



# Gender, Place & Culture

## A Journal of Feminist Geography

ISSN: 0966-369X (Print) 1360-0524 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

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To cite this article: Leda M. Pérez (2021) On her shoulders: unpacking domestic work, neo-kinship and social authoritarianism in Peru, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28:1, 1-21, DOI: [10.1080/0966369X.2019.1708273](https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1708273)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1708273>



Published online: 03 Feb 2020.



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# On her shoulders: unpacking domestic work, neo-kinship and social authoritarianism in Peru

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## ABSTRACT

Poorly paid – sometimes unpaid – domestic workers represent one of the few viable options for household and care support in Peru, where the state is weak in its provision of services and protection. I argue that social hierarchies established through the coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender add a layer of complexity to workers' lived intersectionality of gender, indigeneity, rurality and migration status. It ends up positioning them as inferior in relation to their employers and co-citizens, a situation that is tantamount to social authoritarianism.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 12 January 2018  
Accepted 8 November 2019

## KEYWORDS

Care work; coloniality;  
gender and social  
authoritarianism; power

## Introduction

Peru's model of deregulated growth-led development has succeeded in sustaining a traditional middle class (Saavedra and Torero 2004), likewise expanding a new, 'emerging,' entrepreneurial sector, which is largely part of the informal economy (INEI 2017). In this context, women are increasingly working outside of the home because they are choosing to practice their professions and/or because of economic need (CEPAL 2015). As cultural beliefs hold, women are solely responsible for household chores, and as public programs that might provide some relief are lacking, domestic and care support from poorer, less educated women is purchased privately. Here, domestic workers – often adolescents – who provide home services, including cooking, cleaning washing, caring for children and/or dependent adults, tend to be internal migrants of rural and indigenous origin. These groups claim limited rights, poor remuneration, and are nearly entirely subject to their employers' discretion as state regulation and oversight of this sector is weak, at best.

In Latin America, the complex relationship between domestic workers and their employers is well documented (Bernardino-Costa 2014; Blofield 2012;

De Casanova 2013; Kuznesof 1989; Tizziani 2011). These contributions highlight the sector's historical connection to slavery and servitude and employer-worker power dynamics. However, the present nature of the relationship between rural, indigenous, internal migrant domestic workers and their traditional and emerging middle-class employers – oftentimes, family, acquaintances and/or members of the same regional and/or ethnic communities — is less clear.

My research reveals that the mostly women workers who comprise this sector migrated to Lima as adolescents through a kin-based relationship. Scholarly works on kinship have suggested that these relations can extend beyond to include friendship and/or community ties (Bloom Lobo 1976; Dodson and Zinavage 2007; Glenn 2010; White 2000; Wilhoit 2017). Moreover, in South America's Andean region, while being an important mechanism for rural-urban migration, these exchanges can serve to both support and exploit (Anderson 2009; Stensrud 2017). In this study, I define these relations as 'neo-kinship', suggesting coloniality – or neocoloniality – in the power arrangements experienced between workers and their employers. Here, reciprocity – the idea that 'I help you, as you help me' – has important currency (Bloom Lobo 1976; Vincent 2018). Whether formal or informal relations that delineate the terms for how the worker will provide support in the kin's home, and how that employer will provide at least some shelter and education, there is, above all, the understanding that this exchange goes well beyond work. As Bloom Lobo (1976) has suggested, reciprocity is based on 'a strategy of alliance formation', in which each 'individual extends and consolidates his individual network' (1976, 14).

Even as there is a tacit understanding of mutual support, others have argued that the arrangement may be highly asymmetrical (Anderson 2009; Stensrud 2017; White 2000). In my research, I have found that the combination of a new urban setting, little resources outside of their employers — oftentimes kin — support, discrimination toward this sector, and the absence of state support or monitoring of their rights, means that workers in Peru usually extract the worst end of the bargain (Pérez and Llanos 2017; Pérez 2018). Despite a narrative of reciprocity, the relationship is based on hierarchy, a combination of the coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender (Quijano 2000, Lugones 2008, 2010). They are expressed as social authoritarianism within a neo-kin relationship between employer and worker (Dagnino 2003).

