Breaking the Cycle of Women's Paid Domestic Work in Brazil

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A Study of Mothers and Daughters

By

Anna Maria Del Fiorentino

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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To all mothers fighting for a better future for their children, particularly those victims of an unequal society that takes so much from them and from their children.

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated

—T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, Four Quartets

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In memoriam Deborah Huggett

PREFACE FROM THE BRAZILIAN EDITION

I will start this Preface with a warning if you like, warning the reader of a conflict of interests. I am wary about making an introduction to this work, which started as a master's dissertation and has now turned into a book. As the supervisor of this project and as someone who believes in its relevance, it is my duty to highlight its qualities. But I write light-hearted during this analysis. *Intertwined Memories*[1] addresses a highly important theme: the social mobility of the daughters of paid domestic workers in contemporary Brazil, from an angle that is strongly ignored – the role of family dynamics between mothers and daughters. By giving voice and agency to the protagonists of this process, the book portrays both with subtlety and with strength the stories of trauma, overcoming and healing that together, led to a fragile but undeniable experience of social mobility.

I will write this Preface without more ado, as the book speaks by itself and it is fair that I allow the reader to enjoy reading it at once. I will highlight, however, what are to me the major contributions and implications of the book. In my view, its essence is to give voice to the women that are the drivers of the process investigated by the research. Anna Maria is able to bring our attention to the personal and family efforts that, in all cases she analysed, were fundamental to cement upward social trajectories. It is not an overstatement to say that the reader will reach the end of the book feeling empathy for the women interviewed, after acquiring a glimpse of knowledge about the struggles experienced by the daughters to finish higher education and start their careers.

Equally important, and without denying the agency of the interviewees, Anna Maria does not make the mistake to assume that individual effort is sufficient strategy to reduce the inequalities that mark the Brazilian society. On the contrary, this is an assumption that runs through the book, even if it is not its centre. This way, the book brings forward the undeniable merits of

[1] The translation of the title of the Brazilian edition is *Intertwined Memories: Transforming Trauma into Empowerment* (in Portuguese: *Memórias Entrelaçadas: do Trauma ao Empoderamento*).

these successful life trajectories, which can be read in the light of the economic and institutional scenario that, as fragile as it was, limited the cases of success to the cases that required extraordinary agency from the daughters and their mothers.

The third greatest contribution of the book, although highly associated with the other two, is to highlight the role of the mothers in the process of their daughter's social mobility – and, coming from that, exploring how the trajectories and memories intertwine. There is vast literature about inequality in Brazil and Latin America, highlighting its variations, the social politics in relation to them, and the economics and social dynamics involved in this process. What Anna Maria's work brings to this debate, and this is done with particular sensibility, is to show how family trajectories are key elements to understand the experiences of upward social mobility and its limitations. By giving voice to the mothers, to their daughters, and inviting them to speak about each other the book shows the intricate arrangements that were established to help these women overcome trauma towards new careers and new lives.

Finally, the book also brings light to the extent of the experience of social mobility – once it is achieved. Precisely by telling the intertwined stories of mothers and daughters, Anna Maria shows that to start and to complete a higher education course goes well beyond a personal fulfilment or even a strictly professional one. As Dandara – a fictitious name of one of the mothers interviewed – says to her daughter when she was accepted into a master's programme at the University of São Paulo: "Daughter, you did it! WE did it!". To me, I can't see a more convincing demonstration of the urgent need of an effective social mobility agenda for Brazil as its results, as Anna Maria shows us though her interviewees, has the potential to cure and to result in gains that extend along generations.

I end this Preface with a reflection. *Mothers and Daughters* shows both the transforming power of social mobility and the deep difficulties encountered by the daughters of paid domestic workers in this process towards upward social mobility. The book also brings forward that such ascendant trajectories often do not pass through institutions and public policies, not uncommonly involving individual and family efforts to afford the fees of private universities – although the trajectories with higher social mobility were constructed, at least partially, with public (free) universities.

