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Title: ‘It is very difficult to like and to love, but not to be respected or valued’:

Maids and Nannies in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary

Abstract: This article interrogates two contemporary documentaries that explore the roles and experiences of domestic and childcare workers in Brazilian society:

Consuelo Lins’ *Babás/Nannies* (2010) and Gabriel Mascaro’s *Doméstica/Housemaids* (2012). In order to examine their formal differences, the analysis draws on Ismail Xavier’s typology of Brazilian documentary (2009), and Catherine Russell’s discussion of experimental ethnographic films (1999). Both Lins’ and Mascaro’s documentaries indicate the ways that colonial slave-owning relationships continue to weigh uncannily on modern-day domestic labour arrangements. They show how attempts to confine maids to ‘de-politicised’ home-spaces is a tactic used to deny them autonomy, and political and labour rights. However, while *Babás* attempts to redress the marginalisation of nannies within hegemonic narratives of Brazilian cultural memory, it occasionally risks othering the figures to whom it pays homage. By contrast, *Doméstica*’s experimental ethnographic practice and haptic, affective images actively foreground the violent domestic relationships upon which bourgeois home-spaces are constructed.

Keywords: affect, Brazilian documentary, domestic workers, (emotional) labour, ethnography, maids, nannies, the uncanny.

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‘It is very difficult to like and to love, but not to be respected or valued’:

Maids and Nannies in Contemporary Brazilian Documentary

In a photograph that circulated widely on social media networks last year (prior to former president Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in August 2016), the vice-president of Rio de Janeiro football club Flamengo and his wife were photographed on an anti-government demonstration accompanied by their children.ⁱ However, it was the presence of the family’s ‘Sunday maid’ in the shot that caused online consternation, as the image was held up as evidence of the privileged socio-economic provenance of many of those who participated in protests that called for the end of Rousseff’s Worker’s Party (PT) administration. Despite evidence to the contrary, these protests were often branded ‘popular’ and patriotic. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the children pictured had been dressed in yellow and green: the Brazilian national colours. In contrast to the family, their employee was easily identifiable by her plain white clothes – the uniform that many *empregadas domésticas* [domestic workers] are obliged to wear by their bosses in Brazil.ⁱⁱ <FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE, CAPTION: Anti-government protest, photo by João Valadares (*Correio Braziliense*)>

Domestic workers in Brazil have been seized upon within recent media narratives as emblems of the wider class conflict and political radicalisation that has engulfed the country since 2013.ⁱⁱⁱ The introduction of improved labour laws in 2012 (amongst other factors) has brought about changes in the nature of domestic work, which have been received by some as an attack on middle- and upper-class private privilege. As visual artist Gabriel Mascaro suggests, the issue of domestic work is one that riles many people because ‘a doméstica, afinal de contas, se instala na casa delas. A relação não é só de trabalho como envolve afeto, mas a doméstica, seja faxineira,

conzinheira ou babá, não pertence à família e a relação é marcada pela tensão social’ [‘at the end of the day, the domestic worker lives in these people’s homes. The relationship between them is not purely a professional one as it involves affection, but the maid – be they a cleaner, cook or a nanny – does not belong to the family and the relationship is marked by social tension’] (Merten 2013).^{iv} The various high and low-level conflicts that characterise relationships between domestic workers and their employers are exposed in Gabriel Mascaro’s documentary *Doméstica/Housemaids* (2012) and Consuelo Lins’ documentary-short *Babás/Nannies* (2010), which examine the nature of domestic work in Brazil today.

This article focuses on the way that Lins’ and Mascaro’s films play on the emotional ties between maids, nannies and the children for whom they care. In doing so, their documentaries complicate any notion of domestic work as a purely economic commodity by foregrounding the slippage between labour and affect. Both films’ uses of experimental ethnographic documentary techniques, haptic perspectives and creation of affect, work to highlight the unsavoury elements of the dwellings they depict. Their portrayals emphasise the way in which bourgeois home-spaces are predicated on the repression of the unhomely, that is, on the suppression of difference and of the unequal (even violent) power relationships that create (or provide the impression of) domestic harmony (Sorfa 2006: 98). Indeed, while domestic workers are associated with the maintenance of a variety of home-spaces in Brazil, they are also figures who condense multiple concerns surrounding ‘race’, gender and class-based discrimination.^v

Domestic service in Brazil: a changing landscape

Merike Blofield observes that Latin America as a whole exhibits the greatest income inequalities in the world, which creates both the demand for and a supply of domestic labour (2012: 2). In Brazil, which is the country with the highest number of domestic workers in the world (Gallas 2016), the occupation is often perceived as lower-class women's work. This is an assumption that can be traced back to the end of slave labour when a scarcity of alternative employment led many Afro-descendant women to take up paid service positions (Roncador 2014: 6). In the country today 93% of domestic workers are women and the majority are black (Cornwall et al. 2013: 149), and the role of *doméstica* undoubtedly remains tied to discriminatory socio-cultural notions of 'blackness', which compounds these workers' marginalisation (Roncador 2014: 4).

Gilberto Freyre's *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933), a well-known study of the domestic arrangements that developed on Brazil's sugar plantations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, makes it clear that it was common for Afro-Brazilian slaves to be employed as wet-nurses, as well as to be sexually abused by their European-descendant masters (2003: 278). As such, their bodies have been strongly associated with corporeal and affective – or emotional – labour. The bodies of the frequently dark-skinned nannies (or *babás*) and *empregadas* in modern-day Brazil are still problematically imbued with these connotations, as both of the documentaries analysed here intimate.