In their examination of Latin America's democratic transition, scholars have studied the barriers to full citizenship in this region (Dagnino 2003, 2005; Dagnino, Oliveira and Panfichi 2006; Neto 2017; O'Donnell 1988, 2001). Dagnino (2003) has explored the notion of social authoritarianism in Brazil where, despite democratic reforms, '... unequal and hierarchical

organization of social relations' (2003, 5) has persisted. Specifically, she notes how the concept of citizenship is permeated by historic power relations, characterized by rule and submission not only between people and the state, but between those with more resources and power and the poorest and most vulnerable. In this case, being 'poor' is a sign of inferiority where individuals are unable to exercise their rights (Dagnino 2005). O'Donnell (2001) describes this phenomenon in Latin America as 'low intensity citizenship', where political freedoms co-exist with widespread poverty and the denial of basic social rights, including protection from institutional violence and the abuse of other citizens through social authoritarianism.

For the case of Peru, I argue that social authoritarianism is present at the micro level of household reproduction, where the state is absent from regulating the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. One way in which this occurs, for example, is by refusing to establish a minimum wage and associated rights for this sector (Loyo and Velasquez 2009; Mannarelli 2004). This ensures that this mostly women workforce remains highly vulnerable. As the state fails to enforce even their limited rights, employers ultimately maintain disproportionate power in determining the terms of work, even if abusive and exploitative.

As the following pages illustrate, in Peru the intersectionality of gender, indigeneity, rurality and migration status is overlaid with colonial heritage and persistent social hierarchies. These double, triple or multiple 'jeopardies' combine to inferiorize domestic workers, creating social and cultural distance between themselves and their middle class and emerging middle class employers, some of whom are also migrants of rural and indigenous origins (Anderson 2009; Mannarelli 2018). My aim here is to show how workers' search for 'something better' collides with a social authoritarianism in their work environments that casts them in subjugated positions. This situation is less a statement about these women's absence of agency, and more a manifestation of Peru's structural inequality experienced among social classes.

I have found that workers are trapped at the 'intersection' where Peru's colonial heritage meets with contemporary gender, race/ethnicity, class and migration status (Crenshaw 1991, Raghuram 2019). This in turn positions them as undeserving of rights because their better educated and/or situated employers are not obliged to do more by the Peruvian state and/or because their family employers see them as 'informal helpers.' What role have the country's uneven development policies played in preserving these hierarchical structures? What is the Peruvian state's response to this situation? Finally, what role is 'neo-kinship' playing in reproducing hierarchical, discriminatory positioning of these workers in the context of their employment, allowing a social authoritarianism to flourish between employers and

employees who often share a common rural and indigenous past, if not real family ties?

### **Domestic work at the intersection of geography, gender, and ethnicity**

McDowell (1999) has argued that gender is joined to geography through both physical spaces and social constructs – like ethnicity, class, or migration status – that establish proper places for both men and women. Marxist feminist scholars in turn have produced numerous analyses that recognize the historic placement of women in domestic and/or care work, highlighting the pernicious gender and racial inequality that this has created (Anderson and Collins 2016; Beal 2008; Federici 2004; Folbre and Nelson 2000; Hartmann 1981; King 1988; Land 1978). Likewise, research has also sought to evidence capitalism's ongoing search for cheap labour through the employment of women migrants from the global 'south' in domestic and care services in the households of more affluent 'northern' countries (B. Anderson 2000; McDowell 1999; Young 2001). Here, 'care chain' literature has provided valuable insights on how gender, migration and care work intersect to support labour reproduction (B. Anderson 2000; Federici 2004; Lan 2006; Salazar Parrañas 2015).

Recent feminist development and Marxist feminist literature has centered on the 'care crisis' (Razavi 2007; Razavi and Staab 2010; Fraser 2016). As more women are working outside of the home, social welfare models are drastically scaled down and, state-led models of capitalist development are everywhere in decline the crisis has become more acute (Glenn 2010). However, the burden of domestic and care work continues to fall on women. For those who can afford to pay for this service privately, this undervalued work is essentially shifted to a woman with fewer options and multiple responsibilities (Fraser 2016; Young 2001). Here, scholars have found a high level of precariousness in paid domestic and/or care work (Blofield 2012; Razavi 2007).