Writing this Preface in mid-2021, when a social mobility agenda seems like a distant memory in the current scenario of increasing inequality and oppression, my view is that the country should not attempt to reclaim former policies, although they are attractive if compared to present times. In my view, we need to pursue an effective and wider agenda for social inclusion that guarantee rights, dignity and autonomy instead of recreating fragile and oppressive experiences that, as Anna Maria shows, cannot be overcome without extraordinary combined efforts.

Enjoy your reading!

—Pedro Mendes Loureiro
Centre of Latin American Studies and Department of Politics and International Studies (CLAS-POLIS), Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

I am a Brazilian woman who moved to London a little more than a decade ago. My children were born in London, and I have been a full-time mother since they arrived. Before that, I had a corporate career.

When our family decided to move from London to quiet Cambridge in 2018 at the time my youngest was about to start primary school, I timidly worked on a research project proposal to submit to the University of Cambridge. My aim was to pursue a master's degree that would help me to refresh myself after all those years being a full-time mum and, eventually, rejoin the job market afterwards. Little did I know that this experience would be more than a career change; it was the starting point of a new life in my forties. Age was against me in many ways as a mature student with parental responsibilities, but it was also on my side as, after a broad range of professional and life experiences, I was determined to pursue something meaningful, something that I believed would help, even if only a little, to create a better world, rather than bringing me immediate gains or an addition to my curriculum.

In the times of Trump, Brexit and the removal of President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, I was driven by a high sense of opposition against the political forces that were gaining space in my home country and, indeed, all over the world. I wanted to show my children that there are many different ways of fighting those forces. I have to say, my children are my primary source of hope and inspiration for my academic work and most everything else.

It had been almost twenty years since I left university in Brazil, and targeting a place at the University of Cambridge was ambitious. I went to the university open day when I was still living in London; I spoke to people working in different departments and colleges. After that, I started working on a research proposal draft. I remember struggling to write an academic proposal in English, despite my experience with the language – writing academic material was like learning a new language to me. I showed my first draft to my husband and a few academic friends; I received their

encouragement and, to cut a long story short, I was offered a place on the master's programme. Transitioning from being a full-time mum to a scholar was a bit of a shock but I received support in many different ways. However, pragmatically, if it was not for the financial support I have received from my family, I would probably never have started my studies despite receiving an offer, as I was not awarded a scholarship for my master's.

After some time being a full-time mother, I had lost the financial autonomy that I had before becoming a mother. More than that, my life choice put me behind in many other ways, in the short and long run: from the depreciation of my "market value" as a professional in search of a job, to a significant interruption in my pension plan. On top of that was the ordinary sexism, ageism and other "isms" that a woman faces when competing for places in the world.

Only after finishing my master's and publishing my first book in Brazil (based on my master's dissertation), did I start to see a little clearer what was the real force behind my research interests. It was my own experience of motherhood from the time I was a full-time mother, and the contrast of that period with other life moments, mainly to when I had a successful corporate career. When I was a full-time mother, I noticed that despite working more than I have ever worked before, people around me would often ask if I did not get bored of having so much time in my hands as I did not have a job. Others, with a more positive approach, would suggest that I took the opportunity of being away from my career to pursue other personal projects such a post-graduation project, or finding a hobby during my "spare" time. I struggled to see where was that free time that people were mentioning because if I was not busy with my children, I was certainly busy with our house and the family's domestic affairs. That was when I realized – honestly, I only understood that many years later – that what I did, the full-time work I was busy with looking after two young children in this "motherhood project" I put myself in, was completely invisible to others.

While in academia, I learned that my invisible work is called social reproductive labour, a work of care, often provided by women. In my case as a full-time mother, I experienced an unpaid type of reproductive work. That sense of invisibility connected me with other mothers, strangers and close friends, and with their struggles – our struggles – as we dedicate ourselves to different forms of care work, paid or unpaid, and all we had to

give up for us to benefit our children and family. And how fundamental, however invisible, what we do is to everyone around us, making our children and family feel safe, cared for and happy: that was my reference point and the force behind my academic work. I wanted to show the value of this invisible work of care and love and the difference it makes to the lives of those who benefit from it. I wanted to compare and contrast those experiences to when women (or whoever is in charge of the work of care in a family) don't have the opportunity – or when they are escaping from it, for many reasons – to dedicate themselves to the work of care of their own children. Experiencing life as a mother of young children and their experiences in early childhood, I wanted to show how the presence or absence of parental care in early childhood would impact the mental health of a person later in life. Ultimately, I believe, if the worth of reproductive work is finally perceived, that would encourage more people interacting with children – parents and non-parents – to dedicate themselves more freely to it, and that would bring a positive impact on children's mental health and society at large.

