

**A Law of One's Own: Newfound Labor Rights, Household Workers' Agency, and Activist
Praxis in Buenos Aires, Argentina**

by

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María Lis Baiocchi, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2019

Taking Argentina as a case study, in this dissertation I examine the impacts on the ground of the ratification of the landmark Convention 189 (C189) of the International Labor Organization Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. C189 translates in the Argentine context into National Law 26844, which since 2013 guarantees equal labor rights for household workers. Based on ethnographic research in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area conducted between 2016 and 2018, I look at the ways in which household workers and household workers' rights' activists manage the transition from primarily customary to increasingly contractual modes of regulation of paid household work. I address how workers and activists navigate the challenges inherent in the equalization of rights in a context of entrenched, intersectional, structural inequalities. I also look at how workers and activists traverse the contradictions inherent in having public rights recognized for household workers in the private setting of the household.

The main finding in this dissertation is that the challenges activists face in promoting equal rights for household workers and the trials workers endure in becoming subjects with rights in daily life reveal difficulties inherent in the reconfiguration of the public/private divide when such heritage has been foundational and structuring of systems of law and policy. The experiences of activists and workers highlight the inequalities that have historically depoliticized and feminized

the private sphere in contrast to the androcentric public sphere of employment and politics, which point to the foundational limits in the structure of a state that remains gendered, classed, and racialized in particular ways. These limits continue to be prevalent, and activists and workers must often work around them in advancing and accessing, respectively, full labor rights in everyday life. This entails, on the part of activists and workers, using inventive modes of advancement of and access to labor rights that promote and enable household workers' agency without disrupting the symbolic hierarchies of class, gender, ethnicity, race, and nationality extant between workers and their employers and thus without posing a threat to workers' lives and livelihoods.

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Preface

This dissertation has its origins in the graduate seminar, “Global Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, and Reproductive Labors,” taught by Professor Nicole Constable in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh in the Spring of 2014, a course that signified a radical shift in both my professional career and personal life. When I started my PhD at the University of Pittsburgh in the Fall of 2012, my goal was to build on the work I had done as an undergraduate at the School for International Training Study Abroad Program, “The Balkans: Gender, Transformation, and Civil Society” and in my MA Program in Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University in Budapest. My work at both these institutions entailed focusing on issues of women and gender in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, a work I had the intention to continue at the doctoral level by examining changing gender regimes in the region in the context of post-Socialism and European Union accession.

The decision to change my topic of research to work in Argentina responded not only to a scholarly interest in the subject of the dissertation that is before you, but also to a personal necessity to carry out a research project that would allow me to professionally reconnect with my home country, which I left when I was 17 years old and to which I only returned to live for a period longer than 3 months when I started my dissertation field research in the summer of 2016. While a first change in my topic of research entailed focusing on issues of gender, education and development through an ethnographic study of an EU education project in Argentina, the “Global Intimacies” seminar enabled me to redirect my interest to work on issues of gender and women’s rights in my home country by looking at a topic that was, at the time, novel and under-studied.

Engaging in such a radical shift in my academic trajectory was at the same time exciting and scary and now, years down the line, I am glad and most of all, grateful I took that risk. It is a basic premise of Anthropology that we are as human beings a biocultural species, that we depend on our social bonds with others to survive and thrive. I think this premise is reflected well in the monumental task of completing a doctoral dissertation: if there is one example of how we simply “cannot do it alone,” this is the one. This dissertation has my name on it as its author, but it is the result of multiple connections and collaborations with others who have helped me, supported me, taught me, mentored me, and guided me along the way. Any errors are my own, and I apologize in advance if I accidentally forget to include anyone in these acknowledgments.

