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**(Self) Representations of Domestic Workers:
Race and Gender Politics in Brazil**

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**(Self) Representations of Domestic Workers:
Race and Gender Politics in Brazil**

by

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Dedication

For my mother and role-model, Toni Perrine. Her intelligence, strength, and impeccable work ethic inspire me every day to attempt to live up to the example of her accomplishments. It's proving difficult! I love you, Mom.

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Abstract

(Self) Representations of Domestic Workers: Race and Gender Politics in Brazil

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On April 16, 2012, the much awaited primetime *telenovela* appropriately titled *Cheias de Charme* premiered on Rede Globo, the largest Brazilian television network, and viewers across the nation were introduced to *as três Marias*, the three charming protagonists who, in a rare occurrence on the network, are domestic workers. It is no surprise that domestic workers should be of interest to Brazilian television viewers; paid domestic work is an enormous part of daily life in Brazil and domestic workers make up nearly eight percent of the work force. This project builds on previous explorations of the unique relationships between domestic employers and employees in Brazil, as well as examinations of the traditional ways in which domestic workers have been imagined to draw a clearer image of the changing role of paid domestic work in Brazilian society. Part ethnographic study and part media analysis, this study is mainly preoccupied with exploring various representations of domestic workers. These representations speak to the tensions and contradictions surrounding the social dynamics of the intimate relationships

between domestic workers and their employers, as well as the role of domestic work in Brazilian society, haunted by the legacy of nearly four-hundred years of slavery.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Domestic Work in Brazil.....	1
Shaping the Analysis: Ethnography, Media Studies and Feminism.....	2
A Picture of Brazilian Domestic Work.....	9
Chapter Two: Domestic Workers and Symbolic Violence.....	17
Domestic Work in Bahia.....	18
Symbolic Violence.....	19
Black and Blackened Post-Slavery Subjects.....	24
Part of the Family.....	29
Prevailing Discourses.....	32
Chapter Three: Brazil’s Charming Maids on <i>Cheias de Charme</i>	34
Domestic Entertainment.....	35
The Most Charming Maids in Brazil... Are Not Really Maids.....	39
“Quem tem dom consegue sim”: Brazilian Cinderellas.....	48
Happily Ever After.....	51
Chapter Four: Conclusions.....	53
Bibliography.....	56

Chapter One: Domestic Work in Brazil

On April 16, 2012, the much awaited primetime *telenovela* appropriately titled *Cheias de Charme*¹ premiered on Rede Globo, the largest Brazilian television network, and viewers across the nation were introduced to *as três Marias*, the three charming protagonists who, in a rare occurrence on the network, are domestic workers.² It is no surprise that domestic workers should be of interest to Brazilian television viewers; paid domestic work is an enormous part of daily life in Brazil and domestic workers make up nearly eight percent of the work force.³ This project builds on previous explorations of the unique relationships between domestic employers and employees in Brazil, as well as examinations of the traditional ways in which domestic workers have been imagined to draw a clearer image of the changing role of paid domestic work in Brazilian society. I do this through two main approaches: first, I use the stories of domestic workers to examine the symbolic violence perpetuated against Afro-descendant women employed as domestic workers, and the strategies they use to negotiate the fraught landscape of race, class, and gender tensions in the middle-class domestic space; and second, I invoke *Cheias de Charme* as a case study for examining the ways domestic workers are currently represented on mainstream Brazilian television.

¹ Literally, “full of charm,” meaning that the three women are charming, as well as charmed, as in lucky.

² Few other *novelas* have had domestic worker protagonists although *A Moça Que Veio de Longe* (1964), *SuperManoela* (1974), and *Sem Lenço, Sem Documento* (1977) are among the most notable. The serial *A Diarista*'s (2003-2007) title role is also a domestic worker and other recent *novelas* *Avenida Brasil* (2012) and *Gabriela* (2012) have prominent domestic worker characters.

³ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), "Algumas das principais características dos Trabalhadores Domésticos vis a vis a População Ocupada." 2010.
http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/indicadores/trabalhoerendimento/pme_nova/princ_carac_trab_dom.pdf

Part ethnographic study and part media analysis, this study is mainly preoccupied with exploring various representations of domestic workers. I interrogate how workers represent themselves individually to me during our recorded interviews, and how this is different or similar to the ways they present themselves to their employers or the public. I further examine how other domestic workers represent themselves collectively as members of a union. All of these self-representations can be contrasted to how workers are perceived in the mind of their employers, and how they are portrayed on one television program. These representations speak to the tensions and contradictions surrounding the social dynamics of the intimate relationships between domestic workers and their employers, as well as the role of domestic work in Brazilian society, haunted by the legacy of nearly four-hundred years of slavery.

SHAPING THE ANALYSIS: ETHNOGRAPHY, MEDIA STUDIES AND FEMINISM

When I was sixteen years old, I spent five months in Ribeirão Preto in the state of São Paulo where my mother was spending her sabbatical conducting research. I attended a Catholic high school with middle to upper-class Brazilian youth and did my best to fit in. This initial immersion experience left me completely enamored of the outgoing spirit of the people that I met, but also with some early impressions of the contradictions of life in Brazil. At the insistence of my mother's friends who believed, not only that it was inappropriate for a foreign researcher to do menial house work, but also that it was immoral for her to deprive somebody of gainful employment, a woman would come to thoroughly clean our house once a week. She was the only low-income person with

whom I had any regular interaction and as my first encounter with a domestic worker, her presence made me extremely uncomfortable. During the same period, I also had my first experiences with true affluence and I began to be more curious (and disturbed) about the implications of being a privileged member of a stratified society.

I returned to Brazil for a year when I was twenty years old, this time to Salvador in the northeastern state of Bahia. Having become a slightly more socially aware and observant person, I began to confront the class tensions that could be found in everyday life in Salvador. I developed a close friendship with the domestic worker who cooked and cleaned for my first host-family. Instead of hiding from the discomfort and guilt of paying someone to clean my underwear, I got to know her and her family. By spending more time in the lower-income neighborhoods of Salvador and reading about the city's history, I began to better understand the social processes at work.

Upon returning to the United States, I began to shape the research project that became my undergraduate thesis. This work analyzed what middle-class youth wrote on online forums on the social networking website, Orkut, about the women (mostly Afro-descendant) who worked in their homes. I found that by belittling or sexualizing these women, web contributors emphasized their own privileged positions by rehearsing prevalent social discourses tied to attitudes about race, class and gender. This project was an important part of my intellectual development, but it did not move far beyond merely identifying social inequalities and the ways they manifest themselves. In the hopes of deepening my analysis, I returned to Salvador as a twenty-four-year-old graduate student to collect the data that I use in this current project.

During the nine weeks I spent in Bahia, I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with thirteen women: three who employed domestic workers, five who were employed as domestic workers, one who used to be employed as a domestic worker and four who were active in working with the Union of Domestic Workers to obtain better working conditions for both men and women working in private homes.⁴ All of the interviews were recorded on digital video except for one, which was only audio-recorded. While using video certainly prevented the interviewees from divulging personal information or anything that they would not want their employer or employee to hear, it was never my desire to obtain full disclosure, but rather to get an idea of the discourses about domestic work, race, class, and gender that were present (or absent) in their conversations with me, an irreconcilable outsider. I was very aware of the power relationships present between me, the North American researcher, and my interviewees, especially the low-income women with limited formal education.

Indeed, my concern that they would feel coerced into participating or that the sharing of their stories and opinions would only serve to advance my academic career with absolutely no benefit to them nearly paralyzed the whole project. I felt it was impossible to overcome the perils of this researcher/researched relationship, even though, or especially since, I had known many of the participants before I formally initiated my study. I shared my worries with the women who agreed to speak with me and allow themselves to be recorded and some, especially those active in the Domestic Workers'

⁴ Approximately 5.5% of domestic workers in Brazil are men (IBGE, 5) and while the Union attempts to include and represent them, very few men are members of the Union, which is seen as primarily a women's group.

Union, agreed that this could be a serious problem, but told me that they believed my project would be useful to them as long as I promised to come back and share the end product with them. Others brushed aside my concerns and some were emphatic about the importance that foreigners like me engage in this line of research, insisting that it will likely be heeded more if it comes from a North American scholar rather than a Brazilian one.

As a whole, I did my utmost to make sure my interviewees were not too far outside of their comfort zones and attempted to allow them to take the interviews in their own direction, in the spirit of in-depth feminist interview practices which focus on the lived experiences of individuals.⁵ Such practices attempt to reduce the hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee to the extent possible through participatory models⁶ and question techniques that encourage the interviewees to continue their own agendas, rather than the interviewer introducing new agendas.⁷ These strategies go a small way towards mitigating the problematic aspects of conducting research as an outsider, but I am keenly aware of the limitations of such actions. In part, these limitations are linked to the brevity of the Master's program. My methods would have been improved if I had been able to stay in Salvador for more than a couple of months and to develop more profound relationships with the women who participated in the project. I do think that the product of my analysis is significant and could be helpful, especially for the Union, so I will send

⁵ Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing," in: *Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences*, ed. Joyce McCarl Nielsen, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 118.

⁶ Ibid, 128.

⁷ Ibid, 126-7.

the edited video footage to each of the Union leaders in the hopes that they will make some use of it.

My other activity while in Brazil during this period was to watch the nightly antics of the domestic workers on the seven o'clock *novela*. Although I was only in the country for two out of the six months of the running time of *Cheias de Charme*, all of the episodes were promptly made available online, so I was able to accompany the duration of the show from the United States. The novela also provided a subject for discussion with my interviewees, most of whom watched the show regularly and all of whom were at least familiar with the characters and concept, even if they were not regular viewers. Their responses to the representations of domestic work on the novela and their identification, or not, with the characters form an important part of my analysis of the show.