This book is based on the research work I conducted for my dissertation during my master's programme in Latin American Studies at the University of Cambridge, submitted in 2021. I spoke to mothers and daughters in Brazil with the purpose of understanding the invisibilized role of the mothers in experiences of social mobility of their daughters. The daughters were the first generation within their families to go to university and their mothers were paid domestic workers. Since then, my study has been adapted and translated into Brazilian Portuguese; a paperback edition was published by *Imaginário Coletivo* publishing house in Brazil at the end of 2021. This book is essentially based on my original master's dissertation, however its content was largely extended, as I had the liberty to include more quotes from my interviews and bring in new elements connected to my research that were available after I finished my master's.

You will find many original quotes from the mothers and daughters I interviewed in this book. By highlighting the experiences of those affected through their life stories, I aimed to reclaim humanity amid so many soulless academic texts and bring inspiration that, hopefully, might turn into social transformation. As Terence[1] said, a long time ago: "I am a man, I consider

nothing that is human alien to me"[2]. I hope my readers will relate to the stories of the women I interviewed, as I did. Anyone, as a human, I believe, can resonate on a base or higher level, with the happy and sad life stories of the mothers and daughters you will see in this book. Every time I listen to the audio recordings sent to me by these women, I see and feel something new, I think of something else that was not there when I listened to it previously. I want my reader to have a similar experience when reading these stories and eventually, come to new, different conclusions from mine that will enrich the debate.

I hope you will enjoy this book.

[2] Publius Terentius Afer, known in English as Terence, was a notorious Roman African playwright during the Roman Republic. His original quotation, in Latin, is *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*.

INTRODUCTION

Preta Rara's book *Me, Domestic Worker*[3] (2019) was the starting point of this study. The book is a collection of domestic worker's memories collected from the internet campaign *#MeDomesticWorker*[4], mostly related to experiences of trauma and abuse at work, including the author's own story – and the stories of her mother and grandmother who were also paid domestic workers. Many of the memories are told by daughters and a few by granddaughters and sons of domestic workers who are the first-generation entrants in higher education. Despite the main cause for the reduction in the number of young women working as domestic workers being the recent government programs which broadened access to higher education (IPEA, 2019), it caught my attention that most of the stories in this book hardly mention these programmes. Daughters and sons of domestic workers almost unanimously give credit to their mothers' sacrifices and support as they were a key contribution to their educational achievements and, in many cases, also social mobility after obtaining a university degree. This led to my first research question: why do they see their mothers as a central figure in their own academic achievements? What is the mother's role in this pursuit of further education for the younger generation?

I also observed in Preta Rara's book that the recollection of memories of domestic workers is overwhelmingly narrated by a third person. Only a few are told by domestic workers themselves. The mother's voice is rarely heard in feminist and psychoanalytic discourse, and their daughters tend to speak for them (Hirsch, 2012). I could confirm it by reading this book: the majority of the stories are narratives of the daughters, granddaughters and sons of domestic workers about their mothers' and grandmothers' life stories, recollections of experiences they were told by them but did not experience themselves. Why are domestic workers' voices so faint in this

[3] Original title *Eu, Empregada Doméstica*.
[4] *#EuEmpregadaDoméstica*.

campaign about themselves, differently from other testimonial campaigns such as *#MeToo* in which the stories are overwhelmingly narrated in the first person? It may be argued that the reason for the little direct engagement of domestic workers in this campaign is that the younger generation is more familiar with being involved with politics using social media while their mothers were engaged in other forms of activism, occupying different political spaces with much less reach than the internet (Da Silva, 2018). However, that would only partially explain their silence, which has led me to investigate further about other sources silencing domestic workers.

