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**The Affects of Conviviality-Inequality  
in Female Domestic Labour**

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# The Affects of Conviviality-Inequality in Female Domestic Labour

Nicolas Wasser

## Abstract

The present paper discusses conviviality in the ambivalent power relations of paid female domestic labour, by tracing the ways in which affects articulate social and employment status. As several feminist scholars in Brazil have shown (Kofes 2001, Brites 2007, Biroli 2018), feelings in the domestic working sphere are oriented toward the family and friendship. In my reading, these studies foreground that expressing such affection facilitates the inclusion of a “strange” woman in the household, enables domestic workers to ask for support in difficult moments, but at the same time creates an emotional surrounding in which both hierarchy and inequality are felt more intensely. In accentuating these ambivalent power relations on the level of daily interactions, I foreground an analytical lens informed by queer, feminist and affect studies towards difference that strives to integrate symbolic, structural and subjective aspects of social inequality. In order to do so, I discuss feelings of affection within the domestic working sphere in studies from Europe and bring them into dialogue with affective archives in Brazil. Finally, this paper indicates transversality and disidentification as concepts to rethink the encounter with and in difference(s).

**Keywords:** affect | domestic labour | Brazil | queer theory | transversality | social inequality

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## 1. Introduction

“For sure, sweetheart, you are virtually part of the family!”<sup>1</sup> In Anna Muylaert’s drama *The Second Mother* (2015, original title *Que horas ela volta?*), this is the authorisation for Val, a middle-aged migrant from Pernambuco and resident domestic worker in a rich household of São Paulo, to receive her daughter Jéssica from Recife. Dona Bárbara, her mistress, does not seem to know that Val had a daughter, although Val has been working and living in the house for more than a decade. However, Dona Bárbara expresses to affectively include Val in her family, also because Val has cared for Fabinho, her only son, from birth. But when Jéssica arrives and sets up in the house’s guest room for a couple of days, the affective regimes of the family are shaken. Val, who has literally embodied submission as part of her role as domestic worker over the years, and Dona Bárbara, who is ruling the house, are both confronted with their own everyday staging of Brazilian societies’ deep class divisions. Should Jéssica be allowed to have a swim in the pool? Can she possibly eat from the same chocolate almond ice cream than Fabinho?

The present paper discusses conviviality in the ambivalent power relations of paid female domestic labour, by tracing the ways in which affects articulate social and employment status. As several feminist scholars in Brazil have shown (Kofes 2001, Brites 2007, Biroli 2018), feelings in the domestic working sphere are oriented towards the family and friendship. In my reading, these studies foreground that expressing such affection facilitates the inclusion of a “strange” woman in the household, enables domestic workers to ask for support in difficult moments, but at the same time creates an emotional surrounding, in which both hierarchy and inequality are felt more intensely. In accentuating these ambivalent power relations on the level of daily interactions, I foreground an analytical lens informed by queer, feminist and affect studies towards difference that strive to integrate symbolic, structural and subjective aspects of social inequality. In order to do so, I discuss feelings of affection within the domestic working sphere in studies from Europe and bring them into dialogue with affective archives in Brazil. Finally, this paper indicates transversality and disidentification as concepts to rethink the encounter with and in difference(s).

Amongst the ongoing debates of what has been proclaimed as affective turn in cultural and social theory (Clough 2007), my theoretical and analytical perspective is situated in feminist, queer and postcolonial epistemologies on affect (Ahmed 2004; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010; Cvetkovich 2012; Bargetz 2015). In relocating the relations of the private and the public, it is crucial in this view to follow up the ways in which power circulates through feeling, how power accesses bodies and how it creates modes and forms of emotional knowledge (Baier et al. 2014: 28). In accordance with Cvetkovich,

1 Own translation from Portuguese original: “Imagina meu amor, poxa, você é praticamente da família”

this paper uses affect in a generic sense, encompassing “affect, emotion and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways” (Cvetkovich 2012: 4). I favour this analytical openness and intentioned conceptual imprecision regarding feeling because it foregrounds, as Ahmed puts it, that “feelings are produced as effects of circulation” (2004: 8), and also that not only emotion and feeling, but also affect is – at least partially – culturally embedded.

Within the feelings towards female domestic labour, my analytical perspective is shaped by my everyday experience in the household and the encounters I had with this social question in Brazil over the past eight years. In this sense, it is a situated knowledge as a migrant German citizen and male subject that intersects with the profession of being a social scientist who is focusing on gender and queer studies and who is located in the global South. Both the analytical distance and proximity that pervade my affective responses to paid housework in the region are due to the fact that I have not grown up with this service. I can remember the discomfort I felt, after having moved to a shared apartment in Rio de Janeiro for my PhD, when I discovered that my student flatmates were employing a domestic worker to do the cleaning – something that was far from imagination in the context of shared flats in Germany I had just come from. Having learned a lot about the ambivalences of the above-mentioned discourse of the family since then, situating affect here means also a critique of cultural settings, that is, of both hierarchical power relations as well as degradation of female work in the household in Brazil *and* of normative European-centred notions of affect that claim universality.