My project will contribute to the growing literature on the topic of paid domestic work in Brazil. Multiple authors have addressed the origin of domestic service in Brazil when treating the history of slavery (Lauderdale Graham 1988; Giacomini 1988). Other scholars have traced the progress of activism surrounding rights for domestic workers (Bernardino-Costa 2008). There have been many studies about the relationships between *patroas* (employers) and *empregadas* (employees), mostly within the fields of anthropology (Brites 2004; Kofes 1982; 2001), sociology (Harris 2007) and psychology (Azerêdo 1989; Preuss 1997) as well as important ethnographies that reveal the highly hierarchical nature of Brazilian social and particularly, race relations (Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001). These authors have explored the tensions that have traditionally arisen in

the patroa/empregada relationship due to the presence of a working class woman in the middle-class domestic space. For example, they address the way both employers and employees feel about separation of food or personal items, and the use of a uniform, which either disavow the existing hierarchies or strongly reinforce them. My interviews explore some of the same themes and provide further ethnographic evidence of how such hierarchies are produced in the home, which I will describe in the following chapters. The addition of conversations about the novela exposes more clearly the ways in which domestic employers and employees view domestic work and whether these views align with the dominant narratives portrayed on the novela.

There has also been extensive research on the history of television in Brazil (Hamburger 2005), the presence of Afro-descendant characters on television (Araújo 2000), how women workers have been portrayed in novelas (Afonso 2005), and representations of domestic workers in literature (Roncador 2008). Hamburger traces the development of different types of television programming on the various networks and provides important context for the importance of novelas on Brazilian television.⁸ Araújo focuses on the troubled trajectory of Afro-descendant actors. He shows how Afro-descendant actors have been systematically excluded from Brazilian television and leading roles, and limited to marginalized roles such as doormen and maids.⁹ Afonso examines representations of women and work on novelas from 1999-2001, including a section on domestic workers. She pays close attention to the ways in which women

⁸ Esther Hamburger, *O Brasil Antenado: A Sociedade da Novela*, (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2005).

⁹ Joel Zito Araújo, *A Negação do Brasil: O Negro na Telenovela Brasileira*, (São Paulo: Editora SENAC, 2000).

viewers might be influenced by these representations, though she does not examine domestic workers as viewers.¹⁰ Roncador traces representations of domestic workers in Brazilian literature from the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century, pointing to recurring themes and identifying important influences from social theories of the time.¹¹ These works help contextualize my analysis of a current novela which recreates some similar images and stereotypes that are described by these authors, but also introduces innovative representations of domestic workers which I will problematize in my analysis.

There are significant publications from feminist scholars about the unique challenges facing Afro-descendant women (Caldwell 2007; Soares 2000) and specifically domestic workers (Melo 1995; Mori et al 2011). My project will offer a new perspective through the combined approaches of ethnographic study, which allowed me to attain a deep understanding of the individual experiences of domestic workers and their employers, and media analysis, which opened a space for an interpretation of a popular cultural object (*Cheias de Charme*) that reveals dominant narratives about domestic work and the women who perform it. In other words, the two approaches simultaneously accomplish the understanding of lived experiences, dominant televised images, and individual responses to those images.

This project covers a large range of material organized into three chapters, and while each chapter draws on different source material, they all seek to illustrate various

¹⁰ Lúcia Helena Rincón Afonso, *Imagens de Mulher e Trabalho na Telenovela Brasileira (1999-2001): A Força da Educação Informal e a Formação de Professoras/as*, (São Paulo: Editora da UCG, 2005).

¹¹ Sônia Roncador, *A Doméstica Imaginária: Literatura, Testemunhos e a Invenção da Empregada Doméstica no Brasil (1889-1999)*, (Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2008).

prevailing attitudes about the largely Afro-descendant low-income women employed as domestic workers and the work that they do. The remaining section of Chapter One draws a picture of the history and current state of domestic work in Brazil, focusing on the struggle of the Union of Domestic Workers, their recent success, continuing challenges and hopes for the future of paid domestic work in Brazil. Chapter Two deals exclusively with the interview material I collected. I explore the ways in which the domestic workers I spoke with are subjected to symbolic violence in their daily life through the intimate relationships they have with their employers and the manner in which they confront this reality. Chapter Three focuses on *Cheias de Charme*; it provides a historical context of the presence of domestic workers on Brazilian television and analyzes the representations of the various women on the *novela*, specifically the implications of the way their race and class is represented.

A PICTURE OF BRAZILIAN DOMESTIC WORK

The majority of all middle to upper class Brazilians has at least one domestic employee working in their home who completes an array of tasks that may include general house cleaning, laundry, cooking and whatever else the employer specifies. Based on census data from 2009, a little over ninety-five percent of domestic workers in Brazil were women,¹² working as house cleaners, cooks, nannies, and frequently all of the above. Sixty-two percent of domestic workers were black (*preto*) or brown (*pardo*),

¹² IBGE, “Algumas das principais características,” 5.

the racial terms used by the Brazilian census organization.¹³ Approximately fifty-eight percent of domestic workers received less than eight years of formal education and the average monthly salary was five hundred and seventeen Brazilian reais¹⁴ which is approximately two hundred and ninety-seven US dollars and close to the federal minimum wage.¹⁵ Approximately sixty-three percent of domestic workers did not have a signed work card¹⁶ often because their employers cannot afford or do not wish to pay them according to legal mandates.¹⁷ However, many workers themselves choose not to have their cards signed as domestic workers because the work is not valued, and they do not wish to sully their permanent record. Additionally, many women have multiple employers in order to earn a higher monthly wage and this arrangement is not conducive to regularization through the work card. In other cases, if women were to report their income, they would lose federal benefits such as Bolsa Família.¹⁸ While child labor has decreased significantly in recent years, five percent of domestic workers are still under the age of eighteen,¹⁹ and this matter continues to be an issue for children as young as nine or ten, especially in rural areas. Poor families will give up their children to live with

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 8, 14.

¹⁵ In 2009, the federal minimum wage was 465 BRL. Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego (MTE), “Evolução do Salário Mínimo,” 2011. <http://portal.mte.gov.br/data/files/8A7C812D2E7318C8012F2747672B6449/EVOLEISM2011.pdf>

¹⁶ IBGE, “Algumas das principais características,” 10.

¹⁷ In Brazil, all employed individuals must have a work card issued by the government in which their employer enters information about salary and duration of employment. According to the Ministry of Jobs and Employment (MTE), it was designed in 1932 to ensure fair wages, benefits, paid vacation, and retirement. MTE, “Carteira de Trabalho e Previdência Social – CTPS: Histórico,” 2008. <http://portal.mte.gov.br/ctps/historico.htm>

¹⁸ The Bolsa Família Program (PBF) is a direct transfer program that benefits the lowest-income families in Brazil. It was instituted by the Lula administration in 2004 and currently reaches over 13 million families. Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social (MDS), “Bolsa Família,” 2010. <http://www.mds.gov.br/bolsafamilia>

¹⁹ IBGE.

wealthier families in the city under the pretense that their children will be raised with better opportunities and access to education, but in reality they just work as unpaid servants in the home.²⁰

Due to the many unique challenges that domestic workers in Brazil face in various aspects of their lives, there is a fairly strong presence of domestic workers' unions across the nation. Membership is low in comparison to the number of women employed as domestic workers and the unions struggle continuously with financial difficulties, and raising awareness among workers of their existence and the services they provide. However, they have made important legal and political advances and continue to work towards expanding domestic workers' rights.

Groups of domestic workers have been politicized for seventy years. Laudelina Campos Melo, a militant of the Black Movement and also affiliated with the Communist Party, organized the first association for domestic workers in the state of São Paulo in 1936.²¹ Building from other social movements that had been developing for many years, such as the Frente Negra Brasileira²² and labor movements, domestic workers across the country began organizing themselves into associations at first, and eventually, unions. According to Joaze Bernardino-Costa, domestic workers' struggle has been one of resistance against economic exploitation and "re-existence" to affirm their own humanity

²⁰ Natalia Mori et al, *Tensões e Experiências: Um retrato das trabalhadoras domésticas de Brasília e Salvador*, (Brasília: Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria, 2011), 38, 94-97.

²¹ Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (DIEESE), *As Mulheres no Mercado de Trabalho Brasileiro: Informações qualitativas e quantitativas*, "As Trabalhadoras Domésticas e as Mulheres Dedicadas aos Afazeres Domésticos nas cidades de São Paulo e Salvador," April 2011, www.dieese.org.br/dieese/projetos/SPM/...Salvador/relatorioFinal.pdf.

²² The Brazilian Black Front, a political party active in the 1930s and focused on desegregation and literacy for Afro-descendants.

and redefine social values surrounding domestic work.²³ An important fortifying organization for the domestic workers' movement in the 1960s was the Catholic Church via the Catholic Youth Workers (Juventude Operária Católica - JOC), which organized conferences and meetings specifically for young domestic workers.²⁴ The first National Domestic Workers Conference took place in São Paulo in 1968.²⁵ A notable example of a domestic worker activist is Lenira Carvalho who was a founding leader of the Union of Domestic Workers in Recife for many years.²⁶ Her testimony was recorded and published in 1982.²⁷

The local unions are all connected to the National Federation of Domestic Workers which is currently led by Creuza Maria Oliveira. Born in rural Bahia, Creuza was first sent to work as a domestic at the age of ten. Having been through many instances of physical and psychological abuse in her various work experiences, Creuza was motivated to join the movement. For years, she met with other domestic workers in Salvador, frequently having to hide her activities from her employers, and in 1986 this group of women formed the Association of Domestic Workers.²⁸ Domestic workers conquered several rights through the 1988 Constitution including minimum wage,

²³ Joaze Bernardino-Costa, "Sindicatos das Trabalhadoras Domésticas no Brasil: Um movimento de resistência e re-existência," *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios del Trabajo* 13, no. 20 (2008), 70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ Sonia Roncador, *A Doméstica Imaginária: Literatura, testemunhos e a invenção da empregada doméstica no Brasil (1889-1999)*, (Brasília: Editora da Universidade de Brasília, 2008), 91.

