


BEHIND THE SCENES OF CLEANING: MEMORIES AND SCHOOLING OF OUTSOURCED WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.046-011>**Karin Tyeko Anami Reigoza¹****Abstract**

The study aimed to understand how outsourced female cleaning workers in higher education institutions construct meanings about education, their schooling trajectories, and the very right to learn, based on their memories and life experiences, highlighting processes of social and educational invisibility that intersect gender, race, and class. Methodologically, this is a qualitative study grounded in a bibliographic review of academic works on Youth and Adult Education (EJA), outsourcing, and women's labor, articulated with critical theoretical frameworks such as those of Paulo Freire, Karl Marx, Silvia Federici, and Pierre Bourdieu, in addition to the analysis of narratives and empirical studies that explore the experiences of outsourced workers in different Brazilian universities. The results showed that these women, mostly Black and with educational trajectories marked by interruptions, face precarious working conditions, exhausting routines, and double or triple workloads—factors that hinder access to and permanence in formal education, while also reinforcing their invisibility within the academic space, where they are recognized only as service providers rather than as educational subjects. It was also observed that, despite these adversities, there remain desires to resume their studies and strategies of resistance, indicating the central role of education as a possibility for social transformation and future projection. It is concluded that educational institutions reproduce contradictions by advocating for the democratization of access while symbolically excluding these workers, making it necessary to rethink institutional and public policies that ensure real conditions for access to education, the valorization of labor, and the recognition

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of these women as rights-bearing subjects, thereby contributing to overcoming the structural inequalities that sustain their invisibility.

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education, Outsourcing, Women's labor, Social invisibility.

INTRODUCTION

The university is an institution of higher education dedicated to the production, transmission, and development of knowledge through teaching, research, and extension, training professionals and contributing to the scientific, cultural, and social advancement of society. And as spaces dedicated to the production and dissemination of knowledge, they carry contradictions in their dynamics and internalized cultures.

Although their institutional discourses and documents defend the democratization of access, equality of opportunity, and education as a universal right, these educational institutions fail to recognize their own agents as legitimate educational subjects, maintaining the culture of structural invisibility behind the scenes.

Among these silenced groups to which this study refers, the majority are outsourced female cleaning workers, responsible for the essential maintenance of the infrastructure of educational institutions, whose presence remains socially erased and deprived of recognition.

On the symbolic and everyday level, the presence of these women is often marked by an invisibility historically associated with gender and race. And educational institutions reproduce this logic when they naturalize the fact that these workers are present only in corridors, bathrooms, and classrooms as service providers, and not as potential students or participants in the educational policies that the institution itself produces and defends.

This contradiction shows that, even when inserted in an environment that constitutes itself as the privileged place of education, these women are not recognized as recipients of the right that they help sustain and maintain daily. Freire (1996) already stated that the denial of the right to education is not

merely a formal exclusion, but a process of dehumanization that prevents subjects from perceiving themselves as capable of reading and transforming the world. And with regard to outsourced female cleaning workers, this denial becomes twofold: institutional, on the part of the educational institution, and social, on the part of a logic of class, race, and gender that defines which individuals are considered educable and which remain on the margins.

This research is centered on the life narratives of outsourced female cleaning workers in educational institutions, with the central objective of understanding how these workers construct meanings about education, EJA, and the very right to learn, revealing their trajectories marked by interruptions, returns, silencing, and also resistance. By recording these memories and experiences, the aim is not only to fill an academic gap, but also to contribute to the affirmation that these women are and have always been educational subjects, even when educational institutions insist on not recognizing them as such.

In order to become familiar with the topic and taking as reference other authors and research on the subject, a bibliographic review was conducted on the Scielo and CAPES platforms using the following keywords: “*Youth and Adult Education*” and “*Outsourced cleaning workers.*” Nine (09) texts were found that most closely approached the theme to be researched: “Outsourced female cleaning workers in educational institutions.” The theoretical framework is based on Freire (1967), Marx (1996), Federici (2017), Nogueira (2010), Bourdieu (2020), Mészáros (2002), and Ricardo Antunes (2009).

The table below contains the texts described by author, title, and year of publication.