In Latin America, the practice of retaining domestic workers is related to a cultural legacy of colonialism (Kuznesof 1989); and it presently continues to segment workers along gender, race and class lines. This market segmentation limits tremendously the opportunities for upward social mobility for those in domestic work (Lautier 2003; Tizziani 2011). Furthermore, social protections for this sector are scarce because national domestic work legislations tend to be discriminatory and difficult to enforce, given the private nature of the homes where these workers perform their jobs (Blofield 2012; Espino 2011; Vela-Díaz 2013). In most cases, employers and workers tend to rely on informal arrangements and on individual negotiation to establish wages,

duration of the workday and other working and living conditions (Cano and Sánchez 2002; Cutuli and Pérez 2011).

In their study of Argentina, for example, Gorbán and Tizziani observed that employers 'construct a stereotype of social inferiority for domestic workers through which they legitimize their own dominant position in the labor relationship' (2014, 54–55). Likewise, De Casanova (2013) has found an 'embodied inequality' in the Ecuadorean case where employers devise ways to ensure that the workers' 'body' is presented as socioeconomically inferior. This may be, she suggests, because many families' only claim to middle class status is the presence of a domestic worker in their household (De Casanova 2013).

Other research has analysed domestic worker experiences through the lens of their agency and self-empowerment. Mick (2010), for example, has shown 'how domestic workers transform ideologies in this process, contributing to social change ... exercising influence and power in discourse' (2010, 187). However, Bernardino-Costa's (2014) study of Brazilian domestic workers cautions that context and 'space' are highly important determinants of such 'empowerment.' Here, he found that Afro-Brazilian workers expressed power in their activism outside of their places of employment, as opposed to the inferiorization experienced in the context of the homes where they worked, especially in relation to their women employers.

Not unlike the above-noted cases, in Peru socioeconomic class, gender ethnic/racial and migration status distinctions are illustrated by Ruiz-Bravo (2003) as she recounts the fervent discrimination of indigenous Peruvian women in their early roles as household domestic workers (2003, 108). This is a treatment that continues to exist in varying degrees through other aggressions, including some employers' requirement of the use of distinctive uniforms, or separate plates and cutlery. Likewise, Janine Anderson (2009, 2012) has also underscored the point that women who do this work are inferiorized based on ethnicity, migration status and social class.

Some notable particularities have framed Peruvians' cultural outlook toward rural, indigenous migrants, particularly women domestic workers. First, as Seminario (2016) has noted, the early Republic's leadership developed the coastal areas to the detriment of the highlands and Amazonian areas, a pattern that has persisted to this day. The result of this early policy decision is that while Peru is – in theory – decentralized, the reality is that most better-quality services – namely education and health – are concentrated in Lima. The country's unevenly developed geography, then, is a key driver in the poor, rural migration to Lima. On one hand, it ensures that impoverished people must travel outside of their regional homes to access services. On the other, this results in an important

supply of precarious workers that serve to maintain the coloniality of power and of gender.

Second, Peruvian labour institutions have historically excluded indigenous women, among others, from the category of 'worker,' thus ensuring informality. Domestic workers, for example, were not 'required' to contribute to the social security system (Drinot 2011). Moreover, Drinot (2006) has argued that Peruvian institutions are racist, an essential point for understanding why it might be that some sectors of the labour force, like domestic workers, are excluded from work-related rights or benefits in Peruvian society. Likewise, Mannarelli (2018) notes that in Peruvian society manual labour has been historically associated to indigenous women; that which is inferior and servile. Here, she also comments on the inordinate power placed in the private management of these services versus the comparative weakness of public oversight, providing some insight into the origins of early domestic worker-employer relationships.

Third, Quijano's (2000) work on the coloniality of power and Lugones' coloniality of gender (2008) describe Peru's present racial and social discrimination. For Quijano, in Latin America there are two historical processes that have established the axes of modern power: first, the codification of differences between conquerors and conquered through the social construction of race; and, second, through historical forms of labor control. Lugones (2008) expands this notion, illustrating how gendered labor in service to capital accumulation positions rural, indigenous, migrant women unfavorably in relation to other workers. Indeed, as she notes, the characterization of European women places the former in direct opposition to non-white, colonized women, seen as sufficiently strong to take on any type of work, rendered as less human (2008, 751–753). For the Peruvian case, the coloniality of gender frame clarifies oppression as a complex interaction of economic, racial and generational systems. Seen in this way, the service provided by women domestic workers to their kin or employer is a means for the latter to work and move ahead, while workers' roles as rural, indigenous and migrant are negatively reinforced.