²⁷ Lenira Carvalho, *Só a Gente Que Vive é Que Sabe: Depoimento de uma doméstica*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1982).

²⁸ Sindoméstico - BA: Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Domésticos, "Histórico," 2010. http://trabalhocorporativa.blogspot.com/p/historia_20.html

retirement benefits and the right to unionize.²⁹ In 1990, Salvador's Association was able to transform itself into the Union of Domestic Workers, or Sindoméstico. Creuza has been a key figure on a local and national level for the domestic workers' movement and she has traveled to Geneva for the International Labor Conference to share her experiences. On the local level, she has become a political figure and has run for city council multiple times, attracting visibility for Sindoméstico and the struggle of domestic workers.

I was fortunate enough to meet with Creuza in Salvador several times during her most recent campaign launch in the summer of 2012. I also attended a seminar about

Black Women in the Struggle for Public Policy and Reparations put on by Sindoméstico. The leadership at Sindoméstico is very aware of the racialized nature of domestic work, especially in Bahia and so this



Figure 1. Members of the Black Movement and Sindoméstico participate in a seminar. Photo by Alida Perrine

seminar was a special day-long event in honor of a national day of recognition of Afro-descendant women. The seminar featured several compelling speakers who represented different groups, including DIESSE, the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies, created to give unions an image of themselves outside of information provided by the government. Through attending this event, I made connections with Cleusa Maria de Jesus, the current president of Sindoméstico, and

²⁹ Bernardino-Costa, 82.

Marinalva de Jesus Oliveira, who has also served as president and is now the vice-president. They invited me to the union headquarters where I conducted interviews with both women in a cramped office shared by the union's leadership.

In my conversations with all three of these women, they each stressed the continuing importance of valorizing domestic work. Marinalva identified a major obstacle to the union's goals as the low levels of participation in the movement -- only five thousand of Salvador's one hundred and fifty thousand domestic workers are affiliated with Sindoméstico.³⁰ She lamented that most workers do not care about the cause and do not see the union as a vehicle for empowerment, but just as a place to calculate their salaries or resolve problems with their employers. "Domestic work in general needs to be valorized, but it has to be valorized by those who do the work, because if we wait for that valorization to come from the employers, it won't come."³¹ Many of the women involved with Sindoméstico have experienced great hardship; most of them are from the rural areas of Bahia and began working at a very young age. These experiences are what motivate them to continue to work towards expanding domestic workers' rights and improving their quality of life. "They're situations that we don't want to be repeated with other women workers, especially our youth," Creuza explained.³²

³⁰ Sindoméstico - BA: Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Domésticos, "Sindoméstico," 2010. http://trabalhocorporativa.blogspot.com/p/sindomestico_30.html

³¹ All translations are my own. Original Portuguese: O trabalho doméstico em geral tem que ser valorizado, mas ele tem que ser valorizado por quem faz o trabalho, porque se a gente for esperar que essa valorização venha dos empregadores, não vai vir.

³² São situações que a gente não quer que repita com outras mulheres trabalhadores, em especial nossas jovens.

Thanks to the dedication of women like Creuza, Marinalva, and Cleusa, the category of domestic workers has gained an ever-expanding list of legal workers' rights. Most notably, the Brazilian constitution was recently amended to reflect that domestic workers should have all the same rights as other workers. Having obtained these legal rights, the largest obstacle now is bridging the gap between the law and the reality of most domestic workers. As stated earlier, employers are not always willing to bear the financial burden of ensuring full worker rights for their domestic employee. Furthermore, domestic workers are often either unaware of their rights, or do not feel empowered to insist upon them since it is often the employer who determines the work agreements. Additionally, many domestic workers live in such a precarious economic situation that it is more important for them to make as much money as possible through working in multiple homes, and they avoid regularization in order to do so. Especially for women who have to support multiple children and/or unemployed adult family members, they prefer to sacrifice retirement funds for immediate cash and they work through their holidays and weekends to make ends meet.

The women involved in the domestic workers' union maintain hope that the tide is turning for domestic workers: that domestic work will not be the only employment option available to low-income Afro-descendant women, and that women who are domestic workers are afforded all of the legal rights to which they are entitled, including earning living wages, receiving benefits, and working decent hours in safe and non-hostile environments. However, as I will show in the following chapters, the perceived place of domestic workers in Brazilian society is based on deeply embedded and

widespread ways of thinking about race and gender that manifest themselves in various aspects of daily life, including in employer/employee interactions and in portrayals on nightly television shows.

Chapter Two: Domestic Workers and Symbolic Violence

This chapter examines the symbolic violence acted on domestic workers through their daily interactions within Brazilian society. It explores several examples of the impact that domestic employer/employee relationships and interactions have on the ways that these women imagine or construct themselves as social subjects. I begin with a brief history of Brazil's northeastern region in order to set the scene for the social and cultural context of the experiences lived by the women whom I interviewed. In order to analyze the interview material, I use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence³³ to show the ways in which the employer/employee relationship affects the way domestic workers present themselves as subjects. This symbolic violence causes domestic workers to internalize dominant ideas, for example about their race or manner of speaking. I also explore Christina Sharpe's explanation of monstrous intimacies³⁴ to better understand the way intimate power relationships manifest themselves in the lives of domestic workers. I turn to Gilberto Freyre³⁵ in order to understand the origin and significance of discourses of family and work relationships that emerged in the interviews. Developed since slavery and over the course of the twentieth century, I argue that these deeply embedded discourses shape the way both domestic workers and their employers view domestic labor, and strongly affect the way domestic workers view and present themselves in society.

³³ Pierre Bourdieu, "Gender and Symbolic Violence," in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, (Makten, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

³⁴ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁵ Gilberto Freyre, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1980).

DOMESTIC WORK IN BAHIA

The state of Bahia is located in Brazil's northeastern region and has a unique historical context due to the greater influx of enslaved Africans throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. Approximately seventy-four percent of Bahians are black or brown and the capital city of Salvador has an even greater concentration of nearly eighty percent. This majority Afro-descendant population has greatly influenced many aspects of Bahian culture and society. Between 2003 and 2009, Afro-descendants made up roughly eighty-three percent of the workforce in Salvador and ninety-three percent of the domestic workforce.³⁶

Despite transformations that were occurring in other parts of the country, neither Bahia's economy nor its race relations changed much after the abolition of slavery in 1888.³⁷ In fact, in Dain Borges's history of the Bahian family, he notes that there was very little distinction between the life of a slave and a free black, either before or after abolition.³⁸ Middle to upper class homes both in Salvador and in Bahia's rural areas continued to depend upon the presence of a largely Afro-descendant household staff.³⁹ Unlike other areas in the country, Bahia did not attract many European immigrants,⁴⁰ although employing a Euro-Brazilian maid became fashionable at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴¹ There was no additional legislation passed when slavery was

³⁶ IBGE.

³⁷ Dain Borges, *The Family in Bahia, Brazil 1870-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 10, 29.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 53-72.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 62.

abolished, resulting in minimal structural changes to labor structures and semi-slave work merely replacing slave work, especially in rural areas.⁴²

Industrialization and urbanization were slower to come to the northeast than other regions, but the eventual growth of the middle class and the persistence of low wages for domestic workers led to an expansion of women employed in this area. However, in recent decades, the number of domestic workers has decreased in the Northeast and across the nation. There has also been a decline in the number of workers who live at their place of employment so that in 2009 only approximately thirteen percent of domestic workers in Salvador lived on site.⁴³ Another change is that an increasing number of women work for multiple families, rather than working in the same home six days per week. In 2009, roughly twenty percent of domestic workers in Salvador had multiple employers compared to less than twelve percent in 1999.⁴⁴

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant described symbolic violence as “the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*,” (emphasis in original)⁴⁵ and rejected the “opposition between coercion and consent,”⁴⁶ suggesting rather that relations of domination are effective precisely because the dominated think of

⁴² Luis Henrique Dias Tavares, *História da Bahia* (Salvador, Bahia: Editora da Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2008), 363-364.

⁴³ *A Situação do Trabalho no Brasil na Primeira Década dos Anos 2000* (São Paulo: DIEESE, 2012), 157.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “Symbolic Violence,” in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, (Makten, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 272.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

themselves in the same terms constructed by the dominant. They further explain that these structures of domination come to manifest themselves in somatized ways within the dominated; the cultural constructs become embodied.⁴⁷ The dominated then experience this embodiment through various emotions that may justify their subservient position.⁴⁸ This understanding of dominance is productive for analyzing patroa/empregada relationships and the way workers imagine and position themselves.