Table 01

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publication
DRESCH, Gabriella Ane, ZANARDINE, Lincoln Renato Vieira e FAUX, Stéphanie	2014	<i>As trabalhadoras da limpeza de uma instituição pública de ensino superior: gênero, terceirização e precarização</i> [The female cleaning workers of a public higher education institution: gender, outsourcing, and precarization]	UFPR

SANTOS, Reinaldo Batista dos.	2016	<i>A (in)visibilidade dos trabalhadores de limpeza e conservação da Universidade Federal de Alagoas: imagens reveladas histórias reinventadas</i> [The (in)visibility of cleaning and maintenance workers at the Federal University of Alagoas: revealed images, reinvented stories]	(Dissertation) Federal University of Alagoas
BARBOSA, Beatriz Regina; MESQUITA, Tainá Vitória de Lima.	2016	<i>Um olhar sobre a EJA na universidade Estadual de Campinas: um projeto horizontal de educação de jovens e adultos protagonizado por estudantes de graduação e trabalhadoras e trabalhadoras em regime de terceirização</i> [A look at EJA at the State University of Campinas: a horizontal youth and adult education project led by undergraduate students and outsourced male and female workers]	Linha Mestra
SILVA, Edson Ferreira da	2018	<i>Universidade Federal: os caminhos da terceirização em uma instituição social</i> [Federal University: the paths of outsourcing in a social institution]	Federal University of Santa Catarina
MARTINS, Daiane de Lourdes	2019	<i>Invisibilidades no âmbito do trabalho de limpeza: um estudo em uma instituição Federal de ensino superior</i> [Invisibility in cleaning work: a study in a federal higher education institution]	Farol – Journal of Organizational Studies and Society
SOUZA, Jacione Borges de	2019	<i>“Que horas elas voltam?” sentidos da educação para funcionárias terceirizadas do Instituto Federal do RN</i> [“What time do they return?” meanings of education for outsourced female employees of the Federal Institute of RN]	Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN)
DUTRA, Renata Queiroz e COELHO, Ilana Barros	2020	<i>Eles pensam que a gente é invisível”: gênero, trabalho terceirizado e educação jurídica popular</i> [“They think we are invisible”: gender, outsourced labor, and popular legal education]	Direito e Práxis
CAMPOLI, L.; PEROSA, G. S..	2022	<i>É casa, é luta, é o dia de amanhã: as auxiliares de limpeza terceirizadas da Unicamp</i> [It is home, it is struggle, it is tomorrow: the outsourced cleaning assistants of Unicamp]	Cadernos Pagu
CORGOSINHO, Anna Victoria Medeiros.	2023	<i>O trabalho e a invisibilidade dos terceirizados do serviço de limpeza em uma universidade.</i> [Work and the invisibility of outsourced cleaning service workers at a university.]	(Undergraduate thesis) Federal University of Ouro Preto

Source: prepared by the author. Article titles include a free translation in brackets [] following the original in italics.

METHODOLOGY

The research is characterized by a qualitative approach, exploratory and descriptive in nature, guided by the understanding of the meanings attributed to education by outsourced female cleaning workers in higher education institutions, considering their schooling trajectories, life experiences, and insertion into the world of work. It begins from a critical perspective that understands social reality as traversed by power relations structured by gender, race, and class, seeking to evidence how these markers produce processes of social and educational invisibility.

At first, a systematized bibliographic review was carried out in databases such as *Scielo* and CAPES, based on the descriptors “Youth and Adult Education,” “outsourcing,” and “women’s labor.” Studies that dialogue directly with the theme were selected, composing a theoretical corpus grounded in authors such as Freire, Marx, Federici, and Bourdieu. This stage aimed to map relevant academic productions and support the critical analysis of the investigated phenomenon, allowing the construction of a consistent theoretical framework.

In the following stage, a qualitative analysis of the selected empirical studies was conducted, based on the technique of thematic content analysis, seeking to identify recurring categories such as precarization of work, socioprofessional invisibility, interrupted schooling trajectories, and strategies of resistance. The interpretation of the data was guided by a critical and interdisciplinary perspective, articulating the empirical findings with the adopted theoretical frameworks. As this is bibliographic and documentary research, there was no need for submission to an ethics committee, while the principles of scientific rigor, reliability of sources, and analytical integrity were ensured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first analysis concerns a master’s dissertation by Reinaldo Batista dos Santos entitled: “*A (in)visibilidade dos trabalhadores de limpeza e conservação da Universidade Federal de Alagoas: imagens reveladas e histórias reinventadas*” [The (in)visibility of cleaning and maintenance workers at

the Federal University of Alagoas: revealed images, reinvented stories]. Santos (2016) begins his text by stating: “Not rarely, in these educational institutions, emphasis is placed on research that ‘goes beyond the walls of the University,’ while forgetting, however, the ‘home itself’” (p. 16).

