

# Building the professional identity in an outsourcing environment

## Construção da identidade profissional em um ambiente terceirizado

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### Abstract

This article seeks to understand how outsourced cleaning women at a federal university build their professional identity in a context of inequality and discrimination. A qualitative research was conducted, with participant observation of the ethnographic base and semi-structured interviews, analyzed by the Pecheutian Discourse Analysis. The results were organized from the workers senses about their social interactions, the perception of public invisibility, the prejudices experienced, their historicity, the cleaning woman being, the reasons for working and being outsourced. It was concluded that the professional identity of outsourced cleaning women is being built on duality. On the one hand, the others objective attributes: prejudices, an invisibility, a social class, the precarious work. On the other hand, the subjective attributes claimed by itself: their history, working reasons, understanding about their work and outsourcing. Looking for the balance between what they are and what they want to be, and for others recognition.

**Keywords:** Professional identity. Outsourcing. Public invisibility.

### Resumo

Este artigo buscou compreender como as faxineiras terceirizadas de uma universidade federal constroem sua identidade profissional num contexto de desigualdades e discriminações. Realizou-se uma pesquisa qualitativa, com observação participante de base etnográfica e entrevistas semiestruturadas, analisadas pela Análise do Discurso pecheutiana. Os resultados foram organizados a partir da produção de sentidos das faxineiras sobre suas interações sociais, a percepção da invisibilidade pública, os preconceitos vivenciados, a sua historicidade, o ser faxineira, os motivos para trabalharem e o ser terceirizada. Concluiu-se que a identidade profissional das faxineiras terceirizadas vai sendo construída na dualidade. De um lado as atribuições objetivas dos outros: os preconceitos, a invisibilidade, a classe social, o trabalho precarizado. Do outro, as atribuições subjetivas reivindicadas por si: sua história, seus motivos para trabalharem, o entendimento sobre seu trabalho e a terceirização. In the search for the balance between what they are and what they want to be, they aim for the recognition of others.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade profissional. Terceirização. Invisibilidade pública.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, society has undergone major changes in the world of work, but the practice of outsourcing is not a recent event. The approval of the outsourcing law, Decree No. 9.507/18 (BRAZIL, 2018), rekindled this discussion. Thus, it was decided to revisit outsourcing under the eyes of outsourced workers and the way they build their professional identity.

Outsourced workers are faced with a scenario of distinction in treatment with fixed employees generating conflicts and malaise (DRUCK; BORGES, 2002; COSTA, 2017). In order to contribute to this discussion, this study aimed to understand how outsourced cleaning women who provide services in one of the *campuses* of a Federal University build and reconstruct their professional identity, in the context of inequality and discrimination.

The cleaning women were chosen because they belong to a professional category that is closely linked to “public invisibility”, that is, the psychosocial disappearance of an individual before their common peers in the professions of the poorest classes (COSTA, 2008; GEMMA; FUENTES-ROJAS; SOARES, 2017). In addition, their work imposes, in general, classic characteristics of exclusion such as: gender, race, purchasing power and the type of activities they perform (SANTOS, 2010).

Cleaning work is essential for activities at the University, considering that it allows the maintenance and use of classrooms, laboratories and the others facilities. However, the social construction of the category is almost always stigmatized because this profession is historically linked to individuals with low or no qualifications, socially marginalized, who perform unhealthy and precarious work (BARBOSA *et al.*, 2010).

The spheres of work, employment, family and educational background are fundamental for social identifications of individuals. In the specific case, work is

understood as a source of meaning and self-definition for most individuals (ASHFORTH; MAEL, 1989; DUBAR, 2005). Individuals form, transform and modify the way they define themselves and others based on the activities they develop and the situations they experience in the work environment (PRATT, 1998). The construction of professional identities involves a process of negotiation between identity for others and identity for oneself. The construction of self-definition of oneself is made from a feeling of exclusion or participation in social groups, from the acceptance or rejection of the values and meanings of these groups (DUBAR, 2005). Thus, it is in the work environment, permeated by conflicts, prejudices and differences in rights and treatment, that outsourced cleaning women build their professional identity.

