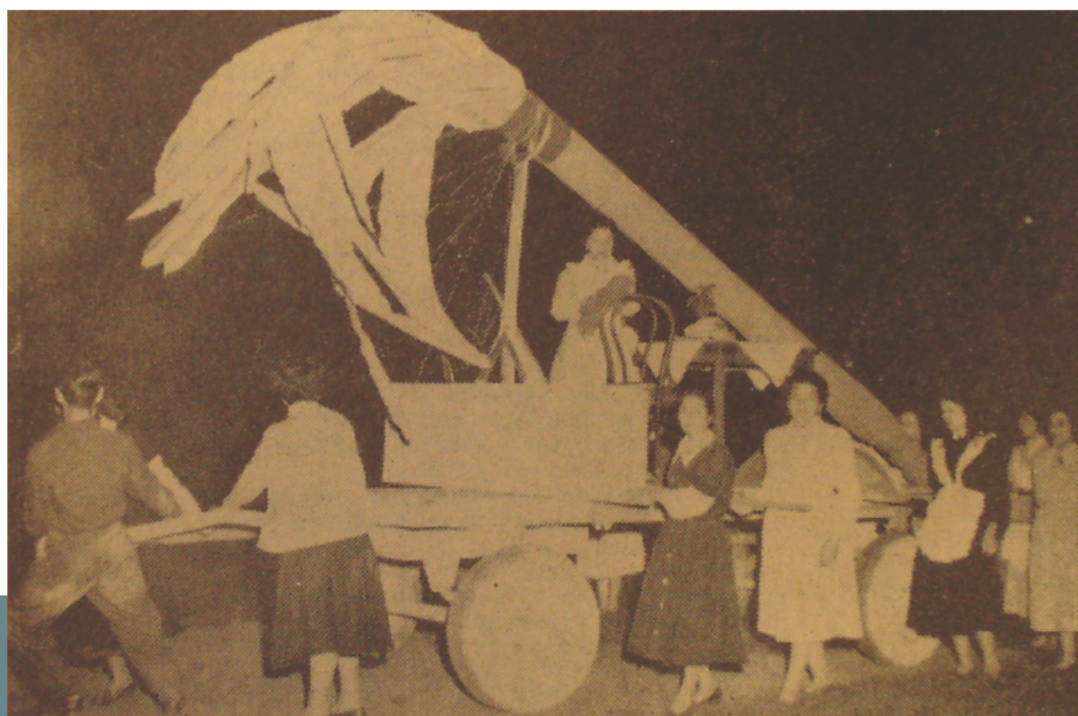


Workers Like All the Rest of Them

Domestic Service and the Rights of
Labor in Twentieth-Century Chile

Elizabeth Quay Hutchison



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WORKERS LIKE ALL THE REST OF THEM

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*Domestic Service and the Rights of Labor
in Twentieth-Century Chile*



Elizabeth Quay Hutchison

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In Memory of Aída Moreno Valenzuela, 1939–2021

For Regina, Dante, Pasqual, and Tita



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ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago
ANECAP	Asociación Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular
ARNAD	Archivo Nacional de la Administración
CEM	Centro de Estudios de la Mujer
CSO	Caja de Seguridad Obligatorio
CNCD	Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Diputados
CNCS	Congreso Nacional, Cámara de Senadores
CONSTRACAP	Comisión Nacional de Sindicatos de Trabajadoras de Casa Particular
ILO	International Labor Organization
JOC	Juventud Obrera Católica
MEMCH	Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena
PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano
RITHAL	Red de Investigaciones sobre el Trabajo del Hogar en América Latina
SINTRACAP	Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Casa Particular
UP	Unidad Popular

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If this book is by now old enough to be a teenager, the original idea for it is ready to get a teaching job. Thirty years ago, during one of many meetings with the Chilean feminist and historian Alicia Frohmann to discuss my dissertation research, Alicia asked me: “Why focus on women industrial workers, when it’s the *empleadas* (domestic workers) who are the real key to understanding Chile’s history?” Shaken by Alicia’s challenge, I have never forgotten it, and now—after more than thirty years of investigation, presentation, consultation, and publication—that question has led me to this book. Along the way, I have accumulated more than a few debts, and it is well past time that I acknowledge the many people and institutions that have helped me complete this book.

World events of 2020—particularly the COVID-19 pandemic—have turned the world upside down, so I will do my part to set it upright by reversing the usual order of things. Rather than thanking friends and family last (who decided that?), I will thank them first, since it is really the case that nothing is possible without their love and support. My partner, Regina, and our sons, Dante and Pasqual, along with our *comadre* Betsy (Tita), make up our noisy, nurturing pod, and Hutchisons and Manocchios spread far and wide celebrate our successes: Victor, I hope you enjoy this book, too! But without Betsy’s Martha, and Ezra Jude, the precious third brother in our Albuquerque family, we are forever changed. I am grateful to my family for their steadfast support.

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oral histories with women and Christians first drew me to Latin America, has offered inspirational friendship as our lives converged in Albuquerque. Books may be shelved and forgotten, but the patience and kindness of friends and family will never be.