His research investigated the invisibility of outsourced cleaning and maintenance workers at the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL), starting from the questions: “*who are the outsourced cleaning and maintenance workers who surround us daily in this university space? In what way does the everyday life of a university, immersed in literate practices, subjectively affect the life memories of these subalternized practitioners?*”

Santos (2016) argued that these outsourced workers, despite circulating daily around the campus in contact with intellectuals and cultural collections, remain opaque and silenced, occupying positions of subalternity defined by relations of power and knowledge.

Methodologically, the author carried out an initial mapping with 35 workers, men and women with life trajectories marked by school exclusion, marginalization, and denial of access to consumer goods. Santos (2016) used an approach through informal conversations and asked the workers to take photographs that served to initiate dialogues revealing memories and narratives.

To read a photograph is to cast an attentive gaze upon what constitutes it as visual language, with the specificities that are proper to it. And this produces a reflection that each image recorded in a photograph is a gesture, an action directed toward a target. Gestures are irreversible and unique. To repeat a gesture is already another gesture, never the same, because the gesture is living energy (Santaella, 2012).

The chapters of the dissertation explored the narratives of outsourced cleaning workers at the Federal University of Alagoas, using fictional names chosen from Tupi-Guarani culture. The analyses were based on individual stories such as those of Ubirajara (lord of labor, with memories of work in a surgical center), Abayomi (escape through networks of conversation and leisure), Araci (everyday

reinvention through photos), Caet (a past filled with rural memories), Mara (female strength), and Tainara (the expressive star).

The photographs, captioned by the workers themselves, revealed experiences of school exclusion, desires to return to studies, and appropriation of academic spaces within the educational institution. The author concluded that the outsourced workers, through their memorial narratives, recreated the past while also envisioning projections for the future.

Freire (1967) had already stated that it is from human beings' relations with reality, resulting from being with it and being in it, through acts of creation, recreation, and decision, that reality is gradually mastered; this means relating to the formation of the worker, who, through narratives and through work, recreates their social reality and projects a future, in the attempt to insert themselves into the world.

In this sense, understanding Youth and Adult Education as a space for critical formation and reconstruction of social reality implies observing concrete experiences that materialize these principles in educational practice. It is from this perspective that the second text is inserted, entitled "*Um olhar sobre a EJA na Universidade Estadual de Campinas: um projeto horizontal de educação de jovens e adultos protagonizado por estudantes de graduação e trabalhadores e trabalhadoras em regime de terceirização*" ["A look at EJA at the State University of Campinas: a horizontal youth and adult education project led by undergraduate students and outsourced male and female workers"], authored by Beatriz Regina Barbosa and Tayná Vitória de Lima Mesquita, which analyzes the EJA project called "Coletivo EJA," developed at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), initiated in 2001 by students from the Institute of Economics and supported by university extension actions.

The "Coletivo EJA" was aimed at outsourced maintenance, cleaning, and food service workers, mostly Black women exposed to vulnerabilities such as salary delays, workplace accidents, and structural racism.

According to Federici (2017, p. 37), capitalism developed by exploiting different forms of labor, both wage labor and enslaved labor, generating a contradiction between the production of wealth and the

wear and tear of workers' labor power. In this process, women were especially harmed, because in addition to participating in productive labor, they assumed domestic and care work, generally unpaid and completely invisibilized.

Barbosa and Mesquita (2016) promoted literacy, mathematics, acupuncture, handicrafts, and computer skills in the "Coletivo EJA" project during lunchtime, the only available time for these workers. At this point, Antunes (2009, p. 172) is mentioned, as the discussion on reducing working hours emerges as an essential starting point, rooted in everyday experience, and this reduction enables the emergence of a life full of meaning beyond the professional sphere, freeing the worker for creative, relational, and personal activities that transcend mere productive survival.

(...) the struggle to reduce the working day or working time must be at the center of the actions of the world of labor today, on a global scale. To fight for the reduction of work with the aim, at the most immediate level, of minimizing the brutal structural unemployment that is a consequence of the destructive logic of capital and its system. To reduce the working day or working time so that the society of the precarized and the unemployed does not proliferate even further (Antunes, 2009, p. 175).

The method used for the analysis was based on Freirean pedagogy, with generative themes and horizontality. The authors, students of Pedagogy and Social Sciences, highlighted the racial composition of Unicamp: while 53% of the Brazilian population is Black, less than 15% of the students are Black, contrasting with the Black majority among outsourced workers, mainly in the areas of cleaning and food services.

