For a long period workers' health was seen as a technical subject. While it was understood that occupational ill health was provoked by work in specific industries, there was also an idea that work was a healthy occupation that prevented depression because of its social function. This idea is true as work can re-socialize deviant people. While such notions were always accepted as common sense by researchers, it took a long time before it was acknowledged that work and workplace relations also make people ill. If the dynamics of collective life make people, ("collective subjects") ill, can these subjects, in turn, also change the dynamics of collective life? For research purposes, it is important to observe both the activity and the person performing the activity. This chapter reflects a number of ideas on employment systems, alliances and competition both among, and between, workers and employers, with special attention being paid to the analysis of activities and how they affect the collective of people who perform activities.

When we look at domestic work in Brazil, there is a general level of satisfaction about the progress of democracy over the last two decades which has resulted in better legal protection and salaries for this particular occupational category. Empirically, such a statement is backed up by evidence. However, some forms of social domination that can affect distinct aspects of workers health, still exist in the current labor market. While such effects on health have always existed, we could expect that they would have become less prevalent because of greater access to knowledge and due to the democratization process.

Changes promoted by economic demands have permitted rather than prevented the persistence of symbolic and physical violence specific to the working lives of domestic workers.

Since the days of slavery, domestic service has been a job where both extreme domination and a relationship of intimacy between worker and employer, co-exists simultaneously, i.e. the job itself involves both distance and proximity. This is a peculiar feature of work in the "domestic space", which is an intimate space. (Research has found that the name given to these workers has been transformed from 'servant' to 'home secretary' (Girard, 1993).) For example, while a maid moves in this space, she should be deaf, not listen to secrets, and have a discrete presence. She is also required to take on different roles such as raising the children of others, while being separated from her own children. Maids can also be forced to have sex with employers, or their sons, while being separated from their husbands or boyfriends, depending on favors to earn their freedom from slavery. (This situation was particularly true in former times, a situation often portrayed in literature and family histories.)

To a large extent the position we occupy in the social hierarchy defines our identity, in other words, who we are. According to various authors, capitalist development attempted to eliminate the identification of professional activity with hierarchy. Such a form of identification prevailed widely until the 18th century in Europe and the 19th century in Brazil. In the case we are examining here, professional activity and position in the social hierarchy have come to be seen as one and the same thing, a situation that is treated as though it were the natural state of affairs. The process of industrial development in the economically developed countries required people, who were not equals, to come together to work. This policy sought to reconcile the irreconcilable, i.e. for people to temporarily give up a situation
of formal equality with others in the same profession and hierarchical position, in order to serve a national project which, when accomplished, would permit benefits to be redistributed. For more than a century until the 1970s (B. Lautier, 1999), the social struggles within democratic regimes moved to decrease the barriers between people imposed by hierarchy, to promote fundamental political rights and, where possible, to reduce various types of inequalities, especially those that closed the gap between rich and poor.

Protection of domestic servants came slowly in Brazil and it took until 1988 for them to gain a legal status closer to that of other female workers.

Our research data from contemporary Brasília confirms the fact that currently, and for many decades past, the majority of domestic servants are non-white, poorly educated women from northeastern Brazil, i.e. it is an occupation that absorbs a highly disadvantaged group and people at the beginning of their careers. The social and sexual division of labor functions by choosing people of certain regions, colors, and ages for its subordinate activities. This situation still occurs today, not only in Brazil, but all over the world (Soria and Girard, 1996).

All occupations have a "public face" that contributes to the formation of our image of the world which, in turn, makes the system of social relations work as imagined. The places workers come from might change but, in order to recruit people into harmful and subordinate jobs, vulnerability must continue as a feature of the labor market.

Maids working in the Federal District of Brasilia

It is necessary to clarify the reason why female domestic servants are classified as belonging to the informal sector despite the fact that a good many of them are integrated into the formal sector. While 69% of them are integrated into the formal sector according to the legislation, in the Federal District only 48% have official, registered work papers. Our study is based on the observation that employment conditions are defined informally and we have attempted to understand how this kind of labor market works and to identify effects on workers' health. Health was not a specific focus when this research was designed but we address it because there were explicit manifestations of latent violence, (both symbolic and physical), in two of the occupational categories we researched, i.e. domestic workers and street sellers.