I would like to thank first, the Association of United Migrant and Refugee Women in Argentina (*AMUMRA*). I say at one point in the dissertation that without my partnership with *AMUMRA* this work would not exist. That point is worth reiterating here. I want to thank first and foremost *AMUMRA*'s president, Natividad Obeso, for opening the doors of her organization to me and welcoming me as one of her own, and for embodying the definition of what a “key informant” is. I also want to thank every single current and former *AMUMRA* volunteer I met throughout the course of my field research. I specially would like to thank Ana María Gantiva, Wanda Perozzo, Silvia Romero, Silvina Estranges, Mariela Pisano, Débora Gerbaudo, Sofía Bogado, Selmira Carreón, Ana Tellez, Adela Briansó, and Anabel Gorbatt for their time, patience, openness, and generosity. *Gracias totales compañeras.*

While I was in the field, my collaboration with *AMUMRA* enabled me to establish contact and collaborate with other institutions dedicated to advancing the rights of household workers in Buenos Aires. I would like to thank the Union of Assistant Personnel of Private Households (*UPACP*) and its Capacity Building School of Domestic Service Personnel and all the *UPACP*

officials, representatives, and teachers I met over the course of my field research. In particular, I would like to thank the School's General Director, Marta Roncoroni, the School's Coordinator for Buenos Aires, María Inés Molina, all the teachers that I had the opportunity to meet and / or interview: Clara Quelle, Margarita Pascual, María Cristina Yerio, and Marta Louzn and *UPACP*'s representative, Carmen Britez for allowing me to learn about their work and for granting me access to their institutions.

I would also like to thank the Assisting Program (*Programa Asistir*) and the Labor Tribunal for the Personnel of Private Households of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of Argentina as well as all the officials and employees of these institutions I met over the course of my field research. I would especially like to thank María Laura Rueda, Marcela Cortines, Pablo Holcman, Julieta Varde, Laura Cubillas, Laura Viana, Alba Napolitano, Silvina Alvarez, Nancy Romero, and Natalia Mabel López for their time, consideration, and openness. It was nothing short of informative to have access to these institutions the way they allowed me to, and I left Buenos Aires wanting to conduct another ethnography just of these institutions alone in the future.

In addition to all the activists, advocates, union representatives and teachers, and government officials, I would like to thank each and every one of the household workers I met over the course of my field research. I thank them for their time, their openness, their generosity, and for finding time in their busy schedules to meet with me. I want to thank them for sharing their stories and experiences with me. They are the protagonists of this work and without them it would not exist. I am forever in their debt and forever grateful to them.

I would also like to thank the following partner institutions of *AMUMRA*'s and their staff for being instrumental in my field research: Refuge of United Women in Action, Legion of Good

Will (*LBV*), We Are (*Somos*), San Francisco de Asís soup kitchen, and Housing Institute of the City of Buenos Aires (*IVC*)

Two different research groups provided me with an intellectual home while I was in Buenos Aires: the Study Group on Migration, Family, and Public Policy (*MiFaPP*) of the Gino Germani Research Institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires (*UBA*) and the Study Nucleus on Intimacy, Politics, and Society (*NESIPS*) of the Institute of High Social Studies of the National University of San Martín. I would especially like to thank Carolina Rosas, Sandra Gil Araujo, Verónica Jaramillo Fonnegra of *MiFaPP* and Santiago Canevaro of *NESIPS* for providing me invaluable guidance and mentorship as a novice fieldworker in Buenos Aires. I am grateful for their excellent advice on how to navigate the challenges of doing field research in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area with household workers, migrant women, and civil society organizations. I also want to thank them and the following people for their wonderful feedback on my work, for their collegiality, for their generosity, and for making me feel fully part of the intellectual community in Buenos Aires: Solange Godoy, Maximiliano Marentes, Jessica Pereiro, Mariana Palumbo, María Florencia Blanco Esmorís, and Verónica Santalla of *NESIPS* and Silvana Santi of *MiFaPP*.

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As I mention at the beginning of this preface, I entered the Department of Anthropology at Pitt to work on a research project in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. I want to specially thank my advisor, Robert Hayden, for his support when I decided to change my research project to work back in my home country, for his support of this project from the beginning all the way to the end, and for his always constructive and helpful criticism of my work, which has made me a better thinker and a better anthropologist. I also want to thank the rest of my doctoral dissertation committee for their guidance, support, and everything they have taught me throughout the years: my doctoral committee co-chair, Kathleen Musante and Gabriella Lukacs from the Department of Anthropology and Lisa Brush from the Department of Sociology. In addition to my doctoral dissertation committee members, I would like to thank the following professors at Pitt for their

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1.0 Introduction: “Neither Maids, Nor Servants, Nor Domestics, Nor Girls, We Are Workers of Private Households with Rights!!”