The project problematized gender, race, and class through continuous training, combating academic hierarchies and promoting cultural gatherings to make workers visible. However, with the change of the maintenance and cleaning company in the bidding process, the students/workers were reassigned and/or dismissed, resulting in the suspension of the extension project. The initiative was (and continues to be) revolutionary by democratizing educational access at a university such as Unicamp,

questioning outsourcing, the absence of quotas, and noncompliance with laws such as Law 10.639/03 (Afro-Brazilian history).

The discontinuity of the project shows how outsourcing policies directly impact not only working conditions, but also workers' access to and permanence in formative spaces. It is in this context that it becomes pertinent to broaden the debate on outsourcing and its structural effects, which leads to the analysis of the text authored by Edson Ferreira da Silva, entitled "*Universidade Federal: os caminhos da terceirização em uma instituição social*" ["Federal University: the paths of outsourcing in a social institution"], which investigates the process of expansion of outsourcing in public service.

Silva's study (2018) began from the understanding that outsourcing is directly linked to transformations in the world of work under the logic of neoliberal capitalism, marked by the flexibilization of labor relations, cost reduction, and the decrease of the State's responsibility as employer.

According to Marx (1996, p. 167), as creator of use-values, as useful labor, labor is thus a condition of human existence, independent of all social forms, an eternal natural necessity for mediating the metabolism between human beings and nature and, therefore, human life. For Silva (2018), this model profoundly alters institutional relations, producing differentiations between permanent and outsourced workers within the university. The research showed that outsourcing impacts not only the material conditions of work, but also the symbolic and social dimensions of outsourced workers.

In his analysis, the author also highlighted aspects such as the precarization of employment ties, the turnover of contracted companies (through bidding processes), insecurity regarding job retention, and the fragility of access to rights. In this scenario, outsourced workers perform essential functions, such as cleaning, security, and administrative support, and yet they remain on the margins of institutional policies for professional valorization, which reinforces processes of invisibility and also exclusion within the institutional educational space.

Federici (2022, p. 172) uses in her studies the term “commons,” which means the collective forms of organizing and sharing resources, social relations, and ways of life outside the logic of the market and private property. According to the author, in order to change the university it is necessary to:

(...) build “knowledge commons”; it is not enough to concern ourselves only with the content of curricula and the cost of education, although these are unquestionably crucial. We need to question the material conditions of the production of a university, its history, and its relationship with the surrounding communities (Federici, 2022, p. 172).

In his conclusion, Silva (2018) argued that outsourcing contributed (and continues to contribute) to the fragmentation of the working class within the university, deepening hierarchies and inequalities. The separation between permanent employees and outsourced workers compromises the feeling of belonging and weakens the construction of collective bonds.

According to Antunes (2009, p. 109), the class-that-lives-from-labor encompasses unproductive workers (permanent and outsourced employees). Unproductive workers are those who meet social needs or assist in the functioning of institutions and companies; however, they do not directly participate in the process of generating surplus value (which is the profit produced through the exploitation of labor in the capitalist system).

The bonds between permanent employees and outsourced workers tend to be fragile because these groups occupy different positions within the institutional structure and labor relations. Permanent employees have stability, greater institutional recognition, and more direct participation in administrative decisions, while outsourced workers are hired by intermediary companies, through bidding processes, with less job security, greater turnover, and less integration with the team.

For Silva (2018), the “paths” of outsourcing in educational institutions are not limited to an administrative choice, but represent a political and economic project that redefines the role of the State and working conditions in the public sector, requiring critical analysis and institutional actions aimed at guaranteeing rights and the dignity of labor.

From this perspective, by understanding outsourcing as part of a political and economic project that reorganizes labor relations in the public sector, the analysis moves on to the article *“Invisibilidade no trabalho de limpeza: um estudo em uma instituição federal de ensino superior”* [“Invisibility in cleaning work: a study in a federal higher education institution”], by Daiane de Lourdes Martins, which investigated how this hiring model contributes to the construction of socioprofessional invisibility, especially among outsourced female cleaning workers, evidencing the inequalities and precarizations resulting from this process.

Grounded in a socio-anthropological perspective, the study discussed how invisibility is produced in social and organizational relations, associated with the social division of labor, the stigma of occupations considered to have “low prestige,” and the precarization resulting from outsourcing. Although cleaning is essential to the functioning of a university’s structure, the work is valued as a result, but the outsourced female cleaning workers remain socially disregarded.