If affect is historically situated (as I do claim here), it is always culturally embedded and hence entangled with moral or ethical judgments that regulate the intensities of feeling. According to Gunew (2009), there may well exist five universal expressions of emotion, but they are induced by different cultural variables. An illustrative example is “what precipitates nausea regarding food” (Gunew 2009: 15), for this bodily reaction is specific to cultural norms (of nutrition) in a given historical and geographical context. So is feeling towards female domestic labour. Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2010) relates to this with the example of an Ecuadorian female migrant in Europe, who is a studied economist: the employment as domestic worker makes her feel invisible and worthless (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010:1), something she would not experience in Ecuador due to her privileged class position. In this example, the domestic worker cannot refrain from the feelings that stick to the geopolitical context of migration and that affect her with degradation. Based on the empirical evidence from studies in Brazil and in Europe, it is my argument that such feeling of hierarchy and inequality is more intense, because the situational affects are located in the intimacy of the domestic sphere – a space, in which the relations between female employer and domestic worker are of a constrained

character and in which the structural association of women with housework is hindering the emergence of commonality between women.

## 2. The Intimacy of Constrained Encounters

As a starting point in this text, I take Gutiérrez-Rodríguez's work on affective labour (2010, 2011, 2015). In her long-term studies on female Latin American migrant domestic workers in Europe, the feminist author addresses not only the deeply ambivalent and exploitative relations between female employers and domestic workers, but she also locates her analysis in the emotional and bodily encounter of Latin America and Europe in the household. Since she finds "insurmountable differences" (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2010: 18) between women and their experiences in her study, she proposes a "politics of affect", based on mutual dependency, care and solidarity. In tracing Gutiérrez-Rodríguez' contemplated concepts "transcultural conviviality" and "transversal conviviality" back to their conceptualisation in Ortiz (1940) and Guattari (1965), I indicate both advantages and limitations of such an analytical lens for analysing conviviality in regionally embedded power and gender relations.

When analysing the affective work of Latin American migrant women in Europe (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010), Gutiérrez Rodríguez's concern is closely linked to a feminist and decolonial perspective on global social inequalities. In the context of contemporary European migration regimes, she examines how relations of domination between women of very different origin and social class are being articulated within the narrowness of both the domestic sphere and paid domestic labour. These relations are of a compulsive character. On the one hand, they refer to the survival strategies of precarious and sometimes undocumented migrant women from Latin America. On the other hand, these relations portray the privilege of European middle-class women to hand over domestic work to other women – normally in an informal employment contract that is in many respects exploitative<sup>2</sup>. Taking the two parties together, domestic labour reflects a site of compulsive encounters: these women would rarely meet in their free time because they usually live in socially segregated groups that do not overlap.

With reference to Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's concept of *transculturación* (Ortiz 1991), Gutiérrez Rodríguez strives to grasp the affective encounters between domestic workers and employers in the household, understood as contact zones of a "transcultural conviviality". In the focus are thus the processes that emanate from

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2 Gutiérrez Rodríguez' work is to be understood in the political tradition of the feminist movement's campaign "wages for housework" in the 1970s and strives to "reload" the critique of gendered division of labour, i.e. by emphasizing the structural inequality between women and men in reproductive labour.

the clash of social groups or cultures, that were “forced to live together” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 9) and that are of a mostly conflictive character. The affects that are circulating within these conflicts are however not only directed towards violence or oppression. As with Ortiz’s tobacco fields in (post)colonial Cuba, Gutiérrez Rodríguez’ contemporary account of paid housework in a xenophobic postcolonial Europe focuses also the strategies of survival, which may emerge in this encounter in a potentially collective way. In the author’s words, it is equally a study about the “human ability and creativity to connect and forge common lives” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 9), about the prospective power to draw connecting lines of intimacy or a minimal sort of commonality within a context of exclusion and highly hierarchical relations.

The reference of Gutiérrez Rodríguez to Ortiz’s concept of *transculturación* is significant to this end. As Nitschak (2016) shows in his comparative work on Caribbean and Latin American concepts of cultural hybridity, *transculturación*, unlike *mestiçagem* in Gilberto Freyre (1998), is much less in danger of harmonising the coexistence of different forcefully displaced and oppressed cultures (Nitschak 2016: 33). In the work of Ortiz, *transculturación* is a painful and violent historical process and it does not always work. Proof of this is the cruel extinction of the indigenous population of Cuba by the European colonisers. Furthermore, Ortiz generally refers to the harmful history especially for those who are on the subaltern side of the (post)colonial relationship – in Cuba the descendants of the slaves that had been deported from Africa. For Ortiz, *transculturación* is finally not only a question of an enforced encounter of cultures, but also of material conditions and the exploitation of natural resources. Both sugar and tobacco appear in his text as “señor tabaco” and “señora azúcar”. As agents and material forces alike, they literally participate in the violent process of *transculturación* (Nitschak 2016: 26).

