this seems to be compensated by the affection she offers to the children: “but it is worth having her because she is affectionate with the children.”

Yet if the patroa acts as a mediator between her family and the maid, the degree to which this intermediary role takes place depends greatly on whether the patroa has outside employment. There is a double take with maids: either the patroa supervises and controls them on an ongoing basis (husbands and children usually expect this, and it is a practice common among patroas who are housewives), or they are expected to almost totally substitute for the work of the housewife, which is more commonly an expectation of patroas who work outside the home. In this, patroas expect that maids assume responsibility for the functioning of the household. *Initiative* is here the magic word. Patroas made a clear connection between their satisfaction with the maid’s performance and their resourcefulness. Eunice, a part-time academic researcher, for instance, complained that her maid does not ever take the initiative to clean the refrigerator and always waits to be told to do it. Eunice would like her maid to “manage the house much more: inform me when I need to buy groceries, buy cooking gas, etc.” Conversely, Cida, a divorced mother of two girls working half-time as a dressmaker, is quite happy with her maid Judite because she not only does all the household work but also supervises the overall workings of the home. In Cida’s judgment, “Judite is special because she is very obliging, very good with children—she pampers them—and she has initiative. . . . I leave the house in her hands without having to worry about anything. I have total trust in her and she is very responsible.” The patroa described their intimacy as quite close, because the maid had lived in the house for more than four years. In the patroa’s definition as someone who truly cares about the patroa and her daughters, Judite rarely takes her weekends off, and because she does not go out, she ends up doing the household work on the weekends as well.

Vera, an academic with three children, living with a professional-executive partner, is another example of a patroa who is happy because the maid “supervises everything and is the manager of the house.” The maid knows how to separate the clothes before and after doing the laundry, she tells Vera when the groceries are almost gone, and she even prepares a list of what needs to be bought in the supermarket. Besides managing the whole household, the maid also supervises the work of the cleaner employed to help her with basic chores. At the opposite side of the spectrum is the statement of Nice, married to a construction worker and the mother of three children, who works as a maid for a middle-class family and substitutes for the housewife, a professor, in the management of the house: “It is very tiring to work as a maid. I arrive at around 8 a.m. but I don’t
have an exact time to leave.” Because her patroa is almost never around, Nice is responsible for the organization of the house where she works, and then she has to face the other half of her double shift when she arrives home in the evening and has to tend to her family’s needs. In the house of the patrões, Nice’s routine includes washing delicate clothes by hand; laundering other clothes in the washing machine; hanging the clothes to dry; cleaning bathrooms; sweeping floors; preparing and serving lunch for the patrão, who is retired but does none of the housework; cleaning the kitchen; and cleaning doors, windows, and the backyard.

In the edited volume *Global Woman* (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002), there are several descriptions of middle-class women transferring their gendered responsibilities as mothers and wives to other women. Even daughters-in-law do this, as in the case of Taiwanese women hiring Filipina maids to replace them in the caretaking of elderly parents-in-law (Lan 2002). The Filipina maids are poor and more often than not not racially marked and stigmatized. A similar but rather inverted process happens in Turkey, where white immigrants from postsocialist countries are being “hired as a caregiver but demanded as a housewife” (Akalin 2007, 220). This is most marked in the case of live-in domestics, because the boundaries between home and workplace, and between the caregiver’s private life and that of her employer, are blurred. Consequently, intimacy and initiative go hand in hand because “one cannot take time off from being one of the family” (Constable 1997, 104, qtd. in Akalin 2007, 220). These cases resonate with our findings in Brazil, although the proportion of live-in domestics is decreasing.

**DOMESTIC RELATIONS BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

The delegation of the domestic to the realm of women’s culture is the prevailing position among our interviewees. This is also pervasive in analyses of domestic relations, which tended to focus on relationships among women, as we described previously. Yet if the network connecting patroas and maids basically comprises women, where are men to be found?

We noted earlier that Brazilian women spend three times as much time on unpaid labor than do their male partners in cooking and cleaning, and that women almost exclusively work in paid domestic labor. We saw that twenty-one of thirty women we interviewed had employment outside the home, and that in more than one-third of the households women contributed half or more of the household income. We also found that it was in homes where women did not take outside employment that, in relative terms, household wealth was lowest and more traditional gender relations prevailed. Overall, we identify a significantly sharp division in gender roles between the women and men in our study. The men are generally absent from the domestic, and maids act as a buffer in potential
gender conflicts over housework. The absence of men in domestic life co-exists with a significant presence of women in the labor market, which has been increasing since the 1970s.