In “Gender and Symbolic Violence,” Bourdieu expands on his theory of symbolic violence using the example of gender relations to illustrate the role of symbolic power in structures of domination. One of his main arguments is that domination is made possible because the dominated only possess the cognitive instruments of the dominant.⁴⁹ A clear illustration of this phenomenon among some domestic workers can be seen with the example of stigmatization of certain manners of speaking, which I witnessed with a woman named Rosa.⁵⁰

Among my interviewees, Rosa is the woman that I have spent the most time with because she is employed in the home where I am a guest when I visit Salvador. She is forty-two years old, self-defined as “galega,” (referring to Galicia, commonly invoked to speak about Euro-Brazilians), and from a small town called Araci in the rural interior of Bahia. Rosa moved to Salvador with her three children when she was twenty-seven years old, according to her reckoning at least, because at that time she had no form of state

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bourdieu, 341.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 339.

⁵⁰ All names are pseudonyms.

identification. She has made her living as a domestic worker in various homes since her arrival in the city and continues to support herself, two of her adult children who are unemployed, her daughter-in-law, and two young grandchildren, who all live with her in her home in the suburbs of Salvador. She also provides as much support as she can for her retired mother who lives near her and two more grandchildren who live in Araci. Needless to say, her minimum wage is not equal to this burden so she frequently owes her employer due to the additional “help” she receives. Being from the rural area of Bahia, Rosa has a thick northeastern accent characterized by replacing /l/ sounds with /r/ sounds and using non-standard patterns for noun and verb agreement.

While speaking with Rosa, she explained to me that when she came to Salvador, she didn’t know anything: she didn’t know how to read; she didn’t know how to make pasta. She only knew how to make a good “gororoba” (grub). Most frequently, Rosa mentioned how she speaks incorrectly: “But there are words that I say wrong,” she would tell me, afraid that I would pick up bad linguistic habits from her. “I talk wrong, Dona Maria tells me all the time [...] I admit that I talk wrong.”⁵¹ This is a perfect example of the symbolic violence that Bourdieu describes: “The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural. This can lead to *a kind of systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration,*” (my emphasis).⁵² Rosa’s employer, Maria, insists on constantly correcting Rosa’s speech. Maria is frequently didactic with Rosa and by force of

⁵¹ Mas tem coisas que falo errado a palavra [...] Eu falo errado, Dona Maria me fala toda hora [...] Admito que falo errado.

⁵² Bourdieu, 339.

repetition has convinced her that she does a great number of things incorrectly. Of course, it is not Maria alone who is responsible for Rosa's belief that she speaks incorrectly. Stigmatized attitudes about rural northeastern speech is widespread and therefore would have been repeated early and often: "[Internalization of domination] is for the most part exerted invisibly and insidiously through insensible familiarization with a symbolically structured physical world and early, prolonged experience of interactions informed by the structures of domination."⁵³

Rosa is not the only example of this embodiment of domination among domestic workers, nor is it strictly limited to manner of speaking. A crucial example is the widespread internalized racism which I noticed most markedly in Lucilene. I met Lucilene in 2007 when I arrived in Salvador for the first time and she was working in the home where I was hosted. She is only a few years older than me and although neither of us stayed in that home for long, we became friends and she often invited me to her home in Rio Sena in the suburbs of Salvador where I met her entire family. Lucilene would often pop in a pirated DVD of some made-for-TV movie from the United States filled with Christian family values. Since the movies were always dubbed in Portuguese, she was shocked to learn the movies were from the United States. "There's black people there?" she asked in bewilderment. "I'm not going there, then,"⁵⁴ Lucilene assured me.

⁵³ Ibid, 341.

⁵⁴ Lá também tem negro? Não vou pra lá então.

The embodiment of relations of domination are often manifested through emotions or the “logics of feelings,”⁵⁵ which in the case of many domestic workers can be seen in a sense of duty or devotion to their employers due to the affective ties that often structure such relationships. For example, several years ago, Lucilene found herself working for a couple that was going through a separation. The man was much older than the woman and his health was very poor. His wife simply moved out while nobody remained in the home to care for him; nobody besides Lucilene. Long after they had stopped paying her salary, Lucilene continued to pay bus fare to go to the home and cook for the feeble man in his worsening condition. Bourdieu would explain this behavior as due to the fact that “the effect and conditions of [symbolic violence’s] efficacy are durably and deeply embedded in the body in the form of dispositions.”⁵⁶ The system of domination became embodied in Lucilene’s sense of pride and duty.

Examining examples of embodied social inequality is a useful approach to understanding the ubiquity of symbolic violence and that “social agents are knowing agents,”⁵⁷ but that does not imply a willingness of the dominated to be in such a position, but rather that domination is systematic and all subjects are complicit in that system. Therefore, symbolic violence will always be present in relations of domination and these cannot be eliminated by raising consciousness among the dominated, but only with a complete overhaul of the systems that keep these relations in place.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, 341.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Bourdieu and Wacquant, 272.

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, 342.

BLACK AND BLACKENED POST-SLAVERY SUBJECTS

In *Monstrous Intimacies*, Christina Sharpe examines “the occupying or refusing to occupy the space of the other [to understand] power in relationships on the intimate level and in their larger historical expression.”⁵⁹ This focus allows for a clearer comprehension of the effects of intimate power relationships such as those present between domestic employers and employees. Sharpe explores important ideas about (black or blackened) post-slavery subjects in a US context, such as the unique position and lasting legacies of the domestic slave, the importance of the mammy figure and complicated discourses of family inclusion and exclusion.

The fact that domestic work is largely done by Afro-descendant women, is domestic, manual and routine and thereby seen as unskilled, causes it to be unvalued work and extremely underpaid. Due to this, all women who perform paid domestic service in Brazil could be viewed as blackened subjects. Sharpe describes blackened subjects as those people whose proximity to “material conditions and circumstances” associated with black populations can lead them to be understood as in a category other than non-black.⁶⁰ This notion is particularly useful in understanding the situation of Rosa, the only non-black domestic worker that I spoke with during my time in Salvador. While Rosa does not experience life in Salvador the same way Afro-descendant women do, her position as a low-income domestic worker living in the periphery contain “raced and classed signifiers that locate [her] within [...] (visually) African-descended

⁵⁹ Sharpe, 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 191.

communities.”⁶¹ Understanding Rosa and other non-black domestic workers as blackened subjects makes visible the strong stigma attached to these women and the work that they do.

The blackening of domestic work has a great deal to do with the legacy of enslaved black women working in the house. Margaret Jordan speaks of the distinction between servant and slave having “to do with class, color and state of freeness,” but even free servitude can seem forced because it is often the only option available to Afro-descendant workers, especially women.⁶² This legacy of slavery is complete with the intimate violence and sexual assault acted on women working in domestic spaces. Sharpe described the notion of ‘every kitchen is a brothel’ and the tension of working in the white domestic space as a site of relative privilege within the context of slavery yet subject to “everyday intimate brutalities.”⁶³ The presence of these domestic slaves contributed to the notion of Afro-descendant bodies as sexually available. This idea of the hypersexuality of the slave woman came to be a justifying factor for sexual relations with the white master.⁶⁴

The culturally constructed image of the hypersexual *mulata* became extremely popular through the Americas and gained currency through such Brazilian authors as Nina Rodrigues and Paulo Prado. Rodrigues was an early twentieth century medical doctor, psychiatrist and anthropologist. In a chapter mapping the presence of Brazil’s

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Margaret Jordan, *African American Servitude and Historical Imaginings Retrospective Fiction and Representation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 21.

⁶³ Ibid, 9.

⁶⁴ Sueli Carneiro, “Gênero, Raça e Ascensão Social,” *Estudos Feministas*. 3 (1995): 546.

foundational “miscegenating couple” in key texts by Brazilian social thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Laura Moutinho analyzes Rodrigues’s description of the “reproductive excitement” of the mulata.⁶⁵ According to Rodrigues, these sexual excesses would lead to miscegenation and ultimately the demise of Brazilian social order.⁶⁶ Paulo Prado, a Brazilian aristocrat writing in the 1920s, had an equally bleak outlook on Brazilian society, suggesting that the excessive behavior of the colonizers in their unfettered search for wealth and pleasure had left the nation in a depressing “post-coital” melancholy.⁶⁷ Although Prado insisted that Afro-descendants did not constitute an inferior race, he agreed that miscegenation was extremely negative for the forward movement of Brazilian society and blamed the Portuguese colonizer’s lack of self-control for falling to the sensual mulata’s temptations.⁶⁸

In his extremely influential book, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, published in 1933, social critic Gilberto Freyre moved away from the notion of Afro-descendant women as naturally more lascivious than their Euro-Brazilian counterparts. Rather, Freyre contended that the social and economic institution of slavery was to be blamed for the sexually depraved acts that occurred on the slave plantations and that it was not a hypersexual quality of Afro-descendant women, but rather a docility that allowed them to be controlled so easily. At the same time, Freyre did hold Afro-descendant women responsible for the precocious sexual behavior to be found among young sons of

⁶⁵ Laura Moutinho, “A lubricidade do casal miscigenador: “raça,” mestiçagem, gênero e erotismo em autores clássicos da historiografia brasileira,” *Razão, “Cor” e Desejo: Uma análise comparativa sobre relacionamentos afetivo-sexuais “inter-raciais” no Brasil e na África do Sul* (São Paulo: Unesp, 2004), 70.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

plantation owners who were sexually initiated by these women. While Freyre denounced the institution of slavery as depraved and detailed some of the horrors that occurred, he nevertheless claimed that a unique relationship existed between slave-owners and the domestic slaves who lived in the “big-houses.”⁶⁹ These slaves, according to Freyre, were like part of the family and this iteration of slavery was gentler than any other to be found in the Americas.⁷⁰ Freyre repeatedly described the unique relationship between the *mães pretas* and the sons of the slave-owners, whose own young mothers were often physically unable to care for their infants, when they did not die in childbirth.⁷¹ Freyre attributed this to the Portuguese practice of marrying daughters at a very young age.⁷² The task was then left to the Afro-descendant wet-nurses to care for the Euro-Brazilian children.

