

Cad. Pagu vol.1 no.se Campinas 2008

Freud's nanny and other nannies*

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ABSTRACT

The Freud-Fliess letters attracted attention to Freud's nanny and also to the role played by nannies in the ideal family of psychoanalytic theory. Included in the models that explained the bourgeois family since the nineteenth century, but excluded by analytic theory, the nanny, ever present in Brazilian upper-class families, still poses a question to the father-mother-infant triangle.

Key words: Nannies-Governesses-Maids, Freud, Domestic Work, Female Migration.

* Published in *cadernos pagu* n.29, Campinas, jul./dez. 2007.

Many thanks to Adriana Piscitelli, Cláudia Fonseca, Cláudia Lemos, Heloisa Pontes, Henrique D.Dentzien, Iara Beleli, Julio Assis Simões, Lília Schwarcz, Sandra Koutsoukos and Camilo Braz, for reading preliminary versions of this paper and for suggestions and commentaries. Thanks also to my students of a 2007 course, with whom I could discuss these ideas.

Poor people! They cannot even retain their own names.
Freud

Around the sixties - precisely in 1964 and 1965 – two nannies were put on the screen by the same actress (Julie Andrews) and made a success in the movies, besides being shown also in many stages around the world. One of them was English, the other one, Austrian.¹ English nannies were, by then, famous in their country and abroad: many a memorialist and a novelist of the 19th century mentioned them, as a source of pleasure as often as a source of displeasure.² Austrian nannies were not so famous, until they were put on the analytical scene by Sigmund Freud.³ Almost all of his patients had a nanny or nurse – some of them had two, what would lead to a curious unfolding of this character, either in the duo good mother/ bad nanny, or, in a kind of duplication, as good nanny/bad nanny.⁴

Freud's interest in nannies began, it seems, with the analysis of the cases that would be known in the analytical literature as those that were in the origin of the 'seduction theory' – and also with his auto-analysis. His interest, though, extended well beyond the time of this emergence, as we will see. Notwithstanding, the recent revisions published in the wake of what is called the 'Freudian wars' did not pay much attention to it, maybe because the authors thought of as a 'minor' or 'domestic' interest.⁵ I will argue here, with the help of many authors who did pay attention to it, that it is a relevant topic, not only for

¹ *Mary Poppins*, produced by Disney and directed by Robert Stevenson, a picture of 1964, and *The sound of music*, directed by Robert Wise, launched in 1965. Both scripts originated from texts written by women- *Mary Poppins* was a successful series published in between 1934 e 1988, by the Australian author Pamela Lyndon Travers (or P. L. Travers, like Harry Potter's J.K. Rowling), and *The sound of music* from an autobiography of the nanny, Maria von Trapp. See Anne McLeer (2002) for an analysis about this film as an expression of the apprehensions about the feminist movement in the sixties in the United States. As I am writing, there are also some TV series with nannies as central characters, besides an "evil nanny" in the series for children *The Fairly OddParents*.

² On the chastisements imposed to some English authors by their nannies, see Yara Frateschi Vieira (1989) and Anne McClintock (1995). This late also refers important people, as Winston Churchill, who had a profound affection for his nanny. One of Freud's first patients was an English nanny and the analysis of another nanny was used by Anna Freud to describe the 'altruistic surrender', a type of projection (1983, cap. X).

³ Here, I am calling nannies the ones that in the literature about the 19th century are called nannies or nurses. Strictly, the *nanny* would be the person to take care of the child in infancy, while the *nurse* would take care of the children when some of them began learning something at home, especially girls (the boys went to school). But in reality, and in fiction, both overlapped. For a good description of their attributions, and their destiny when they got old, see Virginia Woolf, *The Years*. Her sister, Vanessa Bell, captured scenes of nannies and children in the nursery in her paintings. About the familiar context of Virginia Woolf's childhood see the research of Louise De Salvo (1989) – in her case, the seducer was her half-brother and not the nanny.

⁴ Here I am not thinking about the psychological introjection of the good object/ the bad object as proposed by Melanie Klein, as one of my readers understood, but in the sociological relation between nannies/maids and the ones that they took care of in infancy or in childhood - as Freud himself used the family data of poet Heinrich Heine to understand his situation in his essay on jokes.

⁵ See Catherine Meyer, ed., 2005. The less interesting in these wars is the intent to demoralize Freud – after all, who is interested if he did or did not sleep with his sister in-law? The most interesting things are the conflicts of interpretations of his era.

the domestic economy, and the economy of the affects, in t 19th century Vienna, and around the industrializing world, but also for a feminist reflection in Brazil today.

Seduction theory

To begin with the so-called 'seduction theory': in 1896 Freud published a polemic article in which he attributed the origin of hysteria to a sexual trauma suffered by his female – and some male - patients that ranged from sexual harassment to sexual abuse in the hands of a member of the family: uncles (some of whom were revealed as fathers in subsequent publications), brothers, guardians, school colleagues, or nannies. He said that this trauma was “unhappily” caused “too frequently, by a near kin.”⁶ In this article he said that in 18 cases of hysteria until then analyzed by him (six men and twelve women), *all* of them showed this etiology, or cause, of the condition. By the next year, he began doubting his proposition, and wrote to Fliess: “I don't believe in my neurotica [neurosis theory] any more.”⁷ Even if he mentioned the seduction theory in other letters of this year (and also years after), he began, then, to treat these denounces of his patients as a fantasy.⁸

