

WE ARE WITH YOU AT HOME

Domestic Work and Collective Action — Archives, Memory and Testimonies

Conference · Lisboa · 6–7 February 2026



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Acknowledgments



Official Commemorations Commission's showcase for the 50th anniversary of 25 April



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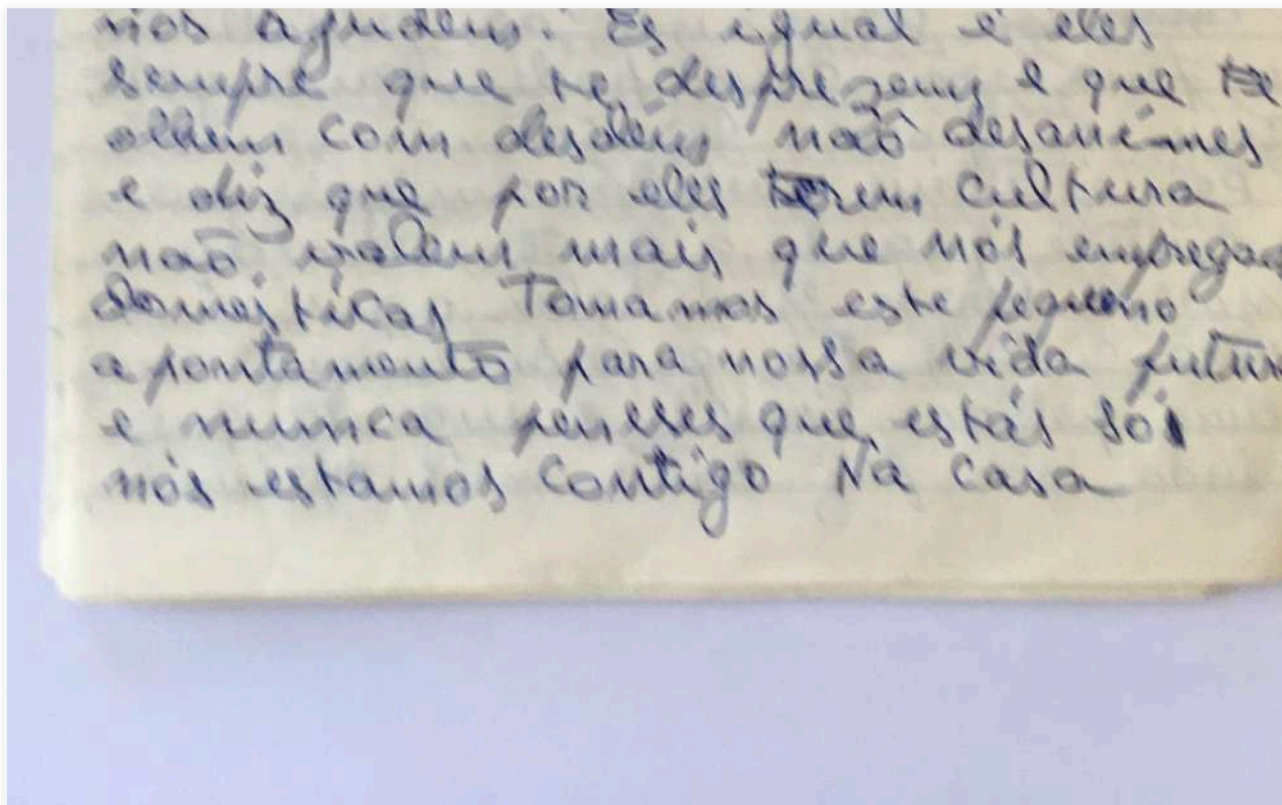
"Le Balai libéré" / The liberated broom

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About this conference

The title of this meeting is taken from a letter written by a domestic worker to her trade union and kept in a domestic service union archive. The document bears no date, sender or recipient, only a handwritten note reading: ARCHIVE. The letter ends with a cathartic note: "...and never think you are alone; we are with you in the house where you work".



Letter collected during the research residency for the first creation of Cassandra artistic structure. Collected by Mafalda Araújo and Sara Barros Leitão, 2021, union archive at Centro documentação CGTP-in, Seixal.

Domestic service

This brief excerpt inspired the title for this conference. It is part of a first-person account of early migration to Lisbon to work in someone else's home at the age of seven, capturing the isolation and collective imaginary of domestic labour.

DOMESTIC AND ARCHIVAL WORK

The focus on the archives of women workers' organisations and the rise in popularity of trade unionism in the domestic service sector has been a hot topic worldwide in recent years. This is partly due to a resurgence of interest in how gender, class and migration inequalities intersect in the paid domestic work sector.

The meeting on 6 and 7 February 2026 in Lisbon is part of the project Women workers' voice: The Archives of the Domestic Service Union [1974–1992]. It will bring together contributions from different geographical contexts and fields of practice. These contributions focus on domestic work, care, and cleaning, and their connection with collective action, cooperativism, trade unionism, and memory-making.

