Changing geographies of cleaning in Brazil

An approach to in-house and outsourced workers at clinics

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Abstract

In the last decades outsourcing became a far-reaching way to employ workers across economic sectors, existing alongside ‘traditional’ in-house contracts. The comparison between those two forms of labour and the changes that outsourcing poses for workers are what ignite the present research. Thus, this master thesis is a qualitative investigation whose focus is on the question *how do in-house and outsourced cleaning jobs at healthcare clinics in Natal, Brazil, differ from each other when it comes to workers’ experiences, workplaces situatedness and political possibilities?*

The literature aiding the discussion covers labour agency, sociospatialities of the workplace, forms of employment relations, flexibility, and social security through work. The fieldwork was conducted between August and December 2016 through semi-structured qualitative interviews with 21 cleaners and 2 labour union representatives. Document analysis, photography and observation also had minor methodological importance.

The fieldwork data revealed substantial differences between in-house and outsourcing when it came to the cleaners’ experiences, with in-house workers demonstrating a more comfortable and safe self-perception of their work-lives than the outsourced. At the same time, in-house workers were also likely to undergo abnormal working conditions, even when they did not see them as such. The political possibilities of in-house workers were debilitated by practices rooted in historical paternalism that undermined solidarity among workers and reinforced the employer-employee bond. The latter would not have been problematic if it was not for the power asymmetries that marked such relation. Outsourcing was rather free from paternalism, but also costly from the viewpoint of working conditions. Lastly, the workplace situatedness created different sociospatial structures for in-house and outsourced cleaners, which helped and constrained them at different occasions.
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Abbreviations

BBC – British Broadcast Corporation
BRL – Brazilian real
CLT – Consolidation of Labour Laws (Brazil)
COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions
EDT – Elite Development Theory
EEA – European Economic Area
IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
ILO – International Labour Organization
IPEA – Institute of Applied Economic Research (Brazil)
JfJ – Justice for Janitors
LCD – Labour-centred Development
MST – Landless Workers’ Movement (Brazil)
MTPS – Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Brazil)
NGO – Non-governmental Organization
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMDB – Brazilian Democratic Movement Party
PSDB – Brazilian Social Democracy Party
PT – Workers’ Party (Brazil)
SEIU – Service Employees International Union (U.S. and Canada)
SINDILIMP – Union of the Employees at Conservation, Hygiene and Cleaning Companies of Rio Grande do Norte (Brazil)
SIPERN – Union of Nurses and Employees at Hospitals and Healthcare Institutions of Rio Grande do Norte (Brazil)
TST – Superior Labour Court (Brazil)
1 Introduction

The first chapter starts with the thesis outline, where the research question, the study summary and comments on relevance are presented. An explanation about labour geography comes next. I chose to do so because as a relatively new approach within the discipline, labour geography can appear as unknown to some readers who are only used to the traditional currents of economic and social geographies. Thus, while this part may seem reductive to a reader who is familiarised with the term, it can also function as an opening section to others who are not. Lastly, the background addresses outsourcing in general and its political context in Brazil.

1.1 Research outline

This qualitative research comprehends a labour geography study towards the work of cleaners in Brazil by using a comparative approach between in-house and outsourced informants. The design limits the scope in location (the city of Natal), economic sector (health industry) and size of firms (clinics and laboratories only). Accordingly, the research question is how do in-house and outsourced cleaning jobs at health clinics in Natal, Brazil, differ from each other when it comes to the workers’ experiences, workplace situatedness and political possibilities? It was analysed how workers perceive their individual power and involvement at work, the dynamics of employer-employee relations, the geographies of clinics, the legal circumstances and the political context at both national and workplace levels.

The methodology addresses qualitative research techniques and concerns, such as interview, ethical considerations, anonymity, positionality and reflexivity. The main reference is the work of Hay (2010), along with other less cited authors. Additionally, empirical narratives describe the planning and execution of the fieldwork, emphasising the personal process, explaining the research object, case sampling, interviewing and coding the data. Due to the political turmoil influencing the legal decisions towards outsourcing in Brazil, the context of the country during the fieldwork is also covered in the methodology as part of the data collection process.

The analysis chapter is where the data is refined, organised in codes and examined. It addresses empirical evidences, focusing on the informants’ experiences by using direct quotation, linking them to the literature and creating theoretical concepts to organise the lived reality of cleaners. First, in-house and outsourced labours are presented separately, emphasising the specific characteristics of each form of employment. Later on, a section that combines the two suggests sharing points of what it is to be a cleaner, independently of the contracting method.

In the discussion the focus shifts from the informants to the examination of concepts found in the theory and in the analysis, aiming at convergences and divergences of the literature and what was found in the fieldwork. The objective in splitting the fieldwork data is to create an introductory chapter to familiarise the readers with the workers reality (analysis) before going in-depth into de theory (discussion). The discussion structure is similar to that of the theory chapter: first, multiple sociospatialities, where the social construction and the geographical disposition of labour and capital in Natal resulted in opportunities and limitations in the clinics; secondly, flexible practices, where new forms of adjusting labour collide not only with the historical fixity of Brazil, but also with workers and employers’ will to bypass regulation; and thirdly, political representation, where the consequences of such form of employment relation on the organisation of labour is addressed, emphasising how political representation is occurring and the prospect of change.

1.1.1 Relevance

To reflect about the relevance of a scientific work is a way of thinking how a study can deliver something back after its completion. When it comes specifically to Geography, the
work of Staeheli and Mitchell (2005) regards forms of relevance that are expected to be found in this master thesis.

First, pertinence is a type of relevance that can mean a variety of things, ranging from intervening, so as to change political and intellectual debates, to contributing or contesting those debates. Perhaps more importantly, it is the understanding that while pertinence can be intended, it cannot be predicted. That is, the users of a specific research determine pertinence subsequently. It is a post facto attitude by the author or specific readers that make the research pertinent.

Secondly, the authors suggest relevance as commitment to be a moral and political philosophy of social justice. The research field is directed towards both conforming to that commitment and supporting to realise the fundamentals that lie at its root. Thus, it implies commitment to some set of values, object or political offspring. This thesis is committed to a perspective in social science that does not commodify people in the form of labour and therefore seeks to investigate the experiences of workers and relate them to the political realm for the sake of social change and political awareness.

Thirdly, relevance as centrality deals with a work being central to key scholarly developments and debates. In other words, it is the geographic thinking as a means of promoting its own pertinence. This study gives evidence to the field of labour geography, a relatively new sub-discipline that focus on spatial relationships and socioeconomic currents within labour and political systems.

### 1.2 Labour and geography

Following the argument of centrality, it is important to support lay people and scholars with where this master thesis is situated within geography. As such, a contextualisation of the relationship between labour and the discipline is here addressed until the stage of what is today named labour geography.

Labour, including all its variation (e.g. waged, voluntary, slave, reproductive, informal, autonomous), is in the basis of human relation to nature and space. In order to express it as a legit field of study for geographers, this section starts by exploring the work of Andrew Herod (2001), who invigorates the word ‘workers’ by giving it meanings that go beyond economic input, granting them with a set of geographical possibilities and
interpretation that are able to challenge and outmanoeuvre the dynamics of capitalistic societies across the globe.

From a historical perspective, the first systematic accounting of labour within the discipline of geography begun in the 19th century, as commercial geographers sought to document the resources of territories. That is, raw materials for industry, navigable riverways, location of mountain pathways or climatic condition affecting production; everything of economic or political relevance was taken into account. From a labour perspective, labour was inert, a component of production no different than a soil type. That does not mean that workers were unimportant for commercial geography: contrarily, its practitioners were highly concerned about relative productivity rates, skills and upkeep costs of different colonised peoples (Herod 2001). For imperial Britain, for instance, being aware of which of its subjects could produce textiles or pick tea more competently was a crucial matter.

Urban economic geography, an approach influenced by environmental determinism as seen by Peet (1985), emerged at the beginning of the 20th century and justified the populating process of a city through naturalistic analogy, determining who lives where in consequence of “biological economics”, competition and dominance. As in previous commercial geography, the notion of workers as inert was present, since the instability of physical environmental forms were credited to eco-economics contractions and expansions driving groups of workers out or inwards a city centre, rather than crediting them as sentient in the shaping of their own lived landscape.

1.2.1 Neoclassical industrial location theory

The ideas tracing back to neoclassical industrial location theory have had a great impact on how geographers theorised work throughout the twentieth century. As a predominant theoretical trend in economic geography until the 1970s, it came up with four principles on how economic landscape is shaped (Herod 2001). First, based on what Weber (1929) called “agglomeration forces”, such as transportation and labour costs that were significant to locational decision of enterprises. Secondly, industrial location theory focused on spatial conduct of competitors, placing the location of a specific firm as dependant on the location of its competitors (strategically close or far from them). Thirdly, it was ‘behavioural’, giving attention to how the internal management of a business influences its decision-making,
therefore altering the economic geography. Fourth, the single enterprise nature of management evolved to the scope of a broader theorisation of the entire economic landscape development (Lösch 1954). Those prepositions were refined and criticised based on their largely spatial assumptions, positivist methodology and for presumption that social actors come to the market as equals (Herod 2001). However their contribution to the marginalisation of labour did not change. In fact, neoclassical industrial location theory focused on firm behaviour not only by explaining its decisions, but also constraining economic geographies to those decisions.

From a labour geography perspective, the implications were that labour came along as passive, together with transportation nodes and networks, raw materials and the market in analysing spatial distribution. That of consumers was the only active role workers had. Equally, neoclassical economics levelled out everything to market efforts of demand and supply, absenting historical and geographical specificity. And lastly, the possible accounts made on labour reduced it to categorisation of skills, wages, levels of unionisation, gender, location and proclivity to striking (Herod 2001). Neoclassical industrial location theory, as interpreted in economic geography, presented the point of view of capital and vacated itself from workers as individuals and members of social groups.

1.2.2 Marxist-inspired approach to labour

Ideas derived from Marxism in the second half of the twentieth century changed the way economic geography was traditionally done. Differently from the neoclassical approach, where spaces were theorised as an ontological and preceding arena where social life and economic activity took place, Marxist-inspired geographers focused on the production of such spaces, their uneven development and expansive forces of capitalistic accumulation. With such trend, thinkers such as Lefebvre (1974) addressed space as a product of capital’s needs to create particular landscapes in order to secure accumulation. Within the core ideas of capital reproduction and capitalist social relations, lies capital’s ability to construct specific material geographies to ensure surplus value. As expressed by Herod (2001), this is a wicked point for workers, since they lack geographical visions when it comes to how the economic spaces should be organised. Even though labour class struggle is frequently highlighted by
Marxist-inspired literature, and even emphasised in the production of space, its role is, again, secondary, since class struggle reacts after the creation of capitalist space, dismissing workers from being able to make their own landscapes.

Harvey (1982, 2001) explores the notion of spatial fixes created by capital to secure its own circulation, being central to unequal development of the geography of capitalism. Similarly, Smiths (1990) addresses the uneven production of space as being inherent to capital (or its inherent inability to produce even spaces), also highlighting the social construction of scales as resulting of the process of capitalistic accumulation. Massey (1995, cited in Herod 2001) aimed at the links between production and social structures to justify the space-economy, illustrating the dynamics of economic geography to that of geologic deposition, that is, that capital produces uneven layers of investment across landscapes. The literature of Harvey, Smiths and Massey, however consistent and pertinent in their own scopes, presented the workers with the mere hope to occupy spaces created by capital.

The literature of Castells (1977, 1983) also covers class and power. Part of his work examines how labour-led rent strikes were able to modify urban politics across the globe. He empirically documented cases where the working-class actively framed the constructed landscape, and however theorising workers’ power, Castells also prioritised capital (or better present in his literature, “the dominant social groups”) as prevailing. As happened with the geographic thinking before the second half of the 20th century, it is not accurate to say that workers were ignored. Labour is, indeed, central to the shaping of landscapes in Marxist-inspired literature. According to Marx (cited in Powell 2001), all value derives from labour, which is essentially commodified by capitalists relation. Even though thinkers such as Walker and Storper (cited in Herod 2001) did differentiate the commodification of labour to that of inanimate goods due to workers’ behaviour being drastically influential on production, the centrality of labour is present from the viewpoint of capital. Herod (2001) points out the distinction between an ‘actor’ and a ‘reactor’ in the construction of geographical space: that is, within Marxist-inspired literature, capital (actor) is the emanating source of power, while labourers (reactor) come as secondary or weak, excluded from the core positions in the context of their own historiography.

1 Lefebvre (1974: 55) states “today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space. Indeed, it is that struggle alone which prevents abstract space from taking over the whole planet (…) Only class struggle has the capacity to (…) generate differences which are not intrinsic to economic growth qua strategy, logic or system.”
2 Harvey (2001) defines spatial fix as capitalism’s drive to resolve its own inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring.
1.2.3 Labour geography

The premise of Herod (2001) is that just as capital does not exist without space, neither does labour. Indeed, the fact that capitalist production relies on the social reproduction of labour power makes the analysis of one incomplete without the other (Jordhus-Lier 2007). Both the biological and social reproductions of workers need specific geographical location to occur, and therefore workers are willing to shape the economic landscape in ways that assist the progress of their own self-reproduction. Such recognition acknowledges them to be inserted into the analysis of capital location and the reason why economic landscapes are made in certain ways and not in others. Even when the labour struggle is not revolutionary or when workers are still constrained to the capitalistic system, the result of the geography of capitalism must not be interpreted as an exclusive prerogative of capital. That is not attesting, however, that workers are free to construct landscapes as they will: labour is limited by history, geography, uncontrollable structures and by actions of opposition; and capital is structured under the same set of limitations.

Harvey (1982, 2001) explains spatial fixes by capital’s ability (which comes out as necessity too) to build certain landscapes at certain point in its history to then have to destroy them (and devalue much of the capital invested therein) at a later moment in order to create arrangements for a new spatial fix and develop fresh accumulation in new locations. Similarly, workers, too, attempt to create “labour spatial fixes” in their own image at particular moments in particular places (Herod 2001). Such recognition sets the production of space at the heart of workers social praxis, even when not conceptualised as such by the same workers. The spatial fix done by labour also concerns that some workers will choose some spatial fixes over others, depending on the context within which they are inserted. Likewise, Jordhus-Lier (2007) stresses that spaces often mean different things to capital and labour. As for workers, spaces are the locus where they live, learn, consume, socialise and reproduce. Therefore, labour will seek to have charge of those places, resulting in a set of differences presented in the spatial fixes forged by workers. That acknowledges us to deconstruct the notion of an “undifferentiated mass” in a “heroic proletarian”. Their influence over the construction of landscapes will vary according to whether they live in the global north or in the global south, to their relationship with the means of productions, their industrial sector, the region of a particular country, whether they are male of female, young or old, and so forth.
Jordhus-Lier (2007) examines workers from different perspectives. From the analytical point of view under capitalism (as in a *class-in-itself*), the deepened spatial integration of the world economy suggests the rising of a global working class. Even though such class could constitute a politically powerful polemic, for most of the world’s workers this does not live up to reality. As a result, when we seek to comprehend the working class as a political entity (as in a *class-for-itself*), then the uneven development of landscape under capitalism puts forward serious divergences and challenges for any prospect of a global class-based movement. In accordance, such non-essentialist perspective on labour is underlying the varying labour spatial fixes. For example, whereas one group may attempt to maintain employment in their home community or country, another may stimulate capital flight to theirs by agreeing to work for less or with fewer restrictive work practices (Herod 2001).

Such critique around the working-class being theoretically neglected in spatial analysis is also present in the work of Selwyn (2016), who presented a labour-centred development theory (LCD) in opposition to what he claims to be elite development theories (EDT). The argument against the EDT is that most of development thinking is elitist, prioritising capital’s demand for accumulation, competitiveness and the systematic usage of labour as a premise on which human development is built. Therefore labour demands are placed in secondary positions, only possible when the needs of capital are already assured.

Within EDT lies an inconsistency that refers to workers being exploited on account of their own prosperity, as defended by Selwyn (2016). If labour wants to outmanoeuvre EDT, it must put in practice the political economy of labour, pushing away the primacy of the political economy of capital. Selwyn (2016) illustrates LCD with examples such as Landless Labourers Movement (known as MST) in Brazil, where small farmers and wage labourers (along with their families) obtained land-titles to over 350 thousand families by using the agrarian legislation to legitimate the occupation of land lacking social purposes, namely unproductive properties. Another example is found in Argentina, a country followed by successive crisis in 2001, resulting in movements like the ‘*fábricas ocupadas*’ (occupied

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3 To Selwyn (2016), the political economy of labour is not focused on how to enhance accumulation, but in a better understanding of social wealth. This may include (2016: 1038) “gender and ethnic equality (to reduce differential rates of exploitation), provision of material and temporal resources to secure and ease the social reproduction of labour (for example the provision of child and crèche care, education, free or cheap food for children at school and beyond); The attainment of higher wages and better conditions in work; (...) Access to the means of production (e.g. land, factories, workplaces) and survival (e.g. water and electricity), Adequate housing and nutrition; And the ability to engage in culturally-enhancing activities such as education, socialising and leisure.”
factories in Spanish), where organised unemployed workers administrated factories that were inactive due to the failure of their owner in paying debts. Although not mentioned by Selwyn (2016), the case of Argentina is interesting because differently from Brazil (where LCD appears in opposition to EDT), ‘fábricas ocupadas’ was a successful alternative to EDT after the collapse of capital. Other examples presented by the author include the ‘Industrial wage workers’, in China; and ‘Abahlali basemjondolo’, in South Africa.

The recent work of Selwyn is important for theorising labour’s role as primary and by giving workers an independent nature that can be achieved once they get together, and for that reason, it is of relevant illustration for this study. However, his literature presents a relatively polarised scheme of workers against capital (LCD vs. EDT) and ignores the role of workers who are not placed in conscious opposition to elite actors in the construction of space. Consequently, LCD only contemplates part of workers ability to interfere in the geographies of space. In this sense, the literatures of Herod (2001) and Jordhus-Lier (2007) cover a more complex, yet less radical approach to the relationship between labour and space.

When it comes to the state, we can discuss its role as embedded in the dynamics of both profit (of major relevance for capital) and welfare (of major relevance for workers). Due to its size, legal powers and monopoly force, the state is the main institution of social regulation within the labour market (Jordhus-Lier 2007). First, because the sphere of social reproduction exists with a considerable degree of autonomy to the demands of capital, being difficult for the latter to control the reproduction of labour and shape it according to its needs; and second, capital itself is constituted by competing enterprises, being impossible for different firms to orchestrate production, reproduction and political control as a whole.

By advocating for a non-caricatured image of the state, capital and labour market, Jordhus-Lier (2007) stresses that labour markets are unique, socially constructed spaces that are constantly generating uneven and varied geographies. Equally, labour markets evolve, as the mediation of demand and supply are being constantly subject of struggle. A possible illustration of the blurry lines among those actors is capital’s reliance on specific structures of labour, encouraging itself to intervene in the reproduction of workers in particular places to prevent the collapse of local labour markets, for example through food coupons or educational provision/finance (Jonas 1996).

Burawoy (1985) asks a still accurate question on whether state and capital lean towards merge or separation. The answer varies significantly across spaces, from corporatist states to the Nordic model(s), being co-related to how labour spatial fixes will occur and how such fixes will be scaled. The words like state, capital and labour come as important ideas when
we try to explain the surface structure, however, they are too broad to explain the proper geographies embedded in the localities.

To theorise about how different forms of labour produce geographic landscape does not mean to portray workers as the sole maker of space, neither it means to stop theorising capital and state. It means that geographers should also research about how workers seek to make space in particular ways for their own ends and to ensure their own self-reproduction in a context of specific capital and government situatedness. As expressed by Herod (2001), a labour geography is not questioning that capital – and secondly, the state – create space, but questioning such primacy defining the field of economic geography.