Many contemporary authors addressed themselves to the nanny theme in Freudian texts, but almost all of them were interested in *his* nanny. His nanny, from whom even the name is disputed, could have been a Czech woman, a catholic, who took him to masses and reproved him for being good for nothing.⁹ He wrote: “Today's dream has, under the strongest disguise, produced the following: she was my teacher in sexual matters and complained because I was clumsy and unable to do anything.”¹⁰ And further on: “she washed me in reddish water in which she had previously washed herself”. Telling that his nanny made him steal money to give her, Freud interpreted his dream as a reproach for asking money from his patients for his bad treatment of them, in the same way as “the old woman got money from me for her bad treatment.” In the next letter (October, 15), Freud registers what his mother had told him about the nanny. Asking her if she remembered the nanny, he got the answer: “Of course”, she said, “an elderly person, very clever, she was always carrying you off to some church; when you returned home you preached and told us

⁶ Freud, *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, SE, III, also reproduced as an appendix to Jeffrey M. Masson's book *The Assault on Truth*. Some of these cases must be the ones transcribed in the *Studies on Hysteria*, by Freud and Breuer, originally published in 1895 - among them, the one about the English nurse, Miss Lucy R., and about Katharina – whose seducer, presented in the original edition as her uncle, was, in fact, her father, according to a note by Freud in 1924. Miss Lucy's analysis is also an interesting portrait of the life of Viennese nannies.

⁷ Letter to Fliess, September, 21, 1897. In December he was still doubtful when registering a fragment of a case and added a new motto: “What has been done to you, poor child?”, in a citation of Goethe. See also the letters of 1898 and of 1899, in which this doubt is equally shown.

⁸ The change from the seduction trauma to the seduction fantasy is a controversial one in the analytical literature, but see Freud's essays from 1905 and 1906. And also the revision of Ahbel-Rappe (2006).

⁹ Didier Anzieu (1989) mentions the name most frequently evoked in the Freudian literature, the one of Monika Zajic, but also mentions the possibility of Resi Wittek or Magdalena Kabet as Freud's nanny. Sander Gilman (1993) choose Teresa “Resi” Wittek. Jones (1974) mentions the hostile relations between Czechs and Jews in that region, at the time, including Czech mobilizations against Jews.

¹⁰ Letter to Fliess, October, 4, 1897. This letter, which began in October, 3, seems to have signaled Freud's abandon of the idea of a seduction made by someone of the family: he explicitly excludes his father from any responsibility: “the old men plays no active part in my case, but that no doubt I drew an inference from myself into him.”

all about God Almighty. During my confinement with Anna (two and a half years younger) it was discovered that she was a thief, and all the shiny new *kreuzers* and *zehners* [coins] and all the toys that had been given to you were found in her possession. Your brother Philipp himself fetched the policeman; she then was given ten months in prison.” The fact that Freud used his mother’s remembrance to strengthen the interpretation he made of the dream –in which *he* was the thief - doesn’t matter here, neither his identification with the nanny, observed by some analysts of this famous dream (“I = She”), but it is relevant to consider that it seems that it was with his auto-analysis that the nanny figure began to be seen as a malignant one or, in the best hypothesis, as an ambiguous one.¹¹

In fact, even if the nannies had already been mentioned in some other letters of this same year as seducers, they seemed rather to be connected with the fathers perversion with them – or with some other maid of the house, that commonly also acted as nannies – and not to the perversions of the nannies vis-a-vis the children of the house, even if these scenes were present in his 1896 essay.¹² But the letters also contained a preoccupation with the nannies in his own family. In a note to the letter of November, 14, 1897, for instance, he almost accused the nanny of one of his sons as a castrating person when mentioning that the child had lost his second teeth: “In fact, the first one was *plucked out* in the night of November 9 by the nanny; it could have lasted till November 10.”[Emphasis added.] He will also say, in 1899, writing about another son who had the tendency to harm himself repeatedly: “I attributed that to a little hysteria. He was the only one who received a bad treatment by the nanny.” And, commenting a literary text, he asks where the material for the familial romance – “adultery, illegitimate child, and the like – came from? “Usually from the lower social circles of servant girls. Such things are so common among them that one is never at a loss for material, and it is especially apt to occur if the seductress herself was a person in service. *In all the analyses one therefore hears the same story twice: once as a fantasy about the mother; the second time as a real memory of the maid.*” [Emphasis added.] In the letter about his nanny, Freud did exactly the same: coupled his memory of his old maid to his memory of a journey in which he saw his mother naked.¹³

Nannies, and maids in general, were in fact omnipresent in the families of Freud’s circle in Vienna: Hans, who was phobic about horses, played the horseman with his maid,

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of this dream , and the mention of other analysts that pointed to the possibility of a baptism of Freud by his nanny, and that the water Freud mentions could be a baptismal water, see Didier Anzieu. Anzieu also asks if, maybe, the fact of Freud having had two mothers could be the reason of his interest about some historical figures that also had two mothers: Oedipus, Moses, Leonard. Anzieu: 143, 145. Sander Gilman (1993) talks about the fear, current among Viennese Jews, and of fantasies associated to it, of baptism of Jew children by catholic nannies.

¹² See, for instance, Freud-Fliess, letters of December, 17, 1896; January, 3, 1897; January, 12, 1897 and May, 2, 1897, for scenes of nannies seducers or seduced, In May, 2, 1897, Freud talked about the “sublimation of these young girls in fantasies” and about “some *highly improbable accusations against other persons* , contained in the fantasies”, concluding that “There is a *tragic justice* in the fact that the abasement suffered by the chief of the family before a maid servant is expiated through the degradation of his daughter.” (Emphasis added.)