## THEORETICAL REFERENCE

We live in transitory forms of production that mirror deregulation of work, regression of social struggles for labor rights and constant adaptation to new ways of producing. By adapting the capitalist mode of production, we left basic constitutive elements of the mass production of Fordism and Taylorism to a new phase: the so-called “flexible accumulation” (ANTUNES, 2011). According to Harvey (1993, p.140), “flexible accumulation involves rapid changes in the patterns of uneven development, both between sectors and between geographical regions, creating, for example, a vast movement in employment in the so-called “service sector”.”

The consequences of these metamorphoses in the world of work generate an industrial reserve army that has a workforce in excess of those needed in the formal labor market, and accentuate inequalities, pushing workers into informality, thus expanding precarious work and wages in the service sector. According to Antunes (2011), these

transformations do not only impact the materiality of the reproduction of the workforce of these individuals, they have profound repercussions on the subjectivity and the way of being of these workers.

Starting from the premise that the subsumption of the worker's ideal is completely different from that conveyed by capital and directly impact the construction of the professional identity of these individuals, we focus on two complementary and interrelated thematic axes, namely: outsourcing in general and how it happens in Public Institutions; and professional identity, discussed with the survey of the main concepts related to the theme.

### **Outsourcing in the public service**

Third-party hiring has existed in Brazil since the mid-1967s, according to Caldeira and Caldeira (2019). Outsourcing can be defined from the perspective of management in two segments: the view of the contracting company and of the outsourced workers. In the first, there is the definition of a strategic tool in the search for business competitiveness through cost reduction and flexible contracts (DRUCK, 2006; SANTOS; ANDRADE; LIMA, 2019). In the second, the loss of some rights by workers, such as reduced wages and benefits and precarious working conditions stands out. This precarious situation is reflected in fixed-term employment contracts, increasing job insecurity and instability (DRUCK, 2006).

Within the scope of the Federal Public Administration, outsourcing was regulated by Decree 2,271/97 (BRAZIL, 1997), which established that only accessory, instrumental or complementary material activities could be subject to outsourcing to matters that are within the institution's legal competence. This decree was revoked by Decree No. 9,507, of 2018, which provides in its article 3, that all auxiliary, instrumental or accessory services may be

performed indirectly in the direct, autarchic and foundational federal public administration.

In this scenario, outsourcing in federal autarchies “has become a means of unbundling, that is, reducing the size of the State, with the aim of making organizations more flexible under the argument of facilitating the changes required by society” (SANTOS; ANDRADE; LIMA, 2019, p. 5). However, Caldeira and Caldeira (2019) warn that decision making when outsourcing services within these institutions should not be based solely on financial costs and flexibility.

The differences perceived by outsourced workers between them and those who carry out the same activity in the public service are present in remuneration (RIOS; GONDIM, 2010; COSTA, 2017), in working conditions (CARVALHO NETO, 1997) and in the treatment given by the heads (RIOS; GONDIM, 2010). Outsourced workers feel like a category on the margins of the productive system and socially excluded by permanent workers, which is why they want to be admitted by the contracting company (BRITO; MARRA; CARRIERI, 2012).

In view of the above, there was a need to investigate how these individuals construct their professional identities in the public service. And, as Antunes (2011) points out, the loss of the centrality of work has been ruled out, as we are a commodity-producing society, and the trends in transformations in the world of work further intensify this production, where there is an intellectualization of some works and a disqualification of others.

### **Construction of professional identity**

Identity is every aspect constituted from the experience of the subjects in society and organizations in a given historical time, that is, it is constructed in the interaction of the subject with the environment. Dubar (2005, p.136) defines identity as the "result at the same time stable

and provisional, individual and collective, subjective and objective, biographical and structural, of the various socialization processes that, together, build individuals and define institutions".

In this sense, personal identity is a process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of self-definition. As pointed out by Melo, Faria and Lopes (2019, p.834) "[...] the sum of the connections and influences of the family, social and organizational world, in addition to own interest and experience, the subject builds his identity". Furthermore, personal identity is not an isolated construction, it is a relational process that is carried out according to interactions with others. Like a construction that is established by/with/against others and should be seen as a negotiation between the individual and the collective. The approach to the notion of personal identity can, therefore, be in the relation between the biographical axis and the relational axis (DUBAR, 2005). According to the biographical axis, a person's identity is the self-definition developed by the individual oneself. It is the formulation of a socially constructed history, the subjective interpretation of past and present experiences. According to the relational axis, identity is constructed in order to face a self-definition from the outside. It is established according to the identifications, differentiations or oppositions with other identities. This construction is forged by ownership, claim or rejection of the social attributes attributed to it by others (GOFFMAN, 1988).