The research used a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews conducted with eight workers from the cleaning sector. Content analysis made it possible to identify three central units of meaning: *the gaze that does not see, the uniform that makes invisible, and the broom and bucket instead of the book*. These categories revealed everyday practices of indifference, hierarchical treatment, and stigmatization of cleaners, who are often perceived only as part of the institutional landscape. The use of the uniform and the association of the work with a lack of schooling reinforce symbolic exclusion and the feeling of non-belonging to the university space.

The results indicated that socioprofessional invisibility goes beyond the dimension of the work itself and extends to broader social relations, legitimizing hierarchies and inequalities within the educational institution. The cleaning workers recognized the social importance of their role, but reported humiliation and resignation.

By evidencing the multiple forms of invisibilization faced by women workers in the educational environment, Martins (2019) reinforced the importance of deepening discussions on how these women perceive and attribute meaning to educational processes in their personal and professional trajectories.

It is from this perspective that, following this bibliographic research, the article “*Que horas elas voltam?: sentidos da educação para funcionárias terceirizadas do Instituto Federal do RN*” [“What time do they return?: meanings of education for outsourced female employees of the Federal Institute of RN”], authored by Jacione Borges de Souza, is presented, in which the author analyzed the meanings attributed to education by outsourced women workers at the Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN), Canguaretama campus, articulating education, work, and gender.

Souza (2019) begins from the observation that these women, most of whom have interrupted schooling trajectories, associated education both with a desire for social mobility and life change and with an experience marked by abandonment and frustration. According to the author, the need for survival, early entry into work, and family responsibilities appear as determining factors for the interruption of studies and for distancing from school.

Mészáros (2002, p. 304–305) highlights the extreme vulnerability of women in patriarchal capitalism, not only because of their concentration in precarious and poorly paid jobs—representing 70% of global poverty—but mainly because of the central role they play in the traditional family, facing growing demands that are irreconcilable with social pressures. These demands overburden women, making it impossible to reconcile them without generating “social dysfunctions,” such as family instability, which only worsens inequalities and perpetuates gender exploitation intersected with class.

Nogueira (2010, p. 61), in turn, states that responsibility for domestic tasks falls mostly on women who also perform wage labor in capitalist production, constituting a double (or even triple) working day, with profound impacts such as physical and mental exhaustion. This overload reveals a deep-rooted gender oppression, in which the home is naturalized as the female domain, while the market exploits their

paid labor power without alleviating the unpaid burden of care. Thus, a dual exploitation is perpetuated: patriarchal and capitalist, widening inequalities and limiting these women's autonomy.

For sociologist Bourdieu (2020, p. 74), symbolic violence causes even attitudes that are apparently small and even well-intentioned, without conscious intention, to end up reinforcing the inferiorization of women, contributing to their exclusion from positions of power and to the maintenance of gender inequalities,

(...) well-intentioned people (symbolic violence, as we know, does not operate in the order of conscious intentions) perform discriminatory acts, excluding women, without even raising the question, from positions of authority, reducing their claims to whims deserving of a soothing word or a pat on the cheek, or else, with an apparently opposite intention, calling them and reducing them, in some way, to their femininity, by diverting attention to their hairstyle, or to this or that bodily trait, or by using, to address them, familiar terms (the first name) or intimate terms ("my girl," "dear," etc.) even in a "formal" situation (a female doctor before her patients), or so many other infinitesimal "choices" of the unconscious which, accumulating, contribute to constructing the diminished situation of women and whose cumulative effects are registered in the statistics of the limited representation of women in positions of power, especially economic and political power (Bourdieu, 2020, p. 74).

Souza (2019) used in her research a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology, with focus group interviews and the film "*The Second Mother*"² as a methodological resource to understand the meanings lived by the participants. The author identified units of meaning such as tiredness, choice, conformism, strength, and confidence, which traversed the trajectories of the women researched. The physical and emotional fatigue resulting from the double working day—formal employment and domestic work—emerges as the main element that hinders return to and permanence in education, especially in the Youth and Adult Education (EJA) modality.

In her final considerations, Souza (2019) highlighted that distancing from school does not result from a lack of individual interest, but from a set of social, historical, and gendered conditions that limit

² A Brazilian film about complex and enduring social divisions that explores barriers of class, race, and gender through the dynamics between the domestic worker Val, her daughter Jéssica, and the upper-middle-class family that employs them, highlighting how structural hierarchies, prejudices, and inequalities shape interpersonal relationships and the course of people's lives, while challenging the passive acceptance of a system that perpetuates servitude and exploitation.

these women's access to and permanence in educational spaces. The author showed that education is perceived as important, but placed in the background in the face of the demands of work and family care, reinforcing roles traditionally assigned to women. Antunes warns that,

(...) capital has also known how to intensively appropriate the polyvalence and multiactivity of women's labor, of the experience that women workers bring from their activities performed in the sphere of reproductive labor, of domestic work. While men—because of the prevailing historical-social conditions, which are, as we have seen, a sexualized social construction—show greater difficulty in adapting to the new polyvalent dimensions (in truth, conforming to deeper levels of exploitation), capital has used this social attribute inherited by women (Antunes, 2009, p. 109, 110).