Features of the employment system

Almost 50% of those working in domestic service are employed by either middle class people living in the central part of Brasilia (known as 'Pilot Plan'), or by upper middle class people living in the southern and northern lake areas. However, cities such as Taguatinga, Guará, Cruzeiro, and Sobradinho also employ many domestic workers even though they have lower average income levels. It was important to investigate working conditions in all of the above areas because there are distinct differences in work situations. Some domestic workers were even employed by other maids, which shows the heterogeneity of the activity. This situation was verified through examination of replies to the question about who cared for the children of maids. The profile of domestic workers shows that many live in an extremely precarious fashion and we were able to verify that 25% of these workers leave their own children alone in order to go to work. This is the first of a very long list of negative pressures that affects workers' roles as mothers and family guardians.
Another finding worthy of attention, is the fact that 20% of the maids live outside the Federal District (DF). This implies that maids face high transport costs and spend very long periods in public transport to get to and from work. Because the law requires employers to pay transport costs, it is a contentious issue in salary negotiations, and can lead to impoverishment. While it is said that maid's lives have improved because of salary increases and improved rights, it doesn't necessarily mean their living conditions have changed for the better. A high percentage of maids live in Ceilândia, Samambaia, Santa Maria and Planaltina which means large numbers of workers go to work in central Brasilia and the lake suburbs, via complicated transport arrangements.

A deeper analysis of the general characteristics of domestic workers shows that 50% of the maids in the DF were born in Northeastern Brazil in the states of Maranhão, Piauí, and Bahia, and 25% in the neighboring states of Minas Gerais and Goiás. This validates the idea that "interstate worker networks" exist, as already seen in other research (Girard, 1993). There is another interesting possibility revealed in this data, (subject to confirmation), about the way in which maids organize access to the employment market. Previously, female employers sent for maids from the Northeast, but this is no longer necessary as the maids themselves establish networks. "Chains of reciprocity" are established whereby maids receive benefits from those who they have helped during difficult times, e.g. in cases of absence due to illness or family obligations. Solidarity between maids is a necessity for effective networks.

It is important to highlight the fact that 91% of maids listed their last place of residence in a state outside of DF which led us to make a general observation that women born in the DF have other career paths open to them other than becoming maids. Networks formed outside of the DF dominate the local market. Regional identity defines not only a person's professional identity but position of subordination in the social hierarchy, in both the city and in the region. In terms of educational levels, maids are divided equally between those who have primary schooling and those with secondary schooling. An interesting phenomenon is that very tiring working conditions, (e.g. being available to employers beyond normal working hours) are accepted, independent of the person’s educational level. We also found that a higher educational level didn't affect employment conditions and terms. School qualifications are not considered to be a competence worthy of remuneration for domestic workers employed in private residences but, for example, a good cook with primary and/or secondary level education, working in a restaurant in a major city, will receive higher wages based on their level of education. In our view, this disregard for educational qualification occurs because these low paid workers fill gaps in public services, e.g. crèches, services that the State is unable to offer. A badly paid workforce also allows women from higher socio-economic groups to work. When thinking about work organization it is essential to consider a connection between status and the needs of those who enjoy a good standard of living because of their productive activities and their levels of consumption. It is not possible to engage in a complete discussion of this question but, for example, if we were to compare it with the contracting of a personal trainer, (who provides private physical education services for middle class clients even though such services are much more expensive than gyms), it would be enlightening for the purposes of comparative research. Many people internalize the view that education doesn't improve employment possibilities.

Maids are poorly paid and the job offers no possibilities for promotion. It is also very difficult for them to earn extra money beyond their salary. While many maids work eight hours per day, (from 07.00h to 16.00h on average, with a lunch break,), the distances they have to
travel, coupled with the poor quality of public transport, makes it impossible for most of them to improve their conditions of employment and income. Our research established that some additional income may be earned, e.g. by selling cosmetics from their own homes.

Living conditions

The lack of State protection for the children of domestic workers is a long standing and well-known problem. 25% of mothers leave their children alone at home and 11% pay someone else to look after their children.