The image of the *mãe preta* (literally “black mother”) that Freyre references is analogous to the mammy figure in the United States, which Sharpe discusses. The *mãe preta* is romantically thought of as the mother figure of all Brazilians as part of the myth of harmonious race “mixture.” Micol Seigel discusses the trend of building *mãe preta* monuments in the early twentieth century to commemorate her contributions to Brazilian society. Seigel describes how such monuments offered a nostalgic counterpoint for the project of the construction of modernity.⁷³ Similarly, Sharpe suggests that the mammy is

⁶⁹ Freyre, 352.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 359-60.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 216.

“the ‘mythic source’ of all U.S./American post-slavery subjects.”⁷⁴ Though the stereotype of the mammy is based on real black women and their labor, it is based on misinterpretations and has become an all-encompassing mythic figure⁷⁵ whose “labor must be accompanied by the affects of cheer and gratitude and not read as labor.”⁷⁶ The figure of the mammy in particular becomes an empty space “into which people project their fantasies,” due to the multiple, contradictory aspects of her; at once asexual and hyper-sexualized, the mother of all and yet subhuman and not allowed to mother her own children.⁷⁷ Sonia Giacomini discusses how the mãe preta was forced to mother the white child, therefore making it impossible for her to mother a black son,⁷⁸ and she links this to nannies today who must sacrifice their own motherhood for the sake of caring for the children of their Euro-Brazilian employers. This continuing trend is apparent in examples of domestic workers who leave their own children in order to raise the children of their employers, as in the case of Rita.⁷⁹

Rita is thirty-one years old and has a twelve-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter. She lives in the suburbs but works in Garcia, a middle-class neighborhood close to the city’s center, in the home of Juliana, a young single mother, and her two-year-old daughter. Rita cleans the apartment, does laundry and prepares food in the morning before picking up Juliana’s daughter from pre-school and spending time with

⁷⁴ Sharpe, 187.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 160,167.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 170.

⁷⁷ Ibid,18.

⁷⁸ Sonia Maria Giacomini, *Mulher e Escrava: Uma Introdução Histórica ao Estudo da Mulher Negra no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988), 57.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 88.

her for the rest of the afternoon. Rita usually stays into the early evening to compensate for the fact that she doesn't work on Saturdays. While the daughter of her employer receives her undivided attention during the entire afternoon, Rita's own children go from the neighbor's house to school to after-school programs and back to a neighbor's house until their mother is finally able to bring them back home around eight or nine in the evening. At that point, Rita must attend to the domestic tasks in her own home, which her daughter assists her with, despite the fact that she is five years younger than her brother. Rita told me, "The boy is lazier. He wants to stay out playing. He [helps with domestic chores] in his own way, not well. The girl is seven years old and does it better than him." This situation illustrates not only how Rita must sacrifice time with her own children to care for her employer's child, but also the additional labor she is required to do in her own home as a woman. Rita's daughter's father lives with her and also works most of the day, but he does not contribute in any form to domestic tasks and this gendered labor distribution is clearly being transmitted to Rita's children.

PART OF THE FAMILY

Sharpe connects this to the narrative in *Corregidora*, a novel written by Gayl Jones that tells the story of a Kentucky blues singer named Ursa who is the descendant of Brazilian slave women. *Corregidora* is the name of the Brazilian slave-owner who was the father of both her grandmother and her mother (and arguably her great-grandmother). The women did not feel any familial relationship to Old Man *Corregidora*, but it did become of central importance for each of them to have a daughter who would inherit the

memories of abuse in hopes that transmission of the truth would someday lead to some sort of reconciliation. Ursa questions this tradition wondering if the Corregidora women should continue to reproduce the violence and coercion of the incestuous relationships. The story told in *Corregidora* indicates that family or kinship ties are not present even when sexual relations are. Annette Gordon-Reed pointed to the ever-present power dynamics in master-slave intimate relationships when she wrote regarding the relationship between Sally Heming and Thomas Jefferson, “The romance is not saying that they may have loved one another. The romance is in thinking that it makes any difference if they did.”⁸⁰

Few of my interviewees invoked the notion of family to describe the nature of the patroa/empregada relationship, but one employer, Carla, emphatically confirmed that her employee of sixteen years, Camila, was just like part of her family. The fascinating thing about this assertion is the fact that the description that Camila shared with me was completely opposite. This relationship was unique among my interviewees in that it was the only patroa/empregada pair who gave me strikingly divergent accounts of their relationship, and Camila was the only worker who openly complained about her current employer, expressing negative feelings about her work experiences as a direct result of the way Carla treated her. The pair was also unique because Carla was the only Afro-descendant employer that I spoke with. Camila indicated to me that she felt that Carla’s poor treatment of her arose from insecurities that Carla felt about her own physical

⁸⁰ Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, (New York: Norton, 2008), 365, quoted in Sharpe, 22.

appearance and skin color. Camila cited Carla's insistence that Camila use a uniform while working, something that Camila had generally refused to do because the material of the dress that Carla had provided made her too hot and she felt more comfortable working in shorts and a t-shirt than in a dress. Camila felt Carla's desire for her to use the uniform had to do with Carla's need to provide a visible marker that would maintain a separation between the two women in response to Camila being mistaken for Carla's sister by visitors to the home.

It is striking that Carla would suggest that Camila was like a family member while Camila told me that Carla was disturbed by the similarity in their physical appearance and took measures to make sure that outsiders would *not* think that the two women could be family. The fact that the use of the claim to family inclusion would only appear in the employer discourse of the relationship that seemed to be the most tense indicates that the true purpose of this type of speech is to justify an exploitative relationship by suggesting that it is a familial one rather than a professional one. In this case, Carla used the idea of family inclusion to present the appearance of a close, mutually beneficial relationship, while Camila's account suggests a far less equitable relationship.

Sandra Maria da Mata Azeredo deals with similar issues in her 1989 study of *patroa/empregada* relationships. She discusses how employers mobilize a discourse of family inclusion to illustrate how their behavior towards their employees is exceptional due to its non-racist quality, by discussing how they would hug or talk to their employee as though they were any other person, indicating that by default they should be treated

differently.⁸¹ Workers interviewed by Azeredo also refer to the use of uniform as a strategy that the employer uses to separate and maintain differentiation, while the employers interviewed insisted that uniforms were a way to maintain cleanliness in the work place (domestic space).⁸² The employers interviewed by Azeredo made raced and classed commentaries about ensuring cleanliness in their home despite the presence of a domestic employee.

PREVAILING DISCOURSES

“It’s not a valued area. Some people with good sense, with good hearts, value it, but others don’t; it’s as though it were the time of slavery,” Rita said of domestic work. “I was obligated to work in this area.”⁸³ I have attempted to show how the unvalued and underpaid category of women working as domestic employees in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil are impacted by the unequal power relationships they have with their employers. Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence provides a framework for understanding the innumerable instances of violence that can affect a domestic worker in the intimate domestic space of her employer in which relationships of domination are recreated on a daily basis. Whether black or *blackened* subjects, domestic workers presented themselves in the space in front of my camera in ways that carried markers of dominant discourses.

⁸¹ Sandra Maria da Mata Azerêdo, “Relações entre empregadas e patroas,” in: *Rebeldia e Submissão*, orgs. Albertina de Oliveira Costa and Cristina Bruschini, (São Paulo: Fundação Carlos Chagas, 1989), 213.

⁸² *Ibid*, 214-15.

⁸³ Não é uma área valorizada. Algumas pessoas de bom senso, de bom coração valorizam, mas outros não; é como se fosse aquele tempo do escravo. Eu fui obrigada a trabalhar nessa área.

The study of paid domestic work provides a unique opportunity for examining the ways in which both employees and employers negotiate the race, class, and gender tensions that arise within the intimate spaces of the middle to upper class home. Exploring the ways in which women involved in this dynamic talk about the conflicts and relationships connected to this area reveals the multiple ways this intimate yet unequal relationship affects the manner in which domestic workers understand themselves and their position in Brazilian society. The next chapter will explore the way different aspects of the race and gender discourses analyzed here appear on television, and how the women I spoke to respond to those manifestations.

Chapter Three: Brazil's Charming Maids on *Cheias de Charme*

The summer of 2012 was the season of domestic workers on Brazilian television with three prime-time *telenovelas* on Brazil's largest network, Rede Globo, featuring cleaners and cooks as main characters. The upbeat and light-hearted seven o'clock *novela*, *Cheias de Charme*, received special public attention because of its child-friendly narratives and catchy musical numbers. The hit song, "Vida de Empreguete⁸⁴" was just as popular among Brazilian viewers as it was portrayed to be on the show and there were even live performances by the actresses who formed the fictional pop group, *As Empreguetes*. This chapter analyzes this popular *novela* as a case study for investigating attitudes towards domestic work and the majority Afro-descendant low-income women who perform this work to make their living. I examine the way race is invisibilised from the televisual discourse about domestic work and how that relates to current racial discourse in Brazil. I also include reactions to the *novela*'s narrative of social mobility among domestic worker audience members. Based on these responses and my own reading of the *novela*, I argue that while the show pays lip service to the valorization of domestic work, it ultimately reinscribes stigma attached to domestic work.