Lastly, in Preta Rara's book, I found that more than half of the stories from the daughters and sons about their mothers' experiences were mixed with their own memories. The reason for that is because they often lived the experiences together with their mothers. Many accompanied them to work when they were children, witnessing the abuse their mothers went through and therefore sharing the trauma too. Many of the domestic workers' children experienced early separation from their mothers, and loss and trauma as a result of their mothers working long hours. Contexts of poverty and the informality of the occupation were responsible for mothers working extended hours, limiting their capacity of caregiving for their children, breaking up the important psychological ties that develop over time between a child and the mother, as their mothers were unable to provide for their day-to-day care (Goldstein et al., 1980a).

Brazil is the country with the highest number of domestic workers (ILO, 2018); they are the second largest occupational group of women in the country (Melleiro & Heuser, 2020) and represent 14.6% of women in the labour market; 92% are women and 63% are black (IPEA, 2019). They have the lowest wages and are subjected to constant discrimination, harassment, violence and abandonment (Almeida, 2019; IPEA, 2019), positioning domestic workers as one of the most vulnerable groups of workers (Fish, 2017). The occupation has been passed historically from mothers to daughters, a social reproduction of paid – and often also underpaid or unpaid – reproductive labour.

Duffy (2007) investigates the role of social reproductive labour on the gendered division of work and women's subordination from an historical perspective. Reproductive labour, a concept originally created by Marxist economics, was developed further in history to designate the invisible work

produced by women's unpaid work in the home that was indispensable to the reproduction of the productive labour force. Such "women's work" includes domestic, cooking and caring work that are "necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation" (p. 316). The concept was widened to embrace the spheres of paid reproductive work when women joined the paid labour force. Domestic work, paid and unpaid, remain unvalued in contrast to other occupations. Duffy also analyses the racialized hierarchy in reproductive labour through an intersectional lens and calls the tasks historically performed by non-white women the "dirty work" of reproductive labour (p. 317), highlighting the racial division among women carrying out reproductive work.

Because women are often in charge of most caregiving responsibilities at home and within their communities, they often end up participating less in the formal workforce. They often have to take a break in their careers or reduce the hours worked in paid jobs after having children. This disruption is felt in the short term, contributing to gender pay gaps for example, but also in the long run, eventually resulting in women's poverty and social exclusion in later life (European Commission, 2015). Childcare is currently unrecognized in most state pension systems, as the time spent by mothers looking after their own children, full-time when they are little, is unwaged (Ginn, 2001). The issue has begun to be addressed by policymakers, as Argentina created a new government programme in 2021 to recognize rights for women who worked as caregivers, wherein women could gain up to three years of social security contributions for each child they had (Alcoba, 2021). Still, we are far from addressing the gender gap in most state pension systems as mothers' unpaid caregiving to their children at home is still not perceived as an occupation.

Paid domestic work is also frequently not seen as work, invisibilized by policymakers and society in general. Only in 2013 did a constitutional reform, and its associated law in 2015, establish equal labour rights for domestic workers in Brazil, contributing to the professionalization of the occupation (Lima & Prates, 2019). However, despite this progress, the newly gained rights were not given to self-employed domestic workers working in several households (Acciari, 2018), and this occupation is still excluded from the Labour Code, lacking extension of all labour rights.

According to IPEA (2017), informality levels are high in paid domestic work: only 29.3% of black domestic workers and 32.5% of white were formally employed in 2015; the formalization is more present in prosperous areas of the country, while it is still sparse in poorer areas such as the northeast. The new legislation made it more expensive for families to employ domestic workers full-time, leading to an increase in self-employed domestic workers working in several households, not covered by labour rights. The same studies show that despite experiencing an increase in income from 1995-2015, domestic workers on average were paid less than the national minimum wage. Also, the occupation is in the course of ageing: while more than 50% of domestic workers were younger than twenty-nine years old from 1995 to 2005, only 16% of them were in this age group in 2015. This indicates that a large proportion of young women are escaping from domestic work – but what has enabled them to break the cycle of domestic work within their families?