Personal identity is, therefore, the result of a permanent negotiation with yourself and with others, being particularly relevant in the interpretation of the subjective meaning that individuals give to their profession. The subjects' identification with a certain group causes them to create a bond with that group, and for the most part they begin to base their actions on the pattern of actions that the group practices. This behavior within the social standards of the group is directly linked to the subject's

desire to obtain recognition from the other, but in return, when the subjects tries to carry out their actions based on their desire, they begin to encounter a reality of duality between managing their decisions based on their desire and the standardized actions of the group (DUBAR, 2005).

Social identity refers to the subject's interaction in social groups or organizations, but for it to happen it is necessary for the subject to be recognized and legitimized by other members (BERGER; LUCKMAN, 1985). The subject, when inserted in a certain social group, differs from the rest, becoming one in that social group (MACHADO, 2003). It is highlighted here that social identities directly influence professional identity, because one contemplates the other and vice versa. This dependence refers to the fact that the two are composed of social groups and the interaction between the components of the groups.

From an early age, the subject learns that when he enters adulthood he must enter the world of work and that this insertion will bring him a social value, being recognized by the collective as a good father, good husband, good son, finally he will be known as a worthy man (COUTINHO; KRAWULSKI; SOARES, 2007). Dubar (2005) explains that the identity configuration and reconfiguration are constituted in the work environment. If this environment is considered to be marginalized by society, professional identity can suffer negative overlaps that negatively affect individuals. Jacques (1996) also points out that the insertion of the subject in the world of work is already pre-established by the factors of gender and class, in which it is reserved for poor girls the domestic work and for poor boys the execution of activities of lesser social nature.

In this sense, Carrieri, Paula and Davel (2008) raise the problem that the subject is at all times at risk of being absorbed by the organization, that is, transforming his personal identity into a

professional identity and starting to identify oneself with it. The authors also indicate that the reverse path can be taken from a professional identity and become a personal identity. In this sense, positive and negative aspects of either have an impact on the other.

## METHODOLOGICAL PATHS

In order to investigate how outsourced cleaning women who provide services to a Public University in the metropolitan region of Minas Gerais build their professional identity, a qualitative research was carried out (CRESWELL, 2007). The choice of the university was based on the accessibility criterion. At the researched *campus*, at the time of the research, there were ten outsourced cleaning women. All of them participated voluntarily in the research.

To collect primary data, participant observation with an ethnographic basis was used, which is based on systematically investigating the research problem presented, using a greater involvement of participants in data collection, trying to create harmony and credibility between the researcher and the participants (CHIZZOTTI, 2006). To this end, one of the researchers followed and carried out the entire work routine of cleaning women on *campus* and in the break periods (coffee and lunch) for two months. The researcher used the same uniforms and personal protective equipment as cleaning women. At the end of each day, all the data observed, the conversations, the remarkable facts, as well as the impressions of this researcher, were recorded in a field diary.

After the period of participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all cleaning women. The option for semi-structured interviews followed the premise of focusing on the interviewee's perception, as the protagonist of the research, the researcher's autonomy in the inclusion and deepening of issues that

were not foreseen in the previous step(s) (CRESWELL, 2007). The interviews were carried out at the workplace or at the participants' homes, according to their choice. The participants were coded from E01 to E10 to preserve their anonymity.

The analysis of these data was carried out by Michel Pêcheux's French Discourse Analysis (DA). DA allows us to see that the relationship between the world and language is always mediated by ideology (ORLANDI, 2009). Orlandi (2009, p. 16) states that DA works "with language in the world, with ways of meaning, with people speaking, considering the production of meanings, as part of their lives". In this sense, the field of DA takes place in the space of production of meaning, in which analyzes take place from "a work of meaning over meaning, taken in the indefinite relaunch of interpretations" (PÊCHEUX, 1990, p.51). As stated by Orlandi (2009), who was the precursor of DA based in Pêcheux in Brazil, Pêcheux guides his studies on the production of discourse meanings in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

For Pêcheux (1990), DA analyzes discourses through the historicity, interdiscursivity and systematicity of language. With regard to historicity, it is necessary to consider, from history, the subjects, processes and conditions of language production, relating it to the outside (ORLANDI, 2009). Interdiscursivity appears in the elements of the statement, that is, in the interdiscourses. Interdiscourse is that which is related to what has already been said by others and is present in our discursive memory (PÊCHEUX, 1990). The interdiscourses most present in cleaning women's speech were the religious and the capitalist.