1.3 Background: outsourcing

Any social phenomenon that promotes change in human relations must be studied in such a way that it is possible to perceive why it emerged and how it is important for the development of societies, i.e. what sort of implication it brings to the political, economic and social realms.

Since the Industrial Revolution, companies have sought how to exploit their competitive advantage in order to enhance their profits and markets; outsourcing is one of the outcomes of such search. Even though such form of contracting labour power was not formally identified as a business strategy until the 80s (Mullin 1996), many organisations were not fully self-sufficient before that. The use of external suppliers (e.g. a publisher that purchases printing and fulfilment services) for essential but additional services might be termed the baseline stage in the evolution of outsourcing.

Today, the practice of outsource can be understood as a method of diffusing work throughout a company for demand and strategic reasons by using another company. Castree et al. (2013) defines outsourcing as the mechanism of contracting out a business activity, which a company may have previously operated internally, to a separate firm where it is bought as a service. The word outsourcing can be seen combined with complements that refer to where the contracted out service is being performed. The two most common terms are onshore outsourcing (when the service is executed in the same location or country, often referred simply as outsourcing) and offshore outsourcing (when the service is moved abroad). Nearshore outsourcing is sometimes used to describe the transfer within an intermediate scale of economic regulation, such as the ones taking place inside the European Economic Area
This research solely addresses onshore outsourcing of cleaning within the region of Natal in Brazil.

From an academic perspective, outsourcing is regarded as part of a political and economic neoliberal project (Herod and Aguiar 2008) whose jurisdiction results in substantial changes for workers.

1.3.1 Outsourcing in Brazil

The fieldwork interviews were conducted during a moment of political transition in Brazil, right after the finalisation of an impeachment process that prematurely ended the second mandate of the former president Dilma Rousseff, on 31st August 2016. Since then, Brazil experiences political instability that is constantly interfering in the labour legislation, and outsourcing has been evoked as a central theme.

The discussion around it was under national attention in 2015 when the federal representatives in the chamber of deputies (the lower house of the Brazilian legislative body) started the voting process of bill 4330/04\(^4\), from 2004, which proposed to authorise the outsourcing of any form of work in all sectors of the economy. The event unleashed strong waves of protest in social media and on the streets, especially coming from the reaction of the trade union organisations. It aroused wide public debate, mobilising parliamentarians, party leaders, trade unionists, businessmen, judges, lawyers, social researchers, journalists and others (Oliveira 2015) in a dispute that existed in the national context between 2015 and 2017. Until 2017, outsourcing was constrained to peripheral tasks, as expressed in the national legislation\(^5\), and forbidden from being executed in core tasks, e.g. a school could outsource its cleaners (cleaning interpreted as a mean-task, peripheral), but could not outsource its teachers (teaching interpreted as an end-task, core). On 23th March 2017, however, a similar proposal but even older, bill 4302/98\(^6\), from 1998, was approved by the national congress and sanctioned by the current president Michel Temer. The main points about the new legislation are: first, it authorises core tasks to be outsourced; second, it authorises outsourcing within public services; third, it authorises the contracted company to

\(^4\) Credited to Sandro Mabel (PMDB-GO).
\(^5\) Súmula 331 from the Superior Labour Court (TST).
\(^6\) Proposed by the former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB).
contract another company⁷; and fourth, it is the contracted company’s responsibility to cover the workers rights in the event of a legal struggle.

The public debate surrounding outsourcing has not calmed down and the topic is a central one in a whole set of labour reforms proposed by Michel Temer. As for April 2017, Temer’s governance disapproval was at 92% according to the French consulting firm Ipsos (British Broadcast Corporation, 2017), meaning that Brazil’s political future is unsure, and equally is the legal status of outsourcing, since changes in the labour legislation have been largely toyed with dense symbolic content in the forefront of political representation in Brazil.

⁷It has been labelled in the national context as quarteirização. Quart refers to a fourth partner involved: (1) the worker, (2) the contracting company, (3) the contracted company and (4) the contracted company’s contracted company.
2 Theory

The second chapter is the theoretical foundation of the present thesis. As such, it starts with the notion of agency, so the workers engaged in this study can be perceived as sentient beings with political possibilities. Personally, I believe that addressing agency is a way of dignifying workers. Later on, a set of geographical interpretations of the workplace will be explored in ways that the centrality of geography will be given effort, but also the basis of cleaners’ spatial embeddedness can be comprehended. Since workplaces and workers are constrained and scaled, the third section is about different actors shaping an employment relationship, such as historical context, the state and union influence. Flexibility is then analysed as a contemporary way of capitalism to dispose itself and something with direct implication on employment, through, for example, outsourcing. The last section covers how social security, employment and political representation are intertwined, emphasising workers’ representation in the form of citizenship and union membership being concerned at the national and workplace levels.

2.1 Agency

It is somewhat impossible to discuss labour geography without any understanding towards human agency, which is broadly defined by Castree et al. (2013) as the ability people hold to act according to their own volition. Archer (1995) suggests in her realist social theory that human beings are born into a continuous sociocultural system and all of us have agential influence on change or stability. This nested power is named primary agency. Even though Archer did not discuss labour issues directly, her literature is fruitful for theorising the relation between human behaviour and space as indivisible.

Following her analysis, primary agency is seen as a passive force. The active force is termed corporate agency, and it concerns the actors who are capable of articulating their volition among themselves and others. Corporate agency can result in orchestrated actions to retain or redraw a structure aspect in question. Another important point for labour geographers is that agents are inserted in contexts of sharing life chances, i.e. conditions of mutual interests.
Archer (1995) points out a paradigm referring to the passiveness of primary agency as being only passive in relation to collectivities, because aside from that, primary agency also produces the surroundings that corporate agents aspire to control. When we employ the previous argument to workers uniting to achieve a change, we will observe those who are consciously acting within (for or against) multiple forms of life chances, along with those who share (and produce) the same reality, but for any reason, do not act accordingly. Thus, not moving from primary to corporate agency. She states that every change is mediated through modification in agents' conditions: corporate agents modify the circumstances in which primary agents exist while the latter modify the environment in which the former operate within. From the perspective of labour, corporate agency not only represent the pertinence of well-organised labour movement as the ones present in Selwyn’s (2016) labour centred development, but also in any collectivity comprising employment relation and political awareness.

Katz (2004) contributes to the topic by dividing labour agency into resilience, reworking and resistance. In brief description, resilience is the capacity of avoiding certain dispositions without changing the structure generating them. Reworking is characterised by the capacity to intervene in the structure, but not in the polarisation of power relations. And resistance is the ultimate instance of labour agency; it rewards workers with emancipatory changes by oppositional consciousness. Resistance is the defining moment when the working class is successful in becoming a class for itself (Andrew 1983). The previous three can all be seen as potentialities hold by workers to reach change in a system they act from, to and within.

Enriching the discussion, Wright (2000) arranges labour agency in two categories. First, associational power constitutes the union of workers among themselves. Second, structural power suggests how enterprises and the whole production process are organised within the present form of capitalism. For instance, it is the combination of the two powers that make possible a scaled up reaction for a local problem.

The author argues that two distinct responses will result from the associational power of labour. In convergence with traditional Marxism, it will constitute power struggle as an essential determinant in capitalist societies. But on the other hand, and diverging from traditional Marxist theories, the parity between capital and workers’ agency will not be only controlled by capitalism itself, but it will rest on a set of institutional factors.
2.2 Geographies of the workplace

Following the argument of Herod (2001) that both workers and capital depend on space and spatial relations to secure their interests, we can theorise the workplace as a socio-economic arena of possibilities that constrains and assists labour agency at the same time. The objective is to aid this research with how the workplaces are entangled in ways that can influence the work life of Brazilian cleaners.

To start with, geographical space is the outcome of human labour in our innate struggle for survival. The relationship between society, labour and space is indivisible and never-ending (Kaercher 1998). According to Santos (1999), space is a synthesis in provisional form between intangible social content and spatial forms; and therefore we should detach ourselves from the idea of a physical view of space, something presented as a space in itself. For years, geographers have theorised about cities, regions, states and nations as if they were geographical entities, but such perspective on labour spaces remain rather unusual, as pointed out by Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017). The authors regard the lack of theorisation as possibly stemming from the fact that workplaces form a vast group of spaces that are different among themselves: from the household to transnational factories, from fixed and tangible offices to mobile and virtual spaces. However, a large extent of variation are also found among cities, regions, states and nations, transcending dichotomies such as private/public and material/virtual without stopping geographers from analysing them.

The workplace seen as an object of geographical analysis can bring to light different sociospatial categories embedded in such space due to its complex organisation, which combines changing managerial, technological and social traits. Following the criticism of human geography bias in prioritising one concept of sociospatial analysis over the others (Jessop et al. 2008), the work of Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017) suggests a division of labour spaces among territories, places, scales and network. We can now briefly address each of these four categories.

Raffestin (2012) highlights the general idea of wage labour as a constitutive category of territorility due to its association with power and control (over resources and finances, for instance). Without labour, there is neither transformation nor conservation or maintenance of the territory. As the author stated, money accelerates the process of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation; labour, then, is presented as a mediator, and as such, it is not thereby any less subordinated to the money whose possessors are in a position to alienate labour by subjecting it to orientations that can be undesirable. Similarly, Jordhus-
Lier et al. (2017) draw attention to when workplaces geographies are altered (for instance via new employment arrangements), it should not be exclusively taken as the effects of wider social streams, but equally as drivers of these very same streams.

The construction of territory is the consequence of territoriality, defined as the ensemble of relations that a society maintains with exteriority and alterity for the satisfaction of its needs (Raffestin 2012). That is, what “surfaces” from multiple disparities. On this matter, Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017) refer to territories as a sociospatial relation structured by bordering and enclosuring, insiders and outsiders. The authors split the territorialities of the workplace between external and internal. The former defines the outer boundaries of the workplace through externalisation of the workforce (e.g. outsourcing, offshoring) and also by redrawing work-home borders. The latter regards micro processes of sociospatial exclusion/inclusion (e.g. restricted admissions, reduced access to democracy), surveillance and control.

Not merely as a consequence of power relations, territorialities also derive from the set of actions conducted by oneself in relation to their attachment to a certain space (e.g. a classroom, office). When so, such ‘fondly territorialised’ space will be correlated to the concept of place. Thus, while a surveillance camera is a symbol of a territorialised workplace, equally is a family photography on one’s office desk (even though in the second the balance swings towards affectivity, it does not exclude power relations of who has the authority to territorialise such office). Within phenomenology the sociospatiality of places exists in accordance to the lived reality of people, being understood through personal subjectivity and affective relationships (Lopes 2012). For Tuan (1983), space precedes place because the second is only engendered after the attribution of value. Subsequently, workplaces are potential arenas of close social relations, given orchestrated occupation due to spatial organisation and time, e.g. work routine (Raffestin 1993). The sense of place generated by workplaces might be based on loyalty towards their co-workers, or an attachment to the building they work at, or even as a sense of pride about the institution they represent (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2017). Thus, a workplace – as seen from the perspective of its workers – is constructed both abstractly and physically, through representation, symbols and social relations.

The core-periphery dichotomy is a key trait of the place dimension and how its social relations are horizontally differentiated. The place-biased division has implications on vital issues referring to both organised labour and capital, such as union proneness (e.g. solidarity)
and human capital of a company (e.g. commitment), both of them dependent on the self-perceived position of workers inside their own workplaces.

Given to a set of local-specific interests and values, places are seen by Santos (1999) as spaces of fixity and resistance when faced by homogenous capitalistic currents. Even though the author did not theorise the resistance of places as a scalar discussion, Santos’ way of thinking is similar to what Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017) suggested by referring to workplace as a critical socially constructed scale. Such scales of resistance, for instance, are several meso-level politics that balance global strategies of expansive capitalistic firms, national policies and the local interest of labour.

On the other side of the discussion, MacKinnon (2010) regards the fluidity content of scaled processes, identifying a set of possibilities for labour such as openness and rescaling (e.g. state restructuring), which workers can take advantage through their agency (e.g. scale jumping and scale bending). In this logic, scalar relations are not vertically constructed from the top to the bottom only. When it comes to regulation, workers and their representatives made up the foundation of political representation in the workplace, independently of the ruling legislation.

Workplaces also form key scales within logistics of the productive system (designing, producing, marketing and selling of services and goods), but equally, they are important for the trade unionism, giving large social spaces with high recruitment potential and union building (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2017). On the matter of how the political realm is vertically scaled, both the bottom-up and the up-bottom streams are likely to cause alteration that can challenge the political actions of unions. Instead of favouring a single scalar relation as a spine for organising labour, the effort must be devoted to seeking effective mobilisation within different political scales. For example, a landscape of restructuration of labour should not be addressed at the workplace level only (bottom-up), but also at the national politics at large (up-bottom), as Jordhus-Lier (2014) pointed out in his study of outsourcing.

By acknowledging the scalar flow of the productive system, we come across connectivities as a component of networks. From a labour geography perspective, networks not only relate to the movement of capital and information among platforms within the economic system; equally important, they perform the role of unique social arenas binding different groups of people.

Workplaces are nodes among transnational movements, legislation (national and supranational), labour supply and demand, and the distribution of different types of work. When seen from a vertical scalar perspective, they represent a hierarchical line of production
(from the farm through production and consumption, for instance), but from the network point of view, workplaces are rather horizontally distributed. In other words, the way they are connected does not necessarily follow a linear logic.

As Jessop et al. (2008) reminded us, when it comes to categories of sociospatial analysis, they might problematize different issues, while being closely intertwined. Thus, the ontological privilege given by a single dimension might expand its analytical and empirical scope, but resulting in chaotic conceptions or carved up objects of study. However it is fruitful to explore a concept in itself, polymorph is a characteristic of space and not of its analytical concepts. Accordingly, the intention in this section was to show the applicability of a multidimensional approach for the sake of expressing the geographical nature of workplaces and how their multidimensionality can be explained in ways that interfere in the experiences and possibilities of the informants of this thesis.

2.3 Forms of employment relation

In order to understand how Brazilian cleaners are ingrained as social and economic actors, it is valuable to investigate what makes up an employment and what it represents for those occupying these jobs in relation to society in general. As seen from the large scope, the relationship between workers and their employers is part of the broad context of employment relation, which is defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2017) as the legal link between employers and employees, existing where the economic exchange of labour capacity results in the production of goods and service. It is through the employment relationship that reciprocal rights and obligations are established between the two partners. It is, and it has been, the main vehicle through which workers access rights and benefits associated with employment in the areas of social security and working law. From the viewpoint of a smaller scope, the discussion surrounding such relationship is likely to vary according to the type of job being addressed, the level of education required, the geographical location, the economic and political junctures, the internal structure of the company and several social attributes.

According to Heery & Noon (2001), from an industrial perspective, employment relationship also underlines the wide variation of employee management, including systems of direct communication and employee involvement that target the individual worker, sectors of production and union representation. The employer-employee relation embodies a group
of concerns regarding productivity, motivation, lawfulness and morale, being crucial to prevent and resolve problems arising out of the work life. The relationship is highly influenced by both governments and social partners, which have key roles to play through legislation, collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Labour legislations exist so health, safety and welfare of workers will be preserved, and accordingly, safeguard the labour from profit seeking exploiters in the cut-through competitive era. The work contract is a way to ‘materialise’ regulation based on the rights granted by the state. In theory, they are an agreement signed by equal parts (employee and employer) defining the basis of the performed labour. Goldthorpe (2000) sees work contracts as the midpoint between efficiency and exploitation, with the interests of employees and employers neither in full harmony nor full conflict. The concern about them is that there are issues that cannot be regulated, such as initiative, responsibility, pressure or adaptability. Therefore work contracts are partly incomplete or implicit.

When it comes to payment, Suleman et al. (2017) addresses the effect of unions on wage structures, suggesting that centralised bargaining tends to reduce wage inequalities, while decentralisation provides employers much more scale for adjusting earnings to market conditions and for rewarding skills. Prendergast (1998) observed internal factors within human capital theory to point out accentuated inequalities as the consequence of stratifying and rewarding employees by skill levels. Suleman et al. (2017) mentions the complexity of compensation policies as involving hierarchical models, the responsiveness of earnings to the labour market conditions (notably unemployment rate) and ingrained traits such as gender wage gap.

The role of unions embodies collective bargaining, employee welfare and legislation. Linking it to the previously covered topics, the union movement is not only an example of corporate agency (Archer 1995) and associational power of worker (Wright 2000), it also exemplifies the scalar organisation of workplaces (e.g. at which scales they need to operate in order to defend interests?) and network implications (e.g. how to organise different identities in a ‘meeting point’ such as the workplace?).

Bargaining empowers employees with the ability to negotiate the terms and conditions of work and pay, provided with a greater voice than what an individual worker would otherwise have. Employee welfare regards the dignity beyond workplace. Unions’ play a key role in the development of labour legislation by focusing on regulation and protection within and outside the workplace. To name a few, their strategies range between
dialogues to generalised strikes, spaces of production to spaces of consumption, political representation to civil representation.

Employers, employees, labour legislation, trade unions and employers associations are traditional pillars of industrial relations. However, the assessment of their combination requires some spatial demarcation. The work of He and Xie (2012) gives one out of the many answers to Burawoy’s (1985) question previously presented in the introduction, on whether or not capital and state lean towards merge. What the authors found is that when over a hundred trade unions were established in China in order to negotiate labour issues with multinational Wal-Mart, they brought hope to start a change in the politics of labour in the country. However, what was later on revealed was a convenience partnership between Wal-Mart’s management and the corporatism of the Chinese government. The two eventually intervened in the unions’ affair, which resulted in leaders being compelled to abandon their positions. The unions became a recreational body rather than an agent one, i.e. it kept workers away from their political possibilities by distracting them with misleading activities.

A second answer to Burawoy’s question is the Nordic model of labour relations. It refers to the economic and social policies common to the Nordic countries, including a comprehensive welfare state and collective bargaining at the national level. The case is interesting because the Nordics have been positively assessed in several social indicators while managed to continuously expand their economies (Løken and Stokke 2009). The region is an example of a less discrepant relation between the political economy of capital and the one of labour (Selwyn 2016), providing economic and social wealth. The model focuses on the cooperation among macro-economic governance, industrial policies, collective agreements and welfare state policies, placing organised social actors in key intermediating roles within the labour market. Accordingly, the union density rate is considerably high, exceeding 60% in Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland (Dølvik 2007).

Old and new forms of organising labour have resulted in varying forms of employment relations that diverge from the standard, full-time, bilateral, permanent employment relationship characterised by the performance of work in the employers’ premises and under the employers’ direct supervision (ILO 2014). The diversity within employment relations will now be explore by taking into account two correlated professions.
2.3.1 Domestic work: personalised inequalities

The literature about domestic work provides this thesis with an important ground when understanding the employment relationship of cleaners in Brazil, because the two professions share crossed points on the matters of servitude relation, executed tasks, historical sedimentation (such as slavery) and profound imbalance of wealth and power between employer and employee. As such, domestic work is presented here as an ultimate expression of contemporary personalised employment, a concept that will be valuable when we move to the analysis of the data.

As pointed out in the work of Tomic et al. (2006), cleaning has been historically associated with gender and class relation and has always been heavily focused upon the home and the ideas of domesticity. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of paid domestic service is fruitful when analysing the employment relation of cleaners, most importantly of those employed at smaller or family-run firms.

In Brazil, the domestic work has its origin with the abolition of slavery in 1888 when it became the main form of living for black women (Teixeira et al. 2015). This was, however, still not a form of wage work. Instead, the relationship between the worker and the boss developed around benefit relations, where the former exchanged its labour force for housing and food (Oliveira 2009). Such feature is part of a historical sedimentation that has heavily influenced the present day dynamics of domestic service in Brazil, which is marked by feminisation, intimacy, subordination and reciprocity that trace back to the colonial past of the country. In 2010 6.9% of the labour pool was of domestic workers, out of which 93.2% were women and according to the Ministry of Labour, around 70% were not formally employed, lacking all sorts of state security, such as pension, minimum wage, sick and maternal leaves (MTPS and IPEA 2016).

