

Identity and Self-Perception Among Domestic Workers in
Playa del Carmen, Mexico

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Abstract

This thesis analyses identity and self-perception among domestic workers in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, by addressing three key research questions: In what ways has carrying out paid domestic work affected domestic workers' own sense of identity in Playa del Carmen? What does the public / private divide mean for participants' construction of identity? How do relationships come into play in terms of construction of self among domestic workers? By focusing on how domestic workers construct and interpret their own identity, I engage with the growing body of research on paid domestic work in Mexico in a unique way, arguing that exploring domestic workers' sense of identity is an important political endeavour. This thesis also builds on earlier feminist research on paid domestic work in Mexico by taking an explicitly feminist post-colonial and feminist standpoint approach; both of which allow for further emphasis on, and exploration of, the personhood of domestic workers. I found that the identities of domestic workers in my sample of one male and seven female participants were multi-layered, dynamic and complex. The age at which participants began doing paid domestic work, and relatedly the extent of agency and level of control they were able to exert over their experience of paid domestic work, were key factors in how far participants felt they could carve out a meaningful sense of identity through doing paid domestic work.

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own, original work and that I have carried out all data collection, analysis and writing. Where I have referenced others' work, due acknowledgement has been made. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University.

1. Introduction

Arriving at the women's health centre where I began working in Playa del Carmen in January 2017, I was immediately introduced to the bustling and vibrant group of individuals present in the family-owned office, including the manager, various staff, and the few children running around. Nobody introduced me to the young indigenous woman sitting in the corner of the main room near one of the sleeping babies, a little removed from the rest of the staff, but still clearly in sight. It stayed with me that nobody had thought it necessary to introduce Celeste, the live-in domestic worker, to me that first day. As I got to know Celeste I became more and more intrigued about her life, her choices, her plans and ambitions. I became interested in the concept of paid domestic work in Mexico, something which I had not encountered before, and I wondered how being a domestic worker fitted into women like Celeste's plans and projects.

Although my research interest was sparked by meeting Celeste, it deepened as I became more familiarised with Mexican society, history and culture, and latterly, the growing body of literature on paid domestic work and feminist and post-colonial theory. It became clear that my initial encounter with Celeste was more symbolic than I realised; domestic workers in Mexico have long been invisibilised both in society and within academia, perpetuating the idea that they are no more than anonymised helpers taking care of menial tasks so that their employers can get ahead in their meaningful lives (Chaney and García Castro, 1989; Goldsmith, 1989 and 1998; Thomson, 2009; Bautista, 2012; Martínez Prado, 2014). When Goldsmith observed almost thirty years ago that domestic workers formed 'a backdrop to Mexican society' (Goldsmith, 1989: 221), she could in fact have been describing the scene which took place when I met Celeste in 2017.

Precisely because of this tendency towards invisibilisation of domestic workers, there is value in exploring their own perceptions of their identities. I am particularly inspired by the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991, 2003 and 2005) and her conviction that there is a decolonising value to critically understanding and giving fair discussion to how 'third world women' (Mohanty, 1991) perceive their own identities. As Mohanty states, 'self-reflexive collective practice in the transformation of the self, reconceptualizations of identity, and

political mobilization [are] necessary elements of the practice of decolonization' (Mohanty, 2003: 14). Mohanty's argument towards reconceptualising one's own identity echoes Plummer (1995), who states that, 'the stories we tell of our lives are deeply implicated in moral and political change...the ability to take control over the story of one's own life may be seen as a major mode of empowerment' (Plummer, 1995: 144). Both Bhavnani (1993) and Plummer (1995) point out that individuals' stories will only find an audience at the right political, social and historical moment, and this feels particularly relevant for domestic workers.

The fieldwork for this research took place in Playa del Carmen over four consecutive months, beginning in February 2018. Playa del Carmen is a new, purpose-built tourist town in the state of Quintana Roo. It is situated on the Caribbean coast around 30 miles from the tourist mecca Cancun, or *Gringolandia*, as it has also been pejoratively dubbed (Torres and Momsen, 2005). The town consists almost entirely of migrants from Mexico and elsewhere, and is the site of rapid economic growth. The service sector thrives and plentiful economic opportunities are one of the main reasons that migrants flock to Playa del Carmen. Little social research has been conducted in the town, and to my knowledge, this is the first piece of research on domestic workers in Playa del Carmen. The literature on domestic work in Mexico overwhelmingly focuses on Mexico City, although in recent years other comprehensive investigations have taken place in Monterrey (Durín) and Guanajuato (Saldaña Tejada), among other specific geographic locations. Paid domestic work is structurally different depending where it takes place. Domestic workers encounter different circumstances depending which city, country or indeed continent they work, and these circumstances may constrict and confine, or conversely empower, domestic workers in various ways. It is important to be aware of the differences of domestic workers' experience depending on their location, as Mohanty argues that giving a geographically focused analysis of women's experience helps in reducing the risk of reproducing the one-dimensional 'third world woman' (Mohanty, 2003).

I undertook my fieldwork to address the three research questions I explore in this thesis:

In what ways has carrying out paid domestic work affected domestic workers' own sense of identity in Playa del Carmen?

What does the public / private divide mean for participants' construction of identity?

How do relationships come into play in terms of construction of self among domestic workers?

These questions provide a framework through which to explore my overarching interest in the identity and, above all, personhood of domestic workers. The first question is intentionally broad. In part, this is because the explicit focus on identity is a new area of study for paid domestic work in Mexico, and therefore I did not enter this project with an informed hypothesis that I intended to prove. Furthermore, this research is person-centred, and during the in-depth interviews I undertook with participants I aimed to create flexible, open and free-flowing conversations where participants could explore their experiences and think about what they meant for their identities.

The second question speaks to the longstanding feminist interest in the public / private 'divide', which is especially interesting in the context of paid domestic work, where the home is both a private space and a workplace. I was also interested in whether participants felt differently about their private identities and their public identities, even if objectively they may have been doing the same household tasks in their own homes and in their employers' homes.

Finally, the third question focuses on relationships, and refers to participants' relationships within their families, their romantic relationships, their relationships with other domestic workers, and their relationships with their employers. Given the importance of relational factors when reflecting on identities, I was interested in finding out whether certain relationships were more significant than others in terms of their effect on participants' identities. Furthermore, previous research on paid domestic work has tended to focus on the negative impact that doing paid domestic work has on workers' relationships with their children; the limitations they can experience in forming romantic relationships; and the complex

relationships between employer and employee. I wanted to find out whether participants had similar experiences, and how that affected their sense of identity.

I begin to answer my three research questions in this thesis by first setting out the critical context within which this research is situated. I discuss the vibrant and rich research which has been done on paid domestic work, with a clear focus on Mexico, and highlight the key themes in the literature to date. In the same chapter, I also introduce some important work on identity, particularly that of Goffman (1969), Hall (1996, 2013), Woodward (1997, 2000 and 2015) and Jenkins (2008).

In the methodology chapter, I present my theoretical framework and explain why this research is informed by feminist standpoint and feminist post-colonial theory. I also locate myself in the research. I do this because a primary concern for feminist researchers is how we reflexively deal with ourselves in our role as researchers, and how we pay attention to the 'secrets and silences' that we find there (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2008. See also Stanley and Wise, 1993; González-López, 2015; Letherby, 2015; Faria and Mollet, 2016). The methodology chapter also familiarises the reader with the practical matters of this research, by detailing the methods, ethics, access, approach to translation, and limitations of my fieldwork.

Keeping my three research questions in mind, I analyse and discuss the main themes which emerge from interviews with participants in this research in the three findings chapters in this thesis. Read together, they begin to unpack the complex and interweaving layers of participants' identities as I have interpreted them. Broadly, I explore the ways participants discussed aspects of their familial identity in Chapter Four, their individual identity and sense of self in Chapter Five, and their social identity in Chapter Six.

Finally, in the conclusion, I bring together my findings, show how my research has addressed some of the gaps in the wider literature on paid domestic work in Mexico, and suggest areas for further research.

It has been a joy to get to know the participants, not only during the interviews, but as I have listened to our conversations again and again and found new meanings in their words, weaving participants' life stories with others' and attempting to capture a snapshot of eight individuals who have at some point in their lives been engaged in paid domestic work. In this thesis, I aim to capture the convictions and contradictions which the participants expressed when they talked about their experiences and their identities. In doing so, I investigate the personhood of the participants, and hope to provide a meaningful insight into their identities and sense of self.

2. Critical Context

This chapter introduces key literature to provide context to my research, as well as addressing the gaps in research on paid domestic work in Mexico. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I trace the relatively short history of research on paid domestic work in Mexico and outline the key themes scholars have focused on and why. In the second section I will introduce some theories about identity which are relevant as a basis for approaching an analysis of identity of domestic workers in Mexico. I will also briefly introduce research on domestic workers' identity in other parts of the world, in order to show how others have brought together theories and the experiences of other domestic workers to explore and analyse themes of identity. In order to provide a concise and relevant analysis of research on contemporary paid domestic work in Mexico, all of the literature discussed focuses on Mexico, unless otherwise stated.

2.1 Literature on Domestic Work: Research with Radical Purpose

Literature on paid domestic work in Mexico has consistently had an activist tone and purpose, and has continuously produced and reproduced political movements occurring contemporaneously within and outside of academia. It has explicitly been informed by and reproduced feminist (academic) principles, meaning that the research focuses on women's experience and is carried out with the purpose of improving women's condition.¹ Research that academics carry out has been significant not only in illuminating the discriminatory conditions faced by domestic workers, but crucially, naming them as such. Academics have been instrumental in developing campaigns to improve the legal and social status of domestic workers, and in establishing the first union of domestic workers in Mexico (Martínez Prado, 2014). To reflect the variety of relevant material on paid domestic work, in this section I analyse both academic and popular sources on paid domestic work, including media discussion and a photography exhibition. These sources are helpful in illustrating the way paid domestic work is represented and understood in wider society. By critically assessing a range of literature and other sources on paid domestic work in Mexico I show that it can be argued that researching it is a political and radical endeavour.

¹ Further discussion in methodology chapter.

*Muchachas No More*² (Chaney and García Castro, 1989) is seen as a groundbreaking work by those with an interest in paid domestic work in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was the first anthology³ to address the political and legal situation of paid domestic work in Latin America, and scholars still regularly reference it in their research today. The purpose of the book was both to illuminate the discrimination faced by domestic workers, taking a gender and class based analysis, and to demand that their conditions be improved. Indeed, Chaney and García Castro introduce the anthology with a chapter entitled *A New Field for Research and Action*. It also marked the beginning of a union between academics and domestic workers, as it contains a section entitled *In Their Own Words*, which includes contributions from domestic workers themselves, as well as the editors' assertion that 'all the themes and topics...need more work and elaboration by scholars, linked as closely as possible to the organizations⁴ and associations of the domestic workers themselves' (Chaney and García Castro, 1989: 10).

It is significant that the anthology was published at this juncture. Academics had finally begun to critically consider paid domestic work, and this was due to the emergence of feminist studies, and perhaps to an extent post-colonial studies. Both of these approaches are overtly political. More precisely, they 'are based on, and intended to promote, positive social values such as equality and justice' (Kara, 2015: 9). Contemporary research on paid domestic work continues to be motivated by the desire to promote equality and justice for domestic workers, and is heavily linked to social and political developments occurring concurrently.

In a contemporary context, we must consider that in 2011 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted Convention 189, which requires employers to provide domestic workers with written contracts, paid holidays, annual bonuses, sick pay and social security. An analysis of the preamble to the Convention shows that it is clearly informed by a feminist, academic position, stating for

² The term *muchacha* literally means adolescent girl. It is seen as disrespectful because it fails to take domestic workers and their profession seriously. Despite the hope displayed in the title of this anthology, the term is still commonly used to refer to domestic workers in Mexico today, despite their ages.

³ A few studies had been carried out in the early 1980s, however, no anthology had been compiled providing a broad and comparative perspective. See Martínez Prado, 2014.

⁴ Original spellings maintained in quotes throughout this thesis.

example that 'domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls' (ILO, 2010a). Both the gendered analysis and the themes of undervaluation and invisibility are prominent in feminist research. Indeed, when the details of the Convention were discussed by the ILO in 2010, they were informed by information received from 'previous consultation with the most representative organisations of employers and workers' from ILO member states, including Mexico (ILO, 2010b: 117). At the time of writing, however, only eleven Latin American countries have ratified the convention, and Mexico still had not.

Brites and Martínez Prado have provided comprehensive reviews of the academic literature on domestic work in Latin America, and they have shown how far the literature on domestic work relates to themes relevant to Convention 189, particularly in the years immediately before and after the Convention was adopted. In the majority of cases, the focus is on highlighting discrimination and in this way campaigning for improved social status and proper legal protections for domestic workers. Specifically, research tends to highlight political and legal status, the difficulty of unionising, and the oppressive relationship between domestic workers and their employers (Brites, 2013; Martínez Prado, 2014).⁵

The relationship between academics and domestic workers has at times been problematic. Women are at the forefront of researching paid domestic work, and they have made important advances both theoretically within academia, as well as more tangibly outside of it - for example women academics (particularly Elsa Chaney, co-editor of *Muchachas No More*) were instrumental in supporting domestic workers to organise in the late 1980s (Martínez Prado, 2014). Perhaps women academics have taken the lead because of the feminist tradition of taking both an interest in, and responsibility for, studying experiences of women which have previously been obscured. Or, perhaps it is because the relationship between employer and employee is seen as being between two women, and the so-called private sphere as women's domain. This leads to another important

⁵ Furthermore, scholars such as Miranda (2007), Williams (2010) and Saldaña Tejeda (2011), have shown that the interest in researching domestic work in Europe, the United States and Canada seems to correlate with the rise in domestic workers arriving in these receiving countries. This would also explain the comparatively large body of work on Mexican domestic workers in the USA compared to within Mexico itself. Again, here we see links between the academic research and wider socio-political events.

process of invisibilisation within paid domestic work, which is that men are arguably those who benefit the most from paid domestic work, yet in many ways appear to be absolved from the responsibility of managing the paid domestic work situation, both practically and emotionally or ethically. It is important to both highlight both this absence of male academics, and to analyse the work of feminist academics, to help deepen our understanding of the development in attitudes towards paid domestic work in academia in Mexico.

Writing almost twenty years ago, Moreno described the editorial meeting ahead of the publication of the Mexican academic journal *Debate Feminista* edition on domestic work as a 'disaster' (Moreno, 2000: 27). She reported that the academics present felt uncomfortable at 'airing their dirty laundry' (Moreno, 2000: 28) and that they openly called the topic 'boring' (Moreno, 2000: 28). At the same time, Acevedo (2000) elaborated on an idea previously expressed by Goldsmith in 1989, suggesting that another problem was that many Mexican academics continued to employ domestic workers, perhaps making it an uncomfortable topic for them to address. Indeed, according to Acevedo, in the article she submitted for the journal, 'with a certain uncomfortable guilt [we] have *muchachas* ...who resolve a good part of our domestic work, so we can dedicate ourselves to other things' (Acevedo, 2000: 64). Despite the discomfort that Moreno reports in the editorial meeting, the issue produced provides a great insight into the way that paid domestic work was conceptualised by some feminist academics in Mexico at that time.⁶

Moreno herself provides a long analysis of the gendered politics of housework in general, similar to second wave feminists' concerns in the 1970s. It is somewhat odd that she often slips into using 'we' to talk about women doing housework, while openly recognising that in the Mexican context, herself and her middle class peers employ other women to do the housework in their homes (Moreno, 2000). Almost as an after-thought she devotes a paragraph to the need to support domestic workers' campaigns for proper status under the law (Moreno, 2000: 48).

⁶ Not all contributors are Mexican, but their inclusion suggests that the editors valued their contributions to this debate in the Mexican context in 2000. It is important to clarify that by not discussing attitudes to paid domestic work among academics and / or feminists outside of Mexico, the intention is not to set Mexican academics apart or somehow suggest that their attitude at the time was unique, but rather it is an attempt to retain a focused analysis of the literature.

Two more accounts of employers' perspectives on domestic workers are particularly telling, and show how it is no wonder that domestic workers have historically felt uncomfortable forming alliances with academics (Goldsmith, 1989; Martínez Prado, 2014).

Alma Guillermoprieto (1999) entitles her piece *Servants*, which in itself is indicative of her attitude towards domestic workers. She believes herself to have had great relationships with these 'servants,' however, her interpretations of friendship leave a lot to be desired. She boasts about helping her first servant to grow and flourish, despite scolding her and being suspicious of her (Guillermoprieto, 1999: 7). She describes a conversation with an English friend over the morality of having a servant. She states, 'for me it was moral to give employment to a single mother, but it was also...comfortable' (Guillermoprieto, 1999: 8). She claims to be loyal to this servant, but fires her somewhat easily at the request of the English friend (Guillermoprieto, 1999: pp.8-9). Finally, she at first appears exemplary as an employer by accepting her last servant Sharad as a live-in worker even though she is heavily pregnant, which is unusual for an employer (Durín, 2013a: 104). Still, the lack of respect the author has towards Sharad becomes clear and is best demonstrated via her description of her weight gain. Sharad was, 'an unrecognisable cow' with an 'enormous bum' and pregnancy-sized stomach (Guillermoprieto, 1999: 10). Guillermoprieto's description of Sharad's body is irrelevant to any practical or political points regarding paid domestic work, and serves only to highlight a lack of respect shown towards Sharad by the author.

Maria Teresa Priego demonstrates a more loving attitude towards Elia, the live-in, indigenous nanny / domestic worker she employs, and is at least aware of the reality of her own privilege: 'Thanks to her I could escape. My independence depended on her slavery' (Priego, 2000: 13). Still, she paints an idealistic picture of a situation which was clearly more pleasant for her than it was for Elia, since Elia leaves one day without warning and never contacts the family again. I wonder if Priego is aware of the irony of one of her closing remarks which she uses to describe the love she had towards Elia: 'She's like one of the family,' I said to myself internally as I left my reading for a few minutes to admire her wash the bathrooms' (Priego, 2000: 14).

Twelve years after the special issue of *Debate Feminista* was published, the January 2012 issue of *Dfensor*, a human rights magazine published by the Mexican government, was dedicated to paid domestic work. In contrast to *Debate Feminista*, the featured articles are nuanced and articulate expressions of paid domestic work in Mexico, with a clear focus on Mexico City, and they are clearly linked to a wider political project. The four articles in the *Opinion and Debate* section are especially useful in providing an overview of the legal situation of domestic workers (Guevara, 2012) in the context of exploring the discrimination faced by domestic workers, linking such discrimination to the fact that domestic work is neither legally nor socially valued (Bautista, 2012; González and Solano, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2012). As González and Solano state, because of this lack of valuation, 'the discrimination towards certain social groups is invisible because it is perceived as normal' and that certain features of domestic work are perhaps seen as incorrect, but not discriminatory, including by domestic workers themselves (González and Solano, 2012: 24 and 28). It is indicative of a concerted change in perspective on domestic work that it was the focus of a human rights magazine, and that Convention 189 also references the human rights of domestic workers.

