



***Canção de ninar (Lullaby) novel and the relationship between women, education and work*<sup>1</sup>**

**O romance *Canção de ninar* e a relação entre as mulheres, a educação e o trabalho**

The *Canção de ninar* novel and the relationship between women, education and work

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**Abstract**

Based on the female theme addressed in the French novel *Canção de ninar/Lullaby/ chanson douce*, by Leïla Slimani, this paper proposes a study of the relationship between some issues of gender, education, and work. Despite being a history situated in the present time, the reading of this book can allow us to approach historical aspects, since the middle of the 19th century, the time in which women were incorporated into labor relations, in order to understand how the problematic involving gender, education and work was forged, which goes beyond historical time, and offer aspects, from which one can perceive a social configuration referring to the role of women in professional performance. Therefore, the novel *Canção de ninar/Lullaby/Chanson douce* becomes a resource as a mobile for training and knowledge of social and historical reality.

**Key works:** Women histories. Teaching. Literary studies.

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## Resumo

Com base na temática feminina abordada no romance francês *Canção de Ninar*, de Leïla Slimani, esse artigo propõe um estudo sobre a relação entre algumas questões de gênero, educação e trabalho. Em que pese ser uma história situada na atualidade, apoiado na leitura desse livro pode-se permitir abordar aspectos históricos, desde meados do século XIX, período no qual as mulheres foram incorporadas às relações laborais exteriores, para entender como foi forjada a problemática envolvendo gênero, educação e trabalho, que ultrapassa o tempo histórico, e oferecer aspectos, a partir dos quais se pode perceber uma configuração social referente ao papel das mulheres na atuação profissional. Isto posto, o romance *Canção de Ninar*, torna-se um recurso como móvel de formação e conhecimento da realidade social e histórica.

**Palavras-chave:** História de mulheres. Ensino. Estudos literários.

## Resumen

Basado en el tema del femenino abordado en la novela francesa *Canção de ninar/ Chanson douce*, de Leïla Slimani, ese artículo propone un estudio sobre la relación entre algunas cuestiones de género, educación y trabajo. Aunque se trate de una historia situada en el tiempo presente, apoyada en la lectura de este libro se puede permitir abordar aspectos históricos, desde mediados del siglo XIX, periodo en el que las mujeres se incorporaron a las relaciones laborales externas, para comprender cómo se forjó la problemática que involucra al género, la educación y el trabajo, que va más allá del tiempo histórico, y ofrecer aspectos, a partir de los cuales se puede percibir una configuración social referida al papel de las mujeres en el desempeño profesional. Así, la novela *Canção de ninar/ Chanson douce* se convierte en un recurso como formación móvil y conocimiento de la realidad social e histórica.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de mujeres. Enseñanza. Estudios literarios.

*Nana neném,  
que a Cuca vem pegar.  
Papai foi pra roça,  
mamãe foi trabalhar.*

*(Sleep baby  
For the witch is coming.  
Dad went to the country  
Mom went to work)  
Brazilian Lullaby<sup>2</sup>*

The traditional *Nana neném* Brazilian lullaby is mainly a terror song. The child represented by the word *neném* (baby) in the song was left alone by the parents; for *Dad went to the country* and *mommy went to work* indicate the parents have left for their professional responsibilities. That child would be afflicted by a mythological creature called *Cuca*<sup>3</sup>, in case he/she did not sleep. However, besides being a *child terror*, it is also a *feminine terror*.

This lullaby, so common in Brazilian homes clearly shows the difference between gender representation and its work relations and hence their family role. Analyzing other traditional versions of the same song<sup>4</sup>, the child is also in danger because she/he is unaccompanied, since the Family is not there. In other classical versions, *dad went to the country* means the man is working, therefore, fulfilling his role as home provider. Male job is named, *going to the country*, that is, agriculture, honest and dignified work.