Similarly to the case of Brazil, the analysis of Ally (2009) theorises the transformation of domestic service from slavery to a form of wage labour in South Africa to be rooted in feudal relations. The author refers to such relation as being marked by the balance between a personalised intimacy and a depersonalised political technology. That is, the heritage of colonial servitude is constantly clashing with ‘new’ democratic forms of employment based on labour rights. However, not only gender and race remained marked in the domestic service in South Africa, but also the hierarchy, asymmetries of power and employer unwillingness are still present in the post-apartheid state. Formalising rights for domestic workers was positive for providing a necessary bulwark of individualised
protection, however, as defended by Ally (2009), such rights came adjacent with a logic that refused the socialisation of care, and therefore reinforced the unequal, dual-care regime between domestic workers and the employers. Namely, it cemented the position of domestic workers in the political economy of reproductive labour and limited the possibilities for a more fundamental redistribution of care.

In Russian cities, even though hired domestic work derives from cultural patterns of class inequalities manifested in modern Russian society, this type of employment is also rooted in the relation between nobles and serfs of the country’s feudal past (Tkach and Zdravomyslova 2016). That is to say the continuity of historical class segregation is sketched in present day capitalist society. Tkach and Zdravomyslova (2016) focus on gender, class, migration, and to a smaller extent, racial issues, in their study about domestic work in Russia. They refer to class division because it is part of a bigger and on-going process of unequal distribution of wealth; migration, since many workers come from the countryside or former Soviet countries; and gender, given the female face of such workers, but also the contradictory truth behind the emancipation of Russian women. On one side, some are able to administrate their full-time job, while the reproductive work of their own household is addressed to another female worker.

Connecting such examples with the propositions of Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017), the household as a workplace for wage labour is a geographical entity in the sense that it not only echoes disequilibrium in society, it is part of the genesis of such disequilibrium. In fact, while ‘outside’ the workplace employers and employees might be levelled out under a political technology of supposed equality (namely democracy), in the workplace the reinforcement of inequality is strong and evident. In this sense, domestic work symbolises the improvement in political democracy while society remained especially unequal in the market place (Fudge 2005).

2.3.2 Cleaning positions: contradiction and stratification

It is worth going through examples of cleaning around the globe so we can observe which form of legislation and experiences such group of workers have in common and to what extent it is related to what will be later on discussed in the analysis chapter.

Aguiar & Herod (2006) compiled a comprehensive study on how cleaners are employed at a political-economic scenario dominated by neoliberalism and globalisation. To
start with, cleaners are placed at an important juncture of the world’s economy. Without them, all sorts of detritus deriving from economic activity would collapse the spaces of production, consumption and social reproduction, which delineate the social architecture of the contemporary economy. In sum, cleaners hold key tasks in the keeping of global economic activity functional. Paradoxically, they remain largely invisible in the landscape, finding themselves in the bottom quartile of all US wage earners. In Australia, they are 2.2 times more likely to suffer an injury at their work place than the national average. In the UK, cleaners are paid an average of £222 (female) and £272 (male) per week, compared to the national averages for all occupations of £396 (female) and £525 (male), as stated by the authors.

A major example of the paradox between sanitation and modernisation is found in Chile. As landscapes of cleanliness are one expression of modernity, the country has experienced its economic miracle of the last decades with a great effort on the hygiene of symbolic nodes such as malls, office centres and institutions of learning. The burden, however, preyed upon the differentiation of space and on cleaners themselves. As Tomic et al. (2006) observed, a turning point towards Chile’s ‘modernisation’ was ‘el plan laboral’ (the labour code), which eventually eradicated most of the political leverage the country’s working class had won by allowing employers to hire strike-breakers, discharging the former from employment responsibility in a trial period of six months and opening up the sector to outsourcing and international capital. Furthermore, the spaces where those who maintain Chile’s image of cleanliness are marked by the opposite: garbage and pollution, unkept sewers, muddy narrow passages or roaring high-speed roads from which wealthy Chileans pass by.

A study case of cleaners of shopping malls in Bangkok showed how techniques of control and acts of resistance shaped their work-life. While malls are perceived as spatial icons of economic progress and modernisation of the Thai society, their cleaners also exemplify the national context of social relation. As showed by Brody (2006), Thai cleaners were followed by the stigma of uneducated, less civilised rural workers who migrated to the capital city. At their workplace, they were made invisible under the malls administration’s intention to provide an idyllic version of reality. Through strict dressing codes, rules of ‘when, how and who’ to clean and constant surveillance, cleaners were depersonalised to a faceless work body and forbidden to show their countryside roots (perceived as backwardness), through, for example, talking to each other on duty. On the other side, the rural-born Thai cleaners in Bangkok showed a sense of pride in their hard-working roots,
they saw their air-conditioned workplace as a definite step up, explored spaces within the malls where they could interact with one another and other workers, retrieved their identity in a slum nearby where they could eat typical rural dishes and impacted the landscape of their rural areas by buying and selling goods and constantly planning entrepreneurial activities (Brody 2006).

In South Africa, the logic behind racial segmentation of the internal labour market is kept in similarity with the apartheid workplace, despite the hope of its break down. Bezuidenhout and Fakier (2006) observed that the transition from apartheid to democratising society has happened under the light of neoliberalism. The study addresses the life of a black outsourced cleaner named Maria. Through her experiences, it illustrates the burden of social reproduction in the country being increasingly carried by rural and urban householders, and not the primary employer or the state. Racial, gender and employment issues are central to the South African labour market divisions. Black women remain responsible for the reproductive work in their household while face the worsening employment conditions in an already highly gendered and racialised sector such as cleaning.

The sociospatiality of the examples above can also be made visible if we look at how Thai workers exhibited resilience (Katz 2004) in avoiding certain conditions, manoeuvring core-periphery dichotomy and finding ‘home’ in a surrounding slum (place), how Chileans cleaners found themselves in areal differentiation of clean and dirty (territory), how power disequilibria and ‘up-bottom’ decisions influenced their lived reality (scale), how such workplaces served as a platform of connectivity in a context of marked social inequality (network).

The two previous forms of labour (domestic work and cleaning) are a brief contextualisation of how employment reflects and produces the categorisation of people into socioeconomic strata. While the phenomenology of domestic workers shows a greater level of personalised servitude, the case of cleaners shows how flexibility has been affecting employment relations. The balance found between these two professions is crucial for the later analysis of in-house and outsourced cleaners in Brazil.
2.4 Flexibility

Flexible labour arrangements cast profound changes on the lived reality of workers and it is a common trait within labour markets throughout capitalist societies. Flexibility focuses on a legal agenda to facilitate profit by altering (usually loosening) state regulation. Outsourcing is one of the many flexible work strategies. Aiming at understanding under which circumstances outsourced cleaners find themselves in Brazil, we start by having a look at the work of Atkinson (1984), who explores the market context out of which practices labelled as flexible have emerged. He also investigates the key features behind the constant restructuring of economies.

Firstly, focus is given on market fluctuation, that combines world recessions and the pressure to compete effectively in world markets; secondly, the uncertainty that keeps firms away from committing themselves in terms of employment or investment; and thirdly, the technological change that affects the pace of production, meaning that firms must be able to adjust to substantial changes in either production methods or product lines. As a result, there is the pressure obliging enterprises and their employees to always consider a wide range of new ways of getting tasks done, encouraging the shift towards the so-called flexible labour market.

Flexibility is, however, a difficult concept to understand because it lacks theoretical clarity and therefore requires a context or follow-up questions such as “flexibility for whom?” (Karlsson 2007). According to Jordhus-Lier (2017), flexibility is not something per se, and not even an inherent property, it must be seen as a way to describe certain dispositions as assumed by specific actors. Also, its desirability will depend on whether it is seen from the viewpoint of management or workers. On this aspect Castree (2013) differentiates labour flexibility between worker-centred and firm-centred. The first regards to what extent workers can adapt to changes in their workplaces or in external labour markets; and the second addresses the intentional use by firms of permanent and/or temporary workers in order to maximise their adaptability to changing market conditions or firm strategies. A common example of a worker-centred flexibility is the one explained by the dynamism within companies and markets that require workers adaptability over the course of their employment (or even lifetime) to catch up with new technologies, training opportunities and placements. It is common for workers to retrain twice or more during their work-lives in order to maintain a secure wage employment, deconstructing the notion of one ‘job for life’. On this matter, Castells (1998) distinguishes between generic and self-programmable labour. Generic
encircles worker that can execute one task only, being vulnerable to substitution by machinery and lacking individual relevance, although the economy needs them collectively. A self-programmable labour means workers possess a higher level of formal education, being possible to retool themselves. Flexibility, then, means different scenarios: the need to dictate the terms of employment for high skilled workers or the subjection to repeatedly change jobs within more or less alike types of employment.

A firm-centred approach refers to the attempts by firms to make their workforces more responsive to changing economic conditions. Atkinson (1984) examines three main kinds of flexibility: functional, numerical and financial.

Functional flexibility is desired when management intends to quickly and smoothly redeploy the workforce throughout tasks. This might determine the deployment of a multi-skilled craftsman moving among electrical, pneumatic and mechanical jobs; it might mean displacing workers between direct and indirect production positions; or it might spell a drastic change of career, for example from draughtsman to technical sales. Since products and their production processes change, functional flexibility determines that the same workforce changes with them, in both the medium and short runs. Atkinson’s (1984) functional flexibility and Castree’s (2013) worker-centred flexibility share the common point of task adaptability, but they are divergent in their framework analysis, being the flip side of one another.

Numerical flexibility is wanted in terms that headcount can be easily and quickly adjusted in accordance with short terms changes in the levels of labour demand. It results in easing legal barriers when hiring and firing a worker, so that the final number can be increased or decreased at any time in order to exactly match the ‘needed’ number of employed personnel. Equally, Atkinson’s (1984) numerical flexibility holds influence over Castree’s (2013) worker-centred flexibility, since the orchestrated numerical flexibility pushes workers to try and benefit from multiple ‘functional’ possibilities. This is, however, not to say that a single company’s ease when laying off an employer could emanate such changes in the work-life in general, therefore the process is constrained by political actors related to the next form of flexibility.

Financial flexibility is sought for two main purposes. First, there is no secret in the suggestion that firms want to employ workforce as cheaply as it can be. However, reducing payment and other employment costs tend to reflect the state of supply and demand in the external labour market. The implication of such type of flexibility is a continued shift to plant level bargaining and widening differentials between skilled and unskilled labours. The
second purpose behind financial flexibility, perhaps of greater importance in the long run, deals with new payment arrangements that assist the progress of either functional or numerical flexibility, such as ‘assessment-based’ pay systems in place of ‘rate for the job’ systems.

This second purpose of why employers seek financial flexibility could also be named as ‘legal flexibility’, in the sense that it paves the way for other forms of flexibility with legal foundation. Nevertheless, firms alone cannot legitimate their management aspirations (such as new remuneration systems). They face workers and state resistances. From such perspective, the variation of flexible arrangements across the globe is the outcome of a political struggle involving capital, workers and the state.

Flexibility wipes out the old hierarchical structure that distinguishes blue from white collars and opens up to a new division where jobs are differentiated according to their specificity to a given firm. In this model firm-specific positions and those involving general skills are found. It would not have been much of a difference from the ‘old’ orthodox division, if it was not for the overtone of breaking up the labour force into increasingly peripheral, as warned by Atkinson (1984) outlook and later on explored as part of a scenario concerning precarious employment by Kalleberg (2009, 2012).

Figure 1. The flexible firm.
The figure represents the flexible firm, which increases its periphery in order to adjust the headcount within non-specific skills by seeking for numerically flexible workforce. The personnel executing the core activities are maintained numerically stable. At the core, the emphasis is on functional flexibility, which workers must accept for the sake of their employment security. Functional flexibility can be both short term (e.g. multi-discipline project teams) or long term (e.g. changing career), and at both scenarios the terms and conditions of one’s employment are planned in order to endorse flexibility. This usually includes single status conditions and new payment systems that prize the acquisition and deployment of new skills, and which are at least partly based on performance assessment (Atkinson, 1984). Equally, core skills cannot be effortlessly bought-in and therefore, the company might seek to separate them from a wider labour market.

Peripheral workers, on the other hand, appear divided into two groups, as shown in figure 1. The first one is made up by labourers who hold full-time employment, but enjoy a lower level of job security. They lack career opportunities and their tasks are plug-ins and not firm-specific, e.g. component assembly, testing occupation and supervisory positions. As a result, the company looks at the external labour market to take these jobs and aims to achieve financial flexibility in ways that are more direct and immediate than those addressed to the core group. Functional flexibility is not desired since these jobs tend to be less skilled, therefore requiring little training. The lack of career prospects and systematisation of job content around a small range of tasks tend to boost a relatively high degree of labour turnover, which in addition, eases numerical adjustment to product market uncertainty. The second peripheral group is the outcome of the firm’s search to supplement the numerical flexibility of the first peripheral group with some functional flexibility, that is, the jobs have the same characteristics of those in the first peripheral group combined with arrangements to match changing business needs. Examples are part-time jobs, night shifts, short-term contracts, job-sharing, public subsidy trainees and recruitment via temporary agreements. They all carry out a similar goal: increasing flexibility while decreasing the company’s commitment to the worker’s employment security, periodicity and career development.

It is interesting to note that the level of education is not necessarily related to company specificity. Even though cleaning positions appear easily as peripheral, a job can be highly skilled and still be placed outside core activities within a firm context, such as system analysis or IT developer, which are plug-ins rather than company-specific, despite the level of education.
The previous analyses of flexibility, whether from worker-centred or firm-centred viewpoints, explain how flexible structures take place and why management seeks them. It covered, however, only a part of the discussion. We can now move on to theories holding a more empirical approach to the matter.

2.4.1 Desirability and lived reality

This section aims at two important points regarding a flexible employment: the workers’ will and experiences. Jonsson (2007) juxtaposes flexibility and stability, using a framework of analysis where a worker desires flexibility. According to the author, flexibility or stability for one part may mean instability of inflexibility for another part. It is a framework that takes the discussion back to ‘for whom’ flexibility has positive or negative implications.

Rilley (1998) supports the notion that flexibility can be mutually positive for both workers and employers while Doogan (2008) addresses work-life precariousness deriving from flexibility to be part of an academic and journalistic hyperbole. According to him, there is a gap between job instability and employee insecurity: the former regards the length of tenure; the latter regards the feeling of eminent layoff. He compares the issue to the fear of flying many people experience. Airplanes are still safer to travel by than cars (referring to jobs being stable in official numbers), but passengers are unreasonably concerned about their safety (referring to widespread employee insecurity). However, the author ignores a set of working conditions, rights and experiences that are beyond the black and white notion of one being employed or not. This dispute is important given the political argument that ‘flexibility generates jobs’. However, the answer to ‘what kind of job’ remains not given.

Flexibility, indeed, seems as a positively charged concept and it is certainly correct to express that employees seek flexibility in their work lives so they can adapt their routine (e.g. leisure, reproductive work) to their jobs. Possenriede and Plantenga (2014) regard temporal and locational flexibilities of work as being both important for workers and firms. Temporal regards the adjustability of working hours and locational addresses the scope of variation of what is considered one’s workplace. In this sense, temporal and locational flexibilities are additional forms of firm-centred strategies along with Atkinson’s (1984) functional, numerical and financial forms, but also part of the desirability discussion given workers’ concern about work-life balance (Possenriede and Plantenga 2014). ‘When’ and ‘where’ to
work are propositions that both capital and workers are highly concerned about, but the conditions behind these propositions are subjected to disputes.

The underlying issue is of which meaning is the word flexibility possessing in this discussion: that of broad and boundless work-life adjustability or that of a well-constrained practice with somewhat hidden prices. Workers seek for both flexibility and stability, but employers and employees strive for them diverge in meanings and consequences for the other side (Jonsson 2007).

The positive side of flexibility is often highlighted in the political speech of its supporters and by market campaigns, such as the ones of temporary work agencies, e.g. “work when you want, be free when you want” (Garsten 2008). The win-win aspect of flexibility is theorised by Pollert (2007) as part of a “modernising rhetoric” that is dedicated to competitiveness by enhancing workforce flexibility and a flexible labour legislation, thus conceiving a set of double-speak tactics meaning the opposite of what they express. Her work is focused on the ongoing quest of the state to free employers from laws. From a British perspective, she addresses the ‘Access to Justice’ from 1999, which ironically resulted in restrictions on justice, and rather than easing access to legal employment rights, the New Labour government enforced limitations and introduced restrictions to an already weak enforcement process.

The literature that claims labour flexibility to be a win-win scenario usually advocates for individualism, propensity for change, self-reliance and willingness to accept risk (Karlsson 2007). It grants individual empowerment to workers so they decide the faith of their own employment status, being equally able to solve issues arising in the work process. Karlsson (2007) observes that the raison d’être of flexibility brings a negative burden to employees, such as confronting risks, longer hours, stress, job insecurity, layoffs and increased work-load (Kalleberg 2003, Garsten 2008, Olofsdotter 2012, Jordhus-lier 2014).

The term ‘flexicurity’ is an attempt to balance security and flexibility in a win-win scenario, however taking the risk of becoming lose-lose due to ‘bad flexibility’ leading to increased general acceptance of flexibility (Karlsson 2007). Indeed, flexibility can become bad for employers and employees when it induces insecurity and reduces workers motivation and willingness to positively influence on the firm. An example of such is found in Spain, a country that approved a set of flexible labour reforms in 2012. González-Anleo (cited in Oliver 2017) observes that while such reforms where able to reduce unemployment, and by this extend served as political propaganda for giving a quick answer to the national and European contexts, they also created widespread precariousness that is now undermining the
human capital of businesses. He argues that a company that pays 2000 euros a month can expect a worker to be committed, but when one earns 700 and it is likely to be dismissed in the following month, too little commitment can be expected. In the Spanish case, the burden of precarious employment falls heavily on the shoulders of the peripheral workers, as they lack individual relevance (Castells 1998) and on the firms themselves, since commitment is of crucial value within their core activities. This does not mean that skilled workers are better off, but at least in the Spanish context, they can still ‘auction’ their employment or contemplate emigration, which can, in return, cause human capital flight, another issue to be politically addressed by the country.

2.4.2 Individual employee and organised labour

Jordhus-Lier (2014) explores how flexibility varies according to three main viewpoints: management, individual employees and organised labour. Returning to the semantics of flexibility, Allen & Henry (1997) say that it only accurately applies to the firm, leading to capital vantage point, while words such as fragmentation or risk would be better applied to the workforce (individually or collectively). While functional, numerical, locational, temporal and financial reasons already explain how and why capital seeks flexibility, we can forward some evidences surrounding flexibility from the viewpoint of an individual employee and the labour movement. Jordhus-Lier (2014) identified six negative consequences of outsourcing for workers in a research conducted within housekeeping departments of the Norwegian hotel sector in the Oslo region.

First of all, outsourcing often results in an intensification of work. The research found an increase from 18 to 26 rooms to be cleaned after the contractual shift. Secondly, trade unionists and workers depicted psychological and social effects of externalisation. The study showed that outsourced workers experienced that their former employers were not willing to take any responsibility in the employment relation, while remained demanding their labour power. Thirdly, outsourcing deepened the working conditions distinction between those under such contractual method and the ones who were in-house workers, in addition to contracting firms failing to pay wages on time in several moments. The fourth consequence is the enhanced mechanisms of control, since outsourced hotel cleaners were supervised not only by representatives from the outsourcing firm, but also supervised by the hotel management sectors in charge of quality control. Relatedly, the fifth point is the
overwhelming complexity of responsibilities in hotels with externalised cleaning staff, both for workers and the personnel coordinating their tasks. Lastly, the division between in-house and external staff was portrayed visible or invisible in different contexts by the usage of mechanisms of disguise and codes, such as the uniform.