Maybe most importantly, the concept of *transculturación* emphasises the openness of its outcomes. Therefore, Nitschak reminds us to distinguish between what makes this process necessary and what results from it:

transculturation is a necessary process for conviviality under the new conditions of a society living from the exploitation of sugar and tobacco, but [transculturation] is not a guarantee of the quality of this conviviality<sup>3</sup> (Nitschak 2016: 33) [own translation].

The strength of the concept *transculturación* lies in highlighting the multiple and open processes of conviviality, without denying its violent aspects or silencing the historical

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3 “[...]la transculturalización es un proceso necesario para la convivencia bajo las nuevas condiciones de una sociedad que vive de la explotación del azúcar y del tabaco, pero ella no es una garantía de la cualidad de esta convivencia.”



frames of domination and colonial rule – both aspects of enormous scope regarding the social question in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Regarding the analogy to feminized migrant housework, however, the limits of Ortiz's terminology are coming to light. At the time of writing, the Cuban author strived towards describing culture clashes of materially anchored relations of domination in (post) colonial societies such as the Caribbean. One of the aims was to oppose the then prevalent anthropological concepts such as "acculturation" that worked with a rather mechanical terminology when it came to describe processes of cultural encounters. Due to this focus on the clashes of cultures, the forms of encounter and living together as described by *transculturación* imply an equation of difference with "cultures". The complex entanglement of cultural differences with gender relations as well as with hierarchies and privileges of class and race, which are all central aspects in the field of migrant domestic work, can hardly be addressed. In other words, an analytical feminist perspective which is attentive to multiple axes of oppression or intersectionality (Hancock 2016), could not be fulfilled. Having registered this limitation in scope as well as in translating *transculturación*, I will now turn to *transversality*, another concept Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2011, 2015) uses in her search for commonality within gendered hierarchy and domination.

Generally speaking, *transversality* can be thought in terms of an affective movement or line of force that "enables resisting a synthesizing strategy of rationalization and categorization, as the heterogeneous and its lines of connection are detected without seeking to press them into an identity grid" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011: 1). Gutiérrez Rodríguez combines several theory traditions, including the early thinking of Félix Guattari (1965), Édouard Glissant's transversal analytics (1996), queer critique on identity (Anzaldúa 1987) as well as feminist work on the possibilities of a politics across differences (see Yuval-Davis 1999). As I argue and elaborate below, *transversality* is a helpful tool for addressing the undomesticated intensities located in the affective power relations within the domestic sphere. Unlike the concept of *transculturación*, *transversality* is epistemologically motivated by foregrounding those articulations that potentially challenge the ruling social order and by "the search for connections in multiplicity" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011) in terms of an ethical project<sup>4</sup>. In the case of the encounters within domestic work in Europe, Gutiérrez Rodríguez addresses its potentials for a "politics of affect" (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 167-169) involving women from highly unequal social positions. This politics acknowledges, as Gutiérrez Rodríguez argues, the interconnectedness and mutual dependency of women despite

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<sup>4</sup> In her more recent work in *Creolizing Europe* (2015), Gutiérrez Rodríguez emphasizes this ethical aspect of her work more clearly (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2015: 97).

both their disparate privileges they benefit from and their very different harms they suffer under the ruling global regimes of feminisation and the coloniality of labour.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez reflects both challenges and pitfalls of such a politics of affects by analysing different encounters of migrant women and their associated projections of an anticipated commonality. Crucial to this respect is her very role as a researcher (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 17). In her self-reflexive portrayal, she describes how she would repeatedly try to chart a line of connection or mutuality when in conversations with the Latin American women. As she had grown up as a daughter of Spanish immigrants in Western Germany, she would relate her biography to the experiences of the migrant women. Her presupposition of being able to assume a shared experience with these women would have been further reinforced by the fact that the conversation was held in Spanish, a seemingly common language between them. However, the reactions of the Latin American women would quickly show that they did not agree with this idea of commonality. According to an Ecuadorian migrant, an indigenous woman would experience racist discrimination already in their own country, and not only when entering the migrant status in a foreign country such as Germany. Therefore, the Spanish language also meant something quite different to her than mere communication. Given the colonial context of her homeland and the associated oppression of Quechua, she would always associate the Spanish language with her mother's experience of violence and shame (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 17–18).

This unequal encounter illustrates what other feminist authors have also addressed in their search for transversal politics: the pitfalls of both “assimilationist ‘universalistic’ politics of the Left” and identity politics (Yuval-Davis 1999: 94). As in the example above, instead of the idea of a common language and of a common migration experience, “insurmountable” differences spread that could not be neutralised (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 18). According to Gutiérrez Rodríguez, the art of translation would be the only way to deal with such differences. However, as she insists, this must not be confounded with an idea of original and copy, but be understood as a creative process that, potentially, can emerge from the encounter: “as a moment of encounter with differences” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 21) and the search for a language that speaks not with the tongue of the universal but in the very possibility of difference (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 25).