Fourth, a country with a long colonial legacy as the centre of the Spanish Viceroyalty, Peru began its way toward full, modern representative democracy only in the 1980s when voting rights were granted to illiterate citizens – a process that remains tenuous to this day. Dagnino (2003; Dagnino, Oliveira, and Panfichi 2006) is instructive here in her analysis of democratic consolidation and in her view of how social domination has served to keep specific populations at the margins. As she suggests, social authoritarianism preserves inequalities and organizes social relations along hierarchical lines. In this way, gender, race/ethnicity and class are the key inputs for social classification that are impregnated in Latin American cultures and that establish 'place' in society. Finally, in Dagnino's (2003, 2005) exploration of the

construction of ‘citizenship’ in Brazil she observed that this process was more concerned with integrating people into the market as producers and as consumers than with including them in the social and political fabric as first-class citizens. I explore how social authoritarianism has served to position domestic workers in Peru next.

## Materials and methods

I develop my views based on 30 semi-structured interviews conducted between January and March of 2015. These included 20 domestic workers who were approached at the Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (AGTR)/La Casa de Panchita (LCP), a Lima-based civil society organization (CSO) and employment agency in the service of paid domestic workers, and 10 employers of the emerging and traditional middle classes (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, interviews with both workers and employers were structured around three central domains: personal histories, occupational history, and experiences as workers or employers – where their anonymity is maintained. From these, key themes were extrapolated from interviews with both groups. For domestic workers, the main areas that surfaced were related to migration decisions; the migration experience (including family involvement in the same); and relationships in work. For employers, themes centered on household needs; in some cases, the justification for the ‘position’ of the worker; and, in others, the insistence that the worker was merely a helper.

The primary venue for interviews with workers was LCP. I approached women there as they arrived to enquire about – or engage in – services offered by the CSO. This provided for a maximum-variation, purposive sample of women associated to LCP. Some workers were new to the organization, and others had prior employment experience through this agency, but all those interviewed met the criteria of being – or having been – a domestic worker between the years 2004 and 2013.

For employers, I identified small business owners in Los Olivos, one of Lima’s most economically dynamic districts, and which includes a notable emerging middle class (According to the 2017 Census, 72% of this district’s population self-reports as mixed race; 14% as indigenous/Quechua. By contrast, 68% of greater Lima residents report as mixed race or ‘mestizo’.). Initial

**Table 1.** Occupational definition of social classes for metropolitan Lima.

Social class	Conceptual definition
Upper class	Managers and large-scale employers
Traditional middle class	White collar workers and administrators
Emerging middle class	Small business employers; self-qualified and semi-qualified self-employed
Working class	Dependent workers limited or no qualifications
Lower class	Non-paid family workers and self-employed with non-qualifications (including domestic workers)

Prepared by the author.



**Table 2.** Interview domains for semi-structured interviews with domestic workers and employers.

Domains	Domestic workers	Employers
<i>Personal histories</i>	Present place of residence Date and place of birth Family origin (composition, occupation of parents, socioeconomic level) Educational attainment Marriage, partnership and children Expectations/hopes Relations with their own families (support and/or conflicts)	Present place of residence Date and place of birth Family origin (composition, occupation of parents, socioeconomic level) Educational attainment Marriage, partnership, and children Expectations/hopes
<i>Occupational histories</i>	History of domestic work Other employers (where, how many, socioeconomic characteristics, characteristics of the arrangement, benefits and remuneration) Other careers or jobs (before or after domestic work and for how long)	Education and/or work history Self-perceptions relative to occupation
<i>Experiences as workers/employers</i>	Experiences, problems and or/ conflicts and other events associated with domestic work and resolutions	Support at home. Who provides this support? Family? Friends? Others? How did they decide that this person would help them? In what does this “help” consist? Would it be possible to conduct their daily activities (work, chores, care of children) were it not for the help of this person? Experiences, problems and/or conflicts and other events associated with hired domestic work and resolutions

Prepared by the author.

contact was made with several business owners through my institution's relationship with MiBanco, a credit-lending bank for micro- and small-enterprises. Additionally, this article is informed by interviews with traditional middleclass professionals, obtained through personal networks and 'snowballing.'

While interviews with domestic workers were more narrowly focused on examining this sector's present-day situation, of special interest in my interviews with employers was to learn more about the nature of the relationship with household workers and their perceptions relative to the benefits of employing the same.