From the perspective of organised labour, while outsourcing became a factor behind workers signing up for membership, in other scenarios it increased union rivalry and membership loss (Jordhus-Lier 2014). As pointed out by the author, the divisions such as part-time/full-time, permanent/casual, visible/invisible, internal/external created forms of segregation that undermined the recruitment of members and casted barriers towards workplace solidarity. The term fragmentation is an important one to describe the consequences of outsourcing from the organised labour perspective, since the disintegration of the workforce results from the expansion of externalising labour. Outsourcing as workplace fragmentation is not part of a chain reaction; it is not the consequence of risk or instability experienced by individual employees. Rather, fragmentation is a suitable concept to express how social relations and solidarity among workers are affected by externalisation. This very same externalisation can be named risk from the viewpoint of a single worker and as flexibility from the viewpoint of management.

2.5 Social security through work

This section will cover the linkage between social security and membership, both at the national level (citizenship as a macro-scaled membership) and at the workplace (membership as meso/micro-scaled). It is common sense that wage labour grants workers with a monetary purchasing power, however, this does not guarantee access to social rights. Since Brazil’s wealth division is considerably unequal, a scenario where welfare is commoditised will result in unequal access to it. We will now cover the instances of justifications regarding employment as a course towards social security.

2.5.1 Industrial citizenship

Part of the contemporary thinking (OECD 2004, Bastos et al. 2009, ILO 2017, Suleman et al. 2017) sees the question related with the concept of industrial citizenship developed by
Marshall (1950). That is, the access to welfare sequels a specific employment relation. The concept has been criticised due to the temporality and locality the author studied, i.e. a time in western societies when the workforce was dominated by white men during a moment of ‘less mobile’ economies. However, industrial citizenship continues to be an important idea because, in this model, it is the workers’ duties and conditions as a member of a group that assure their access to social welfare, rather than the individual itself. That is, it underlines the importance of the right to work, the sharing of work and the appropriate compensation deriving from it. To illustrate accordingly, it is within the domain of industrial citizenship that unemployment benefits are distributed through trade unions in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland (Engelstad 2004). Similarly, every worker in Brazil (holding a formal union membership or not) pays the equivalent of a working day in form of union due\(^8\) in order to finance allowances and the mediate role of unions between employer and employee in the country (Oliveira 2015).

Nowadays, industrial citizenship as present in traditional industrial relation is only the beginning of the discussion around social security. It is relevant for stressing union membership, a valuable political and communal platform, but authors like Fudge (2005) argue that employment standards and collective bargaining legislation have been diminished, which compromised Marshall’s industrial citizenship. She forwards two possible scenarios: the first is ‘market citizenship’, where the government is exempt from welfare responsibility, transforming them in private matters; the second is ‘citizenship at work’ and it broadens constitutional rights ‘from cradle to grave’.

While Fudge’s citizenship at work extends the entitlements of citizenship beyond employment and recognises a wide range of work (socially necessary labour, including caring for family members) as a contribution to the community, it is also worth noting that the scenario of expansion of neoliberal ideas such as deregulation, free trade and cutting government spending, subdued the prospect of implementing citizenship at work. Additionally, contemporary notion of personal independency and individualism is a current that boosts the responsibility of social security towards the people rather than state (e.g. private retirement plan) (Olofsdotter 2012).

In this contemporary neoliberal economic environment of social Darwinism (Giroux 2004), the idea of Fudge’s market citizenship seems to be rendered real. Thus, from a

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\(^8\) The obligatory due – paid every March – is supposed to end in 2018 given the approval of the new labour legislation in Brazil which took place in March 2017 and made the contribution optional to workers decide over it.
citizenship perspective, waged labour retains its role as the mean of attaining social security. That does not qualify waged labour alone as a stage of Marshall’s industrial citizenship, since it does not imply the obligatory existence of any associational agency of workers. But it is a scenario that makes us wonder once again about the links between social security through work.

If the general notion of a national citizenship is undermined by a strong gap between its subject and its substance (Fudge 2005), that is, if the citizenship status fails to live up to its responsibility or if it has its entitlements narrowed, waged workers will find themselves bargaining for commoditised welfare, while non workers and non-waged workers (e.g. househusbands and housewives) will be marginalised or become dependent on another wage worker such as a family member. If the state is minimised along with constitutional rights and the associational power of workers is weakened, large parts of civil society will enter a representative void when it comes to the political realm. However, this can mean a fertile terrain for the formation of new forms of representation or the restructuration of old ones.

The common use of the term citizenship usually implies the sense of nationality, thus citizens are individuals whose status are recognised by the custom or law and their rights and obligations are formally outlined and documented (e.g. in a constitution). Although, in broad terms, citizenship designates some form of community membership, being neither expansive or progressive, and not necessarily inclusive either (Lister 2000). As such, the rights and representation deriving from a small-scaled membership is a possible scenario when facing the reduction of the state and its nationally scaled membership.

Beckman (2009) calls attention to labour unions as a democratic force capable of forwarding an aspect of popular direction to the processes and institutions of formal political representation, even when the latter are marked by ruling-class politics. He illustrates his view with examples of two African countries. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) holds an alliance with two political parties in South Africa (African National Congress and South African Communist Party) and it is both criticised and praised. Critics come from being excessively close to the ruling party and the state, failing to respond to the democratic aspirations of a wider popular constituency such as anti-apartheid struggles, landless people’s movement, anti-privatisation forum and anti-eviction campaigns; but praised for opposing to the neo-liberal economic policies of the government and pushing alternative solutions, including greater government expenditure on transfer payments and an active policy of economic development. Another illustration is the Nigerian case, where unions see themselves as offering an alternative basis for democratic representation in
opposition to what they consider an elitist, corrupted and illegitimate ruling class that is demonstrably unable to deliver welfare to the population.

A form of political representation that has trade unionism in its core is related to, but not the same as Marshall’s industrial citizenship, since the trade union movement must now encompass contemporary facets such as identity pluralism created by post-modernity (Voos and Linden 2002), women’s role in paid labour (Fudge 2005), and fragmented workplaces (Jordhus-Lier 2014). Yet, unions’ potential to reach out, support and give voice to wider movements must not be ignored. This is not to say that unions are redeemers per se. As showed by Beckman (2009) unions are not excluded from falling into ruling-class politics or find themselves in the hands of a labour aristocracy that is preoccupied with its own material interests and fails to involve the population at large.

2.5.2 Civil society organisations and work

This briefly section focus on illustrating a more holistic approach to representation and social security other than electoral representation and union membership. As part of a new way of democratic legitimacy, civil society organisations also claim to politically represent their members. This is commonly labelled in the academic world as participatory governance. Houtzager and Lavalle (2010) highlight Brazil as a leader in the area. According to the literature, examples are found in advocacy NGOs whose aim is to upraise social problems into public issues and campaign until those issues change private behaviour and public policy. A second example is non-profitable services that include actors providing food for homeless, work counselling, shelter for victims of domestic violence and medicine distribution. Other examples are community associations that usually work for and within a defined territory and claim representation over an ‘imagined community’.

Such civil claims, as seen from the labour geography perspective, place labour issues inside a bigger frame where the boundaries between employment and individual aspects are blurring. In other words, the claim to represent the ‘worker side’ of a person exists along with the representative claim of non-labour aspects of the same person (Voos and Linden 2002), such as gender, ethnicity or sexuality. Houtzager and Lavalle (2010) mention the Brazilian advocacy NGO Geledês as an example of civil society organisation that focus on wider aspects of black women in Brazil, including employment matters, but not restricted to them.
This form of access to social security is not directly deriving from the union membership or citizenship status, but closely related to them as part of the political platforms enjoyed by people to represent their political positions regarding their work-lives.

2.5.3 Representation of workers: the case of ‘Justice for Janitors’

Representation is now addressed so the underlying questions sustaining the political portrayal (or the lack of it) can be understood. This theory aids the analysis of how the fieldwork informants are represented, and what set of possibilities and limitations such representation holds.

Pitkin (1967) divides the subject into four types. Representation as active ("acting for") embodies (1) formalistic representation, when it happens through formal authorisation like in an election; and (2) substantive representation, focused on actions taken by the representative towards the represented. Representation as passive ("standing for") embodies (3) descriptive representation, when the representative mirrors aspects of the represented; and (4) symbolic representation, when the understanding is established via codes, such as the colour red symbolises power, danger or passion.

Pitkin’s approach is relevant when analysing isolated parts of representation, but it may result in a fragmented picture. Complementing it, the work of Saward (2010) supports us with the concept of representative claims that are based on socially tested constructions, focusing less on electoral representation and more on the dynamics present outside the formal electoral world. Saward’s formula is the following:

\[ A \text{ maker of representations (M) puts forward a subject (S) which stands for an object (O) that is related to a referent (R) and is offered to an audience (A).} \]

While the assertions of Pitkin (1967) and Saward (2010) will provide us with relevant theory when addressing the construction of political representation for cleaners in Brazil, we can now have a look at a social movement that successfully combines aspects of representation in a context of market flexibility and precariousness for cleaners.

Justice for janitors (JfJ) is a movement initially presented as a campaign and organised by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which stands for the rights of janitors (caretakers and cleaners) in the US and Canada. Against the odds of an American
labour movement in decadence, with only 8% of private sector workers and 13% of all workers in unions (Savage 2006), Justice for Janitors made visible an often unnoticed group of workers and has improved working conditions and pay for janitors. Savage (2006) segregates business unionism and service unionism, giving the increase form of employment relation marked by service industry features, such as externalisation and decentralised firms scattered throughout many types of workplaces (for instance, janitorial staff may move through several buildings each week). Likewise, the challenges underlying service unionism as defined by Savage are called fragmentation by Jordhus-Lier (2014). In this sense, Justice for Janitors overcame flexibility by utilising a bottom-up model in which they organised workers based on geographical area rather than just their worksite, also utilising master contracts\(^9\) that are market-wide, allowing them to confront for different rights while applying any achievement to all workers in that market.

The existence of Justice for Janitors qualifies it as an example of the workplace as a geographical entity, being also a case of labour spatial fix (Herod 2001) since it is resulted from the attempts of workers to influence on their spaces of reproduction through corporate agency (Archer 1995).

This movement succeeds in meeting Pitkin’s (1967) active representation (due to formal authorisation and substantial representativeness) and passive representation (due to the movement being created by and for janitors and the symbolic association that it is able to represent janitors in the political whelm). From Saward’s (2010) perspective, the movement can be seen through the following frame: a group of workers from the Service Employees International Union (M) set up the Justice for Janitor (S) as representative of cleaners and caretakers of the US and Canada (O) to their employers and government bodies (A). Given the absence of the referent (the real cleaners and caretakers, not their representation), the aftermath of such representation was rendered accepted (another scenario would be rejection) and the movement relied on aesthetical construction (verbal/visual) and codes in order to express the locality of the workers, such as the Latin American stigma following cleaning positions in North America (Savage 2006).

Justice for Janitors is used here to illustrate part of the literature addressed throughout the theory chapter, with the geographical possibilities emanating from workers and their workplaces being made evident.

\(^9\) A collective bargaining agreement that covers all unionised workplaces in a given industry.
Theory summary

As a closure for this chapter, I would like to emphasise agency (section 1, opening) and representation (section 5, closing) as potentialities for workers. While agency can be rather inherently human, an effective political representation for workers is the outcome of a conscious and organised move of agency. They both seek to interfere in the employment relation (section 3), a broad term used to describe the juncture of state regulation, socio-cultural contexts, capital and workers influence over one’s job. In this section, I used examples of both cleaners and domestic workers in order to grasp key features of the employment relation of the informants later on addressed in the data analysis and discussion. Flexibility (section 4) is a green light from the state allowing capital to diffuse labour in a certain way that has directly affected agency, political representation and the employment relation of workers. All those factors are given a physical arena with sociospatialities (section 2), a set of analogous relations through which we can see the workplace, the employers, the employees and the structures among them. Sociospatialities render visible how the possibilities and limitations of workers are systemically ingrained in their daily working environment.
3 Methodology

This chapter combines both theories regarding the methodology and narratives based on my fieldwork while in Natal, Brazil, between August and December 2016. The main method used in the research was interviews. Participant observation, photography and document analysis were also used, however they do not appear as theorised methods, since they are mainly part of my personal process of immersion. Since experience is a unique and individual content, a qualitative approach was chosen so that in-depth knowledge about the cleaners’ experiences could be understood. In total, 21 cleaners were interviewed, half of which were in-house workers, in opposition to the other outsourced half. Given the ‘one of a kind’ characteristic of an experience, the best method to access such data was creating a semi-structured interview plan that could keep on track the flow of information when it comes to what was relevant for the study, while letting workers free to speak up about whatever they wanted to. In many cases, the progress of the interviews led to an unstructured exchange between the participants and me. The fieldwork also contained 2 additional semi-structured interviews with trade union representatives, mainly focused on how such organisations were representing the cleaners and how they construct their representativeness.

3.1 Qualitative research

Understood as a collection of methods of inquiring about human behaviour and perception, qualitative research focuses on finding out why and how certain activities and events occur in certain ways. Therefore, qualitative approaches target processes that cannot be assessed in frequency or quantity; rather, it is aimed at understanding linguistics, semiotics, human environments, individual experiences, social processes and behavioural phenomena.

Hay (2010) edited a book that provides a solid base for this thesis’s methodology since it encompasses a human geography perspective on the methods and a vast overview of factors influencing the processes and results of a qualitative research. By the word methodology it is understood the whole process from defining a question to analysing data and formulating a finding, while method refers to the technique used in this process. Furthermore, qualitative research is used in geography as a coverage term for methods addressing a wide range of issues, events and places. Davies and Dwyer (2007) define oral
techniques (e.g. interviews and focus groups), textual analysis and participatory ethnographies to compound the epistemological foundation of qualitative research. Additionally, there are many emergent techniques such as photo-elicitation, walking interviews and discontinuous writing.

3.1.1 Positionality and reflexivity

Two key considerations regarding a qualitative approach are positionality and reflexivity. The first regards the position of the researcher in society and the acknowledgment that ‘who’ and ‘where’ you are and ‘how’ you ask questions influence the information you receive from the participants in a given methodology. As such, an ethical and neutral consciousness must be used so the research remains objective and contributory to the other related works (Braude, 1964). Since bias is a natural human feature, its occurrence in social science is then named positionality so the investigator’s own placement are taken into account within the many contexts, layers, power structures, identities, and subjectivities of the viewpoint (England, 1994).

Reflexivity regards the process of considering your own thoughts on how your positionality affects your interview or your research more generally. It involves thoroughly considering the perks and disadvantages of your positionality, and how this can benefit or hinder your research. Reflexivity is rather infra-individual, while positionality entails the relation of the researcher and the studied object. Both positionality and reflexivity take into account the researcher’s background and the recognition that her or his presence affects situations during the application of methods.

The absolute detachment of one’s positionality is rather utopic, since the researcher will always have a position in society (e.g. gender, nationality, age, physical features, personality and level of education). As such, reflexivity will also outline what the researcher is able to see, overlook or even ignore. In other words, the researcher is a potential and unintentional filter.

When it comes to the fieldwork, the fact that I was ‘local’ researcher engaged in an international university was guiding the interviews was both positive and tricky. Positive because since the cultural cluster did not change, it was easier to grasp some aspects of the
employment relation, and it was equally positive when handling with icebreakers\textsuperscript{10} and creating a friendly atmosphere for the participants\textsuperscript{11}. The cultural cluster could be tricky to manage since it is difficult to be perceived as a filter. On this matter, some relevant aspects of the workers’ experiences could have come across as natural, reasonable or common, and therefore not being open to discussion or theorisation.

Another issue of great relevance is that I was a foreigner who had 45 minutes to understand ‘hidden’ aspects of human connections that were build in years between employers and employees. Hence I tried to avoid any potentially arrogant judgement, especially during the contact with the informants.

\subsection*{3.2 The research object and fieldwork}

The research object of the study is the work-life experiences of in-house and outsourced cleaners working at health clinics in the city of Natal, Brazil. The city is located in Rio Grande do Norte state in the northeast region of Brazil and has a population of 877 000 inhabitants (IBGE 2016), ranked as the 19th most populous city in the country. Natal was chosen as the locus for this thesis based on three correlated reasons. First, tourism is the most important industry in the city, and for that reason, Natal is a constant object of research questions addressing tourism in the national academic context. The intention, then, was to analyse the city under different lenses such as labour. Second, much of academic effort is already dedicated to major cities in Brazil (e.g. Brasilia, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro). While they represent a large amount of people and have interesting phenomena to be studied, Brazil has 32 cities with a population ranging between 500 thousand to 1.5 million people (IBGE 2016) that also need to be studied. Thus, to study a medium to large city is crucial when understanding the geographies of the whole country. The third reason is related to the point that much of the English literature available on Brazil also accounts those major Brazilian metropolis while the rest of the country remain difficult to be found among English academic writing. On the city matter, it is worth mentioning that this is not a study on urban studies, and therefore, the specific dynamics of the city have little impact on the work and

\textsuperscript{10}A wide range of means used by a researcher in order to create an atmosphere of calm, trust and comfort for the interviews; or deconstruct any pre-existing awkwardness.

\textsuperscript{11}However not related to reflexivity or positionality, it was also flattering for the cleaners to be the focus of an ‘international research’, especially due to the ‘unimportant’ stigma following the profession.
lives of cleaners. However, differences between a Brazilian global city and a medium sized one do influence the daily life of workers when it comes to the trade union presence, size of firms and the likelihood of engagement in a more traditional employment relation.

The fieldwork was conducted from mid-August to mid-December 2016 in a moment of political turmoil given the impeachment process of the former president Dilma Rousseff, which ended in 31st August 2016. As explained in the background, outsourcing is constantly evoked with political meaning in the national context, thus, the research object, given its situatedness and experience content (individual and changeable), is also subject to temporality.

In order to make the data comparable in terms of outsourcing and in-house only, the research scope was narrowed to cleaners working in clinics and laboratories, not encompassing those workings at hospitals. The reason of such was that hospital and clinics personnel, while being cleaners within the health service, differ from each other when it comes to working hours, risk at work (e.g. biological waste) and the size of the firms, since hospitals are bigger structures with complex hierarchies. On the other hand, the research object does not discriminate between private and public sector clinics, both were aimed at and analysed for its specificities.

Additionally, in order to assure an appropriate understanding on the political representation, ‘side investigation’ was done with two trade unions in Natal. This is considered an appendix part of the scope since it does not focus on the workers experiences as exposed directly by them; nevertheless, it felt somewhat relevant during the execution of the fieldwork to explore why the trade union movement was present in such specific ways in the lives of the participants.

3.3 Fieldwork: data collection techniques

A wide set of techniques can be labelled qualitative research methods, as discourse analysis, focus group, visual methods (maps, photography, advertisements) and document analysis, to name a few. To start with, the study of the theory is the step that initiates the research since it embodies the emergent thinking on the issue of outsourcing (and flexibility as a whole) and employment relations. This thesis is able to exist thanks to the contemplation at the work of others, since the theory is the foundation of how labour and capital are structured, and what kind of implication they pose for the cleaners taking part in the fieldwork. Alongside, the
possibilities that can be ‘theorised back’ when it comes to the response of such workers to their situatedness is also valuable. The theory is a pervade content in every chapter of this study, and equally, it is part of the background preparation for the fieldwork.

Method-wise, the main one used in the fieldwork was interview. And before giving theoretical ground to it, it is important to say that however not interpreted as such, a great degree of familiarisation with the workplace of cleaners was grasped by the researcher through observation. Participant observation was not planned as a method neither consciously conducted, but the visiting, waiting and sometimes interviewing at clinics provided me with naturally unfolding events. Indeed, simply being with curiosity inside the clinics resulted in the observation of natural activities taking place in the participants’ workplaces, such the voice tone of a task request, clothes differentiation and the barriers to speak with the cleaners while they were on duty.