I thank the many colleagues who have supported this work by buying me coffee, hosting me in their homes and offices, collaborating on panels and publications, and inviting me to share my work with their students and colleagues. My career has been indelibly marked by the sisterhood of Latin Americanist gender historians, including (but not limited to) Heidi Tinsman, Nara Milanich, Jolie Olcott, Ann Blum, Rebekah Pite, Brenda Elsey, Ricardo López, Tom Klubock, Jadwiga Pieper, and Lara Putnam. I am also deeply indebted to those Latin American scholars who have regularly encouraged my work, including Thelma Gálvez and the Chilean historians María Soledad Zárate Campos, Alicia Frohmann, Iván Jakšić, Sol Serrano, Julio Pinto, and Jorge Rojas; in Buenos Aires, Silvia Hirsch, Isabella Cosse, Lila Caimari, Mariano Plotkin, and Graciela Quierolo have received me with unfailing generosity. Inés Pérez and Joan Casanovas, who arranged for Fulbright to carry me all the way to Mar del Plata and Tarragona, respectively, deserve special mention for their warm hospitality, intellectual generosity, and more than a few lively meals. It has been my great honor to work with students of gender and history in the Universitat Romíro I Virgili and the Universidad de Granada in Spain, as well as the Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social (IDES), Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, and the Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires in Argentina, who always gave as good as they got. The recent surge in interdisciplinary research on domestic work has also fostered a new community of committed scholar-activists, the Red de Investigación sobre Trabajo del Hogar en América Latina (RITHAL), led by the indefatigable Erynn Masi de Casanova. The University of New Mexico, my institutional home for over twenty years, is much more than the place I work: there I treasure History and Latin Americanist colleagues, the many students I have been privileged to teach, brave leaders in faculty governance and administration, the UNM staff who challenge us to be better, my colleagues in Faculty SAFE UNM, and the good trouble team in the Division for Equity and Inclusion. It is truly a privilege to call these folks—from Albuquerque to Mar del Plata and Berkeley to Barcelona—my beloved community.

Turning now to those who quite literally made it possible for me to write this book, I must start again with *las imprescindibles*: the domestic worker activists, past and present, whose struggles have marked Chile's twentieth century and

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continue in the twenty-first. Among the many leaders who received me in their offices, told their stories and showed me their archives, I am most grateful to Aída Moreno and Elba Bravo. Fathers Bernardino Piñera and Mauricio Hourton were generous with their time and boundless in their enthusiasm for this history. Also indispensable for their help with archival research, transcription, and processing were the assistants who have gone on to greater things: Carolyn Watson, Fernanda Caloiro, María Soledad Zárate Campos, Scott Crago, Carson Morris, and Lucrecia Enríquez. The historian and translator Jacqueline Garreaud has never failed to render my English into even better Spanish, helping me contribute to Latin American debates on gender and history.

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to Nara Milanich, who told me, with great precision and kindness, how to make this a better book. Parts of this work have been previously published in *Labor, Hispanic American Research Review*, *Nuevo Mundo/Mundos nuevos*, and two edited collections, *Mujeres* (LOM) and *Towards a Global History of Domestic Workers and Caregiving Workers* (Brill).

After a harrowing year of pandemic, which has again exposed the inequality and precarity that shapes domestic workers' lives, it seems fitting to dedicate this work to the memory of Aída Moreno Valenzuela, who passed away at age eighty-one in June of 2021. Doña Aída's unfailing energy and leadership spurred the extraordinary mobilization for domestic workers' rights in Chile, and her written history of this movement—painstakingly researched in newspapers and national archives and distributed in grainy mimeographed copies during the dictatorship—inspired this project. Aída's spirit, as well as the domestic workers' movements she helped foster, live on in this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Empleadas Lost and Found

MY RESEARCH INTO THE history of domestic service in Chile started in 2000 with the archives; or rather, the archives started with me. On several trips through the gray streets of downtown Santiago, as the sun barely broke through the layers of the afternoon's winter smog, domestic worker activists guided me to the leaning, floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that housed archives of many decades' work from Chile's two most important organizations for domestic workers: the union SINTRACAP (which dates, through several organizations, back to 1926) and the Catholic association ANECAP (which emerged from groups formed in 1947). Eager to delve into any uncatalogued records of this long history of the domestic workers' movement in Chile,¹ I soon realized that it was the living archive—members and retired leadership of these organizations—who could help me tell this story. *Workers Like All the Rest of Them* maps out stories culled from workers' life histories—filtered through memories of half a century and the realities of Chile in the twenty-first—within domestic workers' century-long struggle for dignity and rights.

Unfailingly generous in the midst of the many challenges of organizing work, these leaders made sure I got in touch with veteran activists of their movement. In meetings at the headquarters of the Asociación Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular (ANECAP or the National Association of Household Employees), some of the activists present at the group's founding over five decades prior huddled near paraffin stoves in the group's main office, a small room with a bookshelf stuffed with albums and pamphlets on one wall, and file cabinets holding decades' worth of material on the other.² It was in this room, lit almost entirely by dim light edging through a wall of windows, that I sipped the first of many black teas with Elba Bravo, one of the domestic workers who helped to found, recruit for, and lead the original Federación Nacional de Empleadas (National Federation of Empleadas) in the 1950s. Already in her early seventies, hunched over photo albums and clothed in the empleada's blue starched cotton uniform, Doña Elba's eyes sparkled and her hands leapt about her face as she



FIGURE 1.1. Doña Elba Bravo, September 2004, ANECAP, photo by author

described her early days building the *empleadas'* movement in the 1950s and '60s. As the struggle to maintain the organization intensified in the early 2000s, Doña Elba was always eager to meet, happy to share her stories of other, equally challenging but clearly invigorating times, many decades before.

