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Social Representations of Human Rights:

The case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship

Ingrid Le Duc Castro Reguera

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London School of Economics and Political Science

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To my parents:
Blanca Castro Reguera,
Ing. Juan V. Le Duc

THESES

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I investigate social representations of human rights in the context of the relationship between an employer (*patrona*) and a domestic worker (*muchacha*) in Mexican middle-class households. I examine how the theory of social representations can contribute to the understanding of the definition and practice of human rights. By looking at the negotiation of rights and duties in the household, I show how lay ideas about human rights are grounded in lived experiences which go beyond the formal legal definitions of human rights. Two aspects of social representations are explored. Firstly, drawing on the work of Doise (1978), social representations are considered as mediators of intergroup relations, in specific the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. Secondly, the thesis considers social representations as a form of social knowledge expressed through practices. This is done by identifying the practices which define the boundaries between *patrona* and *muchacha* in the context of the household. A detailed ethnography of four Mexican households, individual interviews and focus groups with patronas and muchachas, and individual interviews with community workers, comprise the range of techniques used to generate data while content analysis and space analysis are used to systematize and interpret the material. The analysis of textual data was supported by Nu*dist. Ethnographic and qualitative research methods (participant observation, individual and group in-depth interviews) are used to explore how practices and social thinking intertwine. The results show that the relationship between *patronas* and *muchachas* constructs social representations of human rights guided by the notion of difference. This difference organizes the distribution of space and the negotiations of rights and duties within households. It also overpowers the competing representation of fraternal feelings and gender solidarity, which anchored in religious beliefs and tradition, constitutes an important component in the relationship between *patronas* and *muchachas*. The overall representational field uncovered retrieves notions of blood, ethnic group and social status to explain the problem of difference and to justify the violation of human rights commonly taking place in Mexican households. The study suggests that these findings should be considered in the structuring of human rights campaigns and policies.

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CHAPTER 1

I n t r o d u c t i o n

- 1.1 Framing human rights as a social psychological phenomenon
- 1.2 An adequate theory of human rights
- 1.3 Characteristics of domestic service in Mexico
- 1.4 Central questions of the thesis
- 1.5 Overall structure of the thesis

In this chapter I introduce the central argument of the thesis, concerning the study of social representations of human rights in the context of the relationship between an employer and a domestic worker. This initial chapter has five main sections. The first introduces the central problem of the thesis, how to conceptualise human rights in social psychology: as an element of inter-group relations or as practices expressing ideas. This section also introduces the context of the research. The second section outlines the theoretical framework used to understand the problem, which is the theory of social representations. This is used to conceptualise human rights in the case study selected which is the relationship between employer and domestic worker (*patrona* and *muchacha* respectively) within Mexican middle-class households. The aforementioned is the objective of the third section of this introduction. In the fourth section, I present the central questions posed by the thesis. This introduction concludes with a brief overview of the thesis.

1. Framing human rights as a social psychological phenomenon

This thesis is the product of two somewhat different lines of inquiry. One is social psychological in nature, as I look for an appropriate theoretical framework to contribute to our understanding of the definition and practice of human rights. My intention is to open a path for discussing the universality of human rights from a social psychological perspective. The other inquiry is sociocultural and concerns my own country, Mexico. The study aims to understand Mexican women's contradictory attitudes towards the household, as women claim rights outside the home and complain of being kept indoors performing housework, but also defend the home from public regulations by safeguarding it as their private domain. In this thesis, I attend both lines of inquiry by examining the relationship between employers (*patronas*) and domestic workers (*muchachas*) within Mexican urban middle-class households.

2. An adequate theory for human rights

Regarding my first inquiry, I draw on social psychology's short past and long history (Farr, 1996). I do this in order to explain the reason why I focus on the recent literature to frame my approach to human rights as a social psychological phenomenon. It is my understanding that social psychology has displayed more a curiosity, rather than an obligation to take a stand with regard to human rights. Conceptualisations in the discipline depart from Murchison's (1929) early rejection of universal laws, as he believed them to be illusory. In his work he explored how liberty, ownership and happiness are principles '*attached to forms of behaviour which are either difficult or impossible for the majority of individuals in any community*' (p.60, *in original*). He highlighted that individual protection can only be achieved through a community's own regulations, while the need for such regulations limits freedoms. After the Second World War, a new generation of social psychologists applied experimental methods to find what drove people to commit atrocities that infringe universal rights, and thus research aimed to find the reasons for human cruelty and injustice. One example is the work of Lewin (1936; 1943; 1944) examining the experience of German authoritarianism. When comparing the capacity of German and American to achieve a change of mind, he suggested that collective consent was likely to shift into democracy.

Yet, another relevant body of research in the field was that of Rokeach (1960). His prominent work on righteous or wrongful beliefs formulated value scales which are still useful tools for research on human rights (see Moghaddam and Vuksanovic, 1990, and Doise, Spini and Clémence, 1999). The study of human rights from a social psychological perspective is crucial, as it was demonstrated in Milgram's (1974) empirical studies on obedience to authority. The work on experimental social psychology has laid the foundations for developing further research on human rights as a social psychological phenomenon, although they have only been explored on a superficial level. In the pages that follow it is my aim to explore human rights as a problem for social psychology taking in the general aspects, such as collective values, as well as more particular elements.

The recent body of research concerned with human rights as a problem in social psychology illustrates the limitation of experimental social psychology. While experimentation allows one to generalise and gain some degree of objectivity, it limits our understanding of particular contexts. Therefore, I argue that qualitative methods compliment the study of human rights in this discipline. Recent surveys on human rights show that their observance or obstruction is linked to their common understanding (UNO, 1993). Thus, research depicts the universality of human rights in terms of attitudes where the experimenters explore various attitudes towards human rights. Variations may relate to the political scene where people root positive or negative perceptions of human rights when speaking of violations in the developing world (Diaz-Veizades, 1995) and post-communist countries (Macek, 1997).

The literature review focuses on the most significant body of research relevant to this thesis, which I will explore and appraise in chapters three and four. Using the theory of social representations, a research team developed a survey project searching for the universal social representations of human rights. This research concluded that justice is the core of the representation of human rights (Clemence and Doise, 1996; Doise and Clemence, 1996). My research will look into representation considering the sociocultural elements embedded in the context of the research, as in Herrera, Lavalée and Doise (2000). In contrast to previous research, I concentrate my analysis on a population of working women (domestic workers), rather than students as in Doise et al (1999). I aim to contribute to the body of research on social representations of human

rights by considering ethnicity, religion and social status as part of the context in which representations emerge.

This thesis addresses representations as an inter-group phenomenon, where the exploration of a working relationship assumes that representations of human rights encourage or discourage certain forms of interaction. This type of exploration goes beyond a traditional cause-effect relationship, such as that characteristic of experimental social psychology. Thereby, social representations, when understood as tools for interaction as in Jodelet (1991), contribute to our understanding of group relations, as seen in Doise (1978; 1986). Finally, I explore social representations of human rights as an inter-group phenomenon. This approach will enable me to explore how some characteristics of Mexican society place a strain on the observance of human rights.

3. Characteristics of domestic service in Mexico

My sociocultural inquiry regarding women's rights in Mexico is framed within the relationship between employer and domestic worker. In Mexico this constitutes an asymmetrical relationship of power and one of the most significant experiences for women. For an illustrative account of the issues which will be raised on domestic service in Mexico, please refer to *Appendix One* of this thesis. It is not only the case of Mexico that domestic service is an essential experience for women, domestic service is a global phenomenon, for instance it is part everyday life of 'the global care chain'. This means that there is an entire economy backed up by domestic workers and their foster families, as described in Hochschild (2000). For instance, uniforms made for each occasion and the entertainment industry producing comic books, magazines and telenovelas are examples of the industry backing domestic service in Latin America.

According to Anti-Slavery International, domestic service remains one of the most significant occupations for women in the third world, and in most countries it is unregulated by the law (Annual Report, 2000). In 1985, Bunster and Chaney reported that, in Latin America, at least 70 per cent of the female workforce is employed in the domestic sector, while in Mexico, more recent statistics show that more women are employed as domestic workers than in professional occupations (INEGI, 1995).

It is important to note that domestic service affects a significant proportion of the population in Mexico and it is backed up by an entire industry (Goldsmith, 1989) and an economy of its own. These elements suggest that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is socialised into the everyday life of most Mexican households, and thus creates representations.

The aspect of domestic service most relevant to my research is the relationship established between the employer and the domestic worker. The relationship is vexed between cultural convergence and divergence suggesting contradictions. I argue that through the study of social representations we can understand how the application of humanitarian laws is contradicted by the ideas underlying women's responsibilities as domestic workers or as employers. Thus, domestic service embodies an informal exchange of representations hidden by the formal negotiation of a working contract. I shall demonstrate how the relationship between employer and domestic worker is an excellent example by which to explore representations, because it shows how the execution of rights and duties begins in the most private space. Home relationships are a smokescreen to the use of rights.

In addition, in Mexico the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship constitutes one of the most significant encounters between social groups, as defined by Tajfel (1978). The terms I will use throughout the thesis are intentionally referential: the employer is referred to in this thesis as the 'patrona'; while the domestic worker is presented as the 'muchacha'. This terminology has particular connotations as employers often call their worker 'muchacha' when speaking about her, but not necessarily when she is present. Likewise, the domestic worker calls her employer 'patrona' when speaking about her to other people. By using referential terms, my point is to highlight that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is an inter-group phenomenon that helps to explain social exclusion, among other things. Using the social psychological perspective, the cultural, psychological and environmental conditions of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship provide examples of asymmetrical dependency that merit particular examination as engines of representations. This relationship illustrates the competence of social representations of difference and similarity, as described in Moscovici (1984). The *patrona* and *muchacha* are similar (in gender) but opposite (in social status). The

representations and elements of ethnicity, gender and social status present suggest that the relationship can be explored as an inter-group phenomenon.

4. Central questions of the thesis

The thesis focuses on the use of representations in the negotiation of rights and duties in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The representations of human rights found to mediate in the relationship help us to explore related practices and beliefs in the context of the middle-class Mexican household.

The following constitute the central questions of the thesis.

- 1) Do socioeconomic, gender and ethnic distinctions impact on social representations of human rights in the case of Mexican middle-class households?
- 2) To what extent do social representations of human rights obstruct or ensure the enjoyment of rights to which the constituent parties in the *patrona* to the *muchacha* relationship are entitled, given that this relationship is asymmetric in power?
- 3) If social representations of human rights can be approached as an inter-group phenomenon, influenced by ethnicity and socioeconomic status, how do they encourage human rights in practice? Consequently, do the associated representations and practices add to our understanding of asymmetrical relationships of power, particularly the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship?
- 4) Is the emotional bond between a *patrona* and a *muchacha* used as a justification for human rights violations?
- 5) Are ethnographic and qualitative methods (one-to-one interviews, focus groups, participant observation) adequate for the study of social representations of human rights in the case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship?

5. Overall structure of the thesis

The thesis begins by introducing the central questions, aims and objectives of the study. It then focuses on the context of the research, as in Chapter Two, I present the setting for

the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship and the various implications of the relationship. I define the economic, cultural, gender and ethnic implications embedded in the Mexican household. Drawing on these factors, the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship may be seen as a cultural crossroads, where rural and urban mentalities meet. It is, therefore, important to explore how the sociocultural context impedes the observance of the universal human rights necessary for the peaceful organisation of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship mirrors Mexican society through the experience of a significant group of women. Thereby, I argue that the elements of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship (asymmetry in power, strong dependence, ethnic diversity and gender conflict) give rise to negotiations that require a social psychological explanation.

In Chapter Three, I explain how approach the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship might be approached through the theory of social representations, as in Doise (1978). The main discussion is that, as an inter-group phenomenon, the relationship needs social representations. The chapter presents the main points of social representations theory relevant to this thesis and provides some arguments for the focus on relationships of this thesis. I also introduce my criticisms of the body of literature on social representations regarding human rights. I discuss how research on the topic could explore sociocultural forms of knowledge.

In Chapter Four, I explore the benefits of ethnography and qualitative methods. I use these arguments to appraise previous work on social representations of human rights. The aim of the methodology and the research design was to investigate social representations as part of the cultural patterns that underlie the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The methods are triangulated. Drawing on Flick (1992) I have used three methods for investigating the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The objective in triangulating is to validate the use of qualitative methods. The ethnographic analysis of boundaries between *patronas* and *muchachas* is based on 36 hours of participant observation in four households. The data analyzed is generated from ten interviews with domestic workers, ten with *patronas*, three with community workers and three focus groups.

The empirical findings aid the discussion of the integration of representations of difference and similarity in the everyday life of *patronas* and *muchachas*. In Chapter Five, I delineate the boundaries of interaction in the home whilst emphasising the space distribution, in a similar fashion to Dixon (2000, BPS). The analysis considers the cases of four Mexican households and it suggests that divisions between *patronas* and *muchachas* are an expression of sociocultural knowledge. I show that spatial analysis of the household contributes to the exploration of boundaries between *patrona* and *muchacha*, as representatives of different groups. The operational analysis of households follows Hillier et al's (1987) functional distribution of domestic space, and I argue that architectural design intentionally directs interaction by separating the family space from the domestic worker's areas. As illustrated with maps, each home demonstrates divisions of space within the household, namely upstairs and downstairs, inside and outside and front and back. The use of spaces within the household implies a separation of household duties and roles which I applied to the analysis of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

Chapter Six discusses the differences and similarities between *patronas* and *muchachas* suggested by social representations. The analysis of interviews, systematised using *Nu*dist* software, explores the two core ideas of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. One is similarity and the other is difference. Similarity stems from the implications of gender and feelings of sisterhood inspired by the Catholic tradition. My argument is that the Catholic tradition is a sociocultural element of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. By contrast, the strong belief in education as a socioeconomic alternative for growth in society prevents *patronas* and *muchachas* from considering each other as equals. The majority of times, a belief in differences won over similarities, showing that the distinctions between *patronas* and *muchachas* mark the way in which the relationship evolves. As such, the most relevant difference has been marked by the idea of ethnicity and origin, where origin dictates the destiny for each one to follow. I argue that the relationship is unequal and give examples of the differences that set *patronas* and *muchachas* apart.

In Chapter Seven, I illustrate how representations are integral to practices in the employment, the living conditions and the exploitation found in the cases studied. The interaction between an employer and a domestic worker enables us to explore how

representations intervene between human rights as an abstract idea and their realisation in everyday life. The examples also illustrate how social representations of human rights are indeed, inter-group phenomena. Therefore, in this last chapter I analyse how human rights violations can be explained in terms of similarity or difference, whichever is more salient at the time. Representations of sameness and difference help us to explain how social representations of human rights are part of everyday life.

One of the most important elements of social representations becomes the question of the right to education. Because it seems that a *muchacha* is not supposed to think or react, this example enables the examination of issues related to power asymmetry in domestic service over the centuries. The meaning of events in the context of domestic service governs the possibility of achieving rights. In addition to the physical and mental abuse, rape (by the male members of the household), beating, and emotional blackmail are all violations of the *muchacha's* universal rights. Thus the final discussion of the thesis outlines the threats posed to human rights by their representations. Abuse and violations are an intrusion on an individual's privacy as well as an abuse of trust. The thesis ends by stating that a study of the social representations of human rights adds to our understanding of practices and contributing environment.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, I present the main points of the thesis and further routes to take in policy planning, human rights promotion, reproductive health and female asymmetrical relationships. The conclusions summarise the threats posed to human rights by their representations. The distinction is made between rights as they 'ought' to be respected as and rights as they are seen a relationship of domestic service. Social representations of human rights are inter-group phenomena, encouraging certain forms of interaction and discouraging others, as outlined in Doise (1978). Social representations of human rights guide the way members of different groups relate to each other and in the case of asymmetrical power relationships (such as those presented here) the enforcement or obstruction of rights relies very much on how individuals express themselves as part of a group.

With this brief introduction, I invite the reader to continue reading about social representations of human rights, as emerging from the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship in urban middle-class Mexican households.

CHAPTER 2

The *Patrona* and *Muchacha* Relationship

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7. Conclusions and main points

In this chapter, I introduce the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The relationship evolves in a particular sociocultural context that merits further clarification; I therefore examine the Mexican household with the intention of defining the components and the setting of the research. Throughout the chapter, I discuss the need to assess the household in terms of the reproductive relationships found within. Given the definition of the household, I assert that one of the factors obstructing the enforcement of rights is the dependency of *muchacha* on the *patrona*, which I discuss as an economic underpinning of domestic service. I also argue that another reason why *muchachas* and *patronas* do not observe human rights is the low status assigned to housework. Finally, I suggest that by exploring the feminist and the economic implications of the relationship that is the object of this thesis, it might be possible to understand how better to encourage human rights when studying asymmetrical relationships in power.

1. The household as a space for exploration

This chapter is an introduction to the context of my research: the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as it occurs within Mexican middle class households. In the process, I shall describe the setting for the research.

From my own review of the literature, I have identified two main streams of research characterising the household. One refers to its functions and location as a productive unit, the other examines the household's reproductive potential during interaction.

1.1 The household as a location with productive functions

In Volume I of *Das Kapital*, Marx asserts that the function of the household is the reproduction and maintenance of commodities. Blumenfeld and Mann (1980) argue that the non-capitalist production of the household (washing and cooking) is exchanged with capitalist production systems, and creates 'petty commodities'. It is suggested, then, that definitions of the household by function focus on it as a space for production of goods or services for the market. The spaces contained in the household then have specific functions: rooms for inhabiting, spaces for keeping things, places to work and areas for receiving people. From the functional perspective, all these aspects should help to introduce domestic labour into the market (Lauderdale and Graham, 1989).

Having defined the household as a commodity producing unit and non-lucrative in nature, the events that occur within its walls have not been afforded the attention they deserve. By looking at another definition, I address the way their functions and the interaction with their walls construct the unity of households. The above and the following definition are intertwined to the extent that they can be addressed as elements of interaction.

1.2 The household as a space reproducing knowledge

I draw on my own revision of the literature on households in order to establish the reasons why a study of the Mexican household should view it as a space for

interaction. The vast gamut of literature can be divided in two main streams. The first is referred to as the traditional stream (mainly a Marxist tradition) and it approaches the household in its divisions, functions and location in terms of the production system it entails. The second is the contemporary approach, from which I draw heavily on the recent feminist literature examining domestic service (Brydon and Chant, 1989; Moser, 1993; Romero, 1992; Rollins, 1985). In particular, I consider the Latin American body of literature, mainly journals such as FEM or publications of organisations, such as Atabal and the broad academic research encompassing South, Central and North America (Mexico and its borders with the USA). The second approach to the household conceptualises it as a set of relationships and seeks to identify its meaningful units of production, consumption and investment in terms of economy and social knowledge.

Given that the household is a setting for the reproduction of sociocultural knowledge, the experiences within shape the identity of its members. This is shown in the various definitions I found for the household.

The household is a fairly common form of social organisation in most regions of the developing world and often represents the primary site for the structuring of gender relations and women's specific experience (Brydon and Chant, 1989:40).

Thanks to a kind of mystic solidarity, the home and the small local community are supposed to be able to overcome the forces of fission that tear larger groups apart (Douglas, 1991: 288)

Drawing on the sociology of knowledge, the research carried out until now conceives of the household as a space for the reproduction of knowledge. The definitions above show that the household is an arena for reproduction of a kind of knowledge that establishes social roles. Given that the relationships taking place within a household generate knowledge, it is important to consider how this helps household members in assuming a position in wider contexts. Whatever the element being reproduced, the definitions of the household suggest it is a place that orients interaction.

Others have argued that the home orients interaction by providing a space where different groups associate. Douglas (1991), for instance, argued that the home is the 'embodiment of a mysterious solidarity among groups'. Definitions of the household as an 'embryonic community', or as 'people who eat of the same pot' (Brydon and

Chant, 1989) provide evidence of its orienting role. Goffman (1959) looked at interaction invoking the division of spaces it entailed. Given the importance of space, Bibó (1991) explored Hungarian household relationships as vehicles of wider social meanings. Thus, studies of the household as context developed through practices drawing on this arena explore the symbolic exchanges taking place in the home. Given the social experience expressed through the organisation of space, it is essential to look into the spatial categories for interaction in the household.

1.3 The relationship of convergence and divergence within the household

Given that most of the literature dealing with domestic service defines the household as a space orienting female relationships, roles and identity, it is necessary to identify the dynamics orienting the relationship that is the object of this thesis. The elements of the household suggest a series of contradictions related to the productive and reproductive system of the home. Drawing on the dialectics between women and economy, for instance, the relationship between women and the household might be looked at as one based on a relation of reproduction, rather than these relationships being seen as unproductive or irrelevant to the wider economic structure. This approach is in terms of its function. Moore (1994) shows that the analysis of the household implies power and ideology by looking into the type of exchanges implied in household relationships. While she considers that these are mainly based on contacts, bargaining and negotiation, she suggests that the representations supporting the exchange may contain contradictions that are open to interpretation. The analysis of the household in this thesis calls for a detailed exploration of the sort of contradictions implied in spatial distribution and involved in the relationships taking place at households. These are consequent to the meanings and symbolism, of a sociocultural nature, reproduced and invoked by its members

Having defined the household as a space for orientation and contradiction, I identify three key elements that are reproduced within the household. These, according to Moore (1994), are rights, needs and social identity. The mechanisms for the reproduction of these elements relate to the association of the home as private sphere where needs are expressed in opposition to public spaces, where rights and social identity are defended. The debate could extend to how these elements underpin

problematic relationships in the household. The dynamics of the household, for example, define rights but might not help defend them unless they are expressed or acted upon by household members (Douglas, 1991). The fundamental idea is that when rights, duties and identity are reproduced through household relations 'people also reproduce an experience of those relations' (Moore, 1994:104). This shows that the study of households as spaces for interaction will help to reveal the elements building relationships within it.

More specifically, the Latin American body of literature focused on domestic service points out the contradictions embedded in it. These are introduced into the home from the sociocultural context to which members of the household belong. If the contradiction relates to systems of reproduction of rules for orienting interaction it would be part of the relationships within the household, like the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship given that the household contains elements of contradictions according to Chaney and García Castro (1989).

However, being in essence 'mixed', 'complex' and 'diverse' (Bunster and Chaney, 1985), the home also suggests contradictions. This is due to the set of social relationships that we can find in it and which are unlikely to take place elsewhere.

The household is a set of social relationships among persons who by race (*sic*) and birth occupy markedly unequal social positions (Lauderdale and Graham, 1989: 69).

The household is the site for the encounter of social classes and ethnic groups. However, the interaction does not necessarily unite its members. Human rights violations suggest contradictions to the assumption that the home is synonymous with harmony. In the case of Mexican households, contradictions are embedded in interaction. Therefore, by looking into the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship we can identify a series of contradictions to human rights. Human rights violations encompass barriers to rights to work, women's rights, right to schooling and the right to a reasonable living standard, among others. The way that human rights are encouraged or contradicted is explored in the following section.

Finally, the household, as defined as a space for interaction establishes the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as embedded in a context of cultural distinctions. I suggest that the relationship should be explored considering the household as a space where family affairs develop (Adler-Lomnitz, 1994). The contradictions intrinsic to the relationship are the subject of the following section, where I explore the components of the Mexican household. These elements should help to introduce the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as problematic.

2. Problematic elements in the urban middle class Mexican household

In the above section I introduced the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship in a space of interaction and function. In this section, I explore the elements of the Mexican middle class urban household by illustrating them with regards to human rights. These elements can be considered as part of the household, like housework, the element of the exchange in the relationship. Other elements are introduced into the household from the sociocultural context, and these permeate interaction. These elements are religion, motherhood and diversity. The diverse nature of the household should promote tolerance to others who are different. These elements will be examined because they are part of the sociocultural context of Mexico filtered into the household. These become evident in interaction between the *patrona* and *muchacha*, encouraging convergence or divergence.

2.1 Housework as a dialectical relation of beliefs and rights

Essentially, housework is the accomplishment of work related to keeping a house hospitable. Cooking, dusting, cleaning, washing and paying the bills are all tasks constituting housework. However the aspect which is of interest to this study is that housework encompasses an exchange, namely a working interaction.

From an interaction perspective, the recognition of housework is the object of serious criticism. It has repeatedly been pointed out that others do not recognise the effort and energy invested on the work (Duran, 1986). In addition, the house is constantly in use and the work is never-ending, but rarely appreciated (Seccombe, 1980). Housework is undervalued, as it is believed it ought to be carried out quickly and with ease; for

example, see Saavedra, Bautista and Goldsmith's (1995) critique of the invisibility of housework (1995). These studies show that housework is exchanged during the course of interaction between those who do the work and those who enjoy the fruits of such labour. The attributions to the nature of the work suggest some impact on the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship (non-productive and invisible).

Given that housework is the most significant example of the gender division of labour it is open to criticism. Its performance, for instance, is assumed to be a female responsibility. Feminist literature has examined the roots of such an assumption and found that its cause is women's perceived attributes as cautious and careful (FEM, 1971). Palmer (1989) offered a convincing argument showing that housework also encompasses beliefs on levels of dirt. Her study distinguishes tasks and task performer (employer and domestic worker) according to the amount of dirt involved in the work. However, housework is a tool for earning money and investing time, thereby its attribution as female can work to the benefit of the women who perform it for income.

Besides its ideological implications, housework is also considered to be a global economic phenomenon. Recent literature views it as the basic material in the 'global care-chain', that is the traffic of women looking for employment to support a family (Hochschild, 2000). Women from a poor background will work and struggle for a living doing housework. In addition, housework is also global in that it influences the exercise of human rights, such as the right to self-determination (*ICCPR*¹, *Art 1: The right to the free pursuit of economic, social and cultural development*).

Having discussed the way housework encompasses beliefs and rights, I argue that its positive and negative implications should be assessed according to the cultural context of the particular study. The sort of violations to rights, the demand for the completion of housework and the kind of payment given for such work varies across countries and cultures. For this reason, I distinguish housework in the context of Mexican households. The attribution of housework as female, as easy, as invisible and filthy are part of a wider debate about the division of labour between male and female tasks.

¹ International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Ratified by Mexico in 1981.

The meaning of these must be understood within the context of Mexico and its cultural life.

2.1.1 Housework and Mexican households

Given that the association between rights and beliefs represents a series of contradictions, such as exchanging income for a non-valuable activity, there are a series of observations attacking housework. In Latin America housework represents the starting point to an exploration of the *macho* ideology. In terms of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, housework is the tool to render women as workers *of* and *in* the household, since men would never help to do the housework (Duran, 1986). For example, Galvez and Todaro, (1985) offer a critique of the perception of housework in Chile, where it encourages a confrontational relationship between working women, where one is an owner the other a paid companion. The worker is in charge of cleaning while the housewife escapes from her household responsibilities.

From an interactional point of view, housework allows us to examine the dynamics of power relationships. The distribution of workloads between employers and domestic workers may suggest a power asymmetry. Historical perspectives on the distribution of housework support this idea. When Arrom (1985) reviewed the role of women in Mexico City over the past centuries, she showed how women in the upper classes considered it a sign of status not to work outside their home and to concentrate on administering the work of others in the home. In addition, de Oliveira's (1989) study of Mexican middle-class women concluded that in Mexico a good housewife is characterised by the effortless accomplishment of housework. The effective completion of housework can represent proficiency as the head of a household. As a consequence, earning money from housework is considered degrading. These factors encourage the power asymmetry between employer and domestic worker that is a distinctive feature of Mexican households.

In all, the core appreciation of housework is problematic: women are undervalued but successful. So, can housework be taken out of context and be discussed simply as an issue for human rights? The gender nature of the input in housework and the enduring belief in its low value would suggest that this might be the case. The very heart of it

lies in how the exchange of housework for money is vulnerable to human rights violations.

Human rights violations in the setting of the household relate to the exploitation and manipulation to which the worker is subjected. The worker is exploited as she serves an employer (*patrona*) in the belief that they face ‘similar responsibilities and circumstances’, as she is sympathetic with regards to the *patrona*’s busy life (Romero, 1992). To expect the worker to make such concessions as working late hours or giving up vacation is exploitative and dehumanising, considering that the salary is low and the work tiring (*UDHR, Art5 and ICCPR, Art7: everyone has the right to live free from inhuman and degrading treatment*). My point here is to highlight the need to consider exploitative and oppressive such household interactions as the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

Finally, drawing on the oppressive and exploitative character of housework, the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship reproduces housework roles which are unappreciated. The body of literature shows that women sustain housework and dominate the occupation where different sociocultural contexts of belonging suggest different levels of economic dependency from *muchacha* to *patrona*. This demonstrates that in order to discuss the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, we must go beyond the tasks that it entails to examine the sociocultural elements embedded in the household.

2.2 Some religious underpinnings of household interaction

To avoid making sweeping statements about religion, I narrow down my definition to religion as it is involved in household relations or related to rights for domestic workers. The spirit of human rights when related to a form of Catholicism (Paine, 1720; Farr, 1998a) it enshrines fraternity and equality. In this section I explore a number of contradictory religious principles that are expressed in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

Given the dominance of Catholicism in the country, Mexicans are often ‘in agreement with the sacred word’, according to Paz (1971).² The literature on the subject points out two main characteristics, ‘Mexicans only believe in Our Virgin of Guadalupe (Paz, 1977:13)’.³ Paz argues that Mexicans live unaware of the great impact religious principles have on ways of thinking, acting and respecting one another. This body of literature concludes that religious values are invoked in actions. Mexicans portray them in the household, which is a machinery reproducing religious beliefs, as Lewis (1959) contended. Accordingly, we can distinguish some relationships as moulded through religious values, particularly fraternity. For example, everyday comments regarding ‘being children to the Virgin’ express fraternity. For this reason, it would be a mistake to overlook the religious traditions when studying Mexican households as it has been argued that the dynamics of Mexican households support the structure and ideology of the ancient Catholic corporate state (Lauderdale, 1989).

Among the various spaces defining the influence of fraternity on interaction I focus on just one. That is, whether the idea of being fraternal to others directs interaction within the household, specifically in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. It is important to identify the ways that practices in the Mexican household draw on religious values, because it will help explain the reasons for the *patrona*’s friendly manner towards the *muchacha*.

Having asserted that religion is likely to permeate relationships in the household, how could this be worded in terms of human rights? Gaete (1993) prescribed that human rights are a law created on the basis of a dual relation exchanging truths, religion and life. Human rights violations are the imposition of truth, belief or death lacking the consent of the other. Therefore, human rights can only become legitimate through the recognition of others as humans and entitled to same rights (Schute, 1993). The

² Octavio Paz (born Mexico 1929-died Mexico 1996) known for his unique writing techniques among Latin American poets and writers, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994. His most notable work is *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), an essay on the esoteric identity of Mexican people.

³ The Virgin of Guadalupe is the national emblem of Mexico. On 12 December every year people come from all corners of the country to meet at her holy site, the *Basílica de Guadalupe*. She appeared circa C.15 A.D., to Juan Diego, an Indian believer to whom she demonstrated her miraculous powers with the appearance of a rose bush in the dessert and by printing her image on his white blanket. Experts say her strong image is due to her representation of the country’s mestizaje. Her brown skin, and celestial cloth unites Mexican pluralism into her image.

capacity for recognising others as a people fully entitled to such rights is essential. By fraternity, then, we might understand the recognition of others as similar.

2.2.1 The religion versus rights opposition in Mexican households

Given that fraternity is enforced through interaction, the interaction perspective to relationships in this respect calls for mutual solidarity. Because this principle is necessary for the encouragement of human rights, the *patrona* and *muchacha* would draw on this principle. This is not an opinion, but a regulation enforced by the law. (*LFT: Art.134: obligations and rights of domestic workers and employers*).⁴

However, this principle contrasts with the reality of a relationship marred by oppression and manipulation, as discussed above. The hypocritical treatment of domestic workers by a higher social class has been labelled ‘white liberal guilt’ (Doreknou, 1993), or middle-class remorse (Careaga, 1983). It is arguable whether household members are aware of this conflict between principles and reality with regard to their interaction (Atabal, 1995). This will be discussed in the analysis of the relationship with relation to demeanour (Goffman, 1956).

Finally, the contradiction between fraternity and the lack of recognition of the other as a person in their own right goes beyond the religious definition of the encounter between *patrona* and *muchacha*. It seems that it transcends limits with elements related to social and economic class and ethnicity. I discuss these factors in the next section using the term diversity.

2.3 Diversity in ethnicity and social belonging

Given that in the context of Mexico a household contains people of different origin and cultural background, we are referring to a household that is mixed by definition. Workers, builders, relatives and friends all contribute to the diverse composition of the household. In this section, I describe how diversity may lead towards another problematic angle of the household. In particular in the case of Mexico, where

⁴ *Appendix 2*, has a translated version of Mexican Federal Labour Law (LFT) for domestic workers.

distinctions tend towards stability due to the lack of capacity to modify ethnic and social origins.

The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, while on one level representing an encounter of tolerance and unity, upholds a culture of intolerance and hatred. Besides the need for recognition, the origin of Mexicans has been a theoretical problem since the early establishment of the Spanish Colony (*circa* 1521) when local people could not be conceived as fellow humans, as they were believed to be without a soul (Bernal, 1995). This perception resulted in the slaughter of the native population. Authors have charted this violent beginning of a modern civilisation, stating the impact that this would have on subsequent relationships (O’Gorman, 1958; de las Casas, 1967), for instance, in terms of resentment and revenge as a consequence of the violent and dramatic mixing of ethnic groups (Ramos, 1990). At present in Mexico, there are 19 indigenous groups and most of the population is of a mixed ethnic background. The majority of the population in Mexico today is *mestizo*, a combination of several European groups, such as Spanish and French with indigenous blood (mainly Mexica or Aztec and Mayan). Intolerance of diversity was and still is an element of interaction in the Mexican household where servants and workers have been traditionally drawn from the native population.

Throughout this thesis the rights of certain groups are discussed as a issue of recognition and power, drawing on the work of Tajfel (1978) and Doise, Spini and Clem  nce (1999). However, it is important to note that diversity is a fundamental right as recorded in Article 6 of UDHR (*Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law*). The fundamental right establishes that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion (*UDHR, Art. 18*). In the case of the household, the *muchachas* should be free from discrimination, regardless of their beliefs, ethnicity or religion.

Finally, the mixture of cultures that underpins the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is reflected throughout the Mexican household. The actions and discourses related to the perception of diversity in the household will aid understanding of the contradictions within this space. Cases of physical and sexual abuse of the *muchacha* or the lack of respect of the *patrona*’s property are proof of

the intolerance to diversity which is manifested in degrading treatment. These are all aspects that make the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship an interesting element for discussing human rights.

2.4 The balance between motherhood and work

Another significant element of the household is the balance that is struck between being a mother and working. It is essential to the study of the household because it establishes contradiction. That is, women who are mothers have to work a double shift.

First, motherhood brings a positive element to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. That is, if both women are mothers and perform household duties, there may be compatibility. Accordingly, motherhood implies that *patronas* and *muchachas* share a life cycle. The comprehension one might have of the other could lead to a relationship of respect and mutual aid. However, motherhood represents more the cause than the consequence of interaction. Mothers in Latin America generally organise their lives with regard to the household (Adler-Lomnitz, 1994). In spite of professional aspirations, mothers of working households may face similar responsibilities (Moser, 1987). The trend is changing slowly but, it seems that a mother who is also a *patrona*, would depend on the *muchacha* to liberate her from her responsibilities as mother. My intention is to demonstrate that in the Mexican middle-class household there is a dependency on the *muchacha*, if the *patrona* is a working mother. This seems to be the case as more women take on extra domestic work despite the cost of bearing children (García and Oliveria, 1997). From an interaction point of view, motherhood represents interdependency: domestic workers and employers need of each other to continue meeting their responsibilities as mothers.

Second, a contradiction emerges when the way each women exercises the right to have a family differs. Given the ethnic and social differences between them, it would seem that the interaction has a specific orientation. Becoming a mother imposes a series of roles on the average middle-class Mexican woman. Firstly, there are expectations imposed on women to create a harmonious ambience at home, as noted

by de Oliveira (1990). Secondly, mothers are attributed the responsibility of educating the children (Duran, 1986).

Third, motherhood is a fundamental right. All women should have the right to maternity leave and to take care of their family. It is a right for women to be free of all gender-based violations (UNO, 1993), where motherhood should entitle a woman to special care and assistance (*UDHR, Art. 25.2: Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living*). Motherhood, a reproductive right, involves an exchange in a household. One woman (*muchacha*) takes care of the other woman's (*patrona*'s) children, in a kinder and warmer way than the mother (Hochschild, 2000). This suggests that in the household although there can be points of convergence between *patrona* and *muchacha*, there will also exist points of divergence. Both are involved in the exchange of housework for payment according to their circumstances and this will be reflected in their relationship.

Statistically, motherhood is an important aspect to consider. In Mexico, most housewives are mothers (INEGI, 1995). In the case of Mexican middle classes, Chanquía and Conde suggested (1989) that motherhood imposes a choice on women: to either stay more time indoors, or hire a domestic worker whom they trust and who will look after the children. So, being a mother represent more than just having children, it also represents a reason why middle-class women become pragmatic: becoming a mother is the starting point to draw away from the household as staying at home represents 'an imprisonment'.

Finally, it has been argued that domestic service obstructs the *patrona* and the *muchacha*'s enjoyment of rights. In the case of the *patrona*, once she is a mother, it is difficult for her to pursue a profession. García and de Oliveira (1997), for example, studied how Mexican women organise their public life around the family and childcare. Other research supporting this argument has found that in concentrating on housework and childcare, women feel frustrated and angry towards motherhood (Chanquía and Conde, 1989). In the case of the *muchacha*, becoming a single working mother leaves her with little opportunity to care for her children (Gutiérrez, 1993). Long working hours, living on the job and lack of time prevent her from doing so. These are all violations of the reproductive rights noted above.

To sum up the previous section, I have defined the household as a space that orients interaction but that contains contradictions. In particular, the Mexican household contains a series of elements that suggest that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship would be problematic. Having established that these elements relate to the sociocultural context of the relationship, I will define the *patrona* and *muchacha* in the next section.

3 *La muchacha*: a rural youngster

The domestic worker is understood to be the person in charge of doing the cleaning and other household tasks in search for income (Guerrero, 1980). A domestic worker is functionally a person who performs services for an individual or a family in the setting of a private home. Chaney and García Castro, (1989) contended that in Latin America domestic workers are often rural women with minimal education and who belong to the lower and poorer classes.

3.1 Terminology

'*Muchacha*,' is a Mexican slang that has two connotations, according to the Oxford English/Spanish dictionary. The first is literal: a polite, friendly way to address a female; and the second contextual: anyone who seems ignorant and young. When the term *muchacha* is used to refer to a domestic worker two things are inferred. First, that the worker lacks the skills and experience to find her way around the city, as demonstrated by expressions such as 'how can she know? As a *muchacha* it will be hard for her to find her way'. Second, that she is unaware of what is happening around her. *Patronas* often make remarks like, 'She's only a *muchacha*', 'she won't react', and 'she knows nothing about these issues'. Employers and other members of the household think of the worker as '*la muchacha*', leading to the derivative thought 'once a *muchacha*, always a *muchacha*'.

3.2 Statistics

The term *muchacha* could scarcely not imply ignorance when in terms of education, in the urban areas of Mexico City, 15 per cent of *muchachas* are complete illiterates, 42 per cent functional illiterates (they have been taught to read although they don't practice reading); and only 31 per cent hold elementary education (Atabal, 1995). In

addition to schooling, the majority of *muchachas* are indigenous or come from rural backgrounds with some proximity to their indigenous roots, while some only speak an indigenous language: Nahuatl, Otomí, Totonaca or Maya.⁵ Hence, when I use the term *muchacha*, I refer to a distinct group of Mexican women in terms of ethnic background and educational skills.

3.3 Discrimination bias

One aspect worth stating is that when studying *muchachas* we are also studying one aspect of Mexican society: discrimination. To be a *muchacha* is seen as demeaning because they are poor, ignorant and physically distinct to their employers. The literature exploring the roots of Mexican natives can help illustrate the evolution of discrimination as a form of perception.

In Latin America since colonial times, class and ethnic divisions were expressed through an open repugnance towards people serving as *muchacha* in households. Written testimonies of foreigners visiting the colonies are proof of this. Their testimonies show surprise towards the employer's attitudes towards their servants (Humboldt in Wagner 1991; Villaroel in Arrom, 1985:109).

There is a large volume of literature which explores several sources seeking the origins of the Mexican population.⁶ As Lafaye (1977) observed, it is possible to identify how discrimination penetrated the interpretation of the mixture of cultures in the literature. The narration of the Conquest, for example, is an example of these perspectives. Below, I discuss three explanations that the Spanish used for the origins of the Mexicans, and I believe that this approach to ethnicity might be of assistance in explaining the attitudes *patronas* have towards *muchachas*.

First, Lafaye (1977) discussed how Spanish people imagined that the root of origin of Mexicans lay in Judaism. Mexicans appeared to be similar to Jews in their physical features, in their shy attitudes and their devotion to serpents. Aztec history narrates the pilgrimage of the Aztec people until they were established in Tenochtitlán, (now

⁵ There are 19 indigenous groups speaking an indigenous language in Mexico. However, it was not until 1994 that Spanish became formally recognised as the official language of the country.

⁶ CD-ROM Valores Socioculturales en Mexico y Latinoamérica, ITESM-CCM, 1995, for a review.

Mexico City). The idea that indigenous Mexicans came from Jewish descendants after they fled from Egypt had an enormous impact on the attitudes towards this people. The discovery of America coincides with the expulsion of Jews from Spain. By the time Mexico came under Spanish rule, the prosecution of Jews by the Inquisition had started and the ebb and flow of anti-Semitic feelings was transferred to the Mexicans. Lafaye (1977) believes that here lies the roots of discrimination and racism in Mexico.

Second, the origin of the Mexicans was thought to be Phoenician. The newly arrived conqueror and priest were impressed by the complex political structure of the Aztec Empire and compared it with ancient cultures. Lafaye (1997) argued that this view was soon set aside as the current polytheist religion was not comparable in complexity with the political context of the Aztec Empire.

Finally, testimonies to the Conquest were filled with amazement and disgust towards the Mexican population. These explanations resulted from observations of human sacrifice, a sacred Aztec practice. Spanish priests and soldiers could only make sense of the Aztecs as a barbaric and primitive culture, probably Iberian, which had managed to leave Europe and arrive in the Americas. Lafaye (1977) argued that the perception of the native population as barbaric best suited the interests of the Spanish Crown, which later on encouraged the evangelisation of Mexicans to Christianity.

The point is that the literature often read by educated Mexicans misleads the reader by filtering interpretations regarding the origin of the ethnic population. These explanations highlight the barbaric, shy, or oppressive nature of this people. The existence of a version of the Conquest written by the conquered is proof of the biased narrative of the literature explored above. As this literature continues to be used to this day in the schooling of the middle and upper classes, Lafaye (1977) asserts that this bias leads to discrimination. The *muchachas* belong to the group which suffers discrimination as a result of these misconceptions.

Finally, *muchachas* are a sector of Mexican women who are by their very nature discriminated against. Statistically they are numerically significant and they are often rural immigrants. Therefore, a *muchacha* represents a group with specific characteristics. On the basis of these facts, I argue that the *patrona* and *muchacha*

relationship is a cultural crossroads, where urban and rural groups meet. Their interaction will involve the perception of *muchachas* constituted by learnt discrimination.

4 *La patrona*: an urban woman

In Mexican society where its backbone is the family, the *patrona* has a major role, which is worth looking at.

4.1 Terminology

Patrona is a word with a clear significance. The literal translation, ‘patron’ signifies the buyer of a service (Oxford Wordfinder). The *patrona* is a consumer because she acquires the service of a *muchacha*. In this sense, the word *patrona* is only used when referring to the client. However *patrona* also has a powerful implication because the *patrona* is the one who sets the tone of negotiations. For instance, the *muchachas* often make remarks like: ‘it takes time to please the *patrona*,’. Or *patronas* will say, ‘when I got married I had to learn how to become *patrona*’, and ‘it takes time to know how to be in charge’.

4.2 The ideology or ‘*pensamiento criollo*’

It is possible to imagine various situations in which the term *patrona* is used, often to describe the buyer of a service, or an employer of any kind. However, from an interaction perspective the term *patrona* has a meaning worth looking at. To be specific, there is a hierarchy in the positioning of the *patrona* in relation to her employees. This may be due to her ‘bossy’ way of relating with others. In the specific case of the middle-class *patrona*, this will be viewed as ‘*pensamiento criollo*’.

There is a large body of literature on Mexican classes as a sociocultural phenomenon that agree on one thing: Mexican middle-class identity is one brought ‘straight out from the greenhouse’. *Pensamiento criollo*, its formal name, relates to people’s European tendencies. Now, if we understand that Mexican society is historically diverse in terms of its European and indigenous roots, we can imagine that the *pensamiento criollo* distinguishes particular groups of people. Let me elaborate on this aspect, a *criollo* (Creole), was the person born in Mexico (formerly New Spain) to a Spanish born couple. Creole thinking or ‘*pensamiento criollo*’ symbolises the

mentality of a person who feels repugnance to other Mexicans who are not 'pure-blooded' Spaniards. Later, Spain ceased to be the only fixation, with the rest of Europe gaining importance. Ramos (1990) pointed out this style of interpretation of the Mexican population:

It is true that our pro-European tendencies have much that is artificial, but we cannot say this is less the case for our idea of our tendencies towards a pure Mexico (Ramos, 1990:128, *translation from the original*)

The *pensamiento criollo* nourishes a preference for 'blood purity', be it solely European, or purely Mexican.⁷ This preference is important to consider to understand the position *patrona* assumes in relation to the *muchacha*.

Some authors assert that this *pensamiento criollo* is the essence of middle class Mexican thinking (Careaga, 1983). The way *patronas* are perceived throughout the literature is that they have a feeling of superiority. Explanations focus on the mixture of blood. Above I have suggested a way to address the middle-class women's mentality in terms of being a housewife. The body of literature investigating housewifery tends to compare this role with that of a *patrona*, and this comparison can be traced back to the early establishment of the modern Mexican household, where an important part of the housewife's role was to organise and administer servants.

Besides, if we trace back the construction of women's role as part of the Creole tradition, we may find parallels with the entire colonisation of Latin America. The seminal work of Diaz del Castillo, (1556/1963) sheds light upon the constitution of a culture during and after the Conquest. His work describes how women did not arrive from Spain until later on. Local women were set aside and looked down on, in the belief that indigenous women were non-human, as they did not believe in Christianity and followed barbaric practices. In all, they were perceived as inferior. Although the ethnic mixing began during this time, a Spanish man could not marry a local woman. Rather, Spanish wives and their servants were shipped to Mexico and the other colonies, in the hope that this would speed up colonial expansion (Thomas, 1995). When arriving in new lands, the wife assumed position within the household by

⁷ For further reading, I recommend Carlos Fuentes, (1992) *El espejo Enterrado*, an essay exploring the cultural similarities between Mexico and Spain.

following the orders of the man. Therefore, it has been argued that women's submissive role is rooted in the 'patriarchal organisation' of early colonial households (Lauderdale, 1989), given that women became merely 'additional decorations' to the household (Atabal, 1995). Again, the laws of marriage and inheritance may have had the effect of enforcing a Catholic corporate state, where women had to remain at home.⁸

From the above, we can say that there is a long history of wives taking charge of the administration of payments and the recruitment of servants. The *patrona* and simultaneously wife inject the social life into households. Since colonial times, the relationship between the staff of servants and the *patrona* as housewife upheld her position as administrator of the household. My point is to determine that the way a *patrona* administers her home is distinctive to other roles of women in society. The role of *patrona* is enacted during interaction with a person who is taken as inferior. The perception of the *muchacha* as below the *patrona* perhaps gives certain direction to the *patrona/muchacha* relationship.

5 Domestic service: the back door to Mexican society

Domestic service is defined as the exchange of domestic work for some remuneration. Goldsmith (1989) noted that domestic service is the back door entrance to Mexican society because its study can help us understand the dynamic of an entire social system. In the following section, I look into some economic and gender implications of domestic service, which I consider important to the setting of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

5.1 Some economic aspects

It may be sensible to introduce some economic aspects of domestic service which are important contextual factors to consider when exploring the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The aspects are:

⁸ The *patrona* administered the recruitment of domestic servants, who came from various ethnic backgrounds. According to their mixed bloods each had a different category within the home. They could be white, black, indigenous or *mestizo*. The indigenous servant earned the lowest income, and lived in the least favourable conditions. African slaves had a different status and, thus, the law did

- Domestic workers represent a significant sector of the workforce,
- this is an informal sector of the economy and,
- *muchachas* are economic migrants

5.1.1 A significant workforce

The study of domestic work represents a significant sector of the economy, as Chaney and Bunster (1985) stressed that domestic workers constitute more than half of the female workforce of Latin America. If we follow recent statistics in Mexico, domestic workers outnumber professional female workers (INEGI, 1997). It is, then, important to appreciate that, when looking at the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, I am investigating a group of workers that constitutes a numerical majority with regards to the female workforce of Mexico.

The large proportion of domestic workers can be traced back to historical reasons. At the time when Mexico was a Spanish colony (1521–1810), households lived from their own production in food and goods. Servants were necessary to help in the household production (see Kusnezof's 1989 study of the colonial household, which shows how servants were involved in harvesting the plantation fields, as well as in cooking and cleaning). Servants, then, were considered unconditional slaves, and families of servants remained with the master for generations (Engerman, 1986). In the nineteenth century, in accordance with the emergence of technology and wider production schemes, the servant role transformed into that of the domestic worker, a person who cleans the house, cooks and runs errands to the market (Arrom, 1985). Today, the household remains an economic unit but in a different sense. Domestic workers are often recruited by the head of the household as necessary for its own production: *muchachas* look after the home while its head works or builds up a social life (Tarrés, 1989; García et al 1980). My intention in pointing this out is to show the *patrona*'s dependency on the *muchacha*: she is necessary to the household economy. This is one aspect of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship that we must take into consideration when discussing it in more detail later in the thesis.

protect freed slaves. This meant that when acting as a servant, the African slave enjoyed favourable treatment and salary in comparison to the indigenous people.

