DOMESTIC SERVITUDE: SOCIOCULTURAL ISOLATION AND COERCIVE LABOR RELATIONS IN PERU

Nicola Schalkowski
Institute for Latin American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany
n.schalkowski@fu-berlin.de | https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8091-6769

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ABSTRACT: This article proposes a historical-sociological lens to approach coercive and violent relations within remunerated household labor. Drawing from Orlando Patterson, these relations are understood as interpersonal relations of domination with the concept of domestic servitude. They are analyzed in a qualitative empirical case study on socioculturally isolated domestic workers in Lima, Peru. While the paper attends to scholars concerning migration and domestic work, its main sociological contribution is to empirically and theoretically enrich debates on "unfreedom" beyond economic exploitation. It argues for a reflective and differentiated elaboration on sociocultural dimensions of coercion and violence that are embedded in colonial and patriarchal power structures.

KEYWORDS: Servitude; Domestic Work; Labor Relations; Peru; Isolation; Violence

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SERVIDUMBRE DOMÉSTICA: AISLAMIENTO SOCIOCULTURAL Y RELACIONES LABORALES COERCITIVAS EN PERÚ

RESUMEN: Este artículo propone una perspectiva histórico-sociológica para abordar las relaciones coercitivas y violentas en el ámbito del trabajo doméstico remunerado. Tomando como referencia la obra de Orlando Patterson, estas se entienden como relaciones interpersonales de dominación con el concepto de servidumbre doméstica. Se analizan en un estudio de caso empírico cualitativo sobre trabajadoras domésticas en aislamiento sociocultural en Lima, Perú. Aunque el presente trabajo trata sobre la migración y el trabajo doméstico, su principal contribución sociológica es enriquecer empírica y teóricamente los debates sobre "unfreedom" más allá de la explotación económica. Aboga por una elaboración reflexiva y diferenciada sobre las dimensiones socioculturales de la coerción y la violencia que están arraigadas en las estructuras de poder coloniales y patriarcales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Servidumbre; Trabajo doméstico; Relaciones laborales; Perú; Aislamiento; Violencia

SERVIDÃO DOMESTICA: ISOLAMENTO SOCIOCULTURAL E RELAÇÕES LABORAIS COERCITIVAS NO PERU

RESUMO: Este artigo propõe uma lente histórico-sociológica para abordar as relações coercitivas e violentas no âmbito do trabalho doméstico remunerado. A partir de Orlando Patterson, essas relações são entendidas como relações interpessoais de dominação com o conceito de servidão domestica. Elas são analisadas num estudo de caso empírico qualitativo sobre trabalhadoras domésticas isoladas socioculturalmente em Lima, Peru. Embora o trabalho se dirija a estudiosos da migração e o trabalho domestico, a sua principal contribuição sociológica é enriquecer empírica e teoricamente os debates sobre "unfreedom" para além da exploração econômica. Argumenta-se para uma elaboração refletiva e diferenciada das dimensões socioculturais da coerção e da violência embarcadas nas estruturas de poder coloniais e patriarcais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Servidão; Trabalho doméstico; Relações de poder; Peru; Isolamento; Violência

INTRODUCTION

¡Oh!, si quieres comer tienes que trabajar, en casa del patrón,
que te convierte en su sirvienta, y no en persona.
¡Oh!, hasta te insulta y te golpea, para que no contestes
¿por qué mujer andina, que vienes de la libertad? hoy
tienes que vivir sometida, ocultando, tu dolor, tu sufrir
por un mísero sueldo.
[…]
Mujer andina, eres persona, y nadie te debe destruir
ni en lo moral, ni en lo físico, ni explotándote, con más
horas de trabajo inhumano.[1] [2]

These lines from the poem "Mujer recobra", printed in a manual by and for domestic workers in Peru (Loza *et al.* 1990), tell a story shared by many of them. As girls or teenagers, they are sent to coastal cities and, in contrast to the described "freedom" in the Andean countryside, they end up in the role of a "servant", a non-person, in the urban household. They work in households of relatives or acquaintances of the family in the capital, hoping to relieve their own parents and go to school. There, in addition to long working days, they can face humiliation, limited opportunities for mobility, zero or little pay, as well as the constant fear of violence — especially from the *patrona* (female employer) of the house, her husband or sons. In the remainder of

[1] From the poem "Mujer recobra" in Loza, Luza, Mendoza and Valverde 1990: 89.

[2] Own translation: Oh! If you want to eat you have to work, in the master's house, who makes you his servant, and not a person. Oh! He even insults you and beats you, so that you don't talk back. why Andean woman, who comes from freedom? Today you have to live subdued, hiding, your pain, your suffering, for a miserable salary [...] Andean woman, you are a person, and nobody should destroy you neither morally, nor physically, nor by exploiting you, with more hours of inhuman work.

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the poem, as in reality, they regain their status as persons through the self-empowering effects of the collective union with their colleagues. It is these organized domestic workers in Lima, Peru, sharing their perspectives and experiences of sociocultural isolation, who form the empirical case of this study.

In Peru, the majority of domestic workers (close to 70%, see INEI 2010) are internal migrant women from rural/Andean regions who work in urban/coastal areas. In 2017 the capital, Lima, accounted for 2.9 million internal migrants, which is around one third of the capital's habitants (INEI 2017). Among them are women and girls from peasant communities, Afro-Peruvian, indigenous and displaced women (Maich 2014: 77, Sandoval 2014: 111). They mostly work without contract for people who are not registered as employers. After years of organizing and intense campaigning to renegotiate the discriminatory specialized laws outside the labor standards of other sectors, a new law regulating domestic work in Peru was negotiated by trade unions and passed in October 2020. The law makes explicit reference to an effective protection of external or internal migration in relation to "forced labor" (see Artículo 22, Ley 31047).