Even at her advanced age, Doña Elba did not limit her storytelling to any office, or even the historic buildings on Tocornal Street, built in the 1950s with domestic workers' own funds to shelter and educate domestic workers. In our very first meeting, Doña Elba looked up from the albums and documents spread out on the room's large table with a suggestion that was at once a command: "To learn about this movement, you must meet Don Bernardino." So off we went, following Doña Elba's swift pace through narrow side streets in the deepening dusk and cold, smoggy air, to arrive at a side door of the Iglesia San Francisco, one of Chile's oldest churches, which sits high on Santiago's main avenue, the Alameda. Rushing down long corridors and up grand staircases to the vast, chilly, dimly lit living quarters of the former convent, Doña Elba eagerly clasped Don Bernadino's hands in both of hers and urged him to tell me, a historian from the North, the story of how, as a young Catholic priest in the 1940s, he worked with a handful of domestic workers to establish one of the most enduring and

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FIGURE 1.2. Don Bernardino Piñera, circa 2010, from *Mensaje* (July 31, 2020)

influential Catholic associations of empleadas in the Americas. Don Bernadino, by then white-haired and moving stiffly in his eighties, was more than happy to oblige, on this and many other occasions, always stressing how he valued his work with empleadas over all else: more than his religious career as bishop of several Chilean cities; public opposition to the military regime's human rights abuses; or membership in one of Chile's most distinguished families (his nephew, Sebastián Piñera, would in 2010 begin his first of two presidential terms). In meetings arranged at first in Church offices and cafes, and much later at a residence for retired priests, Don Bernardino proudly offered up his stories about the origins, challenges, and evolution of the domestic workers' movement over the last half century.

In those days I also interviewed the enduring leader of Chilean domestic workers' movements, Aída Moreno Valenzuela, whose warmth, sharp wit, and love of history has made her one of the most sought-after spokespersons for the Chilean domestic workers' union movement since the 1970s. Younger by ten years than her colleague Doña Elba, Aída, too, got her start in the Federación de Empleadas in the 1950s, but from the start she also participated in the Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Casa Particular (SINTRACAP or Household Workers' Union), rising to leadership positions at the national and international levels in the 1960s. Active in elected positions in the 1980s, Aída Moreno nurtured the movement's alliance with Chilean feminists in the struggle against the military dictatorship, a network that would later sustain her participation in regional and international domestic workers' movements and inspire her businesses that sold cleaning products and services to the public. Moreno's close friendship with



FIGURE 1.3. Doña Aída Moreno, 2004, Barrio Santa Rosa, photo by author

the US anthropologist Elsa Chaney, and the international travel and activism through which it was nurtured, also elevated Aída Moreno's historical research on Chilean domestic workers to an international and academic audience. Moreno's long engagement in domestic worker politics, along with her skills as an amateur historian, broadened the horizons of this study, beyond the realm of Catholic mobilization in the 1950s, to the world of domestic worker activism under socialism and dictatorship.

Meetings with lifelong activists and their allies, along with my research in the organizations, ministries, and courts that recorded the lives and activism of domestic workers across the twentieth century, has inspired and shaped the conceptualization of this book. Like the long struggle for visibility by domestic workers' movements themselves, *Workers Like All the Rest of Them* pushes back against the continued *invisibility* of a certain kind of "women's work"—paid domestic labor—that has been as ubiquitous as it was necessary in Chilean households throughout the twentieth century. As elsewhere in Latin America, much of the dominant discourse about "la empleada" portrays her as a fixture of Chilean family life, the living legacy of a long tradition of service that confounded and crossed class boundaries through affective relations, as women from rural or working-class origins cared for the homes and children of wealthier families.³

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Domestic worker activists and their political allies, however, began to seriously confront and disrupt this traditional view by promoting labor legislation and feminist analysis of domestic service in the 1970s and '80s.⁴ In recent years, the Chilean government has gone on to grant empleadas critical labor rights, devoted Cabinet-level programs to addressing their concerns, and begun to implement the requirements of the 2011 International Labor Organization's Convention 189 on domestic workers, ratified in Chile in 2016.⁵ Despite these changes, many Chileans continue to insist on the power of more traditional representations of empleadas, revealing how history, culture, and trenchant inequality continue to shape employers' expectations, even as the legal and political context for paid household labor has continued to change.

What we already knew about the history of domestic service in Chile has long been embedded in a trenchant nationalist narrative of *Chile tradicional*, a saga of rural paternalism, national integration, and economic modernization that remains a source of powerful, if conservative, social norms in Chile today. This affection for an idealized rural past, as well as specific gender and racial hierarchies that sustained it, has been reinforced time and again by the representation of servants and servitude in Chilean arts and popular culture. Chile's high literary canon includes iconic "servant" figures, from the subservient but indispensable characters of Blest Gana's *Martin Rivas* (1862) to those that populate the declining noble households preserved in José Donoso's *Coronación* (1957). The *criollista* tradition in Chilean arts is rife with examples of these static "historical" portrayals of social hierarchies expressed and affirmed through master-servant relations. Stereotypical and melodramatic representations also informed popular poetry and song, which invariably showed female domestic workers as passive agents, exploited both physically and sexually by their masters.⁶ Subsequently, as Chilean society confronted the challenges of development, political instability, and social change by mid-century, empleadas appearing as characters in radio, film, and television dramas illustrated the change and uncertainty in Chilean social relations across class, racial, and gender lines. In iconic characters from radio and stage to television and movies, representations of domestic workers have been critical to Chilean struggles over national identity and progress in the twentieth century.

This investigation began, then, as a study of the *hidden history* of domestic service that lies beneath those divergent perspectives, a history that documents not only workers' agency but also how class, race/ethnicity, and gender were constructed through domestic service relations across time. Although the vast majority of the Chilean women employed in domestic service never participated in

a labor union or encountered a state inspector, for example, their choices about where and for whom they would work shaped modernization, class formation, and political development in Chile as fundamentally as labor history's more celebrated copper and nitrate workers. Although countless Chilean scholars warned me that the historical sources for such a study simply do not exist, by starting with the activists' own accounts of migration, work, and activism I was able to identify a wide range of relevant archival sources, including newspaper accounts, law and social work theses, archives of domestic workers' associations, and the many songs, plays, and scripts that have portrayed domestic workers in popular culture.