¹³ “I can only indicate that [...],in my case the ‘prime originator’ was an ugly, elderly, but very clever woman, who told me a great deal about God Almighty and who instilled in me a high opinion of my own capacities; that latter (between two and a half years) my libido toward *matrem* was awakened, namely on the occasion of a journey with her from Leipzig to Vienna, during which we must have spent the night together and there must have been an opportunity of seeing her *nudam*. [...]” Didier Anzieu says that this journey must have taken place when Freud was four years old. (1989:432)

intimating her to take off her clothes; the Wolf-Man who, as Freud, had had a peasant nanny, who also told him religious stories; Dora had two nurses, one whom she loved and the other one whom she detested – besides that, the nanny of the K family was seduced by Mr. K; Anna O. also loved one nurse and had revolting feelings about another; and Anna Freud also have had a catholic nanny, whom she loved. The older daughter of Freud, Mathilde, has had a wet nurse, almost never mentioned, yet the Freud family maintained a relationship with her family for many years.¹⁴

Theorie's seductions¹⁵

It seems that one of the first authors to deal widely with the question of the nanny in Freud's writings was Jim Swan, in a 1974 essay.¹⁶ Swan refers to the pioneering analysis of Max Schur (1972) and to the work of Didier Anzieu, which has had many editions since 1959. According to him, Schur was the first one to notice the discrepancy between the German expression that signified something like "the first seductress [*Urheberin*]" – in contrast with the Freudian theory that postulated the father as the first seducer [*Urheber*] – and the English expression, in the *Standard Edition*, "the prime originator [of my difficulties]". Swan had also noted that Freud's *nanny* was a creation of the English translation, in Ernest Jones's biography, who used the word *nanny* for the German expression that meant maid [*Kinderfrau*].¹⁷ Swan calls attention to the question of the

¹⁴ Hans case is in the *Standard Edition*, vol. X. For a feminist critique that attributes Hans phobias to his fear of his mother – that spanked his small sister and menaced him with castration – see Barbara Creed (1993); Doras's case is in the SE, vol.VII. The accounting of the choice of Dora's name for this patient is in *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; the observation of Freud about the maids in the epigraph of this text also comes from there – he used the name of the nanny of his sister, a name attributed to her, since originally she had the same name as his sister, her mistress. The Wolf-Man case (SE, XVII) is also analyzed by Ginzburg (1989), who observed that in this essay, published in 1918, the seduction theory, supposedly laid aside in 1897, re-emerged in Freud's textual scene. The Wolf-man also had a religious and amorous nanny, besides an intractable English nurse – and, even if his seductress had been officially registered as his sister, there is at least one mention of his seduction by the nanny (Ahbel-Rappe, 2006:182). About Anna Freud, see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography (1992). About Anna it was also said that she had had two mothers: her mother, Martha, and Aunt Minna, sister of Martha who lived with the Freud family. According to Young-Bruehl, Freud talked with Lou Andréas-Salomé about the daughter they shared, since it seems that she succeeded Freud in the analysis of Anna. Also in Lou Andreas-Salomé- Anna Freud, 2006. This excess of mothers that Anna had should be analyzed more carefully, since she became an expert in child analysis. See, in that context, M. J. Burlingham, 2002. It is worth mentioning that Anna, beginning in the twenties, and after the operations of Freud, became his *nurse* – occupying Marthas's place – until his death, in 1939, becoming also the guardian angel of the psychoanalytical heritage of the family. Anzieu remarks that nanny in Czeck is Nana (1989:143). See also Lou Andréas-Salomé/Anna Freud, 2006 about the wet nurse of Mathilda and her family.

¹⁵ The formulation is D. Anzieu's: "I am trying to dissociate myself from two very prolific tendencies in the last years, one that accuses Freud for abandoning the seduction theory, the other one of having abandoned himself to the seductions of theory" (1989:14) [My translation.].

¹⁶ Jim Swan, 1974. I owe thanks to Swan for sending me a copy of his article, not available in the digitalized version of the journal.

¹⁷ The names seem to be applied to both – maids took care of the house *and* of children. For analysis of the social relevance of domestic service in France and England – generally done by single young girls coming from the countryside, see the classic from Louise Tilly and Joan Scott (1978). Both show that the advance of industrialization did not take women off domestic service: in England, at the end of XIX century, 40% of the feminine labor force was engaged in this type of service and two thirds came from a rural origin. Also, two

Oedipus complex: “What needs explanation is how the theory of the Oedipus complex accounts for the boy’s guilty impulses toward his mother but ignores the boy’s arousal at the hands of his nurse, especially in view of how much more attention his nurse gets from Freud than his mother does.” (p.19) Discussing the possible interpretations of Freud’s dreams along his auto-analysis, Swan notes the relevance of the nanny’s presence in his development until his conclusion that “the remarkable circumstance” is that Freud, in effect, had *two* mothers, “his actual mother – whose nakedness he can only mention in Latin – and his nanny whom he remembers in association with numerous disturbing sexual experiences. Having two such mothers, and the luck of having the ‘bad’ ugly mother banished from his life when he was only two and a half, allows Freud to maintain a secure split between the internalized good and bad mothers.” (p.34) “Unconsciously, Freud’s nurse was his seductress and shamer, his mother the pure object of guilty desire.”(p.50)

The good mother and the bad nanny, or the good nanny and the bad nanny, will from then on be permanently present in Freud analyses, as if many of his patients were *repeating* his development as a boy.¹⁸ In any case, nannies or nurses were always present in the Viennese’s bourgeois households, despite the fact that, as Swan notes, in the case of the Freud family, his father was permanently at the edge of poverty. It is not possible, in this brief account, to make justice to Swan’s essay, but it is worth noting that he made a long digression about the social relations underlying Freud’s boyhood, showing that the “bourgeois oedipal man struggles to preserve his distinction and independence from those on whose bodily labor he in fact depends for his existence and status” (pp. 53-54) – an observation, as we will see further on, which will sediment most of Anne MacClintock’s analysis of Victorian England. And he concludes: “Thus Freud’s discovery of the Oedipus complex emerges not only from memories of a small boy’s guilty, aggressive lust for his mother, but from memories of dependence on her, too – a dependence remembered, however as the seduction of a small bourgeois, Austrian boy by a Czech working-class woman in a province of the Austrian Empire still recovering from the Revolution of 1848.” (p.64)

After Swan, Jane Gallop was one that analyzed the relevance of the nanny on the analytical scene, beginning with the discussion of Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous (1975) about Dora’s case, observing that the figure of the nanny, or nurse, did not exhaust itself in Freud’s identification with a nanny or a maid in this case, but “has a decisive,

thirds of them were single. ‘Maids’ and ‘nannies’ came from this population. I do not have data for Austria but the history of the last maid of Freud’s family, Paula Fichtl – and her tribulations, that included an internation in a foreigners camp, in Britain, during Second World War- as a catholic girl, from rural origin, who got old in the domestic service, in the space of 54 years, seems exemplar. See Detlef Berthelsen (1996). Paula ended her life in an Austrian asylum but was very important in the organization of the Freud Museum, when the Berggasse, 19 became one: she knew where everything was years before and helped to put things back in place.