Building on immersion in trade union archives and historical experiences of self-management and cooperativism in domestic service, we invited proposals that would engage with the diverse organisational and struggle repertoires developed by workers in this sector. Hence, contributions could focus on oral history or archival research, as well as the narration of lived experiences and self-representations of (under)paid working conditions and labour contexts.

A TRANSNATIONAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

Seeking to establish a transnational and interdisciplinary dialogue on these experiences, this meeting seeks to encourage the participation and sharing of ideas among activists, artists, grassroots associations, researchers, workers and trade unions — calling on the voice of workers and the power of archives as a living tool for knowledge, learning and transformation.

PROGRAMME DAY 1 · 6 February (Friday)

Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (FCSH-UNL), Avenida de Berna 26 C



From Lieve Meersschaert's personal archive. Meersschaert was part of the Domestic Service Union and its cooperative, Cooperserdo, and was awarded a grant to work on several interviews she made to Union and Cooperative members. Image: Cova da Moura, 2024, Mafalda Araújo and Lieve Meersschaert.

09:00 | Breakfast and registration [B building, main hall]

09:30–09:45 | Presentation of the Project “The Voice of the Workers: the archives of the Domestic Service Union (1974–2013)”. [Room B3]

With the project coordinator, Nuno Dias.

09:45–10:30 | PANEL 1 — Domestic Service Archives

Memory, history and preservation

Opening the conference through archival work, this panel discussing the preservation, organisation and activation of the documentary collections of the Domestic Service Union, as well as the centrality of letters as a form of political expression and testimony by domestic workers.

Moderation: Inês Brasão. [Room B3]

Participants:

CGTP, “The documentary collection of the Domestic Service Union: preservation and dissemination” **and** Ana Beatriz Martins Vilaça, “The political subjectivation of domestic workers in the letters sent to the Domestic Service Union (1973–1976)”

11:00–13:00 | OPENING LECTURE — Housewives, prostitutes, workers and capital: *The Arcana of Reproduction*, 45 years later.

A conversation between Leopoldina Fortunati and Alessandra Mezzadri

Recently published in Portuguese by Boitempo and reissued in 2025 by Verso, *The Arcana of Reproduction* is the starting point for a conversation between Leopoldina Fortunati and Alessandra Mezzadri. Forty-five years after its first publication, the session proposes a critical reinterpretation of its founding contributions to what is now known as social reproduction theory, emphasising the centrality of domestic work as socially necessary. Moderation: Mafalda Araújo.

13:00–14:15 | Lunch break

14:15–15:30 | PANEL 2 — Other Domesticities [room C111]

Communes, cooperatives and self-management

This panel revisits collective experiences that sought to socialise domestic and care work in the context of the Portuguese revolutionary process, exploring communes, cooperatives and collective infrastructures as political projects for transforming everyday life. Moderation: José Soeiro.

with

Madalena Andaluz, “The Domestic Service Union and the Portuguese Revolution of 1974–1975: towards thinking the socialisation of domestic work”

Lia Antunes, “Houses, nurseries and laundries in the SAAL Process (1974–1976): the demand for infrastructures of everyday life”

Ana Bigotte Vieira, “*Breaking down the city’s doors*: a look at maintenance and reproduction tasks at the Cultural Centre A Comuna – Casa da Criança”

Sara Folhas, “From Domestic Work to Self-management: Continuity and Student Halls of Residence”

16:00–18:00 | PANEL 3 — Memory, Arts and Archive

Reproductive labour in literature and cinematic practices

This panel brings together artistic and cinematic practices that translate archives and research into visual, literary and film narratives, exploring absences, silences and alternative forms of representing domestic and reproductive labour. Moderation: Inês Brasão.

with

Manuel Abrantes, “In the land of others: from sociological fieldwork to literary narrative”

Luísa Veloso, Frédéric Vidal and João Rosas, “Production, Reproduction and militancy on the factory floor: an analysis of the struggle of the workers of Applied Magnetics, Portugal, 1974–1975 through cinematic practices”

Tânia Dinis, “Between archives, memories, bodies and silences in the film: *Tão pequeninas, tinham o ar de serem já crescidas* by Tânia Dinis”

Inês Sapeta Dias, “Inhabiting the remaining film: mapping the place of domestic workers in family films”

—Evening session —

Location: Casa do Comum, Rua da rosa

20:00 | Dinner (registration needed)

Cachupa, Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude

The Moinho da Juventude Cultural Association has been growing since 1984 in the Alto da Cova da Moura neighbourhood, driven by the residents themselves.

By diagnosing, reflecting and acting within the community itself, they have developed training and intervention programmes. The revelation of forbidden culture, namely Batuque and Kola San Jon, has opened up new perspectives for society in general and for the community itself.

It is a pillar of community care, with fundamental and continuous action in the neighbourhood of Cova da Moura — examples of this are the ‘neighbourhood mothers’, the nursery and the ATL, training activities, and the bridges built with other organisations, social and artistic movements.

21:00 | Special cinema session: firing the boss and the creation of a cooperative
(free entrance, limited spaces)

Le Balai Libéré (Coline Grando, 2023)
89 min | Documentary (FR/ENG subtitles)

Film screening followed by a conversation with the director. Translation and moderation by Sofia Lemos Marques.