Under the Fordist model adopted in industrialized countries, society was generally supposed to take responsibility for the risks experienced by workers, e.g. for workers who became sick or injured, for education, and for social protection in times of difficulty. Through intensified exploitation of labor, "Fordist" mass production was intended to offer workers a higher standard of living in exchange for their contribution to rising profits. Support for workers was seen as a just return of social goods that would decrease the effects of social stratification and inequality on the organization of production. Brazil was never completely Fordist, however, and informal work relations increasingly leave workers with little defense against misfortune forcing them to be entirely responsible for solving problems that are, in fact, impossible for individuals to resolve alone. The State and society needs to develop a system of production and work organization, i.e. through effective labor relations, that allows workers to be fully integrated into their society, a sphere which goes far beyond work itself. Durkheim (1991) postulated that the division of labor would allow more social cohesion through the creation of multiple social links, resulting in individualization and autonomy, but the opposite effect may be occurring in Brazil. Domestic employment, similar to other occupations in the informal sector, has never been viewed as participating in the social production of wealth. The informal sector contributes enormously to GDP, but the State does not feel obliged to redistribute the social goods earned by the productive system of the informal sector. Attempts to resolve this question through the partial formalization of employment are not enough. The protection of the law must reach into the maid's workplace otherwise these rights will only serve the avoidance of employer-employee conflicts. More than simply regulating work relations, labor law is a right that should permit access to "citizenship" in a much wider sense, as it does in the Fordist Welfare States. Because this question is unresolved, workers with low status in the social hierarchy, suffer violence at work, resulting in negative effects, including on health.

The vulnerability of domestic workers is largely hidden because they work in private residences. Research shows that tensions and conflicts are seen as "family problems" and resolved through decisions made within the family, whereas they should be seen as workplace and work-related problems. For example, in order to understand the internal relations of any company, it is always necessary to understand how the company fits within a wider social context. Employed domestic labor also facilitates production since it has enabled middle class women to become integrated into the labor market. Domestic workers live with "social violence" because they must live with unequal integration. Our data illustrates this reality, e.g. only 1.9% has access to crèches so, in order to work, they must organize childcare with older children or other family. These solutions cause tensions, particularly for mothers working as domestics, who see the privileges enjoyed by their employer's children, (e.g. private transport to school), on a daily basis. This is the reason why we insist that juridical regulation results in the protection of formal work. However, work activity is much more complex than the simple
idea of formal, regulated work. Despite demands for workers to reject this violence, the increasing state of abandonment they face as the economy and society changes, invites it back in. For this reason, we should now turn our thoughts to reflect on the nature of this lack of support. Our data shows that maids frequently head their households in terms of financial responsibility, including cases where husbands or partners are unemployed which makes it difficult for a man to command the family. (Sennett, 2000. Cattani, 1996) and can increase the woman's burden of responsibility. (By comparing the maid's income with the total family income we were able to verify that the majority of maids are heads of households). Their average income is 2.5 minimum wages (the minimum wage in Brazil is a national wage fixed annually by the government). At the time this article was written, 2.5 minimum wages corresponded to approximately $US200 per month. When we observe the number of children per family, their vulnerability is clear, as is the nature of their poverty. Families frequently survive only on the salary earned by their mother working as a maid.

Like many poor Brazilian workers, working life for maids starts before the age of 14 years, (with an important percentage starting under that age from 8 years on). But, there is a striking difference between maids and other workers as our research shows that once a maid, always a maid! In spite of the fact that many maids consider their domestic service job as a temporary one, they do not change activity. This shows the rigidity of the labor market and, above all, conflicts with the popular idea about the flexibility of the informal sector. Even though there appears to be no apparent barriers to maids moving into other low status jobs, we found that they do not change their occupation which suggests that, in terms of employment policies, it is necessary to improve existing conditions and not rely on the imagined dynamism of the informal market.

A couple of facts worth noting are that a large proportion of maids come from rural areas where they have little access to money, a factor that can complicate salary negotiations. In addition, 52% of maids start their work as maids in the DF, i.e. the DF is their entry point into the labor market. Considering the above facts, it is interesting to see that this particular part of the labor market opens up through relatives and friends as 85% of maids are linked into an informal but very well structured network. The profile of a "good maid" is that she must be reliable, and this characteristic is promoted via the network. A maid who has had previous professional activities is seen as someone who might abandon the job at the first opportunity so it appears that a maid without qualifications is more sought-after. It is more important for a maid to enter and remain in a job than to have skills or experience.