This article addresses the sociocultural dimensions of violence — and coercion — based practices in domestic work and the colonial-patriarchal power dynamics in which they are embedded.[3] This field is approached with the concept of domestic servitude, which understands these practices within an interpersonal, parasitic relation of domination between employer and employee in the household. Moreover, domestic servitude is understood as a social institution based on categories of difference. Building on Orlando Patterson's theoretical considerations concerning servitude and slavery (1982, 2012, 2014), *sociocultural isolation* as a means of servitude forms the key category for the analysis of internal migration under conditions of domestic servitude. Practices on different dimensions concerning sociocultural

[3] Content warning: this paper includes narrations and discussions of racist and sexualized violence.

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isolation maintain the relation of domination and the institution of servitude. These analytical dimensions encompass: (a) deracination, (b) violence and threats as instruments of degradation, (c) denial of independent legal and social existence, and (d) institutional and individual obligations.

Following the introduction and the narrowing of the subject matter within the academic discussion, I develop a theoretical framework and research design based on the concept *domestic servitude.* My methodological approach and data for the case study are presented thereafter. I then turn to the findings of my study of socioculturally isolated domestic workers and their transformation in collective organization. The article ends with a discussion of the main results and concluding remarks on the analytical potential of the concept *servitude*.

RESEARCH DEBATES ON UNFREEDOM AND LABOR

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of scholars have focused on the negative socioeconomic impacts of globalization and the international division of labor (see Anderson 2000, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, Salazar Parreñas 2015). This is in the context of expanding global markets and increased international labor mobility, shaped by economic deregulation and restrictive immigration policies. Cross-border migration is seen as crucial for the configuration of labor relations and for these to take violent and coercive forms (Patterson 2012: 350). I argue that this holds true also for internal migrants who were brought from rural to urban areas to work in households. The aim of this research is to bring together discussion strands of the research fields of "unfree" labor, domestic work and migration research, whereby my contribution is the heuristic gain through my specific access based on domestic servitude.

The complex problem of free/unfree is constantly being re-negotiated. Constructed distinctions between work/non-work and free/unfree labor remain mainly implicit. An example is the International

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Labour Organisation's (ILO) category of *Forced Labour*, legally defined in 1930 with the Forced Labour Convention (ILO 1930).[4] The construction of this legal category is a historical manifestation of the challenge to determine the boundaries between free and unfree labor, embedded in gendered and colonial power relations in the discourse of civilization (see Wobbe *et al.* 2023).

Among historical scholars there is an ongoing debate on how to conceptualize this false dichotomy (Steinfeld and Engermann 1997: 118, see also De Vito *et al.* 2020, Van der Linden and Rodríguez 2016). The current tendency of NGO's and international organizations to categorize all severe working conditions as modern slavery (*e.g.* ILO 2017) is distorting and invites "moral crusades" (Patterson 2012: 359, Rossi 2021).

How can this complex issue be sociologically conceptualized beyond false dichotomies and legal categorizations? In the discussion about appropriate generic terms for unfree social contexts, sociologists Patterson and Zhuo propose the conceptional approach of *servitude* (Patterson and Zhuo 2018: 410). This study builds on these considerations as well as on the pioneering study by Bridget Anderson (2000). Anderson draws on Patterson to empirically and theoretically elaborate on the organization of migrant domestic work in different European cities. Empirical analyses of domestic work in Latin American contexts elaborated by Rutté García (1976), Goldsmith (1998) and Valdez Carrasco (2014) are also highly instructive, and the comprehensive publication by Chaney and García Castro (1989) containing historical, empirical and activist studies. However, concerning the "ongoing neglect" regarding "forced labour in the domestic work industry" (Phillips 2018: 50), as well as the "undertheorised relations

[4] The term *forced labour* is a legal term coined by the ILO that will not be used as an analytical category here. Instead, I use the terms coercive and violent (labor) practices in order to sociologically approach dimensions of unfreedom in different relationships and labor forms (see Renard and Wobbe 2023: 105).

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between unfreedom, domestic labour and social reproduction" (Strauss 2012: 137-48), further research is called for.

DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

Enganche: Domestic Servitude in Peru

The violent treatment of domestic workers in Peru is attributed to the historically built power structures which are relevant on a cultural dimension (Maich 2014, Valdez Carrasco 2014). A historical perspective reveals the specific colonial-patriarchal configuration of domestic work based on coercion and violence in Peru (see Cosamalón 2019, Cumes 2014, Kuznesof 1989, Mannarelli 2018, Quijano 2000, Sandoval 2014). In the colonial context, the patriarchal household of the Spanish colonizers became the "instance of servitude" (Cumes 2014: 371; own translation) as it shaped the social organization of labor and relationships formed around the authority of the patriarch. Following Peruvian social theorist Anibal Quijano's work on the coloniality of power (2000), the codification of differences between colonizers and colonized determined a social classification of the population along *razas*, including biologist attributions of abilities and positioning in the social hierarchy accordingly. Further, María Lugones (2010) elaborates on the hierarchical and racially differentiated binary gender system imposed by colonialism. Lugones argues that the coloniality of gender entails a process of dehumanization — the division between man and woman as well as human and non-human (Lugones 2010). These models of classification structured the control of labor and culturally anchored its legitimacy. In the region today constituted as the Peruvian state, before and after formal independence, it took the forms of *pongaje*, *encomiendas* or *mita's*, in which, in different historic moments, indigenous, enslaved, freed Black women and girls performed reproductive domestic tasks as tribute or payment of debts (Cosamalón

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2019, Kuznesof 1989, Mannarelli 2018). Continuities of these relations of domination, the arrangements of reproduction and the collective cultural knowledge about them are visible in the current social arrangement of domestic servitude.[5] "Sirvienta" (domestic worker in servitude) as well as "patrón/patrona" (employers of the household) are historically constituted subjects (Cumes 2014: 396). The constructed racial and gendered differences of Black and also "indigenous women were socially used to construct a kind of 'destiny' for them as servants. This is present in the everyday social imaginary" (Cumes 2014: 379; own translation).