As for systematicity, DA does not refer only to that focused on the syntactic structure of the language, but also to the discursive strategies used by the subjects, whether unconsciously or not, reflected asymmetrically in the statement elements

(PECHEUX, 1990). In the case of this research, the elements of the statement analyzed were: silences, metaphors, lexical selection, themes, the creation of characters and the implicit and explicit. These elements were highlighted in bold in the illustrative reports transcribed in the presentation and discussion of the results. Note that silences (not speaking) and metaphors (transfers at the level of the unconscious) can be used to omit themes, characters and/or inconsistencies found by the speaker (ORLANDI, 2009). Lexical selection, on the other hand, is a method that the speakers use to communicate and transmit their position. The creation of the characters can bring implicit and explicit that seek to defend or oppose the ideas proposed by other enunciators (FARIA, 2009).

Based on these premises, the analyzes were organized based on the production of the cleaning women's meanings on the following themes: social interactions, public invisibility, prejudice, historicity, cleaning women being, the reasons for working and being outsourced. It is noteworthy that, although separated to facilitate the understanding of the production of meanings, each of these themes happens in an intertwined way with the others and configure the professional identity of cleaning women.

## DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

It is noteworthy that the social and professional identity of cleaning women refers to their interaction in social groups, inside and outside the university, but for it to happen it is necessary that they are recognized and legitimized by the other members of the group, as stated by Berger and Luckman (1985) and Dubar (2005). Such interactions proved to be significant for all respondents, but are perceived in different ways. A group, represented here by E02, perceives an always positive interaction with the company and with co-workers. Another group, of which E09 is

part, points out that interaction with the company depends on the moment.

I say that I was **gifted** [...] that I arrived (at the company) and I was **well-received** [...]. It is a firm that has supported me since I got there. Since I got there, I have no enmity [...] (E02).

**Depending on the moment** I'm going through, **they** (other individuals in the group) are attentive to me [...] and there is a dialogue between us [...]. There is a companionship of my co-workers. (E09)

E02 is identified with its work group, comparing it with a gift. In E02's speech, her gratitude for welcoming the group and the company is implicit. Such gratitude is reinforced by the lexicon "gifted and well". In turn, E09, when using the expression "depending on the moment", implies that her interactions with the company (represented by the pronoun "they") are not always friendly, being superimposed that personal relationships are placed in the background.

Most of the cleaning women showed a feeling of belonging in relation to the group of co-workers. With regard to their superiors, whether from the outsourced company or the university, social interactions are marked by gratitude. The feeling of gratitude reveals to us the immediacy of the relationship of capital-labor contradiction, which is evidenced by the discourse of workers subsumed to the sociability of capital, that they should be grateful for having their bosses as a buyer of their workforce, even if disqualified. In the speeches of these workers, the working relationship, even in precarious conditions, is a gift, as it is better to be exploited than to die of hunger, as explained by Antunes (2018). For them, there is no contradiction in the capital-labor relationship, there is a "nice and charitable" employer who provides basic means of subsistence, with social struggles for the creation of labor legislation and safety and hygiene rules being "forgotten".

The (boss) had the **consideration** (with the workers) of reforming (sector in which she works) [...], he was very sacrificed and he made a **commitment** to modernizing [...], then he provided a lighter working environment. (E02)

He (the boss) told me he was going to give me a month's vacation in advance to take care (of her daughter), because she had left the hospital and was weak [...] I was **too grateful** to him (E09)

In addition to interactions with bosses and other cleaning women, the participants also configure their professional identity through contact with individuals belonging to other groups, such as teachers, technical-administrative employees and students. About them, the interviewees say, in general, that they are well regarded and treated with respect by both teachers and students.