3.3.1 Qualitative interview

More than an inquiring chat, an interview can contain many forms of conducting a data gathering in which there is a spoken exchange of information (Dunn 2010). It can be face-to-face, via phone call or computer mediated (e.g. pre-recorded, live). The three major types of interviews when it comes to how the content are systematically organised are: structured, unstructured and semi-structured; and the three forms can be used interchangeably (an interview can have structured, unstructured and semi-structured sections). A structured interview will follow a prearranged and standardised sequence of questions asked in almost the same way. On the other side, an unstructured interview will be a conversation in which the informant directs the data (rather than a sequence of questions), such as in oral stories. Sharing characteristics of both, a semi-structured interview will have some degree of predetermined order while remains flexible to the flow of data (Hay 2010).

If planned with background preparation that allows the interviewer to prompt and formulate follow-up questions, the interview process in human geography can constitute a skilful method of gaining access to information over opinions, experiences and events. However, since those vary enormously among people (e.g. class, ethnicity, sexuality and age), geographers should refrain from claiming that an undisputed public opinion has been distilled (Goss and Leinbach 1996).
Also part of the preparation (which is unique to every research), a successful qualitative interview is dependant on questions that allow open responses in opposition to closed range of feedback (such as yes/no). Thus, each informant must describe their experiences with their own words, so the interviewer can discover what is relevant to the participants (Hay 2010). Along with the open question, it is important the use of easily comprehensible language that is appropriate to the informants, the avoidance of ambiguity and leading questions (i.e. the ones that encourage a specific answer).

Question types can be split into primary (or original) and secondary. The former are opening questions to a theme, while the latter are prompts that encourage or direct the participant to reformulate or expand an ongoing discussion. Hay (2010) mentions several types of primary questions; the ones used in the interviews were descriptive (details), opinion (impressions and assertions), hypothetical (contrast and reflection) and devil’s advocate (controversial and sensitive). Examples of used secondary questions are formal (it deepens the scope of treatment), clarification (it reformulates what was said), nudging (it continues a line of conversation) and receptive cues (encouragement by cues).

The relation between the interviewer and the informant is crucial to the gathering of insights and opinions; thus, the contact must be done carefully from the beginning of the process with a proper introduction to the research, the researcher and how the informants’ contact were obtained. Equally important is the construction of a comfortable environment where the participant feels relaxed and safe. Adelman (1981, cited in Hay 2010) advises researchers to maintain a critical inner-dialogue throughout the interview, which constitutes a constant analysis of what is being said while formulating a prompt or a next primary question.

While the previous contextualisation explores the content and dynamics of inquiring, interviews also vary according to the environment they occur. Go-along interviews place the researcher in the ‘habitat’ of their informants, easing the access to their experiences, making visible material evidences of the same experiences. For example, if the informant is a teacher, a go-along interview can be conducted in her/his classroom. Evans and Jones (2011) discuss walking interviews as a relevant way of inquiring given the relationship between what people say and where they say. Their study indicates that the data generated via walking interviews are profoundly informed by the landscapes in which they take place, giving emphasis to the importance of environmental features in shaping discussions. However, both go-along and walking interviews are subject to some undesirable conditions such as high/cold ambient temperature or background noise.
Another subgroup of interview is elite interview, labelled as such because it addresses any kind of elite that can be political, cultural, economic or religious. Therefore the meaning of elite should be associated to the notion of power. When interviewing those on the top of any stratification system, one must be aware of the effects of power and representation: dominance, bias, manipulation or restriction of the presented data (Jupp 2006).

3.3.2 Sampling

Sampling is the process of systematically selecting what will be examined throughout the course of a study and it should be taken seriously because it affects data (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). In the case of interviews, it means to select the informants. As the etymology of selection suggests, it should not be random. Therefore researchers aim at different things when choosing their participants. For instance, purposive sampling can focus on extreme or deviant cases in order to develop a richer, more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and to lend credibility to one’s research account. Maximum variation sampling is sought when the aim is at heterogeneity. With this approach, the researcher is able to maximise the diversity present in the research question by understanding a phenomenon through the lenses of different people, at different times and different settings. Typical case sampling embodies cases that are not extreme, unusual or deviant. Thus, it helps the researcher to observe important aspects manifested under typical circumstances.

The sampling recruitment can be made based on a set of criteria. Criterion sampling refers to cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, providing an important qualitative component to quantitative data (Patton 2010). If the recruitment uses well-informed people to identify critical cases or informants who have a great deal of information about a phenomenon, than it is named snowball or chain recruitment. The researcher follows this chain of contacting informants in order to identify and accumulate critical cases. It is a method that can be fruitful when mapping a small number of key cases that are identified by a number of key or expert informants as important cases or exemplars (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). Opportunistic or emergent sampling will occur when the researcher makes recruitment decisions during the process of data collection. As the researcher gains in-depth knowledge of a setting, she or he can take advantage of unfolding events by making opportunistic sampling that were not in the original sampling scope. The last desirable method is
convenience recruitment, when the prime reason behind a sampling is based on low cost, speed or ease, being neither strategic nor purposeful.

3.4 Fieldwork: recruiting, interviewing and coding

The fieldwork accounted 23 participants out of whom 11 were in-house cleaners, 10 were outsourced cleaners, 1 was a trade union leader and 1 was a trade union representative. All interviews were semi-structured so the rigour could be balanced between strength and adaptability (see appendix for the interview guides), leaving open spaces for prompts and hooks. The interview guide for in-house and outsourced workers did not differ from each other, intending a better comparative data.

The selection of cleaners was based on criterion sampling and the recruitment took place by visiting the clinics and laboratories where potential informants could be found. In clear words, it happened ‘door to door’, where the study and the researcher were presented to the cleaners and sometimes to the management representative, so the ‘right to talk’ to the participants could be granted. The interviews usually took place after a shift either at a nearby cafeteria or at the workplace itself. In the last cases the interviews had characteristics in common with walking and go-along interviews, since the cleaners could show their staff room, ‘napping’ sofa, wardrobe and other symbols of territorialisation of their workplaces. They commonly narrated stories by pointing at objects and rooms.

The underlying subject regarding such interviews happening in the workplace requires understanding of the type of business addressed in the research. Since hospitals were not part of the scope, the workplaces varied from small to medium size clinics, commonly run by a family of doctors or close partners, which creates an atmosphere of permissive familiarisation (more in-depth discussion on this is found in the analysis), allowing workers to make decisions over their daily duties. As an illustration, in one specific case, the cleaner was alone in its workplace holding the clinic’s keys and in full control of the balance between task and time. This slightly amiable environment was somewhat double-edged, dissentient for being casual, yet beneficial for creating an atmosphere of comfort for the meeting. On the matter of the workplace, some outsourced cleaners were also working at public clinics, even though employed by the private sector (as expressed in the figure 2 below). Thus, all 21 participants fall in one of the 4 combinations next:
As it can be observed above, the interviews aimed at typical case and criterion sampling (necessarily being an in-house or outsourced cleaner working at a healthcare clinic). One participant, however, revelled to be a deviant case through the interview process, giving the informant’s lack of formal employment, being neither in-house nor outsourced, but an autonomous cleaner responsible for the payment of own tributes. No in-house cleaner at public establishment was interviewed since the Brazilian public services no longer open direct vacancies for cleaners, which is understood as a peripheral activity or *mean*-task, as mentioned in the background section.

The ‘side’ interviews with the two trade union representatives are examples of emergent sampling since they derived from a new lead (Bradshaw and Stratford 2010) during the fieldwork, that required the understanding of how political representation through unions were taking place. Both interviews were conducted at the main offices of the unions.

When it comes to the coding and transcription of the data, all interviews were reproduced in a written transcript. Since 22 interviews were fully recorded (further explanation in section 3.6 ethical considerations), the coding combines both audio and written notes. As advocated by Hay (2010), transcripts should represent the best reconstruct of the exchange, since it contains details on gesture, ambient and facts that are non-audible. Additionally, since coding is a form of preliminary analysis, the transcripts also contain insights and hooks based on the association of the literature and fieldwork practice. When moving from transcription to a more formal (less disordered) analysis, the data was coded via diagrams (e.g. mind map) and umbrella concepts (e.g. paternalistic bond), where the reported experiences were placed according to their reason, space of occurrence, theme and/or actors involved.
3.5 Credibility and transferability

Credibility ensures how trustworthy the study is. Shenton (2004) points out a few ways of thinking about the question. First, *the adoption of well-established research methods* guarantees the correct operational measures. As previously said, semi-structured qualitative interview was chosen as the main method of investigation based on its characteristic of giving a backbone to what is relevant for the study without constraining informants to express themselves freely. Additionally, the background preparation, the selection of questions and the researcher’s resourcefulness in the moment of the interview all count for the credibility of the data. Secondly, *early familiarity* was present given my intimacy with the culture and language, which are my native ones. Observation also contributed to familiarisation. Then, *random sampling* removed the researcher’s bias by adding unknown influences. For Shenton (2004) this varies from study to study, while some samplings require a purposive approach, others are more trustworthy with random informants. The second case applied for the investigation about in-house and outsourced work in Brazil because participants were unknown to me and under ordinary conditions. Also, *tactics to help ensure honesty* was found in the form of free participation and the opportunity to withdraw the interviews at any time. In this way, only those who are willing to contribute remain part of the investigation. Moreover, *peer scrutiny* was found via academic supervision and sharing the work with my academic colleagues, so part of the assumptions could be challenged. And finally, *reflective commentary* is found through wondering about my positionality, reflexivity and revisiting the research project, methods and transcripts.

Transferability refers to how the findings can be applied to other situations. In fact, empirical studies such as the one of Brody (2006) and Jordhus-Lier (2014) about outsourcing in Thailand and Norway respectively, confirm characteristics shared by outsourced workers in Brazil. On the other hand, when it comes to in-house workers, the findings are also comparable to the ones of Tomic *et al.* (2006) and Ally (2009) about personalised servitude work in Chile and South Africa respectively. Although the cases are analogous, we should refrain from generalising them as equals since this is a qualitative inquiry. The transferability will be better understood through the analysis and discussion.
3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics comprises a set of considerations arising in a research. It addresses the treatment given to a delicate subject, such as protection of privacy of vulnerable people. In this thesis, the main concern was related to the consequences and the confidentiality of the collected data.

An informed consent is the agreement between the interviewer and the participants that outlines what the research is about, the sort of explored issues, the estimated time required for the interview and the guarantee that no harm – physical or social – will be created (Hay 2010). Accordingly, the participants were informed about the research content and the acknowledgement that they could withdraw their participation whenever desired.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) all private data that can reveal the identity of the participants should not be included in the project. As such, while the research was not made through anonymity (when individuals’ responses or results cannot be linked to their identity in any way), the confidentiality is preserved, i.e. the connection between the cleaners and the results are known, but confidentiality limits those to whom the connections are revealed. It was optional for the participants to provide or not any information, even the basic ones, such as name or age. And due to confidentiality reasons, the names in the quotations present in the analysis are all fictitious. Parts of the content were also changed – only done whenever possible to change the content without altering the interpretation –, for example, alteration in kinship status.

When it comes to documenting the data, audio recording and note taking were the main methods used. Out of the 23 informants, only one requested not to be recorded. As pointed out by Hay (2010), audio and video allow a natural dialogue because the interviewer is not worried about writing data down, and usually allow the interviewer to be a better listener focused on both the conversation and the critical inner-dialogue. The acknowledgment of a recording, however, may cause informants to feel particularly vulnerable. Equally, the ‘spur of the moment’ may give a phrase a fixed indelible status. Those issues, however minimised by an adequate approach by the researcher, are also intrinsic to the research process.
4 Analysis

In the analysis chapter I address two isolated compilations of the lived reality of in-house and outsourced cleaners. This was made by rewriting quotes taken from the interviews and matching their content with the references in the theory chapter. My objective with the quotes is that readers can create at least a small intimacy with the reality of workers. It was slightly challenging to translate and rewrite colloquial expressions used by the informants without altering the intensity and making justice to the used intonation and body expressions. Therefore, there is a possible subjection to positionality and reflexivity in this section. The chapter ends with shared experiences informed by both in-house and outsourced workers, highlighting characteristics that are not affected by outsourcing.

4.1 In-house

One of the core points present in the investigation of the collected data is whether or not an employment relation is marked by what is here named *paternalistic bond*. And if so, what implications it brings to the work-life experiences of cleaners. The term was chosen to describe the extent of intimacy and servitude present in the employer-employee relation of in-house cleaners. The paternalistic bond, however, cannot be distinguished between existent and non-existent only, for its presence varies in degrees of intensity.

For the sake of clarification, all in-house cleaners had doctors as their ultimate boss and employer, while some also had intermediary managers in between the two. Thus, the word *doctor(s)* present in the participants’ speech also means their employers.

“I have been working here for 25 years, it is like my second family, they are a father and a sister that I have (...) everyone is united here (...) they are three owning the clinic: doctor José, who is 81; doctor Ana, 55; and doctor Amanda, 29.”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

As an opening quotation for this section, the statement of Laura has important content regarding under which circumstances a patronising employment relation was identified. First,
The length of tenure of the cleaner shows a long-term relationship between the worker and the workplace and between the worker and its employers. The enduring relation is also related to the sense of family felt by the informant. Indeed, the specific clinic is an example of a family-run business that is passed on from a generation to another. The three mentioned owners represent three different generations of doctors in the family. As highlighted in the methodology chapter, the health industry of Natal is marked by small to medium-size clinics and the workplace of Laura is one example of such familialistic environment. The paternalistic bond was also identified in clinics were the owners were just business partners without family tie. Others statements that match the previous one are:

“I have been working for doctor Silva for 9 years, it is a family here, I feel very welcomed. My husband and my son can come here, sometimes they have lunch with us. Here everyone is a friend”

Tatiana, in-house 12.10.16

“They (the employers) are the godfather and godmother of my daughter”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

“I have been working here for 8 years. I feel very well here (...) we are always being remembered (by the employers), they travel and they bring presents for us.”

Hugo, in-house 19.10.16

The three quotes above also exemplify the sense of comfort experienced by most of the in-house cleaners interviewed. Tatiana refers to her workplace as an open space for her relatives to circulate, while Laura personalises the employer-employee relation by blurring such line with the baptism of her child, giving her employers the symbolic title of godparents of her daughter. Hugo is thankful for the remembrance addressed to him by his employers, and while such act creates an amiable environment, it is seems rather impossible for Hugo to realise that travelling is a privilege that he should also enjoy.

The second concept taken from the relationship between workers and employers is that such employment is marked by personalisation of relations, in convergence with the literature of Ally (2009) who points out that the work-life of domestic workers in South Africa is characterised by the balance between personalised intimacy and depersonalised political technology. There are, within this balance of familialistic intimacy and political emancipation ‘loose' spaces where regulation does not reach, which is here manifested in the
great range of **deviant tasks** reported by in-house cleaners, even when they did not perceive
them as abnormal, as observed bellow:

“**There is another person for the reception; she is not here in the morning, so I take**
care of it (...) **No, she does not work in the morning, so I pick up the phone calls.**
**My dear, I do everything: I clean, I arrange appointments, I go to the bank. I am**
**not afraid of working.**”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

“**Whenever I need to leave, I leave (the workplace), sometimes earlier and**
**sometimes later. But also whenever they need me, I am here too (...) sometimes she**
takes me to her house and I clean there too, **I make an extra** (money in the end of
the month). **We always need it, don’t we?**”

Magdalena, in-house 21.09.16

The two statements above are good examples of the ‘little favours’ in-house cleaners do. The
experience of Laura lives up to a clear detour of her tasks. In her case, to work as a cleaner
also means to be a receptionist (picking up calls, confirming appointments) and
administrative assistant (banking service). Magdalena is sometimes responsible for cleaning
the house of her employer, and in her case, the connection between cleaning and domestic
work seems clear. Indeed, experiences with other types of cleaning (such as domestic work or
gardening) were found to be common among both in-house and outsourced cleaners. In
connection to the historical perspective addressed by Teixeira *et al.* (2015), the Brazilian
transition from slavery to abolition, created a current of employment not based on wage
work, but on **benefit relation**, particularly strong within household services. Such benefit
relation encircles the exchange of services and favours between a patron and a servant. To a
certain extent, the physical spaces of clinics were perceived as an extension of the doctors’
personal property. Such extension can be exemplified by Magdalena sporadically swinging
between her workplace and the household of her employer. Her example is a good one for
moving from task deviation to the theorisation around benefit relation.
“I have my house thanks to them. I needed the money to buy the lot, I talked to them and they gave me the money. I paid it back in parcels until the moment they stopped to discount (from her salary) (...) Yes, they gave me my house. Everything I need I can talk to them.”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

When asked about why such acts, she continued:

“Because one hand cleans the other. If the boss comes to an employee and says “Please do this” and the employee replies “No no, I’m off work” then it gets difficult.”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

“Here we are two. Now it is only me because the other one is on holidays. (...) Yes, so I am doing both external and internal cleaning. (...) I don’t complain because they have helped me, you know? They helped me with my house, my furniture... I can’t complain.”

Miguel, in-house 13.10.16

Miguel, who was originally responsible for cleaning the external part of the clinic, was, at the moment of the interview, doing the work of two employees at the same time (internal and external parts) because he felt ‘owning’ something to his employers. Laura has internalised a work ethic that is both permissive to the will of her employer and anticipating on his benevolence (from which she takes advantage), consisting the power asymmetries of such relationship. The analysis surrounding the financial benefit is dense and it will be readdressed in the discussion of flexibility and later on in the discussion of representation. For now, it is important to observe that the benefit relation is double-edged. While employees take significant financial advantage from such relations, employers profit from an extensive functional flexibility (Atkinson 1984) of cleaners. On the matter of servitude, the literature of Tomic et al. (2006) can be compared to the one of Teixeira et al. (2015) when asserting that employment in both Chile and Brazil are marked by subordination and reciprocity tracing back to the past of both countries. As such, the servitude and benefit relation identified in the fieldwork must be understood as rooted in historical sedimentation. That is, inequality is within the genesis of Brazilian society within slaves and masters, coloniser and colonised, whites and non-whites. Such disequilibria, then, is more or less
reproduced in modern day Brazil through class stratification, but as pointed out by Ally (2009), such personalised intimacy clashes on a **depersonalised political technology** of contemporary democratic achievements, such as paid holidays, minimum wage, sick leave or parental leave. In other words, the practices of servitude still compelling in a country of deep social inequality like Brazil, however, the modern democratic acquisition granted workers with a set of right that, along with personalisation, shape the employment relation of cleaners. In other words, the degree of task deviation, power asymmetry, benefit relation and intimacy reinforce the translation of Brazil’s colonial past into modern forms of wage labour marked by servitude.

The employees take for granted the class difference between them and their employers and therefore feel thankful for the acts of kindness their employers address to them. However, the cleaners are unwilling to see that such class stratification is not organically inherent to society and that it constitutes the outcome of political and economic decisions made throughout the history up to contemporary days.

The point in this study is far from blaming employers for being on the top of the Brazilian class division, neither blaming nor pitting cleaners for being in the bottom without consciousness of such. The point regarding the paternalistic bond is that it poses an overwhelming influence over the employment relation of the cleaners because the involvement between them and their employers is *strong* and *genuine*.

When it comes to the consequences of such tie, the paternalistic bond seems to cast both positive and negative outcomes. It is positive because the recurring idea of trust and reliability grant workers with a sense of comfort and allows cleaners to make more money due to ‘extra’ services and benefit from the generosity of their employers. On the other hand, they perform a wide range of task deviation not related to the original scope of their employment. Tricky enough, in-house cleaners showed both control over their duties when it comes to the freedom of leaving the workplace earlier or postponing some tasks; while, at the same time, they did not have control over what kind of task their employers could require them to execute. Cleaners had the liberty to make minor adaptations and interfere in their workplace (e.g. leaving the job earlier or taking a family member to have lunch with them at their workplace), however, such liberty is subordinated to the power asymmetries present in the relation between employer-employee; and perhaps more importantly, not based on a political perception of their self-determination. Because of the latter, such autonomy exists within boundaries established by the ‘powerful’ part and therefore does not qualify the
cleaners as proper examples of corporate agents (Archer 1995). Thus, their autonomy manifest in acts of primary agency that take place within loose, yet constrained borders.