### ***A cultural broth for social authoritarianism***

#### ***Limited state supports***

Despite intense national economic growth due to natural resource commodities boom in the first 15 years of the present century, wages remain low for

most people in Peru. This is particularly true for many who work in the informal sector. Likewise, even those 'formally' employed in public health, education and/or public or private administration, for example, do not fare much better. Here, the average Peruvian salary was S/1,723 per month, approximately \$580 (INEI. 2019). Moreover, social protections – a universal safety net and/or welfare system – are absent for most people. For those employed in the formal economy, 'citizen' benefits are limited to EsSalud, the employer-sponsored, highly congested, health program as well as the right to public education, one of the poorest in the Latin American region (Cetrángolo et al. 2013). Despite free public education, parents face indirect costs, such as the purchase of uniforms, books, food, and transportation (Pezo Castañeda 2010; UNICEF. 2016).

Thus, Peru's general labour force is highly precarious, both because of low wages and salaries overall as well as because of the state's weak provision of basic universal services on a national scale, subsidized childcare, for example, and other social support systems. According to the ILO, whereas those covered by social security benefits falls somewhere between 84 per cent and 91 per cent in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Panama, Chile and Brazil, together with Paraguay, Peru's national coverage is only about 60 per cent (Weller et al. 2015). Considering this scenario, this country's labour market, faces a variety of issues that maintain workers in a state of vulnerability: severe informality, low wages, poor education, youth unemployment, and geographic and gender discrimination (Lavigne 2013, 10).

Limited state supports and oversight, in turn, create an apt environment for the exploitation of those with the least resources, among them domestic workers. Some researchers have noted that the situation of these workers might improve due to union membership and enhanced political participation (Chaney and García Castro 1989); yet, my interviews with the cohort presented here suggest that – despite having achieved some success by migrating to Lima, finding work and furthering their education – most reported experiences with some form of exploitation and inability to exit this sector.

There is a social and cultural context for this. Despite a 2003 law that recognized Peruvian domestic workers as not merely service providers, this legislation codifies their second-class status. While on one hand, employers are required to register workers and pay for their EsSalud health care services, – thus creating a path to formality – on the other hand, the law does not require written contracts nor a base minimum salary (INEI. 2013a). Likewise, despite the stipulation that domestic workers should receive an annual compensation for time served (CTS) and two bonuses a year, these are established as only half of whatever monthly wage they are able to negotiate with their employers. In reality, nearly 100% of workers in this

sector are informal, as the state does not actively oversee compliance with said law. Thus, the decision to comply with the legislation is left to the sole discretion of the employer.

Despite efforts by civil society and the labor unions – among them, the two syndicates established by domestic workers – and other efforts led by the Ministry of Labor, the national law has yet to change. In 2018, ILO Convention 189, which calls for the provision of full rights and benefits for domestic workers, was ratified by the Peruvian Congress. However, until Peru's national legislation is revised the situation for these workers remains status quo.

In summary, most of Peru's working population is informal and poorly compensated. Moreover, the state's neoliberal approach limits services, prioritizing focalized programs of questionable quality for the poorest vis-à-vis a solid commitment to universalized rights (Tanaka and Trivelli 2002). Here, like Dagnino's (2003, 2006) analysis of social authoritarianism in Brazil, the greater concern is in ensuring that consumers have unfettered access to scantily regulated markets. The result for a highly unregulated sector like domestic work is that those who can, pay privately for these services; those who cannot, turn to other strategies, including unpaid support that might be derived from a family or acquaintance, through a neo-kin relationship; and, in both cases, those who do the work remain highly devalued and unprotected (Bastidas 2013; Blofield 2012; Fuertes, Rodríguez, and Casali 2013).

My interviews corroborate the preceding; moreover, they raise two reflections. First, the migration experiences of the cohort of workers not only shaped their identity but has also contributed to determining their socioeconomic placement. Second, the relationships between workers and employers are varied and complex; but, in all the cases reviewed, they were based on the power dynamic that the concept of social authoritarianism describes. I explore these findings in further detail below.

### *Female migration and socioeconomic 'placement'*

Domestic workers interviewed were comprised predominantly of single, rural, indigenous, Andean migrant women, with low levels of educational attainment. Although all were adults at the time we spoke, most had arrived in Lima as children or adolescents (between 9 -18 years of age; work is legal at 14, with parental consent). As rural women, education in their provincial homes was limited by both the lack of nearby schools as well by their families' prejudices relative to women's education. Thus, leaving the family to 'work' or 'help' (*ayudar*) in a third party's home was viewed as a path toward upward social mobility. Referring to their hometowns, the women described these as poor, rural, lacking services, and often abusive. Lima, by contrast, is

urban; education and work are plentiful; and one might earn money or become a 'professional'.