Recent discussion of domestic workers in popular media in Mexico reflects a combination of the attitudes described above, suggesting there appears to be a divide between those who still hold on to negative stereotypes of domestic workers, and those who could be described as more progressive. In 2012, four writers conversed with each other through a series of open letters online in which they discussed the situation of domestic workers in Mexico. Sánchez Ambriz and Toledo (2012) and Valenzuela (2012) argued that domestic workers do face the discrimination which academics have highlighted. However, Valencia (2012) lamented the same claims as exaggerated or as outright lies, arguing at one point, 'I have never seen that [a domestic worker] complains that a boss rapes her, but I have encountered...domestic workers that touch the genitals of little boys'. In 2014, an employer (incidentally living in Cancun at the time) posted a video to her social networks with the comment '*the more I get to know people, the more I love my dog,*' the aim of which was to shame her domestic worker, who she had caught taking food for her son without permission (Rodríguez de Altamirano, 2014). The video went viral and inspired the sarcastic hashtag

#LadyChiles. The employer seemed to expect support from her followers, but instead people were outraged that she would attempt to degrade her employee so publically, and online at least, people overwhelmingly took the side of the domestic worker.

Evidence of other developments in sociopolitical perspectives is apparent when we consider how academics discuss agency and resistance of domestic workers. When Mohanty wrote *Under Western Eyes* in 1989⁷ one of her criticisms of western feminist scholars (and non-western scholars adopting the same approach) was that they tended to lump 'third world women' together into one homogenised group, without paying attention to political, geographical, historical and other differences. She argues that the term 'third world woman' is the antithesis to the 'western woman', and the two terms capture 'a history of colonization' (Mohanty, 2003: 227). This is because western feminist scholars often position women in developing countries⁸ as an objectified, homogenous mass oppressed by men (without any consideration of different experiences) and in opposition to the liberated and free western woman (Mohanty, 1991, 2003, 2005). Revisiting *Under Western Eyes* in 2003, Mohanty acknowledged that feminist scholars had become more likely to pay attention to these important differences, had started to situate their analyses in specific geographical locations and, in the best cases, also shown how these examples were not isolated events, but rather women's situation was linked to global interplay. Mohanty also suggests that another way to decolonise research is to pay particular attention to the way non-western women are active agents capable of resistance and subversion, as opposed to powerless victims. This is part of her 'feminist solidarity scholarship approach' (Mohanty, 2005).

Taking such sentiment on board, many scholars are committed to showing how domestic workers rebel and resist in their daily employment. Durín (2013a) and Priego (2000) have both highlighted a strategy adopted by live-in domestic workers in Mexico, which is that of quitting work without informing the employer.

⁷ *Under Western Eyes* has been republished frequently, testament to its prevailing relevance. Although it was first written in 1989, in this thesis I have used the 1991 version which was most practical for me to access.

⁸ The term 'developing' is problematic since it refers to economic and cultural development as defined in the western way, although sadly there is no space to discuss this further here.

Durín shows how some employers worried every weekend that their employee simply would not show up to work on a Monday morning, and Priego describes the anguish it caused her that her employee Elia left her job without a word. A further example of resistance is the relatively small number of domestic workers who have joined unions (Martínez Prado, 2014; Morse, 2015). Saldaña Tejeda believes that this 'formation of alliances implies a reflexive account of who [domestic workers] are within the modern/colonial system' (Saldaña Tejeda, 2015: 948). Burton (1999) refers to contemporary 'colonial modernities' and points to the 'mobility and recalcitrance of women's bodies' as evidence that women are no longer constrained in the same ways as they were in colonial times (Burton, 1999:1). Indeed, today in Mexico there are many more day workers than live-in workers, and this certainly provides a greater sense of independence and control for domestic workers (Goldsmith, 1989; Greene, 2001; Thomson, 2009; Castellanos, 2010; Williams, 2010). Regarding day workers in Cancun, Castellanos remarks that 'the high concentration of Maya women in domestic service constitutes a form of resistance against global capitalism', because there domestic service provides more freedom, flexibility, control and higher pay than working in the hotel industry, the site of major employment in the city (Castellanos, 2010).

However, in the same 2003 essay cited above, Mohanty was concerned 'that much of present-day scholarship tends to reproduce particular "globalized" representations of women,' and that this is problematic because 'although these representations of women correspond to real people, they also often stand in for the contradictions and complexities of women's lives' (Mohanty, 2003: 247). One of these contemporary characters is the domestic worker. Indeed, domestic workers do face very real and multiple levels of oppression and discrimination, and continuing to emphasise this context is crucial in fighting to improve domestic workers' conditions. However, it can also be difficult to then deeply engage with and value the examples of domestic workers' agency and empowerment which scholars are keen to describe. My aim by taking an in-depth analytical look at how domestic workers construct their identity as people who happen to do domestic work, rather than look at domestic work as a discriminatory system first and place the victims within it afterwards, is to build on the work done by other scholars in emphasising domestic workers' agency, and as such bring to the

surface some of the contradictions and complexities of domestic workers' lives that Mohanty references.

I have shown the close relationship between research on domestic work and concurrent political and legislative developments. Feminist academics continue to research and publish on domestic work as part of the continued campaign for the Mexican government to ratify Convention 189. In the context of these important structural developments, the principle aim of my research is to provide some insight into how domestic workers construct their identities as individuals in these changing times. Research tends to define domestic workers based on their participation in a system which oppresses them. It is necessary to focus on the negative aspects of the structure of domestic work because ultimately the aim of feminist research on domestic work is to improve the legal and social conditions of domestic workers. However, I suggest that we can ask other legitimate political questions to help move research on domestic work forward, specifically focused on how domestic workers make sense of their relationship with domestic work and how that affects their sense of identity. These questions would help us understand the personhood of domestic workers and avoid reducing them to one-dimensional characters, which Mohanty argues is a form of colonisation. Given that scholars have lamented that the domestic 'worker is selling not just her labour power but her whole personhood' (Anderson, 2000 in Williams, 2010: 387) when she does paid domestic work, it is interesting to analyse more deeply what that personhood is.

2.2 Identity: Individuals, Society and Relationships

In *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Stuart Hall argued that the concept of 'identity' had come under fire in recent years, with theorists from a range of backgrounds suggesting that it was an obsolete idea (Hall, 1996: 1). However, Hall and others have pointed to its consistent relevance, partly because, they argue, identities are intrinsically linked to discursive and social changes (Hall, 1996, 2013; Woodward, 1997, 2000 and 2015; Jenkins, 2008). By discussing at length some of the interlinking processes we use to construct our own identities and perceive the identities of others, they argue that identity develops through an

'internal-external dialectic' (Jenkins, 2008) where we constantly interpret and reinterpret ourselves and each other in changing social contexts.

The processes involved in understanding identity include signs and symbols which we use to represent and categorise ourselves and each other. Signs and symbols include material possessions, what we wear and how we style ourselves, where we are from, where we live and what we do. The language we use to describe ourselves and each other is also a crucial sign. As Hall reminds us, words signify concepts, and we 'fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is *constructed by the system of representation*' (Hall, 2013: 7. Italics in original). Woodward (2015) argues that Hall was able to show the importance of 'the power of representation' through his work on cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s:

Hall describes a constructionist approach, in which 'social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others' (Hall, 1997: 25 in Woodward, 2015: 7).

This quote from Hall highlights the social nature of identity, arguing that it is the result of consistent interplay between individuals in society. Woodward defines these interactions as social processes which 'include a focus on the personal dimensions of the identity equation as well as an interrogation of how these connect to the society in which we live', meaning that 'our identities are shaped by social structures but we also participate in forming our own identities' (Woodward, 2000: 1). Of course, we can only fully identify people when they are really visible. In *The Politics of In/Visibility* (2015), Woodward deals with the political implications of what we see and what we do not see, or, what is presented to us and what is not. Specifically she discusses the 'gendered significance of being visible' (Woodward, 2015: 80). Woodward's theories are especially important in the context of this research because of the historical importance of visibility / invisibility of women from a feminist perspective,

especially in terms of the public / private divide and housework, and its relevance to a gendered interpretation of identity.

The active nature of identity formation is inherent in us all, even when we are classified or identified into oppressed groups. Woodward argues that 'we have to identify with an identity – that is, actively engage with a position. It is not enough to be classified by someone else' (Woodward, 2000: 16). Our identities are based on finding unity and common ground with others as much as they are about finding points of difference (Hall, 1996). Woodward argues that differentiating ourselves from others is actually a crucial part of identifying ourselves (Woodward, 1997 and 2000). Still, classification is a powerful concept, and at times 'who we think we are is intimately related to who we think others are' (Jenkins, 2008: 12), and even though 'we choose to identify with a particular identity or group [, s]ometimes we have more choice than others' (Woodward, 2000: 6).

Because of the active nature of identification, we can also understand that identities are constantly in flux, and that we are active agents in our identity construction. Hall argues that identities are 'a construction, a process never completed' and 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall, 1996: 2 and 6). Identities are the 'process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves' (Hall, 1996: 4). However, our identities are not so elusive that they are irrelevant in shaping our everyday interactions. Jenkins argues that 'identification and motives for behaviour might seem to be connected: to identify someone could be enough to decide how to treat her' (Jenkins, 2008: 6).

Jenkins is influenced by Goffman, whose work on the everyday theatre of social interactions remains important today. For example, Ueno (2010) drew on Goffman's 1963 work on 'damaged identities' in her exploration of domestic workers' identity kits in Singapore, and Ueno also points out that Lan (2006) was inspired by his work on 'front / backstage distinction' in her exploration of domestic workers' identity in Taiwan (Ueno, 2010: 87). In *The Presentation of*

Self in Everyday Life (Goffman, 1969), Goffman argues that social interactions are governed by our collective understanding of how characters act within particular 'frames' or social settings. He suggests that we are constantly playing roles which are implicitly understood by all of the actors involved; for example, the waiter and customer follow particular routines and scripts, staying in character throughout. However, as predictable as they may be, our roles are not fixed. Goffman refers to 'communication out of character', meaning sudden or unexpected outbursts which Goffman suggests occur when we are misidentified by others, or when others deviate from their implicitly understood role. In this way, we can make links with the arguments of Hall, Jenkins and Woodward that our identities change over time and indeed that we are capable of making changes through the way we choose to represent ourselves.

The literature on paid domestic work in Mexico has not tended to overtly focus on analysing the identities of domestic workers in the kinds of ways described above. Any analyses of identity have usually focused on discursive social elements viewed from a top-down perspective. That is, researchers have shown how far domestic workers' particular intersectional characteristics (gender, race, class and being a domestic worker⁹) causes them to be categorised or identified by their employers, and how that influences their employers to interact with them. Post-colonial feminists such as Harding and Mohanty, and feminists of colour, have argued that 'there are no gender relations per se, but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races and cultures' (Harding in Zinn and Dill, 2005: 20) and that 'making gender and power visible in the processes of global restructuring demands looking at, naming, and seeing the particular raced, and classed communities of women from poor countries as they are constituted as workers in sexual, domestic, and service industries' (Mohanty, 2005: 61).

These observations are particularly relevant to domestic work in Mexico, where most literature pays close attention to how race, class and gender combine to continuously reinforce and perpetuate the domestic work system. Above all, indigenous women face particular discrimination as domestic workers, with

⁹ In the CONAPRED 2011 national survey on discrimination, domestic workers were seen as a particularly vulnerable group, and as such being a domestic worker is almost considered a protected characteristic. It is significant that this was highlighted in 2011, when Convention 189 was adopted.

employers degrading their language, clothes, food, customs and lack of understanding of urban life (Lever M, 2004; Gutiérrez and Rosas, 2010; Bautista, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2012; Macias Vázquez, 2016). Chávez González believes that choosing indigenous girls and women as domestic workers creates a vicious circle; indigenous women doing 'menial, badly paid work in the city...leads society to consider them inferior, thereby perpetuating the racial or ethnic segmentation in this type of work' (Chávez González, 2012: 22 in Brites, 2013: 429-430).

Although race and social class are intrinsically linked, and there is agreement that racism is a factor in domestic service in Mexico, some academics have shown why it may be more accurate to talk about the ways in which domestic service has social class associations. Saldaña Tejeda argues that, due to the ambiguity of *mestizaje*¹⁰ in Mexico, it is difficult to make clear statements about how individuals see themselves and each other racially (Saldaña Tejeda, 2011). Other scholars have also shown how Mexicans are more likely to use descriptors such as rich and poor to differentiate between each other, and may have varying understandings of the differences between the classifications *mestizo* and indigenous (Re Cruz, 1998; Castellanos, 2010; Reyes Foster, 2012). Social class distinctions are easier to pin down. For example, Durín says that young women about to marry in Monterrey in 2013 still expected, 'the three basic 'goods' to distinguish them as a lady: their own house, a *camioneta*,¹¹ and a live-in domestic worker' (Durín, 2013a: 107).

While many studies pay attention to race and class, few critically analyse the role of age in domestic workers' experience. Research that does explicitly look at age tends to be about child labour (DNI Costa Rica, 2002; Levison and Langer, 2010; Orraca, 2014; Miranda Juárez and Macri, 2015; Macias Vazquez, 2016; Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016). These studies provide valuable insight to the impact of starting work as a child. But, domestic workers have very different experiences of their work as they age; they may get married, become mothers, they may find they cannot do the same physical work as they could when they

¹⁰ *Mestizaje* refers to the mixed genealogy of Latin Americans whose collective bloodlines are Indigenous, European and Afro. *Mestizaje* is the concept and *mestizo/a* refers to the person.

¹¹ A pick-up or jeep style vehicle associated with being a status symbol; a contemporary UK example could be a Range Rover.

were younger, they may begin to think about retirement and that they will not receive a pension because domestic work is not an official profession under the law.

My research addresses the gaps in intersectional analysis discussed here in two ways. Firstly, it analyses employees' perception of themselves within society, in relation to their own class and that of their employers. Secondly, it looks at the role of age, specially arguing that the age at which an employee entered domestic work has a significant impact on how they construct their identity, and furthermore that their experience of domestic work as they age impacts upon their identity in significant ways.

With the intersectional differences described above in mind, the consistent significance of gender in the context of domestic work (both paid and unpaid) in Mexico must be addressed. In Mexico, domestic workers are overwhelmingly women and domestic work is seen as inherently feminine. Moreno gives a lengthy analysis of the gender imbalance of housework in Mexico, and also notes her and her colleagues' surprise at learning that a fellow (non-Mexican) academic did not employ a domestic worker and in fact chores were shared among family members, including her husband (Moreno, 2000). For some scholars this feminisation of domestic work helps to explain why it is not seen as *real* work, rather as 'help' or as a job rather than a profession (Goldsmith, 1989 and 2000; Kusnezof, 1989; Moreno, 2000; Thomson, 2009; Vieira de Paula Jordão, 2011; González and Solano, 2012; Guevara, 2012; Morse, 2015). However, as I have described that there is a race and class distinction between which women do domestic work, and which women pay somebody else to do it. This has important repercussions for how women construct their identities around domestic work, whether as employees or employers. In this respect, important questions around the public / private 'divide' are still relevant in a discussion of paid domestic work today, and in the context of identity, how far one is thought to have the privilege of developing their own identity, and whether such an identity is socially valued.

The feminised nature of domestic work makes it an extension of the identities expected of and assigned to (working-class) women from an early age. Segura (2005) and Orraca (2014) have shown that sometimes the eldest female siblings

in poor families are made to enter into domestic work as children, as an extension of their caring roles at home. In this sense, they could be termed othermothers (Troester, 1984; James, 1993; Hill Collins, 2000). Othermothers are girls and women who take on caring responsibilities for children who are not their biological children, including neighbours, community members or kin. Hill Collins shows how othermothers are central figures in low income African American communities, and gives examples of women who were expected to take on this role when they themselves were children (Hill Collins, 2000: pp.178-183). In their gender-based analysis of return to education for youths, Attanasio and Kauffman show how parents are more invested in their sons' education because it is thought they will be likely to obtain prestigious jobs, whereas it is thought girls will dedicate themselves to the home (Attanasio and Kauffman, 2014). A recent piece of research highlighted the difficulty of counting child domestic workers using census data, because they were often counted just as another member of the family (Levison and Langer, 2010).

These blurred public / private identities continue into adulthood, as Goldsmith suggests by using illuminating evidence from the first decades of the 20th century. She demonstrates that at that time there was often ambiguity around whether a woman was a wife or a domestic worker. By a close reading of legal documents, she shows how several women in Tampico tried to claim salaries and other benefits due to them for their domestic service, yet faced difficulty in proving that they were the employees rather than sexual partners of their alleged employers; the implication of course that a wife should carry out the same work as an employee, but for free (Goldsmith, 1998: 89 and 91; Goldsmith, 2000). This blurring of public and private is important when it comes to how far domestic workers construct identity as a domestic worker, or as a family member who does domestic work.

Often, the focus on identity construction within the home is on upper-middle and upper-class women, the employers of domestic workers. In three studies in particular, domestic workers appear on the sidelines as much on the pages as I imagine they do in some upper-middle and upper-class homes. In the examples discussed below, which analyse middle-class women's identities in their homes,

we see how domestic workers are necessary but taken-for-granted features of their employers' identity projects.

The purpose of Calonge Reillo's 2011 study is to show how upper-middle and upper-class women in Guadalajara 'construct homes for their families and in the process provide themselves with their identity as women' and in his study he includes only one mention of domestic workers. He throws in; 'we must not forget that we are talking about upper and upper middle-class families, this means that many of them have domestic employees who take on the most insidious tasks, like washing, ironing or cleaning' (Calonge Reillo, 2011: 70 and 91). According to Calonge Reillo, this means that employers can spend their time involved in more meaningful tasks through which they develop their identities in the home.

In her study of middle class households headed by women, Willis mentions domestic workers alongside cars and holidays as part of the inventory needed in order to retain a middle-class lifestyle in Oaxaca (Willis, 2000: 35). In this case, domestic workers are necessary because they allow middle class women to get on with the important business of developing their public identities: 'All the middle-class households in this survey employed at least one domestic servant assisting the women heads in juggling their responsibilities, freeing them to leave the house for waged work...[moreover] domestic servants reduce the domestic burden, which allows women to socialise' (Willis, 2000: 36-37).

Gilbert (2005) mentions domestic workers almost as disposable goods, which reinforced his argument that middle-class women were 'magicians' who cleverly made unnecessary expenditure disappear in their response to their economic crises (Gilbert, 2005: 141, 143 and 147).

No one piece of research can do everything or include everyone. In the examples above the question is not whether it is more important to study one class of women or another. The point is, in both cases, the way that domestic workers are discussed reinforces a binary assumption; middle class women are able to work on constructing their identities because an anonymous household helper is doing menial tasks, insinuating at the same time that doing such tasks is not associated with developing one's identity. Furthermore, it implies that domestic workers are not able to work on their own identity projects, because they do not have other women to take care of *their* menial tasks.

It is significant that in the previous examples, domestic workers are portrayed almost as supporting actors for middle-class women. This calls to mind the 2010 exhibition *97 Empleadas Domésticas* by the artist Daniela Ortiz. Ortiz used photographs from Facebook profiles showing upper class Peruvians in everyday situations. In the background or at the edge of each photo are the domestic workers who sustain those family homes. The exhibition received backlash as commentators questioned the ethics of using the (publicly available) photos from Facebook without first seeking the families' permission. As Ortiz stated in her response to the criticism, yet again more attention was being placed on the personhood of the upper-class subjects of the photographs, than on the domestic workers in the background (Ortiz, 2013).