5.1.2 Tax exemption

A second economic aspect is that domestic service is an informal sector of the economy. This means three things: that domestic workers are exempt from the payment of taxes; that they are not covered by health insurance; and lastly, the negotiation between *patronas* and *muchachas* does not involve a written contract. These factors can constitute a violation of the universal right to employment (*UDHR, Art. 23.3: everyone has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring their family an existence worthy of human dignity*). To put this simply: this sector is not regulated. Given that, as I showed above, this is a significant proportion of the workforce of workers, the payment of taxes should be of interest to the authorities. One question that arises is why do the authorities neglect the sector? My guess is that the exchanges underpinning the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship govern, in some way, the decision to interfere or not in the establishment of a contract.⁹ Besides, domestic service shares the following characteristics with other informal occupations:

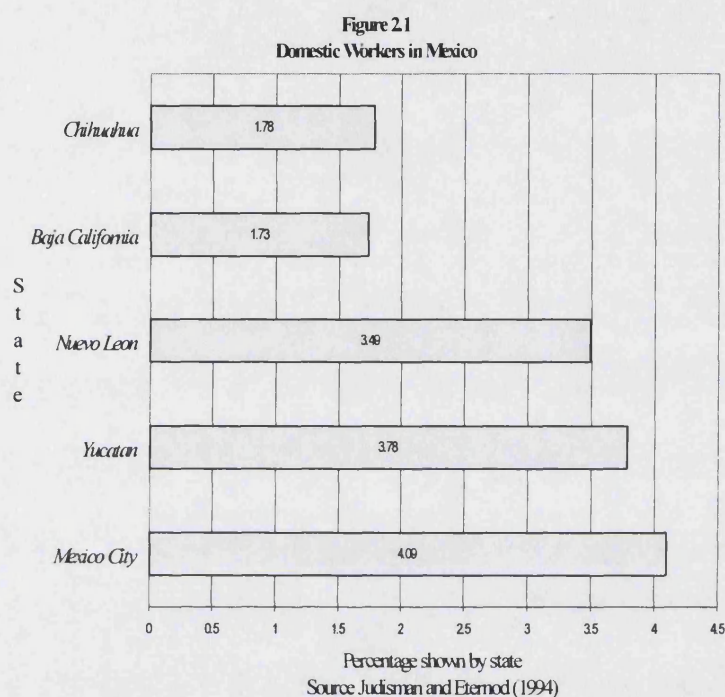
By informal sector we must understand a small-scale catchall economic activity, which operates with 'traditional' labour intensive production methods, and rarely has access to foreign capital. Workers are not necessarily skilled or semi-skilled. Mainly friends or relatives constitute the workforce. Unionisation is rare and earnings tend to be low and irregular. For this sector, there is no paid holiday, maternity leave, pension or other social security benefits. Most types of informal employment operate on the margins of the law, with differing degrees of 'illegality', for instance, working without a licence and the non-payment of taxes (Brydon and Chant, 1989:40).

5.1.3 Economic migration

Third and last, the *muchacha* generally is an economic migrant, this means that they move from a rural area to a city with the intention of finding better living conditions. It is known that the conditions in which migrant workers live in urban areas are sometimes not up to the standard proposed by the Universal Declaration of Human

⁹ As a result of seminar discussions of my work, I have been made aware of the concerns over how the strict legislation can jeopardise the situation of the lower classes involved in the informal sectors. It is often the subject of heated debate, within the branch of Labour Law, whether regulation protecting domestic work will actually damage the workers. The question is whether more protection and/or increased awareness of their rights will lead domestic workers to lose their jobs. Would a *patrona* be willing to employ a class conscious, self-confident, educated worker? Legislators prefer the sector to remain ambiguously protected, rather than increasing the unemployment rate.

Rights (UDHR, Art. 25: everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being). However, the living conditions are likely to be better than their life in the villages, as rural homes often lack basic services and the family has to work in plantation fields (Chant, 1984). The fact that the *muchachas* are rural migrants is important, as it results in cultural specificity: urban but rural. This is an



aspect to take into account in our exploration of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

In figure 2.1, based on Judisman and Eternod (1994), I illustrate the percentage of domestic workers for five states in Mexico. Considering that in more urbanised (industrialised) states of the country there is a wider concentration of domestic workers. The chart support the idea that domestic service concentrates in urban centres, or cities. This figure also helps to illustrate rural population's preference for migrating to urbanised centres of Mexico like Mexico City, Yucatán and Nuevo Leon. So, it can be said that migration, that is economic migration, drives peasant families away from the fields and into the city. A social psychological and sociocultural approach to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship must consider the possibility that *muchachas* 'experience culture shock' (Atabal, 1995). This aspect also helps us to position *muchachas* as part of 'a group with a cultural specificity' (Mercado, 1998), elaborating an 'image of an ambiguous identity' (Pellicer, 1984). For these reasons

they are designated 'Marías' (Arizpe 1980) because they set aside their rural origins but do not become entirely urban.

5.1.4 Vulnerability of rights

At this point it is advisable to turn back to the aspect of the contradictions to human rights involved in the Mexican household. We must remember that an important aspect to consider is the condition in which economic immigrants live in the city. First, when moving with the aim of improving living standards, the *muchachas* give up school, which is a violation to the universal right for education (*UDHR, Art. 26: everyone has the right to education*). Second, as migrants, *muchachas* live in isolation from the outside world and they usually take time to establish a network with which to share experiences and gain support (Romero, 1992). This goes against the right to exercise community rights and freedoms (*UDHR, Art. 29: everyone has duties to the community in which free and full development of personality is involved*), and it also infringes the right to assembly (*UDHR, Art. 20: everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association*). Third, when arriving in an urban home, the *muchacha* has to become familiarised with the use of household appliances and urban customs, namely electrical appliances and different styles of cooking (Gutierrez, 1983). With the supervision of the *patrona*, the *muchacha* undergoes 're-education'. This means that the *muchacha's* rights are vulnerable, like her freedom of thought, as the *muchacha* is acquiring new customs without any choice (*UDHR, Art 19: everyone is free to change beliefs and to manifest their religion and beliefs in teaching, practice, worship and observance*). Although the domestic workers have the choice to work this does not necessarily imply that they should give up their rights. It becomes all the more important to highlight that due to the (contradictory) elements of the household, these rights might be or not infringed.

I am aware that the elements mentioned above are not economic in nature, however they are underpinned by economic migration. Again, I believe that these elements enforce the *muchacha's* dependency on the *patrona*, as it is the latter who is responsible for the acculturation of the *muchacha* into the urban mentality.

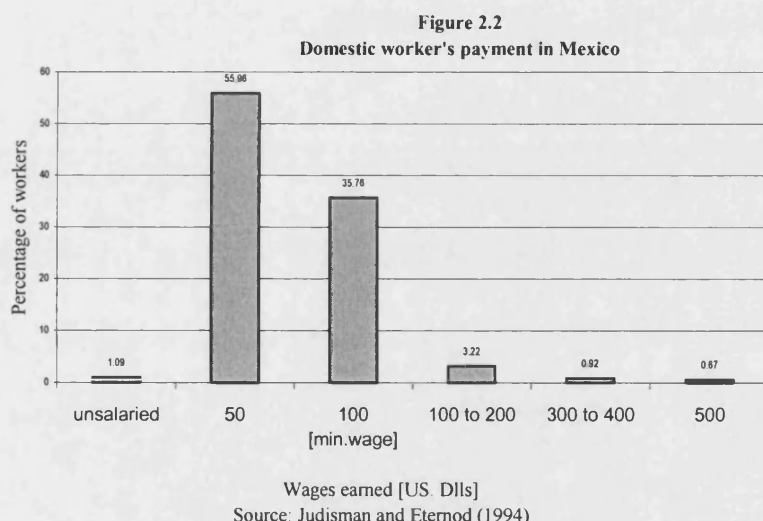
5.2 The symbolic exchanges in domestic service

Basically, domestic service involves the exchange of work for a service. According to the economic aspects of domestic service, I believe it is important to look into what the exchange means to the *muchacha* and to the *patrona*.

5.2.1 Dependency of the *muchacha*

The *muchacha*, first of all, acquires money and benefits in kind, in particular a room, food and sometimes medicines. This is established by the law as the forms for payment in kind and salary (*LFT: Art. 337: employers have the obligation to provide comfortable room and a salary as the payment to the worker*).¹⁰ However, it is the case that the salary of a domestic worker is low, as the following figure shows.

Now, in Mexico it is often that case that *muchachas* are paid less than one minimum



wage, which amounts to US\$100 a month, according to CNN (2000). Figure 2.2 illustrates the wage of a domestic worker. It shows that domestic workers are paid, in average, lower than the minimal wage (55.96% and 1.09% being paid less than a minimal wage). At the time of publication of this thesis a domestic worker in Mexico earned, about US\$50 or less a month. If one considers that a minimum wage should allow people to buy the basic basket products, then it is the case that *muchachas* cannot afford these items and thus, they are poor. Even if this is the case for a large population in Mexico, I stress that it is all the more difficult for *muchachas* in an

¹⁰ Please refer to *Appendix 2*.

inflationary economy; in 1998 the minimum wage in Mexico fell by 76 per cent of its original value (www.LaJornada/24aug98.mx). My intention is to point out that the *muchacha*'s salary is generally low, and I stress, there is no precise mechanism to adjust their wages to inflation.

Economic aspects of domestic service reduce the exchange of work for remuneration to three negative conditions for the *muchacha*: no savings, no mobility and no autonomy. So, from a relationship point of view, the *muchacha* is all the more dependent on the *patrona* and has little or no choice when considering other employment possibilities. Having few skills, and belonging to a floating population, domestic workers have 'a dead-end character occupation' (Colen, 1989) as it holds 'no prospects for the future' (Goldsmiths, 1993). Domestic workers are in a difficult position to change employment, or to leave work to take up schooling or to demand their rights of their employer.

5.2.2 Liberation of the *patrona*

On the part of the *patrona*, in contrast, domestic service is an exchange of money for liberation. In Latin America, where there is a strong sense of family, the *patrona* needs time, as Adler-Lomnitz, (1994) demonstrates that middle-class Mexican women use this time to accomplish the role of wife, by joining in her husband's social life, for example going out to the cinema or attending to guests. The exchange also saves the *patrona* the costs of fatigue from doing housework, as it supports the slower ageing of her body and her image. Although this might sound superficial, Chanquia and Conde (1989) found that for the average Mexican middle-class working woman being relaxed and looking healthy constitutes a powerful weapon to ameliorate domestic tensions. Tarrés (1989) gives a clear account for the reasons why domestic service is essential for the middle class Mexican woman:

Generally, the middle class Mexican woman has domestic workers as this liberates her from heavy loads of housework. She usually has the need to create or sustain a lifestyle which distinguishes her from folk social and cultural expressions, as in comparison with the national schooling average she is highly educated (Tarrés, 1989: 206, *translated from the original*).

I acknowledge that these economic aspects are only some of the many aspects of domestic service. This opens a space for discussion about the ways that *patrona* and

muchacha may interact as driven by social distinction. I also believe that these elements help one to contextualise the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship in the Mexican middle class urban household. It is a relationship of asymmetrical dependency. The *patrona* depends on the *muchacha* in order to gain time to get away from the home or to work while, for the *muchacha*, the *patrona* is the objectification of her income; one of the aspects of this relationship, then, is that if it ended the *muchacha* would be in a difficult situation. Therefore, economic implications serve to situate the *patrona* and *muchacha* in the context of a relationship of asymmetrical dependency.

5.3 The gender implications of domestic service

The gender implications of domestic service may be worth looking at as the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship represents a relationship between women. A body of research on domestic service focuses on issues of gender.

5.3.1 An ideological observation

The body of research into domestic service focuses on the ideological underpinnings of the division of labour between male and female. The underlying idea is that this division of labour encourages the ‘double-day’ routine for women: ‘doing housework and paid work, in that same order’ (Fox, 1980), as women are required to ‘organise family resources’ (Palmer, 1989). Feminists have reacted against this double shift by characterising ‘household drudgery’ as activities that ‘abstract women from a public life’ (Duran, 1986) while performing ‘undervalued work’ (Romero, 1992). This condition ‘denigrates women as house members and workers’ (Constable, 1997) and it undervalues their work (Rollins, 1985; Goldsmith, 1989). This under-valuation of domestic work and the worker may result in the violation of the universal right to equal pay for equal work (*UDHR, ART. 23.1*).

From my revision of the research on domestic service, I found three aspects of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship with gender implications. These are:

- oppression
- subordination

- exploitation

5.3.2 Dialectic materialism

From the relationship point of view, oppression in domestic service turns the *muchacha* into a subordinate of the *patrona*. Marxist-feminist researchers often approach the theme from this perspective by finding that workers and housewives constitute ‘the required unemployed reserve of any capitalist society’ (Colen, 1989), and unlike other service relationships, it ‘involves an ideological reproduction’ (Romero, 1992), mainly that of subordination and inequality. The social psychological approach to this sort of oppression, as Goffman (1956: 43) noted, would suggest that ‘deference is something a subordinate owes to a superordinate’. I would argue that subordination is crucial, considering that *muchacha* and *patrona* may believe that their essential inequality is produced by what gender, ethnic or class represents in the context of their relationship. Thus, I believe subordination and oppression are important background elements to consider in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship because these emphasise the *muchacha*’s position as unequal and lower in relation to the *patrona*.

5.3.3 Interaction

The oppression is twofold, the domestic worker is simultaneously oppressed as a worker and a member of an ethnic minority, while both the employer and the domestic worker are oppressed as women (Chin, 1998). In Mexico it is recognised that domestic workers are generally indigenous or have indigenous roots (Saavedra, Bautista and Goldsmith, 1995). The sense of oppression in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship maybe accentuated by ethnic distinctions.

From a gender perspective, the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship rather than building a bridge between class and ethnic distinctions separates domestic workers as an ‘occupational ghetto’ (Romero, 1992). In South Africa, the equivalent relationship has been examined as oppressive, as domestic workers are oppressed in three ways: *Oppressed as workers, oppressed as women and oppressed as black* (Gaitskell et al, 1984: 86).

Again, I am aware that these are not the only aspects of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, however, I consider that there are gender implications underlying these issues which help to set the context of the relationship. The intention is to bring to the discussion a strong criticism against the lack of solidarity within gender as it has created a body of research touching related issues to this thesis. In the case of the Mexican middle class household the asymmetry in power is a central aspect of the relationship worth considering for its gender implications.

6. The traditional human rights approach to domestic service

According to the New Consensus (1993), human rights ‘as most commonly understood, are the rights that every individual must enjoy and have protected’. It is important to discuss just how they are present or absent in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

Previously, I have pointed out some violations to human rights when examining some of the economic and gender implications of domestic service. I have also mentioned some regulations enshrined in Mexican law. The overall appreciation of the relationship, which is the object of this thesis, is that there exist three main areas where violations to human rights tend to occur. These areas are:

- Employment rights (*UDHR Art. 23*)
- The standard of living and well-being, a civil and political right (*UDHR, Art 25*)
- The right to live free from abuse and other forms of degrading treatment (*UDHR, Art. 7*)

The question is, in what way does the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship threaten those rights mentioned above? It has been argued that ‘domestic workers choose this job because of the salary, autonomy and flexibility it can provide’ (Constable, 1997). However, looking into the case of the *muchachas*, the dependency on the *patrona* leaves her with little autonomy, just as the low salary obstructs any social mobility. It is, then, all the more difficult to intervene in the relationship as it may be expected that

a *patrona* will use the *muchacha*'s dependency as a tool for manipulation, and this is the starting point for violations.

6.1 Abuse

Another important aspect is the abuse commonly suffered by domestic workers. Although it is unregulated and poorly documented, domestic workers are isolated and generally lack a social network to orient them when victims of abuse or discriminatory practices (Joffre, 1994). In the case of the *muchacha*, it is essential to look into the issue of physical and sexual abuse, as well as the ambiguity regarding health insurance. Moreover, the laws dedicated to domestic service are criticised as vague (Goldsmith, 1993). The law is rarely applied, given the difficulty of access into the privacy of households and the characteristics of the working relationship, as the reader will find in *Appendix 2*, where I translate the 13 articles dedicated to domestic work in the Mexican Labour Law. The lack of documentation of birth rates, abortion rates, mortality and maternity in the case of domestic workers in Mexico demonstrates the lack of attention given to this sector in the areas of reproductive health, working environment, education and social mobility. All of these aspects submerge into one: a lack of protection of universal human rights.

6.2 Name-calling as degradation

In addition, it has recently come to the attention of the authorities that the name commonly given to the domestic worker in Mexico has a degrading character. A plebiscite carried out in March and April 2000 aimed to establish consensual form of address for the domestic worker, which could be commonly understood but non-degrading. *Muchachas* voted against degrading names like *muchacha*,¹¹ *sirvienta*, *gata* and *criada*, favouring such terms as domestic worker, household employee, house worker and private home worker. Despite such efforts, an agreement could not be reached, as perhaps the way workers describe themselves could confuse the employer (CNN/Reuters, 2000). When even the name used is considered degrading and the occupation difficult to regulate, then it is essential to look into at how human rights face limitations to their application in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

My point is to highlight that the vague legal background and the discriminatory perception of the worker are significant in the case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. During interaction the elements of the household and of domestic service should be considered through a human rights perspective.

7 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the elements of the household in order to identify some contradictions contained in asymmetrical relationships of power, particularly in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. Given that these contradictions relate to sociocultural aspects of the study, they escape the logic of the law and contaminate the spaces in which they take place. It is therefore worth looking into the cultural undercurrents to specific relationships as this might help us to establish the meaning of the relationship for each of its parties.

Studying the household is to study a fraction of society, considering that the social phenomena therein relate to systems of reproduction (of relations, ideas, and roles). For this reason the study of relationships within a household implies a construction of knowledge reproduced, produced and instigated among house members. Representations of human rights are directly connected to the knowledge of household members. The laws protecting domestic service could gain recognition in terms of interaction, like the *muchacha* and *patrona* relationship.

The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, I have argued, is an asymmetrical relationship in terms of power. The encounter between *patrona* and *muchacha* implies inequality of economic status, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and oppression within a gender. For these reasons the lower category of the *muchacha* creates and enforces dependency on the *patrona*. This aspect deserves further exploration from a social psychological angle, where I will define the social knowledge underpinning the relationship and also the observance or infringement of human rights.

¹¹ The reason why I choose to use *muchacha* is related to its referential use; as well as to my intention to discuss its meaning as an element constituting social representations of human rights.

CHAPTER 3

Human Rights, a Social Psychological Approach

1. Theorising a relationship of social knowledge
 - 1.1 Social representations: outline of the theory
 - 1.2 Main philosophical underpinnings
 - 1.3 Theoretical assumptions
 - 1.4 Important aspects of the theory of social representations
 - 1.5 Outreach of the theory: relevant research on human rights
2. Human rights as social representations, theoretical issues
 - 2.1 The quantification of representations
 - 2.2 The *presence* or *absence* of diversity in a given context
 - 2.3 Human rights as representations guiding interaction
 - 2.4 Comments about my criticism
3. Conceptual issues pertinent to this thesis
 - 3.1 The concept of households as '*domestic space*'
 - 3.2 The concept of *distinction* as a guide for interaction
 - 3.3 Interaction '*a la latina*': about *deference* and *demeanour*
4. Conclusion and main points

Can human rights be addressed through social psychology? Given its political and legal content, human rights has been mostly seen as other than a social psychological phenomenon. The literature review on human rights in social psychology found numerous articles scattered throughout the discipline. They are related to other broad topics, like democratic values (Murchison, 1929; Rokeach, 1960) and authoritarian regimes (Lewin, 1936). There is, however, one body of research (represented by Doise, Clémence and colleagues) focusing on the social representations of human rights. In this chapter my aim is to introduce some theoretical assumptions of such research and to introduce my approach to human rights. First, I outline the theory of social representations, as the theoretical framework. Second, I critically analyse three key issues related to the main body of research on the topic. And finally, I conclude by explaining the concepts which contribute to the examination of human rights as social representations in the case study of this thesis.

1. Theorising a relationship of social knowledge

In the previous chapter, I explained the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as one of asymmetry involving elements of contradiction. The cultural differences, the educational gap and different ethnic backgrounds create convergence and divergence in the relationship. For this reason I argue that any explanation of this relationship must involve practices, as the expression of deeply rooted beliefs. In the specific case of human rights, it is necessary to consider how practices in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship involve interaction and construe it as an intergroup relation. In this case, social representations as a theory of common sense knowledge will help us to explore the psychosocial aspects involved in the construction of boundaries in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. In this chapter I will argue that the theory of social representation provides the initial tools for conceptualising the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as one producing and maintaining social representations of human rights.

1.1 Social representations: outline of the theory

Moscovici (1963/1977) elaborated the science of common sense known as the theory of social representations. His study on representations of psychoanalysis explored how people's linguistic expressions and propaganda used psychoanalytic terminology. The study analysed the contextual implications of psychoanalysis as a popular concept by comparing social representations with scientific knowledge. At the time of the study, representations of psychoanalysis had become salient in discussions on a variety of issues. This study therefore suggested the significance of looking at social knowledge as one constructed upon the everyday.

According to Moscovici (1973) social representations are:

A system of values, ideas and practices with twofold functions; first to establish an order which will enable individuals to direct themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communications that take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (Moscovici in Herzlich and Graham, 1993: xiii)'.

As a system of ideas and practices, the theory allows us to explore the ways in which social knowledge propagates and becomes part of everyday relationships. Social representations, then, are explanatory tools for studying the *organisation* of thought when this involves classification of information. Consequently, social representations should help to explain how individuals find *orientation* in a given context. That is, the study of social representations explores the meaning of objects surrounding a person. Thus, another important part of representations is that they will always be framed by their involvement in *communication*. Regarding this last point, I will argue later in the chapter that interaction is the expression of communication relevant to this thesis. In order to make sense of their surrounding world, individuals translate the unknown (Moscovici, 1984). In a further section, I will examine the mechanism through which social representations transform unfamiliar concepts into familiar objects. However, it is necessary to stress that through the theory of social representations we gain tools to explore the way in which ideas become part of relationships. This is demonstrated in the main philosophical underpinnings of the theory. Social representations serve in interaction both with the world and with others (Jodelet, 1984). Thus, the theory prompts the analysis of relationships taking into consideration the meanings derived from interaction with the subjects surrounding environment.

1.2 Main philosophical underpinnings

Having studied the popularisation of psychoanalysis, Moscovici (1963/1977) developed a theory of common sense drawing on the main principles of the sociology of knowledge. Some of the main underpinnings of the sociology of knowledge are the dialectic and dialogical relationship between individual and object and the holistic interpretation of social phenomena. Both aspects contribute to the construction of the theory of social representations into a new paradigm in social psychology (Farr, 1996, Marková, 1982).

The dialectic and dialogical nature of social representations means that through them we can discuss both stable and dynamic phenomena. Drawing on Berger and Luckman's (1967) seminal work on the construction of reality, the theory of social representations provides the tools for finding this knowledge in the everyday. According to Farr (1996),

this basis for the theory of social representations relates to the origins of the use of the term *representation* in sociology. Durkheim adopted the term in his study on suicide, where he discusses individual behaviour (i.e. suicide) as a product of collective representations, that is a general class of ideas and beliefs, namely religion, myth, time and space. In light of this, Farr (1987) suggests that the theory of social representations serves as a bridge linking explanations of stable phenomena, like beliefs and traditions, with explanations of dynamic phenomena, like practices and group relations. This is the main basis for establishing social representations as dialogical and dialectical.

This dialogical nature gives the theory of social representations a holistic edge useful for the exploration of the relationship between stable and dynamic concepts. Given that individuals create their own reality, the researcher interprets representations as an expression of their 'world view'. This spiral-like explanation is what Hegel dubbed holistic, because it explains concepts taking their context into consideration. The approach will be shown in the conceptualisation of objects and in the methods used to research it. The explanatory framework for phenomena, then, is useful for approaching the way individuals create and live their reality.

By going from the particular to the general, and from general to particular, the theory produces a paradigm shift in the entire body of literature in social psychology (Marková, 1982). The philosophical current in research on social representations created a trend for approaching the relationship between object/subject or individual/group as part of the social knowledge that changes and formulates reality (Doise and Palmonari, 1986; Farr, 1996). This is contrary to the dualistic Cartesian paradigm, which focuses on the meaning of an object and not on the relation it establishes with other objects or subjects. Given that the theory has a dialectic and dialogical nature shared with other social sciences, the theory can be related to other theories and authors sharing similar principles, such as Bakhtin and Aristotle.¹

¹ An recent applications of the theory goes beyond the scope of my thesis, but for further reading see Markova (2000) or Moscovici and Vigneaux (1994).

Basically, social representations help to study concepts in opposition. The underpinnings of the theory show that this exploration and interpretation of concepts will help to understand individual or group interaction. This means that the theory of social representations helps to analyse particular and universal issues by it providing general and specific explanations. This is the reason for the applicability of the theory of social representations to analysing the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, this theory will help to explain the reasons why this relationship relates to wider systems of society.

1.3 Theoretical assumptions

The theory of social representations, considering its philosophical foundations as discussed above, is a theory of social knowledge. The underlying assumption of the theory is that reality is a product of social knowledge because it explores the meaning of things that are taken for granted. This point is of particular interest to my study, as I believe that social representations of human rights are a reality in so far as they constitute relationships. The knowledge of human rights propagates in conversations in the street, the bars, the cafes (Berger and Luckman, 1967). Moreover, social knowledge is considered to be part of the society in question: 'social representations constitute a society's symbolic or mediated reality, and they affect decision making' (Himmelweit, 1990:30 *in original*). This social knowledge also allows us to discuss social representations as knowledge shared by a group, which have been referred to as 'wide spread beliefs' (Farr, 1993b). This means that, if shared and used during interaction, social representations share the assumptions related to social knowledge.

Thus, the social representations studied in this thesis might be understood to be non-hierarchical knowledge about human rights. That is, the importance of knowing about them is only relevant at the moment they become researchable concepts. The knowledge developed by the legal bodies as well as that developed by *patrona* and *muchacha* must be considered part of what is known about human rights. Social representations are forms of social knowledge, which are part of reality and influence common sense thinking

(Moscovici, 1984). My point is to state that the knowledge held by *muchachas* and *patronas* regarding the law should be viewed at the same point in the hierarchy of importance as that of the lawyer or the activist. All are equally significant when viewed in terms of thought and action towards human rights.

Finally, the study of social representations as social knowledge enables us to look at social representations of different groups, and at different levels. Although I have already discussed this point above, my point is simply to state how, in the case study central to this thesis, there is an exchange of social knowledge. The framework mentioned above allows us to analyse the relationship between *patronas* and *muchachas* as one between members of two different groups, who possess different knowledge and who construct their social reality differently. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship suggests different perspectives according to the context of the group, the situation of each individual and the knowledge built up around the working relationship. That is to say, when looking at social representations as the social knowledge of groups, we must look at the groups in terms of their practices and as groups in terms of their circumstances.

1.4 Important aspects of the theory of social representations

The most significant contribution of the theory of social representations to social psychology is related to its tool kit for exploring social phenomena. Some of these tools are of crucial importance to this thesis.

1.4.1 Propagation

Given that different groups are exposed to similar representations, Moscovici (1984) asserted that they are defined by the propagation of information. In his psychoanalytic study, Moscovici (1963/1971) explores three aspects of propagation: source, method of transmission and particularly, its end point or form it takes as a social representation. In an era of rapid dissemination of information, it has been explored how representations of psychoanalysis, mental illness and HIV/AIDS are likely to exist in many contexts underpinning different opinions. (Farr, 1998b). Likewise, students in every continent share a common understanding that the fundamental principle of human rights is justice

(Clemence and Doise, 1996). These kind of conclusions are underlined by the idea that social representations are to be found everywhere, and so they are the incentives, matter and consequence of shared attitudes, ideas and opinions (Verges, Albertini and Riba, 1996). Besides their propagation, social representations also become integrated into knowledge through the mechanism known as anchoring.

1.4.2 Anchoring

Given that social representations propagate, when they are incorporated into prior knowledge they transform it. This is known as anchoring, a mechanism for assimilating 'new knowledge with previous knowledge', as defined by Moscovici (1984). However, this mechanism involves two aspects of knowledge, its transformation and stability. Let me explain. In organising our thought and making sense of the unknown, anchoring is a process of classification that gives unknown objects new names. Thus, it transforms our knowledge when incorporating a new element.

Anchoring is the mechanism that allows for the incorporation of concepts that we are familiar with and that jeopardise our network of categories. It enables us to confront the new term with what we consider to be a component or a typical member of an already familiar category (Doise and Palmonari, 1986: 22).

However, anchoring also helps to explain how traditional knowledge is preserved and resists transformation. When Wagner, Duveen, Themel and Verma (1998) conducted research into representations of medicine in a community in the north of India, they found that people had ambivalent attitudes towards methods of healing in India. Representations showed that priorities alternated between traditional and modern medicine. Modern medicine 'is far from being transformed into a social representation which can compete with the weight of local traditional thinking' (1998:20 *in original*). Their conclusions were that Indian society is 'constituting modernity on its own terms' (1998:24 *in original*). It seems that anchoring produces new concepts but does not necessarily modify the old ones. Given that traditional conceptions resist change, social representations include tradition. This shows how the mechanism helps to differentiate old (stable) from new and uncommon knowledge. The anchoring mechanism adds new concepts while at times preserving the old. In the case of the *patrona* and *muchachas* relationship, this is a

useful tool for analysing how traditional rules governing the relationship have persevered. This will be explored in Chapter Seven, where I critically analyse whether prior knowledge has been completely substituted by the new. In the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, human rights represents a mixture of forms of knowledge. It is important to highlight that the anchoring of human rights competes with old conceptions that domestic service as an occupation is beyond the scope of public authorities and the logic of the law.

1.4.3 Objectification

Having been anchored, representations translate into concrete objects. These are useful tools for making sense of the unknown. Objectification is ‘the process by which the jeopardising categories and recondite notions, ideas and images are transformed into palpable and impartial common-sense realities’ by ‘transforming unfamiliar concepts into familiar ones’ (Moscovici, 1984: 40). Through this mechanism, what were once unfamiliar concepts convert into readable images. The concept of objectification helped Moscovici (1963/1979) to explore the development of naïve conceptions of psychoanalysis into expressions of everyday language. Through objectification the origin of representations becomes ‘obscured’ and ‘eventually the image is wholly assimilated and what is perceived replaces what is conceived’. Objectification is parallel to anchoring as ‘we find incorporated in an anonymous manner, in our speech, our sense, our environment, elements that are preserved and established as ordinary, everyday material, the origins of which are obscured’ (Moscovici, 1984: 40-41). This means that objectification constitutes a reproduction of a concept, object or ideas so genuine that makes new knowledge easier to manipulate in everyday life. This reproduction, or representation, eventually replaces it.

To sum up, the main aspects of the theory of social representations are its two mechanisms (anchoring and objectification), that help to explain the merging of new information with the prior knowledge. These mechanisms provide the opportunity to understand change and stability. In the case of human rights, the study of their social representations assumes that their knowledge is propagated, but will be anchored and objectified according to the context of the study. In a later chapter I explore how an

objectification of the right to employment relates to the idea that the *muchacha* is not entitled to live like a human being in her own right and she is, therefore, paid according to what the *patronas* considers to be appropriate.

1.5 Outreach of the theory: relevant research on human rights

There is a diverse body of research on social representations. There is one stream that seeks to establish the relation between core and periphery (Abric, 1993; Guimelli, 1993). Another stream establishes different techniques for measuring social representations. They create representational fields illustrating the most common themes for social representations, among many other topics (Doise, Clem  nce, Kaneko and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993). This field was later on applied for illustrating how social representations of human rights concentrate in some topics more than in others. In other studies representations are linked with practices and everyday issues of the time (Jodelet, 1991; Wagner et al, 1999; Flores, 2001).

However, the body of research focused on human rights is that most pertinent to this thesis. The literature looking at the social representations of human rights is easily identifiable. *What* social psychologists refer to as the social representations of human rights are two distinct ideas: one is the operational conception of a ‘set of organising principles which help individuals to take a position with regards to human rights violations’ (Doise, Dell’Ambrogio and Spini, 1991); a second stream, when talking about social representations of human rights, refer to a set of studies where students around the world are asked their opinion regarding cases taken to European Court of Human Rights, or its corresponding representative institutions (Clem  nce, Doise, de Rosa and Gonzalez, 1995).

Looking closely at what has been defined as the content of social representations of human rights, the core representation is the idea of justice. This core has been the normative guideline of many studies that conclude them to be a generalised idea of justice (Clem  nce et al, 1996), or peripheral ideas about felt justice (Doise and Clem  nce 1996; Doise, Spini and Clem  nce, 1999). I examined the objectives of some recent studies carried out using the same operational concept or sharing the initial assumption that

justice is the most relevant universal value when studying human rights. From my own review of this literature these are the objectives of the investigations according to their progression:

- An initial objective was to explore how people, mainly students, understand the institutional functioning of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Doise, Dell'Ambrogio and Spini, 1991; Clem  nce and Doise, 1996).
- A parallel objective has been to compare the thoughts of students from different countries regarding specific cases taken to court, such as cases involving refugees or child labour (Clem  nce et al, 1995; Doise et al, 1999).
- A questionnaire was subsequently drawn up, the aim of which was to formulate a concrete and consensual image of social representations of human rights, while considering other important implications, such as tolerance to violations, group history and the individual's own political background (Doise, Staerkl  , Clem  nce and Svory, 1998; Macek, 1997).
- Recent investigations have sought to portray social representations of human rights as a form of 'political knowledge of this era', which is partially involved in the elaboration of explanations for the positions individuals assume either for or against specific political issues, such as the political judgement of effective democratic systems (Staerkl  , Clem  nce and Doise, 1998); or the sovereignty campaign for the independence of Quebec (Herrera, Lavallee and Doise, 2000).

According to this body of research, social representations of human rights reflect ideas about justice and beliefs, like those regarding democracy, these sets of values and beliefs being propagated across countries. These studies support the idea that cultural and contextual differences can be perceived through questionnaires. As such, social practices of human rights can be defined and explored using quantitative methodology, given that their main function is to steer action, according to Von Cranach (1993). To take my analysis of this research a step further, I will highlight some of their main assumptions, identifying their strengths and limitations. This will direct my argument that a distinct approach to the sociocultural elements of the interaction between *patronas* and *muchachas* is central to the study of human rights as social representations.

2. Human rights as social representations: theoretical issues

In this section I critically analyse prior work on social representations of human rights. In so doing I highlight three aspects of the body of research that I suggest looking into its components with more detail.

2.1 The quantification of representations

Having stated that social psychology needs theories that comprehend different levels of analysis, Doise (1986), stated a preference for experimental research.² This idea is salient in most of his investigations. When stating that '*What is of most immediate interest to us is the experimental use of the concept*' (Doise, 1986: 20), the author made a convincing argument for the need to articulate explanations of social phenomena. While defining four levels of analysis in the discipline, (the intra-personal, inter-personal and situational, positional and ideological), he also proposed that new research in social psychology should go from the particular to the universal level by articulating explanations.

If there is a case for distinguishing four levels of analysis, it is in order to unite them better in future research. It is precisely this articulation which in our opinion constitutes the task of experimental social psychology; without this, the proposed explanations necessarily remain incomplete (Doise, 1986: 28).

Consequently, research on social representations of human rights has been carried out using experimental methods, such as the questionnaire that has been applied in several countries (Doise et al, 1996, Clem  nce et al, 1996; Doise, et al, 1999). In the methods chapter I will address some issues concerning quantitative methodology, in this section I will explain the weaknesses of such an approach in terms of its interpretative potential in the study of human rights. Three main critiques form the basis of my discussion.

² Doise (1986) states that the crisis in social psychology was the consequence of incompatible theories addressing similar phenomena. Theories belong to only one level of analysis, however by linking theories, he considers that the theory of social representations articulates different levels.

First, an initial observation is that large samples do not constitute universality. Although the initial sample of the research in Geneva has grown to international proportions (Italy, Costa Rica, France), it remains uniform. That is, the great majority of participants are students of law, or psychology (Clemence, et al, 1995). As a result of such international agreements as the San José Declaration (UN, 1993) governments are committed to the promotion of human rights through education. It is, therefore, likely that students at a university level would be acquainted with the subject of human rights. I would question to what extent is this body of research a legitimate source of universality? It seems that the analysis of these questionnaires may help to define that the idea of 'justice' is the core of the representation of human rights (Doise et al, 1996; Clemence et al, 1996). It is not, however, possible to articulate such a core finding with other levels of analysis say, with direct experience in relations between individuals. It is also not articulated with a wider social structure, or ideological level, an essential element of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

Second, another aspect associated with the methods used to obtain quantitative representations is the lack of opportunity it provides to incorporate other sectors of society into the sample. In particular, I refer to the illiterate population, which constitute a significant sector of society entitled to an opinion about human rights violations. In this vein, I argue that this method excludes many voices from the general conclusions regarding the 'general consensus' on human rights as social representations (Doise, et al, 1991).

The last aspect to be considered in the analysis of the quantification of representations is the quality of relationships that the researcher establishes with the interviewees. In a subsequent chapter I will argue that the relationship established with the context and the participants of the research is an essential tool for the interpretation of data. Studies related to representations of human rights are undertaken for distinct purposes. For instance, one study illustrates how democracy is lived in various regions of Canada, such as Quebec (Herrera, Lavalle and Doise, 2000), another study explores how human rights are perceived to be enforced in non-democratic countries by inhabitants of democratic

countries (Staerklé, Clemence and Doise, 1998). Social representations of human rights, then, express the experience of a group and thus they constitute part of the available knowledge with respect to the human rights of others. Again, this is a contradiction to the idea of universality, as the degree of association with a context or origin is not considered in the quantitative data. It is expected that Swiss students would be sensitive to issues regarding refugees (Doise, et al, 1998), just as Canadians would be to issues concerning sovereignty; as these are part of the current political affairs of their respective countries. However, while this questionnaire was drawn up in such a context, there are issues of translation and adaptation of the material used to explore countries where human rights are neither popular nor acknowledged, as is the case of Mexico (*Amnesty International Annual Report*, 2000). Consequently, the public consensus on human rights, as reported in questionnaires created in a very democratic context, like Switzerland and Canada, threatens the possibility of recognition for the work yet to be done in countries where democratic values are in the process of construction, such as Mexico. The reproduction of this questionnaire suggests that it is being taken for granted that the contextual conditions of a given country do not shape social representations as forms of social knowledge grounded on the experience of a society (Farr and Moscovici, 1984). This point leads to the next critique.

2.1.1 Not like collective representations

Systematic variations are anchored in collective symbolic realities, in social psychological experiences shared to different extents by individuals and in their beliefs about social reality (Doise, et al, 1999: 2).

When Farr (1988; 1998a) distinguishes between collective and social representations, he is fundamentally acknowledging that different groups will have different social representations. The whole point of differentiating collective from social representations is to discover to what extent social representations, while widely shared, are characteristic of a certain group. Collective representations are distributed in terms of mass public

opinion and are to be found across cultures as stable and all-encompassing concepts.³ By emphasising the momentum for cultural expressions, individuals and groups create reality through social representations. It is important to note that despite using the same terminology, social representations are different to collective representations. Farr (1996) shows how the theory of social representations has moved away from Durkheim's proposal. Collective representations, being broad and heterogeneous are facts lying 'beyond and prior to the individual' (Farr, 1987), social representations are defined as dynamic and present in the everyday. Social representations propagate through words, are expressed through actions and activated during relationships. Thereby, social representations relate to what groups know at a certain moment: law and social science students represent human rights in their conversations (Clemence, et al, 1995); students in Italy represent fashion clothing in their actions (da Rosa, 1996). Different groups have different social representations according to specific situations. However, as the above quote shows, Doise does not differentiate collective from social representations. As social representations are intricately linked with the context of a social group I argue that the research on social representations of human rights is far from being defined as collective, as Farr proposes (1998a). Considering the confusion, this thesis seeks out the social representations of human rights in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship using methods suited to revealing them as characteristic to a group.

As Macek (1997) and Moghaddam and Vuksanovic (1990) demonstrated, the popular understanding of human rights is founded on the dimensions of time and space. Macek (1997) showed how representations of human rights in Eastern Europe were linked with the fall of the communist bloc and the introduction of democracy. The latter study also shows how individuals tend to perceive human rights in other countries according to their own country's present situation. It therefore seems that social representations of human rights are highly dependent on the context of their production and reproduction. These

³ Farr (1987; 1993 and 1998) maintains that the concept of social representations remains different to that of collective representations, albeit inspired by the work of Durkheim. Unlike Moscovici (1984), Farr (1993) argues that contemporary social phenomena require explanations from both theoretical frameworks. Farr's (1998) seminal discussion on individualism proposes that collective, rather than social representations help us explore the social psychological traces of modernity and individualism impacting current social projects (i.e. democracy and human rights).

refer to the mechanism of social and not collective representations, as analysed by Farr (1993b).

To sum up, the quantification of social representations is limited in its interpretation and it demands universality. I illustrate this with my research. Studying Mexicans of different social classes presents one serious obstacle: some of the respondents (*muchachos*) are illiterate. How then are we to measure their representations of human rights? I therefore aim to show how there are other alternatives for exploring social representations of human rights that may contribute to articulating the levels of analysis. Theorist and theories should become responsible for applying material gathered elsewhere, and for interpreting results with reference to the context of fieldwork and its culture, like specific settings in Latin America. Purely experimental approaches elude the impulse of research on human rights. The narrow-minded interpretations of methodological statistical studies prevent researchers from acknowledging the real dangers to human rights. These factors lead to a lack of consideration of the context in which human rights exist or are lacking. This leads to the next point.

2.2. The *presence* or *absence* of diversity in a given context

In the previous section I highlighted the relevance of the contextual setting for the study of human rights. I identify three aspects related to the context in which work on social representations of human rights is carried out. Although the body of research has taken into consideration some characteristics of the various contexts for research, such as political preferences and value scales, I argue that the main contextual elements have remained unexplored.

Turning back to the characteristics of the population, Doise defends the '*proven value of human rights as widespread social representations*' in students in '*35 counties in the five continents*' (Herrera, et al, 2000). Is the broad application of questionnaires expanding the interpretative framework of the context in which human rights are assessed? Or is the choice of sample merely providing the tools for comparing the application of the questionnaire among many students around the world? Students are not representative of entire populations. We can refer to the notion of the professional culture, or the student

culture in which students would have more in common with other students around the world, than with lower status individuals of the same country (Giddens, 1991). Given that in Mexico the average level of education is sixth grade, the representations held by university students speak for a selected group of Mexicans, without considering the differences likely to exist between university students⁴.

In addition a study of social representations should not be carried out in isolation from its context if we look at recent work suggesting the political implications of the context where social representations propagate (Jovchelovitch, 1995b; 1997). Given that social representations are socially constructed and they are values shared with others (Moscovici, 1984), then it would be necessary to address the contextual elements building such representations. So, when Doise et al (1999) claim that context is relevant they state:

In countries where adhesion to universalistic values is higher, global attitudes towards human rights will be more favourable. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same reasoning holds for links involving felt injustice (Doise, et al, 1999:26 *in original*).

I argue that a further specification of this claim could look into the local aspects of a culture underpinning those practices enshrining adhesion or rejection to universal values. Cultural practices are shaped by the local knowledge of a group, as Jodelet (1991) has demonstrated. For instance, the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is a targeted threat in the human rights community, but it is also a traditional practice in some parts of Africa and Asia. In order to work for its eradication, campaigns have targeted not the practice in its meaning but in its context: unhealthy and dangerous (no anaesthetics, no proper utensils), see Dorkenoo (1994). My point is that, exploring widespread beliefs related to human rights involves the researcher in a holistic search for the meaning of practices and the symbolic realm in which violations occur. This would contribute to the work of Doise et al (1999) by looking into specific aspects of what they call global attitudes. Let me explain further.

⁴ It is useful to mention that in 1999 the National University (UNAM) went on strike for 10 months. The strike was organised and led by students. Students from expensive schools have other political behaviour.

Considering that the context of this thesis is diverse, as outlined in Chapter 2, it is essential to escape an over generalising ordering of a context by, I suggest, looking into detail at the meaning and consequences that certain practices have in a specific culture. Diversity is about options, abundance and multiple alternatives. This thesis will, therefore, look into contextual elements of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship influencing human rights as representations.

The traditional framework of research on social representations of human rights can benefit from extending its objectives of research and its data collecting methods (questionnaires among students) by associating the object of study with the context and the relationships involved in human rights. There is evidence of research on the topic carried out elsewhere with different premises and methods. An anonymous study came to my attention concerning representations of human rights in El Salvador.⁵ This study considers previous experiences of human rights violations as components of the social representation of human rights, as a form of social knowledge. Representations varied, rich and 'westernised' individuals supported them and wanted to learn more. Former victims of violations during the guerrilla war had stopped believing in them.

Since the above and other studies suggest that experience and context shape beliefs, I argue that beliefs on human rights are specific to a context. Social representations are therefore constructed on dimensions of time and space of a group as much as on individual experience. This leads to the last observation regarding the possible relation between social representations of human rights and the role they play in intergroup relations.

2.3 Human rights as representations guiding interaction

Having defined representations as '*organising principles of symbolic relationships between individuals and groups*' (Doise et al, 1999: 2), it is assumed that human rights

⁵ This wonderful study is anonymous and it was impossible for me to discover the direct source of the document. The title of the article is '*La representación social de los derechos humanos en El Salvador*', and it is part of a human rights informational campaign called '*Promoviendo la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos del Niño en El Salvador*', funded by the Center for the Study of Human Rights, University of Columbia, USA.

constitute the common knowledge of a group used for facilitating interaction. Human rights, as social representations are involved in relationships.

The practices of the inhabitants of one country influence, to a certain extent, the fate of the inhabitants of others, their way of cultivating crops, their health, the functioning of their institutions, their access to all kinds of resources. Mutual interactions and communication between humans generate normative representations. While interacting with another, an individual knows that his or her fate will be affected by that interaction, at least in certain domains, to a certain extent, at a certain cost. Normative representations of what these mutual effects should be exist. Guiding principles for evaluating relationships are part of human cultures. Human rights are such principles (Doise, et al, 1999: 2).

This quote opens the door to construct a social psychology of human rights in a vision where actions in one context affect individuals in other contexts. In order to sustain such statement, we must look at the conditions where the interaction between warrantor-executioner of rights occurs. Using the framework of social representation, my intention is to find evidence that may help to discuss how interaction is affected, directed and given meaning by representations. The quote above suggests that the idea that representations guide interaction (Doise, 1978) but it is sustained by a rather passive view of the individual, as they live unaware of the effects and consequences interaction has on the rights of others⁶. A passive view of the individual is dangerous because it underestimates people's capacity for modifying their situation and environment. Moreover, it may lead to conceptions of individuals as helpless to the effects of their environment. I find this perspective *Eurocentric* and condescending towards peoples in countries where there is a lack of space, not capacity, to reflect on issues of human rights. My intention is explore social representations of human rights considering how individuals act in reaction to already known concepts, and not only follow 'normative guidelines'. The objective is to understand how asymmetrical relationships in power, like the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, have remained despite social changes (transition to democracy) or individual achievement (higher education). In so doing I will explore the symbolic power attributed to space, as it may manoeuvre the flow of representations during interaction. For instance, in Mexico the NGOs I interviewed shared the fundamental concern that government also

⁶ A passive individual is not participating on the social construction of his/her reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

see the people as passive thinkers because *muchachas* and other workers do not demand their rights, while they react to paternalism by expecting others to provide for them.

2.3.1 Interpreting limits, finding proper definitions for intergroup interaction

What is social about social representations is not — in the first place — that such representations are representations of social reality, nor that they are social in origin, they are social because they are shared by many individuals and as such constitute a social reality which can influence individual behaviour (Jaspars, 1979: 7 *in original*).

This statement shows that social representations as part of interaction produce individual representations. They are projected as stable, but influenced through the process of interaction. This top-down model for acquiring and acting on social representations is incorporated by Doise in his work:

Social representations are of particular significance to group interaction. Their content may be modified by the nature of intergroup relations, but they themselves also influence the development of these relations, by anticipating their development and justifying their nature. Although representations are determined by interaction, they in turn also influence the course of interaction (Doise, 1978: 114 *in original*).

The above statement was widely acclaimed, as reflected in such statements as ‘social representations help to communicate what we know already’, (Moscovici, 1984), and ‘they are product, expression and instrument of a group in its relationship with others’, (Jodelet, 1991). The work of intergroup relations is mostly relevant to this thesis when associating intergroup phenomena with the theory of social representations (Doise, 1978). In particular, it is relevant because human rights, as social representations, are studied in a very specific interaction that entails group relations and social representations.

Now, the initial quote proposes a relation between interaction and representations as constructive and constant, but concentrated on the individual. However, in the work I reviewed on human rights as representations, what I found was a series of maps with dots. The distribution of representations on a map with axes should help us to identify those representations involved in practices by prior association. For instance, research shows that social representations would underpin the appreciation of human rights, as enforced,

by other groups. The idea may provide some clues to the influences of social representations (Staerklé, Clemence and Doise, 1998).

First, as I stated above, the mainstream literature on interaction contends that interaction is not only an individual phenomenon, but one necessarily related to society's norms and rules for interacting (Goffman, 1956; Simmel, 1950). But in the work of Doise we find representations illustrated in maps. This contradicts the previous definition of interaction, as used in Doise (1978) and other studies in the field of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). My point is, as the position of representations is already known (between groups and individuals), exploring their content would improve our understanding of their role in intergroup relations. Organisational maps where we find representations of human rights represented by clusters do not give any insight into where and how such representations improve or obstruct interaction at an individual or a social level. Rather, interaction itself should be the objective of the study, as in the *patrona* and *muchacha* interaction. The point of my comment is merely to state my preference for a symbolic approach to the interaction involved in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. This point I develop in a further section.