Lady (born in Chiclayo in 1974), summarized it as follows: 'In the provinces there is no economy.' Likewise, Natalia (born in Ayabaca in 1983), abandoned by her parents at an early age, lived with extended family until she migrated to Lima at the age of 18 to work with an aunt. Finally, the story of Marcela (born in Cajamarca in 1961), the child of peasant parents, best summarizes some of the difficulties experienced by workers in their early lives and in the process of migration.

First sent away from home by her widowed mother at the age of seven to work for distant relatives in her provincial capital, Marcela remembers awaking regularly at dawn with a cold splash of water to her face. Experiencing consistent physical and verbal abuse by her employers that lasted well into her pre-adolescence, Marcela migrated to Lima in the hope of 'something better'.

As in Marcela's case, the primary reason cited for migrating to Lima among the cohort was the search for improved economic and educational possibilities. Likewise, some migrants were not only running 'to' something, they were also running 'away' in the hope that the destination might improve life conditions. Lima was characterized as the place where higher education and a better life would be possible, thus contributing significantly to one's personal development and enhanced identity (Ames 2013).

Interviews also revealed that the 'search for something better' was also an important financial lifeline for the extended family back home. The cohort mentioned others that depended on them in varied ways. Following her mother's death, Maria Angélica (born in Ancash in 1970) went to work in Lima at the age of 17 to support herself and ease her family's burden. In one situation, she was given a room on the rooftop with cold water and a bed that 'was not fit for a human'. Here, meals were differentiated and of poor quality. Likewise, Elizabeth (born in Huaraz in 1996) tolerated a job with an exploitative family so that she might send money to care for her two-year-old son.

I found that some level of abuse/exploitation followed most women into their early experiences in domestic work, continuing sometimes throughout their employment trajectory. Such experiences ranged from verbal and physical mistreatment, to employers' partial or complete ignorance of workers' rights, including the right to education. As a potential conduit away from poverty, rurality and indigeneity, this employment is also a double-edged sword. Though the acquisition of this urban job comes with a wage that is higher than in any rural province, the work is unregulated and undervalued, and employers' relative power in deciding wages and labor conditions outweigh worker's limited rights.

Indeed, working arrangements described included a loose definition of rights and obligations, including accounts of employers who refused to pay

the complete, agreed-upon sum for work rendered or comply with the full provision of the limited rights required by the law. Furthermore, in most cases I found that labor mobility is horizontal, or negative, which makes domestic work the better option.

One explanation that might account for this is the negative connotation given to migration status when combined with the signifiers of gender, rural, and indigenous. This identification is poignant when juxtaposed against some employers who have achieved distance from that condition over time through generational turnover and/or through their own urbanization. As illustrated by María Fernanda (born in Chiclayo in 1979): 'The lady of the house ... insisted that I should eat in the kitchen. The help to the kitchen! You come from a farm and you think that because you have arrived in Lima you are now part of society, one of us. You know what? You in your place, and me in mine.'

### *Employers and 'neo-kinship'*

The *source* of the employment in my cohort also played an instrumental role in shaping worker positions and relationships with their employers. While a few referred to job placement through employment agencies, most were connected to employment through family- and friends-based social networks. In these cases, very low – sometimes inexistent – wages were negotiated. A recurring theme described by women was their transportation to urban environments when they were girls or adolescents, sometimes with only the promise of room and board and the possibility of furthering their education.

On one hand, the 'affective' link provided by the kin relation as a connector to employment was important in terms of assuring a home/employer known to the family. On the other, very low wages were typically negotiated and, given some of the testimonies provided, the 'kinship', real blood ties or otherwise, did not necessarily mitigate women's exposures to unkind and/or unfair employers. Rather, I observed that these arrangements can lead to traumatic memories for the women. Marcela told me, for example, that in her first job in Lima her employer – to whom she was connected by a relative – one day arbitrarily cut her long hair, making her feel worthless. This is particularly poignant given the identity tied to Andean women's long hair, traditionally worn in braids. Symbolically, then, Marcela's employer – in an act of social authoritarianism – attempted 'cut away', belittle, her autonomy. Yet given her youth and poverty, her family's needs, and the kinship ties that brought her to this place, she had few, if any, options but to accept the circumstances of the moment.