They all (the teachers) treat me well. They say **good morning**, talk to me. So I can't talk about any of them, because they all treat me well. (E07)

From the statement of E07, it is possible to see that she considers simple facts as "good" treatment, as a "good morning" that she receives from a teacher. For her, this greeting already means being recognized and respected by them. Upon obtaining this recognition, she expresses the feeling of inferiority towards the teachers' working class, which origin may be due to not having studied and not fulfilling her dreams of consumption, work and the like. Other significant subjects (parents, children, relatives, neighbors) outside the work environment were also perceived as fundamental for the configuration of the cleaning women's identities. Through observation, it was possible to perceive the importance of these groups, which were always mentioned in coffee and lunch hours, mainly.

From their social interactions, cleaning women begin to make sense of the

invisibility of their profession. Such public invisibility, as stated by Costa (2008), reflects the fact that they are not perceived by other groups that interact, such as teachers, servants and students who frequent the places where they work. In this sense, it is highlighted that the cleaning activity is even more "invisible" than others, because it does not bring objective results and that it is only noticed by the error or lack, that is, it is considered efficient if it is really invisible (GEMMA; FUENTES-ROJAS; SOARES, 2017).

Even here in my neighborhood where I live there is a girl who studies there, here she knows me, there she doesn't. [...] I don't know **if** she is ashamed to greet me and to know that others think like, oh she knows her. [...] But there she barely looks at me when **I look at her, she turns her face**, she doesn't greet me. (E05)

Those who don't care pass by and don't even greet, but **at least don't pass and make faces**. (E10)

In the statement of E05, the use of the argumentative operator "if" demonstrates that she prefers to work on the reason for her invisibility as a hypothesis and not as a certainty. During participant observation, one of the researchers experienced invisibility, when she encountered people she knew who recognized her and did not even greet her. In E10's speech, it is possible to perceive the awareness that he is invisible to others, but as a defense strategy, she shows herself conformed to her own invisibility, stating that the situation could be worse, because "at least they don't pass and make faces".

However, the majority report that they do not perceive this invisibility on the part of the *campus* teachers. However, with regard to technical-administrative employees, the theme is silenced, mentioning that most students do not see them and that teachers greet them, that is, they leave in the air how this relationship is established with other employees. E09

evokes the broom metaphor to express how she feels invisible from the eyes of the students. In this case, the broom is used to symbolize her professional identity. For Orlandi (2009), a metaphor is to transfer to symbols the experience of the real that the individual was unable to create meaning. Broom is the main object of work of these women. When she compares herself to a broom, E09 transfers to this symbol her own professional experience of being invisible as a person, "objectifying" her own existence. The interviewee also points out that the cleaning workers' work reaches a position of visibility only through the negative, that is, it is only "noticed" when it was done poorly or not yet done.

**Like a broom if you don't trip over it and you can't see it.** Now if by chance we couldn't do it, they see and say: 'Whoa, where's the cleaning woman here? Where's she? It's dirty. Why didn't her clean it up?' So I see that **we are noticed only when we're not there.** (E09)

In addition to being inserted in a scenario of public invisibility, cleaning women experience another type of embarrassment at work, which refers to the perception that they suffer prejudice. Prejudice here is understood as a pre-judgment that is not malleable and that is based on little information, or wrong information about the subject or class in which you are judging (LEAL *et al.*, 2013).

When asked if she perceives any prejudice from people in relation to her profession, one of the cleaning women "says no, but points to her child making a positive sign with his head, so that this answer is not recorded in the recorder" (excerpt from the field diary). After turning it off, she returns to the subject and says that her son is ashamed that she is a cleaning woman. The discrepancy between the son's expectation about his profession and what it really is resides in the social prejudice that falls on cleaning work. Working with dirt means working with the rest, the filthy, the worthless, the useless, the stinky one

(COSTA, 2008; LEAL *et al.*, 2013; GEMMA; FUENTES-ROJAS; SOARES, 2017). Such adjectives are transferred socially to these women, so the child is ashamed.

The reports of two situations, noted in the field diary, exemplify such a transfer. The first was when a cleaning woman was called by the boss and asked, several times, if she had not picked up an electronic object that had been left on the table. She vented that she could be humble, but she was not a thief. In the second, another cleaning woman reported that one day when she arrived to clean a classroom, the students had tied a trash bin full of trash to the ceiling so that when she opened the door, all the trash fell into her, and the students were laughing. She was so embarrassed by the fact that she did not report it to any superior or open a formal complaint against the students.