The films represent a stark contrast to prior televisual and cinematic depictions of one-dimensional maid characters, typified by the lowbrow *pornochanchadas* [sexual comedies] that circulated in Brazil in the 1970s. These include *Como é boa nossa empregada/How Good our Maid Is* (Ismar Porto & Victor di Mello 1973),

which features the stereotypical ‘randy maid’ character (Dennison and Shaw 2004: 158-163).^{vi} Both documentaries adhere to Ismail Xavier’s characterisation of contemporary Brazilian documentary-production since the 1990s, in that they develop an ‘audiovisual counter-discourse’, which probes personal and social experiences that are often reduced to ‘clichés’ in mainstream media narratives (2009: 210-211).

Since the millennium, Lins’ and Mascaro’s documentaries have been accompanied by a plethora of films produced in Brazil and Latin America, which feature maids in key roles.^{vii} In Brazil, these portrayals include: Fernando Meirelles’ *Domésticas/Maids* (2001), João Moreira Salles’ *Santiago* (2007), Felipe Barbosa’s *Casa grande* (2014), Ana Muylaert’s *Que horas ela volta?/The Second Mother* (2015) and Kleber Mendonça Filho’s *Recife Frio/Cold Recife* (2009), *O som ao redor/Neighbouring Sounds* (2009), and *Aquarius* (2016). Many of them proffer a nuanced reflection on the role of domestic workers in Brazilian society and often attempt to provide insights into these individuals’ lived experiences and/or emotional as well as labour exploitation. Some of them are also characterised by a recognition of the way in which the legacy of slave-owning relationships in Brazil weighs on modern-day domestic labour relations, which has fomented the portrayal of spectral ‘live-in’ maid characters.

It is clear that these productions are emerging from a volatile context in which Brazil has been pressured to ‘perform’ its modernity by protecting vulnerable workers, both as an emerging economic powerhouse (at least until recently), and as a consequence of the introduction of the first international convention of domestic workers, passed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2011 (Blofield 2012: 4). The following year, the PT administration approved a constitutional amendment relating to domestic work, which limited the number of working hours

per week, guaranteed a minimum number of rest days and introduced the requirement that employers pay a proportion of their employee's salary into a government severance fund, which is meant to protect the latter in the case of unfair dismissal (*The Economist* 2014).

Although these amendments sought to challenge working conditions that have been described as a modern corollary of slavery (Cunha 2007), they appeared to provoke a backlash among certain members of the middle and upper classes. Indeed, it has been suggested that Rousseff's support of reforms to domestic labour laws and association with the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenetrad) may have contributed to her political downfall.^{viii} The legal changes approved in 2012, together with an economic downturn, have made it harder to afford a 'live-in' maid in Brazil. This has provoked public unease precisely because these alterations have stoked fears surrounding the need to reorganise bourgeois home and family life. It demonstrates how the conditions of domestic work and expectations of domestic labourers can foreground the complex relationship between the private and public realms and, in particular, the way that the domestic (familial) sphere often appears to subsume the properly political sphere in Brazil. Writing in the 1930s (like Freyre), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda argued that Brazil's history has been characterised by the constant predominance of private over public interests, in particular by the 'supremacia incontestável, absorvente, do núcleo familiar' ['incontestable, all encompassing supremacy of the family nucleus'], which has resulted in 'laços de sangue e (...) as relações que se criam na vida doméstica' ['blood ties and (...) domestic relationships'] providing the model for social relationships ([1936] 2014: 176). Holanda concludes that this occurs even within democratic institutions founded upon theoretically neutral and abstract principles (2014: 176), and he attributes it to the

legacy of Brazil's rural, patriarchal culture and society, established during the colonial era (2014: 175). Unlike Freyre, he believed that the process of modernisation would dispense with the primacy of intimate relationships. However, the continual slippage between the public and the private (or domestic) was clearly illustrated when various *deputados* [political representatives] who voted for Rousseff's suspension prior to impeachment proceedings stated that they were doing so in the name of their children or grandchildren, and thus to protect their private, familial interests (Santos 2016).

Babás and Doméstica: 'experimental ethnographies'

To an extent, then, domestic workers have become contentious socio-cultural figures in Brazil in recent years and filmmakers have, consequently, begun to reflect on the changing status of maids and their centrality to the maintenance of domestic spaces. Both *Doméstica* and *Babás* offer a valuable (and frequently uncomfortable) interrogation of socio-economic and cultural privilege, an issue that has historically been a 'silent terrain' in Brazilian documentary production (Allen 2013: 183), and which remains under-researched within Latin American cultural studies.

For Consuelo Lins – who is a documentary-maker and academic from Rio de Janeiro – this painful, self-reflexive admission of privilege is particularly personal, as she acknowledges the crucial roles that a variety of women played in raising her and her siblings, as well as her own offspring. She reflects on the situation of her son's nanny, Denise, who lived in Lins' home while her son was a young boy; this meant that Denise could only see her own daughter on Sundays, something which, Lins admits, she preferred not to think about at the time. Her film operates as an elegy to *babás* across Brazil and appears to be a product of her desire to atone for their treatment, in what could be considered an attempt to extirpate middle-class guilt.

Although *Doméstica* focuses on the broader category of domestic workers, Mascaro has admitted that he was inspired to make the documentary when his (non-Brazilian) wife said that she did not want to hire a *babá* to help with their childcare needs. She raised concerns about ‘progressive’ friends who employed nannies and expected them to sleep overnight in their homes without paying them overtime (Salem 2013). Mascaro, who is a visual artist and filmmaker, is considered part of the ‘novíssimo cinema brasileiro’ [‘newest Brazilian cinema’] generation, which comprises a group of independent filmmakers, many of whom are based in Recife, and who engage in formal and aesthetic innovation (*Revista E* 2013: 20). Much of his artistic production is concerned with class-based conflict.