In the kinship relationship described at the outset, the worker shoulders the responsibility for honoring the family or friend that placed her in a new

home, while also expressing her gratitude to the person for taking her. The latter, particularly, means that workers themselves characterized these first experiences as ‘help’ rather than work. Moreover, even as these transactions were also viewed as reciprocal – the employer gave the worker a place to stay, the possibility of going to school and, maybe, a small, irregular payment in exchange for her services, it was equally clear that the workers saw their placement in that home as inferior, not as full members of the family. They knew that their role was to serve.

If the source of the employment establishes the placement of the worker, literally and figuratively, the *kind* of relationship with employer also contributes to that positioning and the worker’s identity. I observed two ‘ideal types’ of employment (as per Max Weber’s analytical tool for conceptualizing typical characteristics of a phenomenon). As described above, one type of employer does not view itself as such, nor the worker as an employee. Most common among the emerging middle class, this relationship is based on neo-kinship and the idea of reciprocity. Indeed, among the cohort, this was the most common type of relationship cited in first jobs. The other type is the traditional middleclass employer who hires a worker as a matter of both custom and need. In these cases, not having a family relation was a more common occurrence. I describe two interviews with these employers below.

*Type 1: Employment according to minimum standard.* Victoria (born in Lima in 1974), is a middle class, public-sector physician. Through the support of her family’s live-in domestic worker *both* she and her husband Jaime (born in Trujillo in 1975) pursue careers as public-sector doctors as well as accept other private consulting jobs. These activities ensure that their family enjoys a higher standard of living, including good schools for their two, small children, extracurricular activities, and family vacations.

Like other middleclass professionals, public-sector physicians in Peru are poorly compensated. Thus, it is common for people to take second or third jobs or projects that generate additional income. For Victoria and Jaime, it takes three jobs each. Clearly, Victoria and her husband could send their children to public schools, and they could live in one of the less affluent areas of Lima. However, public education is among the worst of the region and the lack of a unified transportation system makes commuting from periphery neighborhoods cumbersome and dangerous. Ultimately, as two well-educated doctors, they expect that they should be able to afford a good standard of living.

The price for these aspirations, however, is that they inhabit cramped quarters together with the employee who cares for their home and children. Here, tension between this couple and their domestic worker/nanny was evident. When discussing their responsibility toward their domestic worker, Victoria commented, ‘If I do not get a raise, why should she?’ While the couple indicated that they comply with the law, they do so only under its minimum standards. Annoyed

about being solely responsible for ensuring fair pay and benefits for their employee, they will not do more given their own limited rights and benefits.

In this kind of relationship, there is distance between employer and worker; the transaction is less personal. Unlike the next type, the domestic worker is an employee. Yet, a hierarchy that transcends the employer-employee relationship, and that is also social and cultural – the worker is not equal to them, nor does she qualify for the same rights – exists. Although there is no kinship tie here, the neocoloniality is nevertheless present as is the social authoritarianism. Given the state's non-intervention in private homes, these employers ultimately have the power to determine the degree to which rights are enforced.

*Type 2: Part of the family.* This social segment comprised of small business owners and entrepreneurs in commercial and service sectors do not conceive domestic and care services in the same way as other social classes might. For example, Sebastian (born in Chiclayo in 1979) and his wife Jenny (born in Lima in 1981), emerging middle class owners of a small ceviche restaurant in Los Olivos both work long days, yet their expectation is that Jenny is the one responsible for caring for their child and home. Additionally, they employ two adolescents in the restaurant – a brother and sister who also live with them and in Sebastian's and Jenny's words, 'help' with the housework on the weekends. Yet, the youth are not viewed by the couple as employees. Though they pay the siblings a modest amount for their services, the primary currency described in this relationship is reciprocity. The youth help them, and they learn about the small restaurant business.

Sebastian and Jenny believe that they play a valuable role here, providing work, and helping the siblings to 'get ahead'. As Sebastian noted, 'They prefer to be with us rather than watch their father get drunk. Besides there are more amenities here.' Such a comment positions these employers as an important lifeline to poorer relatives who they have helped to transport – or, 'bring' – to Lima. Here, the rural origins of the workers are cast as something that must be left behind, like the 'drunken father.' Urban Lima, the destination of the migration, is the place where a new identity might emerge. In this scenario, the family worker takes the lowest place in the household for very little, if any wages, providing services in the hopes of receiving an education and/or improving their life conditions. There is a term for this – *pagar piso* – which, roughly translated, suggests that the price to pay for potential socioeconomic mobility is the lowest entry position at work.