The chapter begins with a historical contextualization of *telenovelas* in Brazil and representations of domestic workers, specifically with regard to race, based on important works by Joel Zito Araújo and Esther Hamburger. The main section of the paper consists of a formal and narrative analysis of *Cheias de Charme* discussing the choice of actors and the accompanying racial politics. I use João Vargas' notion of hyperconsciousness

⁸⁴ *Empreguete* is a hip version of the word *empregada* (maid).

and negation of race⁸⁵ to make sense of the racial discourses present (or absent) on the show. I pay close attention to the contradictory discourses regarding paid domestic work on the program to make my arguments regarding race and class politics on this primetime Globo novela. Finally, I turn to individual viewer responses of Brazilian women who work as domestics, focusing on their reaction to the narrative of social mobility presented in the novela. This part of my study is based on the in-depth interviews that I conducted in Salvador during the time period that the novela was being aired.

DOMESTIC ENTERTAINMENT

Television came to Brazil only a few years after the first programs were aired in the United States, but there was not a similar wide reach in Brazil as there was in the United States.⁸⁶ It was not until the mid-1980s that television signals reached most of the country and still in 1991, only seventy-seven percent of homes had a television.⁸⁷ In her book *O Brasil Antenado: A Sociedade da Novela*, about novelas in Brazil, Esther Hamburger designates three main time periods of Brazilian television: the Elitist Period (1950-1969); the Expansion Period (1970-1989); and the Diversification Period (1990-present).⁸⁸

⁸⁵ João H. Costa Vargas, "Hyperconsciousness of Race and Its Negation: The Dialectic of White Supremacy in Brazil," *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, Inc., 2008).

⁸⁶ Hamburger, 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 27, 30, 36.

During the Elitist Period, two networks predominated: Tupi and Excelsior.⁸⁹ “Teletheater” programs predominated, while novelas were only marginally important, airing only a few times per week until 1963 when Excelsior released the first daily novela that has since become the standard.⁹⁰ Novelas in the 1960s were characterized by adaptations from other Latin American melodramas making for few opportunities for Afro-descendant actors.⁹¹ In his book *A Negação do Brasil: O Negro na Telenovela*, Joel Zito Araújo identified only sixteen novelas between 1964 and 1969 that included Afro-descendant cast members.⁹² An important Afro-descendant figure at this time in Brazilian



Figure 2. Ruth de Souza in *A Deusa Vencida*, Photo from [Astros em Revista Blog](#).

television was Ruth de Souza. She played a domestic worker in her first novela, *A Deusa vencida*, in 1965 on Excelsior.⁹³ Despite her renown as a talented theater actress through her participation in the Teatro Experimental

do Negro,⁹⁴ she was often asked to play marginal and subservient roles such as domestic workers, frequently without dialogue, which were often the only available roles for Afro-descendant actresses.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 27, 29.

⁹¹ Araújo, 79.

⁹² Ibid, 81-82.

⁹³ Ibid, 89.

⁹⁴ The Black Experimental Theater was created in 1944 by Abdias do Nascimento, an activist in the Black Movement, as a means of cultural affirmation to combat racism.

The Expansion Period was characterized by the dominion of the novela over the airwaves and was heavily influenced by the military dictatorship (1964-1985) in which the government enforced strict censorship.⁹⁵ In 1971, Excelsior went out of business and in 1980 Tupi followed suit. As a private network, Globo monopolized the industry and became the first network to make profits.⁹⁶ In 1970, *Irmãos Coragem* was the first novela to be broadcast nationwide and had a significant number of Afro-descendant actors in important roles.⁹⁷ In the period from 1970 to 1979, forty-seven novelas on Globo and thirty-two on Tupi featured Afro-descendant cast members, although stereotyped roles prevailed.⁹⁸ With regard to the roles available to Afro-descendant actresses at this time, Joel Zito Araújo says:

The black actresses on Tupi had at their disposition a variety of subaltern and stereotyped roles, with the domestic employee prevailing, sometimes represented seriously and treated “like part of the family” and, at other times as a comical little servant, either due to a certain ingenuous ignorance or the emphasis on her infantility.⁹⁹

This captures not only the limited variety of roles available to Afro-descendant actresses, but also the manner in which domestic workers have traditionally been portrayed on Brazilian television.

The Diversification Period, which continues to the present, marks the end of the reign of Globo and the novela. Although Globo is still the largest network, the networks Manchete and SBT (Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão) began to attract audiences through different types of programs. In 1990, Manchete released *Pantanal*, a novela recorded in

⁹⁵ Hamburger, 30-32.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 33; Araújo 116.

⁹⁸ Araújo, 109-114, 138, 153-156.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 150.

the exotic Pantanal region and featuring female nudity.¹⁰⁰ At the close of the 1990s, Record became significant by airing reality television shows and later investing in production of novelas that did not cater solely to middle and upper class Brazilians.¹⁰¹ An important figure in this time period is Taís Araújo, one of the three protagonists on *Cheias de Charme*. Taís Araújo became the first Afro-descendant actress to be a protagonist on a prime-time novela in 1996 with her role as the title character of the novela *Xica*

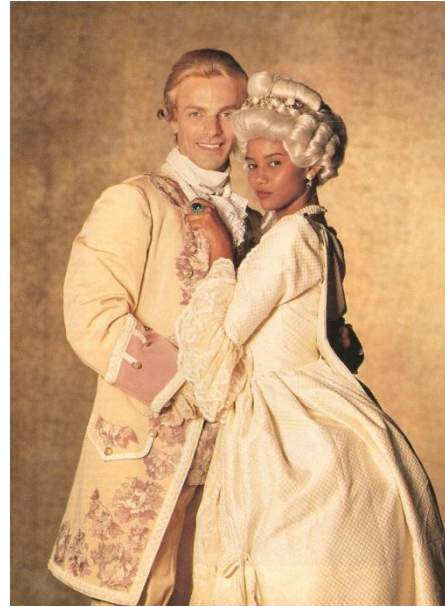


Figure 3. Taís Araújo as Xica da Silva, Photo from Escrevendo a História Blog.

da Silva. Including both of these roles, Taís Araújo has been a protagonist on four prime-time novelas and continues to be one of the very few Afro-descendant actresses who is cast in such roles.

Cheias de Charme is not the first novela to feature important domestic worker characters. The first novela domestic worker to be a success was Maria Clara, played by Jacyra Silva in *Antônio Maria* (TV Tupi - 1968).¹⁰² Maria Clara expressed pride in her work as a domestic and affirmed that it was as though she were part of the family, concluding that “in color, we’re different, but not in our hearts.”¹⁰³ Another significant domestic worker on Brazilian television is Zezé from *Beto Rockfeller* (TV Tupi - 1969)

¹⁰⁰ Hamburger, 37.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 37, 38.

¹⁰² Araújo, 100.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 100.

played by Zezé Motta.¹⁰⁴ In 1976, TV Tupi's *Canção para Isabel* featured Lizette Negreiros as Cristina, a comically nosy and romantic domestic worker.¹⁰⁵ Negreiros was also widely recognized for her interpretation of Zita on *Como salvar meu casamento* (TV Tupi - 1979).¹⁰⁶ Zita's character includes many stereotypical characteristics of domestic workers including the negative traits of lying, gossiping and laziness.¹⁰⁷

On the other side of the screen, domestic workers have become important audiences for the multitude of novelas on Brazilian television. During her fieldwork in a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Donna Goldstein spoke with a number of domestic workers. They indicated to her that they derived pleasure from novelas because they transported them to "lives and problems of people distant from their own lives and problems."¹⁰⁸ This sentiment seemed to hold true for my interviewees as well, despite the fact that *Cheias de Charme* depicts domestic workers. The domestic work presented on the novela is so far removed from the reality experienced by the interviewees that while some of the women identified with certain situations shown on the novela, the characters and plot still seemed to be from a distant world.

THE MOST CHARMING MAIDS IN BRAZIL... ARE NOT REALLY MAIDS

In sharp contrast to the reality of domestic work described in Chapters One and Two, *Cheias de Charme* presents us with the three glamorous Marias: Maria da Penha

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 101.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 175.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 175.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 176-177.

¹⁰⁸ Donna M. Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place: Race Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

(Taís Araújo), Maria do Rosário (Leandra Leal), and Maria Aparecida (Isabelle Drummond). Domestic work is dealt with in an intensely contradictory manner on *Cheias de Charme*. By making domestic workers the protagonists and consulting with the Union of Domestic Workers about content on some of the episodes, it is clear that the creators Filipe Miguez and Izabel de Oliveira were attempting to portray domestic workers in a progressive manner and much of the dialogue insists on domestic work as “decent” or “honest” and a vocation that should be valorized. However, the novela erases race on the show, recreates a number of stereotypes, romanticizes the employer/employee relationship and ultimately fails to truly value paid domestic work, by removing the protagonists from their positions as domestic workers and allowing their personal fulfillment only through socio-economic mobility.

The first episode of the novela begins with the three main characters meeting for the first time in a police station. They have each had a trying day and share their long stories while they wait in a jail cell to give their testimonies. We learn that Penha (Taís Araújo) is a domestic worker in the home of mega pop star Chayene (Claudia Abru) and has come to denounce her employer for assaulting and humiliating her by throwing soup on her and pushing her down. Rosário (Leandra Leal) works as a cook at a buffet but dreams of being a singer and was arrested for invading the dressing room of her crush, popstar Fabian (Ricardo Tozzi), to give him a CD of herself singing. Cida (Isabelle Drummond) works as a cleaner in the home where she had been raised since her parents died when she was young, and was arrested for fighting in a nightclub where she had

caught her boyfriend with another woman. After their night at the police station, the three Marias make a pact to always be there for each other when times get tough.