1.1 Introduction: The Triaca-Heredia Scandal

On January 15th 2018, Argentine economist Jorge Triaca saw himself enveloped in a mass media scandal of epic proportions given his position as then Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of Argentina: his household worker, Sandra Heredia, made public that the Minister had fired her with a voice message over WhatsApp. The message, replicated in all major and minor national news outlets as well as over social media, contained the following message: “Sandra, do not come back, alright?! Do not come back because I am going to tell you to fuck off! You are an idiot!”¹ (Redacción 2018a). As it became clear over the days that followed this revelation, Ms. Heredia had been working for the Minister and his family as an irregular household worker since 2012 and had become a formal household employee only 20 days before the election of President Mauricio Macri into the *Casa Rosada*. Ms. Heredia’s household worker registration documents confirmed that she was formally an employee of Carlos Triaca, Minister Triaca’s brother. In actuality, she also used to work informally for the Minister at his residence outside Buenos Aires. At a previous moment in their relationship, upon request of a salary increase by Ms. Heredia, Minister Triaca offered her another job at the Union of Maritime Workers United (*SOMU*), so that, according to the Minister’s brother, the Minister could have a person of his circle of trust working

¹ Original text in Spanish. All translations by the author.

there (Redacción 2018c). The Minister himself, in earlier and happier times, had publicly complimented Ms. Heredia for her hard work (Redacción 2018b; Redacción 2018c).

Amidst the widespread media coverage following the audio message's revelation, Minister Triaca published the following tweet: "I apologize for the harsh remarks that are going around in an audio message. Such remarks were in the context of a personal dialog. They do not reflect my behavior or personality and I am sorry that they have been used for the purpose of profit" (Redacción 2018b). In addition to the Minister's tweet, the media coverage that followed the revelation of this message included, among others, Ms. Heredia's following declaration: "I felt really bad because I would have never expected that from him. I have always been a loyal, respectful, and reserved person [...] He sent me an insulting audio message that I do not think I deserve. He had never sent me an audio message before. It was the first one I ever got from him and it really hurt me" (Redacción 2018a). The end to the Heredia-Triaca saga included Ms. Heredia suing the Triaca family for 3.7 million ARS (~194,737 USD) and being finally compensated in the form of severance pay for 340,000 ARS (Redacción 2018d; Redacción 2018e).²

This incident did not go unnoticed. Household workers' rights organizations and unions alike publicly condemned it. These organizations included the Association of United Migrant and Refugee Women in Argentina (*AMUMRA*), which is one of the primary actors within Argentine civil society that advocates for the rights of household workers in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area.³ The public condemnation put together by *AMUMRA* and other household workers' unions

² The exchange rate at the time of the dispute between Ms Heredia and the Triaca family was ~ 1 USD= 19 ARS. Ms Heredia's last salary had been 19,500 ARS (source: https://www.cronista.com/economiapolitica/Abogado-de-Sandra-Heredia-Ella-cobro-340.000-y-eso-prueba-el-trabajo-en-negro-20180123-0093.html?utm_source=ecc_notas&utm_medium=cms&utm_campaign=refresh).

³ Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area is a megacity that consists of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and 40 municipalities in the Province of Buenos Aires, including Almirante Brown, Avellaneda, Berazatagui, Berisso, Brandsen, Campana, Cañuelas, Ensenada, Escobar, Esteban Echeverría, Exaltación de la Cruz, Ezeiza, Florencio

and household workers' organizations from various parts of the country, and as posted over various Facebook accounts and WhatsApp groups, evoked precisely the language of rights and obligations that Minister Triaca and Ms. Heredia seemed to miss. Among other things, it reminded the Minister, and whomever else wanted to hear, in bold and caps lock, that in Argentina there are no longer maids, servants, domestics, or girls but “workers in private households, with rights!!!”