Internal conditions of employment

More than 50% of our sample accepted their employer's terms without negotiating anything. Only 40% of domestic workers put forward issues for negotiation which reinforces the idea that employers have an advantage in private negotiations. There appear to be a number of conflicts that stimulate staff to leave their jobs. Severances are provoked by conflicts linked to moral issues such as humiliation, mistreatment, arguments, intrigue, accusations of dishonesty, excessive demands and disrespect of maids. (This list is closely linked to the analysis of external job conditions, which shows that, in the maids' view, the best job is one where they are valued in a moral sense.) Maids must often suffer employer attitudes that devalue her as person, not only as a professional. It is clear that low salaries are also one of the most frequently cited reasons why maids leave jobs, however, humiliation is cited as the reason for more than 50% of resignations while low pay only accounts for 19%.
Most maids could be characterized by the fact that they will “do a bit of everything” and are available to work at least six days out of seven. This has a very negative effect on the maid’s family life which is sacrificed by excessive hours of availability for their jobs.

Considering the above situation, it should also be noted the recognition of maids’ rights has led them to express a feeling that “friendship” with their employers has increased. This expression indicates that the perception of rights is also related to the fact that employers may provide assistance during difficult times; this is a relationship characterized by private ties between employer and employee.

Socialization into domestic service occurs within the maid’s own home as the tasks they do in their own homes gives them the knowledge needed to be a maid. More than 85% of interviewees said that they teach themselves how to respond to the requests and demands of each household they work in.

More than 90% had not done any training, or searched for any training designed to improve their competence for their job. This is an extremely revealing fact because the aim of doing a course (for example, in cooking), would enable a maid to sell her services outside of the confines of her job but this observation reinforces our understanding that the acquisition of professional competence is not valued in this job.

We were able to see that the most valued knowledge related to the labor market, for all population groups, is computer-related skills. It seems that without such knowledge, individuals become outcasts, excluded from the world, even when such abilities are not directly used in work activities. Computer related skills are seen as the passport for an eventual change of job. 22% of maids attend computer courses, 17% sewing courses and 11% manicure courses. There is no doubt that the desire to change activity is very strong (Girard, 1993), but some maids do not look for courses because their jobs demand that they be available to their employers for considerable periods of time. Most often, it is the unmarried and youngest women, who live at their employer's house, who are able to attend these courses early in their careers. Course attendance becomes impossible for married women who live far from their work. The State has never offered professional courses to help improve the income of this population and 98% declare that they have never received State support. Professional courses offered by the official agency SINE receive very few enrolments.

We can also see that low union membership marks this largely private domain of work. 97% are not unionized, an expression of the difficulties of collectively forging occupational rules. Religious participation is high, 93% take part in church services without necessarily taking part in community activities.

**Conclusions**

In our view, when maids become more exposed to risks, in spite of their being subject to increased protection under the law, both potential and real violence occurs. We consider violence to occur because maids perform arduous work in situations inside their employers’ homes, where their so-called internal work relationships are not normally the object of legal intervention. Nobody knows how to minimize subordination in the private space, (i.e. a home), where the maid lives out her work relationships. Our research shows that it is
essentially the internal and external conditions and characteristics of domestic employment that shapes a work situation that we have defined as violent. Action is required to combat this.

Domestic employment is characterized by a high degree of subordination and social stigma, (maids are well aware of this because they choose not to mention their occupation in certain social situations). We should ask whether any greater symbolic violence exists than feeling ashamed about one's profession because "we are what we do". This is currently very significant as there is a profound crisis in relation to work.

Domestic employment has both internal and external characteristics that lead us to see it as characterized by violence, and especially by symbolic violence. Such violence is defined as an aggression via recourse to the symbolic system which is use to define the person’s social identity. It also manifests itself in other ways, e.g. through name calling, the attribution of negative characteristics to others (e.g. on the basis of their race, sex, status). Its key characteristic is that it imposes harm without injuring physically or mentally, it exercises ‘social’ damage in that it devalues one actor within a system of social relations in relation to other actors, and the actors participate in this process. The legal system cooperates when it proves unable to address issues that harm these workers. Domestic workers have accepted the fact that the type of subordinate position they occupy is permanent and has existed throughout history. Unless we enter into a more profound reflection about the history of domination and violence, it is impossible to understand the social dynamics that keep domestic workers trapped and stigmatized.