While *Babás* and *Doméstica* may spring from feelings of class discomfort, their experimental approaches also betray an implicit solidarity with the workers they depict, and appear designed to challenge audiences to reconsider popular assumptions surrounding the roles that domestic servants have been designated in Brazil for so long. They demonstrate an awareness that notions of domestic work are evolving, with the figure of the ‘live-in’ maid perhaps (slowly) becoming obsolete.^{ix}

Despite their clear formal differences, both films can be productively analysed as different types of ‘experimental ethnography’, particularly given that the directors wrestle (either implicitly or explicitly) with the question of how to represent domestic workers ethically, given that these subjects constitute a racial, class (and often a gender) ‘Other’. Catherine Russell defines ‘experimental ethnography’ as the attempt to dismantle ‘the universalist impulse of realist aesthetics into a clash of voices, cultures, bodies, and languages’ (1999: xvii). She suggests that ethnography, which is ‘grounded in an identification with the cultural other’, demonstrates a parallel with – and can be productively complicated by – experimental film and video-making

practices, which are drawn ‘not only to the marginalia of media culture, but also to marginal cultures’ (1999: 19). Russell argues that “‘the human condition’ must be rethought as one of ongoing cultural encounter, translation, and transition’, and that it is avant-garde video-making practices that ‘provide the tools for this operation’ (1999: xvii).

On one level both films could be termed ‘polyphonic’ in that they incorporate a variety of different perspectives on domestic work. However, in both cases their directors retained editorial (and thus authorial) control over the material collected. As Russell emphasises, experimental ethnographic film and videomakers inevitably ‘remain implicated in paradigms of modernism and colonialism, even as they seek ways of revising the production of otherness in representation’ (1999: 19). Elements of their critiques of oppressive relationships, and of their attempts to institute alternative perspectives on domestic work are, nonetheless, effective. Both films defamiliarise and deconstruct the home through the use of haptic images and the choice to dwell on the uncanny elements of domestic spaces and relationships. *Babás* also meditates explicitly on the importance, for many domestic workers, of having the opportunity to own their own homes in order to assert a level of autonomy from those for whom they labour.

Ultimately, however, Mascaro’s experimental ethnographic methodology, which involved asking several adolescents to film their families’ domestic employees, constitutes a more incisive critique. Its direct and conscious reflection on *misidentification* between teen filmmakers and ‘subaltern’ subjects runs less of a risk than *Babás* of collapsing into an unproblematised exoticisation (or condescending approach) towards ‘the Other’. The documentary’s focus on the bodily performance of particular roles and domestic tasks, as well as the production of affect in contested

and divided domestic spaces, provides the audience with ‘an insight’ into the implicit ‘echoes of a colonial past that linger in contemporary Brazil’ (*Doméstica*: blurb).

The unheimlich and the ‘affective remnant’

The postcolonial ghosting to which *Doméstica*’s blurb alludes is expressed through these documentaries’ focuses on the uncanny elements of the home-spaces that they portray. The notion of the *unheimlich* [uncanny] is directly linked to the sense of a ‘not quite home’ space, given that it is the opposite of *heimlich* or *heimisch*, meaning ‘familiar’ or ‘belonging to the home’ (Freud 2003: 124-126). Sigmund Freud explores the link between the unhomely and what was once homelike but is no longer. He suggests that strange phenomena are often unsettling because they are oddly *familiar*, and observes that neurotic male patients frequently ‘state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. [...] What they find uncanny [*unheimlich*] is actually the entrance to the man’s old “home”, the place where everyone once lived’ (2003: 151). David Sorfa suggests that homely or *heimlich* spaces necessarily lead back to the unhomely or uncanny, which is that which was repressed in order to make the unhomely into something homely (2006: 98). As this analysis will show, the depiction of domestic workers in *Doméstica* and *Babás* foregrounds the way in which the homely is precisely predicated on the suppression of the unhomely – that is to say, on the suppression of unequal and exploitative power relationships that can be traced back to the colonial period in Brazil.

The notion of a ‘live-in’ maid is itself uncanny because it is (often silently) predicated on the notion that life itself (as well as emotional, ‘immaterial’ labour) can be commodified. By paying a worker to live permanently in a home and care for a family that is not his or her own, that employee is often prevented from establishing

an autonomous personal life. As Ana Ros explains, the concept of commodification, which is fundamental to a Marxist understanding of capital development, refers to the transformation of relationships that were not previously deemed commercial into commercial transactions (2011: 101). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1969) suggest that the commodification of domestic work – or ‘women’s labour’ – exemplifies this process. Nonetheless, the close personal and emotional attachments that often develop between maids and employer-families mean that these ‘labour’ relationships can, in fact, resist total commodification. Ros terms this the ‘affective remnant’ (2011: 104); it both reinforces the potential for relations between families and domestic workers to be violent and exploitative, but it also complicates – even deconstructs – the notion that domestic labour relations can function in a purely transactional manner. As my analysis shows, both Lins’ and Mascaro’s documentaries uncannily foreground the ‘affective remnants’ of the domestic relationships that they depict.

Babás: ‘found-footage’ filmmaking

Ismail Xavier’s typology of contemporary Brazilian documentary is useful in distinguishing between Lins’ and Mascaro’s films. He suggests that the country’s recent documentary productions can be broadly categorised either as ‘documentaries of the encounter’, or as more classical productions, which rely on a teleological narrative and ‘micro-realist’ techniques, including the medium’s capacity for ‘historical indexicality’ (2009: 211). In various respects *Babás* adheres to the second category. It opens with a tentative assertion and works towards a particular historical thesis through Lins’ use of voiceover and the way that she pieces together a range of archival materials. These materials include: home videos, photography, paintings and

job advertisements, produced from the late nineteenth century up until the present day.