Considering the context of the insertion and maintenance of cleaning women in the labor market, its historicity also reflects in the configuration of professional identity. In this sense, it is possible to report a set of factors that constitute the history of these women and that end up conditioning their own "choice" by the cleaning profession. At first, there is schooling. Most didn't even make it to high school. Professions linked to the cleaning area are historically linked to people with low or no education (COSTA, 2008; BARBOSA *et al.*, 2010). The reasons given for not studying are due to the lack of opportunity and the choices they made in relation to family and studies.

It was a **lack** of opportunity; I had no **financial condition**. My mother had **no** financial condition. (E04)

I stopped (studying) because at the time I **got married**, I thought about going back several times, but then the **children** came, work, home (E05)

I had to work to help my family, so **there was no way** to study (E08)



Analyzing the lexical selections “lack”, “financial condition”, “got married”, “children” and “there was no way”, it is possible to notice that the interviewees put themselves as victims of the system, that is, it were the conditions that did not allow them, implying the capitalist and meritocratic interdiscourse that they would have been successful if they had studied. This statement is also marked by the characters in the speeches: family, mother, children, home, who are present in the reasons that led them to the profession of cleaning woman.

In a second moment, the story of their mothers is brought up. In most cases, the mothers of the interviewees never worked outside the home and the ones who worked performed the services of cleaning woman, housekeeper, washerwoman and cook. Thus, cleaning women built their professional identity from an early age. As stated by Goffman (1988), society creates its stereotypes such as: having little education, early pregnancy and being from a low-income family. In this sense, historically established family relationships are repeated. Thus, the insertion of these women in the world of work was largely influenced or even pre-established by the factors of gender and social class to which they belong (JACQUES, 1996), indicating, once again, impacts of the relational axis (DUBAR, 2005) in the (re)construction of their identities.

When asked what it is like to be a cleaning woman, most of them silenced the answer. They direct their responses to what activities were carried out and the reasons that led them to be cleaning women. In this sense, by not answering the question, they provide us with indications that even they themselves do not recognize positive aspects of their profession that deserve to be talked about. However, E03 defines what it is to be a cleaner from the prejudices experienced at work. By using the lexical expression “being a cleaner, we”, she reinforces this prejudice as social,

encompassing her peers. However, when using the lexical expression “I think that for me” she emphasizes that the dislike of being a cleaner is a feeling of hers, not generalizing to the group.

I don't like the cleaning profession. I think being a cleaner, we **eat a lot of crows**, there are people, some people, the minority treats us well, the others step on us. So to be a cleaner I think that for me it is to **deal with the pride of others**, and I don't like it. (E03)

E03 emphatically states that being a cleaner is that person who “eats a lot of crows” and “deals with the pride of others”. Both expressions refer to the act of endure. The first means having to endure name-calling and insults and not being able to fight back and the second is to endure many “frills” of others. The act of endurance refers to resisting and tolerating, even if it brings suffering. So, to be a cleaning woman is to suffer in silence, because the professional choice was not a “choice”, but the reproduction of a path already predestined when they were born as poor and women. Such a situation ends up being reinforced for the reasons that led them to work.

The professional identity of outsourced cleaning women is built through their exchange of experiences when they sell their workforce for a salary and for the reasons that led them to work. Outsourced workers tend to internalize that their main reasons for working are related to the financial dimensions, since being outsourced they do not have their work legitimized by the social nature, which leads to a breach of professional identity (DUBAR, 2005). In the interviews, the feeling of working for money, being independent, being able to consume and being able to dream emerged.

Work is part of life people; without it we cannot try to be what we are. **Have and give a better comfort to the family.** And you cannot dream without a job, if

**you have no money**, you have no dream. (E05)

For me working **is everything** I like to work, you **being independent**, having your money for you to **buy your things** and so, so for me it is good to work. (E08)

In the statements, two main aspects can be noted with regard to work. The first one is the financial one that allows independence. And the second, is the financial that makes it possible to consume and dream. The dream itself is linked to consumption to “have and give comfort”. E05 points out that whoever “has no money, has no dream”. It is noteworthy the capitalist interdiscourse that reaffirms, at all times, that selling your labor power as merchandise for a salary is something desirable and that allows consumption, as confirmed by Brito, Marra and Carrieri (2012).