PRONUNCIAMIENTO

A LOS MALOS TRATOS DEL MINISTRO DE TRABAJO Y SEGURIDAD SOCIAL JORGE TRIACA, HACIA UNA TRABAJADORA DE CASA PARTICULAR TCP.

Desde los sindicatos y asociaciones de Trabajadoras de Casas Particulares, Repudiamos enérgicamente el trato impune e ilegal practicado contra nuestra compañera Trabajadora de Casa Particular, Sra. Sandra Heredia, por parte del Ministro de Trabajo y Seguridad Social de la Nación.

El Ministro de Trabajo de la Nación, Sr. Jorge Triaca, quien debe velar por los derechos de lxs trabajadorxs y en especial por el cumplimiento de las leyes laborales vigentes, mantenía la relación con la trabajadora de su hogar no solo con un Contrato de Trabajo clandestino e ilegal, sino que además la maltrataba psicológicamente, agredía e insultaba impartiendo sus órdenes de manera autoritaria y despectiva.

El accionar del Señor Ministro, el cual fuera evidente y reconocido públicamente por él mismo, sería no solo grave para cualquier empleador, sino fuera de sus deberes públicos, instituciones y debidos al Honor a su cargo, tratándose del Ministro de Trabajo, siendo una agresión para la Trabajadora Sra. Heredia sino también para todas las Trabajadoras de Casas Particulares.

Es sabido que tradicionalmente hemos sido olvidadas y relegadas en todo lo atinente a los derechos laborales, por ser mujeres, por venir de los estratos más humildes de la sociedad, por ser trabajadoras y por trabajar dentro de casas particulares ajenas a la vista del público. Pero el actuar del Sr. Triaca vulnera los derechos del lxs trabajadorxs en general y los PACTOS INTERNACIONALES de rango Constitucional.

Este hecho, de carácter público, hace que nuestro sector eleve este pronunciamiento a toda la sociedad en su conjunto para extirpar este mal, llevado a cabo por quien posee la investidura de Ministro de Trabajo no puede quedar impune; es un hecho de "Violencia de Género" no aislado, excediendo la privacidad de nuestro sector, agravado por su relación laboral no registrada.

Es violencia no regularizar la relación laboral.

Es violencia insultar a una trabajadora con dichos como "pelotuda".

Es violencia mandarla a donde la mando.

Es violencia despedirla por llegar diez minutos tarde.

Y esa violencia se agrava, si quien la ejerce posee la investidura de Ministro de Trabajo y es un funcionario público.

El Estado Nacional, a través de la CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LA ELIMINACIÓN DE TODAS LAS FORMAS DE DISCRIMINACIÓN CONTRA LA MUJER (CEDAW), en su Art.N° 5, asume la responsabilidad de tomar todas las medidas apropiadas para: Modificar los patrones socioculturales de conducta de hombres y mujeres, con miras a alcanzar la eliminación de los prejuicios y las prácticas consuetudinarias y de cualquier otra índole que estén basados en la idea de la inferioridad o superioridad de cualquiera de los sexos o en funciones estereotipadas de hombres y mujeres.

No puede bajo ningún concepto, un Ministro de Trabajo que representa al estado, que debe velar por el cumplimiento del derecho laboral de todxs lxs Trabajadorxs, realizar acciones como las repudiadas, no nos basta una disculpa; se ve claramente comprometido su mal desempeño y deber como funcionario público.

Por todo esto desde nuestro sector queremos decir basta a la precarización laboral, al trabajo no registrado, y a cualquier manifestación de violencia contra lxs Trabajadorxs de Casas Particulares.