Her documentary-short is an instance of what Russell terms ‘found-footage filmmaking’ (1999: 238) in that it addresses the legacy of slavery that weighs on modern-day relationships between employers and *babás* by *retrieving* and *rereading* historical and memorial fragments “‘against the grain” of dominant culture’ (21). In the documentary, Lins states that she trawled through archival films and family photographs and concludes that, despite many middle- and upper-class households dependence on them to function: ‘é raro encontrar imagens de babás e empregadas domésticas nos arquivos públicos ou familiares no Brasil. Quando aparecem, é quase sempre por acaso, em meio a cenas com crianças em filmes de família’ [‘it is rare to find images of nannies and domestic employees in Brazil’s public or family archives. When they appear, it is almost always by chance, in the midst of scenes featuring children in home-video footage’]. Consequently, she attempts to redress the way in which nannies have been marginalised within (or even erased from) hegemonic Brazilian narratives of cultural memory by sketching out a genealogy of Brazil’s *babás*.

Her documentary opens as the camera pans out from a close-up of the face of an Afro-Brazilian woman to reveal a black-and-white photograph in which a young, upper-class boy leans affectionately on her shoulder. The well-known photograph depicts Artur Gomes Leal with his wetnurse Mônica; it was taken in 1860 in Recife, prior to the abolition of slavery in 1888. Lins confirms the cultural significance of the relationship between the pair when she cites historian Luiz Felipe Alencastro, who wrote that ‘quase todo o Brasil cabe nessa foto’ [‘almost the whole of Brazil fits into this photo’] (1997: 440). The film subsequently cuts to footage of a group of modern-

day *babás* playing with children on a beach in Rio de Janeiro. The amplified sound of the ocean lapping at the shore on the film's diegetic soundtrack forms the link between the nineteenth-century nanny's African origins and the role that these *babás* are employed to play today. Lins' voiceover adds that the impact of the physical and emotional affection that all of these women have provided for the children for whom they care has been 'amolengar, adocicar, amaciar a cultura portuguesa' ['to sweeten and soften (Brazil's) Portuguese culture']. This theme, which runs throughout the documentary, enables Lins to demonstrate the impossibility of condensing domestic labour relationships down into purely commercial transactions. It functions as an allusion both to these women's affective exploitation and to their centrality to the maintenance of 'comfortable' domestic spaces for many families. <FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE, CAPTION: Photograph of Artur Gomes Leal and his wet-nurse Mônica, taken by F. Villela (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco Archive, Coleção Francisco Rodrigues)>

However, the director's comments also uncannily echo those of Freyre when he emphasises the importance of the relationships between the enslaved 'mães-pretas' (2003: 435) ["black mammies" (1963: 369)] and the landowner's children for the formation of Brazilian culture and language during the colonial era. He employs the same vocabulary as Lins when describing the 'softening' effects that African or Afro-descendant wetnurses had in their physical and emotional relationships with their young charges. He repeatedly uses the word 'amolengar' (2003: 367; 419) – which is often translated as 'to mash' with reference to the child's food (1963: 278; 349) – and 'amaciar' (2003: 391; 414), which is employed when referring to the influence that he suggests these women's language had on the 'softening' of European Portuguese in Brazil (2003: 414-415). Afro-Brazilian women's bodies play a key role in a Freyrian

schema of racial miscegenation, which has taken on a quasi-mythical status in popular understandings of Brazilian national identity. His texts have been used to perpetuate a vision of Brazil as a ‘racial democracy’, which masks the reality that black and mixed-race Brazilians are much more likely to be poor and to suffer as a consequence of the racism still present in the country (De Luca 2017: 210).

The opening of Lins’ documentary thus risks regurgitating and reinforcing a romanticised conception of Afro-Brazilian women’s physical availability and role as ‘natural caregivers’. Furthermore, as Russell suggests, ‘in the intertextuality, fragmentation, and discursivity of found-footage filmmaking, *the body* has a very different status than it does in conventional ethnography’; it becomes an element of culture, ‘a signifier of itself’ and it takes on ‘a supplementality that exceeds its role in the production of meaning’ (1999: 238). (This is perhaps because photographs ‘rescue’ specific individuals and embodied interpersonal relationships that have ceased to exist.) It is for this reason that the representation of the body of the wetnurse or nanny becomes overdetermined within the historical and cultural narrative that Lins constructs. Indeed, *Babás*’ focus on the socio-cultural legacy of nannies (or surrogate mothers) alludes to the way in which the familial or domestic realm often threatens to subsume the public or national sphere in Brazil.

Lins’ recourse to archival documents, and to this photograph in particular, verges (perhaps unconsciously) on an attempt to incorporate the figure of the *babá* into a national ‘foundational fiction’. This constitutes a problematic gesture given that, as Doris Sommer (1991) has demonstrated, these narratives obscure the role of the subaltern Other in the ‘birth’ and maintenance of modern Latin American nation states. Similarly to José de Alencar’s (1865) Tabajara princess Iracema, the indigenous mother from his eponymous novel who must be sacrificed so that Brazil’s

new lusotropical nation can survive and progress (Sommer 1991: 169-171), the ‘black (surrogate) mammy’ presented in Lins’ *Babás* is the other of the white mother. Both of these figural women are equated with the space of the nation and must (in differing ways) protect its future political subject (symbolised as a middle- or upper-class boy) in order to safeguard the national future.