Much has been written about the positive results of the expansion of the network of federal universities and affirmative action policies implemented in Brazil during the Workers' Party (PT) federal administrations (2003–2016) (Fonseca, 2018; Marques et al., 2018; Picanço, 2016; Moreira Damasceno & de Andrade, 2016, among others). However, there is very little written about the social mobility that was eventually promoted by it (Alves Cordeiro, 2013). Still, the role of the families on this journey towards social mobility of the younger generation remains unexplored. Also, there is a lack of gaze on women's mobility since class studies in Brazil have traditionally gathered data from the male head of family and their sons (Pastore, 1982; Pastore & Valle Silva, 2000). This ignores the substantial change in women's engagement with their families and the world as they joined the labour market in Brazil, and elsewhere (Goldthorpe et al., 1987).

I interviewed five pairs of mothers and daughters: four mothers are or were paid domestic workers, and one mother was a cleaner in a state-funded school. I included the school cleaner's stories to enrich my analysis, as the social relationship between school cleaners and other members of the school staff is very similar to the one of domestic workers and their employers. According to Machado Chaves (2000), when middle-class women in Brazil first entered the labour market, they tended to go into teaching jobs to complement their father's or husband's income. She argues that they

became "housewives-teachers"[5] (p. 138), while cooking and cleaning jobs were occupied by women that "naturally" had these skills, notably poor, non-white and with low levels of education, extending the domestic environment into schools "[...] where the headteacher is the housewife and the school cleaning lady is there to please her. A personal relationship between domestic worker and her employer"[6] (p. 138).

All of the daughters I interviewed were part of the first generation in their families to go to university. Despite the sons of domestic workers also having benefited from the wider access to higher education, I focus on the daughters as I aim to understand further how they broke the cycle of domestic work historically passed from mothers to daughters in the country.

This book will explore the role of the families, particularly the mothers of the first-generation entrants into higher education during this process. I will investigate their daughters' eventual social mobility in terms of occupation as well as some sense of family income, gathered from the life stories of the women I interviewed. I argue that the families of the first-generation entrants in higher education, as much as the important governmental changes that helped the democratization of higher education in the country, have a key role in this process and are often overlooked. I argue that the sacrifices of these mothers were of high importance for their daughters to enter higher education. To make sense of these results, I introduce the concept of *intertwined memories* to explain how these women supported each other in this process that changed the social position of the younger generation and moreover, helped mothers and daughters to transform experiences of trauma and abuse into empowerment. I argue that the social mobility achieved by the daughters has lifted their mothers as well, not in terms of income or class necessarily but in terms of well-being, having better, more fulfilled lives.

After this introduction, the book is structured into a chapter dedicated to the literature review and methods, then three chapters based on my interviews, and the conclusion. In the first chapter, "A Silent Strength", I investigate the life stories of domestic workers and how acute poverty and the lack of formal education drove them into paid domestic work, along with

[5] "Mulheres-professoras".
[6] "(…) onde a diretora é a dona de casa e a servente vai fazer aquela gentileza. Uma relação pessoal de patroa e empregada".

the experiences of trauma that silenced their voices. The following chapter, "A Job to Read and Write", I explore the multiple factors that enabled the daughters of domestic workers to enter university, as well as whether they have experienced social mobility or not after obtaining a degree. The third chapter, "Intertwined Memories", is a combination of stories from both mothers and daughters. I explore how these women supported and empowered each other, and how the presence or absence of the mothers' care during early childhood impacted the lives of their now adult daughters. I will investigate further how an eventual social mobility from the daughters bounced back to their mothers, allowing them to experience better lives and repair trauma. Each main chapter is divided in six subsections, one for each woman I have interviewed as well as a final one with my findings. Highlighting each woman in the subchapters was the best way I found to give agency to each person I interviewed and their stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

A society in which the success or failure of children with equal ability depends on the socio-economic status of their parents is not a fair one (McKnight, 2015). Unequal access to education reproduces inequalities as the probability of achieving significant social mobility through education is considerably smaller at each step down the class structure. This is because students from lower classes tend to leave school earlier compared to those from upper classes, and the chances of succeeding are smaller as they try to re-enter the system after dropping out (Labaree, 1997).