When scholars have discussed domestic workers' identity in Mexico, they generally conclude that doing domestic work negates or subsumes one's identity. Marcelina Bautista, the founder of the first domestic workers' union in Mexico, who began live-in domestic work aged 14, says that when (indigenous) domestic workers are made to change their clothing, language, food and so on they 'face the loss of their identity, constructing a new one based on an obligatory adaptation in order to incorporate themselves into their work' (Bautista, 2012: 15). She argues that live-in domestic work is not conducive to developing one's own identity because, 'in this space the principle of individualisation is not generated, this is characteristic of public space where identities are constructed' (Bautista, 2012: 15). Indeed, she repeats the idea mentioned above that domestic workers 'only serve as the medium through which other people achieve their objectives focused on succeeding in public spaces, where they will be recognised and obtain power' (Bautista, 2012: 15). She echoes Goldsmith, who observed that live-in domestic workers' identities are muddled as 'their private [life is] submerged within the private sphere of the lives of their employers' (Goldsmith, 1989: 225). Taking this perspective, which fails to analyse domestic workers' constructions of their identities, continues to perpetuate both their invisibility as conscious, reflexive individuals and that there is a public / private divide, with the public being the most valuable space. I will unpack these points throughout this thesis.

Despite the discussions above which have tended to clearly separate the public / private divide, actually the apparently private home where paid domestic work takes place is opened up and simultaneously becomes a place of work for the domestic worker. This creates very particular relationships between employer and employee.

Domestic workers in Mexico have historically been regarded suspiciously by employers, something which dates back to the colonial era, when implicit moral superiority was a fundamental feature of paid domestic work (Kuznesof, 1989; Goldsmith, 1998; Thomson, 2009). Most often, employers are suspicious of theft and sexuality. For example, as recently as 2013 the government of Monterrey tried to create a database of domestic workers' personal information in the hopes of reducing crime (Durín, 2013a). In discussing this development, Durín gathered evidence about attitudes towards domestic workers' potential criminality from employers. She argues that the attempt to create the database mentioned above was not only an unnecessary invasion of privacy, but also stigmatised domestic workers as potential criminals. She argues that this reflects a common attitude about the questionable honesty of domestic workers, which victimises and disempowers them. When scholars such as Durín investigate these phenomena, they tend to analyse the perspective of the employer. They show how the employer's moral judgement positions them as superior to the employee, thus further illustrating the discrimination that domestic workers face and reinforcing a sense of binary difference between employer and employee.

Sexuality is another area where studies have shown domestic workers are closely surveilled by employers. Again, usually the perspective of the employer is analysed and is further evidence that domestic workers are victimised. Saldaña Tejeda (2011) describes how employers often attempt to control domestic workers' sexual conduct, in order to 'maintain the status quo of a social, racial and a political order from which the middle classes benefit significantly' (Saldaña Tejeda, 2011). Describing Latin America in general, Peter Wade argues that domestic workers are especially eroticised, because 'domestic service is a site where various historically significant dimensions of race, gender, class and age together produce a particular and intense form of sexualisation', and that there is a perception that just by being there, domestic workers are making themselves

sexually available (Wade, 2013: 189; See also Goldsmith, 1998: 93; Saldaña Tejada, 2011: 112-113).

This perceived sexual availability was also identified elsewhere by Nare (2014). In her study of migrant domestic workers in Italy, Nare described an 'implicit moral contract' in paid domestic work, and explained that domestic workers were expected to conform to the moral expectations of the household. She showed how participants in her research adapted their appearance to be less attractive, in accordance with what they believed their (female) employers wanted. Nare was clear that there was an added element of judgement about domestic workers' sexuality because of their foreignness; as Eastern European women in Italy, certain stereotypes existed about their sexuality and importantly, their sexual attractiveness to Italian men. According to Nare, employers had made comments about the infidelity of their husbands to explain why they would be cautious about which domestic workers they would hire, or why they were concerned about how they dressed (Nare, 2014). In each of these examples, we see how employers have felt justified in controlling domestic workers' sexuality, and that the implication is that this gives employers further power of employees.

As I have shown, in the research on Mexico, it is not common to consider the 'internal' aspect of identity for domestic workers, or how they may 'construct meaning' in interactions with their employers, and indeed how domestic workers categorise or identify employers. Analyses of reflexive identity development usually centre on employers. Employers are seen as having both the intellectual tools to be reflexive as well as the time and resources to engage in activities that reinforce their identity. Thus, they are more likely to be recognised as 'doing' their identity than domestic workers are (Saldaña Tejada, 2015). Importantly too, employers are more likely to be associated with having a public life, whereas domestic workers are more often thought of as part of the private sphere, even if they are going out to work in a home that is not their own. The literature on paid domestic work tends to reproduce the idea that one can only develop a valuable identity in the public sphere.

However, although identity is not a prominent avenue for research on paid domestic work in Mexico, there is evidence from other countries that of course

domestic workers do work on their own identity construction, even when faced with particularly repressive situations. For example, other studies have analysed the complex interplay of factors which contribute to domestic workers' identities when they are simultaneously international migrants, as such exploring the transgression in domestic workers' identities as they grapple with moving between countries, familial identities and social status. Ueno (2010) explored how Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers in Singapore dealt with their changing identities:

Domestic work is considered a low prestige occupation and workers tend to be divested of the usual "identity kit" to make up their identity front. Specifically, to compensate for their discredited status, domestic workers attempt to reconstitute their damaged identity, obtain a new identity kit, recall previous social and family roles, or anticipate a future identity... They obtain additional roles in an attempt to change how they feel about themselves, to alter the meaning of being a domestic worker, and to redefine their relationships with others. (Ueno, 2010: 82)

As Ueno states, Indonesian and Filipina domestic workers actively improve how they feel and what being a domestic worker means by working on their sense of self.

Ogaya (2004) also analysed migrant domestic workers in Singapore and Hong Kong, and argued that they create 'resistant subjectivities'; that is, they challenge stereotypical perceptions of domestic workers by engaging in activities which increase their self-esteem and the social status of domestic workers. These activities range from joining unions, to participating in training programmes either as students or volunteer counsellors, managers or lecturers (Ogaya, 2004). Ogaya argues that 'since domestic workers are confined to the household, which is socially invisible, their contributions and their conditions often go unnoticed', however, she still argues that through their social activities, migrant women become more than domestic workers, rather they are 'counter-hegemonic subjects...[and] agents of social change' (Ogaya, 2004: 384 and 382). Thus,

Ogaya is engaged in paying close attention to the identities of domestic workers, despite how they may typically be categorised. It is important to keep these studies by Ueno and Ogaya in mind given that the Singaporean context is particularly repressive – legally, socially and structurally – for domestic workers in a global context, yet these theorists do not dismiss the importance of exploring domestic workers’ sense of identity, and do not assume that doing paid domestic work is not conducive to being able to construct one’s own identity.

2.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided the critical context in which this research is situated, beginning with an analysis of literature on paid domestic work in Mexico, and moving on to relevant literature on identity, including how identity has been approached in discussion of domestic workers in other countries. I have shown that research on paid domestic work in Mexico is a radical endeavour, which has consistently been intricately linked to contemporary political and social movements. For this reason, it is a relatively new field of research and has tended to focus on the structural discrimination faced by domestic workers. However, I have argued that researching domestic workers’ identity and self-perception is also a radical endeavour, by introducing the feminist post colonial critical context, particularly the important work of Mohanty, and by presenting arguments made by Goffman, Hall, Jenkins and Woodward which emphasise the political and social importance of analysing identity. In the following chapter I engage more deeply with the theoretical framework which underpins this research, and discuss the practical matters of the research process.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework I adopted within my research, and describes the experience of being in the field. In discussing the methodological framework, I first explain that my research is informed by feminist standpoint and feminist post-colonial methodology. Helen Kara (2015) defines these approaches as 'transformative research frameworks' (Kara, 2015: 2). Rather than claiming neutrality, such frameworks are proudly political and recognise that research can, does and should have a transformative effect on society (Kara, 2015). Next, I position myself within the research, and include a discussion of the role of emotion in research and what that meant for my work. After introducing my theoretical positioning, I describe the practical matters of my research in section 3.2. While no methods are feminist in and of themselves, we can certainly choose to use methods which best fit our methodological concerns. Therefore, I will explain why I chose to use in-depth semi-structured interviews as part of my feminist post-colonial approach. I will also discuss the important matters of access, ethics and translation. Finally, I discuss two limitations in the context of research on domestic work in Mexico, namely the lack of indigenous participants, and my choice not to carry out participant action research.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

As an English academic carrying out research in Mexico, it was important for me to apply feminist theories which would help me better understand the participants' experiences and opinions, and which at the same time helped me thoroughly analyse my own position as a western feminist researcher working with third world women, to use Mohanty's theoretical binaries (Mohanty; 1991, 2003 and 2005). Therefore, my research is informed both by feminist standpoint theory and feminist post-colonial theory.

Feminist standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and was based on the idea that because women are oppressed, they are better placed to understand social structures, ultimately because their subjugated position allows them to understand the 'relationship between the production of knowledge and the practices of power' (Harding, 2004: 1). Feminist standpoint theory has been

widely criticised (Harding, 2004), and Hekman believes that by the early 2000s it was 'frequently regarded as a quaint relic of feminism's less sophisticated past' (Hekman, 2004: 225). One criticism is that it is too universalising and fails to recognise difference by assuming a collective consciousness of all women. However, theorists like Harding (2004) and Hekman (2004) recognise, and I agree, that it 'has laid the groundwork for...a politics [of difference] by initiating the discussion of situated knowledge' (Hekman, 2004: 226).

Donna Haraway first raised the concept of situated knowledge in 1988. Despite the intentional lack of neutrality in feminist research and its rejection of positivist objectivity, she argued that feminists should still seek a certain objectivity in their research in order to strengthen it, and that that objectivity should be based on 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988). For Bhavnani, Haraway's 'sense of objectivity is in opposition to positivist discussions of this concept, and is also distant from the absolute relativism embodied in the view that all truths are equally valid' (Bhavnani, 1993: 96). Indeed, Haraway does not suggest that just any opinion should be taken as a valid epistemology. She states that the ideal feminist objectivity, 'privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing' (Haraway, 1988: 89). Haraway's ideas have informed the thematic analyses of my interviews, and my consideration how my research fits with other research on paid domestic work in Mexico.

There are many overlaps between feminist standpoint theory and feminist post-colonial theory, if we accept the argument that it is possible to address difference through standpoint theory. Zinn and Dill (2005) emphasise the centrality of recognising women's different lived experience in feminist post-colonial theory when they state that, 'many feminists now contend that difference occupies center stage as *the* project of women studies today' (Zinn and Dill, 2005: 23. Italics in original). Racial difference is at the core of feminist post-colonial theory; Lewis (2003) asserts that it 'has engaged in a two-fold project: to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualisation of colonialism and post-colonialism' (Lewis, 2003: 3). Despite arguments such as those put forward by Hekman (2004), both theories stress the importance of locating women and their experiences at specific historical, geographical and

political points and allowing women to tell their own stories in their own voices (Mohanty, 1991, 2003 and 2005; Mills, 1998; Lewis, 2003; Zinn and Dill, 2005).

In particular, I have found it helpful to keep Mohanty's concept of feminist solidarity in mind almost as a set of practical guidelines, especially while I undertook my fieldwork in Mexico. She describes a 'feminist as explorer' approach that she has come across in some women's studies courses in the US. She says that this approach is seen as taking an international perspective because it focuses study on countries foreign to the (US based) researcher. However, this can be damaging. She cautions that this often creates an 'us and them' mentality which takes white, western experience as the norm, and fails to make links to the ways in which globalisation has us continuously interacting with each other, and how western countries are implicit in maintaining the polarity of conditions in so called developed and developing countries (Mohanty, 2005). It is essential, argues Mohanty, to provide rich, intelligent, 'politically focused, locally analysed' accounts of women's lives, which recognise that 'the category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another' (Mohanty, 1991: 65). Here, we can see that Mohanty is almost in conversation with standpoint theorists, but that she has taken the idea that 'Feminist Objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988: 87) and expanded it to show that western researchers like me must be explicitly aware of the uniqueness of individual women's experience, just as much as we are of our own.

My individual experience and identity as a researcher is important to mention in order to be able to position myself within this research. In doing this, I align myself with other feminist theorists who argue that there can be no positivist objectivity in research, or that it is impossible to perform 'the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (Haraway, 1988: 85), rather 'it is inevitable that the researcher's own experiences and consciousness will be involved in the research process as much as they are in life' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 58).

I am a 30-year-old white woman from the north of England. I would describe my social class background as somewhere between working and middle class based on parents' education and income. My journey to Mexico began in 2012 when I

moved to Spain to learn Spanish, with the intention that I would finally arrive in Latin America, which I did, beginning with a year living in Ecuador. In January 2017, when I began working in Playa del Carmen, I started to develop an interest in the specific and striking ways that intersectionality played out there as I observed, chatted to and spent time with the range of (mostly) women who I came into contact with on a daily basis. In contrast to the first few months I spent in Playa del Carmen, when I returned to carry out fieldwork I was equipped with the benefit of four months of masters-level study, meaning I had been introduced to new theoretical concepts and had the privilege of time to mull them over and discuss them with professors and classmates.

This very brief snapshot of my life and consideration of how my opinions developed matters because it is fundamental to position oneself in feminist research in order that it can be more richly and critically interpreted. I find it interesting from a theoretical perspective to consider how far we should explicitly include ourselves within the research process, particularly when writing up results. Some feminist researchers, such as Stanley (1992) and Cotteril and Letherby (1993; also Letherby, 2003 and 2015), are strong proponents of taking an autobiographical approach to the research process. I agree with Letherby's statement that 'all writing is in some ways autobiographical and...all texts bear traces of the author and are to some extent personal statements within which the writer works from the self to the other and back again' (Letherby, 2015: 81). The brief autobiography I presented here clearly shows how my own ambitions and experience led me to the site where I based my research. It would be difficult to argue that this project is *not* a result of my own journey and a reflection of my intellectual interests, and thus that my *self* is completely interwoven with this research.

However, in the context of my research, I feel that it is important to carefully consider a statement such as this from Stanley and Wise: "the researcher' and her consciousness [should be] the central focus of the research experience' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 59). They clarify that the purpose of this approach is so that the researcher is always aware of her subjectivity, and as such feminist objectivity may be better achieved. However, Lugones and Spelman have referred to the dominance of white western voices in academia as 'androcentric

din' (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 574), and therefore in a post-colonial context, it does not sit comfortably for me that my experience, rather than that of the participants, should be the central focus in my research. I have found it more useful and ethical to maintain a critical and consistent awareness of positionality, in order to recognise and reflect upon difference between myself and the participants, and what this may have meant for the outcome of my research.

Typically, the researcher is thought to occupy the most powerful position in the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Letherby, 2003; Kara, 2015). As researcher, the only direct interactions I had with participants were during interviews, and the limited Whatsapp or Facebook messages exchanged to set up each interview. I chose the questions and guided the conversation to the areas which I thought were most interesting and important in an exploration of identity as I understand it. I also have particular characteristics that give me a more powerful profile on paper, especially in the Mexican context. I am a university educated, tall, white, blonde-haired westerner. González-López (2015) and Saldaña Tejeda (2011) have both described these characteristics as having particularly high social capital in Mexico. In an attempt to manage some of this, I was careful to dress in the typical casual wear of shorts and flip-flops that I always use in Playa del Carmen, conscious that our clothing is an important feature of how we present ourselves (Letherby, 2003), and to be relaxed and friendly when the participants and I spoke. I also shared some of my own opinions and responded to participants' questions, in order to generate a more egalitarian relationship during the interviews (Oakley, 2015). When I consider how to (re)present the participants' life stories and facets of their identity, my experiences, outlook and politics unavoidably affect how I interpret their words and how I communicate them (Stanley, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Swauger, 2011).

Notwithstanding the points made above, it is important not to 'over-pacify' the participants. As Letherby (2003) points out, 'they can refuse to answer, take part, tell the truth even, and while it is important that we as researchers remain critically reflexive of our positions it is patronizing of us to always place the respondent in the role of potential victim' (Letherby, 2003: 116). The participants had two key advantages over me, if we continue to apply the narrative of power.

All of them were older than me, which afforded them a certain self-assuredness when we spoke. But crucially, we spoke in Spanish. If they felt intimidated by my level of education – which I do not have evidence of – once I began to speak in my second language and them in their first, it became obvious that they could express themselves better than I could.

As well as being conscious of participants' emotions, many feminist theorists believe that an intelligent consideration of the researcher's emotions within the research process serves several crucial purposes (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2008; Letherby, 2015; González-López, 2015; Oakley, 2015; Faria and Mollet, 2016). Firstly, it plays into ideas about the importance of humanising the researcher, thus consistently showing how the researcher's personality may have impacted upon various stages of the research process. In this context I find Kaloski-Naylor's idea that 'for contemporary white people, feeling guilty is a productive element in anti-racist work' interesting (Kaloski-Naylor, 1999: 92). Perhaps if I did not have some sense of guilt about England's colonial identity I would have taken a less sensitive and analytical approach to this research. Although, much like Gilkes (1999) notes, it is true that I feel less of a sense of discomfort given that I was not researching a country with which my own has a very close history.

Including emotion also strengthens the fundamental feminist conviction that the personal is political. Underpinning the doing of feminism within academia is to challenge traditional, positivist, masculine ways of carrying out research. Oakley argues that traditional research 'suggested a masculinist mechanistic attitude which treated the interview's character as social interaction as an inconvenient obstacle to the generation of 'facts' (Oakley, 2015: 196). Emotional involvement in the subject is the absolute antithesis to positivist research. As Stanley and Wise state, 'academic feminism must take feminist beliefs seriously, by integrating them within our research' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 154).

Finally, and of course relatedly, it serves to share with others the 'messiness' of the research process (Letherby, 2003), which was particularly helpful for me during my fieldwork. On the same day that I arrived in Mexico, my partner was undergoing surgery after having suffered a heart attack that came completely out

of the blue. As may be expected it took quite a toll on him emotionally which in turn affected me. While it was easy to stay focused during my interviews, the days and weeks in between were difficult, frustrating and very emotional. I found that the environment of such raw and negative emotions was actually productive and transformative and an important instigator in allowing me to connect to my work more deeply. Negativity led me to question the point of my research and whether I was going to have anything useful to say, until I arrived at a similar conclusion to Gail Chester and other radical feminists, which is shared by Stanley and Wise. They believe that there is no sense in waiting for an abstract 'revolution at some point in the distant future, once all the preparations have been made' (Chester, 1979: 15 quoted in Stanley and Wise, 1993: 57). Rather, 'we must necessarily effect many small liberations in many small and apparently insignificant aspects of our lives, or we shall never begin the revolution' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 165). This attitude has been critical in making sense of the research I carried out and without recognising how this linked to my emotions, this would have been a quite different piece of work.

3.2 In The Field

Methods

I chose to carry out semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a relatively small sample of eight participants. Choosing eight participants means that I can engage carefully with their words and provide an account that does not claim to be representative of all domestic workers in Mexico by any means, but which allows for an understanding of their identity construction from their own standpoint. Bhavnani believes that small sample sizes are one way of achieving feminist objectivity (Bhavnani, 1993). Furthermore, the in-depth interview is synonymous with feminist research (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Letherby 2003 and 2015; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2008; Kara, 2015; Oakley, 2015). It is seen as a way of redressing the power imbalance within the research situation, because it allows us to hear participants' voices and for them to tell their story in their own words. For me these are important concerns that would allow me to get at the information I hoped for, while staying true to the post-colonial, feminist theories that resonate with me most as a researcher. I felt that a qualitative approach, as opposed to a

quantitative approach, was more appropriate in allowing me to draw out the nuances of participants' sense of their identity and self-perception.