In sum, Lins’ somewhat ‘romantic’ affinity with a subaltern group gives rise to problematic Orientalist literary and artistic tropes. To her credit, she concludes the film by returning to the photograph with which she started and acknowledging: ‘não sei se todo o Brasil cabe nessa imagem. Mas da história da minha família, e de tantas outras famílias brasileiras, essa fotografia certamente faz parte’ [‘I don’t know if the whole of Brazil fits into this image. But this photo certainly constitutes part of my own family’s history, as well as that of so many other Brazilian families’]. Ultimately, then, as well as having organised and edited all of the images and recordings used, Lins’ elegy to *babás* is thoroughly interpellated by her own experiences: in attempting to tell the story of ‘the Other’, she ends up meditating on her own memories and subjectivity. *Babás*’ status as an auteur film does not, therefore, ‘permite que a personagem [da *babá*] possa, pela primeira vez, contar a sua história’ [‘allow the figure (of the nanny) to tell her own story for the first time’] (Blank 2012: 19). Instead, the film follows the Brazilian essayistic tradition in its struggle to ‘converter a representação da realidade social em uma expressão própria’ [‘to convert its representation of social reality into a personal expression’] (Blank 2012: 10). As Leslie Marsh observes, although auteurism offers a vital means for women directors to effect socio-political critique (2012: 160), this mode’s association with a celebration of individual (usually male) cinematic ‘genius’ has provoked feminist objections, which draw attention to its tendency to mask the collaborative nature of

filmmaking (164). Given Lins' apparent determination to pay homage to the maids and nannies on whom she has depended throughout her life, the choice to make an 'auteur'-style short is somewhat perplexing.

Despite this, *Babás*' juxtaposition of home-video footage certainly produces uncanny effects. In one of the documentary's most provocative sequence, Lins reflects on a humorous family video that she recorded on holiday; it shows her son Joaquim being playfully encouraged to try out 'a dança da bundinha' ['the bum dance'] by his nanny Denise. It is a dance that, Lins suggests, 'talvez eu não ensinasse' ['perhaps I wouldn't have taught him']. Following this, Lins introduces an eerily similar sequence from home-video footage recorded in the 1920s by Júlio de Mattos, a doctor from São Paulo state (Blank 2012: 7). The video shows Mattos' young daughter Marieta being encouraged to dance the Charleston by her Afro-Brazilian nanny who, like Denise, lingers at the edge of the frame. Given the popular association of both these dances with African heritage, this sequence sets up an implied link between childcare practices throughout the twentieth century and their origins in the cultural legacy of slavery in Brazil.

Archival footage of this kind is often employed to give a documentarian licence to speak with historical authority (Russell 1999: 240). However, *Babás* stops short of clearly articulating how the history to which the Mattos home video alludes could inform a reading of the emotional and labour exploitation that childcare workers still face today. As Russell notes, what is often evident in found-footage films is 'a discourse of surfaces', in which 'origins and sources are effaced, producing an image sphere with a highly ambivalent relation to history' (1999: 271). Instead, the presentation of the Charleston video risks a nostalgic evocation of an earlier era and a

yearning for the role of the emotionally- and physically-available *babá* that is rapidly changing.

Babás: interviews and domestic autonomy

Indeed, the expression and exploration of emotional attachment in *Babás* somewhat obfuscates an interrogation of abusive labour relationships. These are most directly addressed through the interviews with former domestic servants that Lins incorporates towards the documentary's conclusion. However, given their brevity, these testimonies only scratch the surface of the gender and race-based discrimination these women have faced – discrimination that has been naturalised within the socio-cultural field, as their comments in the film make clear.

Most importantly, the nannies' interviews and testimonies enable the documentary to reflect on the significance that home ownership can hold for domestic workers. As Elizabeth Hutchinson points out, the attempt to align domestic workers (in particular 'live-in' maids) with a 'de-politicised' bourgeois domestic space, and to subsume them as marginal members of the families for whom they work, represents an ideological manoeuvre that has been used to deny these employees recognition of their rights as public workers, as well as their potential for political agency (2009: 80).

Lins' voiceover retells her relationship with Vera, the nanny who looked after her nephew and niece for twelve years. As home-video footage of Vera interacting with the children is shown, a recording is played of a conversation between the other domestic employees with whom Vera works. They express concern over Vera's plans to marry and whether this will mean that she will no longer live or work with them. As footage of Lins' other nannies and maids is shown, the conversation evolves to

address the importance of buying one's own home. The disjunction in this sequence between the visual sequences – of the maids happily interacting with their employers' children – and the recording about home ownership, is a haptic filmic technique, in Laura Marks' terms, which points to meanings that lie between them (2000: 129). Later in the documentary, Lins meets with several maids who work for her friends or acquaintances in (what appear to be) the maids' own homes.^x One of them recalls her earlier refusal of an employer's offer to move into an apartment that she would buy for her. This offer formed part of the employer's attempt to persuade her to not get married or have a family and house of her own.

