



Domestic Workers' Resistance from the Twentieth Century to Post-Pandemic Rio de Janeiro

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MAY 28

Wednesday, May 28, 2025 | 3:30-4:30 PM | Max Salazar Building (MS 402) at CNM (900 University Blvd SE)

Drawing on Afro-Brazilian Nair Jane' de Castro Lima's testimony—a domestic workers' union leader with over fifty years of activism—obtained during my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro (June–August 2024) and secondary sources, this paper analyzes how race, gender, class, and nationalist politics have contributed to the formation of a feminized and racialized domestic workforce in Brazil since the 19th century. This paper aims to challenge the misconception that the lack of labor rights in this sector stems from domestic workers being “a class difficult to unionize.” By tracing this history from the past to the present, this research seeks to contribute to broader transnational discussions on how these intersectional factors shape the status of paid domestic work in Brazil. Additionally, it examines how these factors have been used as political tools to hide the agency of domestic workers, who have consistently resisted social marginalization in both Brazilian and international contexts since the 1930s.

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Jéssica Pereira has an unconventional academic background. She holds a BSc in Physics and an MSc in Materials Engineering from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She recently obtained an MA in Latin American Studies—with a concentration in History and Society—from the University of New Mexico, under the supervision of Professor Judy Bieber. Now pursuing a PhD in the History Department at UNM, Jéssica is expanding the research she initiated during her master's studies to other countries in Latin America. Her work examines how gender, race, class, and political structures intersect to hinder the professional recognition of domestic workers across the Americas, despite their long history of union activism.

All CNM students are invited to attend!

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