

Transformations and Configurations of Domestic Service in Latin America: Argentina and Brazil

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The aim of this dossier is to explore some of the specific dynamics that characterize paid domestic work in Latin American countries through different analyses that focus on Argentina and Brazil. We wish to examine which issues Latin American social sciences have paid the most attention to in relation to this occupation and to see how these issues fit in with the main perspectives found in the international literature on domestic workers, which has developed particularly vigorously in recent decades. By looking at different aspects of domestic work, the articles that make up this dossier enter into dialogue with the core issues of the sociology of work in Latin America. These articles thus analyze the composition of the sector in Argentina and Brazil and labor conditions there, which are characterized by employment conditions that have historically been informal or precarious. They highlight recent transformations in state regulations and public policy for the sector, the impacts these have had, and their ambivalent meanings. They also demonstrate the importance of domestic workers' activism through labor unions and associations during these processes of change. Finally, these texts explore the way in which the different dynamics of inequality that structure Latin American societies (inequalities of gender and social class, ethnicity, and race) have shaped experiences of domestic work and relationships between workers and their employers.

Introduction

In June 2011, the ILO adopted Convention No. 189 on labor standards for domestic workers, which has brought to the forefront the problems faced by millions of women throughout the world who are employed in an occupation that has historically been undervalued and made invisible. This process has coincided with the renewed interest that the social sciences have shown in domestic work in recent years. In European and US perspectives on this, that interest has mainly been driven by gender and migration studies and analyses of global migration flows, often with a focus on the dynamics of the sector in central countries. However, these studies also reveal that domestic employment takes on dynamics of its own in other regions of the world, which cannot simply be included under, or absorbed into a global description of these activities.

Few studies have looked at issues specifically affecting domestic work in Latin America from a broad perspective. The collection edited by Elsa Chaney and Mary Castro in the late 1980s is an exception to the rule and is a touchstone for the region in this field of study. In it, the authors stressed how, up to that point, studies of domestic service had been rare, isolated undertakings that had not managed to create a shared theoretical perspective. Chaney and

Castro's collection opened up a new field of research that has analyzed different national contexts with great dynamism in recent decades. However, there has been little ongoing comparative work at the regional level, despite the profound transformations that domestic work has undergone in different Latin American countries, often at the same time.

The aim of this dossier is to contribute to renewing this comparative examination of domestic service in Latin America by establishing a dialogue between studies on Argentina and Brazil. The starting point for these analyses is a series of questions: what characterizes the activities that domestic service entails in these countries? How do the different dynamics of inequality (of gender, social class, ethnicity, or race) interact in this context and how have they interacted historically? What factors characterize the profiles of workers, their labor histories, and their employment situations? What are the main features of regulations and public initiatives for the sector in Latin America? What impacts have these had and how have they changed in recent years? Taking these two countries as a starting point, this dossier sets out to explore some of the specific characteristics and dynamics of domestic work in Latin America and thus contributes to both the debate on the global organization of these activities and to the design of public policies to

improve labor conditions for domestic workers.

Comparative Perspectives in Domestic Work in Latin America (Argentina and Brazil)

In this article, we seek to establish a dialogue between the literature on domestic service in the global north (where migrant workers account for a substantial proportion of the sector) and the focuses of studies carried out in certain Latin American countries. In light of the experiences of a domestic worker in Argentina and another in France, we analyze how female domestic workers' migrant status affects the way in which their labor trajectories unfold. This counterpoint between two such experiences in different locations allows us to highlight the specific features of the sector in Latin America and to identify some of the core issues that have featured heavily in research on domestic work in the region. The first of these issues relates to the transformations within regulatory frameworks that have been mentioned by various other contributors to this dossier. The second is the importance of social spaces (both formal and informal) in domestic employees' everyday experiences. These two factors are intertwined, as legal frameworks are not the only collective regulation that affects the dynamic of this occupation. Socializing among domestic workers, the networks they form part of, and their spaces for collective organization can be thought of as a set of informal regulations that have significant effects on the ways workers perform and conceptualize their occupation.