Second, the social representations of human rights are often confused with other terms. They are not totally distinct from stereotypes. If they influence and orient relationships by being anterior and justifying practices, there is no clear line between the two. Cantor, Mischel and Schwartz (1982:34) defined stereotypes as 'previous information which help us structure and give coherence to our general knowledge about people and about the social world'. Furthermore, the way the research on human rights is interpreted and carried out, there is no difference between research into attitudes to human rights and social representations. Diaz-Veizades, et al (1995) and Moghaddam and Vuksanovic (1990) studies on attitudes and Staerklé et al (1998) use similar material, populations and techniques for analysing and interpreting data.

According to Doise (1978), one distinguishing feature between social representations and intergroup phenomena is the way in which group membership is approached. Again, this

aspect is yet to be explored and has little or no significance in the case of data from students responding to the human rights questionnaire. However, it is clear that group membership has influences on the propagation of social representations. Ideas regarding discrimination towards other groups suggest that representation helps us to label other groups (Bergman, 1998). According to the findings of one study, Swiss people tend to reject refugees, although Switzerland and other neighbouring countries are in the process of severe political restructuring with regards to receiving refugees. The enactment of a policy could shape representations relating to the universal right to asylum and so this would affect the negotiation of boundaries between groups of nationals and foreigners (Doise, et al, 1991). Thus social representations inform the idea of membership, discouraging the right to asylum. These are important conclusions for the study of human rights. Nevertheless, they do not penetrate the individual, one-to-one level of interaction. Social representations can and should be interpreted in further detail considering them as part of intergroup and interaction phenomena. It would be interesting to find if prejudice draws on representations, as prejudice is a common reason for the infringement of rights.

A third point worth stating is that according to Jodelet (1991), the role of representations during interaction is active. However, it is not one just of influence but also of definition. By defining the setting, situation and course of interaction they guide and shape interaction itself. This is the main reason why I will draw on the concept of interaction in the analysis of data. So, each group has a reason for expressing representations. It is therefore necessary to consider the specific situation in which representations emerge.

2.3.2 Transforming the individual into a dynamic thinker

The last, but most important aspect of the way intergroup relations are defined is the question of awareness. In the above sections I established that when groups conceive human rights it is essential to consider the following dimensions: everyday practices, their context, their history and their meaning. These will have a definitive consequence on the way individuals and groups take actions with regards to them, and as Cohen (1995) highlighted:

There is a paradox in the heart of the human rights movement: we believe that if people 'only knew' what was happening they would do something, but we have learnt that just letting them know is not enough (Cohen, 1995: iv).

This statement tells us that human rights, as representations and practices, are not the product of a top-down knowledge. The quote suggests that while representing, individuals act out representations. The individual therefore transforms from a passive thinker into an active one. The way representations induce action is linked with the group experience and the feelings that members share regarding their fate, sense of belonging and even prejudice, as Doise (1978) argued. Cohen formulated a strong argument for distinguishing acknowledgement from awareness, both processes being involved in the practice of human rights. In Doise's study, social representations of human rights are a replica of the formal knowledge, in the same fashion as *Le Psychanalyse* (Moscovici, 1963/1971). However, this top-down model is not sufficient, as Cohen (1995) shows that also what people know about human rights becomes their official definition and crude reality. This is important to consider as in the case of the *patronas* and *muchachas*, human rights, as representations, exist as the product of an everyday experience at work (domestic service), as well as a neglect of their existence or as pure ignorance. I will argue in the last empirical chapter that social representations are part of human rights as known and lived in Mexican households. This also changes the formal conception of human rights by adapting the definition to the case.

Another, more formal aspect of the conceptualisation of human rights during interaction regards the anchoring of new information. The last appreciation to the body of research is the assumption that people are aware, to some extent, about the exchanges of rights involved in any given relationship. Even if exposed to same information, groups have different social representations (Farr, 1998a). This will depend on their circumstances. This is another important point. Recent research has brought to our attention that age plays an important role in the creation of social representations in a group. A study of the Chinese community in London, for instance, found that representations of health vary according to age. Second generation Chinese are more open to Western medicine than their older relatives (Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 1998). The point is that, although that same information may be propagated within a group, it is possible to find different social

representations within that group. The differences may be related to experience, information or connections with other groups. It is important to point out that groups do not have equal access to information. Take the case of how *muchachas*, generally illiterate, do not have the same access to information as their employers. Had I examined the social representations of human rights among human rights supporters (activists) and had analysed the media they have to hand (progress reports), this study would have resulted in an analysis of representations at a different level. Social representations of human rights, for the group of activists, would focus on infringements; this differs from the social representations of human rights in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. Representations of human rights among *patronas* and *muchachas* will emerge according to the information to which a group is exposed and which becomes part of their acquired knowledge. *Patronas* may have access to information about human rights but *muchachas* have, perhaps, never heard of them. Thus, the levels of awareness and acknowledgement will vary and probably depend on their social representations regarding this issue.

2.4 Comments about the criticism

While human rights do imply a dual relationship between groups and individuals, this refers to the logic of the law. Human rights in their dialectic relationship can either exist or be absent (Gaete, 1993). However, this should not serve as a motivation for phrasing social representations of human rights in a dual 'either/or' equilibrium. Yes, social representations of human rights underpin the existence or lack of human rights, but they could not be produced and reproduced in isolation. They are part of relationships, they are in the media and in the streets. In a word they are everywhere. They should be studied in isolation only for analytical purposes, but taking into consideration the wider social structure supporting and propagating them.

Finally, the study of social representations as social knowledge enables us to look at social representations of different groups, and at different levels. The case studies of this thesis involve an exchange of social knowledge at the level of interaction, but imbued with social meaning. A framework is needed in order to analyse the relationship between *patronas* and the *muchachas*. I consider its components, namely the sociocultural elements embedded in interaction which contribute to the construction of a group's social

reality. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship suggests different perspectives according to the context of the group, the situation of each individual and the knowledge built up around the working relationship. That is to say, when looking at social representations of human rights, we must look at groups in terms of their practices, and in terms of their circumstances. These aspects have to be taken seriously into consideration, and this is the subject of the next section.

3. Conceptual issues pertinent to this thesis

In this section I introduce three concepts contributing to the study of social representations of human rights. Having analysed the body of research on social representations, and bearing in mind that human rights have been conceived as knowledge which is given to people, I present the concepts supporting the research study of this thesis aiming to explore representations of human rights as practices and as thought. In this section I introduce the notion of domestic space as the material expression of relationships within the household, drawing on Moore (1986; 1994). I also consider the concept of distinction from Jodelet (1991) and of deference and demeanour from Goffman (1959). These concepts help to approach relationships '*a la latina*', meaning relationships based on socially ingrained beliefs.

The three concepts that I will present share the assumption that social knowledge encompasses some sort of behaviour. Thus, practices are an expression of social knowledge (Jodelet, 1991; Wagner, 1997). Given that social knowledge draws on experience, and on the situation of the group (as in Schutz's explanation of the life-world), social representations must comprise some type of action or behaviour. In the case of human rights, practices must be viewed as the full realisation of social representations of human rights, as it is through actions that the researcher gets a glimpse of what the person understands as human rights. The observance or infringement of these, I argue, are 'expressions' of social knowledge (Jodelet, 1991) or the 'realisation of ideas' as proposed by Douglas (1991). By enabling the study of human rights 'as practice' and

‘as thought’, it is possible to theorise about representations of human rights as social knowledge in application.

The exercise of human rights, I argue, is guided and shaped by the situation and sociocultural context of relationships, like the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. Given that individuals convey representations instilled by and shared with the group, I assert that this relationship may be considered an intergroup relation. However, in the above section I pointed out that intergroup approach to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship fails to capture the most fundamental events related to it as an interaction. In particular, this is because each woman belongs to distinct social and ethnic groups but these differences are expressed in the boundaries within the household. I will, therefore, incorporate some aspects from the theory of social interaction into the discussion. This task will be carried out by bringing new elements into the framework for the analysis of social representations of human rights.

Given that Doise and the group in Geneva contended that relations need representations to mark the boundaries between groups, this section aims to provide the conceptual framework that will help us to understand how these boundaries work with regards to human rights. I argue that boundaries between groups or individuals are necessarily part of the practices bringing groups together or tearing them apart. These boundaries, I argue, pull against the force of social representations, as described by Moscovici (1984). This section defines boundaries using conceptions of practices to reinforce their rigidity or flexibility. The section focuses on the context of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, as it is argued that the existence or lack of human rights in such a relationship transforms into boundaries.

3.1 The concept of households as ‘domestic space’

Based on the seminal work of Bourdieu, Moore (1986, 1994) proposes the concept of domestic space.⁷ This concept is useful to the analysis of households because it helps one

⁷ This derives from the concept of ‘habitus’ in Bourdieu. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, to explore the term as used by Bourdieu.

to examine how a relationship (i.e. *patrona* and *muchacha*) reproduces boundaries in such a setting. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the operational conception of rights and the household relate to the context for interaction. Moore's concept of domestic space is useful because it explores the sociocultural context embedded in space division (boundaries) and interaction. Among several aspects of domestic space, I highlight two that are pertinent to my analysis.

First, space in its *organisation*. That is, domestic space helps us to explore the type of interaction provoked by the organisation of space. Given the association between space and interaction, in her work: *Space, text and gender* Moore states:

Any discussion of the organisation of space would be incomplete without some indication of how spatial categories and orientations are linked to the ordering of social experience (Moore,1994:53).

This quote suggests that spatial categories might be sought in operational terms in the study of interaction in space organisation. Moore (1994) then, conducts the analysis of households considering gender and economic status as her operational definitions. The concept of organisation of space will be useful to my analysis, to the extent that it helps to relate orientation and interaction with wider social categories (ethnicity, level of schooling, etc.). The concept of domestic space is unique because it allows one to consider space divisions as the material or objective expression of relationships, while sociocultural elements will always underscore such relationships.

Consequently, the second aspect of domestic space that is useful to the study of Mexican households is *meaning*. Drawing on her work on gender, Moore (1994) shows that the concept of domestic space allows the study of practices as indicators of symbolic meaning. In so doing, the study of domestic space invokes the real and the imaginary through practices. Most importantly, the idea that practices give rise to meaning suggests that this meaning can change through practices:

To emphasise the strategic invocation of meaning, and the practical mastery of social schemes and values, provides a way of understanding how individuals are involved

in the production and reproduction of social and symbolic practices, without excluding the possibility of social change and transformation. The possibility of social change is inherent in the strategic invocation and use of cultural values, or if one prefers in their interpretability (Moore, 1994: 190).

Having defined domestic space, as ‘a context developed through practices’ (Moore, 1994:189), it is important to highlight some examples of how this concept has helped the analysis of households. The analysis of the Marakwet household, for instance, demonstrates that social perception and experience are organised in terms of space. In this study, Moore (1994) examines the divisions of domestic space, mainly upstairs and downstairs. These divisions, she indicates, borrow expressions from their environment which are imbued with strong gender symbolism. The association with its sociocultural context infuses domestic space with a set of socially inherited terms. Domestic space then, is a concept that enriches the analysis of space by providing a particular insight in associating the symbolism of space divisions with the wider social structure. In addition, as a tool for analysis, the concept of domestic space entails the idea that if practices change, their meaning will also change.

Both of the aforementioned aspects of domestic service afford the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship an active role in modifying ideas and practices. However, in the previous chapter I discussed how the roles of *patrona* and *muchacha* continue to be determined by the historical antecedents of their social groups. This aspect should not be overlooked, as domestic space has also been considered a form of organisation that has endured over time. It is also considered as ‘the product, at least in part, of past readings and interpretations’ (Moore, 1994: 190). The analysis of domestic space must extract meaning through the activities taking place within that space and, as a result, its final form is the dual product of both its past and its present meaning: ‘of its past genesis and present functioning’ (Moore, 1994:191). In this sense the sociocultural aspects injected into home that provide meaning and support its space organisation are material for study and analysis of the relationships taking place therein.

Given that domestic space is both organisation and meaning, it will be used to orient the analysis of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship in the Mexican household. The

intention here is to explore the meaning and organisation of boundaries within the domestic space. The relationship that is the object of this thesis will be analysed considering the household as a space for interaction (see Chapter Two), and as the embodiment of sociocultural representations. These representations are expressed in practices within its organisation as domestic space. In this thesis, representations of human rights relate to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship in as much as this relationship is shaped by the spatial conditions of its setting.

Throughout the thesis I will refer to boundaries in domestic space exposed during interaction. These are associated with the conception of distinctions in domestic space. Therefore, I now look into how the analysis of domestic space will identify distinctions guiding everyday practices.

3.2 The concept of *distinction* as a guide for interaction

From the vast gamut of literature dealing with interaction, I shall focus on the concept of distinction. Drawing on the work of Jodelet (1991) I argue that distinctions shape interaction by enforcing rules and by creating psychological and physical boundaries. The conception of distinction draws on two main points. *First*, they can be observed because they are expressed through practices that separate individuals and groups. *Second*, distinctions contain conceptions or ideas about others (otherness). Given that distinctions are objective (expressed in practices) as well as subjective elements of interaction (ideas about others), their study allows one to explore the distinctions underpinning the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, shaping interaction and related to a specific context. The examination of distinctions will complement the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the domestic space.

The concept of distinctions is founded on two main assumptions. First is that interaction is a 'continuous game of roles people play to get acquainted with each other' and with a situation, as described in Goffman (1959). I explore interaction in more detail in the next section. This assumption helps us to conceptualise distinction as a tool for guiding interaction with the objective of allowing individuals to get acquainted. Boundaries mark

distinctions and thus, orient an encounter towards a successful interaction. Like Goffman (1959), this thesis contends that interaction is bound to regions, or distinctions of a given setting. For the analysis and interpretation of the distinctions in the household, six distinctions will be identified: front, back, inside, outside, upstairs and downstairs. These regions are distinguished according to the type of interaction that takes place within. The back, for instance, is where people act in a relaxed, natural and friendly manner and at the front people project their public persona. These distinctions are explained and defined in more detail in Chapter Five. Having stated that the *patrona* and *muchacha* co-habit a space for working, the identification of distinctions will help our understanding of their relationship. From this assumption it is understood that while boundaries obstruct certain forms of interaction, they encourage others, I suggest that these forms of interaction are bound by the image *patronas* and *muchachas* have of each other.

The second assumption is that distinctions are part of everyday knowledge. They are taken for granted, and people remain unaware of them even if they impact the course of interaction. While distinctions are embedded in a setting, they constitute the reality of an interaction. This is what Berger and Luckmann (1967) defined as social knowledge. Moreover, this knowledge is pragmatic and repetitive. It is of particular importance to examine how this knowledge constitutes a 'recipe' or 'routine' for human relationships, 'a large part of the social stock of knowledge consists of recipes for the mastery of routine problems' (*in original*: 57). Going beyond this pragmatic use of knowledge is unnecessary until problems cannot be mastered. While not questioning the participants about the existence or meaning of the distinctions I identified, this research draws strongly on the method of observation, a point I discuss in the methods chapter. The point is that the boundaries erected through distinctions are used for the purpose of improving communication. In this way distinctions guide, direct and shape the interaction.

Considering these assumptions, distinctions are considered as the palpable image of an idea about others *as distinct*. This conception draws upon Jodelet's (1991) description of the boundary dividing mentally ill and sane people in a community. In the local coffee shop of the community, the quality of the coffee served to local people was better than

that served to foreigners and patients. The distinction was also drawn in the setting by seating the patients at the back of the place, avoiding contact between them and other customers. These sorts of divisions suggest that practices objectify ideas about others and they are anchored with social meaning. These ideas have a social basis and are of practical significance because they guide and shape interaction.

Why is the idea of distinctions different to Doise's (1978) conception of intergroup relations? It is necessary to point out the way in which I expect to contribute to the idea of intergroup relations. Doise follows the traditional intergroup framework provided by Tajfel (1982), and states that social representations guide intergroup relations by anticipating interaction. Jodelet (1991), in addition, explores the ideas and practices anticipating, shaping and guiding interaction. Jodelet's work relates to the setting of interaction, individual conditions and to the past history of group relations. Thus, the aim in using this framework is to create the tools for redefining intergroup relations. They not only use stereotypes existing prior to interaction but also representations about the relationship and its limits change through the events of interaction.

Having defined divisions as constructed on social meaning and used for directing interaction, boundaries become part of interaction. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship merits consideration as an interaction in a sociocultural context. Besides looking at the meaning of domestic space, this thesis aims to follow the trajectory of the relationship in just such a setting. This research will advance by seeking the conceptions which shape the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship and by defining the boundaries erected in this context. The main task will be to relate the conceptions to the context so as to find how distinctions, as practices and as conceptions, strengthen the development and prevalence of such conceptions.

Finally, I have revised Moore's (1986, 1994) notion of domestic space and Jodelet's (1991) idea of distinction of as conceptual tools for exploring the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as it is objectified in space separations. These concepts aim to support analysis of the household, while also considering the wider social structure to which they are linked. I will use this conception for the analysis of the division of domestic space in

regions, or areas, as exemplified in Goffman (1959). Another expression of the ideas of distinction is the set of rules for interaction, which Goffman (1956) also explored in an analysis of deference and demeanour. This will be the third concept I will introduce to the analysis of data.

3.3 Interaction ‘*a la latina*’: about *deference* and *demeanour*

Interaction is an all-encompassing concept, which should be taken into consideration in the study of boundaries. As I will explain in the following lines, the idea of domestic space and distinctions helps to explain the construction and use of boundaries during interaction. From the various elements of interaction, I select three that I consider enrich the study of social representations of human rights, specifically that area where interaction and intergroup relations need redefinition.

First interaction is defined as a set of roles played by those individuals aiming to become familiarised with one another and where elements of class, economic and social status, integrity and attitudes construct our knowledge about others (Goffman, 1959). Drawing on Schutz (1964), an important aspect of interaction is that ‘temporal and spatial immediacy are its essential characteristics’ where ‘the specific style and structure of social relations and of social interaction are decisively influenced by these characteristics (*ibid*: 23 in original)’. Boasting a considerable number of followers, the body of research using this framework shows that the stability of attributions guiding interaction is related to the permanent context of relationships (Brown and Levinson, 1992). Although individuals preserve their personal traits after an encounter, this is an effect of the type of encounter defined by the relationship, not of perception, as maintained in intergroup theory (Tajfel, 1982). Working relationships, such as those of domestic service, are examples of relationships reproduced by the given context of the ancient maid /master type of relationship. So, although there is some stability in the meaning of interaction, this does not relate to labels or stereotypes as Tajfel (1982) maintains, rather it refers to the momentum giving intonation to the interaction according to its surroundings and space distribution. Interaction then, illustrates the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as one in which individuals act in their own right.

A second aspect of interaction is expressed in the negotiation of meaning that it entails, as it is during interaction that individuals apprehend what words and symbols represent. In particular, my focus is on the apprehension of rules for interaction. I argue that such rules are embedded in space, as demonstrated by spatial divisions, and I explore this aspect later in this chapter and in Chapter Five. It is important to note that individuals follow rules based on a series of assumptions. Schutz (1964) contends that individuals rarely know about the reasons for interaction and the directions it takes, this makes it all the more interesting to study *patronas* and *muchachas* using this perspective. As they are taken for granted, these assumptions are absorbed from the wider social framework.

Two ideas about interaction contribute to the study of relationships in the household. One is the idea that in relationships of asymmetry, the meaning and expectations are instilled by society. Goffman explores *deference* as a common rule of interaction in relationships of asymmetry and inequality. He defines deference as ‘a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient of this recipient’ (1956: 477, *stress in original*). Deference reduces people to a lower position. In so doing, the person with higher position may act in deference as a means to avoid contact with others, or to warn others to respect their distance. The expression of deference is objectified in two actions. One is avoidance. It prevents pollution or becoming polluted by contacting an object or person. Whichever action, it is an attempt to gain privacy in a social space. This concept helps to explain distance as a means of avoiding contact. For instance, when separating the rooms or the cutlery, it would appear that there is a fear of polluting the household with the *muchacha*’s presence.

Demeanour refers to a kind of warning about what distance implies as, ‘*in asymmetrical relations, the superordinate has the right to exercise certain familiarities which the subordinate is not allowed to reciprocate*’ (*Ibid.*:481). My idea is that the representations of deference would help to explain the way in which continuous symbolic boundaries trace the extent to which the individual is not isolated but bounded and barricaded in regard to the other. This means that because of demeanour, an employer may get closer to

the worker, but the worker will not get to know her employer better. This would help to examine the extent to which the *muchacha* becomes 'one of the family'. Demeanour is of particular significance to this thesis. Demeanour is conveyed through palpable things, like dress, hairstyle and deportment, serving to remind others of the deference a person deserves. In Chapter Five I explain how this concept relates to the *muchacha*'s use of uniform, or the area in which she works. Given that demeanour represents the behaviour expected from an interaction, through it the people impinge on the rights of others.

Approaching relationships through the framework of interaction makes it possible to examine the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as one constructing its environment, where deference is displayed and thus, demeanour is affected. In this sense, interaction '*a la latina*' has to be understood as one embedded in its history and beliefs, relinquished in deference and demeanour and conceived in relationships within the household. Let me give some examples of relationships '*a la Latina*', using the concepts of deference and demeanour and which are illustrations of interaction where social representations of human rights are involved. In the case of the Mexican household, deference relates to specific actions. Take for instance the definitions used for this research (*patrona* and *muchacha*). These are referential and this thesis used them in order to represent the relationship. In everyday language the domestic worker is the *muchacha*, in the eyes of the *patrona*. This means that while the *muchacha* is present the *patrona* speaks to her using her first name, but as soon as she leaves the room or is not part of interaction she is referred to as the *muchacha*. In so doing, the employer derogates the worker and puts her back in what she feels is her proper place.

Finally, in this section I have brought together the concepts of deference, demeanour, domestic space and distinction. All these concepts will help us to understand the reasons for, and usage of, boundaries in asymmetrical relationships of power. As boundaries affect space distribution they are the practical expression of thought. Social representations frame all these elements as they are constituted from social knowledge and are expressed in practices that are shaped by ideas, which are *embedded* in and *produced* in everyday interaction.

3.3.1 An important note on the historicity of interactions

Having defined interaction and its main components, I venture to approach the *patrona* and *muchacha* as a unique sort of relationship. Interaction, as a social phenomenon, implies 'historicity', that is a trajectory of ideas and knowledge about those who one interacts with. Schutz (1964) describes this property as 'the predecessors', while Goffman calls it 'the setting of the encounter'. Again, I stress that the sociocultural environment of relationships involves the past history and future direction of those in the encounter and the one projected by the relationship itself. This framework can help us understand the endurance of relationships of asymmetry, subordination and inequality over long periods of time, as has been the case with the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

To conclude, interaction is neither purely individual nor social, it lies in a space between the two, its mediation involves historicity just as it directs the future of the encounter. In this task, interaction necessitates social representations, as maintained by Doise (1978). However, the examination of interaction, as a social phenomenon, would need to consider why and how these representations are invoked by anchoring symbolism in a significant part of the encounter. In particular, social representations of human rights need to be studied as product *of* and vehicles *for* interaction. The interaction then, is divided into its constituent parts for the analysis of social representations, but it is evaluated as a whole phenomenon in order to examine the relations between the content and potential of such representations. These are embedded in space and become objectified in boundaries that discourage or encourage certain types of interaction.

4. Conclusion and main points

The study of social representations of human rights is circular. The study begins by considering the sociocultural context of the study, namely the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. This relationship produces and reproduces a kind of social knowledge where *patronas* and *muchachas* converge and diverge. These contradictions construct boundaries. In this chapter, I proposed that the theory of social representations helps us to understand the reasons why these boundaries emerge and grow. However, previous

studies on social representations of human rights do not provide useful tools for this aim. I therefore incorporated other concepts useful for the analysis of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as an interaction bounded by space and time. This chapter proposes to conceptualise social representations in the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha* by looking into the household as a domestic space where boundaries are drawn by distinctions and these direct interactions. The observation of everyday practices within the households will help us to understand how social representations of human rights reinforce the observance or absence of human rights.

CHAPTER 4

Methods

Section 1

- 1 Approaching the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship
2. Data collection
 - 2.1 Recruitment of interviewees
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 - 2.3 The focus group experience
3. The conditions of research 'in the field', a look into qualitative research
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 - 4.1 Triangulation
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Section 2

5. In the field
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 - 5.2 Establishing trust
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6. Analysis
 - 6.1 Procedure for analysing observations
 - 6.2 Procedure for analysis of interviews and focus groups
 - 6.3 Data integration
7. Conclusion

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section aims to define the approach to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship drawing on qualitative research methods. I also define the methods chosen to conduct research. In Section 2, I narrate the development of fieldwork and the procedures used for analysis. The chapter emphasises the importance of understanding my research in its context and in terms of the relationship between observer and observed, this is shown in the initial insights of research in the field.

Section One

1. Approaching the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship

In previous chapters the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship was presented as an interaction involving different forms of social knowledge. Due to the historical and cultural underpinnings of domestic service, we are likely to find rules for interaction that relate to the wider structure of Mexican society. Considering the framework of social representations, I undertook to carry out an exploration of the relationship that would consider its cultural underpinnings, as Moscovici (1984) and Doise (1978) highlighted the ways in which these direct and orient interaction. I then present the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship as bound by dimensions of time and space and draw on Moore's (1994) conception of domestic space to explore the symbolism expressed through the space and time of such a relationship. Consequently, the methodology of this thesis aims to identify the effects and the significance of boundaries in the household. This chapter explains the procedures for data collection, data presentation and data analysis drawing on qualitative research methods and seeking to identify the elements of interaction within the household.

The body of research in social psychology aiming to explore everyday life is vast and a review covering all its streams, varieties and examples is ambitious, if not impossible (Baszanger and Dodier, 1997). This thesis uses some elements of research in the field, similar to ethnography, as a method for approaching social phenomena. The intention is to 'treat the practical activities, practical circumstances and practical sociological reasoning as topics of empirical study' (Garfinkel, 1967:1). The study of this thesis revolves around 'the comparative, descriptive analysis of everyday phenomena' (Toren, 1996:102). Given that the events relate to the everyday, it is relevant to consider those minimal instances of everyday reality emerging since the first approach to the relationship central to this thesis.

From the fieldwork I gathered two kinds of data, mainly data gathered from interviews and focus groups; and reflexive data (from observations and fieldwork). The data collected from interviews and focus groups was analysed together as it refers to the information directly provided by the participants about the relationship, while the reflexive data constitutes the body of information that helped to uncover the meaning

of the annotations of experiences occurring parallel to the development of the research.

The body of research is shown in the figure below.

PARTICIPANT	METHOD
Muchacha and Patrona	Interviews (10-10) Participant observation (36hrs) Focus groups (1-1)
Households	Participant observation (36hrs)
Public plazas	(2hrs)
Community workers	Interviews (3) Focus groups (1)

Figure 4.1 Body of research

The first step to identifying social representations of human rights in the *patrona / muchacha* relationship was realising that, as a study of interaction in private spaces, I would carry out an observational study. Because in addition to the observations I sought the meaning of boundaries in space, without formulating prior expectations, complementary methods used were interviews and focus groups. In the following section I will explain my data collection techniques.

2. Data collection

There are two aspects of fieldwork that are involved in the data collection process. One refers to the method chosen to investigate, which I describe in a subsequent section. Another refers to the activities leading to the completion of a method, for additional information, see *Appendix 3*. This is the topic of this section, where I will explain the background to interviews, focus groups and observations. Given that data were collected at different stages, according to each method, it provides background information. In this section I describe the conditions and characteristics of my research.

2.1 Recruitment of interviewees

Interviews were my first source of data. During interviews, I collected information about the participants as well as about their everyday life. This provided an insight into the setting for the research, that is to say, the household. I had to ensure that I would meet my participants again, so the encounter between *patronas* and *muchachas*

needed to be handled carefully. Thus, while I managed to gain further access to the household, I also learnt about the relationship and the everyday life of the *patronas* and *muchachas*. In my experience, acting, observing and researching helped to orient the development of my research.

Community workers, that is, activists in the field of human rights, contribute to the promotion of rights and social awareness among minorities. Their experiences show the importance and the necessity of work on issues concerning women from diverse sectors of the population. Community workers were recruited from four organisations, among many that were contacted by phone. I interviewed workers from three non governmental organisations: Atabal, Cidhal and Apis (NGOs) and one government agency and they took place at the headquarters of each organisation. Since the organisations had some publications and reputation, I had previously acquainted myself with the work of each one of them. These interviews provided background information about the current debate on human rights. After working with, and for, domestic service for more than ten years, the community workers provided crucial insights into the theme. So, the information gathered from these interviews added valuable understanding on the main human rights issues related with domestic service, as well as suggesting further routes for research.

Thus, my fieldwork started by approaching community workers, who participated eagerly and gave me suggestions of what to look for with regards to the *patronas* and *muchachas*. I then moved on to the *muchachas* and *patronas* and thus to gain access to households. Although contacting community workers was not difficult, contacting and gaining access to other participants was a very different story. Because accessing the population became a challenging part of the research; it is necessary to express just how the willingness or reluctance to participate in this research itself were in themselves representations of human rights.

Considering that Mexico City is one of the biggest and most violent cities in the world its inhabitants have learnt to fend off threats to the home. High voltage electric fences protect the homes, as if the vigilant cycle police force was not enough protection (as a new environmental policy, policemen have been given bicycles instead of patrol cars). Snarling watchdogs are a precaution against the robberies, kidnappings and assaults

that are now daily events in the city. In the face of such threats, the home represents a retreat from the outdoor dangers. Refusal to participate in my research clearly spelled out the message 'nothing alters the peace of this house'. This fear obstructed my contact with people. Family members simply do not talk on the phone to a stranger, particularly one stating an interest in 'studying' their home. Furthermore, contacting *muchachas* also meant contacting their *patronas*, asking their permission to talk with the worker. I was met with numerous rebuffs and a wide array of excuses.

The data collected while contacting people shows just how frustrating it may be trying to conduct research that goes into private spaces. After a few rejections I opted for a facilitator, a third person who would have some relation to those I intended to interview. Friends or relatives of people I know offered the only possibility for carrying out my research. Thus, having asked around, I indirectly made contact with my participants. Although time consuming, the recruitment of participants began to prove promising and, thus, I began to meet the subjects of my study. This shows how, in some contexts, networking is an essential factor for establishing trust with a researcher.

2.1.1 The topic guide

Patronas and *muchachas* were interviewed in the setting of the research, that is to say, the household. Interviews were tape-recorded and I also made some annotations (see *Appendix 3*). The setting within the household varied, as *muchachas* were interviewed in the kitchen and *patronas* in the living room. Given that each would have a different experience with regards to the job (one delivers, the other makes demands) they were interviewed in isolation and away from the other. The interview guide was constructed in order to encourage them to discuss topics related to human rights (see *Appendix 4*). Interviews aimed to uncover the main topics related to their experience in domestic service and particular experiences in the household relationship.

The topic guide aimed to raise discussion about what is allowed or restricted in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. As it can be noted in the fieldwork diary (*Appendix 3*), questions were piloted on the early steps of research during recruitment. Following the aims of interviewing suggested by Farr (1993a), interaction with the participants became very much the basis for deciding in which order to ask, and also

to bring forward new elements to the interview. In all, interviews aimed to gather information about the interviewee (*patrona* or *muchacha*), as well as of their relationship. Lastly, it was intended that participants stated knowledge they had about human rights.

The dynamics of the topic guide were enriched by the spontaneous contribution of the participants. Due to the systematisation of data, I only include topics that are consistent in the discourses of the participants. Issues related to human rights principles (i.e. fraternity, equality and justice) came up as part of the data set and were related to other topics of the guide.

Finally, individual interviews were carried out in the household of the *patronas* and *muchachas* and at the headquarters of the different organisations. From the interviews I collected data relating to the relationship and to general concerns about domestic service.

2.2 Entering households and carrying out observations

Observations were carried out in four households, where the *patronas* agreed for the research to continue after being interviewed. These *patronas* were Luisa, Yolanda, Andrea and Mari. The number of homes I observed reflects the problems encountered in attempting to conduct research on domestic service inside households. It is crucial to highlight some of the elements that helped me to carry out observations, as these emerged from my perception of researcher as actor and participant.

An initial aspect to observe and to participate in was the ritual surrounding food. Mexican culture is based very closely on food. The welcoming ritual to a Mexican home involves an invitation for breakfast, dinner or supper, or at least for dessert. The exquisite Mexican food made some parts of the research an absolute treat. As a newcomer, I was invited to eat with the family before commencing the formal observations. I joined in the rituals with pleasure. Sitting at the dinner table, I appreciated the first distinction between *patronas* and *muchachas*. The *muchacha*, while receiving the heartiest congratulations for her cuisine, did not pronounce a word, nor did she sit down at the table. However, the *patronas* would proudly state that the tasty offerings were representative of her house, where the *muchacha* had

learnt cooking from her. This helped me to observe how social representations in domestic service fluctuate inside the household and are objectified through actions. The practices surrounding eating and cooking demonstrate the rights to administer the space of action. Preparing food is a ritual that lies at the heart of the authority of a household. As a guest, it was obligatory to receive the food before getting acquainted with the home environment. Thus, I had to observe as much as possible on every occasion for fear that these observations would be interrupted. By eating with the family I was able to gain access to the back spaces of the household, thus observations allowed me to interpret the flow of representations, which I examine in the Chapter Five.

Another factor I was able to appreciate while observing was the importance of children in the home. In order to 'enter' home dynamics, I played with the children. This distracting yet pleasant activity aided me to participate in the comings and goings in areas that are not accessible to the outside observer. Moreover, I then observed the *patrona's* and *muchacha's* routine at close quarters. In doing so, I witnessed the distribution of work loads between *muchacha* and *patrona*. Although the mother was convinced that the *muchacha* adored spending time with the children, the *muchacha* turned her attention to other things rather than the children. The *patronas* and the *muchachas* gladly allowed me, the tolerant psychologist, to help the children do their homework. However, I was careful not to let the *muchachas* take advantage of my presence, and took notes.

Observation techniques allowed access to events of minimal expression but of great significance to the research: for instance, the *muchachas* working routine seemed to be longer and more intense than the *patronas* seemed to believe. As I withdrew from attending to the children, it became apparent that the *muchachas* concentrated on other things such as ironing, washing dishes and getting through the daily routine. During my observations, I witnessed how phone calls and contact with the outside world were conspicuously absent from the *muchacha's* routine. So, having entered the home and gained access to the private spaces, which children allowed me to do, I recorded ethnographic details about the household.

Finally, while the observation techniques were applied in four households, the fieldwork as a whole provided me with a vast body of information regarding the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. Observations were annotated in a fieldwork diary. Notes included the reasons for cancellation and the sort of interaction taking place in each setting. Although observations were often interrupted and cancelled, the data gathered provided information on the setting of the research and some elements of practices in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship.

2.3 The focus group experience

As a technique less formal than an interview, focus groups were used to provide data about the relationship from a less personalised contact with the participants. My main idea was to complement the data collected in observations and interviews for later comparison. Discussion is the basic characteristic of focus groups (Lunt and Livingston, 1997). However, the organisation of focus groups was complex. The lack of interest in any subject related to human rights was demonstrated in the numerous failed attempts to stimulate group discussion on the theme. For instance, when I asked a *muchacha* to join a focus group, her *patrona* reacted violently, screaming at me and sending the worker to the back of the house to prevent any contact. Her fear was expressed openly when she stated that she did not want me to encourage the emancipation of human rights in her *muchacha*. The data collected through this process of recruitment is a valuable source of insight into representations of human rights which may not come to light during the focus groups.

Given the need for trust among participants, the focus groups were carried out in the church nearest to the households. There the interviewees (i.e. *muchacha*) would feel at ease to speak about their counterpart (i.e. *patrona*). They would be away from the perceptive range of the other. This setting demonstrates the lack of space in the home for discussing the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. The *muchachas* would measure what they said, knowing that they were in earshot of the *patrona*, as I saw in the individual interviews. The focus groups succeeded because the church is a convenient and comfortable place for *muchachas* and *patronas* to discuss their home affairs. This testifies to the significance of the household, where none of the participants showed any eagerness to participate in a group discussion about their job. The data collected

in focus groups includes data that emerged throughout the process of recruitment while making the choice of space to carry them out.

Focus groups represented a unique source for a fruitful discussion and although there were timorous responses to joining the group discussion, once they took off the participants wanted them to continue. In the case of the community workers, focus groups were carried out in their offices, well suited to these activities.

The collection of data began with the initial steps of fieldwork. It is important to consider that among the many meaningful events involved in carrying out fieldwork, those that showed resistance are taken into consideration in the interpretation of data. So, observations, individual and group discussions were carried out differently and the events related to them demonstrate the delicacy of speaking about human rights in the context of the *patrona / muchacha* relationship. The process of data collection also takes into consideration the position of the participant, who needs trust to speak in and about activities in their private spaces. Thus, carrying out interviews, observations and focus groups gave insight into the interaction objective of this thesis from different angles. It therefore gave a taste of what the experience of domestic service means to each participant.

Finally, there are two ways to explain the characteristics of the research-researcher relationship. They are known as 'indexicality' and 'reflexivity' (Garfinkel, 1967; Parker, 1994). These help to explain how, as the fieldwork develops, the researcher becomes actively involved in the research. Reflexivity and indexicality are two main conditions of this research that I define in a subsequent section. Prior to their definition I will explain how these conditions help to will lead the presentation of data that will be read in the following chapters.

3. The conditions of research 'in the field', a look into qualitative research

The initial collection of data shows that there are contextual and situational elements incorporated into the process of investigation. Given that the context of the investigation is already part of the methodological approach, this research aims to carry out:

...the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made. A researcher's selected domain of interest here will be a particular aspect of action and experience, but it could just as well be a reflexive study of part of the discipline of psychology itself (Parker, 1994: 2).

By making interpretation part of the research problem, the conditions in which data are collected, presented and analysed are part of the investigative process. Because social knowledge is already out there, the basic constitution of this research, as a qualitative interpretation of events, weaves theory and method together.

Thus, the heavily interpretative character of this research suggests that the logic of the explanations and explorations relate to the experience in the field. Two main conditions mark my investigation as valid and representative of the social representations of human rights in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. These are reflexivity and indexicality. In the following I will define them.

3.1 Reflexivity

This research developed gradually, by thinking and reflecting on the events taking place throughout the entire research, that is, *as it was carried out*. In this thesis reflexivity however, is not meaningful unless it shows some kind of exchange or impact with the participants. Therefore, I argue that this thesis provides us with a vision of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship that is valid in its own right.

The researchers know, require, count on and make use of this reflexivity to produce, accomplish, recognise, or demonstrate rational-adequacy-for-all-practical-purposes of their procedures and findings. Not only do members take that reflexivity for granted, but they recognise, demonstrate and make observable for each other the rational character of their actual, and that means the occasional, practices while respecting that reflexivity as an unalterable and unavoidable condition of their inquiries (Garfinkel, 1967:6)'.

Having stated this, I will mention some of the situations that revealed this reflexivity when accessing households. For instance, while I was visiting one house, the owner cleaned the stove immediately after the domestic worker. When she saw me, she turned around and explained that small details make the difference. This reflection gave an insight into the appreciation of the work done by the domestic worker. These types of examples illustrate the context in which representations emerge.

Considering the evolution of the research, the analysis of data in this thesis is based on the information gathered during the research and the data gathered in interviews, focus groups as well as the reflexive data from the observations. The validity of this research is therefore related to the genuine origin of data and the conditions of their collection. The interpretation of events within the household enables the researcher to explore the influence of wider social structures where validity can be achieved through a series of techniques meant to capture other relevant variables enriching the interpretation of the setting where an object is explored. A popular technique among social psychologists is triangulating methods by using different methods to explore a similar objective (Flick, 1992). I define triangulation and the selection of methods for this thesis in a later section.

Finally, reflexivity affords this thesis the authority to speak of events taking place in the household as knowledge embedded in the everyday life of the participants. It is therefore valid to state that the position of the researcher is part of the research process. As I discussed above, reflexivity combines perceptions of a problem using information from diverse sources.

3.2 Indexicality and relativity

Having made a case for the conditions shaping the research, it is crucial to consider that the outcomes interpret practices in their meaning, and at that same moment. This is what is known as indexicality.

Wherever practical actions are topics of study the promised distinction and substitutability of objective for indexical expressions remains programmatic in every particular case and in every actual occasion in which the distinction of substitutability must be demonstrated. In every actual case without exception, conditions will be cited that a competent investigator will be required to recognise, such that in that particular case the terms of the demonstration can be relaxed and nevertheless the demonstration be counted an adequate one (Garfinkel, 1967: 6).

As indexical, the analyses of data are always tied to a particular occasion or use. By embedding interpretation in the context of the research, the outcomes are bound to have some resonance on the meaning and objects present at the moment of conducting research. Among the many techniques available for the analysis of data, as indexical, I select documentary interpretation, as does Mannheim (in Garfinkel,

1967). This means that the interpretation of data contemplates aspects relevant to the development of the research and tied to the context, for example, the level for willingness to participate in the research demonstrated that human rights have great significance in many aspects embedded in the everyday life of the household. Without the possibility to put social representations of human rights into context, this research would fail to capture an essential aspect of human rights, as practices.

This is to say the conditions in which the research has been carried out and interpreted direct the researcher towards a qualitative interpretation, that is one which will incorporate the contextual elements shaping the research. Reflexivity and indexicality shape the interpretation of the objective of the study; nevertheless, the research is a valid and legitimate study of a contextual relationship.

3.3 Strengths of this methodology

Having argued, in Chapter Three, that investigations to date on the social representations of human rights have failed to capture the sociocultural context of the phenomenon, this thesis is an attempt to overcome these limitations. Therefore, I seek to explore the setting of interaction where representations of human rights exist. I will not go into the debate between quantitative and qualitative methods, as I think the study of human rights can benefit from combining explanations and modes of interpretation. Nevertheless, I explain the reason why I believe that my study provides a useful insight into human rights, as representations in practices.

The research allows us to focus on the exchanges and negotiations taking place in the household. The meaning of the interaction relates to human rights, as practices underpinned by representations, in which interpretation is seen to be:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. An attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do;2. An exploration, elaboration and systematisation of the significance of an identified phenomenon or;3. The illuminative (<i>sic</i>) representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem (<i>Parker, 1994: 3</i>). |
|--|

These aims steer the investigation towards the consideration of the space for interaction, and the absence of participation as meaningful data surrounding the

interviews and observations. The methods and techniques for approaching data used in this study have the aim to explore, capture and interpret the events emerging from the research on the *patrona / muchacha* relationship. Because the collection and interpretation of data may coincide, the methodological approach to the relationship central to this thesis is founded on the readings of the setting and the events surrounding investigation.

Given that social representations of human rights in this thesis testify to a social knowledge formed as a guideline for interaction, as noted in Jodelet (1991), data are analysed as the expression of wider sociocultural structures, whereas the quantitative analysis of social representations of human rights makes no reference to the way history has shaped interaction between people who consider rights should, or should not exist. Such a position would distance the researcher from the research objective, while carrying out an interpretative analysis would do the opposite.

Social representations of human rights have been investigated using useful techniques for generalisation but which separate them from their context. For instance, studies considering political conviction and values as added features of a representation statistically organise the representations as pictures of society, but pay no heed to the elements that give rise to these representations (Clem  nce, et al, 1995). Since qualitative methods explore and describe how common themes are agents of meaning (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999), to seek mediation during interaction would be an aim of particular significance to this thesis. Thus, it is not the potential to generalise, rather the utility of exploring shared meanings that is useful to this work.

Thus, the strength of the research carried out in this thesis stems from its potential for interpreting events in everyday life as part of a given context and as agents of meaning. For this reason the methods chosen aim to explore how categories and concepts are involved in the *patrona / muchacha* relationship. Moreover, these characteristics are distinct to those of other research in the field and, therefore, these studies compliment my research. However the real distinctions between the methods used for this research and for the body of research elsewhere cannot be fully assessed until some of the empirical examples are considered. Therefore, in Chapter 7, I draw parallels between my findings and those of other research in the field.

4. Methodology and social representations

Having defined the methodological approach of this thesis, I will explain my approach towards social representations of human rights and how it explores and interprets objects, considering the subject/object relation as part of the setting. The approach to social representations of human rights basically refers to the epistemological approach to the object of study. These approaches draw on positivistic (Cartesian) or phenomenological (Hegelian) traditions of thought. While both have some popularity in research in social psychology, the latter has a longer history in the discipline (Harré, 1984). By drawing on the Hegelian tradition, the theory of social representations is attributed the paradigm shift (Farr, 1996). This can be seen in the type of explanations given using diverse methods, such as experimental (Doise, Clemence, Kaneko and Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993) and statistical analyses of core and periphery representations (see Abric, 1993). However, the shift has also been reflected in the interpretations of phenomena, including historical aspects of social representations (see Jodelet, 1991). My point is that research using this paradigm has the strength that it takes the cultural and historical elements of social representations into consideration (Marková, 1982).

The aims of qualitative research are to explore, capture and represent meaning and social psychologists agree that there exists a wide array of techniques suited to this endeavour (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000; Flick, 1999). In the case of research on social representations some of the most popular techniques are observation (Jodelet, 1991; Duveen, 1993); the narrative interview (Jovchelovitch, 1995b); and focus groups (Lunt and Livingston, 1996). Through the use of such methods, the theory of social representations contributes to our understanding of the role ideas and practices play during interaction. The study of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is an example of qualitative research exploring, elaborating and systematising the significance of interaction. This thesis is an example of research carried out using this approach, as the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is examined as one oriented by, and immersed in its context and momentum. So, the methods used within the framework of the theory of social representations provide our exploration of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship with the potential tools for interpretation.

4.1 Triangulation

Triangulation, a common form of validation for research in social representations was proposed by Flick (1992). By triangulating methods in this thesis, I aim to approach social representations of human rights from different angles. I sought out three primary sources of information using the research methods mentioned above. My first aim was to identify and access the world view of the actors (participants), namely the *patrona* and *muchacha*, this information being collected mainly through individual interviews. Another aim was to explore their interaction. For this, I undertook participant observation in two settings, the household and public plazas. A third aim was to compare my own observations with what experts know about human rights in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. For this, I carried out interviews with community workers. The triangulation of aims-agent-method resulting from my research is illustrated below.

AIM	AGENT	METHOD
EXAMINE THE KEY ACTORS Make acquaintance with the participants of the relationship.	Muchacha and Patrona	Interviews (10-10) Participant observation (36hrs) Focus groups (1-1)
EXPLORE THE MEANING OF A SPACE Perceive rules of authority, contact, exclusion and self-recognition, among others	Households Public plazas	Participant observation (36hrs) (2hrs)
GET A PROFESSIONAL OPINION Find out what is said about human rights and domestic service	Community workers	Interviews (3) Focus groups (1)

Figure 4.2 Triangulation

In essence, the study of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship can be appreciated from several angles. The most relevant to this study are those angles providing insights to the way social representations of human rights are shared. The study of social representations of human rights through ethnography and qualitative methods is valid with respect to the variety of perspectives it encompasses, the reflexivity involved in the interpretation of data and the agency between participants or setting for achieving an aim.

Because the study comprises a range of techniques, in the following section I define each technique used to approach the objective of the study. There are three groups of

participants: *muchachas*, *patronas* and community workers. Likewise, there are two settings for observations, one is the household and the other is the public plaza. Prior to the analysis of methods, I will define each of them. Having stated this, I refer to these methods as those comprising my ethnographic approach to the Mexican household. These are participant observation, individual interviews and focus groups.

4.2 Conducting participant observation

This method helped me to appreciate subtle exchanges between *patrona* and *muchacha* within certain boundaries. Participant observation, as it is most commonly understood, is the primary method for gathering data in ethnographic research. In addition,

Participant observation is not so much a method as a particularly intense way of living, a day-to-day experience in which you are simultaneously caught up and distant: at once a participant and a questioning observer of your own and others' participation in ordinary events (Toren, 1996:103).

In psychology, participant observation is fundamental for investigating interaction, as it is the only method providing direct experience of the research problem. This is shown by my participant observations which involved a reflective process. An observer participates in his/her research by being there as well as by questioning what takes place. In so doing, observations of the *patrona* / *muchacha* interaction emphasised the singularity of an everyday encounter in everyday expressions. Observations were annotated in order to collect data systematically during my fieldwork.

Participant observation as a method for stating the obvious rescues common thinking and translates it into researchable data. Observations have constituted a cornerstone for contextualising social representations, like Jodelet's (1991) example of representations of contagion, when people separated clothes to avoid any contact. Thus, representations, as embedded in space, language and thought are expressed through practice.

Finally, the analysis of observations of households draws on the dramaturgical model of interaction as a theory investigating the significance of boundaries. Participant observation reveals that a certain type of interaction takes place within each boundary

by witnessing the daily routine of the participants. I will argue in a later chapter that interaction in space is enforced by ideas about what actions are the norm within each space.

4.3 Defining the one-to-one interview

Individual interviews are defined as the encounter between two or more people that promotes a meaningful exchange. The interview involves '*many crucial factors that lie beyond the time and place of interaction or lie concealed*' (Goffman, 1959). For example, the interviews held with *patronas*, *muchachas* and community workers add information to what was observed especially when showing contradictions between what individuals say and what later on is observed.

Farr (1993c) distinguishes the process of interview, using the hyphenated *inter-view*. '*Inter-view is an everyday social encounter between two or more individuals with words as the main medium of exchange. It is a peculiar form of conversation*' (ibid: 182). This means that interviews involve a subject/object position that benefits the interpretation of data. For example, in this study interviews were the primary form used to construct a congenial environment to converse about human rights in the household. When the interviews were completed, the researcher asked for permission to continue researching.

4.4 Investigating focus groups

Lunt and Livingstone (1996) define focus groups as particularly useful technique for carrying out research on social representations, because they facilitate the examination of what participant's say and what they mean by what they say. Although psychological research has used focus groups as a technique in the field of decision making (Morgan, 1993), they are now used in many areas as fertile grounds for discussion. They ensure a convivial atmosphere to encourage debate on sensitive topics, so the purpose of group discussions is to reach an agreement or rejection by focusing on one idea. One of the pitfalls of focus groups is the amount of time one needs to devote to organising them. However, one of their strengths is that they shed light on the roots of a social conflict and they can even lead a researcher to find cultural patterns (Lazarsfeld, 1993). As the group situation tends towards informality the researcher can attain a minimal view of the various perspectives of a topic. The

variety of participants make focus groups a unique forum for passionate discussion. For instance, in the focus group with community workers, the divergence in male and female points of view to domestic work provoked a lively discussion.