The extent to which gender appears on these possible horizons of translation and encounter of differences represents another scenario of Gutiérrez Rodríguez's analysis. In the fields of housework and feminized labour<sup>5</sup>, our first impression leads us easily to the assumption that the domestic workers and the female employers would share a

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5 Gutiérrez Rodríguez refers to Italian feminist post-operaist theorists, to which “feminization of labour” is linked to a “becoming woman” and the attachments of certain activities under current logics of capitalism: domestic work and caring for others represent two spheres, in which a “flexible, resilient subject” is required (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 26).

certain commonality: “Both tackle the fact that domestic work and care work, traditionally seen as reproductive labour, are assigned to them as ‘women’” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 26). Accordingly, a common could be manifested in feeling, for example, in being angry or in other emotional responses of rejecting domestic work as socially imposed on women. However, the narratives of both the domestic workers and the female employers show that their experiences cannot be unified or represented by the category of women. In Gutiérrez Rodríguez’s study, many female employers associate domestic work with an idea of individual choice, since they see it more as an obstacle when compared to their other professional opportunities. Domestic workers, in turn, often do not have that choice and cannot delegate the unsavoury parts of housework. For economic reasons, they are obliged to look for this employment. In addition, in the context of precarious migrant work in Europe, the author distinguishes how their bodies must carry the “disgust” and “dehumanizing effects of racism” expressed in the devaluation of domestic labour (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 29).

### **3. Domestic Affects and Gender Regimes**

Linking Gutiérrez Rodríguez’ work to the Latin American context, I continue to (re)translate her analysis to studies on female domestic work in Brazil. In dialogue with Brazilian feminist work on the topic of affective labour in the household (Kofes 2001, Brites 2007, Vidal 2007), I situate the difference of affective responses between the European and the Brazilian contexts in the colonial genealogy of emotions as attached to the domestic [*o doméstico*] and the cultural setting of family. According to this argument, the ritualised forms of cordial behaviour as well as of the affective allusions to both the family and friendship within domestic labour interactions are part of an archive of feeling shaped by a (post)colonial hierarchy. On the one hand, Brazilian feminist studies help to understand how cordial behaviour may intensify the vectors of domination, especially the inequality of women in the domestic working sphere, and how this emotional archive leaves very little room for overcoming social distinction. On the other hand, authors such as Kofes (2001) also point to the more ambivalent side of these power relations: not only to situational strategies of interest, but also to the desires and articulated aspirations that go beyond the sensations of inequality and that are directed toward equality in a more general sense (Kofes 2001: 374).

In the Brazilian context, there is a body of feminist work on the topic of paid domestic labour. Since, up to the present, the majority of domestic workers continue to be black women (Brites and Picanço 2014: 131), many of these studies are addressing the colonial legacies of a slave-holding society transmitted in the everyday encounter of women within the domestic sphere (Kofes 2001: 129). What is more, whether labelled with the notion of intersectionality or not, these studies are based on a concept of

multiple axes of oppression. In this sense, domestic labor produces gender “in the convergence of class, race and nationality“ (Biroli 2018: 36), and this not in the sense of an identity, but as immersed in a world where the problem of difference is foremost a problem of privileges. As I will show, these studies locate domination not only in the space of the household, but also in the ways of how hierarchies of gender, race and class are experienced, judged and (re)produced through feeling.

Kofes’ seminal book *Mulher, Mulheres* (2001), which is based on both quantitative questionnaires and long-term anthropological fieldwork with women in the 1980ies in the city of Campinas, Southeast Brazil, the author challenges the contradictions of the domestic sphere (*o doméstico*) she describes as at the same time defined and defining the oppressive meanings of the feminine. In her view, the seemingly collective identity woman is but a “virtual” construction: on the one hand, women were literally invented in the first place via the female coded room of domesticity. But on the other hand, the same identity woman was being permanently deconstructed, due to the structural forces of both social class and the country’s colonial past. As Kofes exemplifies throughout her study, in the interactions of the feminine employers and the domestic workers, the latter were constantly being denied pertaining to the (hegemonic) category of woman (Kofes 2001: 26).

Kofes provokes how “this kind of domination that is shaping the relations of inequality in Brazilian society” (Kofes 2001: 28) made it impossible to experience the identity woman as a momentum of commonality. In principle, the female employers and the domestic workers might be subjected to the same constraints of traditional gender arrangements, according to which the woman belonged to the domain of the domestic. Potentially, the shared experience of female oppression as well as the opposition to the patriarchal system could unfold its assembling forces. But as it turns out in the women’s narratives of Kofes’ study, the forces of distinction were inducing a series of “embarrassments”, which were unequally passed on to subjects. Thus, most female employers would for example dissociate themselves from the role of the cook, while at the same time cling to the idea of being the caring and nurturing head of the domestic. Conversely, domestic workers were in a much more precarious position. They were demanded to do paid care work going beyond cooking, but they must constantly be wary of the affective territory of their female employers. Hence the affective ties to other parties of the household (e.g. expressed in the affection towards the children) as well as those activities that would touch the ideal role of the mother, could not only be restricted, but even deprive them of the legitimacy in “being” a woman.