However, the same song shows the woman as a character who breaks family organization by not being there, because *mom went to work*. This version doesn't name the woman's job, which reduces the value of feminine work, since the listener doesn't know this mom's profession which leads to indefinite conclusion on how dignified the job is, especially if compared to the man's job as a rural worker mentioned in the previous verse.

Other version of the same lullaby<sup>5</sup>, the first 3 verses are identical to the first 3 of the previous song, the last verse also refers to female gender, who is not at home but *is coming soon*. In this case, the woman leaves but for no professional reason, since the expression *mom is coming soon* means a short time away from home. So, this version represents female gender as a housewife, a fact that *detains* her as family and house caretaker, in other words, a *discrete* woman, living for the house and family.

There is also a third *Nana neném*<sup>6</sup>, very known version that has the same first three verses mentioned before. But, in this third version, *mom went to the coffee plantation*. Here, the mother character is away from home because she has a job, and her job has a name, just like the father, she is agrarian worker. However, the child is still is

<sup>2</sup> According to Segundo Machado (2012, p.17), "the immediate definition to this genre is provided by its purpose: song made to get a child to sleep, a functional definition, therefore".

<sup>3</sup> To Cascudo (2012) *Cuca* or *Coca* (witch) is an old and ugly entity that appears during the night to kidnap awoken and restless children.

<sup>4</sup> To Machado (2012) Brazilian lullabies have several meanings according to traditional and folklore, depending upon geography and regional reasons or family culture. In other words, creations that remain in families, or contemporary artistic creations associated to recording brands and released to specific public.

<sup>5</sup> *Nana neném, que a Cuca vem pegar. Papai foi para roça, mamãe volta já*". (*Sleep baby, for the witch is coming, dad went to the country, mom is coming soon* (VENÂNCIO, 2014, p.215)

<sup>6</sup> "*Nana neném, que a Cuca vem pegar. Papai foi para roça, mamãe para o cafezal*". (*Sleep baby, for the witch is coming, dad went to the country, mom went to the coffee plantation*) (Idem, ibidem)

danger, because he/she is alone. Even recognizing the woman's job, *Cuca (witch)* still terrifies the baby.

By comparing *mom went to work* and *mom is coming soon*, in both versions, it is clear the woman paid profession is less important than her role as a non-paid housekeeper, for by not naming it, makes it nonexistent, since "identity and difference share an important feature: they result from *linguistic creation*". (SILVA, 2007, p.76, our emphasis)

Even when female work is mentioned as *in the coffee plantation*, the child still would suffer from being alone, showing that although female work is recognized, it is more important taking care of the family.

As the Brazilian *Nana neném*, the French novel *Chanson douce* by Leïla Slimani, also carries gender representation and its relation with work. Leïla Slimani is a French Moroccan journalist and writer who was born in the early 1980's in Rabat, Morocco. In her late teenage she moved to Paris, France in order to finish her studies. With both Muslim and Francophone education, the author is one of the promising names in French contemporary literature. Her work deals with women's silence universe, for it opens up loneliness and introspection that permeates women life in various cultures. In her own words, on an interview given to *Fronteiras do Pensamento em 2018*<sup>7</sup> platform, her works were created to deal with these women "swallowed by hidden melancholy and violence".

The literary work *Canção de ninar* (lullaby in English) from the original French *Chanson douce*, published in 2016 by *Éditions Gallimard*, won the French literature Goncourt Prize in the same year. In Brazil, *Chanson douce* was translated by Sandra Stroparo and published by Tusquets from Planeta Editors in 2018. This work, according to the author, was based on real life of a Dominican nanny who was judged by double murder in 2012 in New York City.

The novel is announced as a psychological thriller and introduces the history of Myriam and Louise. When Myriam goes back to work after being a mother, her husband and she decide to hire Louise as a nanny of her 2 children. In the beginning the relationship between the family and the nanny is apparently comfortable. However, on and on, this relationship turns into a dependency situation for both parts and the congestion of small routine distresses results on a tragedy that leads the plot, introduced on the first lines of the novel: the nanny kills both children, Mila, the little girl and Adam, the baby.