**NI MUCAMAS, NI SIRVIENTAS, NI DOMESTICAS, NI MUCHACHAS
SOMOS TRABAJADORAS DE CASAS PARTICULARES, CON DERECHOS!!**

+549- 1156043412 +549- 2996345783 +549- 3434164586 +549- 297515514 +549- 3364186676

Figure 1. Public pronouncement of household workers' rights organizations and unions condemning minister Jorge Triaca's actions against household worker Sandra Heredia

Varela, General Las Heras, General Rodríguez, General San Martín, Hurlingham, Ituzaingó, José C. Paz, La Matanza, Lanús, La Plata, Lomas de Zamora, Luján, Marcos Paz, Malvinas Argentinas, Moreno, Merlo, Morón, Pilar, Presidente Perón, Quilmes, San Fernando, San Isidro, San Miguel, San Vicente, Tigre, Tres de Febrero, Vicente López, and Zárate (source: <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/gobierno/unidades%20de%20proyectos%20especiales%20y%20puerto/que-es-amba>).

To scholars of intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010), the characteristics of the conflict between Mr. Triaca and Ms. Heredia are anything but surprising: the description of the work relationship by both parties in personal rather than contractual terms, the explosive break-up evocative of the break-ups described in the now classic work by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001), *Doméstica*, and the ensuing range of feelings involved after the end of the work and its concomitant social relationship: anger, indignation, sadness. Also unsurprising is the negotiation of work benefits, such as a salary raise, in the idiom of gift-exchange rather than of money: we could interpret that instead of having been given an actual monetary raise, Ms. Heredia received from Minister Triaca the gift of becoming a delegate at the *SOMU*. But what this case does interestingly show, in a rather spectacular fashion, are the ways in which custom, rather than formal contract, remains a regulating force in paid household work in a country where, in theory, that should no longer be the case.

In this dissertation I examine ethnographically the introduction of the discourse and practices of contract law to regulate paid household work in Argentina, along with the continued use of the non-contractual discourses and practices that have historically regulated the household worker-employer relationship in this setting. I look at ways in which a new legal framework of full labor rights for household workers interacts with structures of pseudo-kinship and the reciprocity economies that have historically regulated the worker-employer relationship, and have often entrenched exploitative conditions of work and cultures of patronage and servitude (Canevaro 2009b; Courtis and Pacecca 2010; Gorban 2012a). I look at how the recent reconfiguration of the legal status of household workers from “servants” with almost no labor rights to “workers” with full labor rights (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014) translates into the daily lives of cooks, cleaners, ironers, nannies, and home caretakers of elderly people. I also

analyze the work of activists who advocate on these workers' behalf in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area, which is home to 54% of all household workers in Argentina (Gorban 2012b). I examine what happens when the quintessential private sphere, the home, becomes in law the quintessential public sphere, the workplace, through the regulation of paid household work. I pay attention to the practices activists are engaging in on behalf of household workers in this context of newfound labor rights. I examine ways in which household workers' knowledge and understanding of the new legal framework may be changing some of the unequal structures that have historically regulated paid household work. I look at the ways workers are learning, thinking, appropriating, interpreting, and using the new legal framework in their daily lives, and analyze the extent to which this new legal framework has provided them with new bargaining endowments. I also examine how workers are accessing and exercising their newfound labor rights in their everyday lives in a realm such as the household, which has historically been constituted as a sphere outside work and politics. I pay attention to the ways in which household workers attempt to access their full labor rights in a context of systemic intersectional inequalities of class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and ability, neoliberal precarity, and general lack of compliance with the rule of law. And I look at the contradictions, tensions, limits and challenges to advancement of and access to labor rights in a context of equal rights under the law but unequal material conditions of existence for household workers.

1.2 Framing the Regulation of Paid Household Work in Argentina at the Intersection of the Scholarships on Intimate Labor and Citizenship

In this dissertation I engage with two scholarly literatures: that on intimate labor and the feminist scholarship on citizenship. Boris and Parreñas (2010) define “intimate labor” as labor “that forges interdependent relations, represents work assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, and, consequently, is usually considered to be a nonmarket activity or an activity of low economic value that should be done by lower classes or racial outsiders” (p. 2). Intimate labors fulfill “the physical, intellectual, affective, and other emotional needs” of others and “comprise tasks for daily life, including household maintenance (cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping) and personal existence (bathing, feeding, turning over, ambulation)” (p. 2). Most distinctly, “they involve bodily and psychic intimacy” and “the presence of dirt, bodies, and intimacy” contributes to the stigmatization of “such work and those who perform it” (p. 2).