Her history seems very similar to that of Hannah Cullwick, mentioned below: in 1972 a physician said that her health problems - when she was 70 – were derived from “a neurotic obligation to work”.

¹⁸ The sociology of the nannies was analyzed in a condensed mode by Jack Goody. Searching for the etymology of the word, Goody remarks that, since the end of the 16 century, maids offered ‘services’ in more than one sense, since ‘nanny’ was also, in the dictionaries of that time, a synonymous of ‘prostitute’, so reinforcing the sense of the ‘bad nanny’ (1969:242). Goody did not mention the psychoanalytical literature and seems to have arrived at his conclusions in an independent way from it. He observed, also, that some dictionaries made the word to derive from the names of Anne, Anna or Hannah.

structural relation to psychoanalysis in general.” “The family never was, in any of Freud’s texts, completely closed off from questions of economic class. And the most insistent locus of that intrusion into the family circle (intrusion of the symbolic into the imaginary) is the maid/governess/nurse. As Cixous says, ‘she is the hole in the social cell’.”¹⁹

Cixous’s reading of Dora’s case, here resumed by Gallop, is that what Freud did not stand for in his relation to Dora was the fact of being dispensed by her – as would be the case with a nurse or a nanny – at a fortnight’s notice.²⁰ “Neither Dora nor Freud can tolerate identification with the seduced and abandoned governess.” (p.145) For Freud, being so ‘feminized’ would signify to accept the place of women circulating in an exchange of women made by men. For Dora, it would signify that she, and notwithstanding her social position, was also an object in this exchange. But, contrary to what Gallop says, this was not an analysis of Freud *and* Dora, antedating Lévi-Strauss analyses – it was Dora who was enraged for “being handed to Herr K as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife”.²¹ If anyone, she was the one who anticipated Lévi-Strauss theory on women’s circulation.

The intrusion of nannies –or of subaltern classes – in the bourgeois households would be summed up by Anne McClintock in 1995, this time adding the race variable to the research universe. She will also resume the question of Freud’s nanny. She summarizes this part of her research as the analysis of “one of the most successful vanishing acts of modern history”, the vanishing of domestic labor.²² And, as she indicates very well, it took a lot of work to make out an appearance of the leisure of the middle-class housewife. The excellent iconography she exhibits in the chapter dedicated to domestic work almost explains by itself her argument. The curious story of the S/M couple Arthur J. Munby and Hannah Culwick – his wife and domestic servant – is almost thrust to the background in this analysis. Munby, who had the habit of picturing and drawing women from the working classes, and also of turning them black in his drawings, had also had a working class nanny, called Hannah, and a delicate and distant mother.²³

¹⁹ Jane Gallop, 1992:144. As Ginzburg, Gallop also remarks that many years after supposedly having abandoned the ‘seduction theory’, Freud mentions it in 1931(*Female sexuality*, SE, vol.XXI): “ The part played in starting [phallic activity] by nursery hygiene is reflected in the very common phantasy which makes the mother or nurse into a seducer... *Actual seduction, too, is common enough*; it is initiated either by other children or someone in charge of the child [nursemaid] who wants to soothe it, or send it to sleep or make it dependent on them.” Gallop. id.ibid., interpolations hers; emphasis added.

²⁰In *his* analysis, Freud said that Dora did not want to be treated like a nanny or nurse because her seducer proposed to her using the same terms that he used to seduce the nanny of his children. (*Fragment of a case of hysteria*, p.106). So it is interesting that he choose the name of a nanny for her.

²¹ *Fragment*, p.34. Gallop expresses it this way: “ Dora *and* Freud have discovered a fragment of the general structure which thirty years later Claude Lévi-Strauss will call elementary kinship structures, that is, the exchange of women between men” (p.132, emphasis added). She repeats the same observation at page 147. On Freud resistance in identifying himself with feminine positions in his dreams, see also Anzieu and Swan (*passim*).

²² Page 164.

²³ It is not the case to repeat the coincidences of the names that reappears in the Freudian family romance, or in the universe of patients and analysts- that also appears here – but it is worth mentioning that in one of his drawings Munby identifies himself with the delicate female figure of Victorian women, in front of a gross, and darkened, masculine figure of a woman worker, evoking Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis about the ‘feminization’ of men from the dominant classes, not analogous to a ‘masculinization’ of women from the working classes. On Bourdieu and the ‘ masculine domination’, see M.Corrêa, 1999.

It would be very difficult to follow the complex history told by McClintock here, but it is worthwhile to remember that she invokes a notion advanced by Julia Kristeva – abjection – to underline that “the abject is something rejected from which one does not part”. (p.71) The notion, coming from Mary Douglas essay on pollution, could have been put to a better use theoretically in her treatment of race, as we will see. As she proposes to articulate the notions of gender, race, class, and sexuality, the author tries to show how the *threshold* figure of the nanny/governess/maid (already evoked by H. Cixous and J. Gallop), always between the house and the street, the family and lewdness, expresses the Victorian splitting between the good and the bad woman – the saints and the whores – and “has its origins, then, not in an universal archetype, but in the class structure of the household.” (p.87) It was “the contradiction between the barely repressed power of the waged female domestic worker and the relative lack of power of the unwaged wife” that was at the roots of this duplicity. So, it is a pity that she did not include the marker of *age* in the list of notions to be considered, since she fails completely in the apprehension of the perspective of childhood in the relations with the nanny – the bad nanny in opposition to the good mother, even if the latter was a violent one.