The stigma and conditions of domestic employment confirm that the violence involved in domestic work effects the way in which the worker constructs herself as a social being, or as what sociologists call a ‘social subject’. This particularly manifests itself in the difficulties domestic workers confront in trying to change their employment situation or the content of their jobs. The very activity of domestic employment is humiliating and results in a tendency for workers to build a “negative identity”. As can be found with many other subordinate jobs, domestic workers are not comfortable when answering questions about their occupation. During our interviews we perceived that workers see their job as temporary, even when they have been working in domestic service for their whole lives. Because maids always have to prove that they are reliable, they tend not to struggle to improve their job conditions and make very few demands on their employers. Maids principally quit their jobs because of conflicts related to humiliation. Our research leads us to believe that domestic workers will suffer psychological and physical health effects because they are ashamed of their professional identity and are frequently considered to be in the wrong. Health is not only the absence of disease and all humans need space to be able to be creative (Dejours, 1998. Gaulejac, 1997) in order to be healthy. All workers experience tension during work activities, e.g. when creative solutions for problems are required, tensions are relieved only when an acceptable solution is adopted, however, conditions that permit creativity are not always available. Maids tend to resolve conflicts by quitting their jobs but this also has negative consequences because the fact that they have had a string of jobs makes potential employers suspicious during negotiations for the next job. Negotiation is not perceived to be a part of the work relationship between maids and their employers. If negotiation is to be seen as a realistic possibility, it is necessary that the parties involved in the relationship are perceived to have equal rights. While this is a necessary condition, people of different social status, who are engaged in conflict, should all be able to negotiate regardless of their status. In our view, workers who carry out subordinate functions are crushed by the representations produced by and internalized by those functions - in the case of maids, a precarious social identity is produced.
within their workplace social relationships. If this reality is not recognized, this means that there is an implicit acceptance that workers fall victim to physical or psychological diseases linked to their work. Workers themselves are blamed for such illnesses, (particularly for psychological problems), rather than it being seen as a societal problem. Domestic workers suffer from the construction of "coercive subjectivity" a term that means subjects cannot build their own social and moral autonomy through work.

Selling on the street

Because street commerce presented the greatest variety of the three activities covered by our original study, it must be specifically defined in functional terms. In general, a great deal of what is normally called “street commerce” is constituted through enterprises that have some degree of formality and legal recognition, i.e. they are commercial firms registered by the relevant state and municipal authorities, subject to some official inspection and/or organization. This is the case for commerce established in street markets and in special locations reserved by government. Such places can be considered to be somewhat “protected” because they are recognized and subject to government action. In practice, legal registration gives access to some government benefits, which differentiates these vendors from many other types of street vendors.

Our research focused on street commerce that doesn't have any kind of support and/or government protection. This segment is more susceptible to market and social network instability and works in an environment where competition, “alliances” and organizational structure define, (and redefine on a daily basis), the spaces and possibilities for commercial activity. Traditional street commerce is very heterogeneous, and permits the commercialization of an ever widening diversity of products.

The types of street commerce were classified into three groups:
   Fixed commerce (benches, kiosks or stalls);
   Traveling commerce (carts, vans or trucks);
   Street commerce with no facilities or equipment (hawkers).

Generally speaking, hawkers are in the weakest position and suffer persecution and/or violence as they work. 21.4% of those working in fixed or traveling commerce indicated they had been victims of persecution or violence, but in the case of hawkers, this percentage more than doubled to 43.7% of interviewees. The vast majority (85%) of hawkers said that this violence came from members of government organizations, reinforcing the idea that the government constantly engages in repressive action.