As I mentioned above, ultimately I had control over the questions and structure of the interviews, however I was flexible and very much led by how participants answered, following up themes that seemed particularly important to them. This is crucial for Letherby, who states that 'the researcher who identifies as feminist...needs to choose a method which enables women's experiences and voices to be distinct and discernible...adopting a flexible research approach which adapts to the emerging data' (Letherby, 2003: 102). Similarly, González-López thanked mindful practice for her ability to 'remain receptive to new information so as to cultivate fresh, innovative perspectives' (González-López, 2015: 449) while she was interviewing participants for her research on the sensitive and controversial topic of voluntary and involuntary incest.

There are some limitations to the interview approach, particularly when using it as a singular method, which are relevant to my research. For example, Saldaña Tejada (2015) has suggested that interviewing may make it more difficult for researchers to pick up examples of self-reflexivity expressed by domestic workers. Furthermore, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) explicitly described the wealth of valuable data she was able to obtain by combining participatory observation with interviews in her research on domestic workers' identity in the USA.

Access

Before beginning my fieldwork I had made contact with two organisations in Mexico, a national indigenous women's rights organisation and a local gender-based violence organisation, both of which had offered to introduce me to research participants. I had also hoped to interview Celeste, the live-in domestic worker whose experiences sparked my interest in this topic. Upon my arrival in Mexico the planned collaboration with the indigenous women's rights group fell through, despite having achieved confirmation of the collaboration before arriving in Mexico. Celeste had returned to her hometown in rural Chiapas, and due to the isolated location and distance from Playa del Carmen, sadly it would have been

impossible to travel to interview her. I was lucky enough to still be able to count on the support of the director of the *Eleonora Mendoza Asociación Civil* (EMAC).

EMAC is a politically independent, small-scale, local organisation based in one of the poorest areas of Playa del Carmen, whose aim is to prevent gender-based violence and support survivors of domestic abuse. The director introduced me to participants, invited me to take part in local events, and arranged a meeting between myself and the local government's women's department, the *Instituto Municipal de la Mujer*.

Ultimately, I relied on a completely random sample of participants. This was beneficial in that the results were random and somewhat unexpected, which proved valuable. However, my sample lacked indigenous participants, which is an important limitation. I will discuss this in the final section of this chapter. The table below (*figure 1*) gives some key information about the participants and how we made contact. Friend A and Friend B are women I know who put me in touch with domestic workers they knew, either personally or in one case, through a colleague. All interviews took place in person, in locations chosen by the participants. These ranged from cafes, to a park, to the participant's home, a mutual friend's home, and the facilities of EMAC.

Figure 1

Name	Age	Currently employed in domestic work?	Experienced in live-in domestic work?	How contact was facilitated
Kenia	42	No	Yes	EMAC
Andrea	66	No	Yes	Friend A
Sofia	45	No	Yes	EMAC
Mode	36	Yes	Yes	Friend B
Gilberto	unknown	Yes	No	Friend B
Isabel	32	Yes	Yes	Friend A
Violeta	55	Yes	No	Facebook
Sole	36	Yes	No	Facebook

Ethics

My research was approved by the ethics board at the Centre for Women's Studies. Each participant either signed a consent form or gave verbal consent before going ahead with the interviews. I decided to include the option of verbal consent because in Mexico some people are hesitant to sign official documents due to a mistrust in authority (González-López, 2011). Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions before the interview went ahead and were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any point. Almost every participant picked a pseudonym to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, although most of them did not see the necessity for this. Mode and Gilberto, however, wanted to use their own names, in the very unlikely case that they accidentally chose pseudonyms which were the real names of another couple who worked together.

Translation

Spanish is my second language and I speak it fluently. Still, in the first interview I was nervous, as it was actually spontaneous and I was not prepared. Listening to the interview it was clear that my nerves affected my ability to communicate well.¹² In an attempt to manage potential difficulties in future interviews, I did two key things. First, I made my fieldwork notes in Spanish, so that I could communicate ideas better to participants. Secondly, I made it clear to participants that they could ask me to repeat my question without worrying about embarrassing me if I had not quite phrased it in a way that they understood.¹³

Necessarily I have had to translate quotes from the interviews into English in the body of this thesis. There are several things to take into consideration from a political and theoretical perspective when translating participants' words. Firstly, if the aim of qualitative interviews is to provide the participant the chance to tell their story in their own words, what is the implication when I take these words and turn them into English ones? Language is a way for individuals to make sense of their identities (Hall, 1996 and 2013) therefore who we are is bound up in how we express ourselves (Spivak, 2004). Spivak also argues that this is problematic from a post-colonial perspective, particularly when translators pay more attention to making their translations flow better in English, as opposed to capturing the nuances and authenticity of the original words (Spivak, 2004: 370 and 376).

Furthermore, it is possible that the cultural significance of particular words and concepts have blurred during the translation process, as I danced between English and Spanish from formulating my thoughts, to interviewing, transcribing and writing this thesis. As Maclean (2007) argues, 'the process of communicating research participants' words in another language and context may impose another conceptual scheme on their thoughts, confirming rather than challenging theories and concepts developed in the West' (p.784). It is not possible to easily compensate the fact that translated words do not carry the same connotations as

¹² In my fieldwork diary I recorded that, 'My Spanish was a nightmare...I don't know how she understood me. I need to take my time I think, try not to be nervous, or not let my nerves win.'

¹³ While there are no obvious misunderstandings in any of the interviews, I cannot know if the participants really felt comfortable enough to ask me to repeat a question, and whether they would have answered differently if they had interpreted what I said in another way.

their original expressions. Mounzer writes beautifully that words are not just objective and innocent letters strewn together, but evocative illustrations of concepts that mean different things depending on how the listener / reader has experienced them themselves (Mounzer, 2016).

Researchers have often pondered exactly how to quote participants' speech regardless of translation, particularly whether or not they should include pauses, sighs, and hesitations and if so, then how (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Letherby, 2003). A common 'filler' in Mexican Spanish is to use the word *este* and it is peppered throughout my interviews. Literally, it means *this*, however it is also used as an English speaker might use *um* or *erm*. I include it in italics in my translations because it is so characteristic of Mexican speech, and I hope it brings a sense of the participants' voices to these pages. As a way to retain participants' authentic voices as much as possible, I have included the original Spanish in the appendix.

Limitations

I had hoped to include indigenous domestic workers in this study. As I mentioned above, my attempts to work with the indigenous women's rights organisation fell through. Counting on the support of this organisation may have improved my ability to access indigenous domestic workers. This is important because other researchers have shown repeatedly how indigenous women and girls face discrimination as domestic workers linked particularly to their indigenous identities – this includes racist attitudes to things like language, clothes or customs (Kuznesof, 1989; Gutiérrez Gómez and Rosas Flores, 2010; Gutiérrez Gómez, 2012; Durín, 2013a, 2018; Macías Vázquez, 2016). However, this thesis is based on research with a small sample of eight participants. This limits both the possibility to draw comparative conclusions regarding racially-motivated discrimination, or to draw broad conclusions regarding domestic workers' experience in general.

3.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined both the theoretical framework which underpins this research, as well as the practical matters of the research process. I have explained that this research is informed by feminist standpoint and post-colonial theory, and argued that these are the most politically appropriate and effective approaches to fairly represent the participants' experiences. I have also discussed methods, access, ethics, translation and limitations, explaining the motivations behind the practical choices made during the research process. In order to make a well-informed and accurate interpretation of the findings laid out within this thesis it is important to keep in mind the key points highlighted here. In the following chapters, I present the key themes which emerged from the data gathered during the interviews with participants.

4. Familial Roles, Domestic Work and the Question of Empowered Identity

In this chapter I discuss the ways that participants spoke about their experiences of the relationship between their familial roles and paid domestic work, with a particular emphasis on their identities as mothers or othermothers. As introduced in the Critical Context chapter, the term othermother refers to the eldest female siblings who take on mothering roles in large, poor families. By analysing participants' experiences of mothering / othermothering and domestic work, I begin to unpack some of the complexities of the 'internal / external dialectic' in identity development (Jenkins, 2008. See also Hall, 1996 and 2013; Woodward, 2015) and show that important questions around the public / private 'divide' are relevant in a discussion of paid domestic work today (Goldsmith, 1998 and 2000; Willis, 2000; Bautista, 2012; Ortiz, 2013; Woodward, 2015). Furthermore, I draw attention to intersectional factors, particularly class and age, and suggest that these are particularly important in determining participants' understanding of the public / private divide and identity.

4.1 Othermothers: Child Domestic Workers

The *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo* (ENOE)¹⁴ recognises that children in Mexico may begin to do paid work from the age of five years old. Studies have shown that the main reason that children enter the labour force in Mexico is poverty, and they are more likely to be sent out to work if their parents are not educated past primary school and do not value the formal education system (Estrada Quiroz, 2005; Orraca, 2014; Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016). Usually, the eldest siblings in large families enter the labour force with the intention being that an extra income will help their younger brothers and sisters continue in education (Levison and Langer, 2010; Orraca, 2014; Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016).

While official statistics suggest that boys are more likely to work outside the home than girls, Miranda Juárez and Navarrete (2016) observed that the lower statistics for girls 'could be disguised by housework, which is generally attributed to women, who take on tasks in the home so that other members of the household

¹⁴ National Occupation and Employment Survey

can involve themselves in productive work, [the tasks] can be looking after younger siblings or doing chores' (Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016: 55). This follows earlier research by Miranda Juárez and Macri (2015) who state that girls are expected to 'relieve their mothers, grandmothers or other adult women' of domestic duties and as such they 'collaborate in chores, participate in caring for the youngest members of the home and in some cases also go out to work in the labour market' (Miranda Juárez and Macri, 2015: 18). Indeed, terms of division of labour in the home, statistics reflect that girls in Mexico generally do much more housework than boys¹⁵ (Estrada Quiroz, 2005: 2; García Guzmán, 2007).

It is difficult to extrapolate exact figures about children's participation in paid domestic work from official sources. Firstly, the occupation is masked under the generic category *servicios* (services) in the ENOE. Furthermore, in their study on child domestic workers in Latin America, Levison and Langer (2010) concluded that it was difficult to rely on census data because respondents were reluctant to admit that the young girls living with them were there to carry out domestic work, either paid or otherwise remunerated (Levison and Langer, 2010). Despite these difficulties, there is some consensus that it is a relatively common occurrence. For example, Castellanos observes that, 'in Cancún, adolescent migrants as young as age eleven work in the service and construction industries...not surprisingly, domestic service is one of the most common forms of child labor' (Castellanos, 2007: 1). At least two studies have shown specifically that indeed poverty is a driving force in children entering into paid domestic work in Latin America (DNI Costa Rica, 2002; Levison and Langer, 2010), with abuse at home being an added factor in some cases (DNI Costa Rica, 2002), and that eldest girls are expected to do paid domestic work to contribute to educational costs for their younger siblings (DNI Costa Rica, 2002; Orraca, 2014).

The conditions under which four of the participants in my research entered paid domestic work are consistent with the evidence above. Andrea, Kenia and Mode were the eldest siblings in families they themselves defined as large and

¹⁵ National surveys in Mexico have found that women, defined as being over the age of twelve, take on an average of 34 hours of housework a week in urban areas and 43 in rural areas, whereas men do an average of 7.5 and 10 hours respectively. See García Guzmán, 2007.

poor.¹⁶ They were all expected to do paid domestic work in order to help support their families economically, in particular their younger siblings. Importantly, none of them had positive experiences doing paid domestic work as children, and none expressed feeling as though doing paid domestic work was conducive to developing a sense of empowered identity. On a theoretical level, this may be related to the concept of the internal / external dialectic (Jenkins, 2008), because of the combination of how they felt while doing paid domestic work, and how domestic work was represented to them. However, the raw, human experience of being placed in vulnerable and exploitative positions as child workers cannot be overlooked as informing their negative experiences.

Both Andrea and Kenia were twelve years old when they started doing paid domestic work. Andrea consistently described her professional life, beginning with her entrance into paid work as a child, as an unavoidable 'struggle' or 'battle' (Andrea).ⁱ She talked about the responsibilities that she felt shared jointly with her mother in raising her younger siblings after her mother's partner left the family home. For example, she recalled of her childhood work experience, 'you're the oldest and you have to, you're struggling with your mum to be able to lift [your siblings] up'.ⁱⁱ Kenia too was expected to support her younger siblings economically. However, rather than accept this as inevitable, Kenia finds her parents' decision incomprehensible and 'cruel' (Kenia).ⁱⁱⁱ Kenia's anger was compounded by the fact that she suffered sexual abuse from her male employer, a doctor. After some months, she resisted going to work, and her strategy was to fake illness. However, after not going to her employers' home for a short while, the *señora* came to ask her to come back to work. Kenia recalled, 'and [my parents] let me go. They let me go, sending me to work, I mean, not 'do you want to go to work,' it was, 'go to work.'^{iv}

Mode missed her parents deeply when she was sent to Mexico City to do live-in domestic work as a twelve-year-old, in order to help pay for the education of her eight siblings. Although her parents lived only an hour and a half a way, she

¹⁶ The fourth child worker, Sofia, was not the eldest, but she entered paid domestic work when she ran away from home to escape her sexually abusive father. I am choosing not to include her in this section of the analysis because her experiences were very traumatic and I do not have the expertise nor the space to analyse them in a way that would do them justice.

could not afford to go home often to visit them. She was also exploited by her employers, who expected her to work long hours, with her days beginning at 5am. With the benefit of hindsight, she says:

At first it was difficult and yeah because at 12 or 13 years old, I mean, I realise that it's an age very...very...it's still, um...very little no, you're a very young teen, well a girl, yeah.^v

Mode could not comprehend how her employers could accept her as a domestic worker at such a young age, expecting her to take on adult responsibilities while she was still a child: 'it's something very difficult, sometimes you find people who sometimes, you say, they don't have feelings' (Mode).^{vi} After a while, she said, she simply had to get used to her situation.

Rather than describing feelings of empowerment, the three participants described feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, which DNI Costa Rica (2002) found was common for child domestic workers. Andrea referred to entering a new home as a risk (*riesgo*), even when she did paid domestic work as an adult, and Kenia felt particularly powerless due to the sexual abuse she endured, especially as she could not tell her parents about the abuse: 'I felt alone, because nobody defends you' (Kenia).^{vii} Her sense of vulnerability was heightened because she believed her abuser's wife knew about the abuse and by not protecting her, was complicit in it. Furthermore, consistent with the majority of other child workers, the participants did paid work because their families were poor. Mackintosh and Mooney (2000) found that family poverty led to a sense of shame, particularly because, they argued, there is 'a relationship between a person's occupation and his or her identity' (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2000: 80). It certainly appeared that this was the case for some of the participants. Kenia, for example, described being embarrassed and bullied when she had to sell sweets outside her own school, also when she was a child, and Andrea felt ashamed by the thought of demanding better pay when employers paid her unfairly.

The way in which Andrea, Kenia and Mode described the tasks they were required to do was also significant in helping me understand their sense of disempowerment. Mode recalled being scolded if she did not know how to do certain chores correctly. Andrea and Kenia clearly expressed that they did not enjoy doing domestic tasks, and they also believed that the adults around them did not see them as important activities. Kenia believes her parents and employers were irresponsible, dangerous and misguided in allowing her to look after two young children while she was still a child.^{viii} Andrea was the only participant in my study who made reference to the undesirable reality of cleaning. She used the example of the 'tremendous battle' of having to repeatedly unblock her employer's toilet because her young son always blocked it.^{ix} In this particular household, Andrea's granddaughter sometimes came with her while she worked. Andrea recalled an interaction between them, in which she emphasised that doing domestic work was not a desirable profession and as such she wanted her granddaughter to continue her education so that she could get a better job:

She would say 'ah *mama* the things you have to do!' Yes, but what else can you do, I told her, they are things that happen and when one goes to work, you have to do it even if you don't like it (laughs). And, *este*, and well, also you have to learn so that you realise that you have to get a better education.^x

Within my research, these were the only participants who expressed dislike for the tasks implicated in domestic work. This led me to consider how domestic work had been represented to them, and how that may have influenced their ideas about what being a domestic worker meant. The tasks which are involved in domestic work and care work are not generally socially and culturally valued, with feminists arguing this is because domestic work, whether paid or unpaid, is feminised (Chaney and García Castro, 1989; Goldsmith, 1989 and 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Acevedo, 2000; Ehrenreich, 2000; Moreno, 2000; Gomes da Cunha, 2008; Thomson, 2009; Vieira de Paula Jordão, 2011; Bautista, 2012; González and Solano, 2012). How we perceive tasks influences how we see the person who does them. Hall argues that 'objects, people and events are

correlated with a set of concepts or *mental representations* which we carry around in our heads' and 'in representation, constructionists argue, we use signs, organized into languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others' (Hall, 2013: 3 and 14; italics in original). During our interviews, Andrea, Kenia and Mode emphasised particular signs which suggested they did not see paid domestic work as empowering. In their descriptions of the tasks involved in paid domestic work, they communicated some of the main cultural representations of paid domestic work which they had been exposed to, specifically that it was menial, unskilled and undervalued. Arguably, this is compounded by the fact these participants were children when they began doing paid domestic work.

For these participants, it seems significant that they described their entrance into paid domestic work as something which was expected of them as the eldest girls, in order that they *help* their family. On the one hand, this suggests continuity between their roles at home and as workers and thus a blurring of private and public identity. Further, if this is the case, their paid work may not have been taken seriously. Indeed, 'women's work has been seen as an extension of [women's] roles as wives and mothers and thus as a secondary activity' (Woodward, 2000: 21), and others have suggested this to be the case specifically for girls doing paid work in Mexico (Miranda Juárez and Macri, 2015; Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016). The evidence above suggests that from a young age, girls from low-income families are expected to carry out domestic work in order to help out in their own homes, and that in some cases, they do the same tasks in a paid capacity outside of the home, again to help support their families. I use the word 'help' deliberately, as it also appears as though it is not regarded as genuine work, given the way respondents to the surveys above failed to accurately include girls' participation in domestic work in their responses (Miranda Juárez and Macri, 2015; Miranda Juárez and Navarrete, 2016). This is consistent with conclusions reached by others studying paid domestic work in Latin America (Kusnezof, 1989; Goldsmith, 1989 and 2000; Moreno, 2000; Vieira de Paula Jordão, 2011; González and Solano, 2012; Guevara, 2012; Morse, 2015).

The particular implications of 'helping' for these children who were assigned a familial role of othermother are especially important in terms of considering identity. Analyses of household dynamics in Mexico have shown that it is commonly believed that menial chores are taken care of by somebody less socially important so that others can get on with making a meaningful, public identity for themselves (Goldsmith, 1989; Willis, 2000; Calonge Reillo, 2011; Bautista, 2012; Durín, 2013a). Both Andrea and Kenia expressed that they felt the tasks they were doing as domestic workers were indeed for the benefit of other people's public and by extension valuable identity development. But for Andrea, Kenia and Mode, as othermothers, not only were they taking care of so called menial asks for their employers' benefit, but they were also doing it so that their brothers and sisters could continue in education. Given their negative views on paid domestic work, knowing that it was intended to support others' meaningful development may have compounded their feelings of disempowerment.