These abundant oral and archival sources demonstrate that the purported "invisibility" of domestic workers is, like so many stories people tell about the past, a kind of myth that can be used to justify their continued exclusion from labor rights and from history itself. In addition to restoring domestic workers to the histories of Chilean labor and politics, this book explores the historical constructions of *labor* and *gender* that allowed the Chilean state to systematically deny labor rights to so many women (and some men), further rendering them hidden from history. In the process, I show how the efforts of priests and feminists, inspectors and legislators, state and international officials—and, most significantly, domestic workers themselves—made Chilean empleadas visible as "workers like all the rest of them" over the course of the twentieth century.⁷ From the earliest associations for domestic workers formed in the 1920s, through the expansion of those unions and the creation of Catholic associations after World War II, to the diverse non-governmental and international organizations that exist today, for more than one hundred years Chilean domestic workers have collectively and simultaneously defended both the labor rights and dignity of workers in their profession.

Workers Like All the Rest of Them recounts this long struggle for domestic workers' recognition and rights, a history familiar to domestic worker activists in contemporary Chile but one that has remained largely ancillary to scholarly histories of labor in Chile and beyond. On the one hand, this history has been obscured by categories of labor and citizenship that relegate domestic service to the private realm, where it is ostensibly sheltered from the gaze of both the state and organized labor. But domestic workers were *not* hidden from history: on the contrary, they were everywhere, shaping among other things the organization of families, rural-urban migration, and state welfare policy throughout the twentieth century. Moreover, the fact that domestic workers mobilized earlier and more extensively in Chile than in other parts of Latin America has left an important record of their experience and agency, a record that challenges their

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exclusion from Chilean history and reveals how and under what conditions domestic workers were able to mobilize for change.

At the heart of this continuing movement has been, in Chile as elsewhere, the struggle by some domestic workers and their allies to name their employment as “work,” and those who perform it as “workers.” Although women’s historians in particular have long examined domestic service as a key site for women’s labor, domestic workers and their allies have continued to struggle for their formal recognition as workers deserving of labor rights.⁸ Why, and how does this matter? Why would cleaning, childcare, cooking—activities that, when they take place anywhere else besides a private home, are simply “work”—ever be considered something else? Why does the location of work, or the private arrangement between employer and domestic worker, result in the exclusion of so many women workers from protective legislation, union mobilization, and the history of labor?⁹ And why has it taken so long for an inter-governmental body like the International Labor Organization, which has intervened in so many different labor relations since the early twentieth century, only recently created an international convention on domestic work?¹⁰ This book approaches these questions from a local and historical perspective: the case of twentieth-century Chile, where a small union movement grew into a vibrant and visible movement for domestic workers’ rights at midcentury.¹¹

In that country, as in other places throughout the Americas, families and individuals have relied on the work of “servants” to organize the work of the household, who perform a wide range of duties from cooking and cleaning to childcare. Once a phenomenon limited to wealthier families, in the twentieth century domestic service proved crucial for the operation and well-being of middle-class households, among other things providing the reproductive labor that allowed middle-class professional women (and men!) to work outside the home.¹² In Chile throughout the twentieth century, women’s domestic service labor remained critical to both the reproductive work of Chilean households and the economic survival of poor families, particularly in the rural sector. According to the Chilean population census, roughly 40 percent of economically active women were employed in domestic service (higher than the regional average), and women in turn comprised over four fifths of that occupation.¹³ Despite employers’ frequent assertions that domestic workers are “part of the family” because they perform caring work, the persistence of poor treatment and low wages tells a different story. It shows the erstwhile “kin” speaking out, organizing, and seeking recognition in their struggle for change, often in ways that reflect the same ideological diversity, strategic differences, and political ties evident in the political struggles of workers in other sectors.

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On the workers' side, of course, the significance of domestic service as a source of income, and sometimes dignity and financial security, is also undeniable. Women and men, young and old, rural migrants and urban residents have worked to sustain themselves and their families through paid domestic service, often traveling far and sacrificing attention to their own families to do so. In Chile, their story has been told elsewhere, and in multiple ways—literature, song, film, testimonials, news reports—but to date no one other than the activist Aída Moreno has told this story of the Chilean *empleadas*' struggle for recognition and protection as workers.¹⁴ For Chilean activists, this global struggle is grounded in a local history of domestic activism and alliances, where workers continue to confront social prejudice and racial and gender discrimination in their quest for labor rights.

AS IN MUCH OF Latin America, throughout the twentieth century women's domestic service labor remained critical to both the reproductive work of Chilean households and the economic survival of poor families, particularly in the rural sector. But by the 1980s, women domestic workers remained as marginal to formal labor organization as they were essential to Chilean social relations, family economic organization, and childhood education. Particularly when compared to today's domestic service sector—dominated not only by day laborers but also characterized by women of diverse education, rural/urban origins, and nationalities¹⁵—most paid household labor in Chile's earlier decades was performed by poorly educated women who migrated as teenagers from southern communities to find live-in work in urban households.¹⁶