4.2 Outsourced

We can now analyse some of the experiences exposed by the participants who were hired through outsourcing companies and had quite distinct workplace experiences compared to in-house ones.

We can observe a fundamental characteristic in the statement below, which is related to the difference between the companies they work for and the companies they work at. Such dichotomy is the basis of many experiences reported by the informants, and therefore, the starting point of this section.

“I am there replacing the other employee that is taking holidays (…) I normally work at an apartment complex (…) I don’t know yet if I am going back there or not, it does not depend on me. It’s on them. I prefer it there (over the clinic), but it’s on them, you know?”

Lucas, outsourced 08.09.16

When asked why he preferred it there, he explained:

“I know everyone there. We have a ‘whatsapp’ group, it’s good people I know (…) The guys and I play football once in a while (…) but it’s uncertain (…) I don’t think it is good, but we cannot say anything”

Lucas, outsourced 08.09.16

Within the legal scope of outsourcing, Lucas was transferred from one workplace to another very easily, and while he was not at the clinic against his will, neither was he consulted by the hiring company whether or not he would like to be transferred. We can highlight the notion of instability as the starting point of the analysis. The recurring transfers, as seen from the perspective of workers, were random and arbitrary, even though they followed the needs behind the hiring company’s logic. Another important idea present in the quote above regards uncertainty due to the lack of information about the future of Lucas’s workplace. He was
unsure if he would return to his previous workplace or not and when asked why he would rather move back to his previous location, he mentioned his personal connections with other people as the main cause. This finding is linked to what Jordhus-Lier (2007) states to be a fundamental difference between how capital and labour see space. In fact, Lucas’s workplace is related to part of his life beyond his job, such as socialisation and leisure. In this manner, outsourcing is a domain of compromised affectivities, since the human-human and human-spatial connections are occasionally shattered. Examples reinforcing the three previous aspects can be found bellow:

“I don’t have anything specifically bad or good to say (...) the ambient here is very nice. I am in my place and they (employers) in theirs. When they need me, I’m there to help.”

Eva, outsourced 17.10.16

“I work for OSC for two years. I started there (actual workplace) two months ago (...) Before I was at UPA (...) They (work colleagues) are a little unknown to me but I talk to everybody. I have no problem.”

Kelly, outsourced 01.11.16

Another observed feature of the outsourced workers is that they showed awareness regarding the scope of their employment. As can be seen bellow:

“They like me because I do my work right. But I also vindicate my rights, I was transferred from the forum because I confronted the direction.”

Leonardo, outsourced 28.10.16

“They (management of the clinic) were upset with me once because I questioned about the contract between Hearty (clinic) and Cardinal (outsource company) (...) there must be some crazy things there.”

Monica, outsourced 15.09.16

The underlying fundament of such is interpreted here as based on the lack of servitude affectivity. It is a situation that relates to behavioural changes in the Brazilian labour market that is linked to the implementation of flexible labour legislation. Such change is similar to the one observed after the Spanish labour reform of 2012, which increased the circulation of
employers among firms, but in return, it also spread lack of engagement (Oliver 2017). Even though engagement and affect are different things (yet analogous), the stressing point is that the circulation of employee among different workplaces has consequences to the relation between them and their jobs. The acts of confrontation by Leonardo and Monica were merely professional, without any strong content of personalisation. Yet, they were marked by a self-understanding of their employment that can be associated to the words of Katz (2004) of oppositional consciousness and equally as a fundamental spark for the institutionalisation of corporate agency (Archer 1995).

Agency was also encircled on the matter of transferability, and therefore, it is not accurate to say that every outsourced cleaner had zero control over his or her likelihood to be transferred. Some cleaners had experienced interfering in the decisions made by their hiring firms. The next quotes exposes two contrary takes on the topic. But first, it is worth noting the fact that some cleaners influencing the fate of their work location does not exclude instability, uncertainty and compromised affectivities from playing their roles.

“...I can’t tell you if all the others have the same openness (...) when I worked at the sales stand I was dissatisfied because I wanted to study at night time, so I told them (outsourced company) (...) but I had to wait because things do not happen from one day to another, then there was a vacant position at Hearty (current workplace) and they transferred me there.”

Monica, outsourced 15.09.16

“I preferred at Cidade Satélite because it was close to my mother’s house so I could have lunch there (...) here it is too bad, one must wake up too early (...) it takes more time to come and to go (back home).”

Antonio, outsourced 14.09.16

The two quotes above address the transferability factor in different ways. While Monica could suggest a transfer to benefit her schedules and future plans, Antonio was negatively affected by the decision made by his hiring company. The example of Monica is a good illustration on how workers see their possibilities within the extent of their employment, either via confrontation or dialogue/request. Katz (2004) defines “resilience” as a form of bypassing certain arrangements and “reworking” as a form of altering the arrangement without interfering the polarisation of power relations; and in fact, the position of Monica is
marked by her avoidance of a working time that did not interest her (resilience) and the change of the organisation of her employment within her hiring firm (reworking). The third stage addressed by Katz, resistance, is achieved when emancipatory changes are obtained, which was not the case of Monica, since her ‘moves’ did not grant her with any emancipatory status.

The quote of Antonio highlights an important feature of the labour experience as an outsourced, which deals with conditions that are unable to be foreseen. It is common sense that when applying for a job, workers consider factors such as the environment atmosphere (some people feel more comfortable than others in health institutions), the working time (some business are open during night time) and geographical location (proximity to one’s residence). However, outsourced employment is characterised by no presupposition of linkage between workers and workplaces, and therefore parts of the working conditions are unpredictable since the organisational features of the workplace also interfere in the work experience, even when such workplace administration is exempt from the contract and responsibilities towards the workers.

On this matter, an outsourced worker gave an interesting interpretation based on his experience:

“I have been thinking and I have noticed that they transfer the person (worker) after two years more or less (...) I believe the place (the workplace company) can interfere if they like the person”

Leonardo, outsourced 28.10.16

The observation of Leonardo not only suggests the consequences of flexibility as experienced by the cleaners, but also a degree of curiosity about the reasons behind flexibility. That is, he wonders about flexibility from capital’s point of view. Since this research is of qualitative content, no truth is claimed to be omnipresent, and as such, the experience of Leonardo could be linked to one specific outsourcing company. Matters like this are part of organisational features of each firm (Esping-Andersen 1990), but since this research does not claim to investigate the experiences of companies and CEO’s with outsourcing in order to understand their operational choices, it is out of the data and theory scope to continue with the investigation regarding Leonardo’s ‘2 years theory’.

Nevertheless, one factor seemed rather unchangeable in the narratives of the informants. What Jordhus-Lier (2014) termed double control in his study about outsourced
housekeeping labour in hotels, is related to what here is claimed to be **double hierarchies**. Cleaners were placed in the bottom line of such structures of power and various workers reported to be supervised by both parts: the administration of the clinics they work at and the administration of the companies they work for. Additionally, not only more control was reported, but also a certain sense of psychosocial discomfort could be observed. Examples can be read in the following quotations.

“We are seen by the direction as a lower thing. (...) By both of them (both administrations). You can see, you talk to your colleagues, you can feel that you value less.”

Leonardo, outsourced 28.10.16

“When I started we had more (meetings with the outsource company), now it is less. (...) we also participate at the Hearty (workplace) meetings”

Monica, outsourced 15.09.16

“We have a supervisor, but we never know when he is here. Sometimes twice a month, but it happens that he is not here for a whole month.”

Omar, outsourced 29.11.2016

When asked about how the relationship with the supervisor was, he declared:

“It is neither good or bad, I know it is his work. For example, when our salaries were delayed, the supervisor came here with promises, said that we were about to earn them. He tried to negotiate (...) we were only hearing from him.”

Omar, outsourced 29.11.2016

The last quote is also a good example of the double meaning carried by the outsourcing company’s supervision as seen from the workers perspective. While sporadic meetings and regular visits from the supervision placed cleaners under double surveillance, Omar also saw his supervisor as a peacekeeper in one specific moment. Which is, in theory, the supervision’s original role: to maintain and to assess the working environment and the good relationship between cleaners and the company they work at.

When it comes to the interpretation of how those hierarchies are scaled in the workplace, it is worth mentioning that the gap between workers and management were
considerably high for outsourced workers. However, fluidity and fixity were experienced in different ways. As reported by Omar, while the outsourced workers’ voice only directly reached the supervisor (fixity), the demand of duties from the top level reached workers more freely (fluidity). In other words, the cleaners’ vindication were relatively prevented from progression, while they remained subjected to their working place management and hiring company. This is especially important when taken into account that, once outsourced, a drastic shift in the employment responsibility is transferred from the workplace administration to the outsource company. The work establishment still demands the labour power from workers, but without will to take responsibility of being an employer, as also mentioned by Jordhus-Lier (2014).

4.2.1 Public workplace, private employer

Making up this small sub-section, cleaners who were outsourced but worked at public clinics experienced the same structures as other outsourced workers, sometimes sharing the same employer. However, the first differentiation relates to the size of the government bodies.

“Only us outsourced bring our lunch (...) the food is only for the state employees (...) in the kitchen we can warm our food in the microwave (...) the director is doctor Helena, but the story we heard is that it was not decided by her, it was a decision that came from the Secretary of Health. When we started here we could cook there (...) I liked it much better back then, because we must take a bus with a bag with uniform, towel and now another bag with food. And there is also the time at night to make the food for the following morning”

Eva, outsourced 17.10.16

In Brazil, the Portuguese name for a relative small clinic run by the government is called “posto de saúde” and despite their small size, they were placed under a high hierarchy at the administrative level. As such, Eva had too little control over the dialogue between her and the top-level administration of her workplace.

A second difference is that while outsourced workers at private clinics had in-house work colleagues who were also ‘private sector-hired’, outsourced cleaners at public clinics compared their working conditions to their colleagues who were ‘public sector-hired’. Since
Brazilian public employees share different benefits as those who are employed by private companies, the informants constructed their lived reality with a relative gap between ‘us’ (outsourced personnel, also including security staff) and ‘them’ (all state-employed personnel). The quote of Eva exemplifies this by her perception of who has access to fresh food and who does not. This differentiation, however, is not entirely negative, since the strategies of control seemed to be softened at public clinics, resembling the experiences of in-house cleaners:

“They (family and friends) can come here; with this there is no problem. I take my pauses and it’s okay (…) but when they call me I must go, you know? (…) For example a patient vomited, then I must hurry up.”

Eva, outsourced 17.10.16

Payment delay is another observation reported by outsourced workers at public clinics. The research extent cannot compare the experience with delays among workers that are in-house, outsourced at private clinics and outsourced at public clinics, for it was only mentioned by outsourced cleaners at public clinics. Independently, the delays were one of the hardships of such form of employment and Omar mentioned it on page 58.

4.3 Converging experiences: labour law, stratification and unionism

So far, we have discussed in-house and outsource labour as rather distinct objects. They are, indeed, distinct in many cases, but informants also shared a good extent of convergent experiences.

First, reinforcing what Castells (1998) named generic labour, workers reported a vast experience in ‘alike’ forms of jobs. The most common for female workers was domestic work, while male cleaners reported gardening and doorman/vigilant job experiences. The clinics served the methodological purpose of placing workers in similar frames so their employment could be studied in analogous conditions, however, too little had to do with the specificities of the clinics. The fact they were cleaners at clinics came across as random, with the exception of minor ‘clinic-centred’ specificities.

One of these specificities refers to the cleaners who are in contact with biomedical waste and obliged by law to receive insalubrity benefit. This bonus exists in accordance to
the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) based in the Federal Constitution of 1988, which rules over employment relation in Brazil. All informants (except the ‘autonomous’ one) were subjected to state regulation and all had the same rights to:

a. Insalubrity benefit (exposure to risk; only when applicable);
b. Transport benefit (a calculated amount that is obligatory when the firm itself does not provide workers with transport);
c. Night shift bonus (between 22:00h and 05:00h);
d. Overtime (when exceeding 44 hours per week or 8 hours per day);
e. Paid holidays (22 working days + 8 paid public holidays);
f. Minimum wage (880 BRL during the fieldwork, 937 BRL in 2017);
g. Absence from work due to marriage, military conscription, blood donation, health conditions and a relative’s death (employers have the right to ask for a formal evidence);
h. Prolonged sick leave (after a minimum time of 12 months of contribution);
i. Parental leave (5 days for males, 120 days for females);
j. Thirteenth/Christmas salary paid every December (a sum of 1/12 of every worked month in the referring year).

As we have already covered, labour law levelled out all informants at the national level. They are the ‘Brazilian version’ of what Ally (2009) named depersonalised political technology in her literature about South Africa. But since workplaces are not only passive to state regulation (they also emanate their own dynamics), in-house workers showed likelihood to adapt these laws according to locally scaled processes, reinforcing their singular employment relations. Undeclared cash payments (as the ones found in deviant tasks and little favours) are illegal and so are the non-paid extra hours, both reported as relatively widespread.

The ultimate expression of disregard to the labour law was found in the deviant case of a cleaner that reported herself as an autonomous cleaner (diarista in Portuguese) and businesswoman, meaning that she was responsible for her own tax payment. Diaristas (a type of freelancer) are legal workers in Brazil, but its legality requires specific conditions. In the fieldwork case, it was an illegal activity due to ‘continuous ties’ (art. 1 bill no. 5859/72) between the worker and the workplace, which excluded the firm from labour rights while keeping it as a beneficiary of a well-established (and illegal) employment relationship. The worker was the owner of a small kiosk that also worked as a cleaner. She emphatically
rejected the idea of being formally employed and exposed a certain degree of paternalistic bond with her boss, whom she has known for several years.

From a researcher perspective, it is difficult to assess a personalised relationship without the arrogance of an outsider’s standpoint. Workers were not found to be forcefully executing anything; in fact, much of their agency regarded their ability to ‘customise’ their work-life. However, from a critical point of view, employers seemed as the final beneficiaries of Brazil’s class gap. That is, the reproduction of old social structures into contemporary wage labour adornments.

When it comes to the legislation, attention must be drawn to the labour reform already sanctioned, which is expected to widespread outsourcing throughout the country, as pointed out in introduction. However, the already mentioned rights are expected to be maintained, in addition to new features (not necessarily rights), such as:

a. Mass layoff without trade union involvement;
b. End of compulsory annual union due;
c. Possibility to split holidays in up to 3 smaller parts;
d. Work break can be reduced from 1 hour to 30 minutes in some cases;
e. Restricted understanding of ‘on duty’. For example, if an employee needs to change clothes, this must be done before the shift starts. In practical terms, employees will be forbidden from doing anything but working while ‘on duty’;
f. Core tasks can be outsourced;
g. Public services can be outsourced;
h. It is the contracted company’s responsibility to cover worker’s rights;
i. An outsourcing company can contract another outsourcing company.

The new laws are presented in the congress bill no. 38/2017, being only valid from the 1st of November 2017. Even though the new law did not have effect in the informants’ experiences during the fieldwork, they are expected to soon influence their reality. The labour law is an important part of the employment of cleaners because it plays a massive role in the distribution of income, access to rights and social stratification (Kalleberg 1988).

In addition to the labour rights, another shared point between in-house and outsourced cleaners was reported in the form of negative socio-psychological class stigmatisation, as we can see in the next statements:
“When doctor Amanda started here, her chair was found with a scratch. They thought it was I because I’m from the cleaning. But it was not my fault. Nobody knows who made it, I did not make it. (…) It was bad, you don’t like to have the finger pointed at you.”

Laura, in-house 20.10.16

“You can feel that you value less. Because you are “from the cleaning”, people think they can talk to you in another way. They ask this or that with arrogant manners.”

Leonardo, outsourced 28.10.16

It is rather irrelevant whether or not the experiences above really had to do with them being cleaners, the important issue is that the workers felt so. In their understanding of their employment, cleaning was a second-class task and several informants reported that they would like to have studied more in order to have better jobs, but equally stated the hash conditions that held them up from doing it. That is an interesting point to analyse: cleaners would like to be something else, rather than lifting up their working conditions, suggesting that they had naturalised cleaning as inherently and unchangeably precarious.

Another shared characteristic observed was the informants’ apathy towards trade unions and this form of political representation. In order to balance the gap between union coverage and union membership, all workers in Brazil pay an obligatory contribution equivalent of a working day to its referring trade union (or union confederation) every March. This contribution, however, will be optional starting from 2018, according to the new legislation. Several workers regarded this contribution as either irrelevant or upsetting, as it can be seen in the quotes:

“…One more tax to be deducted from our salary. When I see it, it gives me dejection, because we already earn too little, you know? (…) I am trying to remember the name (of the trade union) but it is slipping my mind. But it is there, every year.”

Miguel, in-house 13.10.16

“I forgot the name (of the trade union), but they have already been here, they talked to us (…) I don’t even notice the deduction.”

Veronica, outsourced 21.11.16
Additionally, only one cleaner reported to be unionised while the others expressed suspicion or disinterest:

“I belong to SIPERN (union’s name), it is a tiny bit more than 17 BRL a month (...) I like it because they know my rights that I don’t know (...) I think unions are important to guarantee that our rights will be respected by the firms.”
Kelly, outsourced 01.11.16

“I’m not very optimistic about unions today. I know they used to achieve better things, especially salary. But nowadays, with this mess (in the country), I doubt it.”
Hugo, in-house 19.10.16

“To be honest with you, I don’t have contact with them, but I know they do things for us (...) (I don’t become a member) because I don’t need, I solve everything here.”
Laura, in-house 20.10.16

Cleaners had too little to say about trade unions and several of them had never had contact with them. When incited to give their thoughts about unions, the informants gave confused answers, such as the one of Hugo who associates the trade unions with the electoral politics context of Brazil. Perhaps more problematically, Laura’s idea that she does not need to scale up her agency shows the tendency of isolation when it comes to how cleaners addressed the politics of labour.

In divergence with the argument of Houtzager and Lavalle (2010) about Brazil being a global leader in the area of participatory governance through organised civil society, the informants did not report being a member of any organisation. Thus, summarising the lack of participatory governance, the poor trade union influence, and the scenario of political instability in the country with large portions of the population see the events as part of a coup, cleaners in Natal found themselves in a representative void that reinforced the ideas of paternalism and stratification in the workplace.

The analysis chapter was focused on exposing the informants’ lived reality in an organised approach by using concept codes and matching the experiences of cleaners with the literature. The study will now move towards a less empirical usage of the literature, exploring some theoretical nuances of the data.
5 Discussion

The fifth chapter presents a less empirical and more ‘in-depth’ approach to the theory. The quotes are absent so the focus on the concept discussion is kept. Once I realised how interconnected the literature was, it felt natural to place the data under multiple perspectives, but also slightly hard to split the discussion into topics for the sake of readers’ comprehension. Sociospatialities, flexibility and representation make up the three main sections in the discussion, while agency and employment relation, given their versatility, are present as back up theories throughout the chapter. This does not mean that the sections are segregated: outsourcing, network and scalar relations, for instance, are explored at multiple times.

5.1 Multiple sociospatialities, single employment relation

This section observes how sociospatialities give significance to the informants’ workplaces and how certain dispositions are found in their workplace dynamics. In fact, the basis of this thesis addresses a territorial question by investigating outsource and in-house cleaners. That is an issue of insiders and outsiders and an example of what Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017) called external territorialisation. Outsourced informants reported this external differentiation by referring to their employers as ‘outside’ of their workplaces, thus away from their everyday lives. While the link between external territorialisation and outsourced labour is rather obvious, an in-house cleaner also informed to sporadically perform domestic work at her employer’s residence in the form of a paid favour. In this case, the shift from the ‘agreed’ workplace to an external one is an issue of territory that resettles the physical outline of a supposedly defined workplace. This is not to say that in-house and outsourced employment relations are equally affected by external territorialisation. Externalisation affects all outsourced workers, but the findings show that neither in-house labour is completely exempt from this. ‘Little favours’ and deviant tasks, too, can stretch workplace boundaries.