This is precisely where Kofes locates one of the main social contradictions in paid housework, a contradiction, to which most of her interviewed women refer. In general terms, this is due to the historically grown nature of domestic working relations, leaving

the boundaries between intimacy and formality not only unclear, but also unsteady, since they duplicate the tasks of the woman (Kofes 2001: 43). Domestic workers need to take care of reproductive tasks that, beyond cleaning and cooking, have to do with articulating affection towards the employer's family. Since their work is directly located in these power relations, directing feeling is not only a requirement of their job, but also an aspect that makes them more vulnerable to be subject to disdain of both their social and employment status. Hence for the female employers, the affective labour of domestic workers may be relieving. But at the same time, the affectionate relations of the latter are threatening to the female employers in that they often lead to competitive settings between these women. Domestic workers' engagement in caring for their employees' children or for their husband time and again, disputes the female employers' position and self-image as a mother, and therefore within the family and the domestic as a whole.

In my argument, it is this strong affective involvement of domestic workers in the family that illustrates how affects are specific to historical contexts. The above-mentioned embarrassments, for example, are intensive reflexes of culturally embedded emotions that are entangled in a Brazilian archive of feeling, which differs in many ways from the European context such as that of Gutiérrez Rodríguez' study on migrant women. In Brazil, colonial rule and the precarity of the black population in times of abolition (Chalhoub 2011) have left significant traces in the affective fields of domestic labour. These include the general association of manual work with slaves (Kofes 2011: 137) – a symbolic charge that is being re-activated in present situations and turned against black women<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, it is essentially the exceeding cultural codification of domestic labour by family relations (Kofes 2001: 163) as mentioned above, which pervades the social character of paid housework. As cited at the beginning of this text by the drama *The Second Mother*, this is exemplified by the common sentence that the domestic worker was a “member of the family”: a discourse that is often articulated by both the employer and the employed. Kofes sees an ideological mechanism working through this discourse. While none of the involved actors of this relation actually believed that the domestic worker was a true member of the family, it seemed to bring some benefits to both parties. On the one hand, through the family discourse, the female employers succeeded in partially neutralising the unpleasant feeling of having a stranger in the privacy of their homes. On the other hand, the discursive inclusion in the family provided employees with access to resources (for instance, in case of sickness they could ask their employer for financial support), which otherwise would be structurally denied to them (Kofes 2001: 179).

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6 Statistics of Pnads/IBGE 2011 in Brazil show that the vast majority of the 6,5 million domestic workers are black women, a “persisting consequence of a colonial slave-holding and hierarchical society” (Brites and Picanço 2014: 131).

For domestic workers, the informal support their employers might give them in difficult moments, unexpected situations or by means of smaller gifts represent the criteria of a 'good mistress' [*boa patroa*]. In addition to the family discourse, continuing allusions to friendship are the central references within the working relations of domestic workers and female employers (Kofes 2001: 179). This aspect of friendship has also been addressed by Vidal (2007) in his ethnographic account of domestic workers and their mistresses in Rio de Janeiro. Vidal equally stresses that women from both parties would insist on the ideals of both love and friendship regarding their relation, and that they made a strong link to the idea that Brazilians would share an emotionality that positively distinguished them from other peoples or nations (Vidal 2007: 183). As Vidal provokes, this narrative insistence on a specifically Brazilian cordiality<sup>7</sup> functioned, as it were, as a way to transcend the differences of social class that actually separated them. However, he also foregrounds that the expectations attached to this alluded common cordiality in the relation may diverge drastically:

Familiar to one and the other, the ideal of friendship between the domestic and the mistress refers to a shared request for consideration and affection, but has a different meaning according to the position occupied within the relation: to the former, this means to receive material or psychological help in difficult times; to the latter, it is loyalty, trust and discretion that is expected. Domestics and mistresses incidentally know how these expectations, which are the basis of their friendship, actually differ and to what extent the affinity, on which that friendship is based, permits the establishment of relationships between unequal people in a hierarchical manner.<sup>8</sup> (Vidal 2007: 192) [Own translation]

Both sides know that their expectations diverge. But they also have the connective insight that these expectations could form a common basis of the "friendly" relation. In other words, it is knowledge about the creation of assembling lines between socially extremely distant social positions, albeit still in a hierarchical relation.

Brites (2007; 2014) also pursues this everyday knowledge of hierarchy and marked social distances in domestic labour. By following Kofes' argument that family relations would over-codify and permeate the ruling gender regimes of the domestic, Brites

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7 "Cordiality", or *homem cordial*, goes back to Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's classic *Raízes do Brasil* (1936) and continues to be part of debates about Brazilianness in both social theory and everyday knowledge until today.