In my investigation, focus groups varied and created an environment for heated discussions. There was one for *patronas*, another for *muchachas* and another for community workers. The focus group with the *muchachas* led to a lengthy discussion in which their aspirations, frustrations and stories of abuse came to the fore. The *patronas*' group focused on the relationship with the family. The community worker's group conducted a heated debate about human rights and the effects of the gender division of labour.

4.5 Discussing my approach to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship

Having explained the core of my approach to this investigation as one based on description and analysis of space, I draw some conclusions. This thesis, formulated from the fieldwork, is, in many ways similar to ethnography. The exploration of social representations of human rights, as practices in space during interaction, calls for consideration of its context in space and in society. The critical assessment of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship then would comprise ethnographic descriptions to capture the significance of boundaries, and the exploration of meaning, using interviews. It is therefore important to consider the role of the researcher as an interrogator, as stressed in Duveen and Lloyd (1993).

Ethnographic description assumes that social life revolves around collective systems of meaning, and that it is through interrogation of the beliefs and practices of a community that these systems can be analysed (*ibid.*, 1993: 96).

Given that the researcher has some capacity for identifying objects and discovering their significance, this thesis will analyse practices as objects of description. Thereby, the ethnographic description, drawing on observations, interviews and focus groups, explores social representations of human rights in three major forms. These are:

- Describing and interpreting the role of artefacts in space as tools for interaction, and therefore with meaning, as indexical.

- Carrying out research as a means to access spaces and interaction that would otherwise be left unnoticed or omitted from parallel research.
- Interpretation of the divisions of space that is benefited from the inside perspective of the researcher. This is to say that the researcher, as actor (and observer) manages the progression of research, by being reflective.

Thus, the ethnographic description in this thesis allows patterns of communication found in discreet interaction to be revealed, for instance, the *patrona*'s way of demanding things from the domestic worker. By accessing the household I observed how different areas have different meanings. These patterns, I argue, translate into boundaries for interaction. The experiences taking place within certain spaces suggested that *patrona* and *muchacha* use household space differently; such events are not observable through other methods. This type of description is supported by my background knowledge of the context. I lived in Mexico until recent years, and the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is one familiar to me. During fieldwork and, as suggested by Heider (1958), I was 'aware' of how to manage perceptions in order to access households I was unfamiliar with.

4.6 Some concluding remarks

Two aspects shaped the investigation on social representations of human rights in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. One was the collection of data and the other the sociocultural context of the research. I examined how these are parallel aspects to the conditions for the research methods (indexicality and reflexivity). As the research aims to study practical activities that sustain the meaning given to space, the conditions of the research strengthen the analyses. The involvement of participants and researcher throughout the investigation show that an ethnographic description is an adequate approach to the phenomena that are the objective of this thesis. In the following section, I will describe the progression of research conducted through reflection and considering the context of the research.

Finally, this first section explained the extent to which I draw on ethnographic description for the study of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. I suggested that the method is unique in the way it allows access to private spaces, as well as in the way it enables the observation and interpretation of interaction. The technical systematisation of the research involved participant observation, individual interviews

and focus groups. Each proved to be an important source of information for exploring social representations of human rights. By bridging researcher and objective of the research, qualitative research and social representations act together to explore how human rights are exercised or obstructed in everyday life. In the next section, I discuss some aspects of working on the field.

* * *

Section Two

5. In the field

In this section I explain the fieldwork in which my role of researcher and inside member of the community played a determining role in its development. Given that in the previous section I described the methods, here I will examine how they were applied. In the last part of the section I describe the procedures for the analyses. The first contact with social representations of human rights came unpredictably, as soon as the fieldwork started. The research chronicle that follows shows that each of the techniques is in itself a reliable source of information for this research.

Fieldwork was planned linearly, this is I predicted that one method would ensure the access to another phase of the research. The following figure shows how methods and fieldwork were bonded from the planning stage. The question attributed to each step illustrates how I invited the participants to get involved in the research as it progressed.

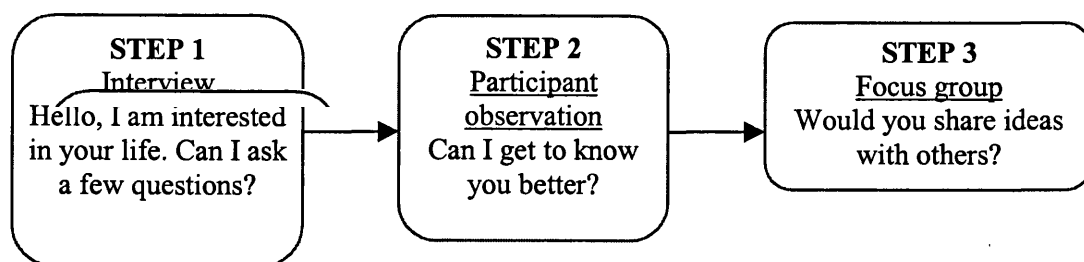


Figure 4.3 Strategic plan

Having stated that data collection was complex, the fieldwork was developed in stages aiming to explore ideas about human rights in the most sacred space: the home. Thus, as soon as I began my fieldwork I faced problems of access. These notes intend to show how I overcame the barriers of fear, rejection and desperation and managed to

accomplish the aims of my fieldwork. Therefore, I now explain the features of the fieldwork which can be structured into the analysis.

5.1 Profile of the people interviewed

At the end of every interview I asked some questions regarding the context of the relationship. This idea draws on the proposal to make a context protocol, as outlined in Flick (1997). These questions constitute a record of the surrounding circumstances relevant to the interview and the entire study and it assembles data relevant to the analyses. The following figure is the context protocol of all *patronas* and all *muchachas* interviewed in this research. The population includes focus groups and community workers.

	Age	Employment history	Completed schooling	Place of birth	Mother tongue	civil status
<i>Patronas</i> N=14 10 interv. 4 focus gp.	40% 25–39 60% 40+	70% Housewife 20% Part-time job 10% Full-time job	40% Teaching/technical school 20% Graduates 40% High School	100% MC	100%, Sp	75% M 8%, S 17%, W
<i>Muchachas</i> N=14 10 interv. 4 focus gp.	36% 18–20 43% 21–35 21%, 36+	64% only as <i>muchacha</i> 36% other informal occupation	7% illiterate 36% year 3 36% year 6 21% secondary	7%, MC 93% O	43%, Sp 57% O	28% MSch 8% M 64%, S
Community workers N= 10 7 interv. 3 focus gp.	100% 25–35	70% government organisation 30% other human rights NGO	100% Graduates	--	100% Sp	40% M 60% S

Figure 4.4. Profile of people interviewed

The protocol brings together focus groups and from interviews.

MC=Mexico City; Sp=Spanish; O=Other; M=married; MCh married with children; S=Single;

MSch=Married with children and separated, W= Widow.

Relevant states around Mexico City: Puebla, Toluca, Michoacan, Hidalgo and Oaxaca.

Languages spoken by *muchachas*: Nahuatl, Mazahua and Totonaca.

The information of this protocol reveals much regarding the initial differences we can perceive between *patronas*, *muchachas* and community workers. These differences help to explain why community workers may identify at some point with the *muchachas*, as workers, and at others with *patronas*, in terms of class.

Community workers are women and men holding degrees in areas of the social sciences. In common with the *muchachas*, they are often heads of a household, but a majority are single and none of them had children at the time of the research. For this reason they might identify with the challenging life of domestic workers as women living a double work day. The fact that they are educated up to graduate level (some were starting post-graduate education) shows that they belong to the middle classes: educated and working (Careaga, 1983). The information given by community workers was valuable as it represented a neutral commentator on the relationship, even if some community workers are *patronas*, they are at the same time workers.

The *muchachas* were revealed to have diverse origins. Note how the majority of the *muchachas* interviewed come from rural areas, giving them the category of migrants. For those for whom Spanish is a second language, arriving in the city can be dramatic, as they are unlikely to use their mother tongue at work. *Muchachas* often begin working before completing of their grammar school (year 6). At a young age, they are hired as nurses, brick makers or tortilla sellers. More *muchachas* completed grammar school than secondary school. Among other occupations, the *muchachas* had worked as cooks and as seamstresses, in the *maquila* industry, famous for its informal and exploitative character. Others had worked in sweet factories or bakeries. *Muchachas* are often the heads of a household, as they are often married with children, but are soon abandoned by the man and have to support their family. Conversely, *Patronas* come from an educated background and some have occupational interests. Most of them speak Spanish as a first language, some of them study or teach English. Regardless of age, not all of them have completed undergraduate studies. It seems that the reason why *patronas* give up work is to mother their children. Most of the *patronas* had been married for a long time and enjoy the company of sons, daughters and grandchildren.

This information shows the role of women in Mexican society, as discussed in Chapter Two. There are a higher percentage of women working as domestic workers than as professionals. The contrast speaks for the cultural distinctions present not only in this relationship, but also in the expectations for women in society. While middle class women are educated up to graduate level, they become housewives and are absent from the productive cycle in society. Illiterate and semi-literate women become

domestic workers and they work to meet their day-to-day living expenses. It may well be that this type of contrast underpins the economy of the nation and this may suggest that due to women's role in the household, rich or poor, urban or rural, they do not have the cultural structure to change the economy of society.

Another important contextual element for this research is the use of language. *Muchachas* do not speak Spanish as the *patronas* do, as they learn it in the streets or get it from television. So they acquire linguistic expressions in specific ways. Due to the semantics of other Mexican languages they speak (see Chapter Two), the metaphoric figures of speech characteristic of *muchachas*' expressions is unique. When they learn Spanish, the *muchachas* adopt a distinct dialect, abusing Spanish grammar. The communication of *patrona* and *muchacha* is fascinating in this way, as *patronas* tend to correct the *muchacha*'s accent, grammar and linguistics constantly. Regretfully, the richness of the expressions they use is lost when translating them into English. This shows that ethnic background goes beyond skin colour, it is the force driving the future development of individuals, as it can be seen in the use of language.

Finally, at the initial stage of the research I collected fundamental information from individual interviews. The different perspectives on domestic service offered by three different ranges of participants (community workers, *patronas* and *muchachas*) shows that the relationship would encourage some differences between them.

5.2 Establishing trust

Given that participants were hesitant regarding their participation, the subject of continued fieldwork had to be handled with care. Contacting participants did not necessarily lead to a meeting. When I did meet people, there were some aspects I had to be cautious about. These showed that representations about the topic emerged in many scenarios of everyday life. At this point I became more and more reflexive in the research.

One aspect of reflexivity was time. As a researcher in the field, meeting a *patrona* called for preparation and time for waiting. *Patronas* made me wait and stood me up several times. Meeting the *muchachas* required time, as I had to go across the city to meet them on their day off work. Time was also needed for prior meetings with the

people who contacted me with potential participants. Meetings became easier after the first contact.

Another aspect benefiting from reflexivity was holding back from personal and political convictions that could influence the participant's behaviour. In this way I witnessed discriminative actions towards the *muchacha*, as some *patronas* look down on the domestic workers, and find them 'retarded or completely stupid'. Presumably to some *patronas* human rights was an appropriate topic to introduce into their home, but for others it was a threat to their home environment. During the first encounter, it was imperative to be one's best behaviour during the introductions to a family's *patrona* or to a *muchacha*. The struggle to gain access to homes revealed that the *patrona* has enormous power to which the *muchachas* comply with loyalty. I was able to watch this more closely as the research developed.

Another aspect was the difficulties that emerged during meetings. This was talking about domestic service in terms of rights and the law. This is a delicate topic to discuss with a stranger, and consequently, several *patronas* withdrew after meeting me. The excuses were many: husband's permission denied, a sick relative, a lack of belief in the topic and fear that the *muchacha* would realise how bad her situation was and would abandon the job. The worst scenario was when I was recruiting *patronas* for a focus group, a woman became so alarmed that she reported me to the police.

The last aspect of meeting people was to establish bonds of trust with the participants. This was necessary as the research took place in the privacy of home. The setting of the research led to a personal closeness with *patronas* and *muchachas*, who also got to know a bit about me. The fluidity of this interpersonal exchange involved the participants and myself in a relationship and, increasingly, I looked forward to the next session. Through bonds of trust my research created a researcher /researched relationship.

Finally, fieldwork has two ingredients before commencing: one is the possibility to contact people and the other is the opportunity for meeting them. Both proved to be difficult, as my presence was seen to violate the harmony of the household. As *patronas* grew more confident inside their homes, the answers about interviewing

became more forthright. Paraphrasing the *patronas*, the most common answers were, *no* meaning ‘don’t come close to my house’, *maybe*, which also meant ‘no’, and *yes* meaning ‘probably, yes but, I have to ask my husband who won’t necessarily like the idea, call me before you come again’. As a researcher and an insider, I had to put on different masks to present myself to each household. Success or failure very much depended on the situation, and in time I stuck to what I considered the most effective role. The bottom line is that if it weren’t for reflexivity and patience, this research wouldn’t have been carried out. Let me now turn to the way in which fieldwork ended.

5.3 Saying goodbye

Before my departure for England, I bade farewell to all the participants. One *muchacha* rebuffed my grateful goodbye; instead saying she was indebted to me. She felt her life was worthwhile, because someone had asked about it. This experience, although rewarding, left me with an overwhelming sense of guilt since my research would improve the domestic worker’s situation eventually, but not as immediately as I would have liked to promise. This concern was silently put aside while drafting the thesis, although it might be evident in a few places.

After I completed the fieldwork, some of the *muchachas* left their jobs and some *patronas* moved home. For this reason the fieldwork is unique, since it is now impossible to contact the *muchachas* and some *patronas*. Therefore, the results of this thesis must be considered as the voice of those participants at that place and time.

6. Analysis

The analysis of data collected for this thesis was done in three separate instances: observations and the two separate analyses of interviews and focus groups (*muchachas* and *patronas*). The data obtained from observations were coded according to the dimensions of household design. This analysis emerged from the journal of observations containing the annotations from the participant observation as the first instance of another people’s reality (Lazarsfeld, 1993). Conversely, the data collected from each interview and focus group were analysed by themes. This analysis was supported by the computer software programme QSR Nud*ist (qualitative software research). Prior to the explanation of the procedures undertaken in the data

analysis, I shall state some basic general criteria underpinning the analysis of observations, focus groups and interviews.

First, the analysis of observations was based on the strategy of ‘documentary interpretation’, involving the ‘search for an identical homologous pattern underlying a vast variety of totally different realisations of meaning’ (Mannheim in Garfinkel, 1967: 78). That is, in different homes I could establish similar patterns. It concerns the descriptions of a common sense knowledge in a society where ‘its members, as a condition of their enforceable rights to manage and communicate decisions of meaning, fact, method and causal texture without interference, use and treat as known in common with other members, and with other members take for granted’ (*Ibid*: 77). This analysis seeks a description of the practices and interaction whereby decision of meaning and fact are managed in the use of household space. These would be based on the *patrona*’s and *muchacha*’s own movement around the house.

Second, the analysis of focus groups and interviews was based on the interview guide that generated instances of responses concerning the relationship with the other (*patrona* or *muchacha*) and with human rights. All themes and subsequent topics that emerged during interviews — categories and subcategories — stem from the data and are based on the respondent’s own descriptions and concerns. Thus, the selection of the meaningful categories is not developed in isolation. The selection of categories was made in an attempt to discover the links that topics had with the relationship, as a self–other interaction, but only those topics related to human rights. This analysis was also supported by the insights and data derived from fieldwork, as noted in the previous section.

Third, avoidance of topics, recurrence in themes, refusal to participate, the style of interaction with the researcher and with other family members and other contextual conditions have generated data in their own right, and serve as background knowledge for further interpretation. The information gathered from experts on the topic (community workers) is also considered as background knowledge guiding the interpretation of those practices uncovering the use or abuse of human rights. In the following section I describe the procedure for identification of space distribution, for observations and the coding framework for the interviews and focus groups.

6.1 Procedure for the analysis of observations

The analysis of observations was based on the diary of observations (see *Appendix 3*). This began with a description of the house's architecture defining rooms, decorations, connections between rooms and some artefacts for the use of household members. The diary began by making a description of the structure of the house and its different distribution of space, like rooms for the *muchacha* being at the back and with cold water. After establishing what would be the architectural design of interaction, I annotated the amount of time that *patronas* and *muchachas* spent in each room, and the activity carried out therein. The annotations allowed me to make inferences on the sort of interaction that is attributed to a space and is taken for granted by household members. In this diary I also annotated the exchanges in verbal and body language between *patronas* and *muchachas*. The journal represented a guide for the identification of patterns of interaction and practices. To illustrate space design, use of space and decoration of areas, I draw three meaningful separations: 1) front/back; 2) upstairs/downstairs; and 3) inside/outside. These separations while strongly suggested by the architectural design of the household were documented mostly by the sort of interaction encouraged and discouraged in each space. The analysis of separations draws on the work of Goffman (1959; 1956), as this body of work helps to define the expectations and reactions of the participants in terms of space distribution. For example, when a *muchacha* was found in a front area, the *patrona* would justify her presence (deferential attitude) to those present; or the *patrona*, if found in a back corridor, would remark on the lack of space for movement (justification of lowering her position). The observations result in an ethnographic description of the household that reveals meaningful instances of space and its distinctions in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. This is partially considered in the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus groups.

6.2 Procedure for analysis of interviews and focus groups

Given the objective of the research, the interview and focus group guide (*Appendix 4*) aimed to disclose relevant instances of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship when related to the enactment of human rights. After adapting interviews to the occasion or participant, the aim remained to disclose elements of the relationship related to human rights. The objective was followed through during the interview process. Thus, the initial thematic for analysis emerged from three main categories, and these were ideas

the subjects have *of* themselves and *about* the other and of experiences in domestic service. Interviews were analysed separately, *patronas* subjected to one analysis (A2)¹, *muchachas* another (A1). From the vast amount of data gathered in these categories, the general topics that were selected were those related to perceptions of others that were later on related to the infringement or enforcement of human rights.

The idea *patronas* have of themselves and of the *muchacha* and vice-versa constitute the categories of Chapter 6. However, after selecting these four categories, a second step was taken in creating subcategories and finding examples — quotations — for each central theme. QSR Nud*ist then emerged as a useful tool for the organisation of textual data and for exploring the content of subcategories in the analysis. The programme facilitates the construction of frame of reference considering the codes and network of categories and discourses within the data. From the analysis of the coding frames using Nud*ist the categories linked to human rights were derived, which are presented in Chapter 7.

In this thesis, the selection of the main codes was based on three criteria. *First*, the sequence or repetition of topics. The general topics were related to two core topics: self-definition and definition of the other. Repeated reference to ethnic differences on both accounts, *patronas* and *muchachas*, and in many interviews, created the code of differences in ethnicity. Using Nud*ist, I was able to appreciate the vast number of quotes referring to this code. The function ‘string search’ finds and gives percentages for the repetitions of content in the codes I programmed. The search relates text and codes, and it also helps to identify subcategories linked to a code. Ethnicity, for example, contained quotes related to pride in blood purity and dignity.

The *second* criteria were the relation codes had to the relationship in accordance to the main topics defined in previous chapters, and to the respondents’ own view of these topics. The topics are related with gender, migration, religion and ethnicity, which created a vis-à-vis coding. This means that the coding considered topics based on the literature review on domestic service (see Chapter Two). Topics related to four grand categories were gender, religion and economical and historical determinants such as

¹ A1= Analysis 1, and A2 = Analysis 2. See also Appendix 5.

migration, poverty and the culture shock of moving to the city. The criteria were useful to distinguish the formal from the everyday reality of domestic workers, as most of the previous research is based on one-sided accounts (only employer or domestic workers). The criteria for quotations in Chapter Six follow this coding involving the evidence of occurrence and my own theoretical criteria.

Having created a thematic universe, I sought to identify the points of divergence and convergence between the first and the second criteria. Nud*ist helped to carry this out. The 'index-search for intersection' related contents in the coding with other categories. By searching for links and associations in the text codes, I found two thematic universes: similarity and difference. This means that a significant number of the codes that emerged had in common ideas of similarity, and another large chunk contained ideas related with difference. The guide for this content differentiation was related to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the interviewees main concerns. Other categories isolated and were thus considered as characteristic of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. Most importantly, categories in isolation and characteristic of the relationship proved to be the ones most concerned with violations to human rights. For instance, I created isolated category codes for sexual abuse, danger of schooling and health conditions and the contract.

Having established core categories for the analysis — differences, similarities — between *patronas* and *muchachas* and the ones in isolation, a next step corresponded to the construction of links and connections to human rights, as categorically defined (relation to each principle). Therefore a *third* criteria for the coding selection relates codes to practices according to the journal of observations. These criteria are crucial to consider as it is when comparing the 'idea' or representation, as coded, with the practice, as observed, that I was able to interpret the meaning and realisation of human rights in the domestic setting of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. It was the exploration of space and meaning, as in Moore (1986), that guided the categorical relationship between practices and human rights. The analysis, then, put into context the categories of the first criteria by relating their quotes and practices within the household as interaction space. As a whole, the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship was interpreted considering similarities and differences, background knowledge and the emancipation of praxis.

A final step for the analysis was to explore some of the categories that were left out of the main categories. I linked these with previous statements and considered them when good examples of some cases. Other categories were also considered when thinking of further paths for research.

6.3 Data integration

Denzin (1994) metaphorically compares qualitative research with a work of art, both being products of experience and design. His thorough exploration of the literature on qualitative research led him to conclude that 'Most often, qualitative researchers use some *combination* of participant observation, interview and document analysis'. The combination of methods allows researchers to associate individuals and their relationships with a system of culture, in the same way as choreography leads a dancer to connect internal feelings with a cultural expression.

In this thesis, the combination of observations, interviews and group discussions is based on the principle that qualitative research captures the larger picture by piecing together information from different methods. Techniques for qualitative research are known to have distinctive strengths. Individual interviews allow for the understanding of individual positions, as their accounts give justification to certain practices (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). By contrast, in the focus group social knowledge is constructed in the process of discussing the contrasts between emerging themes (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). Focus groups and interviews indeed are tools from which we can generate data of different natures to explore a problem from different angles (Denzin, 1994). Both methods had to deal with similar issues, like access (many refusals and cancellations) and necessitated a period of warm-up before introducing human rights into the conversation. This involved establishing trust, ensuring confidentiality and managing the content of conversation. This led to the consideration of both methods as necessary first steps to enter the cultural framework in which the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship takes place. This thesis combines both methods to discuss findings because it is my interest to explore the cultural elements of domestic service in Mexico. Within this framework it became of crucial importance to integrate methods in order to explore human rights as social representations.

Consideration was given to reporting the interviews and focus groups separately, but (1) I had no interest in methodological comparisons, and (2) the optimal design was of one focus group to 10 individual interviews. A separate presentation of the findings would have privileged the focus groups. The report of findings concentrated on the topics emerging from interviews and focus groups that were relevant to the discussion of the context and cultural framework of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. However, although interviews and focus groups shared themes, I respected variations associated with the findings. The combination helped to discuss at length social representations of human rights in the setting where they are lived.

There are some notable precedents for combining different qualitative methods in the exploration of social phenomena. Studies on social representations for example capture the elements of culture involved in the construction of an identity, and embedded in communication, and daily practices. When Jovchelovitch and Gervais (1999) carried out an investigation on health related practices in the Chinese community in London they combined interviews and focus groups with community members and interviews with experts. This enabled them to explore content and processes related with representations of health and illness. Their integration led them to conclude that representations of health and illness in the people studied are based on a mixture of Chinese traditional practices with local knowledge.

The groundbreaking work of Jodelet (1991) is another outstanding example of a combination of methods. This was an ethnographical investigation of representations of madness that mixes several sociological investigative in-depth techniques (observations, historical reconstruction, active-participation, surveys and interviews). The methods were integrated to produce a holistic picture that convincingly illustrated how representations of madness are part of the everyday life of the community. In her own words 'the integration of methods was a means of progress' so, her book 'has answered the need to place our approach to representations in context in order to reveal the conditions under which they form, their manner of functioning and their involvement in development as well as in the practices and behaviour applied to mental illness' (Jodelet, 1991:20). Inspired by these combinations, I integrated the analysis and interpretation of findings.

To sum up, the combination of methods generated valuable information to build a discussion that accurately reflected what was done and what went on in the Mexican households. By discussing social representations of human rights within a cultural framework, I attended my quest to explore social representations of human rights as *thought* and as *practices*. The integration of focus groups, interviews and observations are part of the strategy to construct a complete picture of these representations as mediators of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

7. Conclusion and main points

This chapter helps to show the ways that method and theory are woven together. The development of fieldwork demonstrates that domestic service is, indeed, a fundamental aspect of the everyday life of Mexican women, which is so often taken for granted that not many people consider it worth talking about. The fieldwork progression sifted through denials, cancellations and persistence. I contacted more people than I met, I met more people than I interviewed and I interviewed more people than I observed. The reflexivity of this research was conducted in relation to the context of Mexican society.

In the following chapter I look into the secrets kept within the walls of households which I entered and accessed. Access, I stress, could only be possible through participant observation. This helped to uncover useful information regarding the distribution of workloads and the boundaries drawn between *patronas* and *muchachas*. This is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

The Mexican household: If Walls Could Talk

1. The household as the setting for analysis
2. Four Mexican households: empirical examples
 - 2.1 Luisa and Guadalupe: thought and isolation
 - 2.2 Mari and Victoria: exclusion and abuse of friendship
 - 2.3 Andrea and Tiburcia: controlling the uncontrollable
 - 2.4 Yolanda and Margarita: internalising boundaries
 - 2.5 An important note about the kitchen as domestic space
3. Distinctions in space
 - 3.1 Front: presentation of home in everyday life
 - 3.2 Back: hidden from the public eye
 - 3.3 Upstairs: status division
 - 3.4 Downstairs: thought is forbidden
 - 3.5 Inside: individuality and distance
 - 3.6 Outside: becoming natural
4. Interaction in the household: a discussion
5. Conclusions

In this chapter I present the divisions of space and the type of interaction taking place in the setting of the research. The method of documentary interpretation (Garfinkel, 1967) supports this analysis. Having annotated the movement and actions of *patronas* and *muchachas* within the household, observations were systematised considering the dimension of *space*, its distinction and use. In this way, the ethnography of the domestic space identified practices and patterns of interaction in space. Having stated that domestic space is taken for granted, this chapter separates space, interaction and representations for analytical purposes. The separations and distinctions mapped throughout the chapter are taken from the everyday life of the Mexican households. The interpretations of the interaction in space were made in accordance with previous literature on the topic, particularly Goffman (1956; 1959). The narrative of the chapter begins by describing each household where I illustrate space divisions in maps. Each division — front upstairs and inside — has an opposite — back, downstairs, outside. This interplay between opposite spaces suggests that the limit between each division, as in between front and back, is a boundary. By considering records of events made during observations, the annotations reveal that boundaries underscore rules for interaction because they prevent

contact between *patrona* and *muchacha*. The maintenance of boundaries was indicated by the amount of work performed by the *muchachas* specifically at the back. Finally, the ethnographic exploration of the household shows that the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship takes place in a setting enforcing distinctions through the use of boundaries, and these encourage certain types of interaction and discourage others.

1. The household as the setting for analysis

In the previous chapter I explained the process used in the analysis of observations. In the following pages I present a description based on field notes, research diary and background knowledge acquired during fieldwork. The examination of boundaries or limitations for interaction suggests that it is necessary to examine how these are renegotiated through interaction. Therefore, the ethnographic analysis of Mexican households focuses on the practices taking place in a given space and the meaning of these practices.

The analysis of the household is founded on three main assumptions: 1) the household is an area giving *orientation to interaction* (see Chapter Two); 2) the household is also an area that demonstrates *convergence and divergence* between its members (see also Chapter Two); 3) the conception of *domestic space* should allow one to relate the distinctions found in home with the wider sociocultural context (see Chapter Three). These three assumptions will be present in the analysis of boundaries in space. *Patronas* and *muchachas* defend the space that surrounds them. The analysis of the household seeks to identify the boundaries between *patrona* and *muchacha* based on these theoretical assumptions, and in further chapters to interpret these boundaries with relation to their cultural content.

In the theoretical part of the thesis I suggested that social representations of human rights are objectified during interaction in boundaries. Having presented the thrust of the theoretical approach, I describe the organisation and distribution of the household. The aim is to find elements of convergence and divergence relating boundaries to representations of human rights. Drawing on the concept of domestic space (Moore, 1986, 1994), the analysis of four Mexican households examines the practices containing elements of contradiction (i.e. living together but using separate spaces). Given that organisation and meaning define domestic space, this chapter analyses the boundaries as indicators of meaning, as in Moore (1994). Hence, this framework provides an alternative approach to interaction to that of Doise (1978). The alternative perspective on interaction

relates to the approach to the setting of the research, as well as its interpretation, as Moore (1986) states:

The choice of space as an object of study is partly the result of its materiality and everyday relevance, and partly because it is the context in which all other cultural representations are produced and reproduced. The various cultural productions of a society are not necessarily homogenous, they contain contradictions, and frequently conflict with each other. These conflicts take the form of disputation, which allows for competing claims, ambiguities and reinterpretations (*ibid*: 189).

The examination of space and interaction assumes that space is designed to encourage certain forms of interaction and to discourage others. I draw on Goffman (1959), who suggested that, as in the theatre, individuals perform in everyday life, while these performances have spatial regions (i.e. front, back). Others have taken the idea of space design literally, that is, the study of interaction in space. Hillier and Hanson (1987), for example, consider that room allocation determines interaction. Rooms with several connections, like the living room, are likely to encourage interaction, and rooms with few connections maintain privacy by discouraging interaction.

One aspect worth highlighting is that my analysis is carried out using the theory of social representations as its framework. I will argue that representations are embedded in space. In an earlier chapter, I discussed the way that representations, as forms of social knowledge, direct interaction by providing tools for communication (see Chapter Three). In this chapter I focus on interaction within space, and specifically, at home. Given that representations orient individuals and groups during interaction (Jodelet, 1991; Doise et al, 1998, 1999), I aim to explore representations as forces driving the *patrona* and *muchacha* to play certain roles within established boundaries. I argue that social representations are embedded in the spaces where relationships are enacted.

Finally, in this chapter I introduce the setting of the research and I focus on the dynamics between three concepts: space, distribution and interaction. These elements associate when related to the use of boundaries. Drawing on the work of Jodelet (1991), I argue that boundaries help interaction by marking distinctions between individuals. While

respecting individual and group boundaries, it should be possible to discuss how representations encourage or discourage certain types of interaction. These would help to prevent group conflict, as stated by Moscovici, Doise and Halls (1994). The setting defines part of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. It is important to emphasise that, because I examine space divisions from the perspective of social knowledge, I view these boundaries as neither fixed nor static. Throughout the analysis I will describe how group boundaries are in a constant process of renegotiation. Having drawn parallels between Goffman's (1959) framework for the study of interaction and that of representations, boundaries could thus be explored in terms of their meaning and constant negotiation. That is to say, representations are used to make sense of the relations built up around boundaries. By looking at the establishment of, and respect for boundaries, I show that representations influence their flexibility. Interaction appears to be the means through which representations intervene in making boundaries flexible or rigid.

2. Four Mexican households: empirical examples

In this section I critically evaluate the interaction taking place in the home and the use of architectural dimensions to control interaction. The respect or disrespect of spatial boundaries, therefore, offer clues to the representations underlying the interactions I observed.

2.1 Luisa and Guadalupe: thought and isolation

In this section, I illustrate how the boundaries in one household encourage an interaction of asymmetry and respect. This first analytical example emphasises the role boundaries have as mediators in a relationship that attributes Luisa (*patrona*) the capacity to think and the wisdom to take care of family business. The *muchacha*'s activities are all work-related. The ethnographic description is illustrated in Map 1 and 2, which show the different regions of home. The shaded areas represent the areas in which *patrona* and *muchacha* spend most of their time.

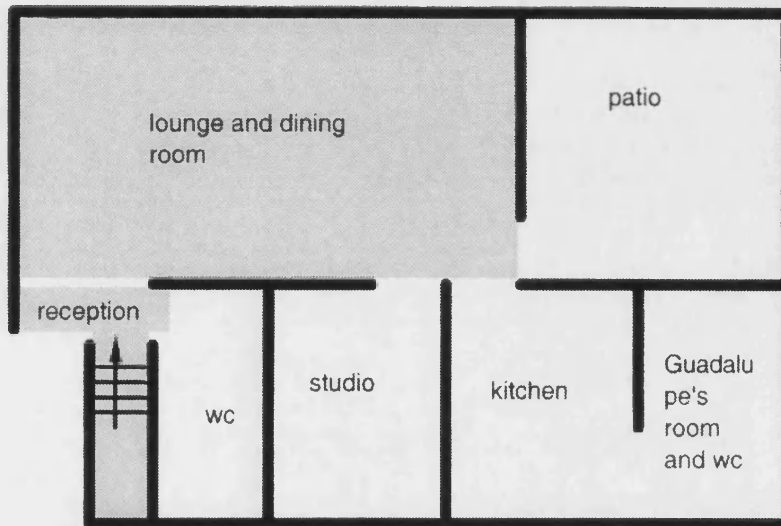
Luisa's house, a two-storey house, suggest that convergences and divergences govern this relationship. The *patrona* controls the home and Guadalupe, the *muchacha*, keeps herself busy throughout the day. This is supported by looking at the ground floor plan, where we can see that Guadalupe spends more time in the kitchen, reception room and the corridors (moving from area to area). Meanwhile, Luisa tends to remain in her room, attending to her business or relaxing, and in the lounge, receiving guests.

The house is designed in such a way that the family rooms are connected and the back rooms are not. This means that it is likely that the *muchacha* and the *patrona* will come face to face other when working or receiving guests in the family area. This design suggests two alternatives, they will either become closer or further apart. So, as a result of these two alternatives, Luisa spends more time in her room than in other areas, where she speaks about Guadalupe behind closed doors. Guadalupe, in turn, is excluded from household affairs, and despite Luisa's comments that she 'is like one of the family', the patterns of interaction demonstrate the opposite.

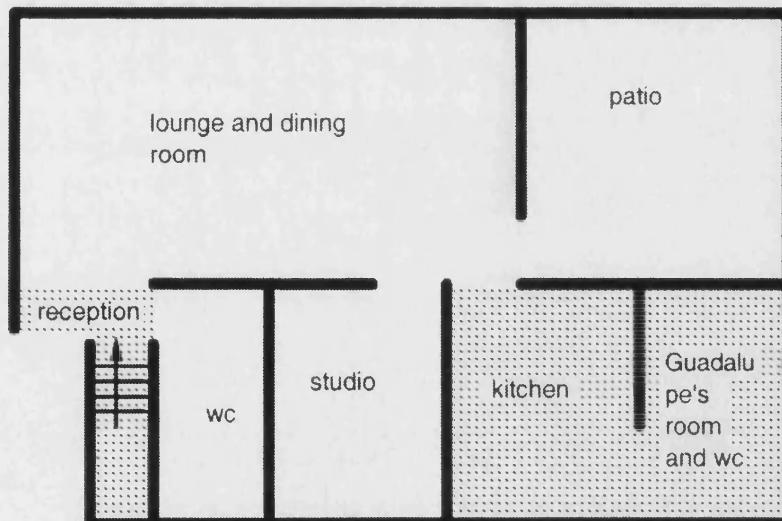
Thus, this house provides an example of how social representations, as social knowledge, help to orient individuals during interaction. For instance, as we can see on the map, the only room in the house without a direct connection to others is Guadalupe's room. Thus, it would be unlikely that Guadalupe will seek privacy in other areas of the house. Moreover, this room is small and only partially furnished, and thus, unlikely to encourage Guadalupe to spend time any planning or thinking. In addition, the lack of telephone adds to her isolation, and this can be construed in terms of demeanour. Her constant presence around the house cleaning and washing is proof of the lack of space she has for doing anything else. Social representations then, help Guadalupe to make sense of the type of interaction encouraged by the space that she lives in. Likewise, Luisa takes control of the front from her bedroom and taking short walks around the house, in so doing she discreetly displays the asymmetry in power.

Having observed the household, there was a show of rebellion. There were two ways in which Guadalupe challenged the boundaries. The first one was her attempts to go outside

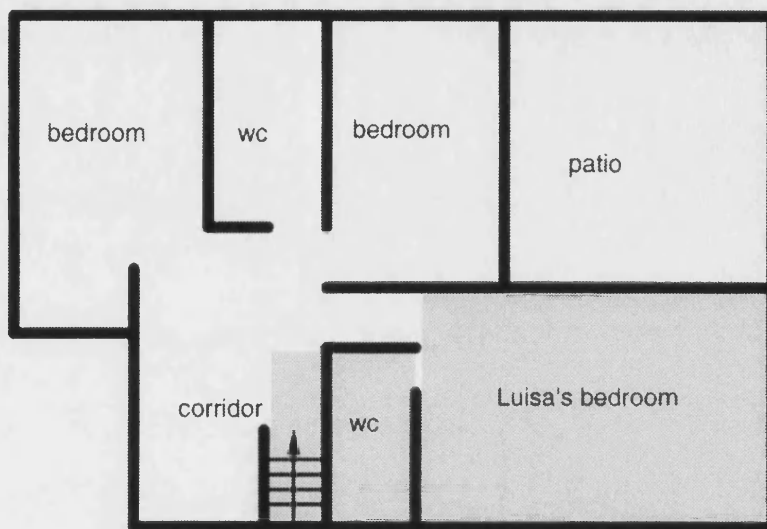
the house. In the patio, while cleaning, she would engage in conversation with the domestic workers of neighbouring houses. This action shows that in fact, Guadalupe rebels against her isolation and searches for alternative ways to contact the outside and communicate with others. The second way in which Guadalupe transgressed the boundaries was inside the home. In fact, the kitchen walls are so thin that what is discussed in the bedrooms upstairs can be clearly heard. Thus, Guadalupe spends time in the kitchen listening and laughing, while knowing all about the likes and dislikes of the *patrona*. This shows us that despite the lack of space for integration with the family, the *muchacha* finds comfort within her space. No wonder that Guadalupe, being aware of her position, is a good negotiator when it comes to asking the *patrona* for an increase in salary and or if she can take a holiday. This shows how boundaries can be transgressed during interaction, when people have information prior to the encounter and learn to manage the expectations of others. These observations allow us to find tools for interaction which are otherwise unknown.



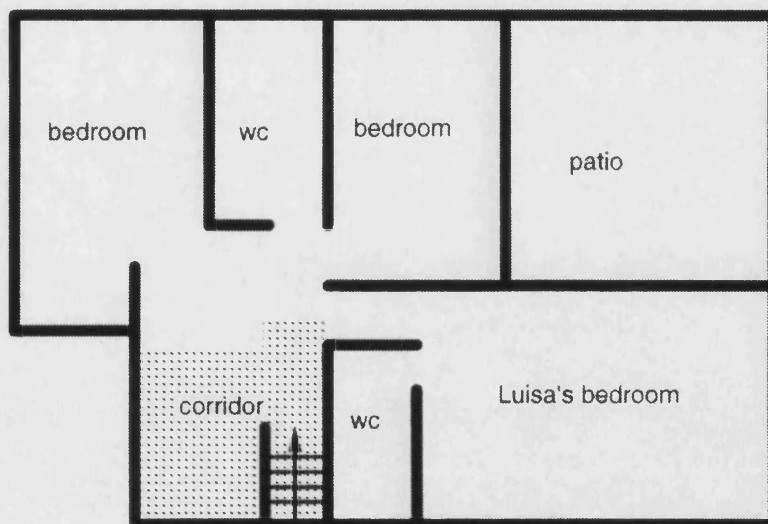
Patrona's space
LUISA AND GUADALUPE, GROUND FLOOR



Muchacha's space
LUISA AND GUADALUPE, GROUND FLOOR



Patrona's space
LUIZA AND GUADALUPE, FIRST FLOOR



Muchacha's space
LUIZA AND GUADALUPE, FIRST FLOOR

2.2 Mari and Victoria: exclusion and abuse of friendship

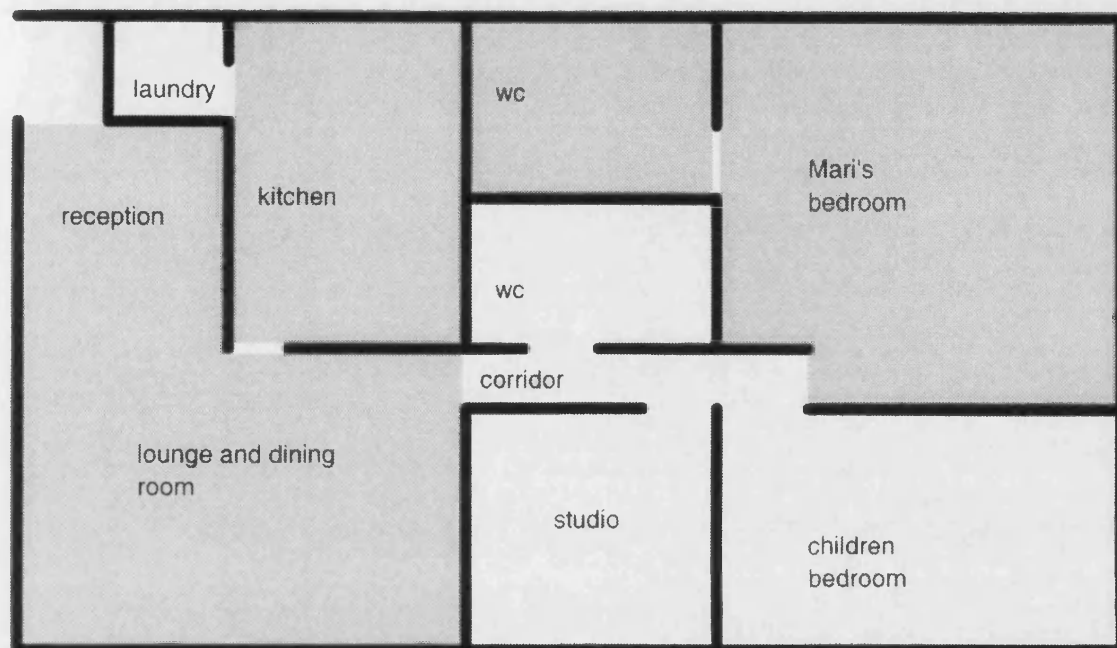
The relationship in Mari's (*patrona*) house is an example of how, despite there being little space to move, isolation and exclusion are represented in the way *patrona* and *muchacha* manage their space. The relationship is, in terms of its history,¹ one of companionship and friendship, but observation revealed one of exclusion. As we can see in Map 3, Mari and Victoria (*muchacha*) use distinct areas of the house. Despite the preference Mari shows for staying at the back and keeping the doors closed to protect her privacy; she is aware of what goes on at the front and promptly takes control of the situation should outsiders arrive.

Isolation is, on the whole, Victoria's situation at home. After the working day, Victoria sits in a corner and takes a quick snooze. While she has the time, she does not have the space to think about anything else, or study, plan, or make contact with the outside. In fact, Victoria's room is outdoors at the top of the building, where the *muchachas* of the entire apartment block share the bathroom. This area provides a space for her to talk with other workers. However, as she spends most of the day indoors, in the *patrona's* household, sleeping, chances are that the other workers will already be asleep when she arrives. This shows us how an outside boundary is reduced by the control Mari has over Victoria's time.

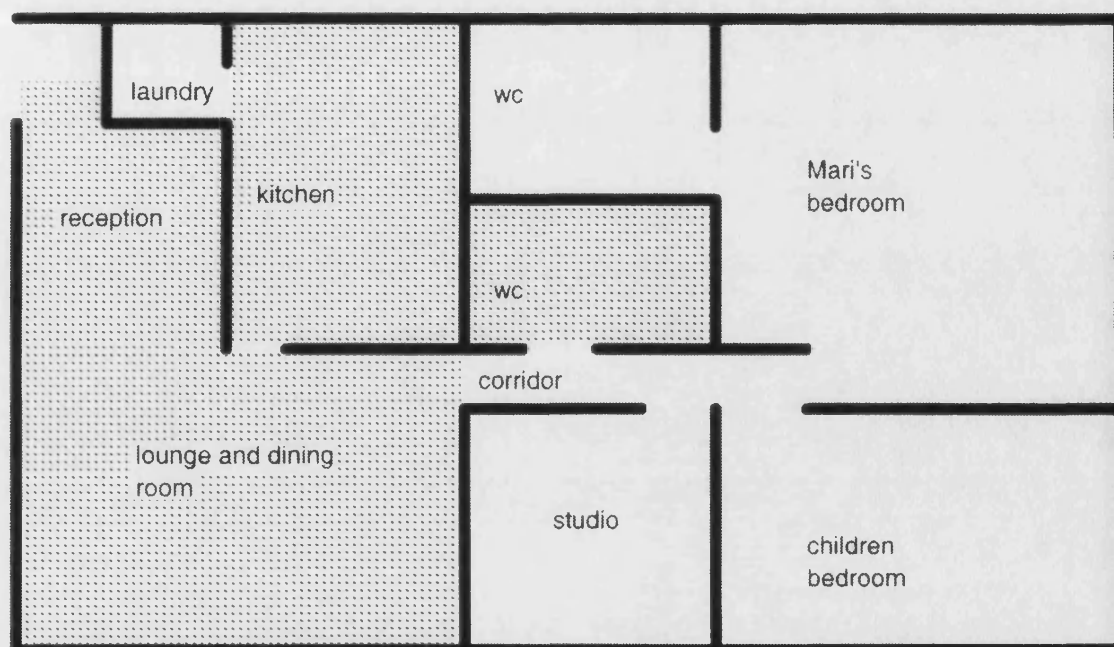
This household also helps us to see how, despite the lengthy relationship between Mari and Victoria, the latter is excluded from family affairs. Contact, for instance, was avoided. This became apparent in the use of the toilet (WC on the map), with one for the use of Mari and her family and Victoria assigned another one. The separation of the bathroom was suggested when not even I, as a guest, would be invited to use the same bathroom as Victoria. Thus, it seems that interaction is oriented by some sort of social knowledge indicating an unwillingness to 'get contaminated' by the *muchacha* and the space she uses.

¹ At the time of the investigation, Victoria had been working for Mari's family for more than 10 years.

This household is also a good example illustrating how boundaries are renegotiated during interaction. Victoria, for instance, knew very well how to play family friend in order to get permission for time off or secure a non-refundable loan. Likewise, she was able to use her seclusion to her advantage and leave the work to others. Mari, wanting to gain control, would allow Victoria, the older woman, to relax whilst Mari carried out most of the duties. Proof of this were the constant complaints from Mari's husband of how Victoria was doing no work and constantly borrowing money. In fact, this abuse of trust would not occur in the presence of Mari's husband or of outsiders. However, this house shows clearly the problematic of the *patrona*, who effectively working a double shift has a child to mother, a house to administer and an occupation to attend to outside the home. Finally, the relationship between Mari and Victoria helps to explain why the *patrona* may feel she is justified in not granting comparable working rights to the *muchacha* because the control of her home may be challenged.



Patrona's space
MARI AND VICTORIA



Muchacha's space
MARI AND VICTORIA

2.3 Andrea and Tiburcia: controlling the uncontrollable

The example of this household supports my argument that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is asymmetrical in power, as much as it suggests contradictions. This relationship is characterised by the secrecy assigned to it as something that should not be on display to the public eye. I illustrate this by showing how Andrea, the *patrona*, is constantly reaffirming her control of the household, while Tiburcia (the *muchacha*) is constantly seeking an escape from her situation. Maps 4 and 5 illustrate the back corridors and back areas of the household where it can be seen how Tiburcia and Andrea divide up the space within the household in order to avoid contact with one another.

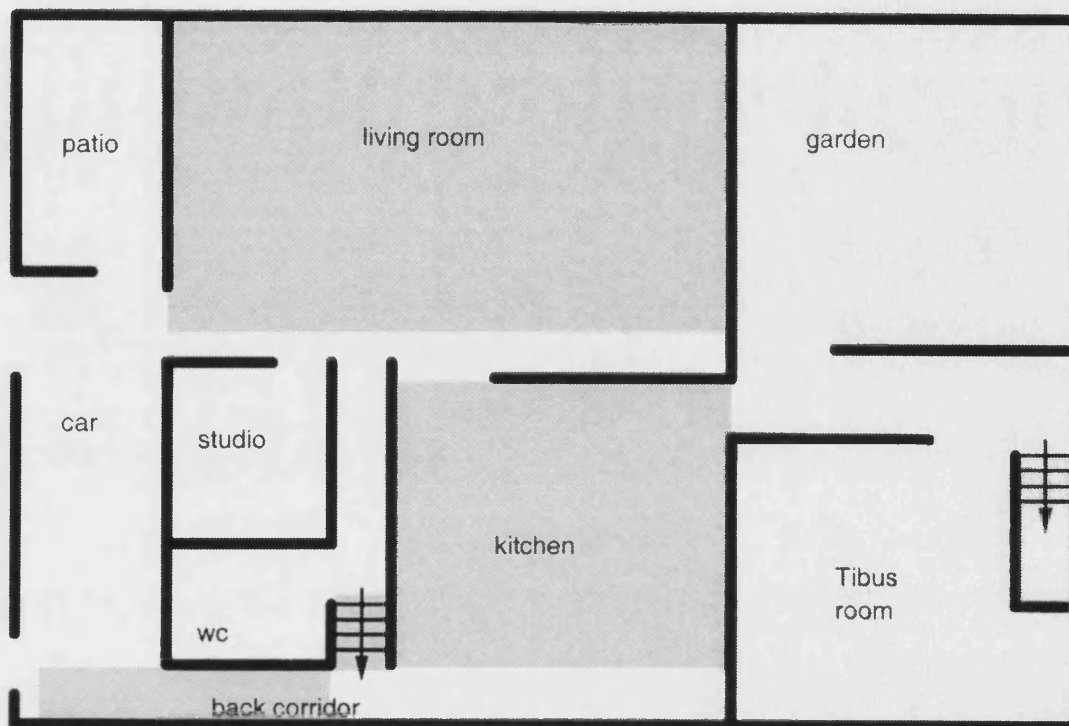
This description of the setting helps to show the importance the *patrona* sets in creating a welcoming environment. Andrea presents herself as hostess par excellence and in complete control, while visitors would be attended to by Tiburcia, who appeared and disappeared from sight using the back corridors and side entrances. Andrea also asserted her control over Tiburcia's time by appointing her daughter to join Tiburcia when going to the corner shop. This helps to show how boundaries are flexible and renegotiated during the relationship: Tiburcia would not talk to outsiders or waste work time if accompanied by a member of the household, in this case the little girl.