This growth in female employment is linked to economic necessities and employment demands but also to demographic and cultural changes, such as a reduced fertility rate and increased education of women. In 1995, 40 percent of the Brazilian workforce was female. In 2001, this rate was 45 percent in the São Paulo metropolitan region (Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados, 2002). In 2005, 53 percent of women were in the economically active population (Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, in Bruschini 2007). The increase has been greater in urban areas and in the most developed regions. Married, cohabiting, and separated (including divorced) women have played a relatively bigger part in the employment rise than have single women. The proportion of married women working was 33 percent in 1985, and that increased to 58 percent in 2005 (PNAD 1985, 2005).

These trends have some parallels with those in more developed countries. For instance, in Britain and the United States, the growth of female employment, particularly that of married women, has also been sharp since the 1970s. In a longer historical trend, consumption of technologies for the home grew enormously in the 1930s, when domestic servants were fast disappearing (Cowan 1983; Glucksmann 1990; Silva 2002). But the Brazilian trend of female employment has had effects on domestic life that are distinct from those in more developed countries, particularly regarding relations between women and men. How have women’s jobs outside the home affected the patterns of domestic living? What has happened in homes when women have increasingly taken on outside employment?

Asked about why domestic service exists, a maid interviewed by Kofes (1994, 190) in the late 1970s replied that for the maids it exists because they—the women who, like her, have no qualification—need to earn a wage. And for the patroas it exists because they can afford it. And then she enumerated the lifestyle of her patroa: “She goes to the gym, plays the guitar, . . . she sees her friends. . . . If she did housework she wouldn’t be able to go out. She would either go out leaving the housework undone or she would not do the other things.” This, quite properly, summarizes the dilemma of housework. Yet in this discourse, domestic work is an issue between women. The reply of the maid in the late 1970s still resonates with patterns nowadays, even if a paid job has replaced a great share of the leisure time the patroa appears to be involved in.

In a study done in the late 1980s with twenty-five middle- and lower-middle-class families in São Paulo, Bruschini (1990) found that men engaged with maintenance or repairs sometimes posed as helpers in their division of domestic labor. In a more recent cross-class study in Rio de Janeiro, Sorj (2007) showed that men preferred interactive activities like
child care, including helping with homework; shopping; and more sophisticated cooking, usually for friends. These male preferences are not dissimilar to those in more developed countries such as the United Kingdom, although the time men are involved in housework tends to be higher, relative to the participation of the women, than in Brazil (Gershuny 2000; Soares and Sabóia 2007).

Studying the use of time and gender inequalities in Brazil, Dedeca (2007) notes a strong discrepancy in the much greater working hours and lower pay of women compared to the hours and pay of men. Unfortunately, however, in relation to the domestic, the comparison of statistical data he presents refers only to paid labor. The more recent study by Soares and Sabóia (2007) includes unpaid labor but uses too-broad categories and acknowledges its lack of detail to account for the gender division of labor in households. It emphasizes, however, that the increased participation of women in the labor market has not reduced their engagement with housework (see also Sorj 2008). Our study offers a singular attempt to grasp the gender differences in time used in the home. Figures 1 and 2 show the visual distribution of time use, as our interviewees narrated. We generally asked people to tell us about how a normal weekday would go from the time they woke up until they went to bed. We asked them to think of a “very common day,” “an average day” when just ordinary affairs took place. Of course, many reacted by saying: “There is no normal day.” The graphic representations show a much busier pattern for women where daily routines are more fragmented and diverse. It is possible for the reader to compare husbands and wives, or partners, in one household, as the graphs follow one same-number sequence for women (W) and men (M) maintaining the household code number.

In relation to housework and child care, separately or combined, the picture of gendered time for the thirty women and twenty-five men we studied shows the following: ten women did not do any housework, but ten other women did considerable amounts of housework (three of these were maids); eight women did not do any child care; only three men did any housework; and thirteen men did not do any child care. Given that all homes had children and in all homes some housework was demanded for the maintenance of bodies (feeding, cleaning, and so on), the freedom from these engagements did not appear to move from the women to men within couples, or vice versa, but to go elsewhere. It went to maids, all of them women.

Virginia (household 11), who is in a low-income household, has three children, and works part-time as a hospital attendant, tells of her routine:

7. Elizabeth Silva acknowledges the assistance of Sophie Tayson in the organization of the data to produce these figures and of John Hunt for his expert graphic computer skills to represent the data. The Open University provided resources for their assistance.
6:00 a.m. she wakes up; 6:30 a.m. she takes the bus; 7:10 a.m. she gets a second bus and arrives at work at 7:30 a.m., she leaves her job at 2 p.m. and gets back home at 4 p.m.. She then works from home doing paid laundry work for a couple of hours, cooks, eats, watches about three hours of television, and goes to bed by 10 p.m. Her husband, Mateus, who works as a truck driver, also gets up at 6 a.m. and leaves for work by 6:30 a.m. He gets to work at 8 a.m. and spends the day driving; he eats on the go. He is back home by 9 p.m., watches a bit of television, has something to eat, and goes to bed by 10 p.m. Their children—thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen years old—look after themselves. They do not figure in the routine narratives of either parent.