The personal stories of many *empleadas* form part of a larger story of Chile's rural sector, a story rife of extreme poverty, unstable employment, cultural and economic domination, and political exclusion.¹⁷ But there is certainly more to this story: instead of dichotomous renderings of pastoral family life versus urban labor exploitation, domestic workers pursued survival and independence through domestic service work. Particularly in light of the range of representations of *empleadas* that dominated public discourse in this period—from criminal elements to suffering victims and everything in between—it is vital that we appreciate the kinds of experiences, choices, and limitations faced by so many *empleadas*, then as well as now. *Workers Like All the Rest of Them* begins by centering the stories I collected in interviews between 2002 and 2005 with over a dozen Chileans who were involved in Catholic associations and the secular union in the 1950s through the 1980s. Their memories of migration, city life, sociability, religion, employment, and sometimes romantic and family life,



FIGURE 1.4. Young empleadas, Rancagua, 1929, photographer unknown. Photograph provided by María Angélica Rojas Flores from a family collection.

inform the central narrative of this book, which begins—as they did—with the deepening poverty that drove so many young women to leave their families in the countryside to seek better wages and situations in Chile’s growing postwar cities.¹⁸ In what follows below, we learn about these transformations through the experience of Elba Bravo, whose personal narrative of rural poverty and migration, household employment, urban opportunities and dangers, as well as her path to religious and labor militancy, reflect a common pathway traversed by women who became leading activists in Chile’s domestic workers’ movements.

Dating back to the early years of the Republic, Chilean systems of landholding and agricultural labor have remained central to the country’s economic growth and social organization, evolving in the decades after independence to an enduring system of large private estates that relied on the *inquilinaje* system—in which rural men and some women were paid, mostly in kind and access to land

on the edges of large estates—and progressively thereafter to one that by the 1950s depended mostly on the waged, temporary labor of a migrant male labor force. Even though women participated in rural labor systems—as workers as well as landowners—attention to rural labor by the Catholic Church, Chilean state, and political parties typically privileged the subject of the exploited migrant male workers whose political participation was at first repressed, then recruited, especially as populist and revolutionary parties shifted their attention to the countryside in the 1950s and '60s. However, women's role in the rural sector, from their participation in *inquilinaje* to their labor in male-headed households, reveals characteristics that help explain how and why so many young women chose to migrate to urban areas for domestic work, and did so with increasing frequency by the 1930s.

Although women had often engaged in rural labor—usually through milking and care of animals—by the 1930s the mechanization of the dairy industry and the increasing monetarization of wages meant that most rural employment and land contracts were made by men, and that more and more of the available waged labor in the rural sector was performed by men, relegating women to unpaid work for their families or, where family income could not sustain them, migration to urban areas in search of work. But there was an intermediate step that young, unmarried women in the *campo* frequently passed through before migration: a contract to perform domestic service in the home of their family's rural *patrón*, through which some women became attached to families that later relocated to the capital.

Empleadas attached to specific families were often forced—if they wanted to keep their jobs—to move from rural estate to city homes and even foreign destinations, a reality that presented difficulties for some and opportunities for others. In other cases, it was the poverty of the *inquilino* arrangement itself that pushed young women to seek work as domestics in distant cities. Elba Bravo recounted how, rather than help out with her father's labor obligations, she decided to seek work in Santiago at age fourteen, leaving the rural community of Graneros, several hours south of Santiago by train: “we had enough to eat and nothing more and so I said I'll talk to the *señora* who did laundry for the rich folks on the estate and ask her ‘isn't there work in Santiago?’—Santiago, which in that year 1948 was like going to another country, there was only the train—and she said ‘sure, I'll see if they need a nanny.’”¹⁹ Even though Bravo's relatives warned her father that she would “come back a mother or a prostitute,” her parents allowed her to move to Santiago to work as a cook in the household associated with the estate on which her father worked, telling her to come back

home if her employers abused her.²⁰ Families and employers alike were preoccupied with protecting empleadas' virtue, for example prohibiting the young Elba Bravo from leaving her employers' home, even to attend parish events.

Although cities were considered dangerous for migrant empleadas, so were employers' homes. The sexual predations of male employers and family members were widely known, and Church teachings frequently warned empleadas to guard their sexual virtue. Despite the frequency of sexual abuse in the household, as in so many other workplaces these dynamics were rarely acknowledged, even in interviews conducted many decades after the fact. Doña Elba was one exception, reporting that she had once been threatened with sexual assault by her employer's nephew. When she reported the encounter to her *patrona*, her employers asked for her forgiveness and banned the offending youth from the household. Most empleadas, Bravo reported, were not so lucky, guarding silence about the abuse or getting fired when employers did not believe them: "the empleada's credibility is worth nothing to the employers: it's like we can never have the truth or be right, because they are always right."²¹

Bravo was quick to point out, however, that what she experienced as an empleada was an improvement overall from what girls like her faced back at home, where they were also vulnerable to sexual threats and abuse of male family members, including that of husbands. As she argued to the laundress she begged to find her work in Santiago, "It's just that, mamita, there's nothing for me here. What girls my age do is get pregnant, then they get hit, they change partners, they marry, the husband hits them, and so on for the rest of their lives."²² For some, migration also meant greater freedom from family supervision. For Bravo and others, their stories of migration for work were not about victimization, but rather (and in retrospect) were presented as evidence of their early maturity and commitment to making better lives for themselves: in these personal narratives, they conveyed their pride in deciding to leave home for the big city.²³