The tension that turns this novel into a psychological thriller happens almost invisibly to the reader, for narrative is developed from ordinary social relationship events. But, it is exactly because of this ordinary man little power competition that narrative tension enhances and becomes suffocating to the reader. Suspense results from ordinary people everyday episodes, in this work.

Looking at female theme, this article proposes a study of the relationship between some issues of gender, education, and work. Despite being a history situated in the present time, the reading of this book can allow us to approach historical aspects, since the middle of the 19th century, time in which women were incorporated into labor relations in order to understand how the problematic involving gender, education and work was forged. It goes beyond historical time and still touches social relations of the present time.

First we review the perspective of gender representation as historical analysis category. Then, we approach structural discursive elements found in *Canção de ninar* novel,

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<sup>7</sup> Disponível at: <https://www.fronteiras.com/entrevistas/leila-slimani-as-mulheres-e-o-melancolico-silencio#:~:text=Le%C3%AFla%20Slimani%3A%20O%20que%20t%C3%AAm,de%20viol%C3%AAncia%20C%20aspectos%20que%20escondem>. Entry in 06/01/2021.

highlighting the analysis of the female characters Myriam and Louise contrasting their literary construction with gender, education and work relations from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Franco Junior (2003, p. 38), “the *character* is one of the main elements that build the narrative. Most of reader’s attention is on the character because of the resemblance illusion the element has with the person”. The *character* is significant for the story because it is the first element that creates straight connection with the reader. So, the emphasis on the two main female characters, Myriam and Louise, can be understood as a metonymical representation in order to exemplify women education and work since mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, literature is the artistic manifestation that uses special written language full of meanings in the highest degree (POUND, 1976), and tries to represent every man achievement in all times. It is a man’s creation about his own creation, so it is qualified to form the human being through their indiscriminate perception, free from conceptual society prejudice.

According to Candido (1999), literature is able to confirm man’s humanity, as critical thought about social relations is awoken by the reader. So, literary work can and must be studied as source of knowledge in several areas.

It is hard to put aside individual and social problems for they make foundation to literary work and connect them to the world we live in [...] there is an analytical moment when a literary work is studied scientifically, author’s problems, values, social and mental acts must be put on hold in order to reinforce necessary concentration on the work to get knowledge; and there is a critical moment that question the work validation and its function as human experience synthesis and projection. (CANDIDO, 1999, p. 82)

Teaching literature is to take advantage of a great resource of social and historical knowledge and formation, for literary work reveals social living unpretentiously, meeting *the will of knowing* of several kinds of readers.

And, undoubtedly, this is what makes literary work, many times, say more about social world than some claimed scientific works (especially when difficulties on achieving knowledge are less of intellectual obstacles than willing resistance, as here); but it is not said explicitly. The limit of discovery is when the author somehow preserves the control of the repressed return. The formalization the author makes works as generalized euphemism and literally no realized and neutralized reality which enables to satisfy the willing to content oneself with the sublimation literary alchemy offers. (BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 48)

So, using *Canção de ninar* to get a historical view of women education and professionalization since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is an effective resource to think over the relationships that have always set social weave.

**Mom went...where? – Women’s history, gender representation history**

*The place of women is on history books.* Anne Firor Scott, Historian Organization president in the 1980s, said that in 1979. Nevertheless, history had always been considered as male creation, about male achievements. Bock (1989, p. 158) claims, “For man experience, as of history, was matched to *general history* and to *history in general*”. History and women historiography was marginal theme along the years according to investigations in this field of knowledge.

Although publications on women’s history have increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies on that area still demanded premises that based traditional categories about history comprehension. According to Bock (1989, p. 160),

It was not only women in history, but history of women, women experience in and of history, a history that although is not independent from men, is a specific history of women as women, though. Women remain invisible mainly because their experiences, activities and spaces did not deserve historical analyzes.