8 "Présent chez les unes et les autres, l'idéal de l'amitié entre les bonnes et les patronnes renvoie à une demande partagée de considération et d'affection, mais possède un sens différent selon la position occupée dans la relation : pour les premières, cela suppose de pouvoir recevoir une aide matérielle ou psychologique dans les moments difficiles ; pour les secondes, c'est la loyauté, la confiance et la discrétion qui est attendue. Bonnes et patronnes savent d'ailleurs combien différent ces attentes qui fondent leur amitié et combien l'affinité sur laquelle repose celle-ci permet que s'établissent des relations entre des personnes inégales dans un rapport hiérarchique."

looks especially at the role of feelings between the domestic workers and the children. With different examples, she points out that many domestic workers, as a result of their reproductive labour, would continue and cultivate their feelings towards their employers' children also in their own private lives. More than incidentally, they would put photos on the wall of their houses that showed different life steps of these children or they would tell stories about them to their neighbours. Brites even comes across a case, in which a domestic worker suffered from deep depression after being dismissed and thus being separated from the children she had previously taken care of (Brites 2007: 98). Affective labour, as I have argued with the example of retail service work (Wasser 2017), naturally induces such sticky social bonds, because re-working the very relations of private and public feeling is literally part of the job.

However, in Brites' study, both the domestic workers and the employers' children are well aware of the fact that they live in separate worlds. Emblematically, one child expresses the desire that their domestic won the lottery so that she would always have time to play with her and sleep in her mother's bed (Brites 2007: 97). Even this 5-year-old child was aware that material circumstances were behind the rules of conduct that regulate the use of the domestic space and forbid the domestic to lie down on her mother's bed. At the same time, the most astonished reaction of the domestic worker to the child's desire – "Lie in her bed! What an idea!" (Brites 2014: 67) – confirmed as how seemingly outrageous this wish appeared. Brites concludes that it was in these "affective ambiguities" the deeply carved lines of social stratification and domination were eventually being reproduced. The affective structure in which the domestic workers, the female employers and their children were immersed in, are for the author the central set of rules of a broader "didactics of social distance" (Brites 2007: 106).

But let us take a step back to what Gutiérrez Rodríguez provokes with her politics of affect at this point. Following the emotions involved in the previous examples, one can also ask whether the child's picture on the wall or the child's desire towards the company of the domestic worker did not refer to more than merely the reproduction of existing social distances. In the following section on queering work and the question of disidentification, I refer to the debates on power, identity and subject formation within queer, feminist and postcolonial theories on affect (Ahmed 2004; Baier et al. 2014). I will argue for taking the role of affects and desires as non- or not previously identitarian forces seriously. From such a perspective, Kofes' examples of both the photo on the wall and the child's wish of the lottery prize could also be interpreted as an expression of a desired proximity: an intimacy – or even transversal politics as a politics across difference (Yuval-Davis 1999) – that rejects the very roles "officially" assigned to the parties and subjects of the relation, be it that of the paid houseworker or that of the

employer's child, and which is expressed through disregarding both the spatial divisions and the prevailing privileges due to gender, race and class relations.

#### 4. Queering Work

In this third movement, I follow the aspirational horizons and “disidentifications” (Muñoz 2007) of domestic workers more closely by proposing a queer reading of working relations, of its identities and of the thesis of social reproduction through feeling. According to the concept of sexual labour [*sexuell arbeiten*] (Lorenz and Kuster 2007), there is a double productivity acting in the daily work routine. On the one hand, products are produced, on the other hand, social subjects and subject positions. It is a production site of gender and at the same time of social distances and intimacy that put these genders and desires in powerful relations to each other. Taking this concept further by both queer feminist notions of affect and again Guattari's notion of transversality, I underline moments and possibilities of resistance against the normative articulations of the emotional archive of the family as described within the Brazilian encounter.

Feeling has always been a main concern in queer thinking (see Berlant 2001; Love 2007). According to Chinn (2012), “queer and gender non-conforming people recognized that eradicating homophobia in others could begin only when we examined our own fears, desires, and hopes” (Chinn 2012: 124). Queer theory thus rejects not only the identitarian truth claims in the binary opposition of male and female, but also refuses the modern homo/heterosexual definition (Sedgwick 1990). Gender and sexual identities are foremost understood as subjectified, materialised effects of powerful identity politics that strive to constrain bodies and desires within a narrow and most often oppressive, violent cultural framework (Butler 1993). From this perspective, both affects and desires are not naturally aligned with bodies, social positions or identities. They may rather point the way to open, non-binary and multiple belongings (Anzaldúa 1987), even if this way is socially conflictive, often violent, and necessarily includes ruptures with cultural norms, strongly embodied beliefs, and with familiar groups (Eribon 2009).

If we take the assumption seriously that the sphere of work is an important cultural locus, in which identities and their relations to others are affectively produced, negotiated, consolidated or discarded, queer critique on identity has consequences for the very concept of work as commonly used in social sciences. The notion of sexual labour [*sexuell arbeiten*], the conceptual result of a group of German queer art theorists and their project *queering work* (Lorenz and Kuster 2007), represents a direct intervention to this respect. *Sexuell arbeiten* aims at bringing together two topical strands of critical



social theory, which are widely separated if not declared as conflictive until today: work and sexuality.

It is central to the notion of *sexuell arbeiten* that capitalist wage labour – and this prominently includes our topic of domestic work until this point – demands a double productivity: it produces not only products, but also normative social subjects, together with their respective social positions, bodies and desires. In dialogue with the work of McClintock (1995), Lorenz (2007) illustrates this with the photographs and diaries of Hannah Cullwick, a domestic worker from the time of Victorian England. As depicted in these images, Cullwick did the hard and sweaty work of cleaning her master's house, but she was also demanded to comply with a range of sexually connoted rules of conduct. Due to the moral request of sexual abstinence as assigned to employed women, she must not walk on the streets at night, should obey her masters and avoid talking freely.