Between Biography and History: Domestic Workers in Contemporary Brazil

The article by Mary Castro, Maria das Graças Neves de Souza, and João Victor Marques da Silva analyzes the modifications to the regulatory frameworks for domestic service that arose in Brazil between 1990 and 2015 and the changes to Brazilian domestic workers' profiles during those years, taking the compilation edited by Mary Castro and Elsa Chaney in 1989 as a point of departure. -Building on that early overview of the situation of domestic workers in Latin America, this text charts the different transformations the sector has undergone in Brazil in detail. To this end, it reviews discussions around regulatory milestones in Brazil and the eventual ratification of these in the form of Constitutional Amendment 72/2013. It charts how this influenced the debates around ILO Convention 189 and Recommendation 201, pointing to the benefits and disadvantages of this legal framework in terms of

how it affects domestic workers' daily lives. Through their analysis, the authors build a dialogue between these transformations and the life stories of human rights activists within the sector. The voices of union leaders reveal the role that pressure from labor unions played while the reforms were being debated, and the progress and setbacks that these reforms have led to in the sector. The article argues that the changes to the configurations of both the sector and legislation are more evident when discussions of material and structural issues are articulated with symbolic and cultural ones. This articulation incorporates questions and contributions from the labor movement, the organizational importance of which grew on a par with activists' awareness of their rights as black working women and benefited from black feminists' struggles and campaigns. These observations point to the importance, within the union agenda, of the quest for social recognition that brings together "individual ways of seeking a hybrid identity, as a member of a social class (the working class), a race (black), and a gender system."

Domestic Hierarchies: Household Workers and Middle-class Employers in Buenos Aires, 1956–1976

Inés Pérez's text looks back to mid-20th century Argentina and the substantial transformations that both paid and unpaid domestic work underwent at this time. These transformations included changes to the composition of the sector (including changes in the migratory origin of the labor force and the growing role of women within it) and the implementation of Decree 326 in 1956, which was the first time the sector had been legally regulated and which remained in force until 2013. It was also a period of intense political and cultural change; one that saw the emergence of the "consumer worker" and the growth in the number of middle-class houses that employed paid domestic workers. As part of this process, the middle classes set novel strategies in motion to distinguish themselves from the working classes. The author suggests that these strategies should be interpreted in the context of the new social positions that both male and female workers attained during President Juan Domingo Perón's time in office. In this sense, the presence of domestic workers in middle-class homes became a constant reminder of these social achievements. It was also a time in which social conditioning based on class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies were produced and reproduced. Pérez undertakes

a detailed analysis of files from the Tribunal of Domestic Work, which was created in 1956 to solve conflicts that arose around domestic service in the city of Buenos Aires. In so doing, she gives us a glimpse of the day-to-day nature of the tensions typical of the relationship between workers and their employers and brings to life the conflicts between the latter and employees who were accused of “inappropriate behavior.” By focusing on such practices, the author explores how the dispute over ways of performing domestic work and being in the home is associated with the construction of hierarchies and social distances that move beyond the boundaries of the domestic space.

New Public Policies and Care Work at the Crossroads of Formalization/Informalization (Brazil)

In this article, Isabel Georges examines different devices for the formalization of care work that have been implemented in Brazil in recent decades. The study is part of a broad range of literature on informality, which has been one of the major topics of the sociology of work in Latin America since the 1980s. This analysis is not exclusively limited to domestic employment, but also includes other sectors where female workers have come to predominate, such as social and health services, because of decentralization and outsourcing policies implemented during the 1990s. By analyzing the transformations that these different categories of care workers have undergone, the author identifies certain global trends that have shaped the policies for formalizing employment and their ambivalent meanings. The process of formalization has undoubtedly led to improvements in labor conditions and the social recognition of these activities as a whole. However, by multiplying existing labor regimes, it has contributed to fragmenting the sector and created an internal hierarchy of different categories of care workers. It has also reinforced the social and sexual division of labor by associating the responsibilities of social reproduction with women and allocating the lowest quality jobs within these activities to the most disadvantaged women.

Recent Themes and Perspectives in the Analysis of Domestic Work in Latin America: Reflections on Remaining Challenges and Questions

In this article, Francisca Pereyra and Lorena Poblete undertake a detailed reading of the different texts that make up this dossier to identify certain common trends that have characterized paid domestic work in Argentina and Brazil and reflect on the challenges ahead and improvements that need to be made. The authors pay particular attention to numerous domestic and international public initiatives that target the sector and which are analyzed in the different articles. They underline how these have increased formal employment rates and improved labor conditions for domestic workers but also point to their ambiguities, in that many new labor regimes (and the way they are implemented) reproduce some of the inequalities that have historically characterized the sector. In addition to these transformations, they point out the symbolic value of these changes and the multidimensional nature of the experiences of subordination among women who start working in these areas. These experiences define workers' positions in both the labor market and the negotiations they enter into with their employers on a daily basis. The authors highlight how policies that have tended to improve living and working conditions for these women emerged in political and economic contexts that looked favorably on such initiatives, which began to emerge in the early 2000s. In this sense, the recent changes in the contexts and political directions of these two countries raises new questions around the scope and continuity of these processes.