Understanding past under this new women’s history perspective can mean a better comprehension on structures that guide social relation and consequently the historical processes of society development. According to Bock (1989, p. 164), “it is questionable separate women’s history from general history as to separate men’s history – and all the more the true general history – from women’s history. That means women’s history is concerned not only to half of humanity, but all of it”. Thereby, women’s history can also be understood as history of genders and its representations.

*Gender* for Scott (1990, p. 14) is “a constitutive element of social relations founded on the differences perceived between the sexes, and it is a primary way do put meaning to power relations”. On the other hand, representations are, according to Chartier (1990, p.17),

Variables consonant to social classes or intellectual means, are produced by the group stable and shared group regulations. These incorporated intellectual schemes create images and because of them the present can become meaningful, the other can become intelligible and space can be decoded.

Representations can be understood as concepts which were built along history, absorbed by several social groups who carry ideas capable of redefine the moment and the current subjects. In other words, “in the first meaning, representation is instrument of a mediate knowledge that sees an absent object by substituting it for an *image* capable of reconstitute it in memory and feature it as it really is”. (CHARTIER, 1990, p. 20)

Thus, thinking over the history of women education and work under gender perspective and its representations means understanding how women have been portrayed during history and cultural time, which can help to comprehend the same questions that still are close to female relations with current society.

This means that sometimes in history, women are primarily defined as reproductive agents, other times as educators of the nation children and even as morality executors and again, reason convertor. They are, sometimes, compared to nature, other times identified with culture. At some time in history they were

understood as having the same soul as men, other times they were distinguished by their lack of reason. (SCOTT, 2012, p. 336)

### **When *Nana neném* lullaby becomes history – constitutive elements of narrative discourse on *Canção de ninar* novel**

We can say that *Canção de ninar* novel presents two main characters that swing between protagonism and antagonism: Myriam and Louise. Sometimes villains, other heroines, the mother and the nanny are characters apparently stereotyped that eventually achieve a high degree of psychological density, that is, they defined themselves “by nonlinear way concerning the relation of what distinguish their *being* (psychology) and their *making* (actions)” (FRANCO JUNIOR, 2003. p. 39).

Both characters are presented intimately by a neutral omniscient heterodiegesis<sup>8</sup> narrator who is responsible for leading the reader to each character psychological imbrication without affecting readers’ possible position towards the narrated events. Myriam is the character who is highlighted in the narrative first part, followed by Louise in the second half.

There two times in the narrative: objective and subjective. Objective or chronological time is characterized by the seasons and months of the year - *the little parks in winter afternoons* (SLIMANI, 2018, p.94), *during that beautiful May day* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 181), *the upset days are followed by the euphoria ones* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 159), *at 6 pm* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 168), in addition to Mila’s birthday and Massé family vacation.

Subjective time, or psychological, to Aguiar e Silva (1988) is the time of the characters’ subjective experiences, their *living time*. The narrative presents subjective time anachronistically by using flashback<sup>9</sup> and flashforward<sup>10</sup>, responsible for revealing characters more deeply, besides being one of the resources that create the suspense suggested by reading the novel.

Narrative is also performed *in ultima res*, a very common resource in police novels, since the narrative discourse begins with what ends the story, in this case the children murdered by the nanny.

Space swings between outdoors, such as parks, beaches, country houses etc., and indoors as the family’s and the nanny’s apartment. However, the description of the indoors space cannot be separated from the main characters, for Myriam’s and Louise’s apartment reflect their emotional condition.

In the beginning, Massé family’s apartment is a distressed, tiny and messy – *it is the smallest apartment of the building [...] they sleep in a narrow room* (SLIMANI, 2018, P. 10), *[...] they try to ventilate the apartment that suffocates them* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 13) – and it turn into a calm, neat and cozy place when the nanny arrives – *Louise has pushed the walls. Made the closets deeper, and the drawers wider. She has put light in* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 28), *[...] Louise makes this apartment drat a perfect bourgeois interior* SLIMANI, 2018, p. 28).