As a domestic worker, Cullwick was not only asked to do heavy cleaning, but also to perform and identify with a body sexually controlled and patriarchally subordinated as a woman from the working class. According to Lorenz and Kuster, having to deal with these subjectivating demands of heteronormativity is one of the crucial aspects of sexual labour (Lorenz and Kuster 2007: 54). What is more, such demands in the sphere of wage labour are often both manifold and contradictory. As we have seen with the example of the study of Kofes (2001), female domestic workers are asked to do reproductive work, are seduced to take on the role of the affective carer and to personalise the domestic as if it were natural to women. At the same time, they are constantly being sanctioned when their performance comes too close to what is expected from the mistress – the mother and head of the domestic. Within the strained hierarchical relations in the domestic, the domestic workers are obliged to gain a know-how of how to manage and improvise multiple identifications and disidentifications with the categories such as woman, mother, domestic worker, cleaner, working class women, black woman, cook, machine, professional, and the like.

In this light, the ambiguities in female domestic labour are pointing to a grid of highly normative identity politics. As I see it, it is less, as authors such as Brites (2007; 2014) suggest, that affects were of an ambiguous nature in this context. Rather, affects refer to this “in between”, that is, they are located in the power relations of the domestic sphere by virtue of circulation. They convey or orient identitarian content toward multiple directions. Therefore, the example of the domestic workers who affectively adopt the children of their mistresses could also be read as an act of disagreement, that is, a refusal of the artificially instituted spatial and emotional rules, norms and privileges within the realm of the domestic. What the notion of *sexuell arbeiten* helps us to understand is that the know-how of how to switch between, combine, refuse or

relate even contradictory identity offers in individual and collective ways also means to participate in those powerful processes, in which differences are negotiated. In the terms of queer theorist Muñoz, the moments of disidentification within sexual labour refer to a “simultaneous work on, with and against dominant ideological structures” (Muñoz 2007: 127). The lived affectivity of a given sexual labourer may not be able to immediately shift or transgress such dominant structures. But it points towards the possibility of another, queered future, towards subjectivities and collective forms of living together that become think- and desirable through the very emotions it provokes.

Gutiérrez Rodríguez’s proposed politics of affects are also circulating within this search for commonality and the desire for mutual care in difference. It is situated within the debates of feminist, queer and postcolonial strands of anglophone affect studies, which compared to the notion of sexual labour, are taking a step forward in the poststructuralist problematisation of the body, identity and subjectivity<sup>9</sup>. In their queer feminist claim to redefine the relationship between “individual experience and social power relations” (Baier et al., 2014: 14), they are questioning the binaries such as emotionality versus rationality, technology versus nature or human versus non-human. Although there is no consensus on what exactly distinguishes affects from emotions, it is generally assumed that affects/emotions play the role of an “in between”, something circulating, and not necessarily pre-charged with identity content. According to Ahmed, it is emotions that first create the relationships between self and other, between self and objects: they create “surfaces”. No one owns nor “has” emotions in the true sense. For Ahmed, emotions are crucially involved in our orientation towards others (Ahmed 2004).

The present argument on the centrality of feeling when we think of its collectivising potential both through translation and directed against domination, should however not be mistaken as a positively romanticising conceptualisation of affects. As Bargetz (2015) reminds us by her queer feminist theory of affective politics of emancipation: “affect and emotions are neither merely enabling nor simply an instrument of power relations” (Bargetz 2015: 592). On the one hand, emotions take part in governmental techniques that devalue or discriminate groups due to their gender, sexuality, race, class and other categories. On the other hand, emancipation works through emotions, articulating collective politics that are not based on identity, but may start by affectively interrupting the conditions of inequality (Bargetz 2015: 583).

This indissoluble ambivalence or “distribution of emotions” (Bargetz 2015) is also at the core of Gutiérrez-Rodríguez’ conceptualisation of affective labour and the related

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9 According to Love, this is also due to an opening, within queer theory, from mainly psychoanalytical references in Freud and Lacan towards a looser understanding of psychic and bodily experiences (Chinn 2012: 126).

politics of affect in transversal conviviality. Concluding her study on female migrant workers in Europe she writes:

What Carla and the other women interviewed in this study do is not just cleaning the house, looking after the children of other women or entertaining the elderly, they are immersed in the affective relations of the household, being affected by them and, more importantly, affecting them. Without the domestic workers some apartments would be left without “life”, some households would be reminded that communal life – and life as such – demands care and love for each other and our environment. This brings us to consider what Eve Sedgwick defines as the politics of affects, a visionary political project emphasizing caring for ourselves as communal beings, embracing solidarity, responsibility, generosity and reciprocity. Affect, while exploited as affective labour and extracted as affective value within the logic of capital accumulation, holds the potential of creating an alternative to this same logic (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 168).