For Andrea, Kenia and Mode doing paid domestic work was not a choice, rather it was inextricably and simultaneously a feature of their identities as eldest sisters and a consequence of being young, poor and female. Their private and public identities were blurred; doing housework and caring for children was a feature of their lived experiences within their own family homes and in the homes of their employers. The issue is not whether they enjoyed or valued their role of othermother,¹⁷ rather it is how far they could have seen it as their choice and what that meant for their ideas about the potential to develop one's own identity through doing domestic work. These participants were assigned familial identities they could not control, and made to do work that was not socially or culturally valued.

4.2 Motherhood, Identity and Choice

Scholars have taken various approaches when discussing motherhood and paid domestic work, and the majority of literature suggests that for domestic workers, an empowered mothering identity is not compatible with doing paid domestic

¹⁷ This is relevant and would be fascinating to explore, however unfortunately it is too complex to address within the scope of this thesis.

work, particularly live-in domestic work. A common observation is that domestic workers around the world are forced to neglect their own children while they look after other women's offspring, either by leaving them alone or with relatives (Romero, 2000; Ueno, 2010; Durín, 2013a; Woodward, 2015). In her exploration of mothering identities among Mexicana and Chicana women in the USA, some of whom had been engaged in paid domestic work, Segura (2005) observed that some Chicana mothers chose not to work because they agreed that the best way to mother their children was to stay at home with them. For Segura, 'their attachment to this ideal is underscored by a harsh critique of their own employed mothers and themselves *when* they work full-time. Motherhood framed within this context appears irreconcilable with employment' (Segura, 2005: 283). Research from Mexico shows that domestic workers may also be forced to give up their jobs if they become pregnant, especially if they are doing live-in work (Saldaña Tejada, 2011; Guillermoprieto, 2012; Durín, 2013a). Durín has shown that for rural and indigenous women in Monterrey, doing paid domestic work can be viewed as part of a stage of life and she relates these stages to motherhood – particularly, something which occurs before (inevitable) motherhood or for young, single mothers (Durín, 2013a and 2018). Others have analysed the sometimes maternalistic relationship between employer and employee, and unpacked some of the contradictions and hypocrisy in describing domestic workers as 'daughters' in the family (Kusnezof, 1989; Goldsmith, 2000; Thomson, 2009; Bautista, 2012; Moras, 2013; Toledo González, 2014). In contrast to other studies, the participants in my research seemed to find ways to have an empowered experience of motherhood as domestic workers.

Sole made the choice to do paid domestic work because she wanted to make positive changes to the way she mothered her sons. When she worked eight to ten hour shifts in a petrol station, she worried about leaving her children at home alone. As a domestic worker, however, she worked for families who did not mind if she brought her sons to work with her. She could also work less hours, meaning she could be at home when her sons returned from school, to make sure they ate well and did their homework. Scholars have shown that women value certain tasks more within their own homes, and that even those who employ domestic workers to take care of so-called menial tasks, are keen to take on nurturing tasks with their children such as cooking for them and supporting

their education (Priego, 2000; Willis, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Calonge Reillo, 2011). These were the same tasks which Sole highlighted as wanting to help her sons with, which led me to consider that she may have felt that by doing domestic work, rather than neglect her sons, Sole felt she could spend more time nurturing them.

Sole's choice to do paid domestic work and how she viewed its role in her identity construction is even more interesting when we consider her life story and how she has made sense of her public and private identities. Sole married her husband at fifteen. When I asked how her life was before she began working, she acknowledged that despite there being many continuities in her life before and after beginning to do paid domestic work, she did not feel she truly worked until she separated from her husband aged 28:

Well, very similar in some of ways, it's very similar. You know, we human beings live by habit...And before well, I didn't work, I dedicated myself more to my house when I still hadn't separated from my ex-husband. Well, I mean, I didn't work outside because in the house there's work. And it wasn't only attending to my sons, rather also to my husband.^{xi}

Mode was the only participant who began working as a child who was still employed as a domestic worker at the time of our interview. Her situation was also unique in that her husband worked alongside her. They met when Mode was sixteen and working as a live-in domestic worker in Playa del Carmen. By eighteen, they were married and had had their first child. Mode and Gilberto work together precisely because they want to be able to have more time with their teenage children. Although her children were aged fifteen and eighteen at the time of our interviews, Mode continued to see them as children who are in need of the emotional support and practical care that she, as their mother, wanted to provide them. She was able to provide this care because of doing paid domestic work:

Well now they aren't children, but as parents they'll always be our children right, well they are our young adults (laughs). And well he, anyway, we don't want to commit to jobs that will have us there all day and from there we're going to neglect our children.^{xii}

Objectively, there were clear continuities for Sole and Mode in their familial roles as they grew up, became mothers and were employed as paid domestic workers as adults. Beginning certainly at twelve for Mode and fifteen for Sole, although potentially earlier, they took on feminised, domestic, caring roles within their families. However, our identities are constantly in flux, or as Hall puts it, 'a construction, a process never completed' and 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall, 1996: 2 and 6). Part of the internal side of identity construction is playing an active role in interpreting or making meaning out of actions, and these interpretations change over time (Hall, 1996). It appears as though as adults, Mode and Sole did not necessarily place the same meaning on domestic work as they did when they when it was an assumed part of their familial identities. They did not have a static interpretation of doing domestic work. While Mode may have felt vulnerable and powerless during her childhood experiences of paid domestic work, now it allowed her to have more time to mother her children in a way that was important to her. During our interview, Sole was very self-reflexive. She recognised that the roles she has undertaken have been similar in both her personal and professional life, but Sole identifies aspects of her position as a paid domestic worker that are distinct. She finds the work fulfilling and freeing, and it is a way for her to explore her own interests: 'I don't see it as if I'm working for somebody, I see it as if I were doing something for me, so that, I like what I do, if I didn't, I don't think I'd do it'.^{xiii}

Violeta and Isabel also began doing paid domestic work as adults, and consistent with the other participants, it appears as though their identities within their own families, and the age at which they began doing paid domestic work, have been influential in how they interpret the possibilities and opportunities within paid domestic work. Violeta began doing domestic work in Playa del Carmen in her late forties and is immensely proud of the independence it gives her. It struck me

that Violeta seemed to talk about her children differently to the other participants. Rather than give examples of nurturing them, she proudly told me that, 'my children are independent too, I taught them that, each one. They have their families and that's it'.^{xiv} She is also from a large and impoverished family, by her definition, however a significant difference is that Violeta was the youngest child and rather than taking on a mothering role, she received the care of each of her brothers and sisters as they grew up, and was not made to work as a child.

The only participant in my research who was not a parent was Isabel. She was thirty-two and single. Although she is the eldest of four siblings and her background is humble, she was not assigned an othermother role within her family. It was clear that Isabel felt she has always had the choice about whether she will become a mother, even recounting conversations with her own family about whether she would intentionally become a single mother:

Yes, I could be a single mother, but what would I offer my child? I mean, look, what do I have, I don't have anything, I'm just starting to do my things, because in my village I've started to make my house...maybe in the future I would have a child...because I know that I alone want to be able to look after [it]^{xv}

Despite being able to make a start on her home and future business, Isabel is still conscious that she cannot yet be the type of mother that she would like to be, so for now she would rather not have children. Isabel and I talked at length about motherhood, and perhaps because we are similar in age and neither of us have children, we expressed similar ideas about options for motherhood for women our age. Her reflexivity about motherhood suggested that doing live-in domestic work was not impeding her from being a mother; rather, she was carefully considering her options about motherhood.

Through doing paid domestic work, some participants in my research were able to have unique and fulfilling parenting experiences because it provided them with the space, time and economic opportunities to reflexively work on being the kind

of parents they would like to be. For participants in my research who did paid domestic work as mothers (or potential mothers, in the case of Isabel), agency and age were key factors in how far they were able to take control of their familial identities through doing paid domestic work. These are important observations, which have not generally received in depth consideration in other studies on paid domestic work in Mexico.

Finally, in a consideration of age, paid domestic work and motherhood, I also found that the age at which participants began doing paid domestic work appeared to affect the way they viewed childhood and adolescence for their children, and by extension their own identity as mothers. Participants who entered into paid domestic work as children were more likely to see their teenage children as in need of practical care and emotional support compared to the participants who began paid domestic work as adults, who in turn emphasised the value of independence both within themselves and within their children. It would be interesting, in the context of the emerging fields of research on girlhood and adolescent studies – the latter being particularly new in Mexico – to analyse whether this is typical and what the implications might be (Helgren et al, 2010; García Hernández, personal communication 2018).

4.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed concepts of public and private identities and the internal / external dialectic in identity formation, with a particular focus on age and agency. I have argued that those participants who were made to do paid domestic work as children as part of their familial role as othermothers did not see it as positive or empowering. They felt they had had no choice over their entrance to paid domestic work, nor the conditions they endured, because it was expected that they would work to help their families. I have suggested that perhaps they did not see doing paid domestic work as conducive to developing an empowered identity because it was so intrinsically linked to their private, familial identities, and because they may have internalised negative social and cultural perceptions of domestic work. Contrastingly, the participants in my research who started doing paid domestic work as adults were more likely to see it as something which could be meaningful and valuable, and as a way to enable

them to have empowering mothering experiences. This is significant as it is not a conclusion which is usually reached in studies on paid domestic work in Mexico. Although our identities comprise many layers and it is difficult to separate them, in the next chapter I move away from focusing on participants' familial identities, and consider how they appeared to make sense of themselves as individuals through doing paid domestic work.

5. Individuals Making Meaning Doing Paid Domestic Work

One of the clearest ways that participants seemed to reaffirm aspects of their individual identities was through their reactions to insults to their moral characters, and the associated boundaries they set in response. The concept of morality is widely discussed in the literature on paid domestic work, and is usually considered from the perspective of the employer. I suggested in the Critical Context chapter, for example by highlighting Durin's (2013a) and Nare's (2014) research, that this may be because it is another way through which employers can yield power over their employees. In this chapter however, I look at morality from the perspective of the participants and in the context of their life histories. Discussions of self and personhood by Goffman (1969), Ogaya (2004) and Jenkins (2008) are particularly important here. Next, I focus on how self-reflexive participants were when they told their stories, and why their self-reflexivity is significant in the context of research on paid domestic work in Mexico. By unpacking how participants interpreted, made meaning, and were reflexive about everyday experiences in domestic work, I contribute to a discussion on personhood, and agency and identity of 'third world women' (Mohanty; 1991, 2003 and 2005).

5.1 *Hazle como quieras porque tú eres la ratera!* – Morality and the Importance of Boundaries

One way employers exert dominance over domestic workers is by insulting their moral characters, often with particular focus on sexuality or supposed dishonesty (Goldsmith, 1998; Gomes da Cunha, 2008; Saldaña-Tejeda, 2011 and 2014; Valenzuela, 2012; Durín, 2013a and 2013b; Valdes, 2013; Wade, 2013; Nare, 2014). When employers insult workers' moral characters, they are reproducing harmful stereotypes, and attempting to legitimise discriminatory behaviour. For example, Saldaña Tejeda (2011 and 2015) cites an employer who fired her live-in employee when she found her lying in bed (fully clothed) with another woman. The employer felt that this behaviour would be a negative influence on her daughter (Saldaña Tejeda, 2011 and 2015). In this example, we can see some of the difficulties which arise in paid domestic work because a private home is simultaneously a workplace, meaning personal and professional behaviour, from

both the employer and employee, is blurred. Indeed, Nare (2014) states, ‘the household is embedded in the economic realm in particular ways. When a person is hired to work in a household an *implicit moral contract* is required...that entails the ways in which the worker needs to behave in order to maintain a decent household’ (Nare, 2014: 368. My italics). Of course, it is the employer who defines the terms of the moral contract.

It is important to draw attention to the persistent discriminatory attitudes of employers, however, when these examples are discussed from the employer’s point of view, we lose a sense of what morality means for domestic workers’ sense of personhood. The participants in my research were not passive actors when it came to ‘conform[ing] to the moral order of the household’ (Nare, 2014: 377). For example, Andrea and I had been discussing working conditions and the risks of entering a new household when she stated:

Maybe the family where you go isn’t very honest either... let’s say you go looking for honest work, but there’s times it’s not like that, you find things you don’t want to find, and that makes you run from the place...it’s not easy [to quit a job] but when it’s necessary you have to do it.^{xvi}

This struck me as somewhat unusual for Andrea in the context of our interview, given that she had seemed almost resigned or accepting of her difficult life, and careful not to be critical of her employers. Still, Andrea was saying that rather than feeling obliged to integrate into a household, she had chosen to leave uncomfortable situations. Andrea implied that she had specific expectations of what a potential workplace would be like, and how people would behave there, based on her understandings of the ‘integrity of the house’ (Andrea).^{xvii}

Much like Nare’s concept of an implicit moral contract, this idea is reminiscent of the ‘implicit and explicit rules’ (Jenkins, 2008: 91) of everyday social interaction which Goffman theorised at length (see Jenkins, 2008 for a discussion). For Goffman, we are consistently playing roles in the theatre of everyday life,

particularly in the workplace (Goffman, 1969). Although we may not be consciously aware of these roles, we have certain expectations of both our own roles and the roles of those around us, and this helps us make sense of ourselves and each other. Furthermore, 'the dialectic ...of identification has a moral dimension, rooted in reciprocity' (Jenkins, 2008: 94). For Goffman:

when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. (Goffman, 1969: 24)

This idea of moral reciprocity and the sense of obligation to be treated in a particular way is significant in my research, because it appeared to be the catalyst that led all except one of the participants to take action to leave employment when they believed their integrity was at risk. For example, Violeta left her first position doing domestic work in Playa del Carmen when her employer implied that she had robbed some cushions. Violeta felt especially offended because she thought her employer knew and implicitly trusted her because of where she was from, and what that meant about her character.^{xviii} Although she had put up with being underpaid and dealing with her employer's unpredictable and sometimes violent moods for some months, it was when her integrity over the cushions was called into question that she told her employer:

Do what you want because you're the thief, plus we'll go wherever you want, plus I didn't sign anything, I don't have any contract with you. So, by then I was angry, I pulled myself together, I said now I'm not working for her again.^{xix}

Violeta's choice of the word thief was interesting, because it seemed as though she was reversing the common identification of employee as potential thief

(Durín, 2013a and 2013b) and employer as morally superior. Jenkins (2008) uses the term identification to talk about the social nature of identity formation, saying that, 'identification makes no sense outside relationships, whether between individuals or groups' (Jenkins, 2008: 6). Rather than this identification being fixed, Jenkins argues that we 'do' our identities rather than 'have' them. Violeta seemed to be 'doing' her identity by proving herself as a trustworthy employee both through her action of quitting her job, and by identifying her employer as morally in contrast to her.

Gilberto's experience of working as a handyman for an employer who was exploitative and controlling followed a similar pattern.¹⁸ For years he had been mistreated by the employer. He finally left when his employer threatened him physically after Gilberto left the premises without permission to buy lunch, and did not answer his phone when his employer called to find out where he was. Responding to his employer's threat that he would accuse Gilberto of stealing from him, Gilberto was confident that he had proved himself to be honest and hardworking over the years, and as such was not worried:

So I told him, I'm conscious that I haven't taken anything, I don't owe you anything sir...you can make a denouncement wherever you want, I have more people who know me, and I have letters of recommendation, people have known me for a long time...you'll see how this means nothing to me, I told him, that's all.^{xx}

According to the way Gilberto recounted this experience with his employer, this was the calm conclusion to a long and heated conversation. Gilberto seemed to find strength or confidence when his employer insulted his integrity, and the

¹⁸ Gilberto shared this story after I asked him and Mode if they knew of any domestic worker who had experienced violence at work. Later in this chapter I analyse Gilberto's understanding of what being a domestic worker means and whether he can be defined as a domestic worker. The couple had also referred to Gilberto as working *de planta* for this employer; definitions of working *de planta* vary. Usually it means to do live-in domestic work but it was also used by participants in this research to describe being on-site working very long hours every day for the same employer (Gilberto) or having fixed, full-time employment with the same employer (Sole).

potential accusation of thievery did not trouble him. Like Violeta, he seemed to place himself as morally opposite to his employer.

Both Violeta and Gilberto had endured significant periods of mistreatment from these employers, yet the catalyst to making them quit was not the conditions, but the insults to their moral integrity. Although they both described their reactions as spontaneous, they appear to have felt both motivated and confident to react in such ways because they had proved themselves to be honest employees, and as such perhaps expected a certain level of reciprocal respect. Goffman describes 'communication out of character' which can occur 'during sudden disruptions of a performance, and especially at times when a misidentification is discovered' (Goffman, 1969: 167). They may have been surprised to be misidentified as dishonest people and in the context of implicit rules regarding morality, perhaps their spontaneous reactions were 'improvisation...[which paid] attention to rules and conventions in the ad hocery of the moment' (Jenkins, 2008: 93). I would argue that they were recuperating their personhood and reinforcing their sense of self when they asserted that they would not accept insults to their integrity. Crucially, in subsequent positions, these participants refused to accept exploitative conditions in which employers insulted their integrity.

By quitting these jobs because of insults to their integrity, Violeta and Gilberto were asserting their boundaries. Sole also seemed to have boundaries regarding the treatment she would tolerate, and employed strategies to avoid having her honesty or good morals called into question. For example, as a strategy against accusations of robbery, she did not bring a handbag with her to work. She had heard of employers revising employees' bags before leaving work each day, something which seemed 'discourteous' (*descortez*) to her. She also gave two examples of leaving positions diplomatically because she felt her character was being questioned. In the first case, her employers disagreed with some terminology she used around their children. In the second case, she felt her employer saw her as flirtatious, which made Sole feel uncomfortable when she was around the employer's husband, for fear she would be accused of inappropriate behaviour with him. Sole seemed to be aware of the implicit moral contracts in paid domestic work and refused to be exploited by them. Instead, she took action to avoid giving her employers cause to insult her integrity.

It is worth clarifying that each of the participants was acting within the confines of their circumstances, in which it could be argued that they occupied less powerful positions than their employers. Ultimately, each of them rescinded paid work because of their reactions to employers' behaviour. Therefore, we can see how employers insulting domestic workers' morality is damaging to the employee. However, an analysis which stops here fails to pay sufficiently comprehensive attention to the employees' experience and particularly the impact on her personhood. In her study on migrant Filipino domestic workers, Ogaya (2004) argued that they:

are capable of creating their own resistant subjectivities to overcome structural constraints imposed on them. Through this, they may regain their 'personhood' *subjectively* which is said to have been sold out to employers *objectively*. This personhood, in fact, has never left the migrant workers' hands. (Ogaya, 2004: 388. Italics in original)

This is in contrast to Williams who references Anderson (2000) when she says that domestic workers (in general) sell their 'whole personhood' and that any sense of agency they have is 'highly constrained' (Williams, 2010: 387). I argue that the experiences of participants in my research are more consistent with Ogaya's argument, particularly if we also keep in mind theories of the self as elaborated by Jenkins (2008) and Goffman (1969). These conclusions are further evidence to support Mohanty's assertion that it is essential to make geographically specific assessments of identity and experience (Mohanty, 1991, 2003 and 2005). By making generalisations, as Williams does in her analysis of paid domestic work and globalisation, it is easy to miss important examples of 'resistant subjectivities' (Ogaya, 2004) which reiterate the personhood of domestic workers.