Theorists of intimate labor problematize Marx’s classical labor theory of value (Marx, et al. 1978) in order to include unwaged labor within the analytical category of “work” and unwaged laborers under the analytical category of “workers.” Dalla Costa and James (1975) and Federici (2012) problematize Marx’s notion of “the worker” as the male, factory, productive worker to include women and the reproductive labor of cooking, cleaning, and caring that they carry out within the home as “workers” and “work,” respectively. Weeks (2011) shows how Dalla Costa and James (1975) and Federici (2012) analyses of the analytical categories of “work” and “the worker” bring attention to the assumptions inherent in classical Marxism of the factory as a place of work and the home as a place of leisure, showing the ways in which implicit, gendered private/public distinctions inform classical Marxist labor theory of value. Weeks (2011) takes the critique of Marx’s labor theory of value further by problematizing the distinctions in classical

Marxism between organized, waged, valuable “labor” and unorganized, non-waged, worthless “work,” questioning the productivist bias in Marxist labor theory of value and using “labor” and “work” interchangeably.

Empirical studies of intimate labor that operationalize this feminist critique of classical Marxism by expanding the analytical categories of “work,” “the worker,” “the commodity,” “alienation” and “value” have examined the experiences of household workers, including cleaners, cooks, nannies, and caretakers, as well as the experiences of nurses, health care workers, exotic dancers, sex workers, egg donors, and surrogate mothers (Aizura 2009; Aizura 2010; Anderson 2000; Bernstein 2007; Brennan 2004; Cheng 2010; Constable 2009; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Hochschild 2003a; Mai 2012; Mai 2013; Pande 2010; Parreñas 2003; Pfeffer 2011; Pratt 2012; Zelizer 2000). Scholars in this field show how exchanges for intimate labor are regulated by a logic of “differentiated ties” (Zelizer 2007), complicating the distinction between contractual and personal relationships. They have also shown how the commodification of intimate labor has gone hand-in-hand with processes of precaritization, feminization, racialization, and class-formation (Constable 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001; Qayum and Ray 2010). Studies in this field have also shown the ways which the commodification of precarious, feminized, and racialized intimate labor has been inextricably linked to processes of international as well as regional migration between peripheral and core countries (Fedyuk 2012; Parreñas 2001; Pratt 2012), between peripheral and semi-peripheral countries (Kofman and Raghuram 2012; Magliano 2007; Paerregaard, et al. 2012; Rosas 2010), and within countries between the countryside and the city (Hong 2017; Jelin 1977; Yan 2008). Scholars have also shown the ways in which the movement of women between and within countries to sell intimate labor is best understood as a central aspect of neoliberal globalization (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Hochschild 2003a), resulting in

global care-chains that echo global commodity chains (Cheng 2010; Raghuram 2012; Yeates 2004; Yeates 2012). Scholars have also shown the ways in which gendered labor migration for the purpose of selling intimate labor has resulted in “care-diamonds” from the interplay between the market and regimes of migration and welfare (Kofman and Raghuram 2012). Scholars have also shown how the transnational commodification of intimacy has resulted in new familial and affective configurations (Cheng 2010; Gaudio 2012; Mallimaci Barral 2011; Oliveira 2017; Pratt 2012). Finally, scholars have also shown how the commodification of intimate labor has resulted in international mobilities that reify racialized, gendered, and classed structural inequalities between the Global North and the Global South (Aizura 2009; Aizura 2010; Brennan 2004).

Little attention has been paid in the literature, however, to the legal regulation of intimate labor as such. This dissertation addresses precisely this gap. Paraphrasing Yeates (2004), I look at the difficulties of, and limits to, legally regulating an activity that has historically been codified both culturally and legally as non-work, and that consequently has historically been regulated outside the idiom of formal contract. Household work takes place within the confines of the private sphere and involves social relationships marked by systemic, entrenched, intersectional structural inequalities of class, ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, and sometimes even physical ability. In sum, in this dissertation I advance the literature on intimate labor by examining the implications of a potentially radical shift in household workers’ legal rights for their daily lives. I also examine the work of the activists who advocate on household workers’ behalf. In this way, in addition to engaging with the literature on intimate labor, I engage also with the feminist scholarship on citizenship.