Myriam is also introduced as annoying and clumsy due to the many jobs she has resulting from maternity - *[...] she wore too loose trousers, old boots and dirty bun hair* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 17), *[...] she felt like being alone and wanted to scream as a*

<sup>8</sup> Aguiar e Silva (1988) presents heterodiegesis narrator as someone who is not co referential to any of the characters, it does not take part of the story.

<sup>9</sup> Accordding to Aguiar e Silva (1988) flashback means going back in time and it allows recovering past events, just like in the movies.

<sup>10</sup> “Flashforward means anticipation in time, in terms of discourse, that allows foreshowing a fact o situation that would only be shown later on. Again, just like in the movies”. (AGUIAR E SILVA, 1988, p. 47)

*madwoman on the* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 15) – and after Louise comes she becomes a tidy happy woman who is fulfilled family and professionally – *she woke up in the morning excited as a child. Put on new skirt, high heels [...] (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 33), laid on the sofa with Adam in her arms, she smiles tenderly and wonderfully. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 56).*

The nanny's apartment is introduced as an extremely clean and neat space – *the apartment has only one room which is at the same time bedroom and living room. Every morning, she carefully folds the sofa and covers it with a black quilt. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 26), she likes to clean the windows, frenetically, twice a week (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 25) – that turn into a smelly and dirty place - [...]laid and sick in her dirty windows apartment. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 133), she hates that place. She is obsessed by the rotten smell that comes from the bathroom (SLIMANI, 2018, p.133).*

Louise also changes along the narrative, since she is introduced from the beginning as a calm, methodic woman – *She picks her flat shoes she bought more than ten years ago, but she took so good care of them, they still look new (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 26), she sings all day to that baby whose 'laziness she admires. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 31) – that ends up getting emotional instability as the narrative goes on – When Sunday comes and boredom and anxiety continue (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 75), Louise laughs less, plays horse race or pillow wars with less energy. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 177).* As we deepen the reflections about the characters, we can propose a parallel between their story construction and the history of education and professionalization on feminine perspective.

### ***Mom to the coffee plantation – Feminine struggle for recognition***

Myriam is one of the main characters. She is the mother of Massé children and the one who decides to go back to work after a gap in in her career due to maternity. Her character is mainly pointed out in the first half of the novel.

Concerning her relation with education, Myriam is described as a woman who has struggled to have formal education. “*She thought about the efforts she had done in order to finish her studies, despite the lack of Money and family help, she was happy when she was admitted on BAR and she wore the lawyer gown for the first time [...]” (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 15).*

Myriam is also described as *the most serious student he had ever met, (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 18),* when the character meets Pascal again, an old college colleague. She also ceases her career due to family arrangements because of the children:

Myriam was finishing Law School when get got pregnant. She graduated two weeks before giving birth to Mila. Paul had one internship after the other, full of optimism which seduced Myriam when she met him. He was sure he could work for both of them. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 13)

The relation between feminine gender and formal education has always been complex. That is because woman has always been attached to inner private space, since her role was connected to pregnancy and household chores. From the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries women started to attend public spaces, since modern society needed workforce demanded from industrial revolution.

Despite the Illuminist trend, girls' schooling was precarious at that time if compared with boys'. According to Aries (1981), girls learned reading, writing, math and household chores, whereas the same age boys could go to attend subjects in liberal arts and nature science.



Schools for few higher classes' girls we ran by the Church that in pretense to offer quality education would shape woman in order to keep the *status quo*.

In western history there has always been who rebelled against their condition, struggled from freedom and many times paid with their own lives. But the so called feminism first wave took place after the 19th century's last decades, firstly in England, when women organized themselves do fight for their rights and the first and most popular was the right to vote.

According to Almeida (1998, p. 27), "with feminism movement claiming for voting which would enable them to act more politically and socially, domesticity was invaded and women started to act in public spaces and demand for equality in rights, education and professionalization". The confirmation that women were capable of work out of their homes was the first great step to get the right to formal education.

However, women professions with higher education, during the second half the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by resistance against the misogyny dominant in education institutions.