Souza's study (2019) contributes by evidencing, through statistical data, dropout in EJA and by highlighting the need for integrated public policies that consider the specificities of outsourced women workers.

In this same field of discussion on the living and working conditions of these women, the article "*O trabalho e a invisibilidade dos terceirizados do serviço de limpeza em uma Universidade*" ["Work and the invisibility of outsourced cleaning service workers at a University"], by Anna Victoria Medeiros Corgosinho, broadens the debate by analyzing the outsourcing of cleaning services at the School of Mines of the Federal University of Ouro Preto, emphasizing how the precarization of work is directly related to the social invisibility of these workers.

The study was grounded in critical frameworks of the world of work, understanding work as a central element of human identity, which, under the neoliberal capitalist logic, comes to be appropriated and emptied of its dignifying character. Outsourcing, in this context, manifests itself as a strategy for cost reduction and flexibilization of labor relations, expanding more fragile ties and consequently generating greater legal insecurity and social devaluation.

Based on a qualitative case study, carried out with outsourced female cleaning workers, the work used questionnaires administered *in loco* to trace the socioeconomic profile of the workers and understand their working conditions, interpersonal relations, and perceptions of the activity performed.

The results demonstrated a group composed mostly of Black women, with low levels of schooling and long histories of outsourced employment ties, marked by company turnover, the loss of labor rights, and the absence of qualification. Working conditions included extensive hours, physical effort, lack of training, and frequent exposure to situations of embarrassment and discrimination in the educational environment.

This corroborates Nogueira (2010, p. 61), who states that the capitalist system constantly seeks to reduce the costs related to the reproduction of labor power, which results in the reduction of wages of the working class as a whole. This process, however, affects women even more intensely, since their labor power has historically been devalued because of power relations between the sexes, especially within the patriarchal family.

In this way, women come to occupy the place of a kind of “reserve army,” being incorporated into the labor market under precarious conditions and with low pay, which contributes to the maintenance of capitalist exploitation. Thus, gender inequality becomes a functional element of the system, allowing the continuation of the precarization of the proletariat in general and, in particular, of working women.

Corgosinho (2023) concluded that outsourcing is directly associated with the precarization of work and the social invisibility of these workers, despite the centrality of their activities to the functioning of the university. The distinction between permanent and outsourced workers reinforces symbolic hierarchies, limiting the feeling of belonging to the academic community and thus compromising the construction of a valued professional identity.

The study showed that the precarization of work presented structural markers of gender, race, and class—affecting more intensely Black women inserted in historically devalued occupations—and the importance of reflecting on the limits of outsourcing and its social and human impacts.

In this same analytical direction, the article *“É casa, é luta, é o dia de amanhã: as auxiliares de limpeza terceirizadas da Unicamp”* [“It is home, it is struggle, it is tomorrow: the outsourced cleaning assistants of Unicamp”], by Lara Campoli and Graziela Serroni Perosa, deepened this discussion by

examining the social trajectories of outsourced cleaning assistants at Unicamp, placing their experiences in the broader context of the flexibilization and precarization of work, also through the lenses of gender and race.

The authors pointed out that these workers—mostly Black women, with low levels of schooling, migrants, and often heads of household—perceive outsourced employment, at the same time, as an achievement in the face of unemployment, informality, and unpaid domestic work. But in fact, outsourced work is permeated by precarization, low wages, instability, and disrespect for labor rights.

With a qualitative approach, the research reconstructed the trajectories of 18 outsourced cleaning workers through interviews, observing the everyday work routine. Campoli and Perosa (2022) used handcraft workshops, articulating history and Bourdieusian sociology to show how class, gender, and race still shape opportunities. The authors highlighted common patterns: early departure from school, entry during childhood into rural and domestic activities, socialization for care, and entry into outsourced cleaning as “the best possible option.”

In terms of working conditions, the article described long working hours, low and delayed wages, absence or failures in benefits, lack of materials and PPE, moral harassment, intense surveillance, prohibition from circulating and using university structures, weakening collective and affective bonds. Even so, these women produced small forms of everyday resistance—“ways of managing,” their own work rhythms, tactical use of spaces and breaks—that partially mitigated invisibility in the educational institution.