The second form of territorialisation is internal (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2017) and covers small-scaled processes of exclusion/inclusion, surveillance and control. The outsourced cleaner who was forbidden from eating the clinic’s food because ‘she was not an state employee’ is an example of such territorial issue. In fact, in-house cleaners were
relatively less subjected to control, surveillance and areal differentiation. Since their employment was marked by trust and reliability, they were observed moving through their workplaces with more freedom than their outsourced colleagues were (remember Laura, the in-house worker in possession of her workplace’s keys).

When we borrow Raffestin’s (2012) idea of wage labour being a constitutive category of territorality due to its association with power over resources and finances, we find in-house workers embedded in a complex matter. Behind their freedom to move all around their workplace exists a permission constructed via power asymmetries that has already been labelled paternalistic bond. As for the outsourced, less ‘hidden’ factors made the territorial implication over them clearer.

Freedom to move throughout their workplace, long lasting employee-workplace ties and workplace comfort create the conditions for in-house cleaners to territorialise their workplaces in ways that outsourced cannot. In this case, territory starts to merge with place. In-house workers territorialised the clinics through personal belongings and taking their family members there. This sense of workplace is in the centre of the place discussion. The concept is understood through subjectiveness and affective relationships (Lopes 2012). The comparison between outsource and in-house legitimises Tuan’s (1983) argument that space precedes place because while both have an established space of work (commonly referred as workplace), the relations that characterise place (as a sociospatial category) were more evident within in-house employment given to material and immaterial territorialisation based on affect.

The analysis of Jordhus-Lier et al. (2017) is slightly different than those of Tuan (1983) and Lopes (2012) because it does not focus on whether place is engendered in the workplace or not, but how place can be used as a lens to observe core-periphery dynamics. The sprawl of core-periphery was found to be rather small for in-house cleaners, partly due to the size of the clinics but also due to the familialistic environment where workers were in the core. What sustain the assumption are their commitment, their close ties with their employer and their pride in executing tasks.

Outsourced workers, on the other hand, were rather aloof when it came to issues not directly related to them. It is, however, dubious to label such indifference as lack of commitment since this could lead to the individualisation of commitment, which is not accurate. Lack of place attachment and commitment are true phenomena among outsourced, but the case is more related to flexibility than to the workers themselves. This is easy to understand when we look at weakened affectivities due to locational flexibility.
It is important to note that core-periphery is not a fixed dynamic. As exposed by the outsourced cleaner that used to gather with his workmates, outsourced informants also construct affective relations that diminish their ‘horizontal differentiation’ (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2017), however, this was constantly endangered by flexibility.

Especially for outsourced labour, the core-periphery is a rather scalar discussion constituting double hierarchal structures. They face two different hierarchies: one at the workplace and another one at the company hiring them. This is observed in the sense of discomfort that some informants reported for being in the bottom line of both structures, thus contributing to their self-perception as stigmatised peripheral workers.

For in-house, there is a scalar factor present in Ally’s (2009) balance between personalised intimacy and depersonalised political technologies, even when the author does not explicitly mention scale. That is, the clash of a locally-generated personalisation and the nationally-generated depersonalised rights. In-house cleaners had an employment relation strongly influenced by both regulated (macro-scaled) and unregulated (micro-scaled) factors. For example, when an informant reported staying non-paid extra hours because “one hand cleans the other”, she was aware of her labour right to leave at the right time, but an employer-employee bond that was scaled at the local level overshadowed this supra-workplace right.

Following this discussion, labour rights (as part of the state regulation) set the minimum legal standard for both in-house and outsourced workers. The difference is that in-house cleaners consciously bypass state regulation by engaging in undeclared financial benefit and task deviation. That is an example of the fluidity content of scaled processes (MacKinnon 2010), since labour rights prevented in-house from suffering abuse they do not consent with (political technology), but such rights were also easily toyed by employee-employer’s will (personalisation). What in-house cleaners do is, indeed, a scale jumping from a national-scaled process to a workplace-scaled one, benefiting from one or the other whenever convenient. The case is also directly related to their agency in the form of resilience (Katz 2004), that is, the power to avoid certain dispositions.

Outsourced workers were entangled in a triple scaled dynamic: micro-level (workplace), meso-level (outsourcing company) and macro-level (state regulation). The ‘power verticalisation’, as observed in the fieldwork, resulted in obstructed communication with their superiors but created an interesting (and unexplored) structure for cleaners’ agency, which will be covered subsequently. The only scalar benefit found among outsourced workers is the case of the informant who changed her workplace to adapt it to her personal
interests. Because of her ‘tripled scaled’ employment, she could call upon her hiring company (meso-level) in order to change her workplace (micro-level) while her labour rights remained fixed and subjected to state regulation (macro-level). Such locational flexibility was reported in different ways, though: sometimes as risk and insecurity (Jordhus-Lier 2014) for workers when they did not have control over it; but also as something desired when they could benefit from it. An argument regarding ‘flexicurity’ will be addressed in the next section.

It is clear that the workplace is a multiscaled entity, emanating and accommodating different forces, which takes us to the exploration of the workplace as a meeting point: a network perspective.

First, the workplace of outsourced cleaners is the contact point of two business structures. The link, in fact, is the outsourced worker itself, whose employment is the materialisation of the contract between an outsource company and a second one hiring the outsourced labour. This is easy to be observed through double control (Jordhus-Lier 2014) when cleaners reported being supervised by two business apparatuses.

Network is also an appropriate lens when observing the workplace as a contacting point of different classes. Especially important for a country with a huge gap between rich and poor, the clinics were a powerful affective-territorial node (place-territory-network) within Brazil’s society. It is affective to the extent that people were not merely passing through (as in a street or airport, for example), but they were creating long-lasting bonds. It is also territorial because the clinics were ‘joining together’ doctors (upper class) and cleaners (working class) who were ‘areally differentiated’ outside the workplace boundaries (healthy/poor neighbourhood or exclusive/popular forms of transportation). As an example of such, we can highlight the in-house worker that had her employers as the godparents of her child: it starts with territorial network, then it evolves into an affective network and it results in a resistant social tie. This example also sustains the workplace as a geographical entity, since the socio-economic processes that take place there are not merely reflections of external structures, but also consequences of what is happening in the very heart of workplaces.

The clinics also connect the two forms of employment studied in this thesis. Since in-house and outsourced workers were presented separately in the analysis, it is relevant to observe that in several clinics they existed together. In order to avoid theoretical density, this section focused on how the clinics were structured from a sociospatial perspective and how it relates to the experiences of workers when it comes to their agency, space of affectivities,
working conditions and employment relation as a whole. We will now theorise flexibility from different standpoints.

5.2 Flexible practices, rigid boundaries

As presented in the theory chapter, flexibility is a difficult concept to understand because its meaning varies among the viewpoints of capital, workers and organised labour (Jonsson 2007, Jordhus-Lier 2014). Additionally, flexibility as an academic concept to address capital’s contemporary way to dispose labour often overlaps with a more or less timeless, decontextualized understating of flexibility as something broadly adjustable, therefore giving it a positive aura (Garsten 2008). Indeed, market campaigns and political supporters often use these blurry lines as part of a ‘modernising rhetoric’ (Pollert 2007). The fieldwork data found in Brazil, however, showed that contemporary flexibility only justifies part of flexible employment forms. Historically rooted relations are also marked by patterns of ‘flexibility’, but workers’ response to them was more positive.

Some forms of flexibility were explored in the theory chapter, such as functional, numerical, financial, temporal and locational (Atkinson 1984, Kalleberg 2003, Jordhus-Lier 2014, Possenriede and Plantenga 2014). The three main types found in this thesis were locational, temporal and functional flexibilities. It is noticeable that outsourcing per se already legitimises financial flexibility (since it is a legal way of implementing flexible labour) and numerical flexibility (since the headcount can be easily redistributed throughout the system). Also, as clarified by Atkinson (1984), numerical is a firm-centred perspective. Outsourced workers are the portrayal of numerical flexibility, but it is difficult for them to perceive themselves as such because each worker only represents ‘one out of many’. Increasing or decreasing headcount is part of a managerial overview that a single employee usually lacks.

Starting with locational flexibility (Possenriede and Plantenga 2014), we can observe that in-house workers were attached to their workplace while outsourced ones showed a great degree of mobility. The burden of workplace flexibility is manifested through transferability and its likelihood to occur. The likelihood refers to the distress of something unwanted coming to happen and the transferability itself is related to the changing in the worker’s routine. As we have seen in the analysis and in the scalar discussion, this form of workplace flexibility was reported in different ways: sometimes as risk and insecurity (Jordhus-Lier
2014) when uncontrolled by workers, but also as something desired (Rilley 1998) when they could benefit from it. Further questions on these two possibilities are: do workers possess a political instrument of control over their transferability? Could this be associated with flexicurity?

The answer for the first question is no. Workers did not have formal control over their transferability; therefore it does not qualify in any way as flexicurity, because the likelihood of transferability cannot be formally predicted, interfered or controlled by labour. Perhaps it even jeopardises flexicurity as something credible. Whenever a worker requested a transfer, she or he was subjected to capital’s benevolence. Jordhus-Lier’s (2014) argues that flexibility is experienced by labour as risk (individually) and fragmentation (collectively); and by using a similar frame of analysis, we can say that locational flexibility is how the participants experience numerical flexibility (Atkinson 1984). Those two forms of flexibility have major implications in the place discussion, since it undermines the sense of workplace, pushing workers towards peripheral zones of horizontal differentiation within their workplaces (Jordhus-Lier et al. 2017).

Locational flexibility was found in the fieldwork in the form of transferability and it is a central characteristic of outsourced employment. It also relates to what Castree (2013) named worker-centred flexibility and to what Castells (1998) named generic labour. That is, outsource workers face the need to adapt themselves to the fluctuation of the labour market through more or less alike types of employment. Even when counter arguments suggest that outsourced workers might have a long-term tie with their employer, an employment relation is also dependant on organisational features of the workplace, and therefore transferability does cast changes over one’s lived reality at work (compromised affectivities and conditions that are unable to foresee, for example).

**Temporal flexibility** (Kalleberg 2003, Jordhus-Lier 2014, Possenriede and Plantenga 2014) is the second reported form of flexibility and it regards the adaptability of the working hours and shifts. Both in-house and outsourced workers in Brazil are subjected to state regulation that legally allows them to work 12 hours shift (with 1 hour of break) without overtime bonus as long as the employee is off work for the next 36 hours. This system is named 12x36 (referred as 12 per 36) and was only found among outsourced cleaners during the fieldwork. While definitely characterised as flexible, the 12x36 system does not derive from outsourcing. It is a move of the Brazilian state towards flexibility in order to allow firms to make adjustments related to ‘when’ workers must be on duty without any form of financial compensation.
In-house cleaners were the sole ones reporting temporal flexibility without any legal base. They were able to make adjustments in their working hours to fit their personal schedule, such as leaving earlier or being absent from work for some hours. That happened largely unregulated and it was also marked by a double-edged dynamic and unpredictability. Employees reported the consent of their employers when the first needed to adjust their working time, but equally, workers also reported flexibility in adapting their personal schedules according to the need of their employers in different occasions, such as staying longer hours and even working extra shifts.

In-house cleaners’ working time flexibility is the closest example combining security and flexibility that the fieldwork found. The paternalistic bond did grant them with a sense of job security and amiability, however we must refrain from making an uncritical association between flexicurity and the working time flexibility found in in-house employment. First of all, the concept of flexicurity is theorised as a hypothetical win-win scenario from the perspective of the changing economy of the global north (Rilley 1998, Karlsson 2007, Pollert 2007, Garsten 2008). Second of all, in-house cleaners in Brazil were subjected to power asymmetries that gave such flexibility an expensive price. In this way, cleaners also worked when they did not want, so as to satisfy their employers. Additionally, temporal flexibility was part of a cluster of reciprocity connected to the next form of flexibility.

Functional flexibility, as first theorised by Atkinson (1984), regards the ease in redeploying workers among tasks. According to the collected data, outsourcing seemed to reduce functional flexibility given the extent of task deviation reported by in-house workers, such as booking appointment, bank service and shopping (mainly medicine, but also snacks for other workers). It is clear that outsourced workers had a well-established task scope and they were also more likely to stick to its extension. It is inaccurate to label the functional flexibility found in in-house employment as intensification of work. The conducted fieldwork cannot answer whether or not outsourced and in-house differed when it comes to the intensification of work, since a single task can be performed exhaustively and multiple deviant tasks can be performed in an indefinite period of time.

In-house workers showed a sense of pride in accomplishing deviant tasks and did not reflect over them as being abnormal. Functional flexibility was correlated to the paternalism between employers and employees because cleaners regarded it as natural and the commitment to being flexible workers constituted their identity and self-perception as good workers.
The cluster of reciprocity encircles functional and temporal flexibility and allows in-house cleaners to financially benefit from their employment in ways that outsourced cannot. Here, there is a paradox that blends the multiple ways of looking at flexibility: while outsourcing represents flexible labour policies in Brazil (such as numerical and financial flexibilities), outsourced workers themselves were found to be ‘playing by the rules’ of the state without large variation from what has been regulated as ‘flexible’. On the other hand, in-house cleaners were more likely to have their employment relation influenced by unregulated workplace-scaled flexibility, that is, forms of flexibility that are generated at the workplace level (micro scale) with somewhat independence from legislation (macro scale).

At least according to the case studied, this research suggests that flexibility derives not only from neoliberal ways of diffusing labour but also from the remnants of Brazil’s colonial past and the pattern of benefit relation employment (Teixeira et al. 2015) that was instituted after the shift from slavery to wage labour. This is, perhaps, the main point to have in mind when pairing the theory about outsourcing and the fieldwork data. Many theories regarding the transition to flexible labour look at the global north as a reference for what existed before flexibility prospered. While outsourcing exists throughout north and south nowadays, the previous ‘old’ labour structures that remain existent alongside outsourcing differ considerably between the global north and south. Or, to avoid generalisation, we can say that Brazil’s historical labour structure is grounded in its own specific ways. Therefore the need to match the literature about flexibility (Atkinson 1984, Kalleberg 2003, Jonsson 2007, Jordhus-Lier 2014, Olofsdotter 2012, Possenriede and Plantenga 2014) with forms of employment that can be associated to the fieldwork data, such as the ones found in South Africa, Chile, Russia, Thailand and other Brazilian cases (Brody 2006, Tomic et al. 2006, Ally 2009, Teixeira et al. 2015, Tkach and Zdravomyslova 2016).

5.3 Political representation

As identified in the analysis chapter, cleaners reported a great apathy and disinformation about unions. This contributed to the representative void along with the political instability of Brazil and the lack of participatory governance via civil society organisations (Houtzager and Lavalle 2010). Therefore, opportunistic investigation (Cohen and Crabtree 2006) in the form of interviews, observation and document analysis was conducted with the two possible
unions for cleaners in Natal. The objective was to understand why unions seemed to be failing and to map points that could give strength to the political representation of workers.

5.3.1 Representing cleaners in Natal

Two trade unions are potential organisations for the informants to unionise, and both of them regard ‘cleaners of clinics’ as part of their represented group. They are:

a. SIPERN, a union encompassing workers employed within healthcare service who are not doctors, including nurses, handymen, technicians and cleaners in the state of Rio Grande do Norte. In Portuguese Sindicado de Enfermagem, Técnicos Duchistas, Massagistas e Empregados em Clinicas e Casas de Saúde do Estado do Rio Grande do Norte.


The literatures of Pitkin (1967) and Saward (2010) are useful to give a theoretical base to the fieldwork data, that is, to understand how those unions are representing cleaners. While Pitkin’s frame is more focused on analysing divided parts of the formal electoral world, Saward draws attention to the construction of representation as a single process of claim. The two literatures are presented in this study as complementary.

Starting with Pitkin (1967), representation as active (acting for) was found in both SIPERN and SINDLIMP in the form of formalistic representation (legal grants), since both unions had formal authorisation for political account and both regarded ‘cleaners of clinics’ as part of their purposes. When it comes to substantive representation (proper actions taken by the representative), both unions troubled with exemplifying their strategies in recruiting and giving support to this specific branch of cleaners. The exception was SIPERN’s engagement with outsourced workers of public hospitals and clinics, where the union representative exposed commitment in organising workers’ confrontation and even strikes throughout the state. Randomly or not, the only unionised informant was a SIPERN member and outsourced worker at a public clinic.
Regarding representation as passive (standing for), the descriptive representation (alikeness between represented and representative) of both unions was problematic and successful in different ways. While SIPERN mirrors the informants’ characteristics related to their workplace (healthcare service), SINDLIMP mirrors their task (cleaning in general). In this case, the descriptive representation of Pitkin (1967) is closely related to the network discussion given the dichotomy between workplace unionisation (SIPERN) and task unionisation (SINDLIMP). That is, workers holding the same task-identity (“I am a cleaner”) are spread among different workplaces (clinics, shopping centres, schools). At the same time, a single locational-identity (“I am a healthcare worker”) can be shared by different task-identities (cleaners, nurses, security guards). In addition, descriptive representation is constantly subjected to outsourcing’s locational flexibility (Possenriede and Plantenga 2014), due to transfers and subsequently reconstruction of workplace sense (Jordhus-lier et al. 2017), a place-related field. Thus, when representing cleaners working at clinics through description (Pitkin 1967), SIPERN’s (focused on location) and SINDLIMP’s (focused on task) efforts face the challenge of changeable sociospatialities and flexibility.

When it comes to symbolic representation (established codes), we must recall the informants’ distrust and aloofness towards the labour movement to estate that unions failed in establishing a socio-cultural notion that they represent workers. If symbolic representation is a matter of learnt behaviour, the fieldwork exposed the absence of symbolic power within unions.

Perhaps the main objection to Pitkin’s (1967) literature is that it presents a too fragmented perspective of a single process. Even though it is fruitful to analyse isolated aspects of representation, we can apply Saward’s (2010) representative claim in order to obtain a more unified understanding of the data. Saward’s formula (maker, subject, object, referent and audience) is presented in the theory chapter and it can be applied accordingly to the two unions:

a. SIPERN: the leaders of the union (maker) puts forward SIPERN (subject) as representative of nurses, handymen, technicians and cleaners of health care institutions and firms (object) to their union members, employers, government bodies and possible members (audience).
b. SINDLIMP: the leaders of the union (maker) puts forward SINDLIMP (subject) as representative of the workers employed in jobs related to hygiene, maintenance and sanitation (object) to their union members, employers, government bodies and possible members (audience).
There are two evident discussions from the previous characterisations. First, that the objects of the unions are different, which refers to the differentiation between workplace and task unionisations, as explored in Pitkin’s (1967) descriptive representation. Therefore not only are the objects different, but also the referents are too. The second discussion relates to the absence of referent – the cleaners *in reality*, not as a construction for a claim. Such absence is the grounding point of Saward’s (2010) theory of representative claim, where unquestionable self-evident representation does not exist; there are only claims of representation done by the representative. The representative, then, can only offer an object of what is being represented. That is, the object is a verbal and visual construction made and supported by the maker and the subject. In this manner, SIPERN’s and SINDLIMP’s claims rendered different objects in relation to different referents, while their audience not always differ.

Saward’s (2010) representative claim explains why SIPERN and SINDLIMP have internal problems at the union level. While it is understandable that both unions want to enlarge their membership potential by extending their objects, this has led to the overlapping address of cleaners of clinics done by them, which refers to one being negatively interfered by the other. The large scope of their referent resulting in objects that are ignored by the audience is perhaps something more problematic. Contributing to that, the aesthetical moment in the representation is not recognised as legit by the workers they claim to represent. In his literature, Saward (2010) points out that the representative needs to operate aesthetically in order to render its representation accepted (rejection is on the other edge of possibilities). One example of arguable aesthetical moment was identified in the SINDLIMP’s orange office, as it can be seen below.