The work is often carried out in the back areas, such as the ironing room and the kitchen. This work would go unrecognised. Thus, Andrea often stated 'I am such a good cook and so hard working', while in fact the food and the home environment are the product of a joint effort. Also, the fact that moving in the back areas conceals work reinforces the lack of recognition given to the work itself. Andrea's children, for instance, showed no gratitude for the food cooked by Tiburcia, or for their mother's efforts cleaning the house. This is the result of the lack of a space to show what it takes to create the illusion of a congenial home environment.

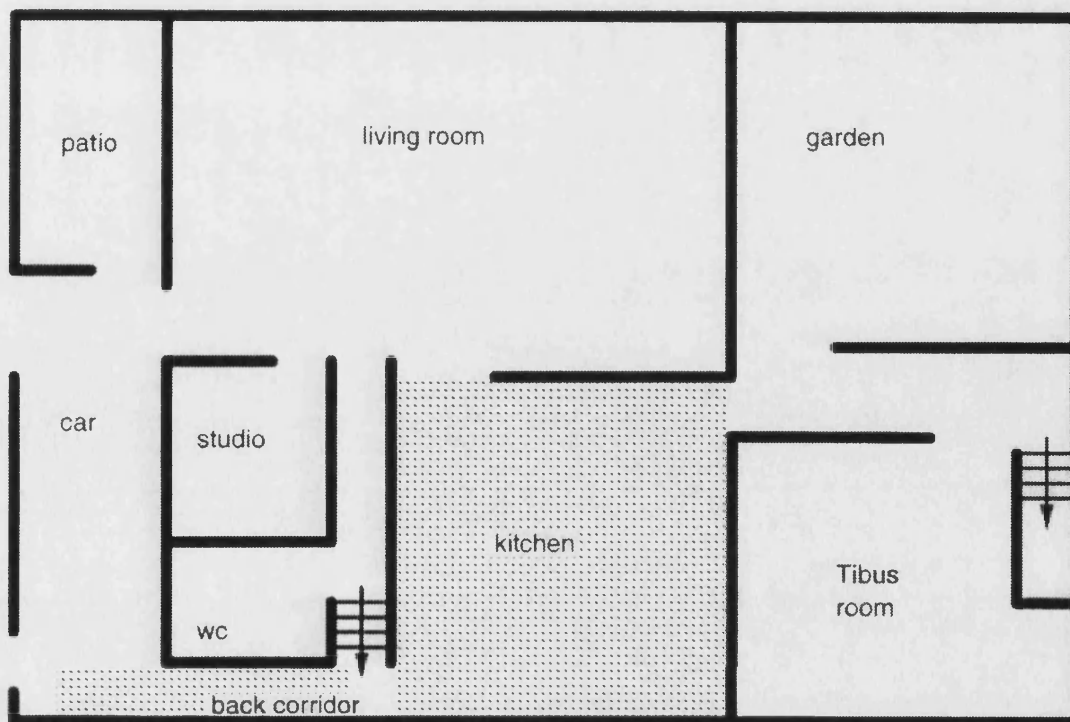
Moreover, this relationship is an example of exclusion, isolation and the lack of space given to the *muchacha*. Tiburcia remained in the kitchen, where she has a television set to

watch. At weekends she would attend computer school, and while the *patrona* encourages her to study on Sundays, she does not give her access to any space upstairs to study, to think or to plan a future. Clearly, Tiburcia's role is to work, not to think.

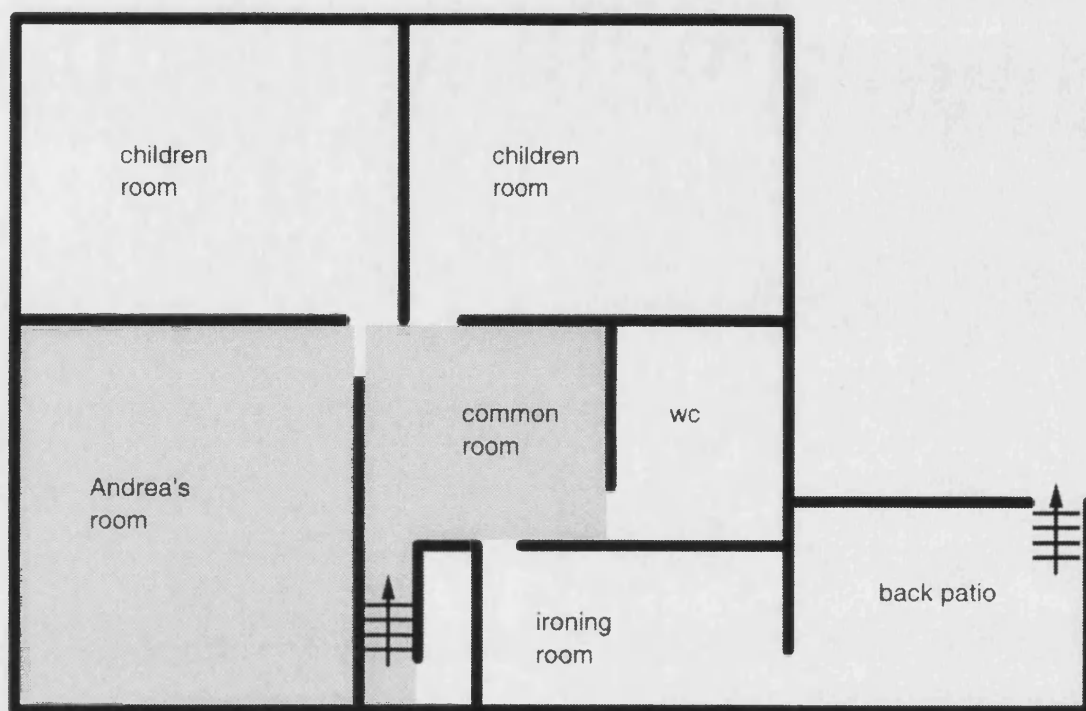
The interesting part of this interaction is that Tiburcia did rebel against her exclusion, isolation and her inert role. One Monday, I arrived at the house and Andrea was in a state of total rage. Tiburcia had gone out on the Sunday salsa dancing and arrived late. Given the public ridicule to which Andrea was subjected, being seen by a neighbour in her bathrobe, Tiburcia almost lost her job. This shows how, the type of interaction likely to take place in the household is by no means open to negotiation where the asymmetry of the relationship is at stake. The point is that while the *muchacha* is made to accept boundaries and renegotiate them with the likes of the *patrona*, the opposite is a threat to the relationship. This example could explain how within households a power asymmetry propagates knowledge. This is more meaningful and suited to the situation than human rights law.



Patrona's space
ANDREA AND TIBURCIA
GROUND FLOOR



Muchacha's space
ANDREA AND TIBURCIA
GROUND FLOOR



Patrona's space
ANDREA AND TIBURCIA, FIRST FLOOR



Muchacha's space
ANDREA AND TIBURCIA, FIRST FLOOR

2.4 Yolanda and Margarita: internalising boundaries

This household provided a good example of the way boundaries can be strict and rigid as an effect of interaction. In fact space design, as in Luisa's home, discourages the interaction between Yolanda (*patrona*) and Margarita (*muchacha*). However, in contrast to other households explored above, Margarita lives out. This means that she goes in twice a week for a working day and then leaves the household. Thus, she does not sleep or eat in. This is, perhaps, the reason why the boundaries do not need constant renegotiation. Another aspect that emphasises the rigidity of boundaries is the design of the house that provides alternative paths for movement. Specifically, the alternative allows *patrona* and *muchacha* to concentrate on their own routine without the possibility of contact. One alternative route for accessing the home is the garden area where we find Margarita's room. The other access route is the front entrance, which connects to the living room, kitchen and staircases to the upper level. These separations discourage interaction in a broad sense. It therefore became impossible to map any interaction during observations.

It seems that Yolanda and Margarita are aware of the alternatives for movement and make full use of them. The consequence was the limited interaction I observed. While Yolanda uses the front and upstairs areas with her family and friends, Margarita is in the opposite area, in the back cleaning or relaxing in her room. This room is connected only to the back regions (garden and kitchen). Basically, Margarita is only in the home to do the mechanistic activities represented by the area she moves in, but she does not rebel or challenge the boundaries. Likewise, Yolanda does not control the spaces used by Margarita. Through its absence, interaction in space influences the negotiation of boundaries. Yolanda and Margarita did not interact but the boundaries grew more and more rigid. Another conclusion to draw from this example is that individuals influence the significance of space and boundaries even if they are not aware of how they use them, as stated by Doise and Palmonari (1986). The fact that Yolanda and Margarita worked within boundaries made them all the more difficult to break down. Boundaries then, exist

before and during interaction and they can become more flexible just as they can become rigid, as this case demonstrates.

2.5 An important note about the kitchen as a domestic space

This is a space built especially for the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. It is the place to cook and prepare for the front of the house, but it is also a place where boundaries break down and there is mutual learning. The reason for this is that it is in the kitchen that the *patrona* teaches the *muchacha* how to clean the home and how to behave. In turn, the *muchacha* teaches the *patrona* how to cook typical Mexican dishes and relates some of her life experiences. Considering the origins of both women, the kitchen represents a cultural crossroads where rural and urban knowledges mix, as stated in Lauderdale and Graham (1989), or a starting point for an ‘embryonic community’, as noted by Douglas (1991).

The kitchen is mainly a space for the *muchacha*, who from it observes the rest of the house. The kitchen represents a small, yet warm retreat where she escapes the rules dominating the rest of the home. The *muchacha* relaxes in the kitchen and forgets some of the manners that are expected of her elsewhere, as I observed. Once inside the kitchen they impersonate the *patrona*, they laugh and sing. When crossing the kitchen threshold, the *muchacha* goes through a drastic change in attitude. For instance, every time Guadalupe left the kitchen to go upstairs and continue her working routine, she would bid farewell to her relaxed attitude, arrange her apron and get into her working mode.

The kitchen has flexible boundaries and the interaction within shows how, depending on group and individual interests, these boundaries may break down. The interaction is varied and it has different nuances, which go beyond the power asymmetry of the relationship. The reason may be that other members of the house have access to it. Children and *muchacha* chat in the kitchen. Yet there is some of the mother’s power limiting the amount of interaction in the kitchen, preventing her child from adopting the *muchacha*’s slang. This avoidance of contact reflects fears of pollution. The deferential

style of interaction passed from mother to children pushes the *muchacha* into a position where her space for contact is reduced and controlled.

Interaction in the kitchen is a good example of the contradictions in use of space and type of interaction characteristic of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. I argue that because the room may lack doors and contains objects that are meaningful to the entire household, this space is a welcoming space, as well as an infertile ground. The television set put there for the *muchacha* to watch when free, is an example of how the kitchen obstructs the emancipation of thought. So, at once a space open for people, but restricted from activities. This is a contradiction.



**Figure 5.4 Mexican kitchen
Luisa and Guadalupe's house**

Finally, in this section I described spatial boundaries in the household through an ethnographic analysis. It seems that domestic space is organised around a world of symbolic meanings intended to exert control, intimacy and asymmetry as required for relationships to develop. I also examined how social representations of contact and status obstruct thinking and promote exclusion within specific areas of the household. The detailed description of each household demonstrates the existence of distinctions between *patronas* and *muchachas*. Given that I considered the framework of social representations, it can be stated that these distinctions, or boundaries, are signals of meaning. The question is how to interpret the boundaries, or what do they show? In this thesis I will approach this question by looking at two aspects of the practices taking place

at these households: 1) the encouraged interaction; 2) discouraged interaction. These two forms of interpretation aim to relate interaction with the representations underpinning the space distinctions.

3. Distinctions in space

The denotation of expressions is relative to the speaker. Their use depends upon the relation of the user to the object with which the word is concerned. Time for a temporal indexical expression is relevant to what it names. Similarly, just what region a *spatial indexical* expression names depends upon the location of its utterance. Indexical expressions and statements containing them are not freely repeatable; in a given discourse, not all their replicas therein are also translations of them (Garfinkel, 1967:5).

In this section I explore the boundaries traced throughout the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. These boundaries have a meaning in their own right and in a context. However, similar meaning underpins the boundaries, as similar boundaries were found: front and back, upstairs and downstairs, inside and outside. The front and back regions encourage behaviour with relation to the presence or absence of an outsider (audience). The separation between upstairs and downstairs seems to be associated with a status hierarchy. The last separation I found was inside and outside, which help to promote intimacy within the household. This separation is similar to the public and private space division, as in Goffman (1959). So, following the previous section, where I described the setting as an introduction to the exploration of interaction, in this section, I examine these separations and highlight the interaction likely to take place.

3.1 Front: presentation of home in everyday life

The exploration of the front is one of appearances given to others where those putting on an appearance are the performers, and those impressed by them are the audience (Ichheiser, 1949; Goffman, 1959). The front enables the study of representations in the setting of social encounters because it is an area deliberately organised for interaction with outsiders. The arrangements of space prior to interaction, I suggest, direct relationships. Consequently, the examination of the front should reveal first, the game of

impression management and second, the activities which these impressions are likely to enforce.

Impression management of a front area entails:

Acting with decorum while the actor is in the visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in conversation with them (Goffman, 1959: 110).

When *patrona* and *muchachas* present themselves at the front, they are careful of their actions as guests see them. Given that a good impression of the home is a sign of status (see Chapter Two), the *patrona* urges the *muchacha* to behave in a polite manner and to be friendly to the guests. Manners and tact, as tools for giving the right impression (Brown and Levinson, 1987), ensure that individuals communicate within the boundaries of an encounter. In this way the *patrona* ensures that she makes a good impression on the guests. The effect of a good interaction with outsiders is often a measure of the successful social life of the *patrona* (de Oliveira, 1989).

To continue, the activities likely to take place at the front are intertwined with the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. This is due to the need of both to act together in order to give off a harmonious impression of home life. We can observe that when the *patrona* gives orders to the *muchacha* she, in turn, promptly obeys. For example, when the *patrona* offers a drink, the *muchacha* brings it soon after. This behaviour gives the impression that the home is 'under control', where the *patrona* and *muchachas* carry out different activities to produce a favourable impression to the outside world.

Where is the front? We would expect that the front areas are those constructed and decorated with an inviting ambience for socialising. The living room, the entrance hall and dining room are all front regions of the household and they can be identified by their decoration, such as furniture for many people, or their proximity to the front entrance of the household.

3.1.1 Control and silence

Control is an essential element for managing impressions. Behaviour at the front allows the *patrona* to show herself as 'morally and instrumentally fit for the situation' (Goffman, 1959), specifically when receiving guests. The *patrona*, responsible for the home, must control the household and be seen to do so. This is often emphasised by her bossy attitude towards the *muchacha*. Therefore, control encourages the asymmetry in the relationship, where the *patrona* exaggerates her commands and the *muchacha* obeys. The point is that by managing control, the *patrona* uses the front space to assert her power over the household and as a consequence she encourages the asymmetrical power relationship with the *muchacha*.

On the part of the *muchacha*, the interaction at the front places her at the weak point of the relationship, in which her voice is restricted to 'yes' and 'no' answers and her movements to opening the front door. Dress is also restricted for a front region, as the *muchacha* sometimes has a special black and white uniform for receiving guests. These restrictions transform the front into an area where the *muchacha* does not have an opinion or make suggestions. Taking actions or speaking up in this area is rebellious and represents a threat to her job. An illustration of this is that *muchachas* receive her guests only outside the household or in the back regions, because she is prohibited from acting as the *patrona* does at the front.

The front region is an area that gives off the appearance that the household is harmonious. At the same time this area encourages the power asymmetry of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. So, while guests witness that the *muchacha* take orders from her superior, the *patrona* and *muchacha* interaction is one of control from the *patrona* to the *muchacha*. This control is taken as normal, and thus, the submission of the worker is also seen as part of the relationship. I observed this when sitting in the living room of homes: if the *muchacha* was working on other things, the *patrona* would serve me drinks, but all the while remarking that this behaviour was unusual.

Finally, the front is where *muchachas* go only to attend to the *patrona's* guests or to prepare the area before outsiders arrive. The *patrona*, in contrast, uses the front to exercise the role of homeowner and to give off an impression of control. Therefore, interaction at the front is characteristically one of demeanour, as highlighted in Goffman (1956). The interaction taking place at the front, though, needs preparation and planning. This is the purpose of the back region.

3.2 Back: hidden from the public eye

In comparison with the front that is public, the back region is concealed from the outsider. The main function of the back is to support the front. Guest are kept away from the work involved in making the house look hospitable, for this reason Goffman (1959) suggested that back contradicts what is staged for the outsiders.

The back regions is marked by its location, which is often hidden from the visual range of the guests. For this reason, in contrast to the front, it is not decorated to create an impact. In terms of design, the back regions are the back corridors, the outside rooms, the cleaning rooms and the rear entrances. These areas are specially built for the use of the workers and are not necessarily comfortable and well cared for. This supports the idea that the back conceals what is needed to give the right impression at the front (Goffman, 1959). What is to be shown to others is the outcome of the efforts put in at the back. For this reason, a significant part of the interaction between *patrona* and *muchacha* takes place at the back and out of sight.

3.2.1 Inequality

It is important to highlight that the behaviour that takes place at the back encourages an inequality between worker and employer, because the tools for doing housework are unequally distributed. For example, the *muchacha* will have a heavier work load, such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, dusting, and they will use traditional appliances. Meanwhile, the modern middle class housewife uses the telephone, Internet and mobile phones to facilitate her preparations to make a good impression at the front of house. Now, at the

back these inequalities are kept secret from the public eye and this makes it difficult to assess the 'modernisation' of domestic service, as sociologists have argued (Chin, 1998; Coser, 1973). Because the inequality in work loads remains despite the introduction of modern appliances, it may be suggested that old ideas about the traditional role of domestic workers direct interaction. It can therefore be said that the back region encourages the exploitative character of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. For instance, there is an inequality in work loads and use of appliances where *muchachas* use brooms and the *patrona* uses electric appliances.

3.2.2 Negotiations in disadvantage

The back is also the area for negotiations, like family business and its conjoint activities. Therefore, the back is where family discussions take place: for example, the *patrona* scolds her children where no one can see. At the back also the *muchacha* and *patrona* negotiate conditions such as salary, vacations, or advance payments. Because the back encourages an inequality in positions, this transforms the negotiations between *patrona* and *muchachas* into a negotiation of disadvantage. That is to say, if a *muchacha* asks for an increase in salary, or for permission for time off, it may well be that the *patrona* will not consider the demand necessary. Still, in asking for what is fully her right, the *muchacha* is posing a threat to the *patrona*. The point is that negotiations that take place in the back regions are deliberately kept away from outsiders, and are kept as family secrets. Thus, family members would find it hard to realise that what is normal back home, may be unusual and cruel somewhere else.

Moreover, the back fosters a lack of recognition for the work done there. This is a vicious circle reproducing a lack of appreciation given to housework (Goldsmith, 1989), and to the worker (Chaney and García Castro, 1989). Even if the *patrona* relies on the opinion of the *muchacha* with regards to the organisation of things, the *muchacha's* input to the house is not given recognition. The back then, is an area that enforces the reproduction of social representations about domestic work as lacking value and having little impact. This helps to explain why women, despite working and taking care of the home, would not be recognised for their efforts.

Finally, it seems that in the Mexican household, as in other studies of boundaries, like those of Goffman, (1956) or Jodelet (1991), the front and back regions host different individuals. According to my observations, the significance of the interaction transgresses the boundaries of front and back. It seems that the *patrona* keeps both spaces under her command, while she does not lose sight or control over the *muchacha*. This control, I will argue, encourages the asymmetry in power between *patrona* and *muchacha*.

The back and front boundaries are important to this research because they help to show how social representations of the human rights of the *patrona* or *muchacha* are propagated in an environment of control, inequality and asymmetry in power. The manipulation of space and work carried out by the powerful party (*patrona*) leaves the second party in a vulnerable position to retaliate (*muchacha*). These aspects are, of course, hidden from the public eye. Thereby, an intervention on the downside of the relationship would be problematic.

3.3 Upstairs: status division

Contrary to front and back divisions, related to an audience, the up and down division is associated with the design of home. This division is crucial to the case study of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship because it seems that the status of people in the home is directly related to the level of the storey in which they live.

In nineteenth-century European homes, the upstairs / downstairs division indicated a status separation to domestic service. Coser (1973) illustrates the division by narrating practices retaining domestic workers at ground level, where they usually cook and dust. Vertical separations of spaces, accordingly, are attributed status or rank distinctions; thus lower or higher storeys testify to the status of people living at home. The separation indicates that relaxation will take place on the higher floor, for the family, and on the ground floor for the domestic worker. Take the example of the famous television series *Upstairs Downstairs*, in which the drama was based around the location of events,

upstairs for the family, downstairs for the servants. The upstairs / downstairs division is one created by space design, but encouraging status divisions between the people who inhabit these spaces.

Coser (1973) also argued that domestic service was an occupational role soon to become obsolete within modern households. He contends that the space division in the home no longer obeys the master-servant rules for rank separation; so the upstairs / downstairs division has vanished. This is not the case for the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship, where rank separations are marked within the household in space, activities and interaction. Let me elaborate on these last aspects.

3.3.1 Business and emotions

The activities that are likely to take place in an upstairs area are related to internal family business and personal growth. The *patrona* usually takes care of household payments and arrangements for social meetings from the bedroom, or nearby areas where she finds a space for thinking and relaxing. Family encounters also take place upstairs where outsiders cannot see the activities involved in caring for the children. In this area, the *patrona* escapes from the mechanistic activities needed to keep the house clean and tidy. For example, when helping children with their studies or educating them, like telling them how to treat the *muchacha*, the *patrona* will speak to the children in her room. Upstairs is a space encouraging activities related to individual and family growth, such as doing homework, studying and praying. For this reason it seems that business and emotions are activities associated with this space. The *patrona*'s emotional life is upstairs where she speaks with her husband and with the children, but also where she negotiates family affairs.² The fact that upstairs is an area housing emotions and thought, I argue characterises the division upstairs / downstairs as a status division. That is, upstairs activities are to be associated with higher thinking, like planning and studying. This is not the case with downstairs. Intimacy, business and schooling are all activities attributed to upstairs. It is likely, then, that *muchachas*, who belong downstairs, are not attributed a

² In Mexico the *patrona* often administers the family inheritance (Goldsmith, 1989).

space for developing comparable skills. I explore this aspect further when looking at the downstairs division.

So, representations are embedded in space, and the location of the *patrona*'s room demonstrates this. It is important to my research to point out that the activities likely to take place in a higher storey discourage interaction between people of different status. That is to say, a *muchacha* will rarely help the children to do the homework, or discuss family business in the *patrona*'s chamber. Usually, when the *muchacha* is upstairs she is working; it is therefore important to discuss whether the downstairs area provides an adequate ambience for the personal and emotional life of the *muchacha*, as the upstairs area does for the *patrona* and her family.

3.4 Downstairs: thought is forbidden

Downstairs is a space for workers and for working, and this is shown by the fact that most 'ordinary' and 'mechanistic' activities, like housework, take place there. Activities include playing, cooking and eating, besides the usual cleaning and dusting. In all, these activities are mechanistic in the sense that they do not call for a level of abstraction to be carried out, as is the case of activities done upstairs. These spaces, then, are assigned to activities and people with a lower status.

Downstairs there is no praying, no thinking and, therefore, no personal development. The lower status assigned to the worker, I argue, is not only a consequence of the kind of work they do, as Rollins (1985) suggested; or of the background education they have, as the literature on the topic maintains (Atabal, 1995). The lower status of domestic workers is embedded in the space where they work and is encouraged by the lack of space for activities that need reflection and thought, like studying and planning.

3.4.1 Numb and not intimate

Another interaction discouraged by the downstairs division is that involving a flow of emotions and intimacy. The worker lives in isolation: no telephone or form of

communicating with the outer world is at hand. Downstairs, *muchachas* rather are given a television set to watch during relaxation time. It would seem that the area is built to prevent the emancipation of thinking.

The *patrona* gives orders from upstairs to the *muchacha*, wherever she may be, as the *patrona* tends to remain more time upstairs attending to family business. Likewise, the *muchacha* spends more time downstairs watching television. There is an inequality in activities evident in this division. This is the division creating a possibility for the *patrona* to have an intimate life upstairs, but not giving the same space to the *muchacha*. Her room is often at the back, or outside, on the lower floor and she has a single bed and no guests are allowed into that depth of the house. This division helps to explain why domestic service is of a dead-end nature (Colen, 1989) and provides few alternatives for a future (Goldsmith, 1993). Basically, the sort of opportunity given to a domestic worker for personal growth is limited and she has difficulty in exercising her sexuality or in improving her schooling. However, when the *patrona* is a single parent, these types of divisions are broken down, and an intimate and emotional relationship may blossom between *muchacha* and *patrona*, as shown by Chanquía and Conde (1989).

Finally, the upstairs / downstairs division shows the status separations that exist between *patrona* and *muchacha*. These separations enforce activities that the upstairs division allows for, like thinking and sharing emotions, which, in turn, are prevented from occurring elsewhere. Thus, the division obstructs the personal growth of the domestic worker.

3.5 Inside: individuality and distance

Throughout the chapter I have explored how space boundaries help to encourage the *patrona* and *muchacha* interaction in the back spaces and discourage proximity at the front. I have also discussed how individuals are given a status and an opportunity for personal growth depending on the storey in which they live. There is one more division that is yet to be explored, and that is the boundary between the inside and outside of the

home. This division helps one to explore the physical extents of the boundaries within which individuals are restricted to interacting according to a given role. In the household these divisions refer to the areas for being *patrona* and *muchacha*. This can be illustrated with an indoor/outdoor division. Let me explore each division in detail.

3.5.1 Respect for privacy

Privacy in the home is to be found in rooms with no connections to others and by making a space fit for privacy and intimacy. Privacy then, is associated with the distance of a room from the entrance, according to the theory of space syntax (Hillier and Hanson, 1987). The theory of space syntax conceives space as a configuration that defines interaction. Rooms that are connected to others but not to the entrance would encourage privacy, for example. The distance between rooms produces a sense of depth driving people further from a certain area. The further a room is from the entrance, the more likely it is to discourage interaction with outsiders.

Given that depth is also an impression given to a space there are artefacts which emphasise the privacy of a space. An artefact is a symbol of demeanour that endeavours to mark the limits of privacy, according to Goffman (1956). The house seems to be designed to support the kind of demeanour attributed to the *muchacha*. Orwell (1940) observed how doors represent boundaries, when looking at the doors dividing the kitchen (private) from the restaurant (public). This is important to consider because in Mexican households, closed doors represent boundaries used to maintain secrecy. However, by drawing boundaries with concrete objects, there is a risk of marking drastic distinctions. Closing doors, for example, gives an impression of exclusion because the person outside is excluded from what is inside, let me elaborate further on this aspect.

3.5.2 Exclusion

While doors mark a boundary between the inside and the outside, the interaction that is discouraged through these doors suggests exclusion. The individual to whom the door is closed is excluded from interaction. Likewise, those inside the room are prevented from 'contacting' those who are on the other side of the door. Those inside the room may get

the impression of being prevented from watching, hearing or touching the *muchacha*, as if she were infectious. The *muchacha*, in turn, does her work or watches television, while the *patrona* converses behind closed doors. This exclusion may suggest an objectification of contact, as identified by Jodelet (1991). It also helps to explain how within a same space, *muchacha* and *patrona* would have different social knowledge of what it means to be on either side of the boundary (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

Now, what would happen if someone opened a door that had been closed? This boundary transgression is threatening. Doors, therefore, represent a warning to others by stating 'do not participate'. In the case of the *patrona*, closing the door behind her generally signals that a 'family affair' is taking place. However, it may well be the case that planning, thinking and negotiations are defended by this boundary, in addition to the upstairs division. Given the ungovernable domain of privacy, doors seem to be the tool for hiding what is carried out inside rooms. This is important to consider in the case of the Mexican household, as it helps to explain the reasons why, despite the repeated claims of the *patrona* that the *muchacha* is considered part of the family, the latter do not, in fact, feel this to be the case.

Finally, the inside division is the structure of the home entitling individuals to privacy and to avoid interaction. The inside structure extends in depth, with some rooms having fewer connections to others. However, when interaction ends, the significance of this privacy takes its entire deferential sense from excluding the worker. If a certain proximity in space would pollute the space and the other in the interaction, it is unlikely that the *patrona* and *muchacha* would share private spaces and interact behind closed doors, otherwise the interaction would suggest a level of intimacy not suited to this type of relationship.

3.6 Outside: becoming natural

In the above, I have discussed how the *patrona* and *muchacha* exclude each other by emphasising their privacy. This is gained through the use of doors and by the distance of

rooms from the entrance. In this section, I emphasise that representations are embedded in space by exploring how, once outside the house, these representations are not impinged upon by the *muchacha* or the *patrona*. In fact, both set aside their identity and become natural.

The outside then, delimits the household. However, the boundary between inside and outside may be flexible, as the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship proves to extend beyond this limit. That is to say, outside the home the *patrona* may try to influence different aspects of the *muchacha*'s life than from the inside. A *muchacha*, for instance, wanting to keep up with her schooling is allowed to attend classes, but not encouraged to study indoors (see the discussion of downstairs). It is, therefore, likely that when a *muchacha* leaves the house, she rebels against her role and abandons entirely her identity as *muchacha*. I explore this point in the following section.

I also have theoretical grounds for carrying out an ethnographic analysis of the outside. This reason is the validity that it gives to my study of home. According to Flick (1992) it is necessary to prove the consistency of an investigation by providing additional supporting data. This is what observations from the outside provide, an inferential understanding of the behaviour of domestic workers once they are not domestic workers. The point is that by looking outside the house, we are looking at an expression of the social knowledge of a group (*muchachas*) when not interacting.

In the following sections I examine the places and occasions that represent outside for the *muchacha* and the *patrona*. For the latter, the outside represents an increase in workload. However, for the *muchacha*, Sundays spent in the plazas, discos, back home and feast days (Day of the Dead, for example) are ways in which she forgets her work. I decided to examine the outside division when community workers suggested that I should explore the dilemma suffered by *muchachas*. That is, first a culture shock when arriving in the city and then, and another culture shock when readapting to their rural life. This suggests that there is more to analyse about the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship than the work

process itself. For this reason I decided to observe 'no' behaviour, where neither space or interaction influences the situation.

3.6.1 Sundays at the plaza: *muchacha* rebels

The social life of domestic workers is a sociological phenomenon that has yet to be examined and, I maintain, would enrich our understanding of domestic workers as a social group. The non-governmental organisations were aware of the help they need in exploring *muchachas* as a group process. So, they invited me to observe the public plazas on Sunday mornings. Then, the *muchachas* go to the public plazas, which are open spaces near to the churches. The *muchachas* entertain themselves by dressing like urban girls and flirting with men. They wear their best clothes, comb their long black hair and adopt daring new hairstyles. This, in fact, was how participants who were married claimed to have met their husbands. Domestic workers from similar areas of the country meet with other informal workers that have moved to the city. In this way the *muchachas* participate in a social life outside the household. By socialising on Sundays, the *muchachas* establish a social network that may lend them support. As a substitute to the family, the network helps them in difficult times. Such individuals as soldiers, policemen, domestic workers, construction workers and prostitutes will all be part of this network.

There are public plazas across Mexico City, but the most popular ones are located in the centre. The biggest is the Alameda Central, and it used to be famous for the Sunday promenades of rich people during the nineteenth century, according to Arrom (1985). Today it is mainly popular for the Sunday visits of informal workers and rural migrants. After the plaza, some girls go back to work, while others get together to go salsa dancing at a well-known venue. Another plaza, San Jacinto, which is in the south of the city, is increasingly popular among workers of the area.

The sociological phenomenon of interest to this study is that once outside, the *muchachas* loosen up from their role as domestic worker. It is interesting to observe that when meeting people they tend to say that they work as shop attendants, secretaries or street vendors, as if they were ashamed of being domestic workers. Community workers

commented that this is the usual response of the domestic workers and the risk is that it impedes them from organising as a group. This suggests that the oppressive character of the household is so subtle, that workers are unable to cope with their identity when leaving it. Thus, domestic workers rebel by abandoning their identity as *muchacha* completely. Being a *muchacha* means acting childishly, forgetting people from the outside and putting aside ones rural roots. So by leaving everything related to the household behind them, the *muchachas* engage in a social environment for which they have little preparation (due to their isolation). This division shows the impact of living in a household as a *muchacha*; the effect it has on the individual goes beyond the situation and the space, it contaminates other spheres of interaction. In this sense, being a *muchacha* is a social knowledge that modifies through group interaction.

3.6.2 The outdoor life of the *patrona*: a double shift

In contrast to the *muchacha*, the *patrona*'s life outside is dictated by her dominant role inside the household, despite which some housewives also work outside the house. Previously, I discussed how the home represents the space to construct a family's social life (Lauderdale and Graham, 1989; Douglas, 1991). As housewives, the *patrona* asserts her position in the front, back, upstairs and downstairs areas of home, while being aware of all household affairs. However, she finds that her need to work outside conflicts with the demands of administering the home. Therefore, the outdoor life of middle-class Mexican women tends to be depend on how she manages to spends time indoors and outdoors.

The ethnographic analysis suggests that the *patrona* is the victim of the double workday, a routine involving housework and office work, in that same order (Rollins, 1985). The home is, indeed, the domain of the housewife as she is responsible for the input of services, such as the *muchacha* herself and food supplies. Consequently, the *patrona*'s life outdoors is determined by the satisfactory performance of a routine indoors. If by the end of the routine housework, she has still time left, an unemployed *patrona* goes outdoors. However, when speaking about working women, their outdoor life, as *patrona* and worker represents the necessity to change priorities. This creates what is to all intents

and purposes a double shift, and increases her anguish over her ability to juggle home and work successfully. In my research, it is important to consider how women may be aware of the difficulty of attempting to work and support a household and this may provoke sympathy towards human rights. I debate the extent to which *patronas* enshrine the comparable rights for working to the *muchacha*.

In all, the home represents an inside space vulnerable to threat from the outside. Doors are concrete boundaries defending the home. Investigation of the home then, should consider that *patrona* and *muchacha* seek for the privacy offered by inside spaces. It is difficult to discuss the inside experience of the *muchacha*, as she remains a worker and at the beck and call of her employer. This is may be the reason why *muchachas* are so eager to go outside the household and step out of the *muchacha* role. Similarly, the *patrona* is eager to find a space indoors where she can get away from the *muchacha*.

Finally, in this section I discussed the elements, activities and interaction corresponding to each of the existing divisions of the household. These divisions, I argue, can be flexible or rigid depending on how the representations are propagated by space and interaction. I illustrate my argument through a critical assessment of my ethnographic analysis of four Mexican households.

4. Interaction in the household: a discussion of differences

The ethnographic description of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship has suggested the extent to which each woman protects her space is a means by which she protects her individuality. In addition, the distances also suggest that various forms of social knowledge, like urban and rural lifestyles, are involved in the definition of domestic space. The setting of the household, in addition, illustrates how social knowledge directs interaction between individuals and groups. It seems that within the household space and interaction are intertwined, marking boundaries between *patrona* and *muchacha*. I would like to emphasise a few aspects that emerged in the ethnographic description. These representations mediate the relationship and they are embedded in space. It is therefore

essential to highlight how the ethnographic analysis is the starting point for the study of the relationship.

The *first* aspect to highlight is *power asymmetry*. Earlier, I examined how the *patrona* controls the use of space and the activities taking place within them (control, exclusion). In particular, the *patrona* directs, in some way, the *muchacha*'s use of space. This is important to bear in mind because the activities carried out in a space encourage the propagation of representations that impact on the *muchacha*'s life beyond the household space. The impediments to thought and study in the space where she lives are an example of how the power asymmetry, as social knowledge, enables the *patrona* to orient behaviour. This is similar to the thesis on how the power of knowledge is asymmetrical within communities, as argued by Jovchelovitch (1997).

A *second* aspect detected is the way that *social knowledge* accommodates to the given situation of those participants in interaction. The separation of space and the practices absent and present in it helps us to understand the representations embedded in space. This gives analytical tools for discussing the elements shaping the reality of those living in it. In particular, the *patrona* / *muchacha* interaction has a hierarchy established by means of an asymmetry in power that does impose the representations of the *patrona* above those of the *muchacha*. This contest of knowledge threatens the harmonious development of the relationship. The analytical tools proposed in this chapter make it possible to differentiate the limits of the hierarchy of representations theoretically: the *patrona* is the owner and the payer and, in practice, this hierarchy may be challenged or assumed in interaction. Let me explain. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship produces mixed and juxtaposed representations. However, outside the space where this mixing can occur (the kitchen), the cross-cultural encounter is taken as contamination and is prevented.

A *third* aspect of crucial importance is the *negotiation* of the organisation of space, because its outcome has specific meaning in the enforcement of boundaries. This chapter has examined how, due to the design of rooms, thinking, speaking or negotiations may be

encouraged or discouraged. These representations suggest that, during interaction, individuals will respect what is accepted practice within a space, or alternatively, they will react against it. Illustrations of this are the way *muchachas* behave in the plazas on Sundays, or the way Andrea intended to extend her power on Tiburcia's time outdoors by following her.

Lastly, the *artefacts* or tools for interaction are another aspect I would like to highlight. These objects result from the transformation of a representation of the interaction that become a tool for interaction itself. This is similar to the mechanisms of objectification, as defined by Moscovici (1984). In the case of this research, for instance, ideas about contact gave significance to objects that facilitated or obstructed contact. This chapter illustrated this in two examples. The first example was the significance of *doors*. The use of doors represented how boundaries applied tools for negotiation during interaction. Thus, by being closed or opened, the doors directed the interaction by excluding or including others from it. The *muchacha* would often stand outside a room awaiting instructions, avoiding crossing the threshold unless she is asked to. The second illustration of artefacts for interaction is the *kitchen*. Objects used for encouraging interaction invade this space. The kitchen provides a safe setting for the traditional asymmetry to vanish and this space is out of sight, far from family business and free of thought and intimacy. The kitchen is generally seen as an area for work; thus, the relationship that evolves there is crucial to the survival of the home.

Finally, this chapter has helped to illustrate the ordering of difference within home. While there are boundaries marking spaces, social representations may underpin these boundaries. In other words, interaction in space respects the rules set by a few. In the case of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship, their interaction is a reaction to what a space suggests they ought to do. Yolanda and Margarita proved this by not interacting and allowing boundaries to become stronger. It seems that a strong sense of difference mark the distinctions and enforce boundaries.

5. Conclusions and main points

This chapter presented an ethnographic analysis of the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*. The analysis reveals elements of the relationship that would escape the analysis had ethnographical techniques not been applied, such as the way boundaries are enforced. The description of practices within the household shows the meaning behind spatial organisation. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship involves certain forms of interaction that present obstacles to self-reflection and exclude the *muchacha* from the family. The analysis also suggests that a fear of being polluted by the *muchacha* or of her polluting the house is one of the reasons for the construction of boundaries. The propagation of representations in space isolates the *muchacha*, while affording privacy to the *patrona*. There are spaces set aside for family affairs and intimacy. However, this analysis opened a space for discussion on the unequal distribution of space as an obstacle to equal opportunities to activities involving personal growth, particularly thought and forward planning. These elements shed light on the debate surrounding the future prospects of domestic workers as a sector constituted by women who do not attempt to fight as a group, or to plan a future or pursue a better education.

Having described the parameters distinguishing the space of *patrona* and *muchacha*, ethnography has been shown to be adequate for this study. Domestic space is constructed upon the use of front, back and other areas of the house as spaces imbued with meaning. The use of these spaces suggests that ideas emerging from a wider social structure are part of the relationship. Examination of the domestic space helped to identify how artefacts in the household establish the ambience for enforcing and obstructing practices within the household. In this way the television given to the *muchacha* in the kitchen directs her practices and interactions, as it is assumed that she will remain in that space alone and watching it. The organisation and decoration of elements in space is endowed with symbolism that is taken for granted and only becomes salient when something out of ordinary takes place, say a *muchacha* reading in the kitchen instead of watching television.

Finally, inequality in space suggests an inequality in relationships, and this is an idea permeating the perception *patronas* and *muchachas* have of one another and which is integrated in those representations flowing within the household. These representations, however, are the product of a social knowledge created elsewhere, through group membership. The examination of this knowledge goes beyond the household, and invites discussion on a wider scale. In the following chapter, then, I critically evaluate the analysis of interviews and focus groups, where two key ideas of the representations of human rights emerged in the context of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship in Mexican middle class homes.

CHAPTER 6

The Construction of a Relationship of Differences

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9. Conclusion and main points

This chapter discusses the data retrieved from interviews and focus groups. Having stated the general criteria for the analyses, in Chapter Four, here I discuss the content of the categories and subcategories related to the main themes of the interviews. The first part of the chapter explores the data separately, that is *patronas* on one side and *muchachas* on the other. This part of the chapter follows the main categories found in the analysis: definitions about themselves and about the other. The quotations presented are retrieved from the systematisation of data using Nud*ist. Following this systematic organisation of data, the second part of the chapter provides a critical evaluation of the representations identified during the analysis. Here I explore the links relating positions in the household with wider contextual issues, such as ethnicity, religion and social status, which are the main characteristics of the *patrona*

and *muchacha* relationship (see Chapter Two). For this second part, I also incorporated my background knowledge and information provided by my observations in the field, I provide some quotes from the data to illustrate my arguments. Given that the narrative of the chapter follows the coding frames and subcategories found in the analysis, the chapter steers us towards the last part of the analysis. This is the identification of anchoring and objectification of representations of human rights as everyday life practices. These practices are discussed in Chapter Seven, the following chapter.

1. Outline of the analysis

This chapter looks into the beliefs, ideas and values underpinning the practices identified as common grounds in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The representational fields of difference and of similarity are crucial to understand human rights violations in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. It is because representations operate at the level of constructing an idea of similarity and difference that we find contradictions in the relationship, for instance the *muchacha* can be degraded and fired despite being considered a family member.

As stated in Chapter 5, the self- other distinction seems to direct the practices in the relationship (i.e. activities in household space). Taking this into consideration, the aim of this chapter is to explore what lies behind the practices marking distinctions and underpinning human rights violations. Prior to my examination of the main themes I look at the construction of images of *patrona* and *muchacha* gleaned from the analysis.

2. The self-image of *patronas*

Having analysed the data separately, that is, one set for the *patrona* (A2) another for *muchacha* (A1); the presentation of data should also begin with two separate strands. The self-image of the *patronas* emerged as a meaningful category for analysis. In what follows, I present the subcategories linked to the way that *patronas* define themselves.

The selection of categories shows how *patronas* perceive themselves. These representations express the problematic lived by women in their situation. When they take on the responsibility of leading a home and administering it, they put their profession to one side. When *patronas* give up running the home to work they resent having to hand over the household. Representations about the instruction within the home offer insight into how *muchachas* work while secretly supervised by the *patrona*, who has given up work to look after her children and the *muchacha*. The identity of the housewife is linked to religion and this is expressed through her experience at home. She is also responsible for decisions taken on behalf of the rest of the family. The double shift routine is tiring and complex, even if she has a *muchacha*.

Patronas have to justify their decision to remain at home and give up alternative lifestyles. At the same time that they emphasise the benefits of staying at home, they express their rejection of those women who do otherwise. The matriarchal organisation of the home, infused with great symbolic meaning, commits women to remain at home. This was shown by two contradictory representations, one supporting motherhood by rejecting homes not under the motherly jurisdiction. Those households left to a third party, usually the *muchacha*, are subject to gossip and small talk. *Patronas* are sceptical about a mixed family education. This was contradicted by the desire to have a career.

Finally, the image of the *patrona* is linked to devotion to home, motherhood and the abandonment of a career. If they wish to continue then it is necessary to hire a *muchacha*, so as to have the freedom to leave home and continue to supervise its progress. Being *patrona* implies the beginning of an indoor apprenticeship. I also identified the rejection of the idea of leaving the children in the hands of the *muchacha*, as this would be akin to abandoning them and constitute a source of criticism and thus of anguish. A man's life is the opposite; it is built outdoors and leaving women alone to deal with their guilt. *Patronas* bear the guilt of leaving the children at home when they need to work or perform other public activities; these observations agree with previous work on the topic (de Oliveira, 1990; Arenal, 1997).

2.1 The *patrona* as the matriarchal figure

One of the most significant categories revealed by *patronas* has to do with themselves as mothers and leaders of the home. Taking over the running of the home and decision-making, they acquire recognition and power. This distinguishes them from the *muchacha*, who lacks power in the household. The self-image of *patronas* as powerful is related to issues of motherhood. This was seen in the way *patronas* acted in relation to decision-making and they take decisions for other members of the household. For instance, they determine which activities are to be carried out by other family members, as well as when and where. One example is when children take classes to complement their education. The choice of activity (i.e. dance, piano, English) falls to *patrona* who decides the activities according to her own agenda at home and outside it. In this way, the *patrona*'s conception of the home as her space is

reinforced, other can do little to contest her directions. This idea also shows how as a mother she shapes the education of her family.

Mari (*patrona*): I was brought up in a house with a lot of communication, meaning that when a member of the family is not comfortable with the solution given to a problem we voice our disagreement. We are open to anyone expressing their opinion, we know we can't all agree on everything. This is the starting point for my family and now that I am married I intend to transmit the value of communication to my children and husband (A2:1.1)

The conception of motherhood extended to many areas of the life throughout the entire household. Given that the *patrona* is responsible for educating others, she influences opinion. In this area, nobody 'dares to give a different opinion to what I, as a mother, decide for the wellbeing of the rest of the family'. *Patronas* inject the values into the family home by deciding, organising and pushing husband and children around. This is all the more significant when examining how the *patronas* believe that they are helping the *muchacha* towards a 'better lifestyle'. By not contradicting her, the other household members support her matriarchal figure, and thus the *patrona* is the queen of home. Andrea, for instance, shows this when speaking about how her husband did a terrible job when looking after the home.

Andrea (*patrona*): I am the one who knows how to do things around the house. When I was recovering from an operation, and in spite of the detailed instructions I gave to my husband on using the washing machine and all the appliances and how to feed the children and put them to bed, the house was a disaster! He can't do it, it can only be me organising my home (A2:1.1).

Subcategories related to the matriarchal role of *patrona* suggest that the power acquired as a mother is innate. Therefore, the quality of mothering in a home is expressed through the administration of home. For instance, motherhood related to a practical wisdom.

Andrea (*patrona*): As a strong believer in the family I maintain that to have a healthy household the family must consist of the father, the mother and children, most particularly the mother. I believe the family is the cell of society and in order to apply some discipline father and mother should agree over everything. Orchestrating the house is complicated because there are far too many things to be aware of, the food, the cleaning, everything related to the household. If something goes wrong my husband and I try always to make ends meet. However I must admit that I am the one imposing order, my husband is rarely around, so I devote my time to the kids (A2: 1.1).

The link existing between the idea of motherhood and practical manoeuvring around the house is objectified in the role of *patrona*. So, as woman, as mother and as wife, the *patrona* orchestrates the harmonious household, and it seems that her role is to ensure that objects and members are in tune. It would seem logical then to relate the *patronas'* self-image to a kind of subtle power that is hidden and cannot be challenged. Having power, the *patrona's* home becomes sacred and it represents the core element of her identity. Through her power she conceives herself as the provider and controller of knowledge, as well as the engine of emotions at home. Because the *patrona* controls the home, the activities inside and outside will be directed, to some extent, by her efforts to ensure family harmony.

Once she becomes the hand behind the wheel, the *patrona* keeps a watchful eye on other household members. This is part of her role, which others take for granted. Another category related with the *patrona* as a matriarchal power is education, as an asset that she transmits to her close kin. Believing home is the first instance of societal life, the *patrona* procures the best possible education in her house. This has also been observed in other studies examining the urban middle classes in Mexico (Careaga, 1983). What is the definition of the 'best' education in an upper middle class Mexican home? In this study a satisfactory education was linked with bilingual schooling, namely English or French speaking schools, and with some kind of artistic complement, such ballet, piano or painting, which the children took as evening classes. These activities are aimed at preparing the children to go out into a competitive society, where they reflect how well the *patrona* has managed to educate them. The variety of codes related to education showed how it relates more to the role of mother than to other elements of family life. *Patronas* criticised bad education as a lack of parental guidance.

I am acquainted with several neglectful mothers who delegate supervision to the *muchachas*. The *muchachas* do the children's homework, they even choose their clothes and dress them up, they cook for them and to me that sounds like they become the mother. The girls can read and write, and it's through their own goodwill that they make the effort to help the child, when in fact they are substituting the neglectful mother. This is wrong! Because the children will grow up lacking a full comprehension of what a real mother can be. I mean one who can help them, one who is educated and knowledgeable about their schooling. Some mothers are eager to pay expensive schools, with English and French teachers, then why not help the child with their homework? The *muchacha* is not qualified for that, she is not

educated, she needs a dictionary to understand proper Spanish! But there goes the mother outside and living it up! (A2:1.1).

Finally, we find the power *patrona* has, as mother orienting family life, as expressed in the tastes and knowledge the family members share. The family members make public the kind of education and preparation that the *patrona* has given them and she will be evaluated as a mother, wife and homeowner on this basis. For this reason, *patronas* defend their homes zealously and with pride and see art, literacy in language and culture as part of the home's characteristics. Categories describing the home relate to the knowledge that is necessary to cope with society's demands. In Mexican middle class homes the ways to survive in society are instilled from birth and are seen as breast-fed from the mother. These representations help to explain how the matriarchal order of the home is imbued in the members of the family. This may help us to understand the reasons why the organisation of home is not challenged from the outside or by its members. In a further section I explain what happens when domestic workers challenge the *patrona*.