Nina (household 3), a medical doctor, in one of the highest-income households in the sample, has two children, aged three and six. She gets up at 7 a.m., spends an hour in physical exercise and shower plus a quick breakfast, and leaves for work by 8 a.m., returning home by midday for lunch with her children and to take them to school, from where she returns to work until 6 p.m., then picking up her children from school on the way back home. She supervises homework and play for about an hour and a half; heats up the dinner, which the maid left prepared; clears up after dinner, gets the children into bed by just after 9 p.m. and for about two and a half hours she watches television, talks to friends on the phone, talks to her partner, or does something else of a personal kind. Her husband, Fernando, also a medical doctor, gets up earlier by about one hour and has a similar work routine, except that no child care time is included. He works longer hours uninterrupted, and his evening free time is exclusively personal time. Nina carries out all shopping, managing the family, socializing, and after-school extra activities. The maid looks after the children in the morning. Brazilian school hours are normally in two periods, either morning, from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., or afternoon, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Luiza (household 10), a lone mother of two girls aged four and six, works as a system analyst in São Paulo and commutes daily. Her live-in maid, the fourth he has had since her first child was born, takes care of everything that has to do with the routine of the home and the children. Luiza gets up at 6:15 a.m. and catches the bus by 7 a.m., arriving at work by 8:30 a.m. She calls this commute time her “happy time,” when she can sleep, read, or chat with colleagues. She doesn’t go to lunch everyday. She catches the bus back by 6 p.m. and is at home by 8 p.m., when she eats dinner, sees the children, puts them into bed with the maid’s help, and then watches television until 11 p.m., when she goes to sleep. Housework does not figure into her daily life either on weekdays or on weekends. She claims not to have any “talent for domestic work.” “I delegate it all. I have no time. I trust she’ll look after the children. I do my bit, the rest I trust in God’s hands.” And she adds: “I cannot live without a maid. When one leaves I hire another.”
All Female

Figure 1
All Male outside home (not 8M)

Figure 2
In two of the homes in which only a cleaner is employed, the women said they wanted to employ a maid but had not done so for lack of money. Their partners, however, said to prefer not to have maids. In the words of Silvio (household 27), a salesman, with three children, married to Cristina, a housewife: “it would take away our privacy.” Yet Silvio does not seem prepared to trade his privacy for greater involvement in housework, and he thinks the solution is to hire a second cleaner on a part-time basis to help the first one. He makes no mention that his wife has time on her hands for housework. The abundant availability of the labor of maids makes it always the first solution to be called on for domestic tasks. The silence about gender conflicts in domestic division of labor indeed signifies that it is generally absent from everyday practices. If this is manifestly true in better-off homes, in the houses of the poor there appears to be little dispute over who ought to be in charge of the laundry, cooking, cleaning, child care, and so on. As Sarti (1996, 75–82) remarks, domestic labor is a defining feature of feminine identity among the poor and is cultivated by women and expected by men. For instance, as remarks Severina (household 5), a maid in our study, in her own home, during one full month when she was ill, her husband washed clothes only once, when it was desperately needed. Although she remarks that she has two houses to look after and clearly resents the amount of work she does, she sees her own domestic tasks as her obligation.

CONCLUSIONS

Reminiscing about the feminist debates in the 1970s in the United States, Ehrenreich (2002, 87) writes, “The radical new idea was that housework was not only a relationship between a woman and a dusty bunny or an unmade bed: it also defined a relationship between human beings, typically husbands and wives.” Of course, a lot of feminist ideas have been debated in Brazil, and many have been productive in bettering women’s social stand. Changes in the domestic in Brazil have also occurred as a result of the struggle of unions of domestic workers and nonprofit organizations dedicated to defending their rights, among which are guaranteed access to payment of late wages and retirement pensions. Brazil has also taken several actions to combat informality and increase the professionalization of maids’ relations to employers. A law approved in March 2006 (Medida Provisória No. 284, March 6, 2006) allows patrões to deduct from their income-tax expenditures related to contributions made toward a maid’s social security. Maids have also become entitled to a monthly payment of at least one minimum wage, paid vacations (30 days per year), sick leave, 120 days of maternity leave, and at least 1 day off per week (Law No. 11.324 (July 19, 2006).
DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN BRAZIL

Yet although domestic relations have been affected over the past decades, no significant change has affected two main tenets of Brazilian domestic life: men's disengagement from housework and the transfer of housework to paid domestic labor. The growth in women's paid jobs has not changed the patterns of domestic living in any significant way, and homes are still run by women in paid and unpaid arrangements. In general, gender relations in well-off homes are not perceived as requiring change. The tensions regarding housework are deflected onto lower-class women, normally women from racially subordinated groups.