All the subtlety that she demonstrated in her analysis of class-relations in Victorian England is left aside when the author moves to South Africa, more specifically to accompany the history of novelist and feminist Olive Schreiner.²⁴ Since Schreiner denounces the domination of the adult *ayahs* – black women – over children, her fiction did not gather any sympathy from McClintock.²⁵ As her rendering of domesticity in England had a strong inflection in class relations, her analysis of South Africa is strongly inflected by the *color* question, much more than by the *racial politics* question.²⁶ When retracing the conflict as between *Blacks and Whites*, the author forgets the nuances she had registered at the beginning of her work – when she showed, for instance that white Irish were not only *socially* blackened as a way of disqualification in Victorian England, but also morally downgraded. So, race turns out as a synonymous of color, and the political aspect of racism is lost.²⁷

²⁴ McClintock (1995), chap. 7.

²⁵ Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), self-taught, and who also had the experience of working as a governess, was the daughter of a couple of missionaries – a German father and a British mother – who went to South Africa to work and that had to endure a situation of extreme poverty. Her mother spanked her cruelly and frequently – which is maybe the origin of her fight, later, against the laws of spanking the Blacks of her country. Since a small child, she used to escape to a world of fantasy, day-dreaming like Anna O. and Anna Freud were said of doing. Her first novel, *The story of an African farm*, published in 1883, first under a masculine alias, earned her an instant celebrity in Victorian England, and many leading intellectuals, among them Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Eleanor Marx, became her friends. For sensible portraits of her, as a feminist and activist, and of her works, see Doris Lessing (1973), Ruth Brandon (1990) and, specially, her own letters (1988). McClintock misread many factual points of her biography and also when she says that her attitudes towards prostitution were a projection of her own vulnerable position and that she did not have a real acquaintance with the lives of prostitutes – see Brandon, cit.

²⁶ *Race politics*, instead of *color*, could have helped to understand the complex articulation between ethnicity, nationality, gender (in the case of Schreiner, the complicated relationship between a German weak father, an aggressive English mother, and the nationality, not yet developed, of being a South-African), and religion – in the case of the natives, as well as in the case of the colonial agents. Not to speak of the mestizos of black and white.

²⁷ Yet, she was very sensitive to the political aspects of racism throughout her book – it is only when she turns to the analysis of Olive Schreiner’s fiction on the black *ayahs* that she traces that sharp division line –

As the author herself observed, color itself is not enough to be a sign of otherness – in the case of Schreiner, the difference is also given by age: in her fiction, she shows a female *child* dealing with oppressive *adults*. The fact that she became an activist, opposing the racialist positions of her country as an adult, shows well her lucidity about its government when grown up. McClintock also loses sight of the fact that the Schreiner's anti-racist struggle could have been produced in an analogous manner as the fascination Munby had for working women – that is, in the daily conviviality of both of them, as children, with working and Black women. The notion of abjection supposes something that we *incorporate* in childhood and from which we cannot get free: a fascination or a repulsion.

Leaving aside the rich uses of psychoanalysis she made of in the case of Munby/Culwick, McClintock treats Olive Schreiner as a privileged colonialist, even if Schreiner's family was a poor one, and even if she describes, she doesn't analyse the aggressions Schreiner suffered as a child, her auto-mutilations, her day-dreams and allegories, her asthma – a long-life companion of her – and “an obscure sexual calamity that befell her”[275]: all of which made Schreiner very alike her Viennese contemporaries - and her reactions indeed made McClintock dub her protest as “hysterical” [264]. Seeing her sorrows as “a peculiarly colonial predicament”, part of a colonial culture “which has no memory”, McClintock loses sight of her human condition and reduces her position to a paramount example of “imperial faith”, even if she commended her “extraordinary foresight of African politics” and lamented that “her political essays... remain by far the most neglected aspect of all her writing” - a neglect she didn't remediate[281,293].²⁸ Being white, the oppressed and humiliated small girl in the fictions of Schreiner could not benefit from McClintock's sympathy given the fact that her (female) oppressors were black – so, the complex articulation proposed about race, class, gender and sexuality is lost here as a fundamental dimension of the constitution of sexuality is lost – childhood experience.²⁹ Such experience, Schreiner took to her fiction and to her political writings, not to the divan. Not being a Jew, and not living in Vienna, she escaped the fate of many of her female contemporaries, as Dora and Anna O., who received a diagnosis that accompanied them through life and who showed symptoms very similar to Schreiner's own, the symptoms of women who did not share the social conventions of their time, and their families – but only

blacks against whites – as an overall and sovereign notion, forgetting all nuances, as age, for instance, which I think are very important in the case of maids, both in South Africa and in Brazil.

The recent polemics on the race question in Brazil, in the academic literature as well as in the media, has emphasized *ad nauseam* that *race* does not exist. See, for example, the issue of *Veja* magazine of June 6, 2007. *Racism*, notwithstanding, persists. See the important work by Sander Gilman(1993) about racism in Germany in Freud's era and, about the debate in the United States today, also part of the debate in Brazil, Sears and all (2000).

²⁸ For Freud and Breuer (1974:58), *Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences*. (Original emphasis.) Even if she uses Jim Swan analysis, McClintock did not improve the analogy between Freud's and Olive's cases, in which both accepted a good mother (one Jew/ the other British) and rejected a bad nanny (a catholic, and Czech one/ and an African one): the Victorian cesure, resulting from the structure of the domestic household, does not extend itself to the colonies, and does not take in account the ethnic debates.