For the first few weeks of the novela, we witness the hardships faced by the three Marias as they are constantly met with adversity as they work hard toward their respective dreams: Rosário wants to be a singer, Cida wants to be with the man of her dreams, and Penha just wants to get out of debt. However, everything changes when Rosário writes a new song about the tribulations of life as a domestic and the three make a high-quality recording and accompanying music video which is leaked to the Internet and goes viral overnight! “Vida de Empreguete” races to the top of the charts and before you know it, *As Empreguetes* are giving shows, booking tours, and starring in television commercials. Suddenly, the seven o’clock novela stars famous singers, not domestic workers.

Besides the questionable feasibility of the rags-to-riches transformation presented on *Cheias de Charme*, the three actresses selected do not fit the profile of domestic workers in Brazil and only one of them is Afro-descendant (Taís Araújo). Other minor characters are played by Afro-descendant actors, but the majority of the characters are Euro-Brazilian including Taís Araújo’s character’s brother, despite the fact that many of the main characters live in a peripheral neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro which would be majority Afro-descendant. This visual erasure of race from the issues of domestic work reinforces the widespread conviction that social inequality in Brazil stems solely from class differences, and is not based on systematic racial inequality, despite the history of slavery and consistent empirical studies linking race or skin color to economic and social

positioning. Such attitudes contribute to the difficulty in obtaining any type of public policy that would address these systematic inequalities.

João Vargas positions this absence of race-talk within a dialectic of simultaneous hyperconsciousness of race and its negation as a meaningful category, which he claims structures how race is conceived in Brazilian society. Vargas traces these prevailing ideas to the notion of racial democracy, popularized by Gilberto Freyre with the release of his book, *Casa Grande e Senzala*, in 1933. At the peak of scientific racism and denunciation of miscegenation as the doom of a country like Brazil with such a large Afro-descendant population, Freyre gave a positive, new perspective to racial-mixing that, despite the atrocities of slavery, created a society without racism and even, eventually, without race. Freyre's work was extremely successful and his ideas were widely accepted throughout most of the rest of the twentieth century. Some argue that racial democracy is not so much a myth as it is a dream that Brazilians have for racial equality,¹⁰⁹ however it largely functions to deny the existence of racism and obscure systematic racial discrimination in Brazilian society.

Illustrating Vargas' assertion that many Brazilians do not consider race a meaningful social category, it is common for Brazilians to refer to skin color rather than race, using terms such as "caramel colored," "whitish," "light brown," "coffee and cream," etc. rather than clear-cut racial terms like Black or white or Afro-descendant. However, these terms are still defined along a black-white continuum and rely on a

¹⁰⁹ Robin E. Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race, and Racism in Urban Brazil*, (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

consciousness of blackness and whiteness. “The multiplicity of colors non-Whites employ to talk about their phenotype often constitute attempts to place themselves closer to the White ideal and as far away as possible from the less ambiguous Black categories their physical appearance may suggest.”¹¹⁰ Despite the ubiquity of white supremacy, many find it difficult to discuss race or structural constructions of racism in Brazil, or even acknowledge the existence of race or racism for fear of being labeled racist, and this silence around the reality of race and racism negates the validity of the experiences of Afro-descendants. *Cheias de Charme* puts the spotlight on subaltern characters, but the Brazilian television industry’s continued inability to cast a significant quantity of principal Afro-descendant actors undermines any capacity the show might have to portray real issues of domestic work.

While the three protagonists neither fit the profile of actual domestic workers nor follow the pattern for how domestic workers have traditionally been represented on Brazilian television, many of the supporting characters on *CdC* are also domestic workers and do recreate stereotypes and stigma attached to domestic work. The main source of comic relief in the novela comes from the fictitious mega pop star, Chayene (Claudia Abréu), whose career is on a downward spiral, and her most devoted fan, Socorro (Titina Medeiros), who does her utmost to obtain the position in Chayene’s mansion of domestic worker, or “personal assistant” as Socorro refers to the job. Socorro embodies all of the negative stereotypes associated with domestic workers on novelas: lazy, sneaky, lying, gossiping, in addition to having ridiculous clothes, hair, and accent. At the beginning of

¹¹⁰ Vargas, 105.

the novela, Socorro works for a typical upper-middle-class family and does everything wrong from burning food to putting the unfed cat in a laundry hamper. Every aspect of Socorro is ridiculed, especially her exaggerated northeastern accent. Because Brazil's northeastern region has the largest concentration of Afro-descendants and is one of the poorest in the nation, its inhabitants are frequently labeled as uneducated, ignorant and backward, especially the rural populations.

Another character on *CdC* who fulfills traditional domestic worker stereotypes is Jurema (Olívia Araújo), a hard-working, but superstitious woman. Another trait associated with low-income people from rural areas, Jurema's superstitions are ridiculed on the show and her exclamations about not placing bags on the ground and making sure sandals are always upright are met with playful scorn. These portrayals create social distance between the employing class and Afro-descendant domestic workers like Jurema by ridiculing her beliefs. In this aspect, *CdC* recreates a reality that I witnessed in similar interactions taking place between employers and employees in the middle-class domestic spaces in which I spent time. In particular, Maria's three adult sons reveled in poking fun at Rosa's stories and legends that she brought from her rural hometown.

Another stereotypical representation of a domestic worker on *Cheias de Charme* is seen in Valda (Dhu Moraes), Cida's godmother and the primary domestic worker in the Sarmiento household where Cida was raised. A devoted worker who takes great pride in her service, Valda's portrayal hearkens back to Maria Clara of the late 1960s. After Cida's rise to fame and fortune, she buys an apartment for herself and her godmother, but Valda has a hard time leaving behind her life as a domestic: "But I do it because I like it;

I love to work!” she insists when other characters attempt to lure her out of the kitchen. Although Valda’s attitude seems to be part of the show’s campaign for the valorization of domestic work, it is very telling that domestic work is seen as a decent position for Afro-descendant characters like Valda, Jurema and even Penha, but we never hear Euro-Brazilian characters Cida or Rosário declare their satisfaction with a lifetime of domestic work.

These portrayals of Afro-descendant domestic workers exemplify a present-day repackaging of Freyrian discourse that appears in *Cheias de Charme*. In order to show that Brazilians should celebrate their African heritage, Freyre argued that the African slaves brought to Brazil were of a particularly good stock, anthropologically speaking, especially in contrast to the “lesser” specimen taken to the United States.¹¹¹

Freyre believed that the perceived “easy, plastic, adaptable”¹¹² qualities of the African slaves brought to Brazil is what made them such good workers and well-suited to living in Brazil, especially in comparison with the “primitive” indigenous populations.¹¹³ This notion, along with the idea of the mãe preta discussed in the previous chapter, create a sense of relatively amicable master/slave relations in Brazil, particularly in the case of domestic slavery, and especially when compared to the brutal brand of slavery in the United States and the Jim Crow South. This sense of Brazilian racial harmony persists to the present with “every monkey on its branch” and domestic workers who love to work, who are satisfied in their position, which *Cheias de Charme* insists on highlighting as a

¹¹¹ Freyre, 306.

¹¹² Freyre, 287.

¹¹³ Freyre, 284, 287

good way for Afro-descendant women to make a living, rather than a violent holdover from chattel slavery.

These supporting characters who play domestic workers, Socorro, Jurema and Valda, are portrayed in a completely different manner than the upwardly mobile protagonists. In this way, *Cheias de Charme* is not actually progressive at all, because the three women with fully developed characters who escape stereotypes leave behind their posts as domestic workers to become successful singers, while those characters who remain as domestic workers continue to be portrayed in the stereotypical manner consistent with Brazilian novelas.

The beginning of the novela vilifies some abusive employers: the ridiculous Chayene and the pampered Sônia Sarmento (Alexandra Richter). We learn to despise their excessiveness and the unfair manner in which they treat the protagonists. However, as the show progresses, the attention is increasingly focused on the positive employer/employee relationships. The most salient is the case of Penha, who continues to work for a lawyer, Lygia (Malu Galli), even after she has become rich and famous, due to Lygia having fallen ill and Penha's dedication to her as not just an employee, but a friend. This heartwarming story of friendship portrays an idyllic notion of the employer/employee relationship. Again, this ties directly to Freyre's idea of contented workers and amicable relations between residents of the Big House and domestic slaves. Of course, Lygia and Penha have a very distinct relationship from that of mistress and slave, but Penha's faithful service to Lygia and her family parallels the embodied

domination experienced by so many domestic workers in the form of emotions that I described in the previous chapter.

In another case, the character Gracinha (Lidi Lisboa), who has worked as a nanny for the duration of the novela, becomes a cause for conflict between two of the wealthy employing families because of her talents with infants. The two young mothers haggle over the opportunity to employ Gracinha with her salary and benefits ever increasing. With the success of *As Empreguetes*, all domestic workers on the novela suddenly find their work valorized by the community. These romanticized representations do a disservice to the struggle of domestic workers by implying that the employer/employee relationship should be a close friendship, or that it is commonplace for the relationship to be non-exploitative.

Characters like Valda, Penha and Gracinha are present-day embodiments of the “good black” that Freyre described. Despite years of activism and revisionist attempts by social movements like the Black Movement, portrayals of honest and content hard-working Afro-descendants are still widely accepted by Brazil’s prime-time TV-viewing public. The notion that it is natural for domestic workers to be satisfied with the work that they do is so deeply embedded in Brazilian social thought that such images are in no way absurd. *Cheias de Charme* was an extremely successful novela and the soundtrack could be heard blaring from every street corner during the time that the novela was on air.

Despite clear attempts to do so, the novela ultimately fails to portray domestic work in a positive way. Supporting characters who play domestic workers are portrayed in much the same way domestic workers have traditionally been represented on Brazilian

television. The social mobility narrative attached to the trajectory of the three protagonists undermines any potential for a strong valorization of domestic work. Repeating dialogue that domestic work is decent and should be valued is negated by the fact that the protagonists find happiness only outside their posts as domestic workers.