Different national campaigns and educational reforms were established in Brazil to help overcome illiteracy in the country (Xavier, 2019). EJA[7] (Education for Young and Adults) is one of these programmes – also popularly known among the women I interviewed by its former name, *Supletivo*. This programme is aimed at youths and adults who left school before finishing it, offering fast-track primary and secondary education in a shorter time and flexible hours. It provides a certificate of primary or secondary education once the student passes the national exams, giving them credentials to pursue further academic endeavours (e.g. higher education if secondary education has been completed) and serving as proof of qualification, often required in job applications. Most of the domestic workers I interviewed, and one of the daughters, caught up with primary or secondary education through these programmes, as you will see in later chapters.

As formal education has become more available over the years in Brazil, popular pressure to equalize access to it has continually widened. Widening access to post-secondary education has for a long time been a political issue (Billingham, 2018; McKnight, 2015), but only in the early 2000s was the education system changed more deeply in the country. This occurred during the *Pink Tide*, the political turn to the left in Latin American countries which in Brazil started with Lula's government in 2003 and lasted until the

[7] Educação para Jovens e Adultos.

impeachment of President Dilma in 2016 (Grigera, 2017). The Worker's Party administration introduced Reuni[8] (Programme to Support Restructuring Plans and the Expansion of Federal Universities), expanding the network of federal universities. New institutions were created as well as new campuses for existing ones, focusing on inland and remote areas of the country to serve rural and deprived areas (Bizerril, 2018). In addition, new funding programmes for higher education were created such as ProUni[9] (The University for All Programme) while the existing FIES[10] (Student Financing Fund) was expanded to support low-income students in private universities (Fonseca, 2018). This increased the number of students in private universities, a contentious issue as some argued that students with a privileged background were still "hoarding opportunities" (McKnight, 2015) and occupying the limited number of places available at public universities (Carvalho, 2013), while the commodification of higher education led disadvantaged students to seek low-quality education in the private sector (Marques et al., 2018). The government programmes therefore benefited a growing number of new, for-profit institutions (Carvalho, 2013).

Educational stratification is present at all levels in Brazil. State-funded schools provide education free of charge, while private schools are fee-paying and are perceived as the most exclusive and prestigious in the country. The best education available at primary and secondary levels is mostly offered privately and, quite often, is expensive. I will use the concept of "public" education here differently from how the term is used in England and Wales where a "public school" is a fee-charging institution, public in the sense of being open to all who can afford it. When I name a "public" school or university in Brazil I will refer to state-funded ones, as opposed to fee-charging which will be referred to as "private".

While top schools that prepare students to enter elite universities are private and are unaffordable to the working class, top universities in Brazil are public and free of charge. They are funded either at federal or state level. Private universities charge tuition fees; some are costly while other, for-profit institutions offer cheaper, low-quality education. Because of this,

[8] Programa de Apoio a Planos de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais.
[9] Programa Universidade para Todos.
[10] Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil.

securing a place at a public university is challenging and elitist, as places are often offered to students of higher social classes that are able to afford private schools and the preparatory courses to pass the notoriously difficult university admission tests. Similarly to what Labaree (1997) describes about the US context, the process of widening access to higher education in Brazil during the early 2000s promoted equality, but also adapted itself to the inequality and stratification that preceded it.

The criteria for entering higher education were also changed during this period. Affirmative actions such as the racial quota system were introduced at federal universities, helping to close the gap between white and non-white individuals (Ribeiro, 2018; Jensen, 2010). Based on the quota system, 50% of places in Brazil's federal universities were reserved either for students coming from government-funded schools or low-income families, who are of African or indigenous descent (Fonseca, 2018). The positive results were quickly visible as non-whites were, for the first time, a majority at federal universities in 2018 (IBGE, 2019). State universities followed, creating their own affirmative action programmes that are also leading to effective changes (Cosme, 2021).