²⁹ As she calls attention to the “resistance and resentment” of the nannies – and not to the dominance exerted on the child – McClintock therefore seems to be oblivious that it was exactly this dominance that, on a reverse mode, was insisted upon by black women on the feminist scene, that made Schreiner discover early on the myth of a “universal feminist solidarity” (p.267).

to be so labeled by one of our contemporary feminist writers.³⁰ To reduce this complex web of experiences – in Africa, in England, and her wide web of friendship with contemporary writers and her political and intellectual life, always beset by ailments is, to say the least, to impoverish the career of one of the most interesting Victorian women.³¹

Here, we would need a long digression about the uses, which are implicit in her analysis, about the notion of culture – in this case, colonial culture. I will be content, however, to mention an observation from Elisabeth Roudinesco - that may open the way for such a discussion - about Jung, who “sustained that every people had a different mentality from its neighbors and that, being so, it was necessary, to the well-being of science, to construct a psychology adapted to the collective soul of every nation.” “It is the soul of the nation. It is the collective ‘thing’, occult and devilish through which man keeps being a sleepwalker.” (1989:176/7)³²

Guilhermina: our nannies

In 1912, Augusto dos Anjos (1884-1914) evoked in a poem Freud’s experience: “My wet nurse Guilhermina/stole the coins that the Doctor gave me”, and concludes: “You had stole the coins, but I, my nurse/ I have stolen more/ Since I stole the breasts/ Who gave milk to your daughter!”³³ This is one of the few references about the fact that black wet-nurses had to abandon their children – or to give milk as a second chance to them – when they were called, or hired, to feed white children.

In an analysis very similar to McClintock’s, Sandra Graham (1992) made a careful evaluation of the relations between maids – among them the wet-nurses, that were best paid –and masters and mistresses at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twenty centuries in Rio de Janeiro. The overall data are analogous to data from the United States and Europe – a majority of women dedicated to domestic work and, among them, a majority of black (here) and single women. Graham also evokes some famous characters from Brazilian society who have had relations with nannies or maids. Machado de Assis, for instance, who did not pay his maids, and Ruy Barbosa, who claimed to have to recur to

³⁰ It seems curious, as she was also a champion against anti-semitism in her country, that Olive appeared to her husband, after a long separation, in the year of her death, as a “small and dark Jewess”. Brandon (1990:91)

³¹ See Doris Lessing’s essay.

³² [My translation.] In another essay I developed a discussion on this theme (Corrêa, 2007). And, even if it seems that Roudinesco is aghast against Jung, in order to contrast him with Freud, she points to a politically relevant consequence of the idea of “ different people/ different cultural logics”, for a long time present in Anthropological debates - implicit here in the analysis of metropolis and colonies.

³³ Ricordanza della mia gioventu, in *Eu* (1912), cited by Koutsoukos (2006).[My translation.] The photograph of the poet, ten years old, complete with boots and a little leather whip in his hands (maybe it was a photographic convention of the time?), evokes the one of Munby used by McClintock in her book – but here, the signs are reversed: the elite of property landed owners was in decline and the poetry of Augusto dos Anjos was an expression, individual and familiar, of this decline, and not of an ‘imperial power’. It seems that the poet fell in love with a subaltern young woman whom is said to have been killed by orders of his mother and that she had left a permanent imprint in his poetry. See www.vidaslusofonas.pt/augusto_dos_anjos.htm

a wet-nurse for his daughter, since his wife could not do the feeding.³⁴ Here, as in Europe, the maid/ nanny was a crucial figure for the keeping of the family. In both places she was stigmatized - the emphasis here being more in the possibility of the transmission of diseases than in the transmission of bad habits, but, here as there, it was poverty that signaled a danger for the family. Here and there, also, the maids/nannies were, sometimes, objects of desire of the masters – but the seduction of children seems absent from the literature, at least in what respects small children, in Brazil. It seems that, in the Brazilian case, color was a kind of veil that colored poverty – always invoked first by social reformers, be it on their attack on slums, be it on the attack to the *miasmas* that came to the city from the spaces inhabited by the poor and that menaced the households in which this poor people (poor *female* people, beginning with the slave ones) made an intrusion.³⁵ But, certainly, poverty was black.

In a beautiful essay in which she retrieves the (small) national bibliography on the nanny theme, Rita Laura Segato begins pointing out to the discussions, on the context of the Abolition debate, a propos the evils of “contamination and moral corruption that the black presence was introducing in the intimacy of the masters’ homes”.³⁶ What means that the female black women were present, first as wet-nurses, then as nannies (*amas-secas*) that did not give their milk to the children.³⁷ Showing that the prevalence of women in domestic work is the continuation of a long tradition analyzed by Tilly and Scott in their study about the industrial revolution, and by Graham for 19th Century Brazil, Segato mentions the official statistics of 2006: 94.3% of domestic workers are women and 61.8% of them are black, or *pardas*. She also mentions that, in her researches on Afro-Brazilian religions, she found that *Iemanjá* was the “legitimate mother” of the *orixás* – the biological and juridical mother – and that *Oxum* was their “surrogate mother”. *Iemanjá* was the

³⁴ Gilberto Freyre also remembered some historical characters who mentioned their black nannies, as Silvio Romero and Joaquim Nabuco. About Nabuco, he mentions a letter of a friend of his father who had to accompany him to the Court: “The boy is happier now that I told him that his nanny would be with him” . (1984:354). It would be worthwhile to compare this remembrances to the ones registered by McClintock about English literary and political characters, to think about the importance of nannies in the life of so many public men in the nineteenth century.