Once installed in their new "homes," the new empleadas relied on older employees to teach them their trade, which depending on circumstance could provide a sense of belonging in the household or alienation from it. In their reflections as well as in contemporary popular culture, empleadas recounted with humor their own stories or those of the "new girl" whose lack of familiarity with her new environment led to mistakes and confusion: Bravo recounts with shame that on her first day as a cook she burned the family's rice. These new circumstances could also provoke overwork and a sense of isolation, as Bravo recounted, complaining at length to her parish priest: "I told him that I was suffering all by myself, and that the people we served were older . . . they were all housewives

who did their work, took naps, and I finished in the kitchen, did the mopping, did everything and then kept ironing: I was the first up in the morning and the last to go to bed at night. . . . it's just that some people put up with all this, but I couldn't tolerate it, it was something that no, no, no!"²⁴ Young women like Doña Elba faced many challenges in the transition from *campo* to *ciudad*; from family to the employers' homes; and in learning the skills and discipline associated with their new jobs. Whereas earlier generations of servants—particularly young women—had found employment on the estates to which their families were already attached through *inquilinaje*, by the 1930s and '40s the economic conditions of the rural sector were pressing greater numbers of women to migrate to urban centers in search of domestic employment.²⁵

The interviews with aging *empleadas* provided ample evidence of the range of treatment they received at the hands of employers, from long-term employment that resembled the much-vaunted "family" in which the young servant was "like a daughter," to the many cases of mistreatment (lack of food and clothing, unhealthy living conditions, and abusive treatment by employers and other family members). Elba Bravo recounted the story of Eugenia—so different from her own experience—in which her friend who worked in the same parish decided to leave her employer because they provided so little food, controlling portions of bread and potatoes given to the workers. When Eugenia announced her intention to leave, she was prevented from doing so and accused of stealing a fountain pen that had been lost by one of the family's children. Inspired by Father Piñera's instruction that *empleadas* should share in the food they prepared for employers, Bravo encouraged Eugenia to leave, and found herself excluded from parish events and scolded by her employer (mother of Eugenia's employer) as a result. Through stories of her outreach to suffering colleagues, Bravo illustrated the spirit of solidarity and justice that motivated her work, even before she began working with the Catholic *empleadas'* association.

In the absence of clear regulations governing domestic service relations, moreover, *empleadas* sought to improve their labor situations by seeking better-paid employment. In a case that speaks to the ways that employers might have been influenced by peer pressure, Elba Bravo recounted how her *patrona* reacted when she announced her desire to leave her position after six years. At first, the *patrona* queried Bravo about her prospective job, then argued that as *patrona* she would be obligated instead to return Bravo to her parents' household in the summer months. Bravo then went and obtained her mother's permission to change jobs, arguing to her mistress (*misia*) that her new position would be less work for more pay, and ultimately securing her *patrona's* blessing.²⁶

Curiously—but not surprisingly—the aging leaders of the domestic workers' movement I interviewed reported excellent relations with their long-term employers, including many episodes not only of good treatment but also of disagreement, in which the activists reported having spoken up to their employers with complaints and requests. This is in many ways not surprising, since this cohort included empleadas whose employers allowed them time off for religious, and later associational, activities, and women who went on to become public figures and activists in their own right. Again, for Elba Bravo, her strong relations with her employers allowed her to endure disagreements (such as Eugenia's exit) and keep her job, and in the end, she was able to work *puertas afuera* (by the hour/day) for the same family. But her departure to work full time in domestic workers' associations sparked conflict and negotiation with her patrona: her employer objected, but Bravo insisted: "I won't stay in any case, for any amount of money, because I felt humiliated—I'm telling you the truth, Señora Yaya . . . I was humiliated by Señora María, her daughter." After much back and forth with her employers, they made her an offer: that she work half days *puertas afuera* for the salary she already received, and they would keep a room open for her should she wish to occasionally spend the night.²⁷ Such accommodations might have been common among some activist leaders, but it was surely exceptional among the many more stories that ended in loss of employment.

Stories of good treatment notwithstanding, and despite these memories of mutual affection between patrona and empleada, none of the activists interviewed reported that they had become "part of the family" in the households where they worked. In fact, when it came to making choices about their job and living situations, they reported disagreements with employers in which they ultimately made their own choices. The disjuncture between their accounts and the narrative of domestic workers as "part of the family" reveal a great deal about the construction of labor as such, even in the intimate quarters of household employment in twentieth century Chile.

For these "successful" empleadas—those who were fortunate to encounter benevolent employers, send money home to their families, work with the parish priests and other activists in support of their trade, and perhaps purchase their own homes for retirement—the contrast between their rural lives with family and their new and more independent lives in Santiago is striking. Among her many fond memories of good employers and even better work as an activist, Elba Bravo treasured her memories of her yearly visits home, when she brought presents for her parents and siblings, helped pay for parties, and was praised by family and friends for her success in the city. Although her brothers teased her

mercilessly for her supposed “airs” of a city girl—wearing nice dresses, and later, owning a home—she tells of how proud her parents were of her achievements. Her father, she reported, was moved to tears at the sight of the small house she bought through the Housing Cooperative, while “my mother was crying with happiness, saying ‘after so much suffering, who would believe this change, so much change, her work has done her so much good.’”²⁸

The stories of aging empleada activists—filtered through memory, nostalgia for home, youth, and their work in specific households—are important because they provide a different, albeit selective, view of domestic service in mid-twentieth-century Chile. Significantly, from interviewees selected because of their decades-long struggle for empleadas’ associations and rights, we gain some insight into the complex emotions and conditions that structured their lives as migrants, workers, and activists. From rural homes where poverty, violence, and limitations were prevalent, to the urban homes where empleadas labored under kind as well as cruel regimes of isolation and hard work, we gain a fuller picture of the limits and choices faced by empleadas as they made their way in the world.