Comments made by Jenny and Sebastian about their own humble beginnings clarified their ideas about reciprocity. Sebastian, for example, is the youngest of six siblings who arrived in Lima to work at the age of 14 shortly after he was orphaned. Jenny, also a child worker, lost her father early in life. They recounted their non-stop work in the beginning just to make ends meet, proudly noting how their efforts had served to double the number of

tables in their modest restaurant in only two years. Thus, the clear message is, 'I help you and you help me and, *maybe*, this is possible for you too.'

In these relationships, workers are part of a family support network. In practice, however, they are not full members of the family, something that is corroborated by the testimonies provided by the workers. Here, even more powerfully than in the first ideal type, hierarchy and unchecked power within this social authoritarian arrangement is much more poignant because of the neo-kin relation in which the worker's lower, or dependent, position marks the employer's social difference and relative power. In contrast to employers' experiences and shared evidence in 'getting ahead', in Lima conversations with domestic workers suggest that the full spectrum of their educational and work aims did not materialize as they had hoped.

### ***Key observations of women's work, neo-kinship and social authoritarianism***

There are a few key observations that arise from these interviews and my study overall. First a clear distinction that might be made between traditional middle class and emerging middleclass employers is their view of the worker. The former, mostly second-generation natives of Lima views the worker as an employee who allows both heads of the household to develop their careers and enjoy some level of upward social mobility. For the latter, mostly migrants, neo-kinship distorts the employer-employee relationship. Here, notions of family, trust and reciprocity are most evident (J. Anderson 2009, 2012; Bloom Lobo 1976; Wilhoit 2017). Indeed, the image that remains is that these arrangements are akin to daily survival where one makes private arrangements within the family network, hopefully with some level of savings and upward mobility. This includes long hours and hard work for all the household's members.

Second, whether through the employment of someone as characterized by the traditional middle class, or the informal help, described by the emerging middle class, the presence of a 'worker' has important implications for gender roles and relations among these two types of employers. For the traditional middle class, it appears that the worker liberates the women head of household from a strict, home-bound gender role, allowing for professional progress outside of the home. This is reminiscent of Lan's study (2006) of migrant workers in Taiwan. Or, like De Casanova's research in Ecuador (2013), this arrangement also allows for some level of middleclass distinction as one who can obtain the hired help of a 'poorer' woman. In either case, there is no question that domestic duties are primarily that of women.

Third, also related to the emerging middle class, is that I mostly encountered people who had arrived in Lima as young workers to support – and be supported – in family initiatives. Thus, child work, seen as help in the context



of neo-kinship, is highly normalized. Reminiscent of Dagnino (2003), this is a 'do-it-yourself' approach in which entrepreneurship is the engine. Everyone must work, and 'the right to have rights' takes a distinctly second-seat.

## Conclusion

Hierarchical, discriminatory relationships between domestic workers and their employers in Peru are based on a form of social authoritarianism. Such a system ensures that rural, indigenous, migrant women enjoy limited work opportunities, sometimes making domestic service the most attractive option. Moreover, I have observed that first experiences tend to materialize through 'neo-kin' relations which keep workers in differentiated and inferior social positions relative to their employers.

This is not unlike the social construction of differences and labour control described by Quijano's coloniality of power (2000) and by Lugones' (2008) coloniality of gender in which rural, indigenous, migrant women occupy the lowliest roles. Yet it also adds a layer of complexity to the coloniality of power and gender hypotheses. Particularly in neo-kinship, distinctions and social distance are created between employers and workers who are ethnically and culturally similar. Yet these employers treat their domestic workers much like the traditional and higher middle classes might, masking these labour relations behind a façade of mutual help.

Future research might examine more deeply the mechanisms of social authoritarianism, shedding light on the way colonial-like hierarchies are reproduced in the relationships between rural and indigenous emerging middle classes and their equally rural and indigenous, women domestic workers, normalized by a discourse of family reciprocity.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Yamilé Guibert, Daniela Ugarte and Nicola Espinosa for their valuable research assistance in the final version of this article.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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