³⁵ Graham’s work, published in 1988, was originally called *House and Street* and was openly tributary of Roberto Da Matta’s analysis in *Carnavais, malandros e heróis [Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes]*.

³⁶ Rita Laura Segato, 2006:5;[my translation]. The comeback of wet-nurses in the United States – and their introduction in China- were noticed as a scandal in newspapers and magazines in 2007. See, for instance, in the magazine *Isto é*, May, 2, 2007, the discussion about this comeback in the international scene and the note saying that this practice is banned in Brazil by The Health Services. About the growing presence of ‘imported’ nannies and maids in the United States, coming from poor countries, see Barbara Ehrenreich e Arlie R. Hochschild, eds., 2004.

³⁷ Ignoring the South and North American systems of slavery, McClintock says, in a passage about nannies in Britain : “*Surely no other culture* has divided female sexuality so distinctly along class lines. Working-class women were figured as biologically driven to lechery and excess; upper-class women were naturally indifferent to the deliriums of the flesh.”(1995:86, emphasis added) This ignorance links itself with an analysis (like in the case of Olive Schreiner) that excludes slavery from the debate on the colonial project. In America, women-workers were, before the constitution of classes, the slaves. See Graham(1992). See also the reactions of the socialist feminists to an analogous division in Russia, in the question of serfdom in the biography of Alexandra Kollontai (C. Porter, 1980). Since her book is a careful deconstruction of the Victorian image of the fragile woman, feminist socialists, or socialist feminists, are strangely absent from McClintock’s analyses – and particularly in what refers to the links established by Olive Schreiner with the London socialists.

equivalent of the English mother, registered in the literature already cited: the “cold mother, distant and indifferent”. The author did not develop the discussion on the attributes of *Oxum*, but uses some iconographic material – as of the picture of D. Pedro II with his black nanny, attributed to Debret – to show the importance of the “black mother” in the national scene. She also uses another interesting analysis that shows the transformation that the photographic images of children and their nannies suffered from 1862 through 1885. “Until the 1880s, the photographs captured children in compositions that were in vogue in the international scene at the time; but, in Brazil, the typical European scene of a mother with child near her face was substituted by the black nanny in place of the mother.” But, around the 1880s the compositions show the progressive intention of effacing the figure of the black nanny that, nevertheless, continues to sustain the baby on her lap so that he could be photographed, and “the black nannies became a trail in the pictures: a hand, a pulse, until they disappeared altogether from the images”; “at first shown with pride, her full face present, then held back from the images, not focused and not shown, till they are entirely banned from the national scene.”³⁸

Disappointing her readers for not treating the question posed in the title of her essay – *Brazilian Oedipus: the double negation of gender and race* – the author did not deal explicitly with the question posed by Jim Swan: how is it that a child denies its first experience with the nanny and transfers it to the mother. But she gives some insights about the answer. Maybe the child does not deny it, but is ambivalent about it, as the notion proposed by Mary Douglas suggests – abjection also means ambivalence.

Gilberto Freyre’s proposal is well known; when he analyzed relations between the masters and the slaves, he said, often enough, that it was in the intimate society with the black mothers that the attraction of white men to black women was developed: “From the slave or *ayah* who cradled us. Who gave us milk. Who gave us food, using her hand to amalgamate the nourishment she gave to us. From the old black woman who told us the first animals and ghost stories. From the first *mulata* who freed us from a worm in the foot. From that one that initiated us in physical love and gave us, in a creak bed, the first sensation of being a complete man”. (1984:283; my translation.) Sociological romanticisms aside, Freyre, as Graham, makes a convincing portrait of the ‘intrusion’ of the women ‘of color’ in the intimate life of the white (or not so white) Brazilian family, one that resulted, it seems, also in an intimate society between whites and black (females) in our country – even if the vice-versa was almost never the case.

It seems that this attraction has been congealed in the Brazilian myth of the *mulata*, but if this myth could only be created by the negation of the black woman (Corrêa, 1996) and if the ‘black mother’ gives place to the *mulata* in the Brazilian imaginary, does it suggest an ambivalence between the white and the black mothers?

What is denied and incorporated in this affective conviviality in childhood is still to be analyzed. But, observing any Brazilian middle-class neighborhood today it is possible to notice that the conviviality of white children with black nannies is not only a historical relationship, but it is firmly grounded to this day among us. Maybe we could advance in our questioning about what is denied and what is incorporated in these childhood experiences using McClintock’s suggestion about the duplicity present in the Victorian household – but, maybe, no longer thinking about the distinction between the good-mother

³⁸ Segato is here citing from the important work of Rafaela de Andrade Deiab, *A memória afetiva da escravidão*; [my translation]. *Revista de História da Biblioteca Nacional*, 1 (4), October, 2005.

and the bad- mother (the saint and the whore), but in the ambiguity that the figure of the wet nurse/nanny/maid incorporated in nineteenth century Brazilian society and incorporates till this day.

In an important research about the pictures of Blacks in Brazil, Sandra Koutsoukos (2006) dedicates a whole chapter to the wet-nurses, not only making a good analysis about a series of pictures of black women with white children in their laps, but also describing the social perception about these women, either by medical doctors or by literary fiction, or about the relationships they maintained with the families they served. It is very clear that the wet-nurse expressed, *in the same person*, the duplicity which has been appointed in the literature between the mother and the nanny. She is the explicit figure of dubiousness – she could take to the homes she worked for all evils that maybe she carried, or all the goodness and care expected from someone who gives her milk to a child not her own. Either attacked on the medical literary works or lovely remembered by families, the wet-nurse embodied an ambiguous figure that could be good and bad *at the same time*.³⁹

This ambiguity would only be solved by the firm defense, on the part of medical doctors, of mothers breastfeeding their babies, and the subsequent attack on “mercenary nurses” – black and white, that came with the massive immigration - when this ambiguity would be resolved in the duplicated figure good mother/bad nurse. But, with the persistency of the use of poor and dark women as nannies, this ambiguity returns.⁴⁰ And it will also be relocated in other terms, exposing the anxieties of the families about this figure – that, when seen in a benign light, ‘is as if part of the family’, but, in a malignant light, it is someone who brings the evils of the world to inside the home.