IN THIS INTRODUCTION, as in the rest of the book, workers’ memories provide an important touchstone for the enduring cultural representations and public controversies over their labor that also shaped that history. Together with archival materials and popular representations, interviews provide a sense of the *ubiquity* of domestic workers in Chilean society: it is only a slight exaggeration to point out that in Chile, everyone has a nanny, listens to *La Desideria*,²⁹ and knows that empleadas are some of the most exploited workers in Chilean society. In the early decades of this longer history—by now inaccessible to oral historians—public debates about the plight, shortcomings, and demands of domestic workers brought debates about domestic service fully into Chilean public discourse by the 1920s, when serious debate on the need for protective legislation was first inaugurated. Widely known as the era of “the social question” in Chile, these early decades of the twentieth century were marked by increasing preoccupation with workers’ rights, resulting in legislation concerned primarily with industrial male workers. With the codification of corresponding labor laws, however, the attention of legislators, religious leaders, and even state officials turned increasingly to Chile’s numerous domestic workers, challenging their exclusion and fueling a small but vocal domestic workers’ movement. It is to these actors and their interventions on behalf of domestic workers in the 1920s that we now turn.

D U R E

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NOTES

Introduction

1. The archival records of domestic workers' unions are contained in four volumes of union minutes held in the Archive of the Union of Household Workers (SINTRACAP), hereafter SINTRACAP, and at the Chilean National Archives. Santiago, Archivo Nacional de la Administración (hereafter ARNAD), Santiago, Fondo Organizaciones Sociales, "Libros de Actas: Reuniones Generales," four volumes, 1926–1964. Hereafter Actas. The author thanks Jorge Rojas Flores of Chile's Catholic University for depositing a photocopied set of the Actas at the ARNAD and for bringing their existence to the author's attention.

2. Santiago, Archivo de la Asociación Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular (hereafter ANECAP). With the able assistance of María Fernanda Caloiro F., research assistant and graduate in history from Chile's Catholic University, much of the ANECAP archive—including the organization's magazine *Surge*, 1958–1962—was photographed and preserved in digital format before the ANECAP National Directorate lost access to its own archives. Digital reproductions of these materials were returned to ANECAP officers in 2005, and also remain in the author's possession.

3. Studies of domestic service have long emphasized employer narratives of paternalism and fictive kinship. See Grace Esther Young, "The Myth of 'Being Like a Daughter,'" *Latin American Perspectives* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1987); Emma Marie Pérez, "'She Has Served Others in More Intimate Ways': The Domestic Servant Reform in Yucatán, 1915–1918," *Aztlán* 20, nos. 1–2 (Spring-Fall 1991): 11–37; Lesley Gill, *Precarious Dependencies: Gender, Class, and Domestic Service in Bolivia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro, eds., *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

4. The quest to produce a critical historical record of working conditions in Chilean domestic service (and other "female" occupations) began in the 1980s, when Chilean feminist scholars—triggered both by critical currents in global feminism and their own contact with domestic workers in women's movements against the dictatorship—produced brief studies that relied on testimony and photographs to describe domestic workers' stories of migration, poverty, overwork, isolation, and sexual abuse. Some of those works include Thelma Gálvez and Rosalba Todaro, *Trabajadoras de casa particular:*

Tábita, Clementina, Lidia (Santiago: CEM, 1984); Rosalba Todaro and Thelma Gálvez, *Trabajo doméstico remunerado: Conceptos, hechos, datos* (Santiago: CEM, 1987); Thelma Gálvez and Rosalba Todaro, *Yo trabajo así, en casa particular* (Santiago: CEM, 1985); Macarena Mack, Paulina Matta, Ximena Valdés, *Los trabajos de las mujeres entre el campo y la ciudad, 1920–1982: Campesina, costurera, obrera de la costura, empleada doméstica, cocinera de fundo, temporera* (Santiago: CEM, 1986).

5. International Labor Organization, “C189, Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189),” https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189.

6. G. Labarca Hubertson, “La abuela,” *Nuevos Horizontes*, January 1, 1904; Daniel de la Vega, “La antigua criada,” *Zig-Zag* 15, no. 776 (January 3, 1920), n.p. Two popular songs mentioned in empleada interviews include Nicanor Molinare, “Rosita de Cachapoal,” and Tito Fernández, “Muchacha de Domingo.”

7. The phrase “trabajadoras, como todas las demás” is drawn from Ivania Silva’s 1972 article urging ANECAP members to unionize: ANECAP, Ivania Silva, “Afiliación a la CUT,” *ANECAP Boletín* 1 (April 1972): 5–6.

8. Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (New York: Oxford, 2019).

9. Jocelyn Olcott, “Researching and Rethinking the Labors of Love,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (2011): 1–27.

10. Eileen Boris and Jennifer Fish, “Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Feminist Organizing, Worker Empowerment, and the ILO,” in *Towards a Global History of Domestic Workers and Care Workers*, ed. Dirk Hoerder, Elise Van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Silke Neunsinger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 530–552.

11. A growing body of interdisciplinary research on domestic workers in contemporary Latin America led to the formation in 2018 of the Network of Research on Domestic Work in Latin America (Red de Investigaciones sobre el Trabajo del Hogar en América Latina or RITHAL), which promotes the dissemination of research findings, interdisciplinary projects, and collaboration with domestic workers’ associations throughout the region. https://www.facebook.com/Rithal-Red-de-Investigaci%C3%B3n-sobre-Trabajo-del-Hogar-en-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina-106986504419062/?ref=page_internal.

12. Gill, *Precarious Dependencies*.

13. Elizabeth Quay Hutchison, *Labors Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), chap. 2; Lucía Pardo, “Una revisión histórica a la participación de la población en la fuerza de trabajo: Tendencias y características de la participación de la mujer,” *Estudios de Economía* 15, no. 1 (April 1988): 25–82.