The forms and practices of labor, reproduction and power relations are not only historically contingent on colonial patriarchy, but also (re)produced within the dominant relations of production (*e.g.* currently constituted by capitalist principles) and maintained in the interest of the state (see *e.g.* Strauss 2012). Challenging material conditions in rural regions and marginalized communities are the context of the sociocultural practice of *padrinazgo*, by which girls are brought to urban coastal areas by so-called *padrinos* or *madrinas* (godfathers and -mothers, mostly relatives) to work in their households. On the basis of a verbal or sometimes written agreement with the parents, the girls arrive in completely foreign contexts under false pretences. Rutté García describes this process as *enganche* (1976: 57, 64; from the Spanish word for "hook") and distinguishes it from voluntary migration "which occurs on the person's own initiative" (1976: 57; own translation). This practice is organized along kinship relations and normalized through a discourse of family mutual support (see Pérez and Freier 2020). Paternalism characterizes the subordination as a seemingly reciprocal relationship: "help" in the household is given in exchange for shelter, food and wage for a seemingly poor, disadvantaged young

[5] In a 2011 UN report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery uses the term *servidumbre doméstica* (domestic servitude) to refer to abusive living and working conditions of rural-born domestic workers in urban households in Peru (UN 2011: 7).

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woman (Anderson 2000, Pérez and Freier 2020, Rollins 1985). Focusing on legal aspects, Leda M. Pérez and Luisa Feline Freier (2020) empirically elaborate on the internal migration of underaged domestic workers in Peru as human trafficking. In this study, the sociocultural dimension of the *enganche* and its coercive and violent moments are empirically examined.

Domestic Servitude: a conceptual approach

For the sociological analysis of coercive and violence-based forms of work and relations, Patterson and Zhuo (2018) suggest to use a concept of *servitude.* This perspective allows capturing analytically the hierarchy constituted in the household between the employer and the domestic worker, as well as the intersections of relatively coercion-free practices with practices shaped by violence. Unlike forced labor, slavery or human trafficking, servitude is not a legal concept. Patterson and Zhuo propose to use this old term and add to the ILO's legal codification of forced labor with their definition:

> we define servitude as that condition in which the work, service or relationships of another person are not freely offered or, if voluntarily initiated, cannot be left or refused, and are maintained under the threat of physical or psychological coercion, violence or some other penalty. So defined, the term servitude embraces all known forms of exploitation or coercion, including forced labor, political imprisonment, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and other relational or specifically degrading forms of domination not centred around labor exploitation (Patterson and Zhuo 2018: 410).

This definition adds a dimension of temporality (start, duration and end of the work relationship) and includes the form of relationships besides work and service. It demonstrates an understanding of servitude as a relational and degrading form of domination that is not exclusively applied to labor. Further, the authors acknowledge the

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fluid character of relationships of domination with varying moments of coercion. The term "serve" denotes an unequal social relation and dependency. The subjugation of a person into servitude is not (only) tied to economic gain, but to gaining power and exercising power. A "servant" is not just a professional designation, but one's position in the social hierarchy. Accordingly, domestic servitude is understood here not only as a field of various reproductive labor activities in the household, but as an interpersonal relationship of domination. This relationship is organized by socially constructed categories of difference such as gender, race and class and constitutes "an expression and reproduction of social relations" (Anderson 2000: 17).

Rutté García (1976) discusses domestic servitude analytically as a relationship of domination in the study of domestic work in Peru in the 1970s to make sociopsychological aspects describable. Even though a lot has changed on the legal level since then, due to domestic workers fighting for their recognition as workers and for major changes in labor law, the "culture of servitude" (Ray and Quayum 2009) and the social institution still persist. Domestic servitude is not only "a historically constructed labour relation" (Ray and Quayum 2009: 2) but a historically formed social institution (Cumes 2014: 372, Ray and Quayum 2009) in which certain reinforced norms underlying unequal dependency structures play a decisive role.

> servile relationships constitute a particular system of interaction, with relatively consistent norms and expectations whereby the employee is expected to be a submissive, obedient person, uncritically responding to the authoritarian behavior of the bosses and recognizing herself as an inferior being, condemned to always serve and with no possibility of developing expectations of achievement and, above all, of attaining them (Rutté García 1976: 78; own translation).