In a recent discussion, in a workshop on Human Rights Committee in the Brazilian Senate, a Father Claudio Antonio Delfino, expresses his anguish about lesbian nannies:

“For instance, I have a niece of one year and two months. Imagine that we put someone as a nanny of this baby and discover that she was a homosexual and ill-treated the child, which is defenseless. The question is: after discovering this I would have, or have not, the right to dispensing this person, because she was treating the child in a manner the family considered improper?”⁴¹

³⁹ See, for instance, a criminal process, referred by Koutsoukos, about a slave wet-nurse that, on knowing that her deal to care for a child included her liberation at the end of it, began behaving herself in a different manner than what was expected. This led to a controversial judicial battle between her lawyers and those of her masters: a ‘darling’ at the beginning, she was next persecuted for her ‘ingratitude’ (2006:204).

⁴⁰ This ambiguity goes well beyond the color-line: in the case of wet-nurses, they were rejected not only because they were Black – even if it was implicit in the medical discourses – but also, maybe mainly, because they were poor, sick, and ‘mercenaries’. See Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2004) for some analyses of similar relationships between White children in rich countries and their poor, and also darker, nannies. These contemporary scenes evoke many cases referred by Koutsoukos for Brazil. As it happened with the domestic labor of poor or slave women that made possible the existence of an ‘idle’ elite in the past, today this invisible work from ‘Third World’ women make possible that their sisters from the ‘First World’ engage themselves in professional work outside the home. About the relationships between mistresses and maids in the Brazilian contemporary scene, see Azeredo (1988) and Kofes (2001).

⁴¹ [My translation.] The workshop was convened to debate the Law Project 122/2006, that proposes to define “crimes resulting from gender, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination or prejudices” One of these crimes is the dispense of an employee by the employer. Father Delfino is responsible for the Episcopal Commission for Life and the Family for the National Council of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). See Simões, 2007, who referred this meeting to me, for the context of the debate as a whole.

More than a century after have being supposedly abandoned, the seduction theory continues to be evoked to name the dangers (or phantoms) that haunts the families – forgetting, or negating, the inside dangers that were put in scene by various analysts, for a long time. This is the scene in question in this debate: the threats to children come from the inside or from the outside of the family?⁴² In the debate on the seduction of children, the first answer seems to point to an internal menace, which is reinforced by the contemporary bibliography on sexual abuse and incest.⁴³ A second answer points to outside dangers – signaled by aggressions on class, ethnic, race or religious bases – which, entering by the back doors, as if it where, menace the supposed peaceof families. Or, as Gallop asked, is the family open or closed to the world?

Maybe to think about how nannies, from all parts of the world, particularly those who come from poor countries to rich countries, or from poorer parts to the richer parts of poor countries, have been important as second mothers of children around the world, could help us to think about how the intersection of the *socially* subordinated categories (of which nannies always are a part, either as part of ethnic migrant groups, or of subaltern groups, girls or women recruited to take care of children and who were recruited because of their race, class or age position) and the *age* of the categories subordinated to them -the children whom they take care of –maybe it could lead us to reflect about the relevance of the infant life for our adult life.

The pest

I read somewhere that, when entering New York, in his first trip to America, Freud commented to Jung: “They do not know that we are bringing them the pest”. The pest, as a metaphor of something brought from the exterior to the interior, certainly continues to spray itself until this day, in the realm of Freudian history: there is always a letter, an interview, or a document never seen before that shows that things were not really as it was thought they were, that what was shown was not *all* that was to be shown, or that what was shown did not corresponded to the analysis made. That is, the fantasies about this history are part of an interminable analysis or an analysis without end.⁴⁴

It seems that the same occurs with the nannies/ maids/nurses – all the discussion we have accompanied shows a certain unanimity in the analysis: they are an external danger (from outside to inside, from the street to the home, from the public to the private) that put at risk the existing familial relationships. The nannies/maids, as keepers of an old history, acknowledged by the few, bring to the interior of the household a pest that, finally, expresses itself in some manner. The recent [2007] news of a spanking without reason of a

⁴² I am not sure if *O encontro marcado* [*A Time to Meet*], a 1956 novel by Fernando Sabino, was one of the first urban novels to put in scene the importance of the maid’s room for male adolescents’ sexual initiation, but surely his observations made visible certain familiar habits of middle-class youngsters. These familiar habits are still being represented in the Brazilian soap-operas till now. An analysis of Brazilian middle-class architecture, focusing on the maid’s room would, certainly be an useful tool for feminist discussions.

⁴³ But see Ian Hacking (1999) thoughts about the social construction of the idea of child abuse as an exacerbation of contemporary sensibility that also imposes a restriction on adults to helping children in public places.

⁴⁴ See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Sonu Shamdasani, 2006.

domestic servant – and other poor women – in Rio de Janeiro, in a bus stop, by middle-class youngsters seems to point to a greater problem than the one expressed in the newspapers *fait-divers*, or in the indignant letters of readers or editorials of the newspapers: a structural intersection between the classes in this country, historically present for many years, and which refers, maybe, to the question of the young people trying to live out in the streets the abjection they incorporated at home. *Abjection* being a notion that expresses incorporation and expulsion- brings inside and puts out. Maybe us, as feminists, should think more about it.

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⁴⁵ When published, I refer the titles in English of books consulted in Portuguese; if not otherwise noted, though, the citations are from the original in English.

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Translated from **Cadernos Pagu**, Campinas, n.29 p. 61-90, July/Dec. 2007.