The authors concluded that outsourcing in the cleaning sector reinforces the sexual and racial division of labor and deepens inequalities, pushing these workers into devalued occupations with almost no prospect of upward mobility. Even so, many of these women project for their children a “better” future, anchored in and guided by studies and access to higher education, which helps explain the acceptance of precarized working conditions.

According to Bourdieu (2020, p. 34), the masculine order is maintained by being naturalized in everyday social and bodily practices, transforming biological differences into justification and imposing on women socially inferior positions, behaviors, and tasks,

(...) inscribed in things, the masculine order is also inscribed in bodies through tacit injunctions, implicit in the routines of the division of labor or of collective or private rituals (it is enough to recall, for example, the conduct of marginalization imposed on women through their exclusion from masculine places). The regularities of the physical order and of the social order impose and inculcate measures that exclude women from the noblest tasks (driving the plow, for example), assigning them inferior places (the lower part of the road or embankment), teaching them the correct posture of the body (for example, bent over, with arms folded over the chest, before respectable men), attributing to them painful, low, and petty tasks (they are the ones who carry the manure, and, in the olive harvest, they are the ones who gather the olives from the ground, with the children, while the men handle the pole to make them fall from the trees), finally, in general taking advantage, in accordance with fundamental presuppositions, of biological differences that thus seem to be at the basis of social differences.

This corroborates Campoli and Perosa (2022), who argue that educational institutions should assume political responsibility for this reality of outsourced workers. And by reinforcing this political responsibility in guaranteeing rights and reducing the precarization of outsourced work, the debate on the role of these institutions in transforming this social reality is broadened.

It is within this same perspective that the article *“Eles pensam que a gente é invisível”: gênero, trabalho terceirizado e educação jurídica popular* [“They think we are invisible”: gender, outsourced labor, and popular legal education], by Renata Queiroz Dutra and Ilana Barros Coelho, is situated. It analyzed the precarious conditions experienced by outsourced female cleaning workers at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), based on the experience of the extension project “Popular Legal Promoters and Coletivo Madás,” evidencing strategies of resistance and strengthening among these workers.

Based on records such as field diaries and reports produced during the course, Queiroz and Coelho (2020) investigated how outsourcing is (and still remains) associated with processes of social exclusion, especially when traversed by markers of gender and race. The project aimed to promote training in human rights and citizenship, creating a space for dialogue and collective strengthening for these workers,

inspired by the principles of popular education and by a critical perspective of law as an instrument of social transformation.

The authors highlighted that the profile of outsourced workers is composed mostly of Black women, mothers, and women with few opportunities for professional advancement. They face exhausting working hours—double or triple workloads—accumulating professional and domestic functions, reinforcing gender inequality in the world of work. The article also argued how the sexual division of labor and the historical legacies of racism contributed to the social devaluation of these professionals, who are frequently directed toward activities considered subaltern and poorly paid.

According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2020, p. 49–50), symbolic domination occurs invisibly and naturalized within society, not through direct imposition or through people’s rational consciousness, but through the ways in which they learn to perceive, judge, and act in the world. These ways are part of what is called habitus, that is, the set of habits, values, and ways of thinking acquired throughout life in human social relations. In this way, people end up reproducing social, cultural, or gender inequalities often without realizing it; that is, these ideas are already incorporated into their everyday practices as something natural.

In the research, Queiroz and Coelho (2020) reported that the course experience enabled participants to share experiences related to salary delays, threats of dismissal, labor irregularities, and situations of social invisibility in the educational environment. The feeling of devaluation manifested itself in the lack of recognition of their proper names, disrespect for the work performed, and episodes of harassment and humiliation, demonstrating how outsourcing affects not only material conditions, but also the dignity of these women.

In their conclusion, the authors pointed out that popular legal education contributed to strengthening the critical consciousness and collective organization of the workers, enabling the recognition of rights and the importance of developing resistance. This initiative expanded the visibility

of these workers in processes of social emancipation, while also evidencing the need to confront the structures that sustain the precarization of work.

The analysis of the final article in this bibliographic research: *“As trabalhadoras da limpeza de uma instituição pública de ensino superior: gênero, terceirização e precarização”* [“The female cleaning workers of a public higher education institution: gender, outsourcing, and precarization”] by Gabriella Ane Dresch, Lincoln Renato Vieira Zanardine, and Stéphanie Faux, presented the results of a social research study carried out with outsourced female cleaning workers working at the Rector’s Office of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR).