Another important dimension relates to access to saleable goods. In 90% of the cases we researched, hawkers directly purchase most goods from wholesalers, but some goods are homemade or bought on consignment. Street commerce represents the final link in a commercial supply chain from wholesalers to consumers. Both moderate and larger sized wholesalers routinely use street commerce in order to forge an alternative outlet for their stock. In general, a significant proportion of a wholesaler's stocks are sold by major store chains and supermarkets, which because of their size, are able to impose their own terms and forms of payment on wholesalers. In the 1980s, when Brazil had high inflation, supermarkets delayed payment to their suppliers for up to 90 days, which resulted in important losses for suppliers.
Wholesalers have adopted a strategy of selling a part of their stock via street commerce, an alliance that helps guarantee their continued activity. Hawkers differ from the members of the two other groups because half of them declared that they have only one supplier while most other interviewees said they had more than one supplier, (71% in the case of fixed commerce and 60% in the case of traveling commerce). This reinforces the vulnerability of this particular group of workers who are greatly dependent on their wholesaler. Wholesalers primarily use hawkers as alternative salespersons who appear to guarantee a higher markup than that which can be obtained through sales to established stores. Competition between established traders and street sellers has led the former to organize private militias in many cities to prevent hawkers operating in established commercial areas.

The data we collected not only shows the vulnerability of street-based commercial activity, as described above, but also shows that alternative work opportunities do not exist for these workers. The position of street commerce and hawkers in particular, appears to be guaranteed within the employment system serving as a vanguard for the wholesale trade! However, the wholesalers use this scheme sparingly because while their alliance with hawkers guarantees the existence of street commerce, it also undermines the competitive capacity of conventional commercial forces.

Conclusions

Examination of the labor market position of street hawkers reinforces our conclusions about the situation of maids - it is clear that it is very difficult for members of both these groups to escape the construction of a negative identity. Street hawkers and domestic workers are regarded as outlaws with no way of resolving conflicts (except by fleeing), when in fact both groups are serving the interests of more powerful actors who are never formally required to explain their roles. The situation is even worse when a profession is not subjected to legal regulation, because workers with no rights, who work in unregulated work, are more subject to violence. The modern democratic State legitimises its existence by serving as a guarantor of individual rights and by protecting citizens against violence. The fact that people work in the circumstances we have just analyzed is not only harmful to them individually and as subjects, but also harms the legitimacy of democratic rule.

Notes on the research methodology

This article focuses on two of the three types of work that we researched, i.e. domestic work and street commerce, both of which are considered to belong in the informal sector. Our research also included activities involving repairs and alterations to buildings but this activity is not covered here. These three activities employ a significant part of the labor force in the Federal District, approximately 110,000 workers, or about 15% of the EAP.

The research was originally developed to consider two themes: firstly, to establish a general theoretical reference to guide and unify the methodology used in all three case studies. The improvement and adaptation of the theoretical category ‘employment system’ proved to be a key element for this theme because using this as a basis made it possible to establish both the content and detail of each of the three studies, particularly when drawing up the questionnaires. For the second theme, we worked with the idea that the treatment given to
each of the three activities should incorporate, (beyond general and common aspects),
specificities that are constitutive of each activity, i.e. the elements that defined and
differentiated each category. The point of departure for our first attempt to fix the frontiers of
the study, was to define what was specific to each group or category through examination of
the three different studies. In the case of domestic work, we started with Christiane Girard’s
(1970-1990)”. Two studies were used for our examination of autonomous building activities:
Theodoro’s (1987) “Informal Activities in Recife: The case of autonomous professionals in
repair and/or renovation work in the building sector” and Theodoro, Quinamo, Araújo and
Bezerra’s (2000) study on “Informal Activities: Evolution and present day conditioning
factors. The case of autonomous workers in Recife.” Finally, for street commerce we used the
work of Lubambo, Araújo, Nogueira e Bompastor (1993): “Operation Street Hawker:
Intervention in street commerce in the center of Recife.”

The basic questionnaires were the fruit of a model originally developed more than a decade
earlier, with the addition of some new elements. Even though we followed a standard basic
formula, three separate questionnaires were prepared, each adapted to the specific features of
the occupational category under investigation.

After a period of prior testing, final adjustments were made to the questionnaires and data
collection began. As a result of calculations of samples sizes, a minimum number of
questionnaires for each category were determined. The distribution of the sample population,
among different administrative regions in the Federal District, was also taken into account.
Quotas were calculated and the following numbers of questionnaires administered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Questionnaires planned/ administered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maids</td>
<td>364 questionnaires planned - 363 administered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building work</td>
<td>328 questionnaires planned - 329 administered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street commerce</td>
<td>321 questionnaires planned - 323 administered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>