These concerns reflect those identified by Nara Milanich who observes that an important issue on the maid's workers' rights agenda in the 1960s was the campaign for maids to be able to own a house, rather than living in maid's quarters (2005: 13). This situation underlined these women's lack of autonomy, identity, and vulnerability. Milanich continues that the traditional conflation between domestic service and surrogate daughterhood 'ruled out the possibility [for maids] of imagining them[selves] as wives and mothers', that is of achieving 'domestic sovereignty' (2005: 13). Delia Dutra traces these women's lack of a right to family life back to a nineteenth-century conception of the family in Latin America, when this unit comprised the employer-family *and* their various domestic servants (2017: 350). These servants could have children of their own, but they were not considered to constitute a family because they did not possess the entire extended family structure or have any time for themselves (Dutra 2017: 350-351). Consequently, domestic (and familial) sovereignty has represented a fundamental stage in the maid's process of acquiring and demanding both a person's identity and a worker's identity (Carvalho 1999: 112). It is perhaps for this reason that Lins' documentary concludes with her

visit to her own former *babá* Iraci who now owns her own home, which she proudly displays for Lins' camera. Nonetheless, the documentary's focus on the importance of home ownership could be read as indicative of an underlying feminist individualist perspective and serves as a reminder that access to this idealised form of domesticity is often reserved for the middle or upper classes, thus complicating the 'progressive' potential of the domestic space.

Doméstica: triangulation of the domestic-space

Perhaps unexpectedly given that Lins worked closely with renowned Brazilian documentarist Eduardo Coutinho, the methodology that Mascaro adopted for *Doméstica* can be more comfortably aligned with the confrontational interview-based practice for which Coutinho is known, and which has become a hallmark of Brazilian documentary.^{xi} In order to make *Doméstica*, Mascaro gave home-video cameras and tripods to thirteen adolescents who agreed to film their family's housemaids for one week; they later handed over the footage to Mascaro. He edited more than 120 hours of material (Merten 2013) down to a seventy-five-minute documentary composed of seven segments, each of which focuses on the experiences of a different domestic worker.

While it may seem counterintuitive to have asked the adolescents rather than the maids themselves to film the latter's daily realities, this gesture epitomises Mascaro's commitment to an 'avant garde', experimental practice. As Russell explains,

within the arena of ethnographic film, 'handing the camera over' to a native filmmaker often simply perpetuates the realist aesthetics that experimental film form has dislodged. The 'authentic identity' of the film- or videomaker is not [...] a sufficient revision of ethnographic practice because differences exist within

cultures and communities just as surely as they do between cultural identities. [...]
Faye Ginsberg has described the impact of indigenous ethnography on visual anthropology as a 'parallax effect'. Indeed, it is not the 'correctness' of indigenous ethnography so much as the opening of multiple perspectives that has shifted the emphases of visual anthropology. (1999: 11)

The section of Mascaro's film that focuses on the experiences of Flávia Santos Silva lends credence to Russell's argument. The *differing* levels of violence and discrimination that distinct *domésticas* face is foregrounded by the fact that *empregada* Flávia is employed by *another* maid to look after the latter's children (in particular her disabled son), while their mother is out working in someone else's home. Flávia tells teenager Ana Beatriz de Oliveira about the extremely brutal experiences of gender and domestic violence that resulted in the loss of her own unborn children, and how this led her to her current role.

Furthermore, the teenagers' control of the camera in *Doméstica* permits a triangulation of the domestic space that enables the audience to see interactions between the employees and other members of the employer-family, including their bosses. The fact that it is a family member doing the filming possibly encourages those on camera to act in a more spontaneous manner, and both the workers and the bosses are also frequently willing to concede interviews to the teenagers about the history of the professional and personal relationships between them. Lúcia Nagib observes that this kind of collaborative documentary-making project results in the crumbling of the usual filming hierarchy (the subject above the object, the director above the crew and the cast) through the productive clashing of active subjectivities behind and before the camera. It is a process of general

empowerment and emancipation that frontally opposes the ‘romance of victimization’. (2009: 206-7)

This ‘crumbling’ of the traditional ‘filming hierarchy’ is compounded in *Doméstica* by the fact that the employees often have a maternal or paternal relationship to those behind the camera (and because childhood itself is frequently figured as the ‘Other’ of adulthood). The power relationship between the children and the employees is, therefore, somewhat diluted when compared to the boss-worker relationship. As a consequence of this, and of the complicity that often exists between the housemaids and the teenagers, the former are sometimes able to exert control over their visual portrayals.

While it is true that *Doméstica* appears to represent an attempt to obfuscate a singular ethics of this documentary’s gaze, the director’s ideological project remains plain. Although Mascaro does not appear in the film (which represents a lack of self-reflexivity that distinguishes his documentary practice from Coutinho’s), he has subsequently acknowledged his ultimate editorial control over the final production, as he selected the particular narratives and footage of which it is composed. He has stated: ‘não tem como negar que o filme é também o meu encontro afetivo e político com o resultado dessas imagens brutas’ [‘it is impossible to deny that the film is also my political and affective response to the results of the raw footage’] (*Revista E* 2013). His choices result in a politically-motivated documentary, which explores the unequal power dynamics that characterise all of the working relationships depicted.

The clashes that make *Doméstica* such uncomfortable viewing are often elided in *Babás* because the director generally chooses to erase her own presence from the interviews she undertook. Lins also confesses that she did not feel at liberty to interview the domestic workers that she employed at the time she was recording the

film because she thought that ‘essas conversas podiam ser comprometidas pela situação patroa-empregada’ [‘these conversations could be compromised by the boss-employee relationship’]. In contrast to *Babás* – which constructs an ambivalent historical and cultural narrative that recognises the (supressed) contribution of nannies to Brazilian society and national identity – *Doméstica* has a thoroughly deconstructive effect. The latter’s experimental ethnographic technique enables it actively and self-consciously to foreground the uncanny – even unsightly – relationships upon which bourgeois home-spaces are constructed.