In this context, the respondents were asked about what it means to be outsourced, and whether they perceived differences between them and the cleaners who were public servants. All answered yes and pointed out the main differences in salary and benefits.

I will tell you in all sincerity, I would rather be a public servant! [...] I think **we are very demoted** because outsourcing, it is a **minimum wage and that's it**. (E02)

There is a difference, this is clear, **there is a difference**. It starts with the **salary**, right, **the benefits** and so on. (E06)

In addition to these, differences in working conditions were emphasized, reflected in the amount of work to be performed and in the materials available for its performance. In the statement of E03, such differences are explicit.

The difference is that in addition to the fact that she earns more than us, the service is much less than ours, [...] **everything is more organized...**

**They have a cart** [...] Everything is more organized and we, **in addition to being almost triple the service**, [...] earn less and are discriminated against. (E03)

Also referring to the salary difference, in a report recorded in the field diary, a cleaning woman pointed out that she worked with a public servant doing the same job, but she only earns a minimum wage and does not receive any hazard pay, while the other earn four times more than she. It is noteworthy that, at the time of data collection, the *campus* of the researched university had only one cleaner public servant.

These disparities in wages and benefits, the number of services and working conditions, together with the vulnerability of employment and the prejudice suffered, create in cleaning women the desire to be a public servant, that is, the desire to be on the other side. It is in this context that the dream of belonging arises, as also stated by Brito, Marra and Carrieri (2012). However, such a dream is made impossible by the reality of Brazilian legislation. The position of cleaning servant is in extinction, at the researched university, since the enactment of Law No. 9,632, of May 7, 1998, which provides for the extinction of positions within the scope of the direct, autarchic and foundational Federal Public Administration. The position is in extinction, as there is, still, on the *campus*, a cleaning servant. Thus, when she retires, the position will be considered extinct at the university.

My dream **would be** to be effective. Obvious! If there was a public selection, but ... There is even the **comment** that they usually say that it is an extinct position [...] So I don't think that would be the phrase well, it is an extinct position, **extinct is what no longer exists, like a dinosaur**. (E09)

At the beginning of her speech, when using the verb "to be" in the conditional tense, E09 already expresses her

uncertainty and indignation, when referring to something she would have liked to have happened. Despite the existence of the law since 1998, E09 states that there is a “comment”, that is, a point of view that is not hers. Thus, she doubts the law itself when saying that “they usually say”, not recognizing this fact as reality. When using the dinosaur metaphor, the interviewee also brings her worldview to the question: “extinct is what no longer exists”. His argument denotes the real work: the cleaning service exists; she and her colleagues exist, so they are not extinct. In this sense, the construction of your identity is forged by the rejection of the social attribute (GOFFMAN, 1988) of “extinction” that was attributed to you by others, identifying, here again, the importance of the relational axis (DUBAR, 2005) in the identity configuration of the interviewees.

In view of the impossibility of competitions, then, the group of cleaning women hopes that outsourcing continues and that the companies winning the bid are “good” and hire them. In E02's speech, she asks her working group to “ask God” that the current company continue to operate. At this point, we highlight the religious interdiscourse to designate something that is difficult to happen naturally, but that with divine intervention can materialize. When human activities fail, people look to religion for answers to their desires, since religious discourse is characterized by the idea of hope, certainty and reliability.

Just like I talk to the girls, here comes a bidding there, **let's ask God** because it's a **good firm**. (E02)

It is noteworthy that for most of these women the other job option, within their current conditions, would be as a housekeeper. And being a housekeeper is not a possibility they crave, because a cleaner is a professional category that has the construction of its identity from the denial of its own condition of housekeeper

(TEIXEIRA; SARAIVA; CARRIERI, 2015). The statement of E01 brings with it this double negation: domestic work and outsourcing. Analyzing her reports, it is observed that she uses the verb “I prefer” to talk about her relationship with the workplace, making it explicit that, even if there was the possibility of working elsewhere, she would not go. Thus, she does not refer to the service provider company, but to the University, as if she were its employee.