They (*students from Paris in late 19th century*) liked the tailors, young workers who took care of their homes and beds, but refused any women concerning political confabulation or courses. When Julie Daublié, with a degree got with hard work in 1861 (when Lyon Saint Simonien Arlès-Dufour and Emperor Eugenia) decided to prepare a teacher's training course in Arts which was only authorized by Paris Rectory if she did not attend the course, in order to avoid any contestation. So she was self-didactic. In 1893, professor Larroumet course at Sorbonne was booed "to protest against women present in the classroom". The professors were also very reserved, especially in Law School, whose austerity seemed incompatible with women presence. The troubles with the first female student were outstanding: intervention by University Council was needed so that she could get in. (PERROT, 2014, p.34, our emphasis)

Perrot (2014) describes how difficult it was for Paris women in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to enter certain urban places which were mainly male ones, such as technical, scientific and vocational education institutions. Thanks to feminist demonstration, women conquered broader spaces in urban society, including schools. These feminine achievements influenced even Brazil, which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century decades, according to Almeida (1998, p. 26), "in educational area, the first years of the century offered better opportunities to women represented by girls' and ladies' education, in the wake of positivist and republican ideas, whose tendency framed the following decades".

Nevertheless, we need to understand that feminist achievement concerning the right to education still developed/develops differently according to gender since masculine x feminine dichotomy was/is implanted in subjects' *habitus*<sup>11</sup>, legitimizing inequality as natural, caused by this distinction.

Bourdieu (1995) supports that social institutions, including schools, foment perpetuation of gender hierarchy divisions, since gender building takes place between their oppositions in social context. These divisions happen naturally as a way to shape subjects by means of behavior related to materiality of their bodies.

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<sup>11</sup> To Bourdieu (2002, p. 83), "being a history product habitus is a system of open dispositions, permanently defied to new experinces and constantly affected by them. It is long lasting, but not unchangeable".

That is why primary education is essentially political: it tends to instill manners to treat the body, all of it or parts of it, masculine right hand or feminine left hand, ways to walk, hold the head, or stare to face, to eyes, or, on the contrary to oneself etc. that are full of ethics, politics and cosmology, because they are mainly sexually different and because by these differences they express fundamental oppositions of world view. (BOURDIEU, 1995, p. 157)

When Myriam leaves her career to dedicate herself to Family care and maternity reflects this *habitus* incorporated to feminine representation in social context. Girls who go to school and work also carry gender symbolic domination imposed by school. So, it is natural to accept a woman back to family and maternity inner space, even with a promising career in public space.

Thus, Myriam is completely misunderstood by her peers when she says she *wants* to get back to work. There is a discussion between Myriam and her husband about her decision to go back to work, and the narrator describes how *he* (the husband) ironizes it, making her ambitions seem ridiculous, giving the impression that she was prisoned in that apartment (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 19, our emphasis). The female character even hear her partner say that *I didn't know you (Myriam) wanted to work* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 18, o).

According to Bourdieu (1995), once social education supports dominating gender values transmission, society understands people who act differently from the expected behavior as awkward. Myriam's husband speech demonstrates this *habitus* implanted on *natural choices* and validated by tradition towards gender representation.

The effect of "denaturing" or relativity often historically produced by confronts with different ways of life that make "choices" seem traditionally natural appear as arbitrary, historically established (*ex institute*), in habit or law (*nomos, nomo*) and not in nature (*physis, physei*). (BOURDIEU, 1995, p.137, author's emphasis).

In order to leave private space (domestic) and get back to public space (career as a lawyer), the protagonist faces judgments from a society that is educated to disagree with gender behaviors already established, besides feeling guilty because she was also educated following that tradition. The statement *she tries not to think about the children, not feel guilty* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 35), Mila's teacher speech claiming that *the century evil is children abandonment while parents are swallowed by ambition [...]* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 35), reflect this *habitus* on gender relation even highlighted by the protagonist herself. According to Cornwall (2018), women economic emancipation by recognized professional work doesn't make social rules, affectionate relationships and underlying institutions that embarrasses her daily disappear.