Figures 3, 4 and 5, from left to right: SINDLIMP (figures 3 and 4) proximity to refuse-collectors of Natal (figure 5) can be seen in the orange colour and in the trash bins.
Source: fieldwork (figures 3 and 4) and natal.rn.gov.br (figure 5)
Orange is a colour associated with street-sweepers and refuse-collectors in general (figure 5), and therefore the ‘colour code’ fails when establishing an effective semiotics between the union and the fieldwork informants (even though SINDLIMP succeeds in its representative construction of refuse-collectors). The discussion relates to the partiality issue of representation, where the final object is only one final construction out of many possible others.

Another point to highlight is that both SIPERN and SINDLIMP can benefit from infra-movement representation (Saward 2010), i.e., to analyse how they perceive and construct their objects (which is also part of their audience) in their internal plan. In other words, to transform themselves in their own audience of a primary claim of representation, and subsequently, rescale the claim towards their intended audiences.

The representation issue precedes any theorisation around the unions’ strategies because while both SIPERN and SINDLIMP affirmed to use strategies of recruitment (workers as audience) and resistance (employers as audience), such as inspection, counselling, welfare facilities, collective bargaining agreements, strikes, and sporadic visits to workplaces; the main obstacle was to connect and inform the workers of clinics that ‘unions were there for them too’. The reason of why this did not happen is that unions failed to insert such workers as part of their core focus. They were marginalised for not working at hospitals by SIPERN and marginalised for not being refuse-collectors by SINDLIMP. The only exception found was outsourced cleaners at public clinics, given the large scale of their workplace (the state) and relative large scale of their employers (the outsourcing company). The outsourced ones at public healthcare were more ‘visible’ to the trade unions than their counterparts.

It is also fair to extend the political representation analysis outside the union level, since serious roadblocks towards workers’ political organisation marked the reality of several participants, as it is discussed in the next section. These roadblocks were out of reach of the unions and examples of how workplace sociospatialities influence representation.

5.3.2 The social security implication

Beyond the unions’ representation issue regarding workplace and task unionisations, other two major factors negatively affected cleaners’ political organisation. First, the workplace bubble regards the isolation of workers within the territorial boundaries of their workplace.
A primary and rather obvious reason behind this bubble is that given the methodological limitation of the size of the companies, the informants had few (if any) work colleagues who had the same job, isolating them from other cleaners and casting barriers towards task solidarity, due to the lack of social interaction among them. Another reason, a somewhat hidden one, relates to the type of social dynamics happening in the workplace, which reinforced their isolation. That is, the paternalistic bond that marks in-house employment constitutes an effective factor binding employees to their employers and constraining them to the territory of their workplaces. In fact, the sociospatialities of corporate agency (Archer 1995), such as scaling up workers response (scale), expanding the employment boundaries by adding unions’ intervention (territory, scale) or creating solidarity among workers (network, scale, place) are undermined by a constrained form of socio-relation that interferes in the daily experiences of workers and their access to social security.

The source of welfare is a complex matter in this study because Brazil’s situatedness of flaw social services, servitude wage labour(s), recent democratic achievement, and current widespread political distrust challenges the political organisation of cleaners and their understanding of social security.

Brazil exemplifies what Fudge (2005) calls a gap between subject and substance when it comes to its citizenship, since the country’s constitutional entitlements towards social security fail at a practical level. Also, Brazil’s current step towards neoliberal economic and social policies (such as the new labour reform) indicates the drifting from the idea of a citizenship at work, i.e. a nationally-scaled form of membership based on the extension of rights from ‘the cradle to the grave’ (Fudge 2005). On the other side, Brazil’s democracy has granted the interviewed cleaners with a set of labour rights, incentive towards unionisation12 and protection against workplace discrimination14. Thus, Brazilian citizenship has an ambiguous role within the social security discussion: it is limited in its substance, but it opens up to other forms of access to social security via representation, such as unionism.

As indicated by Beckman (2009), unions provide an element of democratisation even when the political realm is governed by ruling-class politics. In fact, the efforts of SIPERN and SINDLIMP in setting up collective agreements, legal advising, organising workers and

12 See article 9 of the Brazilian constitution where the right to strike is guaranteed.
13 See article 8 of the Brazilian constitution where it is stated that unions do not require authorization to be founded (except for registration) and neither has the state the right to intervene in the unions’ affairs.
14 See article 7 of the Brazilian constitution forbidding differentiation in salaries, duties and hiring criteria due to colour, age, gender or civil status.
patrolling the labour law fulfilment qualify this unionism as a path towards social security via employment, membership and citizenship, given the premise of decent labour as a constitutional right. Both unions also reported different facilities related to the welfare of their members, such as dentistry insurance (SIPERN), education discount in school and higher education institutions (SIPERN), and housing founding (SINDLIMP). This form of social security is related to industrial citizenship (Marshall 1950), but it is not precisely the same, given the limited extension of these unions and the lack of legal welfare payment via unionism in Brazil. In this way the presence of SINDLIMP and SIPERN inside the constitutional context is only a rudimentary representative platform towards access to welfare, especially when taken into account the insufficient engagement between informants and unions. Instead, outsourced cleaners were largely dependent on public policies that set their labour rights and welfare access, while in-house were embedded in a complex financial-affective relation that gave them a source of ‘security’ that was neither the state nor an union membership, but their employers. That constituted a chaotic scenario of dependency and provisional benefits.

The lived reality of in-house cleaners are marked by a distorted alternative to social security that powerfully undermines their political organisation and reinforces their isolation in a cluster of reciprocity, because it is a type of labour that is capable of granting workers with illicit financial benefit and working time adaptability15 under the price of temporal and functional flexibilities (Atkinson 1984, Kalleberg 2003, Jordhus-Lier 2014, Possenriede and Plantenga 2014). Additionally, the personalised intimacy (Ally 2008) creates strong and legit connection between cleaners and employers that prevent solidarity among workers and strengthens the servitude relationship between two historically defined edges of Brazil’s social stratification.

From the perspective of the labour market as a socially constructed space (Jordhus-Lier 2007), in-house employment does show convenience points over outsourced when it comes to workplace safety, stability, comfort, affectivities and financial possibilities under the price of unregulated work tasks and conditions; however, from the perspective of workers’ political and economic emancipation, in-house cleaners are entrenched in an alienating and historically-rooted servitude relation that poses a serious roadblock towards any prospect of an organised labour movement.

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15 Recall Selwyn (2016) political economy of labour where adequate time for social reproduction and higher wages are fundamental for workers.
5.3.3 In-house vs. outsourced: prospects of representation

The discussion surrounding the experiences of in-house vs. outsourced cleaners in Natal is an illustration of the socioeconomic transition of Brazil, where contemporary forms of employment collide with the continuity of historical processes.

While it is clear that outsourcing is changing the geographies of cleaning in the country, the short-term consequences of it revealed a burden for workers manifested in the form of double hierarchies, straightened control, risk, unwanted transferability (locational flexibility), compromised affectivities, payment delays and territorial differentiation. On the other hand, outsourcing was observed to reduce task deviation (functional flexibility) and make workers and employers more likely to follow state legislation. However, on the matter of the state, it is important to recall a non-caricatured image of it (Jordhus-Lier 2007), since the state’s interests can tend towards fusion or separation of those of capital (Burawoy 1985), as seen in the examples of China (He and Xie 2012) and Nordic countries (Dølvik 2007). Thus, there is no inherent impartiality in the Brazilian labour legislation, and neither must the politics towards outsourcing be seen as neutral.

When it comes to the prospects of an organised labour movement, outsourcing brings two crucial characteristics to the political geography of labour. First, it sweeps out the paternalistic bond, which is perceived in this research as a roadblock to efficient unionisation. And second, outsourcing is a form of organising capital that makes small clinics and workers interconnected: a territorial-network paradigm of combining external territories of multiple workplaces. And by doing so, outsourcing converts into opportunity since it creates potential for structural power (Wright 2000) for workers. For instance, JMT Service, one of the outsourcing companies in the Natal metropolitan region, employs more than 5000 workers in a wide range of tasks and workplaces, both public and private. Thus, the double scale argument of outsourced employment is that while one might work at a small clinic, she or he might be employed by a relative big outsourcing company. One example of such is the outsourced cleaner who has a whatsapp (phone app) group with his former work colleagues even after his hiring company transferred him to another firm. The workplaces change, but the network structure remains linking colleagues who have the same employer.

While the erosion of patronising employment and the creation of structural power are consequences of the shift towards outsourcing, there is no guarantee that such conditions will

\footnote{16 Number found in the official page jmtservice.com.br. Accessed on 29 September 2017.}
result in associational power (Wright 2000) or increase the number of unionised cleaners. We can, nevertheless, *speculate* about a labour movement that is neither focused on workplace unionisation nor task unionisation, but in the multiple professions and worksites of outsourced companies. In this case, it would overcome what Jordhus-Lier (2014) named fragmentation (flexibility from the viewpoint of organised labour) because it necessarily embraces the dissolution of worker-workplace ties. Additionally, to transcribe industrial citizenship (Marshall 1950) into contemporary days implies the inclusion of plural identities and contemporary forms of employment, namely flexible labour such as outsourcing (Fudge 2005, Voos and Linden 2012, Jordhus-Lier 2014).

A second speculative scenario can be imagined by matching the literature of forms of labour in the global south (Brody 2006, Tomic *et al.* 2006, Ally 2009, He and Xie 2012, Teixeira *et al.* 2015) with the ones of the global north (Fudge 2005, Karlsson 2007, Pollert 2007, Olofsdotter 2012, Jordhus-Lier 2014, Jordhus-Lier *et al.* 2017). In this second case, if flexibility in Brazil does not lead to any change in the political representation of cleaners, it will still destroy the pattern of servitude employment present in the country. However, workers in the global north and in the global south are likely to be levelled out in a midpoint named flexibility (for capital), insecurity (for workers) and fragmentation (for organised labour) (Jordhus-Lier 2017). Global north workers will perceive deterioration the most due to the nostalgia of their own history of industrial labour relations, while global south workers will be free from the paternalistic bond (when existent, such as cleaning in Brazil), but not necessarily in a better place than before, since in-house workers did show numerous convenience points in the daily life of workers and their self-perception on their jobs.

Lastly, with outsourcing expected to reach core tasks in Brazil by November 2017, flexibility will impact on the jobs of the country’s upper class, which represents the opposite edge of the servitude relation studied in this thesis, such as the doctors and business owners who were the ‘patrons’ of cleaners. This will result in the future need for further investigation on the labour geographies of Brazil.
6 Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative study was to compare in-house and outsourced cleaners in Brazil when it comes to their work-life experiences, the spatial context of their workplace and their political conditions and possibilities, such as labour legislation and labour representation. The group of informants followed the criteria of being cleaners employed at small to medium size clinics in the city of Natal. No distinction was made regarding ethnicity, gender or age, and both public and private clinics were studied. We can now summarise the findings.

The three main common points between in-house and outsourced participants were found to be negative psychosocial consequences of class stigmatisation, apathy towards trade unions and dependency on the state regulation to set the minimum standard of employment, although in-house workers were likely to manipulate that. Several informants focused on the relationship between them and their employer when addressing their workplace experiences. While in-house participants had a tendency to see their employer as a person, outsourced ones saw their employers as a company. That is a small characteristic that greatly represents the dichotomy presented in the analysis chapter: a personalised and patronising bond marked in-house work while emotional detachment and depersonalisation characterised outsourcing.

For in-house, the personalisation is interpreted in this research as being rooted in the history of labour in Brazil, more precisely in the form of servitude relation that was established following the abolition of slavery in the country. The contemporary situation of cleaners in Natal is similar to that observed in South Africa and Chile, where labour is marked by class gap in a context of clash between depersonalised democratic achievements such as labour rights and the personalised benefit relation of servants and patrons. Similarly, the type of servitude employment of in-house cleaning shares characteristic with domestic work in developing countries such as Russia, South Africa and Brazil itself.

As found out in the fieldwork, in-house workers expressed a set of advantages over their outsourced counterparts such as sense of comfort, strong affective ties, job stability, control over their routine, less controlled work environment and financial benefit under the price of functional and temporal flexibilities. Outsourced cleaners, on the other hand, reported experiences with double hierarchies, fear of locational flexibility, compromised affectivities and payment delays. Some of them addressed differentiation in treatment
compared to their in-house colleagues, while others felt as equals. Positively, outsourced participants were less subjected to functional flexibility.

The advantages of in-house over outsourcing can be seen as deriving from two main sources. The first one relates to ‘what in-house lacks that outsourcing holds’ and refers to the burdens of flexibility such as compromised sociospatial connections. This confirms why outsourcing is problematic for cleaners. The second and more problematic one is ‘what in-house holds that outsourcing lacks’ and regards the dynamics of servitude between employer and employee such as unregulated financial benefit, functional and temporal flexibilities. Although in-house workers positively referred to those practices, they confirm why in-house work is problematic for cleaners, even when workers themselves do not reflect about it as an issue. The matter is that they are sustained in a form of paternalism that poses serious challenges to the political and economic emancipation of in-house cleaners, since the lack of political consciousness endures the historical gap between rich and poor in Brazil. Thus, it makes any prospect of an organised labour movement more difficult for in-house than what it is for outsourced workers, since the paternalism that joins employer and employee undermines solidarity among workers and creates a form of distorted social security for in-house cleaners that legitimises such class based paternalism. The distorted social security is undeclared financial aid from employers to workers that correlates to cleaners’ aloofness towards trade unions and to their widespread distrust in electoral representation in Brazil.

State regulation is perceived in the discussion as a ‘depersonalised and nationally scaled’ actor which in-house workers were able to benefit from and ignore at different times according to their ‘personalised and locally scaled’ workplace dynamics. Differently, outsourced workers were likely to follow labour legislation and they also reported fewer abnormalities in their work routines. It is important mentioning that ‘following labour legislation’ is not a guarantee of decent working conditions, since there is not inherent impartiality of the state when it comes to the labour market. As such, the relationship between outsourcing and the Brazilian state is a paradox: the legalisation on outsourcing is able to standardise employment relations under formal measures, which is particularly important for a country such as Brazil where servitude relation and social vulnerability is widespread. In opposition, outsourcing per se creates immediate burdens for workers as exposed by the informants of this research. The conclusion is that the state holds the capacity to interfere in practices of personalised servitude relation found in Brazil as it has been doing with outsourcing, however, given the working conditions of outsourced cleaners, the
objective is not the emancipation of unskilled labour, but rather the modernisation of class exploitation.

Nevertheless, the structure created by outsourcing should not be seen as solely able to benefit capital. From the perspective of unskilled labour in Brazil, outsourcing is also an opportunity. It does not bring immediate benefits for workers (except for reducing functional flexibility), but it might have positive outcomes if well addressed. Five points sustain this assumption. First, outsourcing was found to promptly deconstruct the pattern of servitude labour ingrained in the Brazilian society. Even though the shift from in-house to outsourcing has immediate costs for workers, it also frees cleaners from a bond that undermines their political awareness. Such deconstruction has direct implication on how workers perceive their agency and where they direct their solidarity to, being crucial to the institutionalisation of corporate agency. Second, however it is not something desirable and neither the only way to break apart servitude labour, outsourcing proved that state regulation can equalise the range of unregulated deviation among unskilled jobs. This realisation opens up for a more positive intervention on labour in the political future of Brazil, even resulting in the reformulation of outsourcing itself. Third, outsourcing contributes to the structural power of labour by ‘popping workplace bubbles’ and connecting clinics that once were segregated. This sociospatial implication is made precisely via labour, since hundreds of labourers can work at several small companies, while sharing a single employer and subsequently similar working conditions to sympathise with each other. Taking advantage of the structural power and developing it into associational power among workers is both a challenge and an opportunity for the labour movement to grow in a scenario of flexibility. Additionally, the structure created by outsourcing makes solidarity likely to flourish among different professions holding a singular employer, being neither task-oriented nor workplace-oriented. Fourth and related to the third, outsourcing made cleaners more visible to trade unions in Natal as they exist today. The introduction of cleaners into bigger outsourcing companies make the unions ‘uncover’ cleaners who once were isolated in small clinics. Fifth, outsourcing in Brazil was reserved to peripheral activities, but with the expectation of outsourcing reaching the core of firms in November 2017, unskilled outsourced workers will gain important allies in the struggle for better labour legislation surrounding outsourcing, namely the highly skilled upper class of Brazil.

The points above are speculative, but sustained on the fieldwork data, studied literature and present-day context of labour in Brazil. It is, unfortunately, also possible that the labour movement can fail at expanding its presence among all workers. In this case,
cleaners will remain politically underrepresented and outsourcing will continue the process of equalising work at a low standard. That is, without the variation caused by paternalism but with the precariousness typical of flexible employment. Despite everything, the discussion between in-house and outsourced work live up to the socioeconomic moment of Brazil, a country in transition whose political decisions attempt to follow market reformulation. In this moment, the engagement of political actors is decisive in securing a way of development that can finally address class inequality and the political marginalisation of what yesterday was named slaves and servants, and today represent unskilled workers such as the cleaners who contributed to this research.

Furthermore, the findings of the thesis support the idea of giving a second thought to the idiom ‘outsourcing is bad’, especially when it comes to what existed before outsourcing was established and to what kind of job is being contracted out. Indeed, outsourcing has a vile side for cleaners in Natal and this thesis does not support it as a win-win way to address work in Brazil. However, the outcomes of outsourcing are not solely dependent on, nor controlled by, capital itself. As a premise on its way to solidification, outsourcing is something the labour movement must see as real, but not indomitable. As found in the dynamics of clinics, the workplace of outsourced workers holds a sociospatial situatedness that outmanoeuvres the historical pattern of paternalistic labour in Brazil, as well as it is a form of diffuse labour that benefits the structural power of workers. If well addressed by political actors, the discomfort of outsourced cleaners in Natal can be oriented towards actions aiming at the political representation of unskilled workers, a powerful instrument when forwarding social equality via labour in Brazil.
References


Appendix

Interview guide 1 (cleaners)
*The guide was originally written and used in Portuguese

In-house ( ) Outsourced ( )
Informant ________________________________
Workplace______________________________ Outsourcing company__________________________

For how long have you been working with cleaning? What kind of other jobs have you had? For how long have you been working for your current company? And at this specific workplace?

Could you narrate a typical day at work for you? When do you start and finish, when do you take pauses, when do you eat? What are the main tasks?

How many cleaners are in the cleaning crew? How would you define your relationship with the other workers? Would you say you have friends at work? Do you feel welcomed and taking part?

How would you define your relationship with your workplace? Are you attached to it? In which ways/why not? Do you have a place for you (take me there?)? Have your family or friends been here? Do you feel comfortable at work? (Safety, inclusion, hygiene)

Could you tell me the best experience you had at work? And what about the worst? When you are not satisfied with something, how do you do? (Communication and self-strength) Could you please give me an example? Have you ever acted collectively? (From gathering money to buy a boiler to discussing working conditions)

Do you earn more than the minimum wage? Is it your final income? How do you make to the final income? Do you work overtime/night shifts? Are they paid? Have payments been violated?

What do you think of trade unions? Do you belong to any labour organisation (why so?)? Do you belong to other social organisation, how is it? What do you think of the compulsory union fee?

Would you like to be doing something else other than cleaning (reasons behind the answer)?
Interview guide 2 (labour union representative)

*The guide was originally written and used in Portuguese

What is the main purpose of your union?
How is the profile of your members?
What are the strategies of recruitment?
Are cleaners of health clinics part of your union? How is the approach to them?
What are the strategies of resistance?
What kind of service do members enjoy, including benefits?
What are the main difficulties your union face?