This empirically based conception of servile relationships, its underlying norms and the servant subjectivation correspond to Patterson's insight on the isolated status of enslaved people which deprives them

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of any sense of authority over their own existence, profound belief in their own self-worth and potential for personal growth, and genuine trust in fellow human beings (Patterson 2012: 325). Patterson's fundamental sociological research on slavery and its sociocultural preconditions and consequences provides a productive theoretical framework for addressing domestic servitude. Based on a historical comparative study, Patterson creates an analytical framework that understands slavery as a specific form of domination of unfreedom, the *social death* of a person (Patterson 1982). He challenges economic-centered scholarly discussions that reduce slavery to the legalistic aspect of ownership. In contrast to other scholars in labor history (De Vito *et al.* 2020, Van der Linden and Rodríguez 2016), Patterson understands slavery as a specific power relationship that is not limited to labor. He defines slavery as an interpersonal relationship of domination: "the violent, corporeal possession of socially isolated and parasitically degraded persons" (Patterson 2012: 329), whereby he differentiates specific characteristics on sociocultural dimensions. In the prototypical case, *absolute power* over life and death of the enslaved person can be exercised (Patterson 2014: 68), whereby the *degradation* and *dishonor* of the enslaved person parasitically increases the social status of the enslaver (Patterson 2012: 325). He therefore defines slavery as a form of *human parasitism*, since the master is dependent on the slave to gain honor and status.

Subjugation into slavery or servitude requires a certain ideology that deems people as Other and non-equal. Patterson's concept of human parasitism can be understood as "an orientation to the world that regards certain kinds of people — women, Black and brown people, or the working poor — as existing primarily to support the lives of others" (Greenland 2019: 899). In the case of domestic servitude, patterns of legitimization come into play that turn certain people, and especially their bodies, into alleged servants for the performance of domestic service, enhancing the social standing of the privileged (hooks 1981: 154, 155; Patterson 2012: 350). Additionally, in past and present, the *corporal domination* (Patterson 2012: 323) — *i.e.* the complete power over the body of the enslaved — as well as the gendered

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nature of slavery determine this relationship. Patterson links this "highly gendered relation of domination" (Patterson 2012: 323) to the patriarchal power of disposition over women (Patterson 2014: 70), because the status of unfreedom in many slave societies was equated with that of dishonorable — and therefore unfree — women (Patterson 2014: 70). Finally, slavery differs from other forms of domination by the *sociocultural isolation* of the enslaved and the *deracination* from their context of origin (Patterson 2012: 324). In traditional contexts this includes the alienation from their natal rights of origin, legal-standing and participation in society (Patterson 2012: 329). In contemporary migration contexts Patterson speaks of sociocultural isolation referring to the isolation from "familial and social ties" (Patterson 2012: 324) and denial of a legal standing because of the terror imposed on them by illegalization (Patterson 2012: 324). Being uprooted from family structures (*e.g.* in village contexts) can be observed in various forms of servitude that are not equal to slavery.

In her *longue durée* analysis of women's enslavement, archaeologist and anthropologist Fiona Greenland speaks of *parasitic domesticity* regarding the relationship between female slaves and masters (Greenland 2019). This points to the dependency and relationality of the socially constructed positions in the household — the roles gain meaning only in relation to each other: master/slave, *patrona/sirvienta*, urban women/peasant women.

Bridget Anderson (2000) not only demonstrated how employers gain prestige and status through their domination of racialized domestic workers, but she also argues that as women assigned with household labor in patriarchal structures, the employee and female employer are "differently constructed" (Anderson 2000: 2). This difference must constantly be established and upheld by the employer in order to maintain her superior status, and "violence may be one mechanism for doing so" (Anderson 2000: 144). Relating to Patterson, Anderson specifies that the employer not only controls the labor power of the domestic worker but also dominates her personhood, which dishonors the worker (Anderson 2000: 113, 142).

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ON POSITIONALITY AND METHODS

This qualitative case study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Lima between October and December 2022 with organized domestic workers and activists, and on interviews from a previous research study (June-August 2018).[6] The gained knowledge is moreover based on conversations at workshops, events and visits at the organization centers throughout 2018 and 2022.[7] What is crucial is the unique characteristic of my sample consisting of organized workers who broke out of the isolation. What would have remained concealed becomes expressible in the light of shared experiences within a secure self-organized environment.

My positionality as a young, white, German, queer, non-native Spanish speaker, female academic researcher who is involved in labor activism and has a feminist standpoint is influential in the research design as well as in the interview process, although it is dynamic in the sense of a relational positionality (Crossa 2012) that had different effects within interview situations, depending on which commonalities or differences were present and conceived as prevailing. In line with a reflexive perspective, all material is analyzed following a qualitative

[6] The corpus consists of (in some cases multiple) interviews with 21 people, of which 11 are domestic workers.

[7] The domestic workers organizations include Amunetrap (Asociación de Mujeres Negras Trabajadoras del Perú), Fentrahogarp (Federación Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar Remunerados del Perú), Fenttrahop (Federación Nacional Trabajadoras y Trabajadores del Hogar Perú), Iprofoth (Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Trabajadoras del Hogar), Sintrahogarp (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar del Perú), and Sinttrahol (Sindicato de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores del Hogar de la Región Lima). Other contacts with activists on the ground (from Casa de Panchita, Flora Tristan and Antrha [Asociación Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar]) came about through conversations with trade unionists and the ILO, or at trade union and ILO events in Lima. Access to the domestic workers organizations was established in 2017/2018 within the context of an ILO consultancy in Lima.

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thematic analysis approach combining deductive and inductive strategies (see Braun *et al.* 2018).[8] All names are changed.

FINDINGS

What can be deduced from the narrations and their interpretative, selective ascription of meaning, in order to learn about the interpersonal relationship of domination within servitude and its systematic violent and coercive elements in sociocultural isolation? In the reflective interpretation, the implicit in what is said is made explicit in conceptual-theoretical terms based on my theoretical framework. The analytical instrument with its four dimensions of sociocultural isolation takes the empirical material as a starting point and deductively builds on Patterson's theoretical considerations. The focus of the analysis lies on narrations of now organized domestic workers who were brought to Lima and started at a young age to work and live in households.