2.2 Our Christian home

Another category that emerged in the analysis was religion. The category was strongly linked with the number of responsibilities attributed to the *patrona* once she is given the authority to organise the home. The main responsibility for the *patrona* is injecting values into the members, and in Mexico values are strongly related with Catholicism.¹ This religious spirit relates to actions of comprehension and tolerance, especially those towards the *muchacha*. Therefore, a religious sisterhood might be part of the relationship that is the object of the thesis. For instance, the *patronas* defined their responsibility as to create welcoming home for all people, as we are all children of God. So, children are taught to help and tolerate others; they are expected, for example, to help the *muchacha* around the house and lessen her workload. Most *patronas* spoke of being Catholic as contributing to the housework. This teaching is intended to help the domestic worker and is an expression of Catholicism.

¹ Statistically, Mexico is predominantly Catholic, and socially Catholicism has shaped social relations. This is a topic for a separate thesis, but I recommend Paz's (1971) acclaimed *Labyrinth of Solitude*.

2.3 The worker / housewife dyad

The last main category retrieved from the analysis shows that the *patronas* live in constant anxiety. Despite having authority within the home, they long for a life outside it, where *patronas* expressed frustration with regards to a profession. As educated and prepared women, they yearn for a life beyond the home. This category links with subcategories of profession, aspirations and needs. However the ideas of power and ownership, as successful housewives, compete with ideas of professional development. *Patronas* described how their full-time devotion to the home obstructed their career as they attempted professional training but had to abandon it. The category is linked with the matriarchal idea that *patronas* run the home, however it is also linked to frustration.

Mari (patrona): Doing housework is like baking a cake, as if you add the ingredients, put the mixture in a tin, and put the tin in the oven to cook; and when time comes, it comes out eggs, milk and flour, and then you mix it once more and you put it in a tin and in the oven and it comes out eggs and milk and flour again, and again, and again! What's more, nobody notices it or is grateful for it. This is why I want to continue the studies I left behind (A2: 1.2).

Patronas regret wasting the good education instilled by their mothers. The idea of profession shows that there is a vicious circle. The *patronas* identify with their own mothers, who also as *patronas* did not have a profession and wasted their potential skills for working in educating their children. The frustration is also linked with the low value assigned to housework, which is seen as non-productive (see Chapter Two for this discussion). These categories help one to understand that Mexican middle class women, albeit with the training to take up a profession, lack the social structure to support their professional life. This analysis also shows that the role of *patrona* has been reproduced over the centuries and although changing slowly, women have to fight against their own sense of self definition to succeed. Therefore, it might be possible to suggest that the question of human rights within the household produces conflict for the *patrona*, as it threatens her identity. What would it mean, then, to the *patrona* to enshrine comparable rights, which contest her identity as a woman, to the *muchacha*?

It seems that the younger the *patrona*, the more professional success is related to managing the household duties. Having explored their activities, I identified one key

characteristic of the urban middle class Mexican women. This is the frustration caused by the responsibility given to the middle class, middle aged professional women, who need to be pragmatic and efficient both within and outside the home. This category relates to the double working day, undertaking the duties of housework and employment in that order. So, subcategories related to employment contained expressions of feeling constant sickness or disability, as *patronas* are pressured to leave work and meet their responsibilities as mothers. As emphasised by Chanquía and Conde (1989), this creates a frustration expressed in the symbolic construction of pregnancy as an overpowering helplessness. The subcategories related to profession and housewifery determine how *patronas* harbour frustration and also justify their lack of interest in finding employment, as when they highlight the benefits of working at home.

Luisa (*patrona*): I must stress that am not 100% housewife, I have plenty of activities. It is not that I am an indoor woman, I can carry out duties from here related with my outside life. Before I was totally devoted to the house, I left my job when I got pregnant the first time to look after the children. I never regarded housework as a burden, rather as a routine, which I carried out patiently and even enjoyed. In any case it is necessary to have someone responsible for looking after the smooth organisation of the house, you know, orchestrating its every movement (A2: 1.3).

Given the observations, I identified some elements of the everyday showing how *patronas* use coping strategies to deal with their frustration. Even though most of the *patronas* interviewed handled all domestic obligations, they managed to find short-term activities outside the home, like teaching language, taking children to classes and joining charities. Those who found other jobs or were absent from home were scolded by their husband, who do not share the emotional bond with the household, nor the responsibility or public shame. The *patronas* take the observations the husband makes about the home as personal criticism. The analysis helps us to understand the meaning of the inside / outside dyad for the *patronas*. This helps to explain why, at some times, the *patrona* becomes closer to the worker than to other members of the family.

Finally, the worker / housewife dyad puts constant pressure on the *patronas*. This pressure transforms into regret, anger or frustration, which sometimes the *patrona* takes out on the *muchacha*. Working women regret leaving the children at home. On the other hand women who retire permanently from work regret giving up a public

and professional life. Overall, the active role as mother, transmitter of values and women in society constitutes an essential part of the identity of the *patronas*.

3. Self- portrait of the *muchachas*

The categories identified in the analysis of *muchachas* (A1) suggest that past experience and their present situation underpin their identity as domestic workers. Thus, their representations reveal a self definition founded on the traumatic experience of leaving behind their home and family to work. Having identified the economic conditions placing *muchachas* at the weak side of the relationship, the analytical categories relate to the way *muchachas* perceive themselves in a household and in society. Subcategories retrieved from the interviews and focus groups show that part of their identity relates to the wisdom and strength required for adapting into an urban home and other parts relate to the way urban people look upon them as outsiders. Therefore, we find that *muchachas* escape from a life of scarcity, abuse and violence but are introduced into an alien world.

3.1 Transforming from peasant into *sirvienta*²

An initial category for *muchachas* relates to personal growth. They embody the change from rural to urban ways. The contents of this category relate to the awakening to basic needs that are satisfied in the city and not in the rural villages, such as electric appliances, the microwave oven, a constant water supply. They understand services as part of their occupation, so a subcategory of what it is to be a domestic worker relates to their experiences in adjusting to the comforts of urban homes.

Guadalupe (*muchacha*): In the country we do similar cooking but we do not have the same things. On the ranch things are different because there is no microwave, blender or electricity to make things easier (A1: 1.1).

Tiburcia (*muchacha*): I carried water to my house from the river every day, here there it is in your shower, and you can have as much as you want and hot too. I get used to this and don't look forward to going back home! (A1: 1.1).

In this category, the acquisition of knowledge constitutes an individual quest to

² This is the old fashioned name for domestic workers, which is now considered degrading. For other references to the name, see Chaney and Castro: *Muchacha* no more (1989).

accommodate newly acquired knowledge. An example of the process of finding themselves is learning how to carry out their duties. Subcategories relate to shock and surprise, in particular to the realisation that they had to put themselves before their families, to whom they send their money. Words like 'take over', 'conquer' or 'find myself' express this shift from rural to urban lifestyle.

Magdalena (*muchacha*): After arriving in the city and getting kicked out of a job, I realised that I needed to earn money for myself, while also sending part of it to my family. But I cannot return to the village before I achieve something of my own. With more money I can go and buy myself a new dress or personal things. I intend to save any spare money to buy a little piece of land in my village (A1: 1.1).

Given that the confrontation with new elements is part of their job, so is their acquaintance with a new family. Therefore, feelings towards the employer's family are also part of the experience of becoming *muchachas*. Loneliness, abandonment, being homesick and confusion, are all feelings which the girls fight against while trying to perform as domestic workers in a new home.

The process of change and accommodation these workers go through, and at a very young age, constitutes part of the ill-defined role they acquire in society. So, from the resulting mix of rural and urban knowledge, a cultural specificity emerges. They are branded as *muchacha*, or as *sirvienta*. The existence of these discriminatory terms shows that the workers take their ambiguous definition to be part of their identity.

Magdalena (*muchacha*): It makes me feel very sad to know that the people cannot find a name for me, I walk down the street and the people call me names which I don't understand. This makes me feel very bad. Why do they call me such names? Why can't people look at me differently? Even the *patrona*'s gaze is vicious!

Researcher: So why do you think they can't define you?

Magdalena (*muchacha*): Because people, as good as they can be, always, always they will see me for what I am,

Researcher: And what are you?

Magdalena (*muchacha*): Me? I am such a worthless thing for people with money or around here, I am just the *sirvienta* and nothing more (A1: 1.1).

Finally, categories related to the definition of the role of *muchacha* are linked with three aspects. The first are the appliances they use, another is the separation from their family and the third aspect is the disparagement and lack of respect attributed to the work itself. The combination of these aspects suggests that *muchachas* assimilate their

role with all its negative implications and these underpin their low self-esteem.³ Domestic workers refer to their experiences as a ‘conquest’ because making sense of the urban lifestyle is a radical transformation. Anchoring new knowledge to what they already know, domestic workers use representations to orient themselves in the household.

3.2 Domestic service as an alternative

Another main category for how *muchachas* define themselves is related to domestic service as an alternative for survival. This is due to two main factors. *First* is that domestic service is perhaps the only alternative to earn an income, as they do not have the skills to do other things, *second* is as an alternative to leave behind difficult circumstances and become a new person. *Muchachas* realise that domestic service is the best option for earning money, particularly when they have children.

Guadalupe (*muchacha*): But, well it depends on well, your own resources, because, you see, for instance, since we [the family] lost our father we lost all his support... so we had to be resourceful ourselves with the little that we can do. We are forced to fight for a living. Because of the lack of economic opportunities we can't afford the essentials or basic home comforts. That is how and why we came up with the idea of going out searching for work, the need to obtain things (A1: 1.2).

Subcategories spotted in the analysis often indicated a background of alcoholism and extreme poverty providing a symbolic meaning to being a *muchacha*. The contents of the categories suggest that work offer an opportunity to escape the past. For instance, *Jesusa* grew up alone and she compares her employer's house with her difficult childhood. She finds it rewarding to see that there are alternative ways to grow up. As an only child she never spoke directly to older people, and she remembers how her parents wouldn't listen to her, she now works with a communicative family and she finds them intrusive but supportive. Also, *Guadalupe* mentioned how working helped her to get over the sudden loss of her father, who was struck by lightning. Domestic service represents an alternative lifestyle and *muchachas* use it as a shield to prevent them from dwelling on their sorrows.

Victoria (*muchacha*): People are talking, you know, about me ... because life has been hard on me, it has dealt me several blows: my marriage, my husband's violent

³ Community workers showed concern about the cultural specificity shaping the *muchachas*, which is identifiable and characteristic but has not been given proper attention except as material for mockery.

character and so on. I am working on my own. I managed to help my family with these two humble hands and with God's blessing. Many girls are ashamed of being domestic workers. I am not because, despite doing someone else's dirty laundry, my children are now grown adults, is there anything wrong with that? We needed a real push, but we made it. I am married and have a husband, but this is as good as if I was single. People say that I work because I like to work but the reality is that I work because I need the money. Two out of four children are now sorted, I work for the other two and I don't feel ashamed of it (A1: 1.2).

Domestic service is an alternative to earn a living and for getting over the disappointments of life at any age. Young *muchachas* flee from a life of scarcity, older *muchachas* turn to domestic service to support their families. Victoria, Jesusa and Juanita spoke about their choice of work with sorrow but pride as they have found the strength to take over their homes and succeed. All were abandoned by their partners and with young children. Jesusa was a seamstress, but her wages were low and the job was demanding and had awful hours. The *patrona* met her there and suggested domestic service. Similarly, Juanita needed to take up work because her husband got ill; and Margarita also worked because she needed the income. Therefore, domestic service represents an alternative.

A last category linked with the idea of domestic service is the future prospects of the worker and the occupation. The idea domestic service is the best alternative, both economically and emotionally, might help to explain why domestic workers remain in the job for many years. While *muchachas* stay in the occupation because they need the income, they have other reasons for not moving to other fields. Contents of the category indicate that they grow to like earning money and not paying extra costs, like transportation and taxes, and putting up with a daily routine. While retirement is not a viable option (they get no pension), they also compare their lot to that of the *patrona*, and know, as Margarita commented 'how hard one can work in setting up a home nicely but soon you realise you don't earn a penny'.

Finally, the idea of *muchachas* as domestic workers has implications for the value of the occupation itself. The representations support the worker's experience and point of view. These categories help to explain why, on the part of the *muchacha*, domestic service remains a viable option and also why workers do not attempt to organise in order to restructure the occupation in terms of salaries, hours and working relationship. It seems to be comfortable and emotionally soothing to keep domestic

service as it is.

3.3 Portrait of the *muchacha*: a new family member?

The last significant category of the analysis retrieves the quotes and symbolism related to the specific experience of the *muchacha* in the family they work for. Having explored the culture shock experienced by workers and the living conditions of the *muchachas*, as migrants from rural areas, we find that within the home they work in they feel lonely and isolated. In their first few weeks domestic workers long to go back home and fear coming back after a visit home. They don't want to readjust to the loneliness of the city. After some time they learn to cope with their loneliness by believing they are integrated into the family they work for. This helps them to deal with their loneliness and after a while the sadness and the tears of missing the rural life and feelings of estrangement and loneliness fade. Consequently, in a last section, the *muchachas* stated the importance of feeling like one of the family.

This category is intertwined with the ones mentioned before, as it underpins the reasons why a worker chooses to remain in a household, or to change family. Moreover, the *muchachas*' representations of their place of origin transform once new concepts are anchored. That is to say, they are not willing to give up the comforts of the city. This shows how the anchoring mechanism preserves, to some extent, prior knowledge, as described in Wagner et al. (1998). After dealing with the culture shock and adjusting to a new lifestyle, the workers make a concerted effort to remain in their job.

Finally, the representations of the *muchacha* determine the basic conditions under which she takes a job. They challenge their rural origins by facing the loneliness of working far from their homes and having little support. They are proud to be fighting for their family, and confused by being introduced into a household that demands that they leave the past behind and to take on the mantle of migrant and working woman. Given that the worker arrives from the rural areas, the occupation itself represents a new experience to which they have to adapt and become familiar. The analysis (A1) defines elements incorporated into their experience as *muchachas* and these include origin, fate, emotions and expectations. The initial analysis of their perception help to

explain the conditions in which *muchachas* negotiate a contract, ignorant of most of the working conditions they will have to confront.

4. Constructed asymmetry with the other

Having presented the main categories for self definition, I look into the categories that represent distinctions and demeanour in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. The categories explained in this section are retrieved from the same analyses, A1 and A2, but they refer to the perception of the other 'as distinct', as examined in Jodelet (1991). This helps to explain how the boundaries between them encourage deferential practices, as described in Goffman (1956). First, I shall examine the *patronas*' representations of their *muchachas*. Second, I explore the representations *muchachas* construct of their *patronas*. From these representations I draw some main conclusions on the representations mediating the relationship (similarity and difference).

5. Representations about *muchachas*

Below, I examine what constitutes the representations *patronas* have of their *muchacha*. The socio-cultural characteristics of *muchachas* as rural and workers become salient when the *patrona*, an educated woman, addresses her.

5.1 Helplessness

The first category that emerged from the analysis was related to the reasons leading the *muchacha* to enrol as a domestic worker. Thus, an initial idea is that *muchachas* are helpless and turn to domestic service as the only alternative. Categories linked to this idea of the *muchacha* as weak relate to two characteristics of the *muchacha*. *First*, her background origins, as in the countryside there is a scarcity of services, education and wealth. So, from the *patrona*'s perspective, the domestic worker is a victim of society, as she cannot change her origins. *Patronas* also consider that the abandonment and loneliness endured in the countryside shape the future and present condition of the worker. Abandoned by the male figure of the household, such as the father, brothers or husband; and lonely because the girls struggle alone to sustain a family.

Yolanda (patrona): *Muchachas* are not honest about their family background. They

do not dare say that they don't have the support of their family. What I have seen is that it is very common that the father has illegitimate children, numerous sisters and brothers to whom they have never been introduced. The father is also an irresponsible head of the family, usually an alcoholic, so all the responsibility falls to the mother who works so hard that she ends up dying at a young age. The *muchachas* are then left alone to look after the father, offspring and close kin. Sisters and cousins look for work in nearby neighbourhoods in the city (A2: 2.1).

The *second* subcategory refers to ignorance. Being young when arriving to work, and accepting a job about which they know little, the *patronas* consider that they are helpless but brave. While the worker is courageous to arrive alone in the city, she knows nothing of the dangers that she is letting herself in for. For example, Mari recognises that Victoria has been fortunate to have her help and the *patrona* paid for an operation that she needed. This perception of the *muchachas'* helplessness was noted in phrases like, 'unfortunate woman', 'poor lady' and 'give her a break!' The idea that the *muchacha* is weak and alone suggests that her employer should give her comprehension and support.

Having noted that helplessness is a dominant representation, another subcategory that emerged was linked to responsibility. Hiring a *muchacha* is a huge responsibility for *patronas*, especially when the worker is alone and a long way from her family. The *patrona* looks after her wellbeing and comfort. This helps to explain the deferential treatment from the *patrona*, who gives the *muchacha* things and may come down to the *muchacha's* level to help her when sick or troubled. However, the comprehension shown by *patronas* does not entail genuine feelings towards the worker, as if the worker responds on the same level she is seen as a threat. Andrea was clear about this: 'They are like one of the family until they betray you, you give them everything and then, they stab you in the back'.

So, the idea that the *muchacha* is helpless is a basis for the exchange in the relationship. The *patrona* takes on the responsibility of helping the worker, but also her appreciation of the domestic worker is a tool for deferential treatment and to mark a distinction between the two. Given that *muchachas* are seen as unwise, ignorant and unfortunate, the *patronas* help them. Therefore, their experience in the household is underpinned by these judgements on their origins and education. Observations linked to this category found that domestic workers are offered little space for reflection, as there exists the belief that they are incapable of making decisions regarding the use of

time and money. The *Patronas*' judgmental perceptions support this idea: 'Do their fathers advise them to be careful when going out? Do they tell them about the dangers of speaking to strangers? Do they advise them what to do and what not to do? No, they don't, and I put up with them because I pity their lack of support'. So, the *patrona*'s idea of the worker as a woman lacking direction and needing guidance is involved in the relationship.

5.2 'La India!'

Another significant category of the analysis is linked to the appearance of the *muchachas*. Categories linked with ethnicity show the highly symbolic meaning assigned to the way *muchachas* look, smell, dress and speak. Coming from rural and generally *mestizo* origins, they are '*Indias*'⁴. This word in Mexico, if used strongly can be taken as an insult. It is often used to label people with low levels of literacy and born in rural areas. In this thesis, the identification of this category helps to explain why *muchachas* are not given the opportunity to improve their skills and education, as they are what they look, and their destiny is a dead-end job. Let me explain.

In this aspect, the use of separations and boundaries in space is enlightening. How do *patronas* react to the idea that within their home they are sharing space with an India? *Patronas* react to this representation by drawing a strict line between them. They account for domestic service as the best and most decent alternative, considering domestic workers are women of Indian ancestry. Representations extend to evaluate domestic service as the optimal opportunity for people like her, allowing the worker to grow healthy while earning money. Nourishment three times a day is dramatically different practice to that of rural homes. So, *patronas* make use of their knowledge to separate the Indian habits from the urban ones; words such as protein, vitamins, health and productivity represented the differences in habits.

María Antonieta (*patrona*): '*Muchachas* can eat milk, eggs, fruits and vegetables here, on my income I can afford a wider range of food than theirs in the countryside, where they do not even know of the existence of the wide variety of food produced in our country!' (A2: 2.2).

⁴ It is adequate to point out that Columbus died holding the belief that he had found an alternative route to India. Therefore those living there were called Indians. The Spanish word *India* or *Indio* has since been used to refer to the native Mexican population. The word in this thesis refers to such meaning with an added negative connotation.

Besides these nutritional foods, the *muchacha* is provided with a room, toilet and items for personal hygiene such as creams, toilet paper and shampoo. As they are entitled to wash their clothes using the household appliances, they are using household services such as electricity, gas and water, without paying for them. María Antonieta and Luisa thought of these services as gratuities. On top of all these provisions, the workers earn a weekly wage. All of these are meted out by the *patrona* through a personal agreement, which represents elements of work as benefits to the worker. This type of distinction (what is commonplace for me, is exceptional for the other) underpins discrimination and subtly it puts the *muchacha* back in her place, at the back and out of view.

Finally, we find a broad category describing *muchachas* as Indians: undernourished, used to living surrounded by filth, no belongings, no services and no opportunity to study. As Indians, they are also unaware of what an excellent opportunity it is to be working in the city. They are even benefited by the contract, which they do not know could be done formally. The living conditions of the *muchacha* trigger a series of evaluations dominating the *patrona's* perception of the worker, transmitted along with all her prejudice and value judgements to other members of the house.

5.3 Not really like one of the family

The last category, consequently, relates to the ideas and practices incorporating the worker as one of the family. This category is relevant because it is a shared perception that the *muchacha* is like one of the family. However, this last category is also intertwined with the above: as an Indian, as distinct, as helpless and ignorant, is she going to become like one of the family? Considering that *muchachas* start working around the age of 11, this posits an interesting question. The category of family member determined four main reasons why the *muchacha* is not like one of the family.

First was the subcategory linking family bonds with trust, where ideas of betrayal emerged. When the *muchacha* leaves the job without prior notice, or when something disappears in the house for which the worker is blamed, the idea emerges that the *muchacha* is not to be trusted. This suggests that as in any home, the *muchacha* is

necessary, as I observed there is always a need to blame someone when things might go astray. In the Mexican household, the *muchacha* is the one who takes the blame.

Second, inclusion in the family emerged as a biological impossibility. This relates to the question of physical attributes. To put it another way, the *muchacha* is not *built* like members of the family. Representations of the *muchachas* ‘not being like the family’ related to their rural roots. Practices demonstrating this included the fact that, *muchachas* never sat at the table, that their eating habits were seen as repulsive and distinct to members of the household, for example, they eat more tortilla and use their hands.

Third, the *muchacha* represents a threat to the harmony of the home and when young, her beauty worries the *patrona*. The femininity of the *muchacha* is also seen as a threat and the *patrona* tries to control it. For example, the worker is recommended not to have children, not to have boyfriends and not to relate to the youngsters of the house. This shows that the *patrona* attempts to prevent the recognition of the *muchacha* as a woman.

Patrona: My sister was aware of the need to avoid hiring young and attractive *muchachas* while her sons are between 20 and 25 years of age. This is a cause of diverse conflicts (A2:2.3).

Unlike other members of the family, *muchachas* remain workers, of an uncertain origin, of ambiguous roots and with an uncertain future. While forbidden to share a life as women, *patronas* and *muchachas* share a life cycle and belong to the same gender. So, it seems that the way the *muchacha* experiences being a woman is distinct to the *patrona*, and this difference may be associated with the way *patronas* manipulate the relationship.

Coco (patrona): She had a baby who I looked after for her. But she soon met another man and got pregnant again. She had to leave, although the time she was with me was wonderful. Other people who have come after her have also gone for similar reasons. As you know people build castles in the air and promise them they might live inside them, others brainwash them with promises to pay them the Virgin’s sacred pearls. With these hollow promises the *muchachas* abandon the house and me, after some time they repent and come back for help, they ask for their job back. But they are wrong; I am not going to change one girl for another one who broke the contract (A2:2.3).

Representations, then, show that the development of the worker within the household may be considered part of family life, until the *patrona* considers it pertinent to end this relationship.

Finally, in this section the *muchacha* was defined through the experiences of the *patrona*. These ideas show that domestic workers are treated with deference and distance and are prohibited from growing to adulthood. The worker is considered helpless and alone. As in previous analyses of the household private spaces are characterised as feminine, but also dominated by the mother (Colen, 1989; Galvez and Todaro, 1985), Here, the feminine character of households holds a secret logic kept by the *patrona*, as discussed in Jodelet (1991). However, the distance between *patrona* and *muchacha* suggests an asymmetry in the relationship. In addition, the asymmetry permeates the representations that *patronas* have about the *muchachas* and that govern the relationship. They have power over the contract. For this reason it is important to consider how representations act as agents in their relationship. These representations are in part founded on an educational gulf and a lack of support and good advice puts the *muchachas* in a position where they appear as vulnerable and lonely. *Patronas* look on them as victims of society and continue to regard domestic service as the best alternative for them. The *patronas* interpret the life of *muchachas* as one of hardship as it seems that parents literally throw them into a life of hard work and disappointment. Rural families display a behavioural pattern maintained over generations. So, the *patrona* conceives the *muchacha* as a helpless individual with limited horizons for growth. The domestic worker's limited education and non-urbanised values are an impediment to them moving to a better occupation. These representations help to explain the reasons why the *patrona* might make decisions on behalf of the *muchacha*, unaware that she is obstructing the full realisation of the worker as an active member of society.

6. Representations about *patronas*

In addition to the representations of *patronas*, I now look at representations formed by the *muchachas*.

6.1 The fulfilled middle class woman

The first category for this analysis shows the material significance of the *patrona* in the eyes of the *muchacha*. The employer represents the number of commodities and services that can be attained by urban people. In this way she perceives a high standard of living, which is something new to her. In admiring the material possessions of her employer, the worker believes she is fulfilled and very happy.

For example, Victoria, who worked for 20 years with Mari's mother admired her *patrona's* smile, this admiration grew when she was faced with problems. Their perception of how such women deal with adversity seduces the worker into a sense of ease. Observations regarding the ways *patronas* confront the everyday problems mention ideas of 'life without shouting, screaming, pouting or violence'. Representations like this are informative.

So, the appreciation of the *patrona* as a wealthy benefactor is balanced between admiration and alienation, as they perceive the *patrona's* lifestyle as alien and threatening. Representations about the lifestyle criticise the *patrona* with accusations such as, 'plastic, hasty, superficial, contemptuous and pedantic'. Consequently, the worker keeps her distance and constantly compares what she experiences with the rough yet genuine tone of their own home.

6.2 Fortunate and distinct

Another core category in the *muchachas'* perception of their *patronas* is that of their plastic, insipid lifestyle. The *patrona's* importance at home is criticised. What *muchachas* call a plastic and superficial personality relates to their appreciation of the way a woman assumes the role of *patrona*; *muchachas* are often also heads of their households and do not need to project such an artificial image. The main differences rely on their way of dressing, the *muchachas* mock the *patronas'* 'golden earrings, fancy skirts, jogging suits, scarves with sophisticated knots, big and ridiculous hairdos', unlike their employers, the workers prefer to wear jeans and t-shirts with discreet jewellery.

The mockery made of the sophisticated lifestyle is aimed not only the outward

appearance but also the whole person. From the perspective of a working woman, *patronas* are fake, and act only to please others of the same social group. The workers assert that their employers put up so many screens that they cannot be seen as they really are.

Lidia (*muchacha*): Our laughter is different, our conversations are handled with trust, not like the *patrona*, always suspicious and careful about what she says and to whom she says things. The people who employ us, I think they are unable to change, but they cannot be genuine, always stiff, not relaxed like us. They cannot laugh heartily. They are plastic and superficial, like when they lose an earring they have to find it, no? It will look bad not to wear earrings, but I couldn't care less about such things (A1:2.1).

Finally, this category contains ideas delimiting the relationship, marked by the *muchachas*' opposing definitions for themselves and the *patronas* (warm or cold; real or plastic). The main characteristic they don't possess is the exaggerated manners of the *patrona*. For the *muchacha* their ways of presenting their 'educated' manners are a smokescreen concealing a lack of genuine feelings. In spite of the demands of her lifestyle, the *patrona* should be sensitive to the needs of others.

6.3 A final remark about the analyses of *patrona* and *muchacha*

Given that *muchachas* perceive the *patrona*'s power and respect it, it is fair to say that the relationship is peacefully asymmetrical. Both sides of the relationship appreciate the differences and find ways to cope with them in private and in public. This fact does not exempt workers from recognising the discrimination that they are subjected to, and against which they often rebel. The *patrona*, as the person responsible for the household's education, has the power to manipulate the relationship and some aspects of the life of the *muchacha*. Meanwhile, Victoria complained about the way people react to her presence: 'They act like I ought to be eternally obliged to them for having done work!'. Representations are objectified in boundaries in the household and in the absence of words. Thus, silence symbolises the rejection both women might feel towards the other. The ideas that *patronas* and *muchachas* have about themselves and about the other construct a relationship of convergence and divergence, challenging expectations and exchanges. The limits set by the ethnic, social and educational distinctions are the object of the next section, where I explore some of the expressions of these distinctions. However, prior to explaining those elements of difference, I will

briefly explain some similarities between *patrona* and *muchacha*.

* * *

In this part I bring together the separate analysis of *patrona* and *muchacha*. The following are general categories resulting from the comparison of analytical categories, considering the theoretical proposal presented in Chapter Three.

Those who render deference to an individual may feel, of course, that they are doing this merely because he is an instance of a category, or a representative of something, and that they are giving him or her his or her dues, not because of what they think of him or her 'personally' but in spite of it (Goffman, 1956: 478)

Having established that the analyses of the interviews are based on two aspects, among many, here I relate these aspects to the theoretical framework of Chapter Two. These aspects were the perception *patronas* and *muchachas* have of themselves and the other with relation to gender, ethnicity and economic distinctions. In addition, the analyses presented in this section considered domestic space, distinctions and intergroup relations, as inherent to cultural contexts. Given that meaning is not a permanent attribute of any spatial order, but something people refer to, the analysis uncovers the meaning of space during interaction through discourse and practices. In this section I look into the discourses about the interaction, which bestow meaning on the spatial order described in Chapter Five. The idea that 'meaning is context-dependent' (Moore, 1986) allows for an analysis of discourses and actions as strategic. In this section, I link the symbolic universe established in the analysis with the sociocultural conditions building practices at home. It is relevant to consider that the meaning and values attached to the organisation of space demonstrate the practical nature of social knowledge. More specifically, this section discusses how representations of similarity and difference compete and construe the relationship that is the objective of this thesis. The previous section suggested that ideas of difference guide interaction between *patrona* and *muchacha*. It also helped us to understand how representations mediate their relationship by providing meaning to the distance that separates them. I shall begin this next section by exploring ideas of similarity.

7. The religious sisterhood between Mexican women

A number of categories retrieved in the analysis of *patrona* and *muchacha* with regards to similarities were associated with religion. As I examined in Chapter Two,

Mexican people identify with religious icons. In the case of *patronas* and *muchachas*, the analysis found strong associations with the icon of the Lady of Guadalupe.⁵ The religious sisterhood shares this devotion. Thus, when *patrona* explained her relationship to the *muchacha*, she found it necessary to be considerate to her, in accordance with the wishes of her patron saint. Likewise the *muchacha* would try to honour the Lady of Guadalupe with her actions. Representations of sameness then, were expressed in practices that united class, ethnicity and status. The idea that some practices correspond to religious beliefs was underlined by the *patronas* and *muchachas*' appreciation of their solidarity as fellow Catholics. The *patronas* stated that as women they 'share a life cycle', or that they treat the *muchacha* 'like one of the family'. These sentences were accompanied with clarifications 'the Lady would not approve of such bad treatment', 'we all fell from heaven', 'because we are all God's children'. Sisterhood then, is an objectification of the representation of similarity between *muchachas* and *patronas*, who belong to different groups.

Finally, the domestic working relationship has a tradition of establishing links between the rich and the poor sectors of society, as the Latin American literature points out (Chaney and Castro, 1989). In addition, this analysis found that the type of link between rich and poor is connected to religious indoctrination. So, the more aware a *patrona* is of religion, the more considerate she will be towards the *muchacha*. Coco described how her family's religious education made her grow into a good-hearted person and her sisterhood with the *muchacha* is one of her qualities as a good Christian, who often helps other people in need. Thus, the *patronas* and *muchachas* enjoying a good relationship were usually also those involved in chapel or church activities. Overall, sisterhood and religion are values representing a mutual recognition of similarities. So, *patronas* and *muchachas* both agreed that people who acknowledge their similarities are often those who adhere closely to religious teachings.

7.1 The system of give and take

One of the practices related to the representation of similarity is the system of exchange related to domestic service. This system was already examined as part of the

⁵ La Virgen de Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexicans.

working relationship in Chapter Two. In this section I explore this system as a practice connected to representations of similarity.

Patronas often referred to domestic service as a recruitment process where they ‘give away’ money and commitment and they ‘take back’ trust. Hiring a *muchacha* implies the commitment of the employer to a relationship where she takes care of the worker as if she were a new family member. Like other bonded labour agreements, it is the employer’s decision to increase the benefits of the worker, as documented by Anti-Slavery International (2000). The worker benefits from her good relationship with the employer. In this way, the asymmetry in power between employer and an employee transforms into an arrangement of give and take. In the case of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship, this aspect needs to be specifically considered, as the *patrona* has the power to manipulate the contract. In addition, it was found that the give and take system is strongly founded on religious beliefs regarding similarity as well as on the sisterhood bonding *patronas* and *muchachas*.

7.2 How similarity translates into loyalty

The last aspect of the representations of similarity is to associate these with the stability of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. This relationship enduring time and change has remained the same for centuries (see Arrom, 1980 and Guzmán, 1983). The analysis revealed that perceived similarities, feelings of sisterhood and the system of give and take led to incalculable loyalty from the worker to the employer. The *muchacha* understands these gestures as an invitation to the *patrona*’s family. In so doing, the *muchacha* transforms into an unconditional worker, because when the *muchachas* accepts benefits, such as increases in salary and holidays, her commitment towards her employer strengthens. *Muchachas* were grateful to their *patrona* for the gradual improvements in food and living conditions, which they had not received from other *patronas* in the past. The commitment between women in the relationship studied in this research shows why the *muchacha* would remain working for a family for years, despite having other opportunities. Juanita, a *muchacha* loyal for many years to one of the families I interviewed, explained her loyalty.

Interviewer: What made you set your mind on this household when you have received other and better job offers?

Juanita (*muchacha*): For me the most important element is the *patrona*'s disposition to help you. The family is kind to me, and the *patrona* has gradually increased my payment in goods and services. When you are a domestic, you are lucky if you get your healthcare paid, but in my case, my *patrona* has helped my situation to gradually improve. Anything that the *patrona* is willing to give is an enormous help, so it is good. We need it anyway (A1/A2:1).

The exchange system underpinning this loyalty has already been studied as a tool for emotional blackmail (Bakan, 1997; Romero, 1992; Rollins, 1985). Workers feel in debt to the employer, while probably what is given and taken is a legal obligation of the employer.⁶ This aspect is essential to consider when, in the next chapter, I look into a series of human right's infringements hidden behind the smokescreen of a relationship between similar people.

This category relates the agreement with trust and loyalty, two essential elements of the relationship. The agreement protected beneath the guise of a sisterly agreement provides the essentials for life in the city, while the *muchacha* may overwork for the sake of the family. In my research I found that *muchachas* feel part of the family when they are invited for holidays with the family, and get hand-me-down clothes, additional payments for extra work and Christmas presents. Representations of similarity drive the incorporation of worker into household activities while feeding the spiritual need of *patronas* and *muchachas*. Overall, the religious aspect of sisterhood and loyalty supports the enforcement of rights when leading towards the enforcement of trust.

The actions taken by *patrona* or *muchacha* defending the relationship illustrate the importance of loyalty for domestic service. For instance, Victoria followed her previous *patrona*, the mother of her current employer, around the country in an expression of her loyalty.

Mari (*patrona*): While Victoria was working for my mother her husband used to beat her up. She would turn up to work badly injured, weak and emotionally devastated. My mother was worried sick about her and started to help her in many ways. I guess this led her to start to appreciate Victoria as a person and not just as the domestic worker. From that moment Mum developed a close relationship with Victoria that grew stronger over the years. Every time we moved house, Victoria would also move (A1/A2:2).

⁶ LFT, Art. 337-II. UDHR, Art25, refer to Chapter Two: Standard of living and wellbeing.

Finally, I have examined similarity helps to explain how people socialise in a diverse context. This is of particular significance for Mexico, where *patrona* and *muchacha* use Catholic ideas to nurture representations of similarity. This identification leads them to establish a system of give and take, the logic of which escapes the law. Due to the benefits offered by this ungovernable relationship, it is likely that domestic service will remain unregulated by bodies of the law.

7.3 The enigmatic contrast between inequality and sameness

The main element linking similarity with other aspects of the relationship was the discussion regarding equality. The lack of equality emerged as a significant component of the relationship. When Romero (1992) explored the dependency bonding employers and domestic workers, she found this unique loyalty could translate into exploitation. Among the ways of expressing loyalty is the unconditional service of the *muchacha* despite being overworked, sick or experiencing abuse. It is an instituted condition not to be challenged, as it is taken for granted. For instance, if a *muchacha* decides to assert her rights and ask for an increase in salary, she is jeopardising her friendly contract. Acts of rebellion on the part the *muchacha*, like abandoning her job or abusing the use of the phone, challenge the authority of the *patrona*. These actions are spoken of as betrayal of loyalty or as an abuse of trust (A1 / A2: 2). So, the representations of similarity are enigmatic as they unify the *patronas* and *muchachas* but on unequal terms. This investigation looked at some of the rules enforcing representations of similarity in domestic service.

Thus, while the representation of similarity implies that the women share some responsibilities (home, children, receiving guests), these responsibilities are distributed unequally. For instance, while the *patrona* may incorporate the *muchacha* into the family by stating that ‘she is one like the family’, the *muchacha* carries out most of the heavy work and has less opportunity to go outside the house than other members of the family (See previous chapter).

Finally, the *patronas* figure as morally obliged to the *muchacha* in as much as they have to ensure them eventual improvements in their salary and living conditions while working for them. In turn, the *muchacha* will transform her gratitude into

loyalty. However it should be noted that this exchange is effected on unequal terms as the powerful side of the relationship, the *patrona*, has the power to decide where the similarities end and where inequality rules. Although this inequality may seem to benefit only the *patronas*, as employers they are concerned not to let go an efficient and trustworthy *muchacha*. Thus, the *muchacha* has a lesser possibility for using her loyalty in order to manipulate the employer. This is important to consider because it helps to explain the permanence of *muchachas* in a certain home. That is, the narrower the margin for negotiation, the less likely the possibility that a *muchacha* will remain in a home. For this reason, Antonieta, an experienced *patrona* acknowledges that the likelihood that a *muchacha* will remain in a job will depend on the *patrona*'s clear or guilty conscience, as all *patronas* know they are morally obliged to the *muchacha*. When they do not give an annual gratuity and paid vacations they run the risk of losing the loyal worker.

In this section I have examined the representations linked with similarity. These will be central to a series of practices involving contact between *patrona* and *muchacha*. Given that these women symbolise different social groups, they are brought together by their similarities while working in a household. This was exemplified in the way *patronas* and *muchachas* are morally and religiously committed to their relationship. Sisterhood emerged as a key concept for explaining the benefits given away in domestic service, but also, the awarding of benefits entails some gratitude in return in the form of loyalty. These aspects are essential to consider when exploring the way *patronas* and *muchachas* evaluate each other and uphold the asymmetry of the relationship.

8. Differences that distance *patrona* and *muchacha*

In this section I look at the representations of difference in the *muchacha* / *patrona* relationship. These representations are retrieved from the separate analyses, and the categories indicating differences are explored in relation to other wider categories relating to domestic service and to Mexican society. I set the example of the way *patrona* and *muchacha* expressed mutual disgust and rejection on the basis of their differences. This representation is based upon a series of characteristics such as ethnicity and origin, level of education and socioeconomic status. While two of these are of a 'biological' nature and the rest have a sociocultural character, I shall discuss

the relevance of each of these in order to understand their interaction. It is also essential to consider that the competition of each of these elements affects the negotiation of the working relationship, since social representations support relationships of asymmetry, as described in Jovchelovitch (1997). In addition, the practices related to representations of difference appear to illustrate the reality lived by domestic workers more adequately than representations of similarity.

Throughout the thesis I have argued that intergroup phenomena use representations as a necessary device to cope with diversity. This helps to explain how, despite the evolution of loyalty and trust, *patronas* and *muchachas* tend to remain distant. In this way *patrona* and *muchacha* find reasons why some actions direct them to be apart. In the following section, I explore the representations and practices linked with the notion of difference amongst two social groups.

8.1 Ethnicity as the language of difference

One of the main expressions of the idea of difference is appearance. In the case of Mexico, this distinction is complex. Ethnicity is not just about looks, but also about tastes. Chapter Two has dealt with some aspects of the ethnic origins of *muchachas* and *patronas*. However the analysis of appearance goes beyond ethnicity and it leads to the issue of where people come from, what people become and what they know. Now, bearing in mind that *muchachas* are migrant workers and have left their rural roots behind, there are certain aspects that are relevant to this discussion. The importance of ethnicity as part of the representation of difference raises the question of the extent to which a group member may acquire new concepts that modify their prior knowledge. This question has long been central for psychologists, for instance, when exploring the roots of prejudice (Tajfel, 1982), as well as when arguing for its inevitability (Billig, 1985). What representations of ethnicity show is that there exist certain elements of representations that remain despite this newly acquired knowledge, as Wagner et al, (1998) showed. Even when a *muchacha* becomes acculturated into urban life, the *patrona* tends to see her as ethnically distinct and, therefore, treats her as different.

The analysis also shows that some of the historical and cultural motivations underpinning the prejudice against *muchachas* are still pertinent in the present day. *Muchachas* and *patronas* are echoes of past categories (one native, the other European). However, representations of ethnicity suggest that the origin of each distinguish them by putting them on opposite sides of the balance: urban or rural, rich or poor, educated or illiterate. These distinctions obstruct the full acculturation of the *muchacha*, a rural woman, into the urban life of the city. They also enforce the representation of ethnicity as exotic and unknown to the *patrona*. Therefore, this analysis provides an insight into how asymmetrical power relationships draw on representations in order to enforce the differences between individuals.

Now, besides being a common topic for conversation, ethnicity also emerged also as an explanation for the incidents faced throughout life by *patrona* and *muchacha*. Almost anything could be related to ethnicity: difference in wealth, amount of work, marriage problems and personality traits. Statements demonstrating the determining role of ethnicity and origin included: 'We have a different destiny because we come from different places', or 'Of course we do different work, each has a specific body build' and 'We understand life differently, we suckled different breasts'. Destiny and ethnicity are woven tightly together. The question of ethnicity illustrates how representations of difference make sense of the reality lived by individuals as well as of the route the future may take. Luisa, an assertive *patrona* accepted her differences from Guadalupe:

Luisa (*patrona*): Our differences go beyond the working asymmetry. Although Guadalupe is the same age as my daughters, the latter are the children of property holders, and the former isn't! In addition, it is not healthy for Guadalupe to feel similar to my girls, as her reality is completely distinct. She has to be careful not to come to have the same expectations as my girls have of life (A1/A2:4).

Ethnicity, as a question of difference, helps to explain the reasons why, although feelings of sisterhood bind *patrona* and *muchacha*, elements of difference remain. Thereby, ethnicity provides the tools for relating with members of different groups. Jesusa, a *muchacha* for at least 20 years, stated that her origin and ethnicity is a milestone separating her from the rest of the household. She stated that the household, is a scale model of Mexican society, where people already have a given place that cannot be changed. Thus, it can be considered that difference is a representation,

which helps people to cope with a given position that they cannot modify. These representations shape group interaction. Ethnicity, then, is indisputable, as no amount of money or bonds of fraternity can disguise what makes people distinct.

To sum up, ethnicity and origin help to explain why the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship has changed little since the early sixteenth century. It seems that the meaning of belonging to a certain ethnic group in Mexico has been passed on through generations. However, there is another aspect of ethnicity which helps to understand the way *muchachas* and *patronas* cope with their difference, this is the idea that ethnicity is linked to personality. Let me explain this aspect in a separate section.

8.2 Blood composition and relationships

Besides being an observable difference, ethnicity underpins the relationship between *patronas* and *muchachas*. As I described extensively in Chapter Two, *patronas* and *muchachas* belong to distinct ethnic groups. What the analysis showed is that difference is anchored to blood composition. Blood is a symbolic boundary, where the bodily fluid represents ethnically inherited personality traits. In this terminology the mix of flesh and blood provides the potential for coping with difference. In the case of this research, blood represented the main individual trait for enduring asymmetrical relationships of power. The composition of blood constitutes one of the essential differences between *patronas* and *muchachas*. Guadalupe (*muchacha*), even after two years of friendly treatment, stated that her blood density differs from her *patrona*'s.

Interviewer: Do you know the family secrets by now?

Guadalupe (*muchacha*): Well, not really. I am fond of them and I care for them. When the *patrona* is away I miss her, and I get sad. It is not that I know them but that I have integrated the house into my blood. You know ... I have taken over.

Interviewer: What do you mean by 'taken over'? Is caring for the patrona a conquest to you?

Guadalupe (*muchacha*): Yes, in a way it means to get to like her and the others, it is related to the density of your blood, you see? They say that blood leads your relationships, so I guess that my blood and this house can mix. This was a correct path for me as I could conquer this household (A1/A2:5).

Blood and ethnicity anchor to the notion of difference as part of what may be taken for granted. This shows the enormous challenge faced by those who wish to intervene in the life of domestic workers. Strong beliefs that remain and become salient during

interaction govern the relationship. Leaving the law aside, if it is a question of blood and ethnicity, I ask then, how might one intervene in domestic service?

8.3 The socioeconomic and educational distinctions

Other aspects relevant to our analysis of difference involve the social and economical concepts anchored to the representation. These characteristics are indisputable and they constantly nurture the notion of difference. In an earlier chapter, I illustrated the differences between *muchachas* and *patronas* in terms of the distribution of space and workloads. The difference in the use of space is related to the notion of difference in status. The expressions of Magdalena, a young *muchacha*, when arriving to work in a new household illustrate the reality created by the distinctions between *patrona* and *muchacha*. Magdalena, captivated by a very wealthy household, describes her enthusiasm using the words ‘nourishment’, ‘space’, ‘modern’ and ‘very rich’: *‘When I arrived at that house, I realised I would get good food, and a room to sleep in and a space to keep my belongings and to hang my clothes, how wonderful!’*

One of the aspects of representation of difference that was most salient was education.

Antonieta (patrona): We are different. Some of us come from a higher educational background, while the domestic workers have merely completed elementary school, although I helped mine to become the exceptions who managed to initiate technical careers, one as a secretary, another as seamstress. It is not, however, just a question of allowing them the time to study, in fact most of my *muchachas* simply do not have the aspirations or want to attend school or do any other activity! What can you do for them? (A1/A2:6).

This quote indicates how education anchors to the representation of difference. The capacity to read, write and obtain higher education provides the individual certain tools for interaction. Education is part of the representation of difference. Education becomes part of the reference to the use of language. Pellicer (1984) examined how *muchachas* speak Spanish as a second language that they learn from the streets and television shows. The *Patronas*, who refine their Spanish at school, use language differently. The use of language is often taken as material for mockery and for pointing out the educational gap between them. The educational background of each woman illustrates the unequal foundations on which they stand. Education is objectified into ways to move, to speak, to relate and also to manage expectations.

Lidia (*muchacha*): In domestic service you never pull through and never progress. Always going from one home to another, from job to job, without advancement or moving to a better occupation. You never notice and then five years down the road, or six, and there you are still doing the same things, and with the same complaints and living with the same dreams. If only we were better educated, had time for more schooling! Then we could work somewhere else, like in a store, and then we could achieve more in life (A1/A2:7).

The objectification of the notion of difference in education is associated with other aspects of life. The socioeconomic differences begin at birth and are crystallised in education. These are recognised with resentment in Lidia's words above. It is important to note how the question of education helps to explain the dead-end character of domestic service. Other socioeconomic differences such as wealth and status become objectified in material possessions. *Muchachas* and *patronas* are just one small example of a society where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, and poverty is endemic to a large proportion of the population (INEGI, 1995).

This section has helped to explain how representations of difference are necessary to make sense of the distinct characteristics of the working relationship. It has also shown that we can discuss representations as historical in the sense that they are vehicles of thought through generations. The resonance of ethnicity, origin and education throughout generations of domestic service shows the potential some representations have in governing working relationships.

8.4 Discussing socio-cultural boundaries

At this point, I turn back to the main aim of the research, which is to establish an association between the elements of social representations with human rights, as practices and as thought. The chapter provided a conceptual framework from which to discuss the dimensions of difference and similarity in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The interpretation of data suggest that ideas of difference override ideas of similarity and the former mark strict boundaries between *patronas* and *muchachas*. However differences are obscured by the participants' preference for finding similarities, like their shared double-shift. The chart below summarises the dimensions of difference, and a second table summarises the dimensions of similarity.

DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE	ANALYSIS 2 (A2) PATRONA	ANALYSIS 1 (A1) MUCHACHA
Origin and status	Urban, rich, modern	Poor, rural, less human
Education	Literate	Illiterate, <i>India</i>
Role in household	Decision-maker	Submissive
Power asymmetry	Contractor, leader	Worker, victim

Table 6.1. The dimensions of difference

DIMENSIONS OF SIMILARITY	ANALYSIS 2 (A2) PATRONA	ANALYSIS 1 (A1) MUCHACHA
Religion	Believer and giver	Believer and devoted
Loyalty	Provider of payment and comfort	Unconditional loyalty
Gender	Double-shift helped by <i>muchacha</i>	Double-shift alleviates her poverty
Liberation	Dependent on <i>muchacha</i>	Dependant on <i>patrona</i>

Table 6.2. The dimensions of similarity

The above tables summarise the information that is useful to understand the contradictions characteristic of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. On the one hand, we find ideas of religious loyalty, gender sisterhood and mutual dependency. On the other hand, we find ideas of ethnicity (rural or urban), role in the household, status (wealth), education and of power asymmetry (contractor or worker).

The observation of boundaries seen in Chapter 5 supports the idea that the participant's emphasis on their similarities disguises the effects that ideas of difference have on their relationship. For instance, it was commonly seen how long working hours were shadowed under the idea of gratefulness. This is, *patronas* argue that as *India* and peasant, the *muchacha* should be grateful for the provision of a roof, food and services. In addition to this, the *muchacha's* also covered exploitation with unconditional loyalty. Nevertheless there is ample evidence that *muchachas* are overworked and underpaid *despite* of the accounts expressing ideas of sisterhood and mutual dependency. Thus, representations of similarity become a smoke-screen to the human rights violations taking place in this relationship. The task of pursuing an improvement of human rights in this arena is immeasurable, considering that representations of difference overpower ideas of similarity but the latter blur the effects of the former.