There is a time when Paul, Myriam's husband argues that *counting overtime work, the nanny and you (Myriam) are going to earn about the same. But, anyway, if you feel like this can amuse you...* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 19, our emphasis). Although she seeks for professional recognition, for in the office she is given *responsibilities former employees never had the right to*. (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 34), Myriam profession is compared to *amusement* by her spouse, supposing that female work in public places still carries a stigma of being superfluous and even unnecessary. In other words, even when *mom went to the coffee plantation*, society understands that, actually, *mom is coming back soon*.

**Mom went to work – The invisible women**

Louise is the other protagonist and she is the most processed character after the second half of the novel. Widower, lonely and having a daughter she hasn't seen in years, she is the nanny of Massé family and the one who commits the crime at the very beginning of the novel.

There is no evidence that Louise had formal, scientific or vocational education, different from Myriam. Apparently, there are signs that Louise was raised in an institution for children, and maybe that is where she had her formal education.

For the first time in her life she sits on a sofa and someone cooks for her. Even when she was a child, she has no memory of anyone doing that just to please her. Small, she ate the leftovers from someone else's plate. She had warm soup in the morning, a heated soup day after day, until the last drop. She had to eat it all, in spite of the fat stick to the edge of the plate, despite the tart taste from the bones leftover (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 116)

By describing her meals, it is possible to state that the character had been through hard time when she was a child, due to her social economic situation, so, maybe she also had hard time studying in that institution. Thus, Louise had no professional option left but taking care of other people.

According to Guedes (2016), taking care of children, elderly or sick people is still basically women's job. This scenario in private space reveals "inequality between female population in public world and the conservation of patterns that forces women to keep on developing a centered way of taking care of others" (GUEDES, 2016).

Bourdieu (1995) claims that social education, institutionalized or not, that perpetuates and confirms domination patterns based on gender opposition, also builds a perspective of women work legitimation against men's work. By belonging to public space, men's work would have more recognition and value than female activities in public spaces.

Because it is registered in social world divisions or more precisely, in social relations of domination and explorations established between sexes, like in brains, as division principles that classify everything and every practice according to reduced distinctions to opposition between male and female, ritual mythical system is continually confirmed and validated by the practices determined and legitimated by itself. By official taxonomy, women were put inside [...] all housework is given to her, that is, private work hidden or even invisible or ashamed, such as children and animal, care or some outdoors work mainly with plant (watering, gardening), milk, wood, and even the dirtiest (carrying manure), the most boring, the hardest and the humblest. As for men, because they are out, official, public, [...] they are assigned all the brief, dangerous and spectacular acts [...] (BOURDIEU, 1995, p. 138)

For a woman who has no academic scientific education, like Louise, the only thing left for her is to reproduce established *habitus* and play the role assigned to feminine gender, underjobs, lack of economic value resulting from finding these women activities natural.

Hirata (2001) points out women's activities focused on family care and education suffer from a polarization. In one side there are high qualified workers seeking for professional recognition, whereas on the opposite side there are workers with no or the so said *low qualification*, with low wages and tasks with no recognition or value.

Even when employers compliment Louise, she is seen as a *low qualified* professional, for she makes house work neither Myriam nor Paul notice. So, dependence between the family and the nanny is built thorough abuse relation for both sides, since there is Louise, the maid that on seeking for attention, professional recognition and appreciation ends up having a peculiar condition by manipulating events. And there are Myriam and Paul, the employers who are coerced by Louise manipulation, but they cannot define their problems, precisely because they don't notice Louise.

During Massé family vacation trip, Paul teaches Louise to swim. While he helps the nanny, he notices something he hadn't noticed before: *Louise has bottom. Louise has a body that shakes in Paul's hands. A body he hadn't seen or even suspected, he put Louise in the world of the children and of the employee. He, without doubt, didn't see her.* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 63)

The same thing goes on with Myriam, in the end of the novel, when she sees Louise walking on the streets, she realizes she had never seen her as a woman with he own life. When her son asks about her preceptor destination, the mother answers: *...she goes home –Myriam replies – to her house* (SLIMANI, 2018, p.184). Here the pause indicates that even Myriam had just realized that Louise was a person before being her nanny.