“QUEM TEM DOM CONSEGUE SIM”:¹¹⁴ BRAZILIAN CINDERELLAS

During the two months of *Cheias de Charme*'s six-month run that I was able to spend in Salvador, I asked my interviewees for their opinions about the show. They all responded enthusiastically with their impressions of the popular novela and its narrative. The general consensus among them was that the Cinderella story portrayed on the novela was perfectly feasible and convincing, but none of the women felt that it was something they themselves could achieve, providing various excuses of not being beautiful or talented enough.

Camila, a forty-year-old woman who has worked in the same home for the past sixteen years, expressed a common sentiment when I asked her about the feasibility of the narrative of social mobility on the novela: “I don't see it for myself because I don't have that gift. Many people are really gifted. There are workers who have a gift, they sing... Not everybody has such a gift; it's rare.” Camila did not identify personally with the protagonists' departure from the world of paid domestic work to the pop music scene, but this did not weaken the plausibility of such an occurrence in her mind.

¹¹⁴ Those who are gifted can make it.

Many workers were able to identify with the experiences of humiliation and difficult work conditions depicted in the beginning of the novela before the transformation of the protagonists. This dose of reality seemed to help some of them believe in the fairy tale aspects of the show. After sharing some of her own past experiences of exploitation and unfair treatment, Alice, a thirty-one-year-old woman who works in two homes, affirmed: “[The novela] is reality, completely pure reality.” When I asked her if she thought the social mobility narrative was possible in real life, she answered:

Absolutely. Everyone has the right to move up in life, depending on the situation they find themselves in. Nobody is obligated to spend their whole life... there's lawyers who stop being lawyers to do something else. Nobody is obligated to continue doing something that, not that it's not good for them, but it's not going to get them to where they want to be. [...] So their experiences [on the novela] of leaving that lifestyle, which was not very good in relation to the way they were treated, right, and to end up with that life [of famous singers], I think that's the dream of any domestic! There's nothing in the world that would be better for a domestic. It's spectacular. And as much as it might be fictitious, I think that everyone has to work hard and struggle to achieve.

Here, Alice replicates aspects of the meritocracy discourses of hard work and perseverance that are present in the novela, but her statement betrays confusion between social existence and fame. Despite suggesting that “everyone has to work hard and struggle to achieve,” she identifies *pop star* as the alternative to *domestic worker*, rather than *dentist* or *engineer*. Micael Herschmann and Carlos Pereira describe this phenomenon: “In this way, especially in countries like ours, marked by inequality and by social exclusion, where there are fewer opportunities for visibility and social ascension, anonymity is interpreted by less privileged parts of the population as an act of violence,

more evidence of their lack of citizenship.”¹¹⁵ Conversely, celebrity, as opposed to anonymity, would seem to confer this citizenship. The basic rights of these underprivileged classes in Brazil are so compromised that their concept of citizenship becomes distorted in this manner.

Another good illustration of this notion appears in the novela itself. After *As Empreguetes* become famous, Rosário returns to the orphanage where she spent her childhood. In a touching scene, Rosário tells all of the orphans that they can realize their dreams just like she did. A little girl says she wants to be a singer like Rosário and a boy chimes in that he wants to be a soccer player. This desire to vanquish anonymity, and non-citizenry along with it, is bound up with meritocracy discourses throughout the show. There are numerous scenes in which Taís Araújo’s character, Penha, mentions her lifetime of hard, honest work that went into realizing her dreams of remodeling her house and not having to worry about piling credit card debts. Yet, there is a persistent equation of obtaining basic citizenship with becoming famous or well-known, which is quite opposite to the idea of a meritocracy.

Although most (but not all) of the workers that I spoke with informed me that they enjoyed their work in family homes, the fact remains that it is an undervalued and extremely underpaid position, making it difficult to meet financial needs, and many wished for a better life. While none of them felt they possessed the “gift” necessary to

¹¹⁵ Micael Herschmann and Carlos Alberto Messeder Pereira, “Isso não é um filme?” in *Mídia, Memória e Celebidades: Estratégias narrativas em contextos de alta visibilidade*, org. Micael Herschmann and Carlos Alberto Messeder Pereira (Rio de Janeiro: E-Papers Serviços Editoriais, 2003), 42. (my translation)

undergo the transformation presented on *Cheias de Charme*, many did feel that their own hard work would be rewarded as long as they remained in the daily struggle.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The last episode of the novela shows the reunion of *as Empreguetes* who had split up earlier in the show after their initial rise to fame. Cida and Rosário have a double wedding with their handsome boyfriends and every character ever introduced on the novela is shown with a partner of the opposite sex, except the one homosexual character who has no apparent love life. Such a fairy tale ending is typical of light-hearted novelas like *Cheias de Charme*, in which even most of the antagonists are redeemed. Such an idyllic conclusion emphasizes the fantasy aspects of the show, which strays from reality through the course of the novela, and is unable to valorize domestic work in an innovative way.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to explore the ways in which paid domestic work is understood in Brazil and how workers are represented on television. By examining the history of Brazilian television specifically with regards to novelas and representations of Afro-descendant characters and domestic workers, I was able to show that despite its proclaimed progressive goals, *Cheias de Charme* continued to represent domestic workers in a marginalized, stereotyped manner. Through my brief analysis of some of the characters, I pointed to continuing stereotypes and the inability of protagonists to obtain personal fulfillment while they remained in the position of domestic workers.



Figure 4. Araújo, Leal, and Drummond as *As Empreguetes*. Photo from SóMúsica10.com.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

In an attempt to reach out to spectators of *Cheias de Charme* who were domestic workers, Globo decided to launch a contest called, “Brazil’s Most Charming Maid.” Domestic workers (with signed work cards) were asked to submit an original music video featuring themselves in their employer’s home. The selected winner would make a guest appearance on an episode of the novela. Thousands of submissions poured in and four finalists were chosen so that the actresses, Araújo, Drummond and Leal, could decide the winner. To the amusement of all, the honor was bestowed upon a woman from Salvador, Marilene Machado de Jesus. An Afro-descendant woman originally from rural Bahia and living in the suburbs of Salvador, Marilene fit the typical profile of a domestic worker much better than any other characters on the novela. Globo took as much advantage as possible of her affiliation with the show by making extra videos of her tearful reaction to having won the contest and teaching viewers how to make vatapá, a traditional northeastern dish. Besides winning a trip with all expenses paid to Rio de Janeiro to participate in the recording of the novela, Marilene became the center of attention for a short period of time and the network lost no time in comparing her trajectory to that of the protagonists on the show.

The final episode of *Cheias de Charme* aired on September 28, 2012 and buzz about *As Empreguetes* has since died down. Initial speculations that a *Cheias de Charme* movie would be made have now disappeared, but the centrality of domestic workers in Brazilian society has not diminished. Building off of the momentum of their recent legal success with obtaining full labor rights for domestic workers, the Federation of Domestic Workers continues to work towards the implementation of those laws for all domestic workers in Brazil. The women that I interviewed continue to make the daily commute to

their places of employment, and Marilene has also returned to her routine after her moment in the spotlight.

Throughout this work, I have attempted to illustrate prevailing attitudes surrounding domestic workers in Brazil and their labor, originating from women who are employed as domestic workers, women who employ domestic workers, and a prime-time television show featuring domestic workers as protagonists. The attitudes I encountered reflect tensions regarding the presence of low-income women in middle-class domestic spaces and derive from deeply imbedded notions of race, gender, the role of Afro-descendant women in Brazilian society, and relationship structures based on domination that extend from colonization and slavery. I showed how this domination is internalized and embodied by the domestic workers I spoke to, illustrating the powerful and systematic nature of the symbolic violence exercised against domestic workers in Brazilian society. In examining the telenovela *Cheias de Charme*, I pointed out the ways in which this extremely contemporary cultural product reinscribed stigma attached to women performing domestic labor, despite its apparent attempts to portray them in an innovative manner. While the pop music soundtrack of the novela and the glittery show costumes worn by its protagonists may give the impression of a new face for domestic work, the discourses recreated by the novela relating to the place of Afro-descendant women in Brazilian society date as far back as the 1930s and Freyre's idea of "docile" Afro-descendant workers.

Due to time constraints and limited resources, the brevity of this project did not permit more in-depth analyses of important topics only gestured towards in this work. For example, a more complete exploration of the activities of the Union of Domestic Workers would reveal how women are negotiating the evolving aspects of their work, as well as those that are resistant to change. How far does their activism take them in dealing with

the quotidian challenges of being a low-income woman in a potentially hostile middle to upper class domestic climate? What about the majority of women who are not affiliated with the union? How does domestic work relate to the fashioning of their identities? What prevents them from participating in activism and what alternative activities do they value?

Another avenue for further study is the realm of television representation of domestic workers. Has *Cheias de Charme* changed anything in terms of the norms of representation for domestic workers? Despite the ultimate failure to escape the tropes of how servitude is dealt with on prime-time television, the show still made a splash with its choice of domestic workers as protagonists. Will the success of the novela lead others to follow suit? Will future portrayals of domestic workers have similar outcomes? Finally, what else can be drawn from the ways viewers respond to and interact with the types of narratives presented on these shows? How do viewers manipulate televisual discourses to convey their own understandings of their world, as represented on television? As attitudes about race, gender and domestic work in Brazil continue to shift, further investigation of manifestations of domestic workers in cultural products will remain an important area of study.

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Vita

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