Image credits: *Le balai libéré*, Coline Grando (Doclisboa / YouTube).

[Synopsis]

In the 1970s, the cleaning ladies at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve fired their boss and created their own cleaning cooperative, called Le Balai libéré (The Liberated Broom).

Fifty years later, the cleaning staff at UCLouvain meet with the workers from back then: is it still possible to work without a boss?

[About the author]

Coline Grando, born in France, obtained a master's degree in Film Directing from the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (Belgium) in 2015. Her first documentary questions the role of the partner in an unplanned pregnancy through the accounts of five men between the ages of 20 and 40. Through these portraits of life, the director analyzes the relationships between men and women.

In 2019, she continues to explore abortion, but this time from the point of view of the doctors who perform it, with *Les mains des femmes*, commissioned by the Fédération Laïque des Centres de Planning Familial and the Centre Vidéo de Bruxelles. The film gives doctors a voice to talk about their practice. How do doctors who perform abortions feel? Why do they do it? What do they gain from it? What are their fears, but also their convictions?

Le Balai Libéré questions self-management and the current working conditions of two generations of workers who cleaned the same place, the University of Louvain-la-Neuve, 45 years apart.

DAY 2 · 7 FEBRUARY (Saturday)

Cabo Verde Cultural Centre, Rua de São Bento, 640

13:30–14:15 | Screening of “*After dinner, it smells like bleach*”.

A project by Ana Beatriz Santos, Maria Lima, Nádía Duarte, and Sofia Sousa (School of Arts, (Catholic University of Porto). Presentation by Cláudia Varejão.

Different perspectives of domestic workers on their work, at different stages of life, from childhood in the countryside to the process that leads them to end up in the city as maids. Hidden stories and secret letters, about things that went unnoticed while they worked. A film inspired by the work of Sara Barros Leitão and with the artistic guidance from filmmaker Cláudia Varejão.

adapted from authors' synopsis



“Servant until when?” – SE.DO Theatre of the Oppressed Forum Theatre Group, Lisbon. A group of women domestic workers united in the struggle for domestic work to be recognised as dignified work. Collaborations with GTO and immigrant solidarity. Credits: Instagram page @sementeiraviseu.

14:30–16:00 | PANEL 4 — Migration, collective mobilisations and informality

This panel establishes a transnational dialogue on migrant domestic work, informality, unionisation and practices of memory, bringing together ethnography, oral history and activism.

Moderation: Ackssana Silva.

with

Ana Luiza Miranda, "Between Borders and Stoves: domestic work, migration and social reproduction in Portuguese semi-peripheral capitalism"

Elsa Nogueira, "Domestic workers in struggle: care as resistance"

Beatriz Realinho, "An ethnography between Portugal and Uruguay: domestic work, collective organisation, care, resistance(s)"

Susana P. Miranda & Franca Iacovetta, "The Politics of Commemorating Portuguese Cleaners' Militancy in Toronto"

16:15–17:15 | Performance by group SE.DO

Serviçal até quando? Forum-theatre session.

Through Forum Theatre, the piece *Servant until when?* reflects on the everyday lives of domestic workers, exposing power relations, exploitation, precarity and invisibility in the sector. The performance highlights the urgent need to dignify domestic work and the importance of collective struggle.

[About the group]

SE.DO is an informal collective of women united in the struggle for the recognition and dignification of domestic work in Portugal. The collective has mobilised to bring domestic service back into the social and political agenda, calling for greater visibility, public recognition, and a fair legal framework for those who perform this work.

To advance these "Dreams of a Better Life" — the title of a manifesto published in 2024 by the three women who initiated the collective — SE.DO has engaged in activities at local, national, and European levels. These actions aim to foster critical reflection and public debate on the value of domestic work and on the urgent need to secure labour rights for domestic workers.

They have been to the European Parliament and the Portuguese Parliament to present the issue. The Theatre of the Oppressed is one of the tools of resistance used by this collective, which has been holding various Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre sessions.

17:30–19:00 | FINAL PANEL — Contemporary struggles and challenges for the future

Closing roundtable dedicated to current struggles, political challenges and possibilities for articulation between research, trade unionism and social movements.

Com Paula Santos (Mujeres Migrantes Diversas), Anabela Rodrigues e Rosa Rosário (Grupo Se.Do), Vivalda Silva (STAD, Union of Workers in Security, Cleaning, Domestic and Other Services), Catarina Martins (Iniciativa Report on Domestic Work, European Parliament).

Conference organisers

Mafalda Araújo (CICS.Nova-FCSH), Inês Brasão (IPLeiria/IHC), Nuno Dias (CICS.Nova-FCSH), José Soeiro (ISUP, FLUP)

Research centres

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São Bento Street, where the Domestic Workers' Union headquarters was located.
Still from the programme *Servir em casa alheia* (*Serving in other people's homes*),
Cinequipa (27 December 1975).

FREE ENTRANCE, **REGISTRATION** IN THE LINK BELOW:

<https://tally.so/r/2EAqJj>

For questions and other queries: encontro.trabalhodomestico2026@gmail.com