Doméstica: Valdomiro and Vanuza – performative subjects

Mascaro’s choice to invite teenagers to film and interview their domestic workers appears to encourage both parties to behave in a performative manner on camera.^{xii} This, in turn, highlights the clash of competing subjectivities, as well as the adolescent filmmakers’ frequent unawareness or misunderstanding of the housemaids’ personal histories and experiences. Nonetheless, similarly to *Babás*, the use of home-video footage underscores the undeniably close (even affectionate) emotional relationships that many of these children and employees have with each other.

The first of *Doméstica*’s ‘chapters’, which features the adolescent Valdomiro Neto who films his family’s maid Vanuza Santos de Oliveira, is typical of many of the other segments of which the documentary is comprised in that it frequently features the presence of the principal cameraman, Valdomiro, who clearly enjoys filming himself. Although Valdomiro often relinquishes control of the camera to Vanuza, thus allowing her to choose how she would like to portray herself, their ‘shared authorship’, to borrow Nagib’s description of collaborative documentary

projects, ‘eschews any idea of a harmonious conviviality, resembling much rather a battle of egos on a filming arena’ (2009: 205). At one point, when Vanuza is driving him to English class, Valdomiro asks her whether she ever had any ambitions other than to become a *doméstica*. Vanuza’s reaction to his question is one of visible physical and emotional discomfort. She eventually explains that she worked from a young age out of socio-economic necessity and that she has since faced a variety of problems in her family life. The interview thus underscores that although the pair are clearly close, Valdomiro is unable to empathise with her past experiences. After Valdomiro has left the car, abandoning the camera on the passenger seat, Vanuza switches it back on again, places it on the dashboard and begins to sing along to a song on the radio. When it ends, she burst into tears and states: ‘é muito difícil você gostar, amar e não ser (bem) tratada, respeitada, valorizada’ [‘it is very difficult to like, to love and not to be (well) treated, respected or valued’]. Her statement reflects on her own personal and professional life, as well as those of so many of the other *domésticas* represented in the film.

Just as in Coutinho’s work, the documentary draws on this personal confrontation between subject and filmmaker in order to defamiliarise an unequal power relationship, which is made theatrical as a result of the presence of the camera. It becomes clear that both parties are playing particular roles, but for Vanuza this possibility appears to become somewhat liberating and cathartic. In the sequences where she takes control of the camera the effect can be likened to that of testimonial writing, in which, as George Yúdice has pointed out, a subaltern subject is able to ‘engage in a process of self-constitution and survival’ (1991: 18-19). The documentary’s performative and self-reflexive quality appears to compound its potential to evoke the ‘affective remnant’ that characterises these domestic

relationships. Being the focus of the camera's attention (as in Vanuza's case) frequently leads to a dramatic outpouring of emotion and grief from many of the domestic employees who, until now, have been confined within a particular role and limited space within their employers' households.

Doméstica: Gracinha's grief

In a subsequent segment, Maria das Graças Almeida (known as 'Gracinha') is filmed in poor lighting and grainy close-up by Alana Santos Fabel. The adolescent ostensibly others Gracinha by describing her 'nocturnal' working habits, almost as if she were an animal; she later films the maid while she pauses to nap as she cleans the living room at night. Mascaro does not, therefore, dismiss 'otherness'; instead, he adopts an experimental, performative ethnographic methodology in order to acknowledge that 'otherness' is a 'discursive construction', 'reified in colonial culture', which remains 'a structural component' of both historical and psychological desire (Russell 1999: 24). The sequence exemplifies the way in which the documentary defamiliarises domestic relationships of power and affect by making the *domésticas* the 'objects' of the adolescents' cameras.

Later on, Gracinha proudly shows off her bed and orthopaedic mattress that her employer bought her because she struggles with back pain. The way the sequence alludes to her physical discomfort via close-ups and bodily gestures could be termed 'haptic' in that it institutes, to borrow Marks' terms, an embodied relationship to the image through camera movements that achieve sensuous effects (2000). The tactile visuality that is evident in the adolescent's images of Gracinha is nonetheless 'mournful', as Marks' description of the 'haptic' predicts (2000: 192). These sequences point painfully to the limits of the filmmaker and audience's 'sensory

knowledge' and emotional understanding of Gracinha as she comments on the recent death of her only son, who she had not been able to see because of her employment: she lives with her employers and only returns home once a fortnight, or sometimes less frequently. Gracinha was caring for Alana's grandmother following surgery, and had not returned home from three months, when her own son was murdered. Even though her relationship to her son had been compromised by her job and cut out of her daily life, her grief saturates the domestic space in which she is filmed. In his discussion of the economic policies that have compelled so many to migrate in search of waged labour, due to the concentration of wealth in certain areas, George Lipsitz argues that,

The creation of homelands and homesteads in industrialized countries has always depended upon the exploitation of displaced and dispossessed workers from somewhere else. Romances of patriarchy and patriotism promising secure, stable, and homogeneous homes and homelands have drawn their cultural power [...] from the necessity of hiding the heartlessness on which both hearth and *Heimat* have been built. (1999: 194)

Gracinha's story of migration and loss reinforces his argument and foregrounds the highly unequal power relationships that are frequently repressed in an attempt to maintain the bourgeois family home.

Doméstica, Helena: 'a part of the family?'

The 'chapter' featuring Gracinha concludes shortly after she has spoken about the death of her son, as she is shown washing up at the kitchen sink. The film then cuts to focus on maid Helena Araújo, who is also at a sink, doing laundry; she has her back turned to her baby daughter, Maria Fernanda, who stares curiously at the camera from

her pushchair. The film thus forms an implicit link between Helena's daughter and Gracinha's loss of her own son. It alludes to the presence/absence of these women's biological children, who may face neglect as a consequence of the nature of their mothers' work. The segment that focuses on Helena is made more troubling by the fact that her boss Lúcia is frequently shown holding and caring for Maria Fernanda while Helena does the housework. Although Lúcia's support is well intentioned, her confession that when Maria Fernanda was born she felt as though she was having another child alludes to a postcolonial nostalgia for paternalistic servile relationships.