5.2 Participants' Self-Reflexivity

Being self-reflexive is 'generally understood as a process in which people reflect on their biographical projects through increasing self-monitoring' (Saldaña

Tejeda, 2015: 945, referencing Giddens, 1991 and Lash, 1994). That is, that individuals make conscious links between who they are in relation to what they experience. One of the main motivations for Chaney and García-Castro (1989) in compiling their anthology *Muchachas No More* was to make paid domestic workers in Latin America visible, not just because they were seen as invisible in society, but also because they were 'invisible to themselves' (Chaney and García-Castro, 1989: 4). In the same anthology, Goldsmith elaborated that live-in workers especially lost a sense of themselves because they were 'submerged within the employers' life impl[y]ing the negation of [their] own existence' (Goldsmith, 1989: 228). It was not until just over twenty-five years later that Saldaña Tejeda (2015) published the first article which expressly problematised the self-reflexivity of domestic workers in Mexico, or more specifically, problematised the way questions of self-reflexivity may have been overlooked in earlier studies on paid domestic work. She argued that although some studies indirectly represented domestic workers as reflexive subjects when they were politicised members of unions or when 'the pride and empowerment of earning a salary allows them to construct themselves as independent women' (Saldaña Tejeda, 2015: 953), discussion of workers' self-reflexivity was otherwise scant. She suggests that this may be because there tends to be an assumption that being able to be self-reflective is a privilege of the middle and upper classes:

Lash (1994) questions the appearance of reflexivity in some places and economic sectors and not in others and then goes on to suggest that there are 'reflexivity winners' and 'reflexivity losers' in today's class-unconscious and class-polarized society. Lash asks whether 'vulnerable' subjects (he uses the example of a single mother in an urban ghetto) have the resources to be 'reflexive' and, therefore, to self-construct their own 'life narratives'. (Saldaña Tejeda, 2015: 946)

This argument is particularly relevant given that it has been argued that domestic workers are seen even as the epitome of the vulnerable subject (Mohanty, 2003). It also makes paying attention to the self-reflexivity in their personal narratives

especially important, since this 'can destabilize received truths and locate debate in the complexities and contradictions of historical life' (Mohanty, 2005: 60).

Saldaña Tejada also argues that there are methodological challenges in recognising domestic workers' self-reflexivity, because researchers usually rely on qualitative interviews when studying self-reflexivity and this is problematic when respondents are not used to recognising and placing themselves in their own narratives (Saldaña Tejada, 2015). Within my interviews though, it became clear that even if participants had not previously recounted their own narrative, they appeared to 'unmask' (Hockey et al., 2007. See also Gutiérrez Gómez and Rosas Flores, 2010; Adriansen, 2012) and reflect upon things they may not have considered before during the interview process. It was compelling to listen to participants analyse their experiences, and I was reminded of González López's thoughts on the potentially empowering nature of the interview process for participants:

[It is] invaluable to see how people may develop some kind of awareness as they immerse themselves in their own personal histories and stories.
(González López, 2011: 545)

For example, my interview with Kenia began somewhat awkwardly. She seemed nervous, even perhaps impatient and irritable. I had begun with some small talk, attempting to build rapport, and was met with the response, 'and *este*... I don't know what you want to ask me' (Kenia).^{xxi} Feeling flustered, I continued with light questions: what did you think of the work, was it difficult?

K: Mmm with the babies no. It was difficult when the boss arrived and started touching us.

T: Oh, ok.^{xxii}

Kenia's almost immediate admission that her employer sexually assaulted her surprised me, but it became one of the most prominent themes of our conversation.¹⁹ She had never felt able to talk about the assaults, and during our interview Kenia reflected on how they had made her feel. She was clear that she never felt like the abuse was her fault,^{xxiii} and as we continued to talk, Kenia explored the idea that the experiences with her employer directly influenced some significant interactions with her father and her uncle. She described confronting her uncle for his inappropriate behaviour towards her and her sisters, and intervening as her father hit her mother.

K: ...I feel like since I worked there, it's as if I tackled my way of looking after myself...when my uncle wanted to give kisses, I ended up telling my mum...but they never believed me.

T: And how did you feel?

K: Well it makes you angry. But...you feel braver, no? Once you say 'get away from here', I mean once I was very rude, once I confronted him...

T: How brave.

K: Yes, in fact when my dad, when we were older, and he wanted to hit my mum, we would go 'no no, I mean, that's enough.' Maybe it was useful in some way this anger that I got from the doctor, something I got from the doctor, everything he did, ah, I can tell you that.^{xxiv}

By the end of our interview Kenia seemed to have made some connections between what she had endured with her employer, and how that may have impacted her life in other ways. It is unclear why she had not discussed the experiences before, however, she was certainly able to be reflexive when we discussed them in the interview.

¹⁹ Three of the participants described either experiencing or being aware of specific incidents of sexual assault happening to domestic workers they knew. I am concerned that there is not enough space here to give sufficient analysis to such a serious issue, nor do I have the expertise, particularly as the assaults endured by Kenia and Sofia happened when they were children. Deciding not to discuss these cases in more depth is in itself problematic, especially since Wade observes that 'many studies mention, usually in passing, that sexual harassment and abuse are frequent problems' (Wade, 2013: 190). Choosing to avoid discussing sexual harassment could be seen to downplay the issue.

Other participants were consistently reflexive about their experience of being domestic workers, without any prompts from me. Isabel, for example, talked about why doing paid domestic work suited her personality, and that that was why she had decided to continue doing it. One of my first questions was a straightforward enquiry about what tasks she was expected to do at work, in order for me to get context about her conditions. Isabel responded by telling me how she *felt* about her job²⁰:

T: So, what's a typical day like for you at work?

I: Well, I feel at home!^{xxv}

Immediately, Isabel implied that she had made connections between her personal life and her professional life. She went on to explain that she was originally employed to look after the children, but her employer asked if she would also take on some light cleaning tasks, if she increased her salary. Isabel agreed.

T: And did you feel like you could say yes or no, you felt like you had an option?

I: Well it's that...well, it's that I like being in the house (laughs)...I mean, it's not something that, that I get bored or I think I don't want to do, well like I would've left, right...and apart from that, I even like it because she's not particular or like that...I don't know, maybe for that I've stayed with them and got used to them, with others I would've left already (laughs).^{xxvi}

Again, Isabel was describing how doing paid domestic work suited her and that she felt comfortable. Doing live-in domestic work is usually seen as the most

²⁰ Isabel's answer - *Pues, si como estuviera en mi casa!* – is translated literally as 'as if I were in my house.' Because Isabel had such a comfortable and positive working environment and relationship with her employer's family, I understood that Isabel meant that she *felt at home*, rather than that she did the same feminised tasks of chores and care work in her own home and her employer's home.

oppressive and restrictive form in Mexico and elsewhere (Chaney and García Castro, 1989; Goldsmith, 1989 and 1998; Thomson, 2009; Bautista, 2012; González and Solano, 2012; Valenzuela, 2012; Durín, 2013a), but Isabel linked her contentment at work to her introverted personality²¹.^{xxvii}

Violeta was comfortable recounting her story, which was linear, detailed and emotional, and she seemed to focus on key elements of her personal and professional development. It was clear that she was used to being reflexive and was interested in themes of emotion and identity. She had joined a self-help group upon her arrival in Playa del Carmen eight years ago and explained that in the group she told her story, '*like I am doing now*',^{xxviii} suggesting that she saw the interview as a similarly confessional or self-affirming process, which Adriansen (2012: 48) argued was one of the main benefits to taking a life-history approach to interviewing. Carefully and clearly in our interview, Violeta explained the ways in which the group helped her make major improvements in her personal life and how she puts the skills she has learned through the group into practice in her work. She talked about her simultaneous personal and professional development, telling me for example that, 'today I'm a professional in everything I do, and in this my group has helped me'.^{xxix} Doing paid domestic work has provided an opportunity for Violeta to continually work on herself and create a sense of identity that she is proud of, perhaps because doing domestic work is so inextricably linked to the personal self. Violeta was also able to reflect upon her life experiences and make links between past trauma and associated behaviour:

Today, my quality of life is better, because to begin with, I live alone. I've never lived alone, I've always been scared of being alone because I had a lot of abandonments when I was a girl.^{xxx}

Perhaps this is also to do with her interest in psychology. She said she would have liked to be a psychologist, but she left education early because of problems

²¹ For example, she also said: *I prefer being in the house...I can't be bothered going out (laughs). I have to prepare myself mentally a week before to tell myself Isa, next weekend you're going to see whatever friend.*

at home, and because her teachers did not believe in her academic abilities. Through doing domestic work, however, Violeta is able to take on another role that is more than simply doing domestic chores. She 'enter[s] the intimacy' of her employers' lives, as she puts it.^{xxx} She uses her observation skills to help build rapport with her employers, and from there a certain trust is developed:

So, I have learned this, to be observant. I don't like to be over-familiar, if you understand? I mean, I, even if they don't express much with me I see their tastes, what they like, what they don't like, I observe all that, and like I have adapted to that.^{xxxii}

With [my employer] yes, with other women, I've listened to them...to the people I work with, who don't know, I'm not going to tell them because I'm anonymous,²² but maybe they've gained trust and they have chatted to me about their lives and I keep quiet. I have been like a confidant, with the people I work with.^{xxxiii}

By behaving in this way with her employers, Violeta has the chance to do two things which benefit her both personally and professionally. Firstly, she can practice the counselling skills she has learned through her self-help group, which she both enjoys and values. At the same time, by doing so, she purposefully retains a professional identity with her employers, meaning that she consciously presents an independent and professional self who is competent and trustworthy. She attributes the success of her independent business to these interpersonal skills.

5.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed some of the ways that participants reinforced their sense of self when doing paid domestic work, and how they were self-

²² The self-help group Violeta is part of requires participants to remain anonymous and not reveal their participation in the group.

reflexive about their experiences of doing paid domestic work. By analysing participants' reactions to implicit understandings of morality in paid domestic work, I have attempted to show some of the ways that they reaffirmed their personhood when doing paid domestic work and in doing so challenged the typical approach which focuses on employers' attitude to workers' morality. Goffman (1969), Ogaya (2004) and Jenkins (2008) have all argued that individuals react according to their own and their fellow actors' perceived identities, within the confines of particular social situations, in ways which reaffirm their own personhood. I have suggested that this was also the case for participants in my research. For some of the participants, their self-reflexivity regarding their experiences doing paid domestic work showed that they were able to be analytical about how doing paid domestic work linked to their identities. Domestic workers' self-reflexivity is a new area of study in Mexico, which was first overtly explored by Saldaña Tejeda (2015). Here, I have expanded on some of Saldaña Tejeda's core points, and argued that perhaps now is the right moment to begin to study the concept in more depth, particularly if we are committed to emphasising the agency and personhood of domestic workers (Mohanty; 1991, 2003 and 2005; Ogaya, 2004; Ueno, 2010; Saldaña Tejeda, 2015). In the next and final data chapter, I consider the importance of difference in participants' subjective understandings of themselves as social actors.

6. Setting Themselves Apart – The Significance of Difference in Participants' Social Identities

A common focus of the literature on paid domestic work in Mexico (and elsewhere) is that domestic workers' gender and social class is fundamental in explaining structural oppression in paid domestic work. With this in mind, I look at how far participants appeared conscious of their gender and social class in their everyday experiences, and what that seemed to mean for their sense of identity. In making sense of our identities, Jenkins argues that we experience an 'ongoing process of identification' where 'the self as an individual's reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, [is] constituted *vis-à-vis* others in terms of similarity and difference' (Jenkins, 2008: 50 and 49). This interplay between recognising similarity and difference is especially relevant in terms of gender and social class, as I will show in this chapter. I go on to look more closely at the significance of difference for participants, particularly regarding how they set themselves apart from other domestic workers. Theories of representation and language as discussed by Hall (2013) are especially important here, as well as those of difference, especially in the way that Woodward argues, 'the marking of difference is crucial to the construction of identity positions' (Woodward, 1997: 29). There are also interesting overlaps with the findings of Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) and Ueno (2010), who looked at the social identities of domestic workers in the United States and Singapore respectively.

6.1 Gender and Social Class

It is possible to reach several interesting conclusions about gender and paid domestic work in Mexico by taking a feminist analysis of research on Mexican households. Studies which explicitly focus on paid domestic work in Mexico consistently and overtly take a feminist perspective, and argue that one of the fundamental reasons that domestic work is exploitative is because it is commonly believed to be women's work, which is devalued in a patriarchal society. Women are seen as naturally inclined to do housework, meaning it is seen as unskilled, and regarded more as help rather than work (Goldsmith, 1989 and 2000; Kusnezof, 1989; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Moreno, 2000; Gomes da Cunha, 2008; González and Solano, 2012; Guevara, 2012; Morse, 2015). Work by other

scholars, including feminist scholars, highlights some of the complexities and contradictions of the employer / employee relationship, raises striking points about intersectional characteristics of race and class, and can inadvertently reduce domestic workers to features in an inventory of symbols (Hall, 1996 and 2013) that 'perform their employers' class,' rather than as women in their own right (Anderson 2000 in Nare 2014: 369. See also Willis, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Calonge Reíllo, 2011; Durín, 2013a; Toledo González, 2014). As a feminist academic, it is easy to recognise recurring themes of gender-based oppression in paid domestic work, regardless of the source material. However, in terms of how far the participants in my study were conscious of the social significance of gender in their work is difficult to say.

It seemed that for the participants, the idea that domestic work was feminised was obvious, so much so that perhaps this is why they did not seem to have thought about it as critically as they had other issues. When I asked questions explicitly about gender roles, participants seemed surprised. It appeared difficult for them to be reflexive about this topic, even though I was usually asking about their opinions following statements they had made regarding their own experiences. For example, towards the end of our interview, I asked Andrea why she thought that it was usually women who did domestic work:

Why? Well (pause). Because we are the ones who work more in the house I imagine, no? Or, *este*, or well, it's more like we look for work in the home, often...let's say, well, *este* they have assigned us that place let's say, or we have assigned it to ourselves, indirectly.^{xxxiv}

It appeared from Andrea's hesitant answer that she had not considered that question so directly before. Nevertheless, she went on to suggest that perhaps women are more trustworthy, or better acquainted with the home.^{xxxv} Given her background and lack of formal education, Andrea may well have had less opportunities to think critically about the feminisation of domestic work and was unlikely to have been exposed to feminist theories about it. However, even Sole,

who had well-defined and critical ideas about paid domestic work, and who shared some ideas which had recognisably feminist influence – such as unpaid housework indeed being real work^{xxxvi} – simply laughed at me when I asked whether she thought paid domestic work was devalued because it was feminised!

My conversation with Gilberto and Mode was one of the most surprising in terms of ideas about gender roles. Gilberto and Mode are married, have two teenage children, and for over ten years they have worked together doing paid domestic work in Playa del Carmen. The contact who introduced us told me that Gilberto worked with Mode.²³ However, it seemed clear from the beginning of the interview that for Gilberto, only Mode was the domestic worker. He positioned himself at the end of the picnic table where we sat, with Mode making herself comfortable directly opposite me, and when the interview began, Gilberto signaled that Mode answer the opening questions. After around twenty minutes, Gilberto joined in when Mode looked to him for clarification on a point, at which point I asked if he had another profession.

Me? Really, I'm a plumber, an electrician. But anyway, well for a while I've known, I know a bit about domestic cleaning. I mean, like who I am, a domestic worker well no I'm, *I'm a man!* So, well, yeah like, well, so nobody is going to misunderstand things...^{xxxvii}

During the course of the interview, Gilberto described working alongside Mode, carrying out tasks such as cleaning, cooking and making fresh juices. However, despite having realised these tasks in the context of paid domestic work for over ten years, Gilberto did not see this as his *real* job. He further distanced himself from the identity of domestic worker when he said that, 'they aren't paying me, I'm only helping, the only thing they pay is what we earn between the two of us.'^{xxxviii} This attitude was consistent in the way that he talked about his role as a

²³ I will admit that at this point, before meeting them, such were my own ideas about gender roles in paid domestic work, that when I learned that Gilberto worked with Mode, my initial suspicions were that he was controlling and possessive and therefore did not want to let Mode work independently!

father. Repeatedly, Gilberto referred to 'helping' his wife with her parental responsibilities by doing paid domestic work. For example, he said:

I accepted the work to help her, my wife, with the *señores* that I told you, for the problem²⁴ we had with the school for the children.^{xxxix}

With his constant references to helping Mode, it seems as if he believed that primarily looking after the children was her responsibility. When the couple went on to talk about the division of their own housework, they both seemed to share the idea that above all this was also the woman's responsibility, and that Gilberto was unique in his attitude:

M: Well there are men that don't do [housework], by picking up a broom they feel like a woman, or I don't know...

G: Yes

M: And anyway now men, well, him anyway, has always been like this, sometimes he cooks for us at home, sometimes he makes the lunch, and he cooks dinner for us, and sometimes he helps us...^{xl}

Again, any work that Gilberto did in their home was categorised as help. Despite Gilberto taking on daily childcare responsibilities while his wife earned the salary that they shared, it seemed that both he and Mode still appeared to believe in traditional gender roles. It was interesting that as women the majority of participants were expected to do housework and carework, as I discussed in Chapter Three, and in doing so this reinforced their feminised identities as othermothers. Yet even though Gilberto did paid domestic work and took on an active parenting role, neither he nor Mode expressed that this affected their idea

²⁴ The problem he is referring to is that one of them needed to be able to take the children to and from school.

of traditional gender roles, even if Gilberto was keen to make sure that I understood his gendered identity.

It is interesting to consider Gilberto and Mode's situation in relation to wider research on masculinity, social class and familial roles in contemporary Mexico. Some research has pointed to ways in which traditional gender identities are reinforced and reproduced through everyday behaviours or actions in the home. For example, Hockey et al (2007) have suggested that some household tasks take on a gendered identity because they are generally done by women. In the case of Mexico, in two pieces of research carried out over a decade apart, both Casique (2000) and Rojas Martínez (2012) reached similar conclusions as each other regarding gendered identities within family homes in Mexico, suggesting that through actions like taking control of daily-decision making in the home, 'on the one hand, the need - still prevailing among Mexican males - to make known and reinforce their identities as men and adults through marriage, procreation, and fulfilling the role of providers of their homes' still existed (Rojas Martínez, 2012: 80).

However, both Casique and Rojas Martínez emphasised the importance of social class in their analyses. Casique showed that women were more likely to have autonomy and power if they worked outside the home, or if they pertained to a higher social class (Casique, 2000). Rojas Martínez agrees that there exist, 'possible transformations in some dimensions of the masculine identity related to married life, always keeping in mind that said changes vary in regards the socioeconomic inequality persistent in the country' (Rojas Martínez, 2012: 80). These changes were that men of a higher socioeconomic status appear to be taking a more active role in child rearing and housework, and as such traditional masculine identities were in flux for some sections of society.

In terms of how this relates to Gilberto and Mode, it is interesting on one level that the couple seem to be in the process of grappling with these very identity developments in their own relationship. In the broader social context, it is all the more meaningful because it demonstrates the possibility of a sense of flexibility or identities in flux in terms of gender and social class identity among domestic workers.