14. The earliest history of this movement was written using archival sources by the domestic worker activist Afida Moreno Valenzuela, in a mimeographed account, “Cuadernillo de antecedentes históricos de Sintracap” (August 22, 1989), in the SINTRACAP archive. This work was later published in English as “History of the Household Workers’ Movement in Chile, 1926–1983,” in *Muchachas No More*, ed. Chaney and Castro,

407–416. See also Aída Moreno Valenzuela, *Evidencias de una líder: Memorias de una trabajadora de casa particular* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2012).

15. Sonia Montecino and Loreto Rebolledo, *Diagnóstico sobre inserción laboral de mujeres Mapuche rurales y urbanas* (Santiago: Universidad de Chile and SERNAM, 1993); SINTRACAP, “Realidad de las Trabajadoras de Casa Particular en Chile: Resumen Ejecutivo” (Spring 1993), photocopy, Archivo SINTRACAP; Ximena Díaz and Iris Delgado, *Personal de Servicio Doméstico: Estudio Diganóstico, Chile 2001* (Santiago: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer, 2001); Silke Staab and Kristen Hill Maher, “The Dual Discourse About Peruvian Domestic Workers in Santiago de Chile: Class, Race, and a Nationalist Project,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 87–116.

16. Ivonne Szasz, *Mujeres inmigrantes y mercado de trabajo en Santiago* (Santiago: CELADE, 1994) and David E. Hojman, “Land Reform, Female Migration and the Market for Domestic Service in Chile,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, no. 1 (1989): 120–121.

17. Cristobal Kay, “The Development of the Chilean *Hacienda* System,” in *Land and Labour in Latin America*, ed. Kenneth Duncan and Ian Rutledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 103–40; Arnold Bauer, *Chilean Rural Society from the Spanish Conquest to 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gabriel Salazar, *Labradores, peones y proletarios: Formación y crisis de la sociedad popular chilena del siglo XIV* (Santiago: SUR, 1985); Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950–1973* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

18. Elba Bravo, Aída Moreno, and Father Bernardino Piñera, in particular, gave generously of their time to allow me to collect their stories on multiple occasions in Santiago between July 2002 and June 2005. Since then, however, all three have passed away, most recently Aída Moreno on June 2, 2021.

19. Elba Bravo, interview, Santiago, Chile, July 5, 2002.

20. Bravo, interview, July 5, 2002.

21. Bravo, interview, September 8, 2004.

22. Bravo, interview, September 8, 2004.

23. Heidi Tinsman has also documented the risks and benefits of female migration and rural labor with respect to sexual abuse and income in “Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet’s Chile,” *Signs* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 165–167.

24. Bravo, interview, July 5, 2002.

25. Studies of these particular migrant flows are available only in the 1950s forward. Szasz draws on a variety of statistical sources to demonstrate the predominance of young, poorly educated, migrant women employed in the Santiago domestic service sector between 1952 and 1982, while David Hojman’s 1986 survey of household workers in Santiago showed that a minority (thirty out of 112) had been born in the Metropolitan Region; most migrant empleadas came from rural communities south of Santiago, and

over time migration originated in the southern regions even more distant from Santiago. Szasz, *Mujeres inmigrantes*, and Hojman, "Land Reform," 120–121.

26. Bravo, interview, September 8, 2004.

27. Bravo, interview, September 8 2004.

28. Bravo, interview, September 8, 2004.

29. A radio and television character created by the actress Ana González Olea in the 1940s. María Elisa Ruiz Vera, *Ana González: Primera Actriz* (Santiago: Edebé, Editorial Don Bosco, 2002).

Chapter 1

1. El Porvenir de Empleados de Casas Particulares, "Los empleados domésticos," *La Nación*, November 1923.

2. ANECAP, Ivania Silva, "Afiliación a la CUT," *ANECAP Boletín* 1 (April 1972): 5–6.

3. Steve J. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989–2006* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Peter Winn, ed., *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973–2002* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Edward Murphy, *For a Proper Home: Housing Rights in the Margins of Urban Chile, 1960–2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

4. Alvaro Jara, *Guerra y Sociedad en Chile: La transformación de la Guerra de Arauco y la esclavitud de los indios* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1971).

5. David J. McCreery, "Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala: 1876–1936," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 6, no. 4 (1983): 735–759; Donna Guy, "Women, Peonage, and Industrialization: Argentina, 1810–1914," *Latin American Research Review* 16, no. 3 (1981): 65–89.

6. Heidi Tinsman, "Rebel Coolies, Citizen Warriors, and Sworn Brothers: The Chinese Loyalty Oath and Alliance with Chile in the War of the Pacific," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98, no. 3 (2018): 439–469; Julio Pinto Vallejos, *Trabajos y rebeldías en la pampa salitrera: el ciclo del salitre y la reconfiguración de las identidades populares (1850–1900)* (Santiago: Universidad de Santiago, 1998); Mario Góngora, *Origen de los inquilinos de Chile Central* (Santiago: Universidad de Chile, 1960).

7. Nara B. Milanich, *Children of Fate: Childhood, Class, and the State in Chile, 1850–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884–1943* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Christine Ehrick, *The Shield of the Weak: Feminism and the State in Uruguay, 1903–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Sol Serrano, *¿Qué hacer con Dios en la República? Política y secularización en Chile, 1845–1885* (Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008).

8. Sergio Paolo Solano and Roicer Flórez Bolívar, "Política y trabajo: Debates sobre las normas jurídicas y las relaciones laborales de servidumbre en el Bolívar Grande (Colombia) en el siglo XIX," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 45 (January–April 2013): 16–28.