While here at the University, I **prefer** to stay here. I like it here [...]. (E01)

Also denying domestic work and outsourcing, E03 expresses her desire to get a better job through formal education. It is clear in her statement that she does not like what she does and highlights that she is only in this job because she has not yet found another “better service”. “Accepting the job that appears” is what happens to the large mass of workers who are removed from the formal labor market and driven by marginality, underemployment and the constitution of the massive reserve army, as stated by Costa (2010).

For me it was the job that appeared [...], now I'm studying to try to improve, to see if I can get a **better service**. (E03)

The interdiscourse of meritocracy in capitalism also appears in its statement, bringing the responsibility for its own qualification and the identification and insertion in the “better service” as individual actions of the subject. It is clear that, for the researched group, the dream is to have a better quality of life, to be better paid, not caring about the exploitation relationship of their workforce, as long as it is recognized and financially rewarded for it.

Although the work of outsourced cleaning women was the solution presented to the group for unemployment and the lack of financial resources, the fear of

unemployment reappears at each end of the service provider's contract, that is, at each new bid. Outsourced cleaning women try to live with the uncertainties of a “service with no future” and with the insecurity of something that is not something they “can trust”, as stated by E03.

I think it is a **service with no future**. I'm looking for a public vacancy. But outsourcing is like that. [...] So, **solve the problem when we are unemployed, but it is not a safe thing, that we can trust**. (E03)

The cleaning women's professional identity was and is built amid an environment of conflicts, such as their coexistence with the cleaning servant and the perception that there are differences in working conditions, in addition to the instability that comes with each new bidding, confirming Druck and Borges (2002).

By making sense of their social interactions, public invisibility, the prejudices experienced, their historicity, being a cleaner, the reasons for working and being outsourced, the cleaning women participating in this research build their professional identity. Such an identity is a relational process of continuous construction (DUBAR, 2005) that is carried out according to the interactions with the service provider company, with the university, with its bosses, with the teachers, with the students, with technical-administrative servers, with their family, with their co-workers, and with society in general. In this relational process, there is the identity of cleaning women to others with whom they live, marked by invisibility and prejudice. In the biographical process of construction (DUBAR, 2005), it is as cleaning women themselves define themselves through their socially constructed stories and their subjective interpretations of past and present experiences, that is, their historicity, the reasons that led them to work as cleaners, as they perceive themselves as cleaning

women and as outsourced workers. And they build their professional identity in the midst of divergences and objective and subjective transactions between their identity for themselves and their identity for others.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to understand how outsourced cleaning women who provide services in one of the *campuses* of a Federal University build their professional identity. To this end, a qualitative research was carried out, with participant observation based on ethnography and semi-structured interviews, analyzed by the *Pecheutian* Discourse Analysis. The results were organized based on the production of cleaning women's senses about: their social interactions, the perception of public invisibility, the prejudices experienced, their historicity, the cleaning women being, the reasons for working and being outsourced.

It was noticed that the interviewees build their professional identities marked by: a positive interaction with bosses and coworkers, however they live with instability at work and they want to be part of the permanent staff, even being aware that there is a law that regulates the outsourcing of cleaning services; historically constituted family relationships are repeated and they reproduce their mothers' types of employment; and experiences of prejudice and public invisibility at work and in the family, having as main reason to work the financial resource to be able to be independent, dream and consume.

It was concluded that the professional identity of outsourced cleaning women is being built in duality: on the one hand, the objective attributions of the others: prejudices, invisibility, social class, precarious work; on the other, the subjective attributions claimed by themselves: their history, their reasons for working, the understanding of their work

and outsourcing. In the search for the balance between what they are and what they want to be, they aim for the recognition of others.

The findings of this study can contribute in a pragmatic way to improvements in people management policies and practices in organizations that have outsourced workers and to literature for working with the theme of identity with outsourced cleaning professionals, since, nationally and internationally, there are few studies that work on these themes in an integrated manner.

The limitations of this research are inherent to the fact that it was carried out in

only one of the *campuses* of the researched University. As difficulties found, initially, the cleaning women's initial resistance to the study itself stands out, as they accepted to share their daily lives with a researcher and student from the institution itself.

It is recommended a research agenda that includes the monitoring of Decree No. 9,507/18 on outsourcing and its diverse impacts on the life and identity of workers, as well as the study of the identity of outsourced workers from other professional categories covered in order to identify similarities and discrepancies.

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