Sociocultural isolation

a. Deracination

The sociocultural isolation experienced by young girls brought to Lima is intricately connected to the processes of deracination, of losing their family and societal ties. In their handbook *Así, ando, ando como empleada,* published in 1990 by organized domestic workers, they dedicate a chapter to the experience of "alienación cultural", *cultural alienation*. They describe the loss of their cultural identity and the loneliness that stems from being isolated from their context of origin

[8] In contrast to positivists views, this approach acknowledges and "emphasize[s] the partial, multiple, and contextual nature of meaning, and view[s] knowledge as the actively created product of the interpretive efforts of a particular researcher (or researchers)" (Braun *et al.* 2018: 9).

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(Loza *et al.* 1990: 135). They are confronted with a foreign context and have to leave behind the cultural values that gave significance to their actions (Rutté García 1976: 61). Milagros M. (now an elderly woman), who was brought from the Andean region around Puno to Lima as a child by a *madrina,* does not know exactly where she came from, who her family is nor her own age. She had no access to an education and lived her life in different households as a domestic worker.

> Milagros M.: No conozco mis papás. No, no, no sé. No recuerdo. Me regalaron. O sea, no tengo familia. Estoy sola, sola estoy. Es como que nací sola, de la tierra.
> Lorena L.: ¿Por qué no regresaste a tu pueblo a buscar a tu familia?
> Milagros M.: Yo no lo conozco. ¿Dónde voy a ir?
> Lorena L.: Y como ella no salía, no iba al colegio. Nada. Por eso no conocía […] La tenían en la casa nomás.[9]

The often "brutal process" (Rutté García 1976: 60) of deracination is fostered by restricting or blocking the communication to the natal family. In some cases, like Lorena L.'s sister who was locked in a room all day with a baby to take care of, the employer, often a relative, lies directly to the parents to hide abuse.

Established familial and affective relationships become unreachable. The separation and weakened ties cause emotional harm not just for the girl but also for her family who miss their daughter. Isolation is not only a key instrument of control but also a deprivation of the basic human need of belonging (Patterson 2012: 325).

[9] Translation: Milagros M.: I don't know my parents. No, no, I don't know. I don't remember. They gave me away. I mean, I don't have a family. I'm alone. I'm alone. It's like I was born alone, from the land.
Lorena L.: Why didn't you go back to your village to look for your family?
Milagros M.: I don't know it. Where will I go?
Lorena L.: And since she didn't go out, she didn't go to school. Nothing. Therefore, she did not know […] They just kept her in the house.

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> Y la madrina siempre decía "También está muy bien. Está estudiando, está trabajando, que no sé qué. Está muy bien. Está muy bien", a mi mamá […] Y a mi hermana hizo llorar por nosotros, por su mamá, por sus hermanas, por todos (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[10]

> Cuando llegué ya acá a Lima, no tenía comunicación con mi familia. Pero yo me acuerdo que hacía las cartas y este señor decía que se lo va a llevar y nunca mejor lo llevaba (Delia M., trade unionist and domestic worker).[11]

An illustrative example of deracination is the theme of death. As an internal migrant in domestic servitude, a person is emptied of elementary social ties, and, in the case of Milagros M., she has no memories herself. The stories of funerals for workers who found shelter at the Iprofoth organization house in Barranco, Lima, who died because of old age or fatal diseases, show that in some cases there will also be no social memory of the worker beyond death. Because the workers came alone without connections to relatives, it was up to Iprofoth to organize funerals. The graves are located in the cemetery Virgen de Lourdes on the periphery of Lima — the traditional place for low-class internal migrants to bury their relatives. Their bodies remain far from the middle and upper-class households where they lived and worked for years.

[10] Translation: And the madrina always said "She's also doing very well. She's studying, she's working, and whatnot. She's doing very well. She's very well" to my mom [...] And my sister would cry for us, for her mum, for her sisters, for everybody (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

[11] Translation: When I arrived here in Lima, I had no communication with my family. But I remember I used to write letters and this man said he was going to bring them, and he never brought them (Delia M., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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b. Violence and threats as instruments of degradation

The socially normalized arbitrary violence is an effective form of isolating degradation and control. In relation to the denial of a legal standing (see subsection c), the use of threats and violence is very effective. Degrading racist and sexist slurs communicate to the worker that she is not deserving of respect as a person. The dehumanization, the reduction to an inferior being (see Lugones 2010), a "nobody', serves to justify and uphold subjugation and violent treatment.

> Me dijo "tú no eres nadie, Chola […] Yo estoy en mi casa y te puedo gritar todo lo que a mí me da la gana. ¿Tú quién eres para decirme que yo no te grite? ¿Quién eres tú para decir que yo te grito?". Me gritó y me dijo: "ahorita soy capaz de ponerte la mano, de cachetearte de todo, y no pasa nada. Estoy en mi casa y acá tú no eres nadie". Y yo me quedé calladita (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[12]

Violence is a means for the female employer to establish dominance and difference to the other women (see Anderson 2000: 143). Dishonoring her through arbitrary humiliation, food or sleep deprivation, long working hours without rest, and physical violence is degrading, divesting her of power and diminishing her personhood (Rutté García 1976: 7).