The study was developed using a qualitative method based on the application of questionnaires to 21 workers, with the objective of analyzing working conditions, as well as the relationship between gender, outsourcing, and the precarization of work. It was perceived through the profile of the employees that the majority are adult women, with low levels of schooling, married or with children, and residents of the metropolitan region. Many entered the cleaning field due to a lack of opportunities in other professions and because they already had experience with domestic activities, which reinforces the social association between women’s work and tasks of care and home maintenance.

According to Antunes (2009, p. 109), inequalities in the world of work are not determined only by social class, but also by gender, since men and women are educated and prepared in different ways from childhood, through the family and school, to occupy certain professional and social roles.

This social construction creates a sexual division of labor, in which certain activities are associated with men and others with women. Capitalism benefits from this division, using it to distribute functions and value labor unequally, generally attributing greater prestige and remuneration to masculine activities and devaluing the work performed by women.

The research evidenced the contrast between the constant presence of these workers in the educational space and their condition of invisibility, marked by the absence of participation in academic activities and by the lack of effective access to the opportunities offered by the institution.

The authors mentioned that the outsourcing of labor only intensifies the precarization of working conditions, resulting in low wages, recurring deductions, high turnover, and shifts that begin very early or extend until late, which often implies long commutes. This means weakening labor rights and professional stability, contributing to the deepening of the social vulnerability of these workers.

In the conclusion, the authors also highlighted that, despite the difficulties, many outsourced workers stated that they saw dignity in the profession and demonstrated appreciation for the social relations built in the work environment. However, a significant portion of them expressed the desire to change fields and return to school, revealing dissatisfaction with the conditions offered. Gender inequalities, combined with outsourcing, keep these women in socially devalued positions, indicating the need to broaden the debate on women's labor and the precarization of work.

CONCLUSION

The analyses of these studies demonstrated the structural invisibility that permeates outsourced female cleaning workers in educational institutions, revealing contradictions between institutional discourses of educational democratization and exclusionary practices of neoliberal capitalism, which fragment the working class through precarizations and hierarchies of class, race, and gender.

Santos (2016) illustrated this by mapping memorial narratives of UFAL workers, such as Ubirajara and Mara, who, despite being essential to the campus, recreated the past and projected futures through photographs and dialogues, echoing Freire (1967) in the idea that acts of creation and recreation with reality combat subjective silencing.

Likewise, Unicamp's "Coletivo EJA" by Barbosa and Mesquita (2016) emerges as horizontal resistance, promoting Freirean literacy for Black outsourced women during lunchtime, but perishes with bidding-process company changes, highlighting, with Antunes (2009), the need to reduce working hours in order to humanize lived time and challenge the logic of accumulation that exhausts women's labor power, as denounced by Federici (2017).

Silva (2018) and Corgosinho (2023) deepened the critique of neoliberal outsourcing, which generates turnover, loss of rights, and symbolic exclusion, distinguishing permanent employees from outsourced workers and weakening belonging, while Martins (2019) reveals, through interviews, categories such as “*the gaze that does not see, the uniform that makes invisible, and the broom and bucket instead of the book,*” naturalizing indifference in federal educational institutions.

Souza’s study (2019), inspired by “*The Second Mother*”, unveils the tiredness and conformism in these women’s double working day at IFRN, where gender and survival frustrate the desire for EJA, perpetuating dropout and patriarchal-capitalist oppression, according to Nogueira (2010).

In view of this theme, one may ask: why not change the legislation? This corroborates Bourdieu (2020, p. 139):

Only a political action that really takes into account all the effects of domination that are exercised through the objective complicity between incorporated structures (both among women and among men) and the structures of the great institutions in which not only the masculine order, but also the entire social order, is realized and produced (beginning with the State, structured around the opposition between its “right hand,” masculine, and its “left hand,” feminine, and the School, responsible for the effective reproduction of all the fundamental principles of vision and division, and also organized around homologous oppositions) will be able, in the long term, no doubt, and by working with the contradictions inherent in the different mechanisms or institutions referred to, to contribute to the progressive disappearance of masculine domination.

An amendment to Brazilian labor legislation and to the bidding processes for hiring outsourced workers should establish a maximum working week of 20 or 30 hours in cleaning service contracts. This change, perhaps conditioned on proof of enrollment in Youth and Adult Education (EJA) programs or extension projects, would free up the time needed for study, allowing these outsourced male and female workers to constitute themselves as full educational subjects, fostering educational institutions that are effectively inclusive and that value the dignity of human labor.

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