The analysis shows that representations of similarity ‘cover up’ representations of difference. Representations of difference objectify into practices when workers were given heavier workloads instead of given a space to study. However, due to the powerful role of representations of similarity it was common to find juxtapositions: participants spoke about similarities, but acted upon their differences.

8.4.1 In the Mexican household

In his psychoanalytic analysis of modern Mexican society, Ramírez (1990) concluded that the mixed condition of Mexican people has created its own means for survival. These conditions transform into representations that help to explain the distances between millions of Mexicans. My thesis, in contribution to this argument, discusses how, through the representation of difference, symbolic boundaries mediate intergroup phenomena. In the case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, the analysis helps to define the boundaries constituted by ideas of flesh, blood and education. These boundaries are objectified in practices that represent their differences.

These representations constitute a partial tool for explaining the elements of an intricate relationship as they compete with and contradict one another. This is a source of conflict in those individuals connected to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. An individual interview provided a good example of the forces created by simultaneous representations of similarity and difference. Linda narrated the story of a family who adopted the *muchacha*’s child to bring her up in a wealthier environment and boost her possibilities of success.

Linda (patrona): The *muchacha* of some friends became a single mother, and the family decided to adopt the child by giving her the family name. Since then, they have been looking after the girl and have paid for her education. I don’t think it was such a good idea because it has become a real burden for the child. She has to deal with two mothers and this creates too much confusion. She attends a high society school, where she often has to deny her mother’s origin. Then, she thinks of the *muchacha* as her ‘womb’ mother. So, now she acts towards the *patrona* as her mother, her ‘material’ mother, and sees the *muchacha* as her ‘biological’ mother. She is growing into a very confused adolescent (A1/A2:8).

Linda has revealed one of the enigmas produced by competing representations, on the one hand the identification of similarity to a family, particularly that between mother and child. But on the other hand, the conflict separating source of life from source of social life. The rich child confronts her uneducated, poor mother. This conflict is represented in the mother / child relationship. The child expresses confusion when separating 'womb' from 'material' mother, from one obtaining life, from the other the tools for succeeding in it. Kinship and status become vexed if held simultaneously. As we can appreciate, the child is aware of her differences to a lower member of society in this case her mother, and prefers to associate with the wealth of her adoptive parents. The apparent preference for aligning with the material family reflects perhaps the objectification of a more immediate need in her development, such as relating to peers with educated parents.

The representations explored along the chapter support what community workers openly spoke about as 'endemic practices in Mexican society'. For instance they referred to the *muchacha* as the 'sexual object for young men' as the Mexican household is a context where men initiate sexual activity by abusing the *muchacha*. This emerged in the *muchacha's* focus group:

Focus group *muchacha*: [crying] ...that is when the abuse started, and I couldn't do anything about it, as I am worthless compared to him. He began by showing me his.. his... parts, and then he appeared in my room, and I was afraid. I didn't want to say anything because the *patrona* was so good to me and I liked the job. But when the *patrona* found out I was fired, and I feel so degraded! (A1/A2:8).

It is therefore, necessary to point out that the threats to human rights are there *despite* the emotional bonds established between employers and domestic workers. Again, social representations compete and are contradictory, and while dimensions of similarity operate at the level of ideas, dimensions of difference operate at the level of practices. This is a crucial aspect of the relationship to discuss from the findings of this research.

Finally, in both *muchacha* and *patrona* representations of similarity cover the representations of difference. The dimensions of such differences underpins their relationship and encourages their asymmetrical positions. The research helps to explain why everyday practices that are exploitative, abusing or degrading may be

accepted as part of the working relationship. They are kept, reproduced and concealed within the household.

The next chapter identifies clear examples of cases where representations of difference are objectified and overpower ideas of similarity. Representations of similarity and of difference are pieces of a wider social puzzle, illustrating how exclusion within Mexican society is considered part of tradition, religion and family values.

9. Conclusion and main points

This chapter presented the representations emerging from the examination of the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*. The main points of the chapter are suggesting that representations of difference and of similarity present convergence and divergence, and according to the situation to which *patrona* and *muchacha* have to become familiarised, they compete. In this relationship, *patrona* and *muchacha* cope with their differences through a set of actions keeping them distant. Representations were content analysed and compared with observations. Thus, representations are a necessary part of interaction, while they are grounded on social meaning.

Throughout the chapter I have explored the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*. The representations examined distinguish the elements contributing to the organisation of domestic space and that suggest that interaction is underpinned by a series of representations and deferential practices. In the next chapter I will argue that representations of similarity and difference compete and interfere in the exercise of human rights. I will discuss how these representations determine the observance or violation of human rights in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship.

CHAPTER 7

Human Rights: Illusion or Reality?

1. What to do with representations of rights in space and interaction?
2. Employment rights and emotional bonds
 - 2.1 Management of the contract
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3. The standard of living
 - 3.1 Health and wellbeing: coping with urbanisation
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 - 4.1 Secrecy and abuse
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 - 5.1 Four main points
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6. Conclusion and main points

This chapter presents a brief overview of the main findings presented in chapters five and six. I explore some examples of how these categories emerge in everyday practices in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. These examples are retrieved from the analysis of observations, interviews and focus groups linking human rights with the representations of *patronas* and *muchachas*, as explained prior to this chapter. The data presented in this chapter attempts to provide clear examples of how the thematic universe — difference and similarities — are embedded into practices that challenge the exercise of human rights. In this analysis the categories related to human rights illustrate how ideas of difference govern the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship, and these ideas result from a specific sociocultural context, namely that of Mexican society. The chapter then compares the findings of this thesis with those of other work on the field, namely Doise (1991; 1998). The chapter concludes by inviting further research and suggesting how these findings might be applied in other fields of knowledge.

1. What to do with representations in space and interaction?

In the last two chapters, I have argued that the use of, and movement in domestic space enforce its meaning. I have also explored the ideas underpinning the defence of space during interaction. In the case study of this thesis, ideas about contact with others are objectified in boundaries. The resulting space design creates a world of meaning that will guide our exploration of the way human rights, as representations, entail practice.

In the case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship we have seen that the household presents clear separations. I have therefore discussed representations embedded in space because they encourage certain interaction and discourage others. It seems that deference and demeanour influence interaction within household spaces and these correspond to beliefs and previous experiences that permeate the symbolic universe of the home. The exploration of these ideas points towards the wider social structure and, according to the literature, some aspects of the relationship are shared with other cultures. The fundamental idea is that the representations of *patronas* and *muchachas* are relative to the context of domestic service, and to the history of Mexico. This was seen in the practices and architectural design marking difference through deference.

Deference images tend to point to the wider society outside the interaction, to the place the individual has achieved in the hierarchy of this society. Demeanour images tend to point to qualities which any social position gives its incumbents a chance to display during interaction, for these qualities pertain more to the way in which the individual handles his or her position than to the rank and place of the position relative to those possessed by others (Goffman, 1956: 492).

It is suggested then, that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is one among several asymmetrical power relationships, where gender, ethnicity and social status propagate. Having explored both sides of the relationship, the analyses revealed a dynamic of disgust, avoidance and fear. The relationship is united by religious ideas, and this helps to explain why *patronas* take on the responsibility of educating the worker in the ways of the home. Given that the relationship is mostly underpinned by difference, practices in domestic space push the *muchacha* to the back areas, and affirm the *patrona*'s power in the household. Between *patrona* and *muchacha* there are divergent perspectives of each other drawing on the abuse and lack of family support that most

muchachas suffer, whereas the *patronas* are seen as superficial, but powerful. The basis of difference justifies the history of wrongful dismissals and deceptions elucidated in some cases.

Having explored the symbolism involved in the relationship, it is necessary to explore how these ideas transform into practices. Considering the framework of social representations, the concepts I explored suggest that life in the household reproduces old practices. Prior to any evaluation of the home and its knowledge as legitimate and private, I end my study of the relationship by looking at the representations of human rights of *patronas* and *muchachas* in household practices. Discourses related to education as a symbol of status and the identity developed through ownership are inherent aspects of human rights in practice, in as much as topics related to ethnic origins as a symbol of poverty and a lack of power to complain are also part of human rights. These practices shape the *muchachas*' responses to their life in the household. Given that movement within the household respects boundaries, the logic of households sustains a world of meaning kept secret from representatives of the law. This internal and private logic of the home invites a careful examination of the home.

The selection of codes for representations of human rights that I explore in this section relates to the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship and meets three theoretical criteria. *First*, they would be practices demonstrating convergence and divergence between the *patrona* and *muchacha*, and this supports the analysis of differences and similarities (Chapter Six). *Second*, they are practices that impede or obstruct any development of *patrona* or *muchacha* as an integral individual. This criterion is in accordance with the nature of the household as a community for growth, as explored in Chapter Two. *Third* and last, these practices require a space for accomplishment, and it will be argued that the household lacks the space, or that the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship negotiate its space for practice (Chapter Five).

Provided that the similarities and differences between *patrona* and *muchacha* are embedded in the practice of rights, I will look into 1) the right to employment; 2) the right to an adequate standard of living and 3) the right to live free from abuse or

degrading treatment. These would be enjoyed or obstructed through interaction and they entail a life with dignity.

2. Employment rights and emotional bonds

Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. UDHR Article 23, 1–2.

This right is universal and it imposes a series of obligations on the employer and the employee. The categories related to employment shown in the analysis suggest that emotional bonds underpin the establishment, development and improvement of employment. Moreover, these bonds suggest contradictions shown in the way the contract is respected and broken. Employment rights are limited by the space of the household, as once outside it, the *patrona* has no obligations to the worker. However, while in the house the employer looks after the worker, providing food, accommodation and teaching the ways of the home. My point is that employment rights are based on emotional bonds, rather than on the law. In support of my argument, I examine three significant stages of employment in domestic service, one is contraction, the other the acquisition of benefits and the last is payment in kind and money.

Given that contraction in domestic service functions by word of mouth, references are necessary to obtain a job. Contraction follows the open negotiation between the future employee and the employer, thus, the *patrona* and *muchacha* announce beforehand the vacancy for a job, and their availability. By spreading the word, *muchachas* who are newly arrived find work through an acquaintance. The woman who introduces the *muchacha* into a household is her ‘reference’. The analysis shows that references preoccupy the workers, as it is difficult to obtain a job without previous history. This shows that the opportunity for work is not an open competition, but an issue of relations and public notice. The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship initiates with the job, as *muchachas* are given a week’s trial before they are taken in. The recruitment of domestic workers, then, is selective and shows that the power to contract is always in the hands of the *patronas*. Tiburcia arrived in the city to work for her cousin’s

patrona, as in many other cases. As references are part of the recruitment process for work, outside regulations would help to facilitate the selection of workers. However, there seems to be a certain resistance to recruitment agencies. *Patronas* devote time to selecting the worker and prefer references given by someone they know. This shows that domestic service is recruited ‘a la latina’, where *patrona* and *muchacha* feed, and live from, a social network of friends and family engaged in the domestic service market. Luisa professes to ‘found’ Guadalupe by telling her sister she needed a *muchacha*, who in turn told Guadalupe about the job, who in turn asked her sister about the *patrona*. Domestic service is a unique form of employment regulated by its own market. Moreover, this market engages both parties from the start and, therefore, contraction involves feelings towards the selected worker and towards the employer who selected the worker.

Luisa (*patrona*): When Toña left the job, I was not even a minute without a *muchacha*. Guadalupe came through the door just as Toña left, I’m very grateful to her sister who convinced her to work for me! It is a question of luck to have a good reference (HR:1).

The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is significant for its form of employment, since it implies a specific recruitment process. Emotions and feelings direct the ways to exercise this right. *Muchachas* inquire about the *patrona*, while the latter takes her time to choose and make, what she believes, is a good selection. Representations should help to make sense of the first encounter between *patrona* and *muchacha*. For this reason, the recruitment of workers remains ambiguous and difficult to govern by legal bodies.

2.1 Management of the contract

Since for both women initiating a good relationship is a great comfort, maintaining the contract is essential. Thus, when *patrona* and *muchacha* create trust, they will bend the contract for it to last. Given that *patronas* often work outside the home, they need a *muchacha*. The *patronas* need to learn to manage the relationship with the *muchacha* in order to continue their life beyond the home. The analysis suggested that *patronas*, being educated, are aware of the legal and cultural aspects of domestic service. For instance, the *patrona* who works acknowledges her achievement in

Mexican society, as they need to uphold their job and take care of the home, this situation makes them conscious of the domestic worker's rights (HR:1.1). This shows that there are personal motives underpinning the contract. Some of these motives may provoke bonds of trust between the *patrona* and the *muchacha*.

The *patrona*'s dependency on the worker is related to her own desire and need for employment. The *patrona* needs to trust the *muchacha* to make her responsible for the home. Thus, *patrona* will 'come down to the *muchacha*'s level' and treat her well, in the hope that she will remain in the job.¹ If the *muchacha* abandons the job, the *patrona* is faced with a loss of time and investment of trust. Nevertheless, the management of the contract implies that the contract evolves in an enigmatic environment. That is, contradictions in practice are common, for instance while treating the *muchacha* like one of the family to make her feel welcome, deferential images serve to isolate her, as I examined in Chapter Six. Therefore, the conditions for the evolution of the contract combine knowledge acquired through experience and knowledge from intuition, collected by hearing the experience of others.

Antonieta (*patrona*): Domestic service is based on a personal arrangement that involves the employer taking the responsibility for contracting an employee. The employer, that is me, is going to lend a hand doing tasks she has already paid for. Further to this, the *patrona* is bound to offer her the necessary artefacts for living and working, like salary, food, living conditions, medical treatment, for as long as the domestic worker inhabits her home. Despite the informality, the contract implies a huge responsibility by accepting a stranger into one's home and transforming the housewife into the actor responsible for a traditionally ambiguous working agreement. *Patronas* protect the workers better than the law ever does, because what we do for them is based on our appreciation and our need for them (HR:1).

The stories and examples emerging in the analysis suggest that the contract is fragile due to its informality. As a spoken agreement dependant on bonds of trust, commitment to the contract varies. For instance, salaries tend to increase over time, but so do the working hours. The more the trust given to the worker, the more the employer demands and the worker accepts. While these concessions might appear as gratitude and trustworthiness, if the *patrona* wishes to she can dismiss the worker

¹ It is, however, important to mention that among a higher social class the *patrona* does not depend on the *muchacha* and does not care to establish trust, as the household's organisation does not completely depend on the aid of a domestic worker. In other words, upper class *patronas* can take advantage and exploit the domestic worker. If the worker decides to leave this does not represent a great loss.

without prior notice. This shows that the power asymmetry supersedes the emotional bonds underpinning the relationship.

It seems that the conditions of employment depend on the relationship between *patronas* and the *muchachas* as much as on previous experiences. For this reason, Andrea made a comparison between domestic service and marriage. These relationships are the two most significant relationships in the life of many Mexican households. She stated:

Andrea (*patrona*): Settling the contract with the *muchacha* is like getting married. You need to set the record straight from day one. The rules to be followed ought to be clear from the beginning in order to establish a clear set of limits. As with a husband, you cannot go back on what one has agreed upon at the start. Whoever is more clever, controls the relationship' (HR:1).

Finally, the management of the contract shows that mutual bonds help to establish a working agreement and a good relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*. These bonds may provoke confusion, considering that representations of difference govern the perception of the relationship. For instance, the attempts *patronas* make to ensure that *muchachas* enjoy the job is a useful example of how the representations underpin the exercise of rights. Given that the *patronas* have personal motives to warrant what is the *muchacha*'s by right, we can speak of employment rights in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship as social representations.

Having explored the legal implications of employment in Chapter Two, we can determine that employment rights exist when domestic worker and employer have a good relationship. Wages and accommodation will improve gradually according to the development of the working relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*. Thus, *patronas* and *muchachas* 'grow into' the business of domestic service. Part of this growth implies to gain more experience of administering the contract.

2.2 Payment and its symbolic meaning

Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for him/herself and his /her family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. UDHR, Article 23–3.

The last aspect of the emotional exchange between *patrona* and *muchacha* is the material exchanges it involves. This is an important aspect to consider as payment in kind and money is considered the legal compensation for domestic service. These payments vary, as each relation is unique in its emotional depth, bonds of gratitude and mutual recognition.

Mari (*patrona*): We have a hidden agreement. Of course, the affective liaison is with me, not with my husband. For me this is a woman I care about, for him she represents a worker and that's the end of the story. He demands every aspect of the so-called contract to be honoured as if it was written. For instance, she sometimes asks me for some money to go back home or to buy medicines, I gladly give it to her and do not take it off her allowance or salary, or ask for it back. My husband does keep a strict account of that. I help her because I understand our silent agreement: You help me during the day to clean, so I help her with other things (HR:1).

This quote helps to explain why *muchachas* consider the payment in kind and money as situational and conditional aspects of the job. Having said this we can take the example of presents given at Christmas. Jesusa received turkey and presents from her employer's family. An aspect related to this system of give and take in payment is what *muchachas* are prepared to put up with as part of their job. Victoria, for instance, states her loyalty to her employer despite the fact that her salary does not cover all her expenses. As with other cases, attachment to the *patrona* is associated with life outside the job, where she provides support. In the exchange of kind then, understanding and comprehension of alcoholism, abandonment and health problems represent payment. By supporting each other, the payment becomes emotional and the need to pay back loyalty to the family governs any attempt to change job (HR:1).

Therefore, non-monetary forms of payment exceed the significance of payment. Even if the domestic worker needs a salary increase, they sometimes prefer to keep quiet in order to avoid losing their job with a good family. In exchange, the *patrona* will try to compensate the situation regarding salary and living conditions with other kinds of payment. For instance, she takes care of the worker's future and payment in benefits like pension and medical assistance or by helping her to open a bank account.

Providing an emotional bond exists, *patrona* and *muchacha* warrant and exercise employment rights. However, the right is more related to aspects of the everyday in

the households, not necessarily in relation to the law but rather to interaction. Thus, the practices related to the right to employment have a strong emotional content starting with the trust invested in references and selecting the worker for the job.

3. The standard of living

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Article 25.1 UDHR.

This right is another important aspect to discuss in terms of the convergent and divergent representations of human rights. As a universal right, local culture threatens the definition of standard of living. This has been pointed out as a matter for serious concern (IWIGA, 1995; Gaete, 1993). The *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship is a good example of how this right is beset by contradictions. I will discuss them in terms of the texts referring to rural and the urban lifestyles causing divergences between *muchachas* and *patronas*

In chapters two and six, I explored the urban-rural shock experienced by the *muchacha*. The data provide useful evidence associating culture with the relationship, as domestic workers have to adjust to a new environment. The framework of social representations is useful to explore this adjustment, in particular the anchoring mechanism. For instance, the *muchacha* becomes familiar with the customs and cultural expressions of the urban people through anchoring. Likewise, her speech and new tastes for clothes may indicate some objectification of this new culture. However, new concepts do not necessarily substitute the old, as noted in Wagner et al (1998): when returning home the *muchachas* would feel at ease and not want to return to the city, or would resist the urge to go home in order to avoid the culture shock.

Thus, by standard of living we should understand a home environment that would help *muchachas* to cope with urban life. *Muchachas* take understanding as not speaking back to the *patrona*, who in turn constantly thank them for their services.

Magdalena (*muchacha*): When I saw the house so jolly and big I felt really happy. This *patrona* was good to me because although limited in terms money she connected me to a rich family and appreciated my work (HR:2).

The right to a satisfactory standard of living involves some ideological elements, namely those related to the clash of rural and urban cultures. The way in which *muchachas* and *patronas* anchor new concepts emerging from the encounter of deeply rooted beliefs underpins practices. For the purpose of illustration, I have selected three examples. These show that different and sometimes opposing ways of making sense of the household propagate. In the following section, I explore the conflicting visions between *patronas* and *muchachas* guided by diverging and converging points of view.

3.1 Health and wellbeing: coping with urbanisation

Data show that health is at the same time a right and a requirement for work. As such, it is of considerable importance to the relationship between *patronas* and *muchachas*. On the one side the *patronas* strive to provide the necessary medicines and treatment for the *muchacha* should she become ill. On the other hand, to facilitate her swift recovery, the *muchacha* is responsible for taking her medicines and resting.

Patronas take care of their *muchachas* when ill. In case of an emergency, they make sure they are taken into hospital. Minor emergencies abound, such as cuts, burns or broken limbs. The workers are taken into public hospitals like the Red Cross, or to the local health authority. During convalescence, the *patronas* take care of the girls, as they can't do any work. Medicines are provided free by the hospital, but if there is any need to buy others, the employers usually take care of this.

The data helped to reveal the challenge posed by health-related beliefs. It seems that *muchachas* resist the attentions of 'western' or modern doctors. Miscarriages, haemorrhages and other major health hazards occur without prior warning to the employer. Given that an employer is responsible for the health of the employee,² the fear of medical attention does represent a serious threat. *Muchachas* are reluctant towards doctors, on occasions they contract a skin disease or scalp allergy, parasites,

² She can face charges in case of death or fatal disease.

headaches or the flu. For instance, Yolanda took a *muchacha* to her gynaecologist, he said she needed to go into hospital because there was a problem with her pregnancy. Although Yolanda was prepared to take the worker into hospital, the worker refused and left, saying she feared the doctor's knife. *Patronas* are awe-struck by these rejections and try to understand the reasons why a *muchacha* prefers alternative medicine. The representations emerging draw on ideas of ethnic difference as dangerous and ignorant.

Thus, social representations underpinned by a culture clash construct the meaning of health in the workplace. This is important in the case of the *muchacha* and the *patrona*, as the worker needs to be healthy to work. Divergence is expressed in the way that *muchachas* reject 'urban' habits related to health. Moreover, the reaction is taken by the *patronas* to be indicative of the Indian, rural and ignorant characteristics of the worker. Previous work on health beliefs identified the mixture of medical care as the product of a resistance to western medicine (Gervais and Jovchelovitch, 1998). A similar effect can be explained as rural medicine differs to urban, the latter being western while the former is closer to nature, to spiritual composition. Thus, the right to health and wellbeing very much depends on the encounter between two sorts of knowledge, the urban and the rural. Even if these rights are universal, individual conceptions of living standards and medicine govern related practices.

Finally, the example of the right to health and wellbeing testify to a substantial objectification of representations in practices leading to better or worse health conditions. While domestic workers resist modern medicine by sticking to their belief in herbal remedies and amulets, they need modern medicine to continue in a job. This right, then, illustrates a cultural threat to human rights, related to the conditions of its practice in the preference for alternative medicine.

3.2 Maternity: an impediment to work

Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.

Article 25.2 UDHR.

The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognised. ICCPR Article 23.2

Another aspect showing divergent and convergent criteria relates to maternity. As a fundamental women's right, women should be able to decide when to have a family. Having stated this, domestic service impedes workers from having children, as they lose their job if they do. Maternity in the case of Mexican middle classes subjugates women to a double workday, as housewife and worker, as explored in Chapter Six.

According to the dual demands placed on a woman, as mother and worker, *patronas* and *muchachas* face similar challenges: the grind of domestic work. It is an issue for all of women, who have to fight together to study and decide where they want to be today and where to go tomorrow. However, the data show that *patrona* and *muchacha* understanding of women's rights differs. First, domestic workers are not encouraged to become mothers, as maternity and pregnancy interrupt the working routine. A pregnant woman gets tired and cannot be exposed to heavy workloads, or dangerous substances often used to clean. Second, the *patrona* has to take the child into her home with the worker. Third, the domestic worker represents more responsibility and requires more comprehension from the *patrona*. Taking all this into consideration, *patronas* prefer younger and single domestic workers, and this helps to explain why maternity is not accepted as a human condition of the worker. The rights attached to it are therefore, overlooked.

3.3 Schooling and representations of reflexivity

Everyone has the right to education. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. UDHR, Article 26, 1–2.

Given that the right to education is an essential right for all, it is important to discuss how education is encouraged or discouraged in the Mexican household. Having explored the lack of space for thinking in the household, the data also show that there is a lack of enthusiasm for attending school. Often the *muchachas* do not believe that schooling will change their condition. They therefore lose enthusiasm soon after reincorporating to school in the city.

Researcher: *Would you like to study, what are your plans for the future?*

Tiburcia (*muchacha*): I am studying now, let's see how far I can manage to go! It is difficult to imagine myself in other shoes, to become a different person. It is entertaining to dream, to plan your future living on the clouds, it hits hard to come back down to reality, to wake up and realise one is not there. I'd rather keep my feet on the ground all the time and face my harsh reality. My life is full of pretty things and horrid things and I would rather concentrate on learning how to face them than on dreaming of tomorrow (HR: 2.3).

The idea of having a dead-end life doing a dead-end job is linked to the notion of helplessness and of domestic service as the alternative for income and emotional relief. There is a convergence here between employers and workers, with both considering *muchachas* should not pursue their education, but each woman has different reasons to believe so. The reasons are associated with the conditions in which education is represented, as awareness and privilege for the *patrona*, and as an activity that creates no income for the *muchacha*, given that working impedes studying, and studying is not a tool for survival. Despite wanting to broaden their horizons, *muchachas* show little enthusiasm for continuing in school and this was heightened by the lack of support on the part of the *patronas*. For example, a *muchacha* aged 12 or 14 would finish secondary education with a great deal of effort, like working on weekends and not going out instead, and by taking on yet another responsibility on top of the others she already has with her work and family. Considering their age, their lack of family support and lack of enthusiasm from the employer, they consider that acquiring a profession is a dream, but wish only to improve their reading and writing skills in order to make a slight difference to their qualifications (HR:2.3). Working and studying represent contradictory rights; it is hard to combine the work timetables with studies. The controversy results in the representation of the 'dead-end' character of domestic service. This shows that the exercise of the right to schooling depends somewhat on relationships. The *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship is a good example of how the lack of space and support from one part may lead the other to lose interest in schooling.

Finally, I explained how representations relate to the right to a decent standard of living. Given that these representations draw on divergence and convergence, representations linked to this right speak for the social reality, in which they are

rooted, where a cultural gap between *patrona* and *muchacha* is a key obstacle to its practice. The symbolic meaning of living in a household involves *patrona* and *muchacha*'s incorporation of new ideas with prior knowledge. This is expressed in representations linked to health, education and motherhood.

4. Living free from degrading and other inhuman treatment

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. UDHR, Article 4.

Having explained how the use of space pushes individuals to separate locations, this section aims to explore degradation, torture, abuse and discrimination in these spaces. There are three main expressions of discrimination that I found expressed in practices and that the data in previous chapters help to discuss. However, prior to my examination of each of these, I provide two aspects related with the violation of this right. In a previous chapter, I argued that representations involve ideas of self and other, and these may create distinctions between *patronas* and *muchachas*. Ideas, for instance of ethnicity and lower status are linked, then, with practices putting the other in their place, for example when a *muchacha* uses different cutlery so as not to contaminate the cutlery for the rest of the household. In this sense, the interaction between the two is bound to enshrine the negative conceptions *about* the other. This section argues that the most serious violations to human rights occurring in domestic service are related to the undermining of the other, as distinct, lower and repulsive.

4.1 Secrecy and abuse

With regard to the situation and context of the relationship, abuse is often a hidden practice with symbolic connotations. First, abuse entails an environment in which it takes place, like a family home where the worker is sexually abused. Second, abuse also entails the situation when an individual is abused, like an act of violence in a fit of bad temper. Third, abuse also entails the effect on the abused, as a reaction to make sense of the abuse as part of the working agreement. Throughout the interviews, abuse emerged as a category of violation to rights linked to the idea of the other as an inanimate object or as an individual of lesser value. Abuse in the relationship between

patrona and *muchacha*, then, creates emotional distress and encourages each woman to look down on the other.

Abuse formed a significant part of the content analysed in the discourses of *muchachas* and *patronas*, in particular when discussing concerns over the reasons for the termination of previous contracts. The main reasons why abuse became part of the discourse among the participants was related to concerns over the consequences of the abuse. While feeling forced to adjust to a world of violence and insecurity, the *muchachas* became concerned about the trust and loyalty they had invested in the *patrona*. Meanwhile, the *patrona*'s main concern was the respectability of their home, despite knowing that their son or husband had abused the worker. As this is a highly controversial issue, I do not have the authority to condemn anyone in those cases where abuse was mentioned. Data are confidential but they showed that workers had trouble in making sense of what was going on at the *patrona*'s house as abuse.

Nevertheless, abuse leads to deterioration in the relationship with the *patrona*. For instance, one story of abuse told how the *muchacha*, when alone at work, had to put up with the sexual jokes of the *patrona*'s son. After a while this situation got worse and she felt threatened. Despite her agitation she kept quiet in order to keep the job,³ and once she decided to confide in the *patrona* about it she was dismissed with a warning from the *patrona* not to slander her family name. This experience, like others shows that personal bonds and ideas about the lack of alternatives to work force the workers to remain in an abusive situation. Representations, then, lead to grave violations of human rights (HR:3.1).

The context for abuse is protected by the *patrona*'s need to defend her home from public scrutiny. The *muchacha* is dismissed to avoid scandal. Therefore, the right to not be subjected to abuse and the right to employment are both vulnerable to the events taking place in the household.

³ Exact figures for *muchachas* reporting sexual harassment and abuse are rare. Workers prefer to leave a job and not go to the authorities, as the antecedent may scare prospective employers. My knowledge about assaults is based on interviews.

It is also significant to look into how tolerance constitutes part of the relationship. This is related to other representations of the worker as non-reflexive, as if she were aware of alternative working conditions she could leave the job and escape the situation. While abuse represents part of the tradition inherited with domestic service, this abuse encompasses various forms of mistreatment, such as violent screaming, name calling, beating, or locking the *muchachas* in the house. Therefore, the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha* reproduces several forms of abuse and emotional blackmail, which the workers are not prepared to confront, and the knowledge of the occupation does not link it with the public order.

4.2 Discrimination and degradation

Given that discrimination is the act of making an unjust distinction on the basis of race, origin, belief or class, this may be perceived in interaction. In the specific case of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship, discrimination constitutes a significant motive for a series of actions. Categories where the *muchacha* is seen as a lower member of society relate to discriminative actions. However, *muchachas* resent the discrimination to which they are subjected and react against it by ‘rebellious’. Actions in which the *patrona* is left open to ridicule, or when the *muchacha* uses the phone too much, or becomes deaf to the *patrona* are all responses to their perceived discrimination.

Discrimination is demonstrated in deferential actions, as when the *patrona* corrects the *muchacha*, and while becoming closer to her, she puts her in her place (back and out of sight), as described in Goffman (1956). While observations showed that *muchachas* don’t always get along peacefully with other members of the house, they react to the deference. Given that the categories on self-definition suggest that *patronas* are self-assured and direct the worker, the *muchacha* is seen in terms of her defects. For instance, when something goes wrong in the house, the *muchacha* is blamed, as when the soap runs out, she ‘used it all’. The *muchachas* are also attributed a limited knowledge of household supplies and the places for keeping them. In truth, the *muchachas* know every cabinet as well as the household supplies kept inside. *Muchachas* represent imperfection, as they are constantly wrong, or steal the soap or break the appliances. These small details show discrimination.

In addition, discrimination is also objectified in the parallel drawn between the workers and animals or insects. Victoria detested the way her employers gave her separate dish and cutlery, she felt like a strange kind of a bug, or as if she had some bad smell. When the workers are given the leftovers from the day before, they feel like the pet. 'Thoughtless vain people provoke this disgust. Only *patronas* who trust you and see workers as human beings don't see them as objects or animals'. Seen as filthy and treated with disgust, the separation of the things the *muchacha* touches demonstrates discrimination. As noted in Palmer (1989), domestic workers represent the filth from the rural areas and their customs are looked on with disgust. So, *muchachas* leave the plates dirty and this gives the *patronas* a bad feeling about the differences between them in terms of eating habits and tidiness. These habits also involve eating with their hands, which is an action attached to social class and contributes to the low regard afforded to domestic workers.

Discrimination is produced and reproduced in the deferential symbolism separating the family from the domestic worker. The *muchacha* represents an unknown proximity to elements that are not common in the urban home. Becoming urbanised, and acknowledging the discrimination to which they are subjected, the *muchachas* acknowledge their blood, origin and spiritual beliefs to be distinct to those of the household, but lament their discrimination. In turn, they put up with the gestures and impolite behaviour symbolising the distance between *patrona* and *muchacha*. This shows that discrimination is linked to beliefs and expressed even in the most sacred spaces. What, then, can be done to counter such discrimination?

Likewise, degradation involves discrimination with an added action intending to lower and punish the individual for their belonging to a certain group.

Magdalena (*muchacha*): I feel that deep down inside, they know who is right but they won't believe me, as it's my word against the son's. I am only a low category servant and that means that compared to the son, I am no one (HR:3.2).

If it is true that people consider the other deserves degrading treatment, it is essential to look into the expressions of such ideas. This has been the objective of studies in intergroup relations, such as Doise (1978), and the framework of social

representations should prove useful in explaining such phenomena, as I argued in Chapter Three. Thus, I have explored how the *muchacha* is degraded when considered invisible and moving around the house, when given a room at the back and made to wear a distinctive uniform. Likewise, the *patrona* is punished by the *muchacha*, when she steals or lies. The mistreatment is intentional, and it follows ideas of the other as not like oneself and worthless. When explaining the fieldwork, it was mentioned how awareness and knowledge is a constant threat to the harmony of household. *Patronas* denied access to impede the worker from becoming aware of their rights, by preventing them from thinking they are being degraded.

Muchachas often feel degraded when treated as invisible. Jesusa felt degraded when the children at one of her workplaces took the car without the *patrona*'s permission. They used her as they left no message with her to the parents and made her look useless when the *patrona* returned home and asked for her children. Jesusa was scolded for being useless and thoughtless. Episodes like this one allow us to speak about the 'utility' of having a *muchacha*, when she is the scapegoat for family tension and for the *patrona*'s anger. Being powerless in the workplace, the domestic worker feels that she is treated like an object absorbing family friction.

In turn, *patronas* feel their authority to be undermined. When fed up with having the worker all day long sitting around the house, they want their space but cannot find it. They wish that the household allowed them time to themselves, but the worker does not leave the house, giving her little space. Take how Tiburcia and Guadalupe spent more time in the kitchen than in their bedroom. The *patronas* long for the worker to become independent in the sense of having the initiative to leave home during the day. The authoritative position of the *patrona* is also undermined, often by the intervention of her husband in her relation to the *muchacha*. Experienced workers take advantage of *patronas* who are not clear about the limits of the contract from the start. *Patronas* are afraid of hurting the worker's feelings by correcting them or demanding more attention to the job. Abusing access to the phone, avoiding work or leaving work without prior notice undermine the *patrona*'s role as employer and as caretaker. When the *muchachas* leave a job, the employers are the ones who feel degraded. *Patronas*, then, protect themselves from humiliation by setting strict limits with new workers.

The fight over punishment becomes a pursuit in which the winner gains the power to reduce the other from status, rank or authority. This subtle but consistent war demonstrates how representations of difference transform into resentment and even revenge. For instance, Andrea was about to fire Tiburcia on the grounds of humiliating her. What happened was that Tiburcia needed to sleep, as she had a late night out. She overslept. First, Andrea had to wake up early to start the housework. Second, and gravest of all, Andrea was locked out the house and in pyjamas. Andrea was embarrassed in front of the neighbours, who as witnesses saw her humiliated by Tiburcia, who, in turn, enjoyed a discreet act of rebellion against her employer.

Patronas defend themselves by keeping an eye on the workers, they mistrust them, and see them as robbers, thieves in their own home ‘with one blink of the eye, she can steal everything from you’. The vigilant eyes kept on them, watching what they do around the house shows this. The *patronas* show a conviction that *muchachas* have no feelings for them or their family and thus they criticise any attempt to defend them:

‘*Muchachas* are not stupid, they have clever ways to govern the household, and you have to keep your eyes open not be betrayed!’ (HR: 3.2).

Consequently, the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship is no innocent game, as the workers themselves acknowledge that people follow them around the house and they know when they are exploited. Angry and wanting revenge, they acknowledge their necessity to work and keep quiet. However, before any trust is built up with the *patrona* they hesitate by feeling already misjudged. Some *muchachas* resent the fact that people look on them with disgust.

Victoria (*muchacha*): Life is unfair. We are all different people measured with the same rule. Sometimes for the bad deeds of one domestic, all the rest end up paying the debt. There are domestic workers who do not really want to work, they go to the houses opportunistically to steal or get something out of the family. The *patrona* then finds out and has this idea about all of us, if you knock their door you get it slammed in the face! Or if you get the job they keep a keen eye on you. That is discrimination. It's unfair (HR:3.2).

Finally, degradation and discrimination are often an integral part of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. However, as the treatment involves bonds of trust, comprehension and forms of payment in kind and money, these elements create

confusion but they are also taken for granted. Even if both *muchachas* and *patronas* feel degraded in their relationship, the dynamics repeat themselves, in as much as the representations underpinning them exist and the new meaning is anchored to the old. Even if the law was altered to do something about degradation and discrimination, the context and the situational links are so strong that they would only modify the new laws to the requirements of the everyday relationship. My point is that traditions and the historical content of social representations emerge as stable and encroach upon individuals. This raises the question of whether it is possible to change or reduce discrimination and degradation to ensure a better exercise of human rights.

5. Towards a social psychology of human rights

At this stage, I would like to clearly define some aspects of the model I have used to explore human rights in the case study of this thesis. I believe that the empirical outcomes of the thesis have shown how a social psychology of human rights should be constructed upon a theoretical framework and using the methodological tools that explore how severe human rights violations may be comfortably disguised behind a kind of social knowledge. This knowledge is part of the representational field embedded in space and interaction, it is cultural, historical and shared by individuals. Moreover, I consider that other research in the field has not concentrated on this aspect of human rights. Therefore, this section highlights the main aspects of this thesis which have not been addressed in prior work in the field, particularly Doise et al. (1991; 1996; 1998, 1999; 2000), and which, to my belief, could lead to the construction of a social psychology of human rights that is 'adequate to the context'.

The interpretation of data presented in chapters six and seven contends that the combination of data obtained through interviews and focus groups with reflexive data (observations) is a powerful tool-kit for research. Basically, the tool-kit outlined was based on reflexivity and it established boundaries expressing ideas of difference and similarity in the household. These were expressed in the social representations of human rights in the particular case of the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. Moreover, the practices identified as representations were discussed as symbolic because they are embedded in space but are buried beneath the

surface, as social knowledge. It was in this way that I discussed exclusion, degradation and abuse as everyday practices in the Mexican household learnt by *patronas* and passed on to their family.

5.1 Four main points

There are four main points of this thesis that might serve as a point of departure when constructing a social psychology of human rights.

The *first* point is related to human rights *violations as inferences* drawn by the researcher from observing the course of interaction. This thesis provides evidence relevant to human rights and interaction. Given that the rights explored are the product of linking perspective of self with perception of the other (A1 and A2), they objectify in practices linked to the conditions of work. Considering the framework of social representations, human rights in thought and practice exist before, during and after interaction, they shape its inception and give meaning to the space where encounters happen. In the example of the right to schooling, for instance, it was determined that interaction can discourage the *muchacha's* desire to study. This was backed up by the observations of space design and the interaction therein. The study shows that the absence of space for thought and reflection may determine the worker's lack of will to pursue this fundamental right, in as much as the employer's lack of enthusiasm to help her study is a deterrent. This shows how space has to become 'democratic' in order to ensure rights. Due to the concentration of power with the *patrona*, as seen in Chapter Six, domestic space is authoritarian and contradicts human rights. When Staerklé et al (1998) examined the role of perception in the construction of cross-cultural social representations of human rights, he reached a similar conclusion. The study concluded that social representations of a human rights situation were constructed upon information about the general politics of a country and from 'stereotypical characteristics of their inhabitants' (*ibid*: 223). Having studied representations of human rights drawing on social inferences about group member's characteristics, they criticise the passive role given to the individual in 'democratising' the environment where human rights propagate. Similarly, this thesis demonstrates

that the household is not a democratic space because individuals cannot exercise human rights. Rather, interaction resists rights, but this resistance lies beyond perception or stereotypical images, as in Doise, Spini and Clem  nce (1999) where perceptions are taken for granted as part of the context. So, in this sense, the findings of this thesis complement to a certain extent some parallel work on the subject where individuals do not promote human rights during interaction.

Second, the observance or infringement of human rights must be understood in its *relation to a situation*. A situation led by interaction determines the present, future and past of an individual. This was illustrated in the case of the interaction between *patrona* and *muchacha*. Let me explain in more detail. In Chapter Six, I discussed how perception of self is constructed upon ideas imposed on the person. For instance, *patronas* see themselves as homeowners and as decision-makers; likewise *muchachas* perceive themselves as poor, unequal and ‘conquerors’. This self-definition influences how they see one another, say *patronas*, as decision-makers, see the *muchacha* as lower in terms of class and alien in terms of ethnicity. These representations are acted out in the *patrona*’s deliberate separation of cutlery, leading to an interaction of distance and degradation. The situation also encourages the *muchacha* to have a low-self esteem that in turn does little to encourage self-determination to study and move on to other occupations. Therefore, the situation creates a repetitive cycle reproducing representations of where they come from, belong and will remain. A *patrona* who had a bad experience with a *muchacha* that studied or got pregnant will do everything she can to prevent schooling or maternity in a future worker. This is what I call a violation of human rights induced *in* and *by* a situation.

Third, representations of human rights can be better understood by considering the *juxtaposition of social knowledges involved*. Therefore, their study should depart from the *divergences and convergence* characteristic of a given context. As a social knowledge, it suggests that the social reality of the participant is constructed upon the knowledge bridging individuals with groups. This means that a right that could be upheld might contradict the beliefs of others. The respect of beliefs, then, would be a violation of this right. In the case of the *patrona* / *muchacha*

relationship, the clash between urban and rural ideas threatens the wellbeing of the *muchacha*, particularly in areas of health and education, as suggested by their rejection of urban medicine. The case of the *muchacha's* daughter rejecting her mother due to her social background is an example of the way knowledges diverge: similar in blood but different in status. The conflict threatens the child's identity and produces rejection of her biological mother.

Fourth, human rights are *linked to an emotional bond*. This characteristic is a distinctive feature of interaction (Goffman, 1959) and, therefore, of my research as emotions were indeed, part of the relationship studied. Because one individual or group carries out violations of human rights in order to affect another individual or group, it is reasonable to say that this would involve a degree of interaction. Therefore, it may well be the case that most violations are linked to an emotional bond. I have argued extensively how social representations of human rights are symbolic exchanges between individuals and groups, and they go beyond the stereotypical images emitted by a society, as they are in constant re-negotiation (Jodelet, 1991). Rather than felt or unfelt justice, as Doise (1999) has determined, emotions are the precedent to the infringement of human rights, as shown in the case study of this thesis. This research has shown that the closer the relationship, the more likely the *patrona* will respect the *muchacha's* right to enjoy a life outside the domestic environment. The flip side is that the closer the *muchacha* feels to the *patrona*, the more likely she will be to put up with exploitation and even sexual abuse, and the more reluctant she will be to speak out about her conditions. This was seen earlier in this chapter, when I examined the evolution of the contract. *Patronas* and *muchachas* may be rude to each other, however they will overlook the treatment aside for emotional reasons. Likewise, loyalty to an employer or worker is more an issue of love and care than one of commitment to an ambiguous contract.

5.2 Proposal

What is the difference between the study presented here and previous work on the topic? The four points highlighted above can be summarised into a proposal for

the study of the social representations of human rights. Having promised to make an attempt to approach human rights in a different manner to that of Doise, Clem  nce and their colleagues, I will contrast both kinds of research.

- 1) Inferences about the meaning of certain representations (i.e. human rights) require observation in order to provide detailed descriptions. The deductive interpretation would also benefit from prior knowledge about the context in which the violations occur. The attempts to make inferences would contrast to those following comparative measurement of the shared understanding of human rights statutes and infringements, as in Doise et al (1991). The kind of inferences resulting from cross-cultural samples are limited in their capacity to provide detailed descriptions of the context and situation in which human rights exist or are absent. This has been the case of Doise et al (1998; 1999), where we can only speculate about what minimal statistical differences on social representations of human rights across countries entail.
- 2) Relating a situation to human rights violations poses a methodological issue of paramount importance. There is a need to exploit ethnographic tools for the study of social representations of human rights. This thesis has attempted to show how, by considering the context of an interaction, the description is a legitimate source of human rights representations. Because data are valid as legitimate illustrations of their source (interview or observation), the results are far from just an initial step towards formulating questionnaires, as advocated by Doise et al (1991). Qualitative methods are not the prelude, but the research itself.
- 3) The dual existence of stability and dynamism of representations is reflected in the historicity and in the updated contents of a representation that jeopardises what people say and do. This study helps one to understand that during interaction, forces compete and may contradict the expectations of the researcher. The reason might be that old practices survive radical social changes. A good example was set by the *patrona* living a double shift while exploiting her domestic worker. So, *patronas* may be fervent believers in

human rights, while preventing the *muchacha* from enjoying her comparable rights. The notion of divergence allows one to discuss how spatial distances are used to prevent bodily contact in the household, and this idea stems from long-held beliefs that the *muchacha* is a soulless being. This action was backed up by ideas of similarities and differences in representations that are stable but related to a context. So, what I propose here is an alternative study of human rights considering how the content of representations is shared, yet it is not universal as it includes local beliefs and values. Doise and Clem  nce (1996) and Clem  nce and Doise (1996) concluded that the social representation of human rights is a consensual idea of ‘justice’, but this interpretation remains superficial: practices contradict this consensual notion (Jodelet, 1991). It has been seen how the model of study in this thesis finds contradictions between thought and practice.

- 4) Emotions are embedded in interaction and, therefore, are also involved in the construction of social representations of human rights in praxis. Stereotypes are not a useful construct for the study of human rights. Social representations suggest that human rights are infringed not only by an individual’s distorted image of others, but also by the feelings they have towards those whose rights are warranted or violated. Emotions are an aspect unrecognised by debates of political affiliation within human rights (Clem  nce et al, 1995; Macek; 1997; Staerkl   et al, 1998; Herrera et al, 2000). However, one important aspect that ought to be considered is the issue of feelings and emotional *bonding* between the warrantor and the executor of a right. Emotions could explain how and why human rights in everyday life are not so much a product of institutional functioning, as asserted in Doise et al (1998), but rather that of interaction. Emotions are an essential component of interaction as they regulate the development of a relationship between equals and non-equals.

A social psychology of human rights should depart from a holistic, qualitative and descriptive approach. The proposal presented in this thesis intends to overcome the limitations of prior research that fail to consider elements present throughout the course of interaction (i.e. culture, emotions, membership). The case study in

this thesis shows that the infringement of rights in the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship refers to its own bank of knowledge where forces compete to make sense of human rights. The Mexican household is a context of diversity, where rural and urban people meet. For instance, the divergent experiences were useful to explain how the right to health causes confusion between *patrona* and *muchacha*. The differences in findings with prior research may correspond to the methods and interpretative framework used.

6. Conclusion and main points

This chapter has summarised the main aspects of the analysis and interpretation of data. Giving examples of social representations of human rights, the chapter has also provided some examples useful to a discussion of the extents and limits of the law. The chapter concluded by highlighting four aspects of the analytical part of the thesis, which uncovered evidence useful to the understanding of social representations of human rights as practices and as thought. The proposal for a social psychology of human rights suggests a qualitative and descriptive approach to human rights, this approach may prove useful for the future implementation of programmes and the evaluation of human rights as ‘adequate to a given context’.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

1. Responses to my questions
2. Constructing the study of human rights
3. Further routes for research

In this chapter, I reaffirm the two central concerns of the thesis: the social psychological and the sociocultural contextual aspects of one particular relationship. I outline the main characteristics of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship and affirm the adequacy of ethnography as a research method. I then go on to show the main factors contributing to the construction of social representations of human rights in the Mexican middle class urban household. Finally, I recommend further fields of application of the theoretical and analytical framework used in this thesis.

*'Young workers not only face dangerous working conditions.
They face long term physical, intellectual and emotional stress.
They face an adulthood of unemployment and illiteracy.
Few human rights abuses are so widely condemned, yet so widely unnoticed'*

*Kofi Annan
UN Secretary General, 1999*

1. Responses to my questions

I began the thesis by opening two lines of inquiry. One looked for the theory which could best help us to come to an understanding of the definition and practice of human rights. Another line of inquiry sought to examine the sociocultural, economic and gender implications of life within middle class Mexican households. Both inquiries converged in the study of social representations of human rights, in the relationship between *patrona* and *muchacha*.

Throughout the execution of this thesis I confronted both inquiries by exploring and interpreting the experience of domestic workers and their employers. The responses to my quests were intertwined, that is there were no separate or determinate answers. However, there are three particular ways in which my social psychological and socio-cultural inquiries were developed throughout the thesis.

First, the social psychological inquiry was directed and solved by focusing on the study of interaction. In the case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship the framework of social representations helped me to approach human rights as thought and as practice. Moscovici's conception of social representations was useful in considering they are vehicles of thought and patterns of communication (1984). Having a foundation in social knowledge, as in Berger and Luckmann (1967), the concept of representations also aided in associating interaction with wider social structures. Moreover, the conceptualisation of the setting for interaction as a space with meaning revealed useful data. Drawing on Jodelet's (1991) definition of distinctions as expressions of deep-rooted beliefs, the use of space showed the relation between space and meaning. That is, the reciprocal exchange of *a specific* interaction with *its* attributed *significance*. The relationship that is the object of this thesis provided a useful illustration of human rights as expressions of thought within the

household. Using Doise's (1978) framework of social representations as a guideline for interaction between individuals and groups, I explored the elements feeding into the construction of relationships, namely self-perception and the perception of the other. This approach helped to uncover the constituents of representations linked to group membership and constructing identity. The identity of the *muchacha*, for instance, contains divergences between her ambiguous role in urban society and her belonging to a rural family. Again, through the framework of social representations, I could explore the implications of self-worth in the accomplishment of human rights.