Much like Gilberto and Mode, Andrea discussed domestic work (whether paid or unpaid) in a way that suggested that she believed that domestic work was women's responsibility, or that it was a supportive activity rather than real work. Andrea talked about her belief that when she was younger, it was her responsibility to look after the children and housework single-handedly, as well as working:

One, here, well, one does everything. One is accustomed to doing everything for the children. But [my husband] saw that I worked, I've always worked...and *este* I would get home to cook the dinner, attend to everything. He would drink.^{xii}

Interestingly it was her husband who suggested one day that their sons take care of their own chores, so that they could learn to be independent. Although this was uncomfortable for Andrea, her sons each began to enjoy particular tasks and as adults they do chores in their own homes. Andrea is proud of this, even if the idea that housework is women's responsibility is deeply ingrained, as Andrea's use of the word 'help' here suggests:

My son helps my daughter-in-law – now yes, he helps her, like you say! But well it's not help, he says it's sharing, the responsibility is for both of them.^{xiii}

The topic of gender did not come up explicitly in interviews with any other participants. Although participants did not talk explicitly about what relevance their gender might have in terms of their identities as domestic workers, they appeared more likely to be aware of social class.

The literature has often focused on the importance of class-consciousness for domestic workers. As well as occupying precarious positions given the lack of

formal provisions under the law, some academics have also suggested that domestic workers lose out socially when they are reduced simply to symbols or signs that represent employers' elevated social class, particularly if this implies that they cannot develop their own identities (Willis, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Calonge Reillo, 2011; Bautista, 2012; Nare, 2014).

Since domestic workers and feminist academics first formed productive alliances in Mexico in the 1980s, an important strategy in working towards improving conditions for domestic workers has been through encouraging them to form trade unions, which has involved years of awareness-raising and focused campaigning (Chaney and García-Castro, 1989; Goldsmith, 1989 and 2012; Thomson, 2009; Martínez Prado, 2014; Rojas García and Toledo González, 2017). González and Solano (2012) suggested that workers tended to see their individual relationships with employers as unique, as opposed to symptomatic of structural oppressions, and argued that this caused difficulties in bringing workers together to demand better conditions. Thomson (2009) had already seen a change in domestic workers' attitudes over time in this respect and was glad, given that she too argues for the unionisation of workers. She observes that 'twenty years ago, the relationship with the *patrona* (mistress) was seen by the workers as inseparable from the actual conditions of employment, and many strongly resented that they were not treated as equals by their employer....with the changing nature of domestic service and increased education, these types of attitudes are, hopefully, beginning to change' (Thomson, 2009: 285). Finally, in 2015, SINACTRAHO was officially registered as the first national domestic workers' union in Mexico.²⁵

None of the participants in my research were members of unions, and it is difficult to conclude how class-conscious they were. For example, consistent with findings from González and Solano (2012), during our interviews some participants appeared to place importance on the uniqueness of the individual employer / employee relationships as a way to explain the quality of their working conditions in each particular employment. Andrea recalled that 'some *señoras* are really conscientious, but there are some that honestly, they want to pay you a little and have you do a lot'. She went on to say that she felt too embarrassed to

²⁵ For more information, see: <https://sinactraho.org.mx/>

argue over pay, but rather than seeing poor pay an example of structural oppression, she believed that, 'they're the advantages and disadvantages one has, like personally sometimes, let's say'.^{xliii}

At the same time, Andrea and other participants did agree that domestic work was not valued socially and that this led some employers to attempt to take advantage of their labour, perhaps because of the intrinsic relationship between what we do and who we are (Mackintosh and Mooney, 2000; Woodward, 2000; Chávez González, 2012 in Brites, 2013). When Violeta and Sole gave examples of this happening to them, they certainly did not imply that they should be deferent to these potential employers, as Andrea seemed to have felt. Violeta recounted a recent incident with an employer she had known for around three years who had promised to leave money for Violeta so that she would clean her house. When Violeta arrived, there was no money, so she refused to do the job. She told me she did not 'give [her] work as a gift to anyone, because people are sneaky. If they don't pay me, I don't do it'.^{xliv} Sole was also adamant that she would only accept fair prices, despite what potential employers attempted to offer. She explained:

Something that I have noticed, and it's something like in general, that the majority of people like, like they don't give real value to domestic work. And this is, practically, it doesn't matter if you're poor, if you're middle class or if you're rich. I mean, in general, people think that's a job that should be cheap and I always, it's happened a lot of times that I don't accept employment because they want to pay less than I aim to earn...sometimes, yes it annoys you, because you say, if it was so easy and so simple, why don't they do it?^{xlv}

Sole's mention of social class is important, as is the way both she and Violeta were clear to state the professions – a doctor (Violeta) and a *licenciada*²⁶ (Sole) -

²⁶ *Licenciada* means licensed, and is a title for a person who is educated to undergraduate level in any profession. It is used as a title, as in Ms / Mr, or as Sole used it, interchangeably with a profession – as in, '*la licenciada*' rather than 'the lawyer,' for example.

of employers who had attempted to pay them unfairly or to not pay them at all. This could imply that they had, or perhaps that they thought I might have, certain expectations about how a middle-class professional should behave, and felt it important to highlight behaviour that appeared out of character. In contrast to my earlier observations in Chapter Five about individuals acting out of character in *defined and implicitly understood* social situations (Goffman, 1969), it seemed as though the participants here had a different interpretation of the social situation than their employers. While the employers may have devalued domestic work, Sole and Violeta had a different opinion of its worth, and as such they did not simply accept poor conditions as their employers may have expected.

Several reasons may explain why participants seemed less likely to discuss gender in relation to their perceived social identity, and more likely to emphasise social class differences. For example, it has been argued that some of our social identities are so taken for granted that it is difficult for us to be self-reflexive and critical about them, because we have never stopped to consider them. Hockey et al (2007) pointed to the difficulties that participants in their study on everyday heterosexual identities had in analysing their sexuality, and Kaloski-Naylor (1999) has shared intriguing discussions she has had with white students in the English education system, who had never problematised their racial identity. This seems relevant in a consideration of gender and participants' understanding of their social identity, particularly as only Gilberto felt the need to mention his gender in relation to paid domestic work, to reassure me (or perhaps himself and Mode) of his masculinity, despite doing feminised tasks.

Furthermore, this plays into Woodward's arguments which emphasise the importance of difference when we reflexively think about our identities. She argues that identity 'is not the opposite of, but *depends on*, difference' (Woodward, 1997: 29. Italics in original). Not only is domestic work itself so feminised, but its conditions are organised almost exclusively via the employer / employee relationship, which is between what are ostensibly two women, regardless of other intersectional characteristics which distinguish these women. Therefore, one reason that participants may have been less likely to overtly discuss gendered aspects of their identity could be because as women doing

feminised work and interacting with female employers, it was difficult to identify anything different from which to set themselves apart.

On the other hand, participants may have been more aware of the classificatory systems in domestic work that reinforce the binary social class differences between employer and employee. As Woodward argues, the 'marking of difference takes place both through the *symbolic* systems of representation, and through forms of *social* exclusion' (Woodward, 1997: 29). Regarding paid domestic work in Mexico, symbolic systems may include using domestic workers as symbols of employers' social class (Willis, 2000; Gilbert, 2005; Calonge Reillo, 2011; Durin, 2013a) and social exclusion could be the precarious legal position of domestic work or the low social value it is given. However, when participants who were still engaged in paid domestic work talked about social class, two themes stood out in regards to how they seemed to see their class identity.

Firstly, they referenced symbols of their own social class which emphasised that they did not seem to identify as poor. Mode and Gilberto explicitly self-identified as middle-class. They earned enough for their daily outgoings and they could save a little. Other participants were proud and keen to mention belongings that they saw as testaments to their success; Isabel owned land and was building a house, and Violeta also owned land and a car, and maintained her home independently. Sole provided for her sons without the help of her ex-husband.

Secondly, and relatedly, they did not act in ways which perpetuated the perception of them as occupying a lower social class than their employers, in fact they were actively engaged in elevating their social status. By being assertive about pay and conditions, participants' relationships with employers transcended the sorts of class boundaries which other researchers have suggested reinforce class binaries that keep domestic workers subjugated. According to Ogaya, 'while women may start out with economic motivations, in time they acquire other experiences, which may result in new or redefined identities....[which] could lay the foundations for the emergence of resistant subjectivities' (Ogaya, 2004: 388).

The identities of participants in my research were not static. Even though they were not unionised, and they did not generalise about social classes, they were

aware of wider social ideas that contributed to their lesser social status, but they were not prepared to accept them. Some of the participants explicitly stated that they valued the work they did in their employers' homes and were proud to do it. For them, they were imparting a legitimate and necessary service, which merited fair pay and fair treatment.

6.2 *Yo Soy Camarista Independiente* – Participants' Dynamic Identities

It was clear that all of the participants had the capacity to create change in their sense of self, and to continuously develop dynamic (not static) identities (Hall, 1996 and 2013; Jenkins, 2008). As I have stated in the Methodology chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, it is important to keep in mind factors which affect how far domestic workers are able to display agency. For example, in the context of my research, participants who began working as children described situations in which their agency was very limited by their age. As adults, however, the participants in my research appeared invested in taking action to elevate their social position, either as domestic workers or by moving into other professions. I have already shown some of the ways that participants did this through their individual resistance. However, in a broader social context, they also achieved this in three key ways: through informal networks, consistent with findings from Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), as well as their focus on their future identities, and the ways they represented themselves to others, which relates to findings from Ueno (2010) and Vieira de Paula Jordão (2011). It became increasingly clear when listening to how participants talked about social situations that asserting difference was important for them in their identity construction (Woodard, 1997; Jenkins, 2008; Ueno, 2010).

Sole, Gilberto, Violeta and Kenia explicitly discussed informal networks where employees warned each other of undesirable or abusive employers. The participants said that through talking to each other on buses or in the neighbourhoods where they worked, they warned each other who was violent (Gilberto), suspicious of workers' sexuality (Sole), sexually abusive (Kenia), or who did not pay fairly (Violeta). The purpose of this information sharing was not to gossip, rather it was to warn and advise each other of conditions. For example, Violeta said that over time she learned what she should charge and how to

interact with employers, something which she did not know when she began doing paid domestic work.^{xlvi} I asked her how she had learned:

When I didn't have my car, sometimes I joined with other people that we would go, *este*, on the way, we went by *camión*, and I would chat with them, with other domestic workers. From there I got the idea. If I know how to do my work well, I started to realise, I was giving my work as a gift.^{xlvii}

Violeta explicitly references her conversations with domestic workers as the main reason she learned about appropriate pay and conditions. Kenia also talked about the importance of talking to other workers. As well as sharing her own experience of sexual assault with me, she talked about one of her own uncles who she believes sexually assaults domestic workers in his home. He and his wife would go to a nearby village to recruit young women to work in their home. Kenia referred to them when I asked if she believed it was important, in general, to talk openly about sexual abuse in paid domestic work:

Yessss, because I realise this, that the girls from the *rancho*²⁷ avoid that other girls fall into the hands of my uncle, and my aunt as well, because my aunt is an aggressor.^{xlviii}

Violeta and Kenia gave clear examples of how talking with other domestic workers had a direct impact on the conditions they would accept at work. While others have mentioned these informal networks, they are not necessarily associated with influencing social change in a significant way. Perhaps this is because of methodological challenges; how do we define an informal social network, and how do we evidence its impact? It is much clearer to analyse concrete examples of collective reflexivity in official groups like unions. However, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) did show the importance of informal networks, over two decades ago, and in the context of majority Mexican immigrant workers in the

²⁷ 'Rancho' refers to a rural area.

USA. She pointed out that informal networks might be ignored because 'since domestic work is generally viewed as a stigmatized, second class job, studies have typically investigated the extent of upward mobility, both individual and intergenerational, out of domestic work' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 51). She also suggested it was difficult to identify these networks because most studies on paid domestic work are based on interviews, whereas hers included observation, which meant she often 'observed immigrant women engaged in lively conversation about paid domestic work' in various social situations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 54).

Hondagneu-Sotelo places great importance on these networks, and her findings are worth considering when we think about domestic workers' social identity. She argues that, 'a domestic worker's position within the occupation is not static. It is subject to change and may improve as she gains experience, learns to utilize the informational resources embedded in the social networks' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 51). This is consistent with the experiences of my participants. I would argue that, along with improvements in treatment and conditions, using social networks is another example of participants reinforcing their sense of personhood as they acted to improve their conditions. It may have encouraged them to see themselves as different, 'not as victims, but as workers consciously and actively trying to improve their working conditions' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 52 referencing Romero, 1987).

For participants in my research, another way that their 'position within the occupation [was] not static' (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 51) was because of how they themselves conceptualised it. Ueno (2010) has drawn from the arguments of Goffman (1963) to show that even though for participants in her study, 'the officially recognizable role is that of domestic worker' (p.87), of course the domestic workers themselves did not view themselves in such a one-dimensional way. Rather, they viewed their identities as a composition of multiple past, present and future selves. This was also true for participants in my study. For example, many of them looked to the future, discussing the professional plans that they had. Isabel and Violeta had both bought land and intended to use them to build businesses; Violeta planned to build a party-hire venue, and Isabel a small shop. Sole was planning on studying once her sons were grown-up. She

was considering studying either psychology or teaching, and referenced the interpersonal skills she had developed through doing paid domestic work as important in preparing her for her future studies. In this way, Sole was looking forward to a future identity and capitalising on the range of skills she was developing in the present, which is similar to observations made by Ueno (2010).

It is also worthwhile to compare my findings to those of Vieira de Paula Jordão (2011). In a section of her essay entitled 'Agency and Self-Perception', she describes how domestic workers felt about their jobs. She found that the majority believed that doing domestic work was not socially valuable, and as such they seemed to see any other profession as preferable, even if they had a vague understanding of it, and certainly seemed to believe it was out of reach for them. She explains:

Most do not see this work as a profession and would like to pursue other professions such as salespeople, lawyers, managers, bankers, models and others. Sometimes, the workers do not seem to know exactly what the intended profession consists of, such as Olga, who would like to be a detective. When asked why, she replied, 'I don't know. If I had studied, I would be a detective' (Olga). The same goes for Deise, who dreams of working, 'in anything, as long as it's a business' (Deise). This seems to signal that, no matter which one, the domestic workers interviewed would rather have another occupation. (Vieira de Paula Jordão, 2011: 105)

In contrast to Vieira de Paula Jordão's findings, most of the participants in my research were quite sure about how they would like to progress their careers, and clear about the ways in which doing domestic work would help them in this. These findings are closer to those of Ueno, whose participants also seemed to believe that it was possible to use domestic work as a stepping-stone towards other professions, which usually had a higher social status.

Not all of the participants referred to themselves as domestic workers. Gilberto and Violeta's use of specific terminology when defining themselves in relation to paid domestic work was telling. Language is fundamental in understanding our

identity and how we communicate it to others (Hall, 2013). Neither Gilberto nor Violeta referred to themselves as domestic workers. They appeared to have an understanding of what a domestic worker was, and when they considered their relationship with the tasks they did, the label of domestic worker did not fit.

In the interview situation, it appeared particularly important to Gilberto and Violeta that they properly expressed to me what their professions were (or rather, were not), so that in turn I would have a better understanding of who they were. For Gilberto, this was achieved through his assertions about his masculinity.

Violeta also sets herself apart from domestic workers, by referring to herself as an 'independent chambermaid' (Violeta).^{xlix} She explains that she names herself this because of the level of professionalism and quality she brings to her work, and the fact that she is dedicated, independent and self-sufficient. She 'live[s] from this' and has her own cleaning products and equipment, and because she 'leave[s] their house like a hotel'.^l

This was consistent with observations from Hondagneu-Sotelo and Romero (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 54). The way that Violeta refers to her profession appears indicative of her growing self-confidence and self-assuredness. She also values her work and herself, something which she learned in her self-help group.^{li} The change has only come within the last two years, when she began to buy her own cleaning products and equipment, and build up her network of contacts. The growing confidence and assertiveness she is able to express is not limited to her professional life; she is proud of how independent she feels in her personal life too.

6.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which participants appeared to make sense of their social identities. I have shown that they were more likely to be aware of the relevance of social class to their identities as individuals doing paid domestic work, as opposed to gender. I have argued that perhaps this is because they were more aware of the social class differences inherent in paid domestic work, and this gave them a framework through which to construct their own

identities. Contrastingly, because domestic work is so feminised and consistently involves interactions between women, it may have been more difficult for participants to be reflexive about their identities as women, given the absence of overt gender difference in the profession. I also looked at how participants appeared to mark difference and change in their social identities, through considering how they talked about informal networks, career development, and the language they used to describe themselves and their relationships with paid domestic work. I have argued that they were in control of their changing identities, and that this may well contribute to a firm sense of personhood, and be part of a wider phenomenon of altering the social position of domestic work.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to explore the identity and self-perception of domestic workers in Playa del Carmen. In doing so I aimed to contribute to the rich body of research on paid domestic work in Mexico by explicitly analysing identity as understood by the participants themselves. This is not common, given that typically research in this field in Mexico looks at working conditions and structural discrimination, and any references to identity are usually made indirectly and in the context of domestic workers' responses to this discrimination. By analysing identity from the standpoint of domestic workers, my intention was to build on the important work done by other feminist scholars and emphasise the personhood of domestic workers. To get a thorough sense of this personhood I carefully analysed participants' words and considered how they made sense of their own experiences. I built up a more comprehensive picture by drawing on theories of identity as developed by Goffman (1969), Hall (1996, 2013), Woodward (1997, 2000 and 2015) and Jenkins (2008), and as well as work from Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), Ogaya (2004), Ueno (2010) and Nare (2014) who have explored identity among migrant domestic workers in Europe, Asia and the USA respectively.

This research aimed to answer three key questions. I found that while each participant's experience with paid domestic work was unique, it was possible to extrapolate some key themes, which offer some answers to the research questions.

Firstly, I considered in what ways carrying out paid domestic work affected domestic workers' own sense of identity. There seemed to be a clear split in findings between participants who were made to do paid domestic work as children and those who chose to do it as adults. Those who started working as children tended to have much more negative perceptions of being a domestic worker, were unlikely to see it as empowering, and were more likely to hold ideas that it was an undervalued profession and by extension believe that being a domestic worker was not socially valued. Importantly, it appeared that for these participants, the identity of domestic worker was fixed and there was little or no room to change the meaning of being a domestic worker. They were more likely

to generalise about paid domestic work rather than analyse what it had meant for their own identities.

Contrastingly, the participants who began doing paid domestic work as adults had more creative interpretations of how being a domestic worker affected their identities and were more likely to be reflexive about themselves as domestic workers. They did this by reaffirming their sense of self through asserting boundaries, and by easily relating their own personalities and life histories to their identities as domestic workers. They did not have one-dimensional views about paid domestic work, and seemed to see it as a valuable experience in helping them emphasise other features of their identities, or as a stepping-stone for their future identities. It is crucial to reiterate that two of the participants who were child domestic workers were also sexually abused at work, which undoubtedly reaffirmed their negative experiences, perhaps emphasising their sense of disempowerment and lack of control or autonomy. Indeed they were also unable to assert boundaries within these particular employments, which was so important for adult domestic workers' sense of identity.