Widening access to higher education in Brazil happened in a favourable context, accompanied by economic growth, low inflation, job creation and the increase in the real living wage, along with the introduction of cash transfer programmes and the Zero Hunger programme, among others. Together, they have changed the lives of many, contributing to a significant decrease in poverty and hunger, and driving the country towards greater income equality (United Nations, 2014). The combination of these new policies and the positive scenario that was created drove a great number of disadvantaged young people into university, the majority of which were the first generation within their families to go to university in Brazil – this new influx included the daughters of domestic workers. The country experienced what some called a "silent revolution" (Brito, 2018) and many young women broke out of the family cycle of paid domestic work as a result. However, this progress has been under threat by the economic downturn in mid-2014 and by the more recent installation of a conservative, male-dominated government (Gates Foundation, 2017). In addition to that, uneven recovery paths across and within countries since the 2020-2021 global pandemic are likely to affect young, low-skilled women more,

especially in emerging markets and developing economies such as that in Brazil (Gopinath, 2021; Canuto & Zhang, 2021).

Higher education plays an important role in enabling upward social mobility, but a degree per se will not translate into social mobility as other conditions are required, whether on a macroeconomic level such as level of employment, at the university environment or at home. The latter is the object of this research.

In his book *On Education*, Russell (2009) distinguished "education of character" from "education in knowledge" (p. ix), the first being particularly important in the early years. He argued that neither character nor intelligence will develop as well or as freely if there is a deficiency of love given to the child during their first years of education, and that society can only be transformed if the basis of education is knowledge wielded by love. More than just acknowledging social mobility in a material sense, this book aimed to explore the education of character, reimagined here as the formation of the identities of the first-generation entrants in higher education. I will investigate how the experiences in early childhood affected their well-being and mental health in adulthood, a novel approach to exploring lifelong generational inequalities. For this reason, understanding the intergeneration transmission of these women's memories was a key element in my work.

Hirsch (2012) and the theory of postmemory was the starting point to explore the transmission of memory between domestic workers and their daughters. Her theory was created in the context of the Holocaust and the discussion of historical trauma, memory and forgetting. She argues that the memory of certain extreme experiences can be transferred from Holocaust survivors to their children, despite the younger ones not being present at the event (Hirsch, 2012). Sarlo (2005) has developed Hirsch's concept further, applying it to the context of the Argentinian dictatorship and the transmission of memories of persecution, torture and disappearance from a generation of parents that fought against the dictatorship, to their children. I build upon Hirsch's concept of postmemory by exploring the dynamics of memory transmission between mothers and daughters, in the context of acute poverty and multiple oppressions that led these mothers to experiences of trauma and abuse, often present in their daughters' memories and identities as well.

I noticed in my interviews that when gathering stories of trauma I often encountered silence as a response, and new approaches were therefore required. Traumatic memories were "forgotten", often omitted by the mothers, while their daughters, despite not always sharing their traumatic memories were keener to talk about their feelings.

Silence is frequently associated with remembrance rather than forgetting. Pollak (1993) explored the political silence in Germany after the WWII period and the ambivalence of feelings of the victims associated with traumatic memories, including guilt and embarrassment. He argues that silence is also personal rather than political and is often used to protect the younger generations from the scars of their parents. Also, he argues that silence is a way to cope when a person is a victim of a social classification that perceives them as invisible and inferior. He calls these forms of silenced memories, "underground memories"[11]. They are kept alive through informal ways of communication, transmitted within families or specific groups and, differently from the "official" collective memory, they are not generally available. Eventually, the weight of the silence is too heavy (Lorde, 1984) and these memories overflow, invading the public space and initiating public conversations. The unsaid, marginalized memories then – quite frequently – transform into protest and a demand for justice.

I have previously discussed social mobility for the domestic workers' daughters and argued that higher education is insufficient to explain this mobility, requiring further investigation about intrafamily relations by bringing up memories. For the latter, I have interviewed five pairs of mothers and daughters: Marilla and Lucia, Dandara and Tereza, Val and Paula, Vitória and Helena, and Carmem and Julia.

Mothers and daughters were selected according to the following criteria: i) mothers had to be or have been paid domestic workers, including cleaners and carers providing services within a private house. I widened these criteria and collected a few stories from school cleaners as well; ii) daughters had to be the first generation in their families to obtain a higher education degree, either an academic or a professional one; iv) daughters had to have started university during the early 2000s and had finished it. I was not actively looking for daughters that were benefited by the affirmative action

[11] *Mémoire souterraines* as opposed to the *mémoires officielle* (Pollak, 1993, p. 18).