Many interviewees shared intimate experiences of physical — in many cases sexualized — violence. The effects of the trauma from repeated violence in the workplace — in some cases also violence witnessed or experienced in their family of origin — paralyzes and isolates them. The deep insecurity and fear cause the loss of trust or prevent the building up of trust in others (Patterson 1982, Rutté García

[12] Translation: She told me "You're nobody, Chola [...] I'm in my house and I can yell at you as much as I want. Who are you to tell me not to yell at you? Who are you to say that I'm yelling at you?" She yelled at me and said "Right now I can put my hand on you, slap you all over, and nothing happens. I'm in my house and you're nobody here." And I kept quiet (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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1976). Especially, the arbitrary threat of violence emanating from men causes a state of immobility and constant stress.

> Estoy pendiente a qué hora él viene de trabajar. Y a qué hora viene ella. O sea, para no quedarme sola con el hombre […] Aún tenemos el temor. Temor nos congela […] No me siento con tranquilidad porque si estoy con un pantalón quiero de repente que el mandil me tape, me cubra todo, ¿no? Todas estamos así porque es como que la defensiva, el miedo, el temor que no se nos va. Te estresa todo el tiempo (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).[13]

> Y acá nosotros hemos tenido compañeras que vivieron medias loquitas, que han vivido así, así que "me persigue, me quiere violar, me quiere golpear y me quiere" (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[14]

Beyond taking advantage of the women, sexualized acts of violence parasitically and "perversely enhance […] the sense of manly power" (Patterson 2012: 357). The employers or their relatives hold significant power, enabling them to silence the worker and exert control by isolating her from support or from reporting the abuse.

A striking characteristic of the relations of domination is arbitrariness, which serves as a means of control. The domestic workers' narrations reveal an arbitrariness with regard to punishments, payments, tasks, sleep situation, food provision or termination of the employment relationship. Salazar Parreñas describes this arbitrary

[13] Translation: I keep an eye on what time he comes home from work. And what time she comes home. I mean, so as not to be alone with the man […] We still have fear. Fear freezes us […] I don't feel at ease because, if I'm wearing trousers, I suddenly want the apron to cover me, to cover everything, right? We're all like that because it's like the defensiveness, the fear, the fear that doesn't go away. It stresses you out all the time (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).

[14] Translation: And here we have had colleagues who have been living half crazy, who have lived like that, like "he's chasing me, he wants to rape me, he wants to beat me and he wants me" (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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domination (2021: 12) in her study of migrant domestic workers under the kafala system in the United Arab Emirates as a defining element of unfreedom. This concerns not only actual arbitrary actions, but the threatening nature of the mere possibility that the domestic workers must constantly reckon with.

c. Denied independent legal and social existence

The isolated status in servitude also occurs due to the denial of a legal standing and, overall, an independent social existence outside of the workplace. According to Patterson, enslaved people were incorporated into the master's household with an outsider status and cut off from legal claims and pre-existing ties and society.

Within domestic servitude the legal standing of a person is denied not because they are property under law like in legal slavery, rather it is their social status which prevents them from asserting their rights in different ways. Firstly, they face threats from the socially higher standing employer to use legal means against them (such as false accusations of theft). Secondly, they endure threats towards their bodies of physical violence or eviction. And thirdly, the authorities' indifference and unwillingness to regard domestic workers rights as people hinders them to report abuse. Violence against women and domestic workers is normalized and culturally accepted.

> Y yo conozco a chicas. "¿Qué te ha pasado a tu mano?" "La señora[15] me puso la plancha en la mano. Porque no planché". "¿Y te has quejado?" "No. ¿A dónde me voy a ir a quejar?". Y no se ha quejado. Para los policías, para las autoridades, para todos, era normal que la trataban mal a la trabajadora del hogar, que la acusieron. Que le pongan la plancha, es normal; que le pongan la mano es normal. Que te despidan a cualquier

[15] "Señora" is the term used to refer to the *patrona* of the house.

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> hora, es normal. Que la violen es normal […] Se hace de la vista gorda (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[16]

Historically built, collectively shared cultural knowledge about assumed "docility" of girls from rural Andean regions constructs them as a homogeneous servant class and shapes the violent and coercive labor arrangements. Likewise, Afroperuvian women are constructed as a homogenous servant class, as they are historically racialized, sexualized and associated with bodily labor and slavery (Glenn 1992, hooks 1981, Velásquez Castro 2000).[17] Nevertheless, these narratives are rejected and challenged by domestic workers in various ways (for the US see Glenn 1992: 33).

Since knowing about one's rights is the first step to exercising them, employers strategically look for young rural-born girls and keep them from expanding their school education. Thereby they are also prevented from building connections.

> "No la mandes a estudiar. Ahí es donde se malogran. Ahí es donde se juntan con otras. Y que reclame sus derechos. ¡Por eso, búscate una recién llegadita y no le mandes a estudiar! Te recomiendo que no le mandes a estudiar, que no sabe, ni salida le des. Porque si no, va a

[16] Translation: And I know girls like that. "What happened to your hand?" "The Señora put the iron on my hand. Because I didn't iron." "And have you complained?" "No. Where am I going to complain?" And she hasn't complained. For the police, for the authorities, for everyone, it was normal that they treated the domestic worker badly, that they accused her. That they put the iron on her is normal; that they put their hand on her is normal. That they fire you at any time, it is normal. That they rape her is normal […] They turn a blind eye. (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

[17] Greenland identifies the cultural motif of female "domestic docility" that supported the (Atlantic) slave trade by transmitting a biological-based narrative of human commodification (Greenland 2019: 885).