Domestic, private work that belongs to feminine universe is invisible, just like the bodies of those who work on it. When Paul realizes *Louise had bottom*, he also realized he didn't see her because he *put her in the world of the children and of the employee* connecting Louise, his maid to an insignificant and inferior position.

The verse *mom went to work*, in *Nana Neném* lullaby reveals feminine work depreciation comparing with male work. This woman work does not deserve to be mentioned or named. Likewise, the *name* is responsible to materialize what is not materialized. By using names we know, learn and seize the world. A job with no name does not exist, at all. And if this job doesn't exist, people who work on it also don't exist. Louise has an inner, depreciated, not named job, since she is only the nanny of the children, but he makes all the housework. Louise is not seen as a person by those people who are around her. Women are only invisible because their work is invisible.

### ***When the witch (Cuca) comes to get you – Bravery is a female word***

According to Candido (1999, p. 34) “popular tales, illustrated stories, police or spade and cape novels, movies, as well as school and family are part of children and teenagers education”. Men are forged by society. They are made of what other human beings offer them, from family to anyone else around them. Literature opens valuable possibilities of interactions with others which enrich learning endlessly.

As source of knowledge, paraphrasing Bourdieu (1996), literary work brings knowledge about social world that not even the so called scientific work can register. That is because literary work is man's creation to humanity about the own man's achievements

in this same humanity. Thus, put literature as education object is a provocative resource to think over society interweaving.

The issue of woman in contemporary society has been relevant in minority discussions and feminine fights were even examples for other struggles featured by other groups who developed awareness of social injustice they underwent/undergo. Even that there were many achievements since women position in society started do be discussed; there is still a long way to go debating gender equality and equity.

As Tedeschi (2008, p.40), claimed “by approaching women history with representations, identity discourses are brought up as well as male world interpretation. Then, it’s up to us, men and women, help to make this history not normal.

Under the premise of learning through literature, this paper has tried to discuss education and work facing gender representation, rooted in *Canção de Ninar/ Lullaby*, by Leïla Slimani.

The perspective of gender representation is and analysis category that should not be neglected, especially to discuss the building of social historical processes and of power realtions resulting from those processes.

The main characters in the novel, Myriam and Louise, are complementary oppositions. The former, a middle class woman, mother, wife and formally educated professional, with a recognized job. The latter, a widower, lonely, no children present in her life with an underjob resulting from her lack of formal education. However, both characters are not legitimated by the same *habitus* concerning female universe in the society along the historical development, each one struggling on their own way against this power structure that comes from gender relationships.

Whereas, Mila, Myriam’s daughter, is described as *retreating*, because she would *reply to all adversities by screaming* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 31), as *malignant* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 32). Because she was a little girl, she hasn’t assimilated behavior settings expected from girls by society. That’s why she is described as *malignant* and *retreating*.

Nevertheless, Mila can be taken as a small synthesis of history of woman struggle for social rights. During the brief review about gender issues (role of women) in this article, we can notice that since other history time – here particularly from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – women could only achieve their social rights after much commitment to be heard by society, or even little Mila, *by screaming when replying to all adversities*.

Just like Mila, who *was still alive when help came. She resisted as a beast. They found fight evidences, pieces of skin under her soft nails* (SLIMANI, 2018, p. 09), modern women, inspired by their background voices, many times still need to *resist and fight as a beast*, facing the possible *Cucas (witches)* that can appear, so that they can guarantee their rights and transform society into a more balanced and fair space to all genders.

Thus, this paper, as announced, tried to understand how the issue involving gender, education and work was framed exceeding historical time, based on “*Canção de Ninar*”/ *Lullaby* novel as a piece of work for education and social reality knowledge. Some representative female universe image concerning social relations valid since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century can be raised as a significant issue.

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