<FIGURE THREE ABOUT HERE, CAPTION: Helena Araújo and Maria Fernanda, *Doméstica* (Gabriel Mascaro, 2012)>

Despite teen filmmaker, Juana de Souza Castro's insistence that Helena is a part of the family, Juana later reveals that Helena's accommodation is behind and outside of the main family home, in a separate building – a fact that appears to make Juana uncomfortable. The separate location of Helena's accommodation has the uncanny potential to evoke the colonial relationship between the *senzalas* [slave quarters] that were positioned outside of, but on the plantation owned by, the landowners who inhabited the main *casa grande* [house] (according to Freyre's description [1933]). This evocation is reinforced by the generational ties between Helena and her boss' family. Lúcia explains that Helena's parents worked on her family's ranch and that she brought Helena with her when she moved to Salvador (instead of a different *doméstica*) because she trusted Helena's family, later adding that Helena did also want to come. The segment thus strongly indicates that while affective ties between employers and employees prevent these relationships being categorised as purely commercial transactions, the situation of 'live-in' maids facilitates emotional domination and subjective repression that harks back to the

colonial era. Furthermore, Helena barely speaks during the segment, even asking not to be filmed at one point, despite the fact that the film is meant to focus on her. It begs the question of whether some of the workers felt compelled to agree when their employers' children asked if they could film them. Helena is not the only housemaid who appears uncomfortable with being filmed, but Mascaro implies that the teens obtained the workers' permission to record them as one of the segments shows the adolescent Luis Felipe Godinho asking his maid Lucimar Roza to sign a consent form.

In conclusion, these documentaries demonstrate that the domestic spaces they depict are traversed by affective power relationships of domination, separation and togetherness. The thematic links and behavioural patterns that unite the home-video footage which makes up Mascaro's *Doméstica*, as well as the colonial relationship that haunts the national psyche in both films, demonstrate the impossibility of de-politicising or separating the home and its domestic relations from the political or public realm. These films' attempts to show the ways in which domestic workers simultaneously do and do not belong to the domestic spaces in which they live and labour produces an uncanny unhomeliness in which the home-space can be deconstructed as a point of intersection in a wider network of highly unequal and exploitative socio-political and cultural relations. Ultimately, while *Babás* attempts to instate the centrality of nannies within Brazilian cultural memory, it risks exoticising these figures. Contrastingly, *Doméstica*'s experimental ethnographic practice foregrounds the violent domestic relationships upon which bourgeois home-spaces are built, although without resolving ethical concerns surrounding visual representations of the 'Other'.

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ⁱ Moments after the image had been shared on Facebook by the Brazilian newspaper *Correio Braziliense*, it had received 12,600 likes (*Correio Braziliense* 2016).

ⁱⁱ The maid pictured, whose name is Maria Angélica Lima, was tracked down by the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper; she made it clear that she sympathised with the anti-government protests, but that she went on the protest with her employers because she was working and was obliged to do so (Franco 2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ This is discussed in the article ‘Foto do *Correio* no Rio viraliza e expõe um país e uma web divididos’ (*Correio Braziliense* 2016), which features some of the memes inspired by João Valadares’ photograph.

^{iv} All of the translations from Portuguese into English are the author’s own, except for translations of Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933), which are taken from Samuel Putnam’s (1963) translation of this text.

^v This is supported by Jéssyca Bernardino and Edlene Silva’s analysis of *Doméstica*. They highlight that the maids’ testimonies, which are often marked by violence, enable us to problematise oppressive relationships of class, gender and race and the ways that these intersect in the case of female, Afro-Brazilian domestic workers (2017: 147).

^{vi} The title functions as a pun by playing on the word *boa* in Portuguese, which can mean either ‘nice’ or ‘sexy’ when used to describe a woman (often depending on the word’s placement within a phrase).

^{vii} From Latin America (excluding Brazil) these include: *La ciénaga/The Swamp* (Lucrecia Martel 2001), *Cama adentro/Live-in Maid* (Jorge Gaggero 2004), *La nana/The Maid* (Sebastián Silva, 2009), *El niño pez/The Fish Child* (Lucía Puenzo 2009), *La teta asustada/Milk of Sorrow* (Claudia Llosa 2009), *Empleadas y*

patrones/Maids and Bosses (Abner Benaim 2010), and *Reimón* (Rodrigo Moreno, 2014).

^{viii} Rousseff shared a platform with the President of Fenatrad, Creuza Maria de Oliveira, when she was facing impeachment proceedings. Oliveira made clear her support for Rousseff, stating ‘mexeu com ela, mexeu conosco’ [‘you mess with her, you mess with us’] (see Palácio do Planalto 2016). A possible link between Rousseff’s support for domestic workers’ rights and her impeachment has also been intimated on social media networks, including in a poem by Hertton Gustavo Gratto, which has been performed in a YouTube video (see Costa 2016).

^{ix} It is now common for domestic workers (‘diaristas’) only to offer specific services, rather than to live with a family and handle all household tasks.

^x Lins does not introduce these interviewees by name, but the names of the nannies who appear in the film are included in its closing credits.

^{xi} See Xavier’s examination of Coutinho’s ‘documentary of the encounter’ (2009: 211-217).

^{xii} Their propensity to perform (often through song or dance) may also be a product of a contemporary culture that is pervaded by celebrity, reality television and social media.