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empezar a reclamar". Cuando las señoras hablan entre ellas (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[18]

Not being able to exercise their rights or get an education excludes the worker from full participation in society and ensures the dependence on the employer. Another means is the restriction of mobility, sometimes with a narrative of protection. This can include physical isolation by locking the worker up in the household or withholding their passport — effectively forcing them to stay: "She had our documents, and because we were minors, I think she made sure of that and didn't want to give them to us [...] I wanted to leave from time to time" (Ana M., trade unionist and domestic worker).

Being uprooted from their contexts of origin and brought to an unfamiliar area also hinders leaving the workplace, since the girls do not have anyone to go to. In addition, the workers cannot determine their own living space. If they are given a small room, symbolically separated from the living area, they often have to leave the door open and be available at night. In other cases, they have to sleep on a sofa or on the floor in the children's room. These arrangements not only leave them exposed to abuse, but also deprive them of control of their own space and body.

Even though most of the internal migrant women who work in urban households plan to leave the sector at some point and get a better social position and a family, many only move horizontally from employer to employer (Pérez and Freier 2020). Sociocultural isolation from a young age undermines their sense of authority over their own life. This and the lack of economic resources make it difficult for them

[18] Translation: "Don't send her to school. That's where they go wrong. That's where they get together with others. And demand their rights. So, find a new arrival and don't send her to study! I recommend that you don't send her to study, so that she doesn't know, nor let her go out. Because otherwise she'll start complaining." Señoras speaking among them (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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to create a perspective of their own family, community and identity outside of the workplace.

d. Institutional and individual obligations

The denial of social belonging and participation in society stands in relation to the fostering of emotional attachments through institutional and individual obligations. The worker is on one hand constrained in servitude by the institutional obligation to the employer (in a labor relation) and on the other hand constrained by individual obligations, first, to her family of origin and, second, to the family and especially children in the household she works in.

The latter can be a barrier to leave unfavorable circumstances. This emotional dependency is intensified by the social isolation from their family of origin and the lack of love they feel from it.

> A nosotros, las empleadoras nos hacen miles de cosas. Y la única satisfacción y la única paz que nosotros sentimos es cuando la señora nos deja con sus niños. […] Será que como estamos trabajando desde niñas. El cariño no nos han dado. Entonces el cariño, lo vemos en los niños. Entonces, cuando algo pasa y queremos ya irnos de ese trabajo, a veces no podemos por los niños (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).[19]

> Verdad, hasta sin sueldo trabajarían. Cuando le dan afecto, le dan cariño, le dan todo, no le exigen ni los derechos, no le exigen nada […] y "no es

[19] Translation: They do thousands of things to us, the (female) employers. And the only satisfaction and the only peace we feel is when the Señora leaves us with her children […] Maybe it's because we've been working since we were children. We haven't been given affection. So, we see the affection in the children. So, when something happens and we want to leave that job, sometimes we can't because of the children. (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).

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> como lo voy a dejar a los niños que son como mis hijos.Yo les he criado" (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[20]

Moreover, the over-personalization of the labor relationship fosters the attachment of the worker to the household they are working in and determines the treatment. Being addressed as "part of the family" hides the institutional rights and obligations and disguises the hierarchical power relationship. Among trade unionists, the phrase arouses a lot of anger and they classify it as paternalistic and abuse-veiling. It serves as a mechanism of oppression in the name of kinship norms (see Pérez and Freier 2020).

> ¿Cuál parte de la familia? Piensan que sí somos "parte de la familia". Pero no es así, ¿dónde acaban? ¿Dónde acabó [Milagros]? Mira, ha entregado toda su vida. ¿Ahora es parte de la familia? […] ¿Piensan en su vejez? No, y no somos parte de la familia. No nos pueden decir que somos parte de la familia y ellos lo saben. Somos parte de la familia mientras tenemos fuerza, mientras nos explote y mientras estemos sirviéndole ahí como esclavas (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[21]

[20] Translation: True, even without a salary they would work. When they give you affection, they give you love; they give you everything. They don't even demand their rights; they don't demand anything [...], and "it's not like I'm going to leave the children who are like my children. I have raised them" (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

[21] Translation: What part of the family? They think "yes, we are part of the family". But we are not. Where do they end up? Where did [Milagros] end up? Look, she has given her whole life. Now is she part of the family? […] Do they think about her old age? No, and we are not part of the family. They cannot tell us that we are part of the family and they know it. We are part of the family as long as we have strength, as long as they exploit us and as long as we are serving them there like slaves. (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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Individual obligations also stand to the family of origin to contribute financially and to be grateful for the sacrifices made by their parents and siblings. These obligations on the one hand prevent them from complaining to their parents or employers and on the other hand limit them from leaving the labor relation. This is visible in the case of Sirena O., an Afroperuvian woman who started working since she was 11 years old together with her sister, cleaning the household of their employer (where they also lived) and additionally laboring in her shop. She shares the experience of being unable to report abuse even though she speaks of being forced to do degrading work, of beatings and sexual harassment from the sons.