The creation of such an alternative – a “new cosmological vision of transversal conviviality” – would be based on a deep “acknowledgment of interconnectedness and interdependency” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010: 168).

What also resonates in this call for interconnectedness is Guattari’s notion of transversality (*transversalité*), a concept striving to resist the dimensions of identity, verticality and horizontality. For Guattari (1965) *transversalité* is a force that is pouring out of a collective unconscious. Based on his many years at the psychiatric clinic of *La Borde*, he comes to the insight that in each institution such a collective unconscious occurs. However, this unconscious is not only invisible, but it is being suppressed by the existing institutions and their individuals acting in them: “In as much as the psychiatrist or nurse wields a certain amount of power, he or she must be considered responsible for destroying the possibilities of expression of the institution’s unconscious subjectivity” (Guattari 1984: 17).

According to Guattari, this subjectivity can be released through a group analysis that rejects both the mechanical logic of organisation charts (verticality) and the compulsive individual survival strategies (horizontality). The movement and direction of *transversalité* unpredictably cross “the large institutional and hierarchical assemblages that claim to rule the world”<sup>10</sup> (Fourquet 2007: 556). *Transversalité* thus denotes both a place of a group’s unconscious subject and a non-hierarchical dimension of power (Fourquet 2007: 558).

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10 “les grands ensembles institutionnels hiérarchisés qui prétendent gouverner le monde”

## 5. Coda

In the domestic encounters of *The Second Mother* (2015), the arrival of Val's daughter Jéssica marks a turning point in the social drama. It is not only the beginning of a series of conflicts about who has the right to use certain spaces and things in the residence, of who is to be destined to study at the university or who is affectively being addressed as the mother. It is also the awakening of those unpredictable collective forces Guattari reminds us to perceive and free when he writes on transversality, "the unconscious subject of the group" (Fourquet 2007). On the one hand, Jéssica's self-determined attitude in deliberately disrespecting the rules and subtleties of postcolonial domination within the household opens a space of reencounter with her mother, the domestic worker Val. Val is having a hard time coping with her daughter's revolts and, for a long time, defends the rules of power and subordination she had thought to know for herself until then. But at the latest when Jéssica passes the entrance exam for architecture studies with flying colours (in contrast to her mistress' son Fabinho), she can change her mind. While she had defended her mistress' command to take Jéssica out of the swimming pool a couple of days before, she now secretly enters the pool at night and shares her personal conquest with her daughter. It is this uprising commonality and affectivity that starts to tie together these two women, Val and Jéssica, and that is equally a moment of disidentification with the attributed normative roles of both the female domestic worker from Northeast Brazil and the second mother within the ambivalent family discourse.

On the other hand, Jéssica also troubles the relational affective rules and behaviour of Dona Bárbara's family. There is Don Carlos, the husband, who happens to invite Jéssica to eat at the family's table and to eat from Fabinho's chocolate almond ice cream. Transversality, so to speak, also appears in his unexpected affection for Jéssica that even includes a proposal of marriage, and that goes back to his unease of being a frustrated but hereditary wealthy artist, idealising Jéssica as a heroic student from the working class. Also, his rather immature son, Fabinho, is fascinated by Jéssica. It is Fabinho that transgresses the verticality of the institutionalised power relations and affects within the domestic when he pushes Jéssica in the swimming pool. Although his relation to Jéssica is shaped by envy due to her talent and being studious, his affective response in that situation is also an outbreak of the ambivalent family discourse, in which every involved person knows that domestic workers are not factually included, and especially excluded from the right to have a swim in the pool.

As I have tried to show with the studies of Kofes (2001), Brites (2007) and other feminist work in Brazil on the topic of female domestic labour, affects do not float in a vacuum. On the one hand, their circulation is circumscribed by their contextual power relations of the domestic sphere, directing normative impressions and meaning

about women, domestic work, and domination. On the other hand, I argued that these impressions and affects are historically specific. The feelings that course in the conflicts and in the transversal moments described in *The Second Mother* as well as in the emotions analysed by the discussed studies are directed toward the family, affection and friendship, which are inseparable from the regional histories of colonial domination and its intimate forms of hierarchisation. The present paper is thus not only a call for comparative studies on how affect is culturally embedded, but also for considering feeling in its role of articulating social and employment status. Looking at affect and interdependency within female domestic labour, as I hold, enables a critical perspective on the tensions of conviviality-inequality that brings together the complex interplays of everyday interactions, gendered subjectivity, and structural dimensions of hierarchy and exclusion.

Now the feminist and queer notions of affect regarding the household and female domestic labour go beyond the restrictions of fixed identities, constrained social bonds and unsurmountable differences. What the concepts of transversality (both in Guattari 1965 and in Yuval-Davis 1999), disidentification (Muñoz 2007), distribution of emotions (Bargetz 2015) and politics of affect (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010) share is their epistemological stance of how to rebuild the encounter with and in difference(s) that enable new visions of interdependency, solidarity and emancipation that interrupt the very logics and conditions of social inequalities or exclusions.

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