A feminist approach informed both the original ethnographic research and our reanalysis of the data. The article pays especial attention to the subtleties of daily domestic life. We examine the intricate interweaving of power relations between different individuals and their social positions, and we scrutinize the ongoing production of inequalities within the domestic in Brazil. We look at the home as a site in which relations of gender, class, and race are constantly produced in tandem with the larger social world. We also emphasize that there is a complex and constant struggle among the members of a household over material and emotional aspects.

The article contributes to the identification of a connection between paid domestic labor and the exercising of whiteness and blackness. It also shows the more privileged position of men in the domestic, and it identifies some of the peculiarities of Brazilian domestic life. Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 are crucial tools of analysis, for they allow the visualization of important aspects of domestic life, such as the divisions of race and class in Brazilian households, the difference in the use of time between men and women, and the extent of the transference of labor to maids increasing according to a social class gradient.

The article demonstrates how the widespread use of paid domestic labor strengthens the association between whiteness and power and the naturalization of black women's subservient position. It also identifies the existence of different degrees of supervision of patroas toward maids, which varies between control and delegation according to whether the patroa is respectively a housewife or someone who works outside the home. The absence of men from domestic life shapes relations between women and men, and the buffering role of maids in the household directly influences relations between couples.

Our article contributes to identify some peculiarities about Brazilian domestic life vis-à-vis the domestic in other countries. Among Brazil's specificities are those pertaining to paid domestic labor, a context in which maids are mostly native-born women and their labor is cheap, abundant, and devalued—to the point of its use to offset an underuse of domestic technologies in middle- and upper-class households. We recognize that many such features also characterize other Latin American countries, and
we therefore suggest that future studies of the domestic in Brazil can benefit from a comparative approach with those countries.

We found considerable stability in the patterns of social divisions of gender, race, and class. Despite Brazil’s significant social changes over the past few decades—reduced fertility rate, increased female employment, increased education of women, and greater availability of household technology—old patterns of gender, race, and class inequalities still prevail. In homes in which women have increasingly taken on outside employment, the household chores are much more frequently passed on to the maid. Increased female labor market participation has not become a direct factor of transformation of family arrangements. Most men and adolescents remain exempt from engaging with reproductive work. Likewise, working women who can afford to pay a maid to substitute for her labor in the home escape housework burden to a great extent.

REFERENCES

Akalin, Ayse  

Anderson, Bridget  

Blay, Eva  

Bishop, Libby.  

Brites, Jurema  


Bruschini, Cristina.  


Bruschini, Cristina, and Maria Rosa Lombardi  

Castro, Mary Garcia  

Chaney, Elsa M., and Mary Garcia Castro, eds.  
DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN BRAZIL

Chauí, Marilena

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz

DaMatta, Roberto

Dedeca, Claudio

Ehrenreich, Barbara

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds.

Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados

Gershuny, Jonathan

Glucksmann, Ruth

Goldstein, Donna

Graham, Sandra Lauderdale

Hewitt, Roger

Hochschild, Arlie


International Labour Organization

Karner, Tracy

Kofes, Suely

Knudsen, Knud, and Kari Waerness

Lan, Pen-Chia

Lovel, Peggy A.

Lutz, Helma

Madeira, Felicia
1985 O espaço do trabalho doméstico no capitalismo. Article presented at seminar of the doctorate in social sciences, Campinas, Unicamp.

Mauthner, N. S., O. Parry, and K. Backett-Milburn
1998 “The Data Are Out There, or Are They? Implications for Archiving and Revisiting Qualitative Data.” Sociology 32: 733–745.

McCallum, Cecilia

Pena, Maria Valeria

Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios

Pinho, Patricia de Santana

Radcliffe, Sarah A.

Rodrigues, Jessita M.

Saffioti, Heleieth

Sarti, Cynthia

Schwartz, Roberto

Silva, Elizabeth B.


DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN BRAZIL

forthcoming “Maids, Machines and Morality in Brazilian Homes.” Feminist Review 98 (July).

Silveira, Maria Lucia, and Neuza Tito, orgs.

Soares, Cristina, and Ana Lucia Sabóia

Sorj, Bila


Sovik, Liv

Williams, Fiona, and Anna Gavanas