> Nosotros no queríamos trabajar, pero nos han obligado a trabajar [...] Si no queríamos hacerlo, nos pegaba, nos maltrataba [...] A este lugar iré por mi mamá, porque mi mamá se quedó viuda [...] Y nosotras solamente salíamos al colegio y después no nos dejaba salir para nada a otros lugares. Que queríamos salir. Queríamos visitar a la familia […] Y cuando teníamos que ir a limpiar los cuartos, nos encontrábamos a sus hijos ya con todo el calzoncillo abajo. Estaban así, todo bien echados en la cama. […]
>
> Y muchos dicen "¿Y por qué no lo decías a tu mamá?" […] Porque la señora como no nos pagaba, pero sí le daba a mamá arroz y azúcar. Le daba el arroz y el azúcar; le regalaba ropa usada, ¿no? Y para mi mamá eso era bastante […] Y entonces la señora abusaba pues (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).[22]

[22] Translation: We didn't want to work, but they forced us to work [...] If we didn't want to do it, she beat us, she mistreated us [...] I went to this place for my mom, because my mom became a widow [...] And we only went out to school and then she wouldn't let us go out at all to other places. We wanted to go out. We wanted to visit our family [...] And when we had to go clean the rooms, we'd find her sons already with all their underpants down. They would be like that, all stretched out on the bed. […]

And many say "And why didn't you tell your mom?" [...] Because the Señora didn't pay us, but she did give mom rice and sugar. She gave her rice and sugar; she

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These examples of constraining individual obligations demonstrate that, independent of possible economic losses or suffering, the sociocultural isolation holds the worker in servitude and enhances the power of the employer.

BREAKING OUT OF ISOLATION THROUGH BONDS OF SOLIDARITY

The weight of the sociocultural isolation becomes more evident when the rural-born workers break out of it through organizing. Through unions they regain control and build self-confidence while revaluing their identity as workers and their culture. In the case of Amunetrap they created a necessary space for celebrating their Afroperuvian identity and fighting against racist discrimination.

Getting in contact with other domestic workers has a meaningful impact on the sense of self and community, since the experiences of loneliness and abuse are not isolated incidents but collectively shared among them.

> Los testimonios que yo escuchaba de todas […] y decía "que no es mi hermana nomás que ha pasado por esos problemas; casi todas las trabajadoras del hogar han pasado por esos problemas y todo ese trauma que tiene, toda esta vida que lleva, todas esas cosas. Diciendo que no la han pagado, sin familia, lejos, sin afecto, sin cariño, sin nada". Y a mí me… era algo como que para mí me chocaba horrible, ¿no? (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).[23]

gave her used clothes, right? And for my mom that was a lot [...] And so, the Señora was abusive. (Sirena O., trade unionist, activist and domestic worker).

[23] Translation: I heard testimonies from all of them. [...] and I said "it's not just my sister who has gone through these problems — almost all domestic workers have gone through these problems and all the trauma she has, all this life she leads, all these things — saying that she hasn't been paid, no family, far away, no affection, no love,

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The self-determined communal setting of a domestic workers organization provides a sense of belonging and reassurance. Being surrounded by others who can relate to their struggles and empathize with their experiences creates solidarity — and it is compared to a family. Instead of the usual disbelief, workers are met with understanding. Through building bonds of solidarity and speaking out about experienced injustice, the break out of the isolation becomes a political act (see Anderson 2010). In meetings that became a weekly routine for many, the workers created their own spaces and "a lasting sense of political agency" (Anderson 2010: 25). As organized workers and members of a trade union, they actively participate in society, build their own structures, contest devaluing narratives, educate each other and negotiate with governmental actors for improved labor rights. Consequently, solidarity among colleagues and organizing contradict the isolating system of domination in servitude (see also Glenn 1992: 23), even when faced with repression.

CONCLUSION

This article contributed to the theoretical discussion on "unfree" forms of labor, by expanding the empirical knowledge based in an understudied context and looking at coercive and violent dimensions of domestic labor with the concept of servitude. Sociocultural isolation serves as a potent method to maintain the relational domination within servitude on different dimensions. It determines the coercive and violent form of this social arrangement. It serves as an analytical sociological term to describe and discuss historical, social and political configurations and sociocultural schemata that manifest in every day interactions. As a social institution, domestic servitude is rooted in societal structures that uphold a culture of servitude. Ongoing historically

no nothing". And for me, it was something that shocked me horribly, right? (Lorena L., trade unionist and domestic worker).

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build material inequalities and cultural norms, based on constructed differences, are maintained in current political and economic structures of capitalism.

The article employed a historical-sociological approach and presented a case study on socioculturally isolated domestic workers in Lima, Peru. By using the concept of domestic servitude, drawing insights from the sociology of slavery, the analytical methodology delves into the sociocultural aspects of coercion and violence, providing a nuanced understanding of parasitic power dynamics within household labor. A (work) relationship that is arranged within servitude as a relation of domination has a corporal dimension, it is degrading, isolating, and it invariably entails the possibility of violence and coercion, exercised arbitrarily. Colonial and patriarchal societal structures and norms around servitude put the employers in an entitled position to parasitically exercise power over a lower-class, racialized or feminized person. Sociocultural schemata relating to gender, race and class are navigated and negotiated between the interrelationally dependent roles of *patrona* and *sirvienta*. This sociological approach highlights the specificity of this field and demonstrates that it cannot be problematized as mere "economic exploitation". It can neither be reduced to shifting household tasks from the wife to a socially low-positioned woman (see Anderson 2000). Ringing a bell to demand that a person runs down two floors of stairs in order to pour water into a glass or tie someone's shoes is hardly about a relief of tasks: it is degrading domination. The employers do not simply acquire labor power, but a projection surface for their paternalistic yet authoritarian exercise of power. The affective incorporation into the household or family may seem contradictory to the violent and coercive treatment — however, the cases indicate that it is crucial to perpetuate isolation.

Through self-determined spaces of solidarity and organization, as political subjects the workers break out and reject the position of a socioculturally isolated non-person, who is normatively treated as "docile" and denied participation in society. Against disbelief and indifference, they build their own structures and rightly call for social

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transformations on a legal, political and also cultural level, exerting moral pressure.

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