The second research question I aimed to answer dealt with the public / private divide and what it meant for participants' construction of identity. Again, age and agency were especially important factors here. Child domestic workers were made to work as part of their familial identity as othermothers. I have argued that as such they may have internalised representations of domestic work as natural, feminised, and simply as help. These representations are not socially valued, and perhaps this is why they did not seem to see that being engaged in paid domestic work could be conducive to developing a unique sense of identity.

On the other hand, the participants who chose to do paid domestic work as adults saw it as separate from their private roles in their own families, whether those roles were as siblings, daughters or mothers. Even though objectively the tasks in looking after a home or children were the same, these participants seemed to change the meaning which they attached to these tasks and were able to see themselves as professionals when they engaged in this work outside of the home. These participants were also more invested in improving the social status of domestic workers, usually by consciously refusing to perpetuate negative

stereotypes of domestic workers, or through the way they described their work to others, including to me in the interview situation.

Finally, I analysed how relationships came into play in terms of construction of self among domestic workers. In answering this question, I wanted to know which relationships were the most influential for participants' understanding of their identities as domestic workers. I kept in mind family relationships, relationships with employers and other domestic workers, and social relationships.

For child domestic workers, as I have discussed, their family relationships were influential in causing them to start doing domestic work and potentially in leading to them internalising the low social value of paid domestic work. It was also interesting that as these participants became mothers, they were more likely to see their children as in need of their nurturing and care. This may have been influenced by many factors, but their sudden and premature moves from childhood to adulthood through their experience of child labour may have contributed. The participants who started doing paid domestic work as adults were all single, except one, whose husband worked alongside her. They all seemed to find that they could have positive relationships with their children through doing paid domestic work, which provided them with flexibility and independence.

Domestic workers' relationship with their employers has been widely analysed in the literature, and indeed I found that relationships with employers were significant for all of the participants. When they had the choice, they tended to stay with employers who reinforced positive elements of their identities, and left employment where their employers insulted their integrity. Some of the participants seemed to consciously set themselves apart from other domestic workers, or at least their perception of other domestic workers. Through their actions and language, they emphasised their difference and as such reinforced their individual sense of selves.

None of the participants made generalisations about social class based on their relationships with their employers. However, this did not mean that they were not class-conscious. Instead, they seemed to be aware of common perceptions of

social class and domestic work. Those who started working as children seemed to see their poverty emphasised through being domestic workers. However, those who began paid domestic work as adults did not identify as poor and indeed seemed to see themselves as socially equal to their employers. Finally, the concept of gender is important in that the participants seemed to take for granted that doing domestic work was feminised. The very lack of difference, either real or presumed, in their gendered identities compared to those of their employers' may have made it more difficult for participants to be reflexive about the significance of their gender to their identity as domestic workers.

In setting and answering these research questions, this thesis has contributed to expanding the discussion on domestic workers in Mexico. It builds on the important work done by feminist researchers such as Chaney and García Castro (1989) and Goldsmith (1989, 1998, 2000) among others, whose ground-breaking early work highlighted the structural discrimination faced by domestic workers and has been instrumental in helping domestic workers' rights to be recognised as a human rights issue. There is still a long way to go until domestic workers' human rights and labour rights are fully recognised in Mexico, as exemplified by the continued resistance from the State to ratify Convention 189. In this context, previous research has tended to take very particular approaches to identity. For example, it has often focused on the ways in which the personhood of domestic workers is obscured when they are seen as playing supporting roles in allowing their employers to develop their identities, or it has analysed how employers view domestic workers' identities. These conclusions serve to highlight the many layers of complex structural discrimination which exist and are consistently reaffirmed in paid domestic work.

However, I have argued throughout this thesis that it is also the right social and political juncture for domestic workers to tell their stories in a way which explores their own sense of identity and personhood. As such, my findings fit interestingly with those of researchers such as Saldaña Tejeda (2011, 2015), Durín (2013a, 2018) and Toledo González (2014), who have more closely analysed the interpersonal, lived experiences of domestic workers in Mexico. My research has built on these studies by further examining the fluidity of paid domestic work for some women, considering how paid domestic work may influence temporary

identities for some women, and above all, looking at the meaning which participants extrapolated from domestic work and what that meant for how they constructed their identities.

My research also serves to continue the discussion which Saldaña Tejeda began in 2015, on self-reflexivity of domestic workers in Mexico. Saldaña Tejeda argued that it was challenging to find examples of self-reflexivity in interviews with domestic workers, perhaps because researchers were focussed on finding answers to other issues. Important work like hers has laid the foundations for a deeper discussion of identity among domestic workers in Mexico, and perhaps because of this I did not find it difficult to identify examples of self-reflexivity among some of the participants I interviewed. Indeed, it is prudent to emphasise the importance of self-reflexivity for some participants' conception of their identities.

In order to come to informed conclusions about participants' identity construction, I have drawn upon the theories of Goffman (1969), Hall (1996, 2013), Woodward (1997, 2000 and 2015) and Jenkins (2008) and I have shown how these theorists' observations on the importance of social performance, signs and symbols, and the internal / external dialectic are relevant to paid domestic work. This thesis has also expanded on interesting research carried out by others who have analysed - or touched upon analysing - the identity and self-perception of domestic workers outside of the Mexican context. Like Ogaya (2004) and Nare (2014), I found that implicit understandings of social situations, such as those identified by Goffman (1969), are engaged with and used by domestic workers to help construct their identity.

The conclusions I have drawn from this research follow in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a random sample of eight participants. There are some important limitations to note due to the characteristics of the sample. Firstly, I accepted any participants who had had some experience of doing paid domestic work, meaning that I placed no restrictions on whether they had done live-in or day work, and when they did this work. This therefore adds to the variation in results and would make it difficult to draw some specific conclusions. Furthermore, due to the small size of the sample, it is impossible to be able to make general statements about

domestic workers' identity. However, this does indeed serve to support my theoretical argument regarding the problematic implications of over-generalising domestic workers' identity, which has been well expressed by Mohanty (1991, 2003 and 2005), and which I have discussed widely in this thesis. The positive experiences that some of the participants report in my research should also not undermine the negative experiences that other domestic workers have reported both within my study and in other research. It is also significant that none of the participants in my research are indigenous women. As I have stated in this thesis, other researchers have described some of the specific negative practices that undermine and devalue indigenous domestic workers' identity.

While domestic workers' identity has been more widely researched in the context of international migration, there is scope for much more research in Mexico itself. Arising from this research, the importance of age and the impact of starting work as a child are key themes which would benefit from further exploration. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of domestic workers' self-reflexivity and how they make meaning from their work would be a valuable feminist and post-colonial research pursuit.

Words: 29,341

Appendix

- ⁱ For example, Andrea told me: *We struggled, we struggled...well you learn to*
- ⁱⁱ Eres la mayor y tienes, estás batallando con tu mamá para poder levantarlos (Andrea)
- ⁱⁱⁱ *There came a moment when I say to my parents, why were they so cruel, sending us to work.* Llegó a un momento en que digo a mis papás, de que porque eran tan crueles, mandarnos a trabajar. (Kenia)
- ^{iv} Y me dejan ir. Me dejan ir, mandándome a trabajar, o sea no de 'quieres ir a trabajar' era de 've a trabajar' (Kenia)
- ^v Al principio fue difícil y sí porque pues a los 12 o 13 años, o sea, me doy cuenta que es una edad muy...muy...todavía es, um...muy poco no, eres una jovencita, una niña pues, sí (Mode)
- ^{vi} Es algo muy difícil, a veces te encuentras con personas que a veces dices no tienen sentimientos (Mode)
- ^{vii} Me sentí sola, porque nadie te defiende (Kenia)
- ^{viii} *Well, more than anything they're irresponsible, no? Like I repeat, a little girl is going to look after a baby?* Pues mas que nada que son irresponsables, no? Que como te repito, una niña va a cuidar a un bebé? (Kenia)
- ^{ix} *Every time [the child] went to the bathroom. It was a tremendous battle there, honestly, no no, it was something I didn't like...I had to unblock! It was struggling, honestly.* Cada vez que iba al baño. Era una batalla tremenda allí, es de veras, no no, era algo que no me gustaba...tenía yo que destapar! Era batallar, de veras. (Andrea)
- ^x Decía 'ai mamá como lo que tienes que hacer!' Sí, pero ni modo, le digo son cosas que pasan y que uno al trabajar, tienes que hacerlo aunque no te gusta (laughs). Y este...y pues, también tienes que aprender para que te des cuenta que tienes que prepararte mejor. (Andrea)
- ^{xi} Pues, muy parecida en algunos sentidos es bastante parecida. Ya ves que los seres humanos vivimos de costumbres...Y antes pues, no trabajaba, me dedicaba más a mi casa cuando todavía no me separaba de mi ex esposo, pues no nada más era, no trabajaba fuera, porque en la casa hay trabajo. Y era no mas solo atender a mis hijos sino también a mi esposo. (Sole)
- ^{xii} Bueno ya no son niños, pero como padres siempre serán nuestros niños verdad, bueno son nuestros jovencitos. Y, pues él, igual, no nos queremos

comprometer en unos trabajos que nos tenga allí todo el día y de ahí nos vamos a descuidar a nuestros hijos. (Mode)

^{xiii} 'Entonces no lo veo como que si le estoy haciendo trabajo a alguien, yo lo veo como si lo estuviera haciendo para mi, entonces eso, me gusta lo que hago, si no, yo creo que no lo hiciera. (Sole)

^{xiv} Mis hijos son independientes también, así los enseñe, cada quien. Tienen sus familias y punto. (Violeta)

^{xv} Sí podría ser madre soltera, pero que ofrezco a mi hijo? O sea, a ver, que tengo, no tengo nada, apenas estoy empezando a hacer mis cosas, porque en mi pueblo estoy empezando a hacer mi casa.... tal vez más adelante tendría un hijo,..porque sé que yo sola pero quiero poder mantener (Isabel)

^{xvi} Quizás que la familia donde vayas no sea tan honesta también...digamos vas a buscar un trabajo honesto, pero hay veces no es así, vas encontrando otras cosas que no quieres tu, y eso te hace huir también del lugar... No es fácil pero cuando es necesario, se tiene que hacer. (Andrea)

^{xvii} integridad de la casa (Andrea)

^{xviii} *I said you know where I live, because she, when she employed me, I told her I was from [Mexico] City, she says that's why I'm employing you...and from there the trust began, I began to look after her daughter...*Dije usted sabe donde vivo, porque ella, para cuando ella me contrató, yo le dije que era de la Ciudad, dice por eso te contrato...y ya de ahí empecé la confianza, empecé a cuidar a su nena (Violeta)

^{xix} Hazle como quiera porque tú eres la ratera, además vamos a donde quiera, y además no la firmé nada, yo no tengo ningún contrato contigo. Entonces yo ya enojada, yo me armé de valor, y dije ya no vuelvo a trabajar con ella. (Violeta)

^{xx} Entonces le dije, yo estoy consiente que no he agarrado nada, yo no le debo nada a usted...usted puede poner la demana donde quiera, y tengo mas personas que me conocen, y tengo cartas de recomendación también, y mucho tiempo me conocen también le digo. Y, ya verás como nos vale dije, nomás.

(Gilberto)

^{xxi} Y este...no sé que me quieres preguntar

^{xxii} K: Mmm con los bebés no. Era difícil cuando el patrón llegaba y empezaba a tocarnos

T: Oh, ok

^{xxiii} K: Sí, te marcan. Te marcan pues porque te quita tu inocencia y...es miedo, es miedo.

T: Y te hicieron sentir que era tu culpa?

K: Este...nunca llegué a sentir así, y le tenía hasta coraje hasta ella porque no le dentendría.

^{xxiv} K:yo siento desde que, trabajé allí, como que mi manera de cuidarme ya que se aborda...cuando mi tío me quería dar besos, y yo si llegué a decirlo a mi mamá...pero nunca me creyeron....

T: Y como te sentiste?

K: Pues da coraje. Pero...te sientes más valiente no, una vez que dices sácase por allá, o sea, una vez yo fui muy grosera... Yo una vez confronté a él...

T: Que valiente.

K: Sí, de hecho cuando mi papá, cuando ya estábamos más de grandes, y quería pegar a mi mama, nos poníamos 'no no, o sea, ya.' A lo mejor sirvió de algo eso, el coraje que sacamos de ese doctor, algo que saco allí del doctor de todo que me hacía para, ai, puedo le decir este (Kenia)

^{xxv} T: Entonces, como es un día típico para tí en el trabajo?

I: Pues, si como estuviera en mi casa!

^{xxvi} T: Y sentiste que pudiste decir que sí o no, sentiste que tenías opción?

I: Pues es que..pues es que me gusta estar en casa (laughs)...o sea, no es algo que, que me aburra o digo que no quiero hacer, pues así me hubiera salido verdad? ...y a parte hasta me gusta porque no es medio especial o así... no sé, a lo mejor por eso me haya quedado con ellos y me he acostumbrado...otros pues ya hubiera salido..(laughs)

^{xxvii} Prefiero estar en casa (laughs)...me da pereza (laughs). Tengo que mentalizarme una semana antes para decirme; Isa, la próxima fin de semana vas a ir a ver a tal amiga telefono entonces como que así se me va el tiempo. Ya de repente si salgo, a veces si, pero no es muy común.

^{xxviii} Me escuchaba mi historia que yo platicaba en una tribuna, como ahorita estoy haciendo. (Violeta)

^{xxix} Hoy soy una profesional en todo lo que hago, y eso me ha ayudado mi grupo. (Violeta)

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- ^{xxx} Hoy, mi calidad de vida es mejor, porque para empezar, vivo sola. ... Yo nunca vivía sola. Siempre tenía miedo de estar sola porque tuve muchos abandonados de niña....(Violeta)
- ^{xxxi} Entro en la intimidad. (Violeta)
- ^{xxxii} Entonces yo he aprendido eso, ser observadora. A mí no me gusta ser confianzuda. Si me explico? O sea, yo, aunque no exprese mucho conmigo yo veo sus gustos que le gusta que no le gusta, y observo todo eso, y como yo me he acoplado eso. (Violeta)
- ^{xxxiii} Con ella sí, con otras, las he escuchado....a la gente con que trabajo, que no sabe, no los voy a decir porque soy anónima, pero a lo mejor la confianza les he dado y me han platicado sus vidas y yo me quedo callada. He sido como confidente, con la gente con la que yo trabajo. (Violeta)
- ^{xxxiv} Porque? Pues. Porque somos las que trabajamos más en casa me imagino no? O este...o, pues, es que nosotras que buscamos más bien el trabajo en casa, muchas veces...digamos que pues ese, el lugar que nos han asignado digamos o nos hemos asignado indirectamente. (Andrea)
- ^{xxxv} *Possibly because we're more, este, I don't know, more involved with the home.* Posiblemente porque nosotras somos más, este, no sé, entregadas a la casa. (Andrea)
- ^{xxxvi} *And before well, I didn't work, I dedicated myself more to my house when I still hadn't separated from my ex-husband. Well, no it was just, I didn't work outside, because in the house there's work too.* Y antes pues, no trabajaba, me dedicaba más a mi casa cuando todavía no me separaba de mi ex esposo, pues no nada más era, no trabajaba fuera, porque en la casa hay trabajo.
- ^{xxxvii} Yo? Yo en realidad soy plomero, electricista. Pero igual, pues desde hace tiempo, igual sé, sé algo de limpieza doméstica. O sea, como quien soy, doméstico no pues, soy, soy hombre! (M laughs a lot) Entonces, pues, sí así como, bueno para demás se vaya, malinterpretar las cosas...(Gilberto)
- ^{xxxviii} A mí no me están pagando, sólo estoy ayudando, el único que le pagan es lo que ganamos entre los dos. (Gilberto)
- ^{xxxix} Yo acepte el trabajo para ayudarle a ella, mi esposa, con los señores que le digo, por el problema que teníamos de los niños de la escuela.
- ^{xl} M: Pues que hay hombres que no lo hacen, que por agarrar una escoba se siente mujer, o no sé,

G: Sí

M: Y igual ya ahorita los hombres, bueno, él pues, ha sido siempre así, a veces nos cocina en la casa, a veces hace comida él, y nos cocina, y a veces nos ayuda.

^{xli} Uno, aquí, pues, uno hace todo, uno es acostumbrada a hacer todo para los hijos, pero él veía que trabajaba, yo siempre he trabajado, y este, y llegaba yo y a cocinar la cena, atender a todo. Él tomaba. (Andrea)

^{xlii} Él ayuda mi neura – ahora sí, la ayuda, como dices! Pero pues no es ayudar, él dice que es compartir, la responsabilidad es de ellos dos. (Andrea)

^{xliii} A: Hay señoras muy consientes pero hay señoras que, la verdad, te quieren pagar poco y que hagas mucho. Y eso pues para uno siento que no es muy, este, digamos, que es no tan fácil el trabajo, y tampoco es tan valorado....a veces pagan y a veces no.

T: A veces no pagan?

A: No, pues se enojan, o uno por pena, bueno lo que me quiera dar (laughs) sí, pero, pues, este, pues, es cuestión de, digamos, valorarse tanto el trabajo de una como de la otra.

T: Ah ok, y eso ha pasado a usted?

A: Er, hay veces (laughs) hay veces (laughs)...pues son las ventajas y desventajas que tiene uno, como personalmente a veces, digamos. (Andrea)

^{xliiv} Yo no le regalo mi trabajo a nadie porque la gente es mañosa. Si no me paga no lo hago...yo no regalo mi trabajo, porque las personas todo les urge. Les urge que les haga la limpieza y que quede perfecto, y la paga cuando? (Violeta)

^{xliv} Algo que sí he notado, y es algo así como general, que la mayoría de las personas como que, como que no le dan valor real al trabajo doméstico. Y eso es prácticamente no importa si eres pobre, si eres clase media, si eres rico, o sea, en general las personas piensan que es un trabajo que debe ser muy barato, y yo siempre, me ha pasado muchas veces que no acepto el empleo porque me quieren pagar menos de lo que yo pretendo ganar... a veces sí, sí te molesta porque dices, si fuera tan fácil y tan sencillo, porque no lo hacen ellos? (Sole)

^{xlvi} No sabía cobrar dinero, pero hoy sí cobro y cobro bien. Y aparte es la limpieza es una cosa, planchar es otra cosa, lavar es cosa, y guisar es otra cosa. (Violeta)

^{xlvii} Me daba una idea de lo que yo platicaba, cuando yo no tenía mi carro, yo a veces me juntaba con personas que veníamos este, en el camino, para ir a tomar el pasaje en el camión, y me quedaba platicando con ellas, con otras empleadas domésticas. Y de ahí me daba la idea. Si yo sé hacer bien mi trabajo, yo empecé a dar cuenta que estaba regalando mi trabajo.

^{xlviii} T: Crees que es importante hablar de eso?

K: Siiiiii porque yo noto esto de que las chicas del rancho evitan que otras chicas caigan en las manos de mi tío. Y de mi tía también, porque mi tía es agresora.

^{xlix} Camarista independiente (Violeta)

ⁱ Yo soy camarista independiente. Por que? Porque yo vivo de eso, porque llevo mi escalera, hago limpiezas profundas. Tengo mi equipo efectivamente. Mis productos de limpiezas, los trapos...este, todo, todo, todo. Entonces este limpio así todo, neveras, ventiladores, yo les deajo una casa como un hotel. (Violeta)

ⁱⁱ Hoy soy una profesional en todo lo que hago, y eso me ha ayudado mi grupo. (Violeta)

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