Another conceptual tool applied in my first inquiry was the idea of 'domestic space'. This facilitated the study of the meaning associated with the use of space. Drawing on Moore (1986, 1994), the concept of domestic space was understood as 'context developed through practice', social perception associated with meaning in relation to practices therein. In particular, this helped in the interpretation of the perceptions of *patronas* and *muchachas* as instances of meaning related to a wider context. Given that interaction somehow guided relationships, this concept supported the search for forms of symbolism linking practices and interaction with human rights. When *patronas* correct *muchachas* when they speak, they feign concern, but reaffirm their standing as the outsider to the household. These kind of observations helped to identify symbolism embedded in space and relevant to interaction.

A *second* focus to my inquiries was the historicity of domestic service, identifiable in this thesis. The weight of historicity resonated throughout the thesis in the experiences found in the body of literature explained in Chapter Two, as well as in the data collected and their interpretation in later chapters. Domestic service has a long tradition, carrying with it assumptions about the conditions of work, the value of housework and the relative humanity of the worker. These images appeared and were objectified in practices separating individuals in the household. This was observed as part of the reality in which representations are formed. Provided that reality is rooted in a social context, then the relationship of employer and worker in domestic service is a reality in its own right. Domestic service still exists in almost every country of the world (Coser, 1973) due to its legitimate construction and reproduction within its own market, the thesis helps to explain why. By letting *muchachas* and *patronas* speak through my data, I also explored some practices that endanger the successful

application of the law, through official bodies attempting to regulate domestic service. On the whole, this is an informal occupation with a working agreement emerging from the relationship between employer and employee. For this reason, it is likely that analogies may be drawn between the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship and similar employment relationships in other cultures (Chin, 1998; Bakan, 1997). However, my point is that through the framework of social representations I identified links between the old style servant and master relationship, and modern style domestic service (Romero, 1992; Rollins, 1985; Chaney and Buster, 1985; Chaney and Castro, 1989; Emmer, 1986). It seems that practices carry with them meanings related to a situation concealed in its space, in this case in the household.

The *third* and last point was the validity of descriptive and intrusive ethnographic methods for accessing meaning concealed behind the walls of the household, as I examined in Chapter 4. Through the techniques of qualitative research, mainly focus groups, individual interviews and participant observation, data were interpreted in their relation to human rights as enshrined in the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship. The work in the field produced valuable information from the beginning of the research, until the last moment in situ. Methods of data collection and interpretation took into consideration the researcher's reflexivity and indexicality (Garfinkel, 1967, Parker, 1994), seeking representations of human rights inside and outside the Mexican middle class household. Giving a sense of unity to the entire fieldwork, the approach and interpretation supporting the argumentation of the thesis were treated as an integral part of the investigation. The thesis comprises observations on the problem in isolation (human rights in statutes), critiques to previous research in the field (Doise et al, 1991; Doise, Spini and Clemence; 1999; Doise, Staerklé, Clemence and Svory, 1998, Staerklé, Doise and Clemence, 1998 and Herrera, Lavalée and Doise, 2000) and recommendations for further research. Finally, this thesis has demonstrated that ethnographic approaches to the study of human rights, as representations, provide an insight into issues that other research methods cannot, in particular, the everyday expressions of human rights such as the difficulties encountered when recruiting participants for the research.

So, whose voices were heard and heeded in this thesis? The main thrust of data resulted from interviews (chapters five, six and seven). Having analysed separately the

interviews of *patronas* and *muchachas*, each group of women voiced their own representations. Categories were selected according to their recurrence during discourse and in relation to the main concerns of the participants. The analyses, together with the interpretation of space divisions recorded during observations, carved out the paths to thematic universes. Subcategories of difference and similarity emerged in the latter stages of the analyses, but they showed that, in these given circumstances, wider social structures, like ethnicity, religion and social status guide interaction and are contradicted by the emotions bonding employers and domestic workers. Again, the procedure for collection and analysis of data revealed just how meaningful human rights are to the life of a household. Therefore the thesis uncovered data that I consider useful and valuable for the association of human rights with social representations — as thought and practices. These were the main findings:

Right	Meaning	Practice
To employment	Arriving in the city and searching for work. Provide good references. Make good friends, win over respect and popularity Respect the members of the household	Not signing a contract and establish secret arrangements. Commodities given according to the relationship, not the contract.
To health (standard of living)	Confront rural and urban ideas about medicine. Accept urban cures. A condition of employment. Not wanting pregnancy.	Stay ill or abandon a job for fear of treatment. Not being honest about health condition at the time of contraction. Abortion through alternative cures.
To schooling (standard of living)	Acquire reflective thought and become a competitive individual. A worker who thinks is dangerous.	Lack of support given to the muchacha to continue her studies, hampered by heavy workloads and tight timetables.
A life free of abuse	Do not grow into a woman	Rape and abuse.
A live free of discrimination	Become like one of the family. Accept sameness and act with respect.	Worker looked upon with disgust. Separate cutlery and dishes used.
A life free of degradation	Coping with difference, accepting and asking forgiveness.	Degradation, punish with resentment or abuse of trust, or excessive authority
	Squeeze the most out of patrona or muchacha in a subtle and discreet manner. Consider the other as an object.	Workers leaving their job without notice, stealing things, and talking too long on the phone. Employers overwork the employee, extend the hours of work and lend to neighbours without asking opinion.

**Table 8.1. The social representations of human rights:
The case of the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship**

2. Constructing a social psychology of human rights

In demonstrating how social representations of human rights are ingrained in everyday reality, the *patrona* and *muchacha* relationship illustrated meaning and practices enshrining rights. Having associated social categories, like ethnicity, status and religion with violations of human rights, context was shown to be relevant. Overall, the thesis shows how a social psychological approach can provide useful insights to current political and social issues. Moreover, the thesis also showed that human rights can be conceptualised in a variety of ways, not only as attitudes (Moghaddam and Vuksanovic, 1990), or as widespread knowledge, as Doise (1998; 1999). However, the conceptual and interpretative framework of the thesis covered three aspects.

The findings and interpretation suggest that, contrary to the ideas of Moore (1994), *the reflective individual is not all that capable of modifying their environment*. The reality of individuals, as based on a social construction of reality, means that people assume their lower or higher position in asymmetrical relationships of power. This was shown in the confusion of *patronas* and *muchachas* when interacting. It seems that their deep-rooted beliefs of difference and similarity show contradictions in practices. For instance, *patronas* demonstrated frustration when attempting to escape their traditional role as housewife to become a professional, as they were reluctant to cede the power in the home to the *muchacha*. The anxiety and frustration conformed to the existing social structure reproducing representations of women's role in and out of the household. These representations underpin their definition as *patronas*, including their relationship to the *muchacha*. As a social role that is imposed and has historical significance, it is difficult to change. The data show how for women to handle a double workday is like swimming against the current. The knowledge that has been reproduced over centuries is consecrated in beliefs and value systems. I believe that this kind of social knowledge underpins the patterns of behaviour across households. Each household showed that practices can vary, in some cases *muchachas* and *patronas* are closer, and yet what lies beneath these practices remains the same: ideas about one another. This is what I called the core idea of difference / similarity. These ideas create confusion and prevent the individual from acting upon their environment. So the thesis shows that although people may be able to stand back and reflect upon what they have taken for granted, it is a separate issue to discuss the extent to which

an individual has the power to modify their situation. Observations in the field show that once *muchachas* acknowledge the abuse and exploitation to which they are subjected, they find subtle ways to rebel, but they are powerless to change the distances set by the relationship. Attempts to modify the order of things represent a threat to their employment.

One example that offered a useful illustration was the case of Magdalena, outlined in Chapter Seven. The reasons why she put up with abuse related to her idea of the *patrona* as someone who cared for her. However, the moment she spoke about the abuse, she was fired. After her dismissal, she realised that her position as an outsider to the family was behind her suffering and humiliation. That is to say, her reflection would have done little to improve her conditions. Another useful example was that of space divisions in relation to thought (see Chapters five and six). Given that the *muchacha* has no space for sitting, reading, reflecting or studying, she does not pursue her studies in an effort to change her situation.

The question of power merits a few lines in this discussion, as it appears that the capacity to manipulate a working contract lies with the person, who wields the power in the relationship. The study here shows that the *patrona's* attitude towards schooling has an influence on the *muchacha's* enjoyment of this universal right. Her lack of support would discourage her, and the lack of space to study represents a further obstacle. So, even if the low levels of literacy in the population of domestic workers can be explained in purely sociological and demographic terms, this thesis shows that power during interaction in the household underpins their reproduction and continuity. By prohibiting the *muchachas* from speaking with others, myself included, and isolating them from knowledge, the *patronas* show their fear of the *muchachas* reflecting on their situation. This could 'awaken' them to their rights. Representations emerged from the data, and they show that, indeed, people need more than reflexivity to change a given situation, they need power and control over that situation.

Considering the content of representations, *this study suggests that human rights in action are intricately related to the degree of 'humanness' people attribute to others.* The thesis established that categories of gender, ethnicity, status and religiosity produce a mixture of values involved in how people perceive and act towards

members of other groups. For instance, while *patronas* think of *muchachas* as *Indias* (people who are lower in status) they assign them to a lower human category. The consequent rejection and disgust is expressed in the practices attributing a certain level of ‘humanness’: separation of cutlery, quality of food, use of uniform, lack of opportunity for personal growth. These examples are backed up by the theoretical idea that thought and practices become objectified in the categorical definition of the other, as in Doise (1978). In addition, the household illustrated a space where the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship uses representations that are very much part of the vocabulary of everyday life. The *patrona* who reported me to the police (see discussion on the participants in Chapter Four) provided useful evidence of this relationship of power; this action demonstrated how her thinking of human rights as ‘dangerous’ implies some sort of practice that will diminish the *patrona*’s position in the household. In addition, practices such as the separation of cutlery used by the domestic worker express the idea that they infect and transmit disease. Boundaries were the most evident objectification of ideas of difference, by separating practices, they represent an attempt to prevent pollution of spaces.

The household, as diverse but containing *contradictions*, shows that a *space may keep old perspectives alive through its design*. Thus, the ideas of difference influencing spatial design underpin representations, which are contradicted by its use but are reinforced by its stability in design (households are not knocked down and rebuilt). So, this study shows that the relation between representation and practice is not linear, nor logical. That is, in order to approach contradictions inherent to human rights, we must understand that practices can be related to ideas of similarity as well as those of difference. Moreover, those who exercise or warrant rights are guided and driven by representations underpinned by a logic that escapes the law and its universal expressions. The interaction between *patrona* and *muchacha* showed how such relationships are beset by contradictions. *First* the adaptation to an urban environment that shapes the identity of women as workers, with all its prejudice, stigma and lack of recognition. *Second*, the logic of relationships, like the study case of this thesis, suggests that practices assimilate concepts that are unknown to its actors to a certain extent. The main example was how modern medicine was used but rejected as new knowledge. *Third* and last, contradictions were also shown in the child who rejected her birth mother (*muchacha*) and became closer to her material mother (*patrona*).

The findings suggest that interaction, meaning and space are intertwined categories useful for the analysis of human rights. The body of the thesis shows that people modify interaction and their use of space by anchoring new concepts to old or by making sense of their space according to the course of interaction. The relative meaning of space, however, is subordinated to the power embedded in space and identifiable in its distribution. The powerful woman sets the terms of the contract, for example. However, this does not prevent the *muchacha* from rebelling in her own manner by rejecting urban ways and western medicine.

Finally, through the voices of the participants and community workers, the thesis has shown that practices and thought associate as social representations. By marking boundaries between *patronas* and *muchachas*, representations of ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status mediate their interaction. This thesis has found that representations objectify in patterns for interaction. By venturing into the household, I exposed the meaning of the setting for interaction when related to human rights as social representations.

3. Further routes for research

Having defined social representations of human rights, in the last part of the thesis I recommend further routes for future research. The methods and procedures for investigation have helped to critically evaluate the relationship between the meaning and content of social representations of human rights in relation to a social setting. In so doing, the meaning of boundaries in space was explored. The data helped to ascertain how boundaries and distinctions determine the *patrona* / *muchacha* relationship. Moreover, as examined in Chapter Five, spatial boundaries have emotional and ideological underpinnings that encourage or discourage the exercise of rights. Using the framework of social representations, the meaning of boundaries was associated with human rights, as practices integrated within the household. The findings contributed to our understanding of how interaction in private spaces relates to beliefs on the value of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education and religion reflected in the wider social structure and deeply rooted in Mexican society. Therefore, the interaction between *patrona* and *muchacha* is a relation ‘*a la latina*’,

meaning that its exchange involves payment in kind, money and emotions very much in relation to social representations. While the employer represents the warrantor of rights and the employee the executor, then, social representations of human rights are thought and practice. They are rooted in reality and historicity. The exploration of this particular relationship within the Mexican household served as an example that may aid our understanding of similar relationships — like other service relationships — or of the settings for asymmetrical power. In light of what this thesis has uncovered, I suggest other fields of research where the framework and findings may contribute. I point out the current topics for research that could benefit from using the same theoretical framework and the analytical tools for interpreting data. These areas are:

- Gender asymmetrical relationships of power, like women in the workplace, be it professional, artistic or academic. Their study could benefit from the consideration of elements in the context of the working relationship and what is expected of them as workers and as women. Considering what it means to women to give up domestic roles and compare this in different cultural settings.
- Everyday situations involving different levels of awareness for warrantor and executor of rights, as in health-related practices and issues of reproductive health. This directs us towards the study of ideological cultural structures involved in warning people against practices that threaten human rights. Likewise, when introducing human rights policies in fertile ground for their development.
- Policy planning and implementation, specifically the areas of human rights in countries where they are becoming popularised and where reluctance to accept them might be linked to cultural and local knowledge. This would entail the examination of local practices and their impact on how human rights are understood. This might also consider the categories anchoring human rights to other aspects of reality.
- Teaching and propagating information for the purpose of re-interpreting the past and facing the future of a group or society, as in post-authoritarian regimes and countries in the process of democratisation, like Mexico and Central America. In

particular, in situations where schooling should stimulate self-determination, insofar as individuals and groups can democratise their space and practices therein.

- The study of cultures and groups experiencing a culture clash could consider the flow of representations coming from a specific cultural background. The symbolism conveyed throughout the acculturation process is a key element in understanding the present and future potential for individual development. Studies on the Mexican-American border would be an example of this recommendation.

Finally, I have carried out the fieldwork, analysis and interpretation of findings maintaining a distance from my research problem. It is, however, a personal deed, not as a researcher but as a person, to here dissipate the academic smokescreen obscuring my opinions from my findings. I made a case for economic and social rights, as they are the primary necessity for both *patronas* and *muchachas*. Perhaps when I fly back home I will be shocked when a *muchacha* serves me a glass of water. After some time, I will get used to the fact that domestic service is part of the everyday reality of Mexico. I now acknowledge, as I hope the reader does also, a moral obligation to encourage and guarantee the fair treatment and the provision of benefits to which the domestic worker is entitled. It is not that cultures and their peoples ignore human rights, rather we must assure that human rights are successfully designed to adapt to situational demands. Their adoption is their commitment of everybody and every institution. I believe only this way, human rights will become universal.

APPENDIX 1

***PICTURES OF SOME PATRONAS AND MUCHACHAS WHO PARTICIPATED
IN THE RESEARCH,
AND A LOOK INSIDE MEXICAN HOUSEHOLDS***



One of the participants of this research carrying out her duties.



A Mexican rural home.



Advertisement for a domestic worker.



Mexican urban home.



Participant with the *patrona*'s child.



Two participants in the kitchen, *patrona* is on the left and *muchacha* on the right.



The focus group participants.

APPENDIX 2

FEDERAL LABOUR LAW CHAPTER SIX: LABOR SPECIAL CASES

(Translated from original: Ley Federal del Trabajo, Mexico)

DOMESTIC WORKERS:

Article 331: Domestic workers provide the service of cleaning, dusting, assisting and other similar or inherent to the household of a family or person.

Article 332: The following are not recognised as domestic workers according to this law:

1. Workers providing cleaning and assistance to clients in hotels, housing associations, restaurants, bars, hospitals, mental institutions, schools, or similar; and
2. Porters and guards of the above institutions, apartment blocks or houses.

Article 333: Domestic workers should enjoy time off to eat and rest at night.

Article 334: Except for the established in agreement, retribution for the domestic worker shall consist of salary in money, food and board. With regard to this law, the food and board will amount to up to fifty per cent of the salary in money.

Article 335: Regional Commissions are there to set the minimum wages payable to the domestic workers and must be submitted for the acceptance of the National Commission for the Minimum Wage.

Article 336: In setting the salary, the conditions of the place of work will be taken into consideration.

Article 337: The patrons have the following obligations:

1. To be considerate to the worker and to abstain from bad treatment in words or in actions;
2. To provide the worker with a comfortable and hygienic place to sleep, nourishment should be healthy and satisfactory, as should the necessary working conditions to ensure the workers good health;
3. The patron must cooperate in giving instruction to the domestic worker, according to the norms dictated by the corresponding authorities.

Article 338: Besides the above obligations, in case of sickness not due to work, the patron should:

1. Pay the domestic worker a salary corresponding to one month.
2. If the worker's illness is not chronic, provide medical assistance while the worker recuperates.
3. If the worker suffers from a chronic disease and that worker has been working for at least six months, provide medical assistance for three months, or take the worker to any recognised health authority.

Article 339: In the case of sudden death, the patron should pay for the burial.

Article 340: The domestic worker has the following obligations:

1. To be considerate and respectful to the patron, the family and those who visit the household where they are working at, and;
2. Be as careful as possible when using household utensils and when moving around the household.

Article 341: The infringement of any of the obligations mentioned above will result in the termination of the worker's contract.

Article 342: The domestic worker can terminate the working relationship at any time, as long as at least eight days' notice are given.

Article 343: The patron may consider terminated the working relationship rendering no responsibilities within the first 30 days of service, and at any other time during service, without the need to give evidence or cause for the decision and paying the compensation corresponding with the settled agreement and with article 49, clause IV, and article 50 of this Law.

APPENDIX 3

FIELDWORK DAIRY

24/nov/97

Today I will interview Linda who is a former colleague of mine. Linda graduated with a degree in Pedagogy. As this is the first interview, I want to pilot the questions and structure of the interviews, rather than begin collecting information. Since I arrived in Mexico, I have realised how original it was to select this topic and this particular approach.

After talking about my research with other people, I realised the special significance of the relationship between patrona and muchacha. A system of household traditions and social clashes supports the relationship. Thus, I found that newly wed women have certain needs that can be met by acquiring a muchacha. It is common to hire a nanny to look after the children. As some women can't afford to pay a nanny, the muchacha does the work. Besides cleaning and cooking, the muchacha attends to the children. She has a full day's routine, with little time to relax and in addition the muchacha is blamed whenever the child does something wrong, or bursts into tears.

Contrary to my expectations, the muchachas appear quite accessible and eager to speak. I already spoke with my mother's muchacha.

As muchachas are not paid for each day's work, nor by the hour, I do not consider it necessary to divide the participants into live-ins and live-outs. In both cases, while at home, they lack a designated space and move around the house at random.

I hope to find people who will talk comfortably about the topic.

5/dec/97

Some days have passed and there have been a number of setbacks. My plans are threatened, people don't seem to be eager to participate. I found it hard to recoup the energies to continue working.

In the yellow pages I looked-up for Associations and Organisations. First I made a list of the organisations which I might approach and then I rang them up. Also, I searched the COLMEX library (Colegio de Mexico) for literature about domestic service.

Several articles quote the work of ATABAL, an organisation focused on domestic workers. My colleagues have already mentioned this organisation. I must get in contact with them.

6/dec/97

Today was the first interview with a domestic worker, Doña Tete.

The interview was difficult to start with, as it took some time for the conversation warm up. At first Tete was reluctant to allow tape recording, but she later conceded. I presented myself as a psychologist and as a friend of Linda (her patrona). From the beginning, I told her the information would be treated as confidential. It was made clear that nobody else would have access to what she revealed. I repeatedly said that tape recordings facilitate the research, because I couldn't store everything in my memory, or write it down as we spoke. Anyway, Tete opened up little by little.

I should probably change the initial question from: tell me about your occupation? And instead ask how they got started in the home cleaning business.

I also plan to give the interview an impersonal approach. This is, to find the way to create a relaxed atmosphere. If the muchacha does not name names, or point out people, then they feel more at ease to describe a patrona and share with me a specific experience.

Another good idea is to address the muchacha with the formal 'you' (*non-translatable – usted*).

Asking about their lifestyle is too forward for commencing the conversation. I ought to find a better way to bring up their occupation, as to them I am an outsider. Also I should be more careful about interrupting the speaker.

Tete appears to be a very sincere and honest woman. She finds her education different to what she calls the *others*.

I should definitely ask them about human rights and use the term human rights. Muchachas do have notions of them.

I must bear in mind that muchachas strongly believe in the difference between an *honest* and *dishonest* person. I should also bear in mind the muchacha's *ideology of improvement and of being different*. They come from generations of strugglers who work to bring up their family.

7/dec/97

I just looked in the second hand ads publication. Domestic worker agencies advertised as *servants for home delivery and with good references*. I would like to interview a coordinator of such an agency. Maybe this would be a convenient way to access a population of muchachas.

9/dec/97

Rich people don't allow me to speak to their workers.

Focus group

I am at a governmental development agency. After spending all day long waiting for the people to gather, I found the space and time to carry out one focus group.

Two men and six women constituted the group. This was quite a good mixture because perspectives were diverse. The group comprised middle-class bureaucrats, graduated from several social sciences. They are responsible for carrying out projects aiming to improve political awareness and social organisation. As community workers, they work closely with peasant and rural classes in the country. Throughout the conversation about domestic service, inequality and social difference were the main concerns. Although education was not the central topic, it was agreed that education is the reason for such inequality and an obstacle to establishing a relationship of equality between people of different cultural backgrounds (or something of the sort).

My past involvement with this agency was used to my advantage. As people already knew about my research, some community workers eagerly participated. The space for discussion was a room built specially for the performance of group discussions. But also one of the interviewees is a very close friend of mine, and she facilitated my introduction to people. I believe this networking of acquaintances can aid the progress of research. Sadly, I do not believe this opportunity will be repeated.

10/dec/97

Rebuffs

Next day I went to another of my former jobs. As this is a school for higher education, the people seemed very busy and with little time to spare to participate in the research. I visited former desk partners, but none of them demonstrated a genuine interest in my academic career. Therefore, I did not feel comfortable enough to share my interest in organising a group interview. If I interview some of the people, the interviews will take place outside the working environment.

Characteristically, these workers seldom relate to people other than students. I believe this situation restricts their sensitivity towards my research objectives. In the end only one interviewee came from this pool of people.

In the afternoon I approached women with whom I am relatively well acquainted, and told them about my study. As conservative upper middle class women, they are in their early thirties and recently married with children. They wondered whether by interviewing their muchachas I would be '*putting weird ideas in their heads*' and scare them off. One of them was adamant, she forbade me from approaching her muchacha, from the beginning of our conversation. It is the belief of this woman that an inexperienced muchacha might become aware of her adversities and her state of oppression if she talked to me. This realisation would scare her into leaving her job.

Due to the difficulties in making direct contact with the muchachas, without restrictions from the patronas, my next options are: churches, public plazas on Sundays and blocks of flats.

17/dec/97

Luisa and Guadalupe

It is Christmas time, and people are busy with their preparations. Still, I managed to arrange four interviews in a block of flats.

It is essential to establish a bond of trust with my interviewees. In this block of flats, I first approached the mother of a very old friend. From my early years, she watched me grow up. The bond between us allowed for an open and lengthy conversation about the research. After talking to her, I approached Guadalupe, the muchacha, she was too reserved and shy. Guadalupe and I did not establish a good rapport. The interview was short and she spoke little. My guess is that she felt uncomfortable speaking to me, as she has no real proof of my trust. Guadalupe described her life as beautiful and harmonious, but Luisa, the patrona, had told me about Guadalupe's hard life beforehand.

Coco and Sofi

Following Luisa and Guadalupe, I experienced a weird situation. While interviewing Coco, another patrona from the same block of flats, Sofi, the muchacha, joined in the interview. Instead of answering my questions about the muchacha (to see how well they are acquainted), Coco asked Sofi to answer me directly. The interview continued and I tried to do both interviews at the same time, while observing their interaction. When I came to the association of ideas about human rights, Coco intercepted Sofi's answers. Coco considers Sofi to be completely ignorant and that she should not be troubled thinking about such things. Although Sofi was present, she was not allowed to speak with freedom. Coco and Sofi seem to have a genuine relation of devotion and companionship with one another.

I reckon it is a good idea to go for blocks of flats.

Homogeneity

A main bias to my procedure of enlistment is that my facilitators are characteristically altruistic women moved by progressive ideals. Therefore, the patronas are similar and up to now they could know each other. The recruitment of participants is like a cobweb. I should try to find a population of less humanitarian people to compare representations.

Incorporation into urban life

When incorporating into a new style of home environment, the muchachas are met with a personal dilemma. The process of incorporation they call '*imposing*'. This distinctive Mexican slang refers to the acculturation process where new values and ideas are imposed over the original ones. During the fieldwork it is suggested that the patronas experience a similar acculturation; where patronas learn rural ways from the muchacha.

Obstacles

I face the problem of persuading the interviewees about in-depth interviews. People here are familiar with open-ended surveys. As a result of the popularisation of opinion polls, the representation of an interview is of a survey. They expect short questions that call for quick and simple answers.

Mistrust and suspicion are two important obstacles that need to be overcome. Mexicans avoid strangers out of fear. I must bear this in mind in order not to take the rebuffs or short interviews as a personal rejection. Muchachas can be reserved when talking about themselves. I must organise a group interview with muchachas in order to identify points of contention related to the occupation.

About rules at home

According to the patronas there are NO rules. To them, muchachas perform their job without restrictions. Their confidence about the accurate use of rules corresponds to the events that lie beyond perception. The everyday dynamics of the house express hidden elements. Muchachas do not receive or make phone calls, they do not go out, nor do they share the family table.

23/dec/97

Denials

Today I received another rebuff. The muchachas of an open-minded and considerate family, for whom they are 'like one of the family', would not participate. According to the patrona, who facilitated the contact, the muchachas already knew about my call asking them for an interview. After prompting the idea of an interview, they denied any knowledge of it and hung up on me.

The patrona later explained that this attitude obscures the muchachas reality. She believes that muchachas do not want to be servants, therefore, they won't talk about their job. This might appear to be a unique event. It is not. Previously, when I contacted the people from Atabal they also expressed a concern over such attitudes. According to their experience, in public spaces, muchachas introduce themselves as secretaries or as shop assistants. The change of occupation is particularly used when they are introduced to a man. The people at Atabal claim that this attitude obstructs the promotion of domestic worker's rights.

* * *

SOME TIME AFTER

1/ sept/98: Feels good to be back home.

9/sept/98

Mari and Victoria

I went to María's home in another block of flats. She is 28, married with a three-year-old child. Victoria, the muchacha, has been with her family for over ten years. As her mother moved to the north of the country, María sort of inherited Victoria. Victoria and María come from Toluca, a suburb where Victoria first worked with the mother and she later moved to the city with them. María gave me permission to interview Victoria. I will have to call her again just to fix a date. I have to ask information such as age, civil status and so on. From what I heard, Victoria is the head of a family and sleeps in a room located in the roof of the building, where all the muchachas from each flat sleep.

After some days I rang Victoria and she agreed to meet on Monday, but she insists that she has a boring life. I must remember to ask her the reason why she has remained with Mari's family for so long. I imagine there is an emotional side to this story. I must also find out about the distribution of workloads and of time.

11/sept/98

Apis: Non-governmental organisation

Interview with Elsa C. a feminist activist and leader of a non-governmental development agency (Apis). She is also an external advisor to the National Human Rights Commission. She provided great insight about the application of the research and about other issues related to the topic.

12/sept/98

Further attempts

I went to another house for breakfast. Entering another block of flats. Citla, the patrona is 26 and a prominent solicitor. She moved out of her parents' house earlier this year. This is not common in Mexico. For the moment, she is on the verge of commencing an independent life, and she faces the difficulties of running her own home. This is why she has contracted a muchacha to clean her home every Saturday, the only day of the week that Citla is at home.

She bosses Juana, the muchacha, around. Juana looks about the same age as Citla. This is the third time Juana has worked for Citla. The patrona has doubts about the amount that she should pay: 60 for five hours work? She asks me. The contract was only verbal.

They show no affection and there is a lot of scolding. Juana obeys all of Citla's instructions, and calls her by her first name. It is interesting to watch them addressing one another by their first names. No formal 'you' or 'señora' attitude. Citla teaches Juana how to do things. She confides to me that she thinks Juana is 'stupid or narrow minded and intellectually limited'. Between them there is no sort of bonding, and they maintain separate lives.

Because Juana had a wedding to attend, she finished up quickly and left. However, I managed to find time to speak to her about my study on working women and I asked her whether she would like to talk with me. She agreed quickly but asked me to do it next week. Good. I have to see what workload the girl has compared to a live-in. Ask both types of muchachas.

Ask ages, if there are differences between Citla and Juana, they appear to be a similar age.

I never repeated or went further with this couple. After this first time I received several excuses to postpone the appointments.

After serious thought about the rejections, I decided to draft a letter of presentation to hand to the people living in blocks of flats. This would introduce me to them and would probably help in the organisation of a focus group.

17/sept/98

Another week has passed. After many attempts, at last I arranged to go to a house. We Mexicans are so informal. The housewife's routine depends completely on the husband's and children's activities! Activities range from the child's classes, to the husband's social life and family meetings.

Luisa and Guadalupe

Today I went back to Luisa's, I wanted to give Guadalupe another try. Surprisingly, I found Guadalupe in a different mood. She was happy and healthier than on the previous occasion. She wore a new uniform, had gained weight and was chatting eagerly. I believe that hers was the worst interview before. Today, we established a good conversation and empathised with one another quickly. She likes to talk about her family and the ways to overcome her problems, 'imposing' herself. I had coffee while talking to her. I guess I am also more confident with my work and less concerned about following structures, preferring to talk to people.

18/sept/98

Antonieta and Juana

Today I will meet Antonieta, another patrona. She is a relative of a dear friend of mine. I wonder if my personal characteristics predetermine somewhat the progression of the research. The people

I have contacted are friendly and show a genuine interest in participating, and interviews have gone well. As expected, I lost all the morning and part of the afternoon spending time with my friend who was to introduce me to Antonieta. Remember to be patient.

My friend and I bumped into Antonieta while walking on the street, near the local market. Antonieta and I had a short chat about the research. Apparently, she was enthusiastic about my work and she pointed out the importance of studying abroad while maintaining a concern for the country and this specific topic.

I interviewed Antonieta and then I interviewed Leo, the muchacha. She spoke using a very low pitch. She appeared agitated when she spoke about sexual abuse.

Regrettably, the following Friday I received a call from my friend. Having put me in contact with Antonieta, she was responsible for cancelling the meetings. The excuse was the visit of a sick relative. What a shame!

20/sept/98

Andrea and Tiburcia

Both of them are in the house. The patrona is the sister of another good friend of mine. At this stage of research, the discourses of patronas and muchachas begin to be repetitive. Based on her previous bad experiences, the patrona is knowledgeable in the ways to manipulate her muchacha. The muchacha differs to others I have interviewed. She works as a means of self-improvement and hands no money over to her parents. She buys her own clothes and gadgets and studies computing. She just turned 19.

My incorporation into this house began with an invitation to dinner. After spending some time with the family and children I did the interviews and arranged for the observations.

Compared to my earlier attempts I feel more at ease as an interviewer. The interview is handled as an informal conversation. While keeping my concerns at the back of my mind, I manage a conversation covering all the topics. I no longer need to take out the list of questions. With experience, I ensure that these topics are spoken about at some time during the interview. There is little or no need for an introductory question leading the encounter.

Magdalena

I spoke to Magdalena on the phone. The mother of a colleague told her about my studies. Magdalena asked her to put us in contact. She wants to share a devastating experience she recently went through. I will meet her next Saturday. I am excited and pleased to have established a direct contact with a muchacha, avoiding any reference to the patrona.

21-23-24/sept/98

Luisa and Guadalupe/ Mari and Victoria

At last, my observations are on track in two homes. I believe perseverance is achievement. At first, the patrona seemed committed and kept me talking as a way of welcoming me to her home. She even set her tasks aside to be with me. The second time this situation eased.

As a sign of courtesy I brought to both homes a selection of sweet pastries to accompany a tea or coffee break. They both shared them with the muchacha.

In one of the homes things normalised rapidly, so I was able to detach myself and move around the house. Thus, observation was carried out with reasonable freedom.

In the second home it was interesting to observe how tea was prepared for us to share. There were three of us (Mari, Victoria and me). Although Mari set a place at the table for Victoria, she refused to sit down and have tea with us.

Soon after tea, Mari felt indisposed and went to bed. The next day she rang me to excuse herself because she was feeling unwell and had neglected me. My guess is that tomorrow will be a better day.

Mari rang me to cancel my visit. Again.

25/sept/98

Focus groups

In Luisa's block of flats I knocked door to door. I handed out letters of introduction asking patronas and muchachas to assist me in a group discussion. This discussion was planned to take place at the local chapel. There are 13 flats.

The woman from Flat 11 called the police and she complained bitterly. Angry and offended, she accused me of intruding on her privacy by giving her muchacha a letter! With what right do I do this and what right have I got to do this! Of course she tore the letter into pieces. Luisa helped me to clear up the situation. The policemen recommended that I leave the flats, I felt very scared and confused. Luisa explained to the policemen that I was carrying out a study and only volunteers would attend the chapel on the set date.

I was overcome with humiliation. I felt like giving up, almost in tears. But after giving it some thought I decided to go and knock on this woman's door and ask her the reason for her offence. This could be revealing. As expected, the door of this home never opened, nor did she answer my calls.

26/sept/98

Magdalena

The interview takes place in a horrible part of Mexico City, Villa de Cortes is a ramshackle and run down location near the city centre, devastated in the 1985 earthquake.

Magdalena began to work as a muchacha at the age of 15, she has now turned 19. She has a long list of mistreatment in several of the houses that she has worked. The experiences range from beating, to underpayment, humiliation and sexual harassment. She feels lonely and very confused at the moment.

Magdalena's boyfriend is a soldier Does he know about the harassment to which his girlfriend is subjected in a rich home? I wonder if this sort of hatred triggers some of the violence in private homes.

This interview provoked a series of reflections.

Reflections

1. The need to support women of her condition in some way.
2. The practical side of my psychology must be assessed. To what extent am I a psychologist or only a social scientist? Besides her eagerness to collaborate with my research, Magdalena was looking for support
3. Some of the questions and issues around the objective of study are emerging. The role of the muchacha is defined in relation to the patrona, for this reason their discourse concentrates on the relationship with the patrona.

The people I interview are characteristically altruistic, if not they would refuse an interview.

29/sept/98

Andrea and Tiburcia

Another day of observations. The most interesting bit was at the dinner table. I feel like such an anthropologist. I have eaten in three houses while observing and interviewing. I eat everything and chat. It frustrates me a bit not to be able to take notes while I eat.

The table was set swiftly by the muchacha. She served the food, did the washing up and cleared the kitchen all in one move. She listened to everything we said and observed. The patrona and I spoke about education, private and public schooling, we concluded that education spoils children, making them become lazy or insolent adults. We discussed the way that the muchachas do everything for them at home and this creates an air of snobbery. Boys and girls that grow up in this environment tend to boss people around. In the meantime the girl looked at us and kept silent, she wouldn't look me in the eye (this is very common). However, she is very happy and fond of the children and the dogs. She seems to prefer them to the patrona! At the end of dinner she joined in a conversation about food.

30/sept/98

Focus groups

I went again to each one of the houses, knocking door to door. This was to remind the muchachas to come to the chapel in a few minutes. They all said they would come, and here I am sitting in the chapel waiting and no one turns up, ten minutes past the set time. I knocked on another door and they allowed the muchacha to come out, she is still not here. I am so anxious I could scream, but the chapel has an enormous echo. Why am I so anxious? I do hope they turn up! 15 minutes past the allotted time!

At half past five Guadalupe turns up, soon after, three more join the group. I put the microphone next to the Christ on the altar.

After I turned off the tape recorder a story about sexual abuse came up, involving the son of the house. Silence of the parents is tantamount to support of the abuse.

The boy told the girl: 'you are no longer virgin, still, we do not belong to the same class and therefore we are not equals and this relationship should stop'. The patrona told her to marry the son.

When the discussion ended officially, and I left the chapel, the girls kept talking heatedly among themselves. When I went to look for the patronas they kept talking, chatting and laughing. They have little time to bond and share experiences. One of them is a very clever young girl with every intention to further her studies and get a degree. As her ambitions were very obvious, she did not reveal her salary.

1/oct/98

Mari and Victoria

I went to see Mari and Victoria, we engaged in a long conversation. Nothing much goes on in their flat. Although this place is sparsely furnished and small, the couple and the child manage to ignore Victoria's presence. We went out to the playground so that the child could play. Victoria stayed at home. The information is becoming repetitive. I am getting bored with the study, or maybe it is just a boring day. I am considering going to public spaces to observe, gather a different sort of information. I will also approach NGOs.

6/oct/98

Andrea and Tiburcia

What appeared to be a peaceful atmosphere was just the opposite. Andrea and Tiburcia were quite upset with one another. The patrona is on the verge of firing the muchacha. The muchacha went dancing the night before and came back in the early hours of the morning. She fell asleep, leaving the patrona locked out of the house in her pyjamas. A neighbour had to climb the fence to open the door to the patrona. The muchacha was oblivious to her duties. The patrona considers giving her the sack.

11/oct/98

Furthering my reading and acquisition of local literature on the topic

I have to account for focusing on middle class literate patronas and low income muchachas.

Class division sets boundaries for access.

1. Upper class: inaccessible to me, they are reluctant to allow an interview with the muchacha. Fear of disclosure, I guess.
2. Lower middle class: women of this class usually perform a double shift, inaccessible for time reasons.

12/oct/98

I contacted Atabal's director general, Irene left on her holidays! Why didn't I call before?

I also spoke with the woman who put me in contact with Magdalena and she told me about another girl who wants to talk to me! Good.

She also told me that Magdalena felt relieved after our conversation and left happy. So was I. I hope she contacts this NGO I recommended to her.

13/oct/98

Andrea and Tiburcia

I joined them for dinner again. The muchacha doesn't sit at all in the presence of the patrona. I now realise that the house is split in four dimensions, upstairs against downstairs and front against back. This particular home is constructed with passages and doors in the back linking the kitchen and ironing room to the muchacha's room (which is outside in the back garden). This makes the home 'presentable and welcoming'.

We eat in the kitchen.

Andrea's husband was sent to Argentina to work for six months. Andrea is in a state of shock after his sudden departure. This event disrupts my observation in this home. The children are demanding, the mother seems neurotic, the muchacha remains in the kitchen. The patrona constantly tells me that I influence her children's, dogs and cat's behaviour. I think this is a polite way to ask me to leave.

Apis invited me to go to the Alameda and do some outdoor observations.

I must still organise my visit to Cidhal in Cuernavaca.

22/oct/98

Interviews with Atabal and Cidhal are completed. Apis has not contacted me about the visit to a public plaza. Badly organised, they do not answer my calls. I have changed my ticket back to London twice and won't do it again, I have two more weekends left for putting together research, then it is over. This is terrible. I will go on my own.

Information is now very repetitive even in observations. All patronas realise their mistakes and are more careful.

31/oct/98

Alameda Central

Why is this place so empty? Oh God! I forgot it is the weekend for the Dead! At this time of the year the girls go to the cemetery instead of coming here.

1/nov/98

Plaza San Jacinto

Day of the Dead. However, some girls are here in the park having a picnic, because if they didn't get tomorrow off then they could not travel all the way back home.

6/nov/98

The thing about going to the cemetery or to other public places where muchachas go is to see how they assume other social roles. It is easy to miss them, for they are out of context and act differently. They lose their distinctive look. Why?

1. The looks of any non-muchacha corresponds to the traditionally Mexican complexion. They don't seem like just another household gadget.

2. They dress and look different.

13-14-15/nov/98

Farewells, to all my participants and deepest gratitude to the NGOs who supported me. I rang all of them to say goodbye. I am expected to join 'Jenny Cooper' Latin American Congress of Domestic Workers in the year 2000. They want to examine possibilities for unionisation.

COLACTRAD: Colectivo Latino Americano the Trabajadoras Domésticas. This is constituted of Groups in Bolivia and in the South Cone. These are the ten organisations leading the domestic worker's force of Latin America.

Many thanks and see you next time!

OBSERVATIONS (Extract)

4:00pm

Downstairs

I arrive and Tiburcia opens the door to me. The family has just finished eating.

Tiburcia is standing next to the family, she cleans the kitchen copiously.

At the same time she watches soap operas on TV.

Upstairs

Andrea watches TV with her son and the dog. She invites me for coffee downstairs.

Coffee is served downstairs.

Downstairs

Tiburcia is still cleaning the kitchen (4:40pm).

Andrea asks her to serve water and to set the table for us to have coffee.

Andrea starts telling me about a problem she had with Tiburcia earlier in the day.

Apparently Tiburcia arrived in the early hours of the morning from dancing. This meant that she did not wake up in time to get the ready children for school.

Andrea did it instead and she also opened the door to get the car out of the garage.

By mistake Andrea was locked out in her pyjamas, she rang the bell but Tiburcia was so fast asleep she did not hear. The neighbour climbed the fence to open the door to her.

Andrea was about to dismiss Tiburcia and she scolded her.

Tiburcia is working very hard to make up for her bad deeds.

5:00pm. Tiburcia has finally finished cleaning the kitchen, and goes upstairs to play with Andrea's daughter.

5:30pm. The daughter and Tiburcia said they will go out to get milk at the local shop. Andrea gives them money.

She insists that the girl go with Tiburcia so as to keep an eye on her.

*Notes and
interpretations here*

APPENDIX 4

1. Topic guide for *muchachas*

All information you provide will be handled with strict confidentiality.

Section 1. Her home and everyday life

1. Tell me about your job, how is it?
2. How do you feel in your workplace?
3. Do you have any favourite areas to be in the house?
4. Who does the cleaning of those areas?
5. Would you make any arrangements of the house decorations?
6. Have you felt uncomfortable at any moment?
7. Do you know of any rules to follow in the household?
8. Does everybody follow the same rules in the house?
9. What do you use to do your job?

Section 2. Her and the *patrona*, description of the relationship

1. Tell me about your *patrona*
2. How is she with you?
3. Do you think you know her well enough?
4. Have you learnt from her? Has she helped you? Have you helped her?
5. Does she make you feel different to others, or excluded or like one of the family?

Section 3. Her and the possible, impossible and her ideals.

1. Tell me about yourself, what do you like to do?
 2. What would happen if...
 3. What do you like about your job?
 4. What would you change of your job?
 5. Have you had better jobs?
 6. How would you react if the *patrona* was closer/close to you?
 7. Tell me one good/ bad memory about your experience.
8. Are you familiar with human rights?

2. Topic guide for *patronas*

All information you provide will be handled with strict confidentiality.

Section 1. Her and her home, her everyday life.

1. Tell me, how is your life at home?
2. How do you feel in your household
3. Describe me your house and those who live in it.
4. Do you know of any rules to follow in the household?
5. Does everybody follow the same rules in the house?
6. What happens when the rules are broken?
7. Anybody helping you to look after the house?

Section 2. Her and the service, relationship with the *muchacha*

1. Tell me about your *muchacha*
2. How is she?
3. Where is she from? How did she arrive here? How long ago?
4. What do you know about her personal life?
5. Has she got friends/ partner/ phonecalls. Does she go out much?
6. Do you think she knows you well?
7. Has she changed to your view, since she arrived here? Are you of any influence?
8. Have you learnt anything from her during your contact to her?
9. Es she very different to you?

Section 3. The changes of role, the *muchacha* rebels.

1. Can you remember a good / bad memory about any *muchacha*?
 2. What happens when the *muchacha* breaks a rule?
 3. Why did previous workers leave this household?
 4. Does the *muchacha* work or study?
 5. What would be your reaction if she...
6. Are you familiar with human rights?

APPENDIX 5

CODING FOR MUCHACHAS (A1).

THEME	CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	CONTENT	EXAMPLE
1. Being <i>muchacha</i>	1.1 The <i>sirvienta</i>	1.1.1 Coping with modern appliances. 1.1.2 Realising what people tag them as.	- Amusement to new technology like microwaves, fridge, oven, hot water. - Stories of confusion to define themselves in the city.	- Cooking comparisons. - Comparing the water source in the field and the city. - Magdalena's determination to get money. - Magdalena's story of name-calling.
	1.2 Domestic service as the alternative	1.2.1 Stories of loss, abandonment and struggle. 1.2.2 Self-assurance and pride.	- Necessity for income and for escaping the reality of the field. - Pride in successfully helping their family grow.	- Guadalupe's story of the loss of her father. - Victoria's point of view of her job.
2. La <i>patrona</i>	2.1 Powerful, rich and cultivated.	2.1.1 Protector and provider 2.2.1 Not sharing the same problems.	- Description of their loyalty as related to the good character of the patrona. - Distinctions drawn from personal traits.	- Comparing laughter. - Juanita's justification to remain loyal to a family.
	2.2 Different in blood (ethnicity)	2.2.1 Thick blood is superficial. 2.2.2 Blood as leader of relationships	- Reactions to the idea that they are similar. - Description of things they don't like.	- Guadalupe's definition of blood composition.

CODINGS FOR PATRONAS (A2)

THEME	CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	CONTENT	EXAMPLE
1. Being patrona	1.1 The matriarchal figure	1.1.1 Transmitter of values. 1.1.2 The decision-maker. 1.1.3 Mother and wife (gender). 1.1.4 Knowing how to find a muchacha. 1.1.5 Responsible for the family towards society.	- Descriptions of what is the household. - Stories about the construction of home. - Description of contraction. - Stories of shame and pride with regards to society.	-Mari's communicative home. - Andrea's quote of her home when her husband took care of it. - Critique to mothers who do not look after the household.
	1.2 The responsible for religion	1.2.1 A fellow Catholic 1.2.2 Helper of the muchacha	- Topics relating the trust to the muchacha as a deed of fraternity.	
	1.3 A victim	1.3.1 The working woman with a life outside home. 1.3.2 The frustrated housewife. 1.3.3 The frustrated professional.	- Definitions of housework and housewifery. - Stories of what they don't like. - Stories of their desires.	- Comparison between the household and baking a cake. - Justification for being like housewife but having other activities.

CODING FOR PATRONAS (A2)... continued

THEME	CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	CONTENT	EXAMPLE
2. La muchacha	2.1 Helpless	2.1.1 Object of distrust: dishonest and ignorant. 2.1.2 A necessary burden. 2.1.3 Victims of their own poverty and lack of education.	- Description of the worker. - Justification for having a muchacha. - Justification to the conditions in which the worker lives.	- Yolanda's perception of muchacha as dishonest about herself. - Description of benefits to the <i>muchacha</i> .
	2.2 An Indian (ethnicity)	2.2.1 Lack of preparation and judgement. 2.2.2 Undernourished. 2.2.3 Polluted.	- Responses to why they think a muchacha stays in the occupation. - Things they learnt from the muchacha.	- Comparison between the muchacha's eating habits and the patronas.
	2.3 Integration to the family (ethnicity)	2.3.1 Impossible due to the lack of trust. 2.3.2 Impossible due to the composition of blood. 2.3.3 Threat to the family when growing. 2.3.4 Her children are not part of the family.	- Description of future routes of the relationship with the muchacha. - Narrating reasons for dismissals of previous workers.	- Linda's story of the adoption of the child. - Coco's story of dismissing a muchacha because she got pregnant for a second time. - Quotes about muchachas being sexually abused by someone in the family.

APPENDIX 6

A1 / A2

COMMON THEMATICS SUGGESTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN *PATRONAS* AND *MUCHACHAS*

Muchachas/ Patronas	Negotiation of contract	Loyalty and trust (gender)	Same but unequal (religion)	Education (socio- economic)	Origin and ethnicity	Class (socio- economic)	Future perspectives	Culture as boundary (historicity)
Negotiation of contract	1. Depends on good or bad feelings							
Loyalty and trust (gender)		2. Sisterhood within gender						
Same but unequal (religion)			3. Same to God but unequal to the law					
Education (socio- economic)				4. Literate or illiterate				
Origin and ethnicity					5. Blood composition			
Class (socio- economic)						6. Destiny varies within rich and poor		
Future perspectives							7. the level of education	
Culture is boundary (historicity)								8. Urban vs. rural
	SIMILARITY			DIFFERENCES				

APPENDIX 7

PATRONAS AND MUCHACHAS

CODING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES AND THOUGHTS (HR).

CATEGORIES IN ISOLATION

THEME	CODING	CONTENT	TEXT	EXAMPLE
Payment, length of working,	1. Employment rights	1.1 Management of the contract 1.2 Payment	- How the relationship started and developed. - Defining who leads the relationship. - Effects and consequences of the verbal agreement.	- Antonieta's definition of domestic service as a personal arrangement. - Andrea compares domestic service with marriage. - Mari's definition of the hidden payments.
Standard of living	2. Standard of living	2.1 Health	- Description of illnesses and how patronas have taken muchacha to the doctor.	
		2.2 Maternity	- Interruption of work due to pregnancy	- Coco's justification for firing her worker.
		2.3 Schooling	- Stories of fear and actions preventing the worker to reflect and study.	- Description of the kitchen. - Andrea's monitoring Tiburcia outside her home.
Dignity	3. Rights to live free of abuse and other degrading treatments.	3.1 Abuse	- Stories of abuse given by patronas and muchachas.	- Magdalena's story of abuse.
		3.2 Discrimination and degradation.	- Deferential treatment and interaction. - The terms patrona and muchacha are used deferentially.	- Magdalena's feelings towards her patrona. - Patrona's idea that muchachas would abuse their trust. - Victoria's account of bad treatment. - Separation of cutlery.

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