Scholars of citizenship define “formal citizenship” as a subject’s recognition before the law as the member of a polity and thus as a marker of “insider” and “outsider” political status (Berlant

2007). They define “substantive” citizenship as the capacity to exercise citizenship through participation in civil society and “sovereignty” as the nexus between “formal” and “substantive” citizenship (Berlant 2007). Exercising “citizenship” means submitting to the rules and regulations of the state the citizen belongs to while at the same time exercising control over one’s own life and body, “a condition of limited personal autonomy that the state has a responsibility to protect” (p. 37). In this sense, “citizenship” signifies an individual’s capacity to access the conditions for full belonging in the polity as a subject with rights and obligations (Berlant 2007). Scholars have argued that traditionally “citizenship” has entailed civil, social, and political rights (Isin and Turner 2007). They have also argued that a more expansive notion of citizenship should also include, among others, rights such as sexual rights and labor rights in addition to civil, social, and political rights (Berlant 2007), insofar as the expansion of these other rights would contribute to facilitating access to belonging in a particular polity. In this dissertation, I draw from this understanding of citizenship when conceiving the granting of labor rights to household workers as an expansion of citizenship rights. This understanding of citizenship is in line with a tradition of feminist scholarship that has problematized what Anderson (2000) calls the fiction of the public/private divide.

This scholarship has shown how putatively universal citizenship has historically been partial given that it was conceived as the granting of rights to white, land-owning, educated men while excluding women, people of color, poor people, and illiterate people from citizenship (Barrancos 2012; Brown 2004; Giordano 2013; Giordano 2014; MacKinnon 1989; Narayan 1997; Okin 1989; Pateman 1988; Young 1990). Feminist theorists of citizenship have shown how the division between the masculine, public sphere of politics and work and the feminine, private sphere of family has been a hallmark of the modern state across various contexts (MacKinnon 1989;

Narayan 1997; Okin 1989; Pateman 1988; Young 1990). They have problematized the public/private divide, showing the ways they are implicated on one another along specifically gendered lines (MacKinnon 1989; Okin 1989).

Scholars have also shown how the gendering of the public/private divide has provided unequal access to citizenship to differently gendered, classed, and racialized social groups (Barrancos 2012; Brown 2004; Giordano 2013; Narayan 1997). Researchers have also shown how demands to remedy unequal access to citizenship have often been perceived by states as requests for special treatment rather than as requests for reparation of historical gendered, classed, and racialized injustices (Narayan 1997). They have also shown how a notion of citizenship that takes into consideration difference in the social positions of different subjects could actually render citizenship more inclusive, challenging universal and homogenizing notions of citizenship that actually advance exclusions (Narayan 1997; Young 1990). This is particularly evident in the case of sexual and reproductive rights, where women's capacity to become pregnant puts them in a differentiated position compared to men and thus requires the recognition of abortion rights as a matter of citizenship rights

Empirical studies of citizenship that in many ways operationalize this feminist critique of universal citizenship have examined the ways in which women have been historically systematically excluded from citizenship rights. Brown (2004), Barrancos (2012), and Giordano (2013; 2014) examine the history of exclusion from civil, political, and reproductive and sexual rights for women Argentina. They find extraordinary parallels between the processes of institutionalization of patriarchy in law and policy identified in other contexts as characteristic of the same process of the project of modernity in the Argentine one. Giordano shows that like in other Latin American nation-states—and we may add, like in other countries in other regions as

well—women in Argentina first entered the law as “incapable subjects” (2014, p. 22) severely limited in their capacity to exercise their full civil rights until the year 1968. Barrancos (2012) discusses the recognition of Argentine women’s right to vote and be elected into office in 1947 and its subsequent repercussions as another iteration in the struggle toward full citizenship for women. Brown (2004), like Barrancos (2012), traces women’s historical lack of access to sexual and, as she put it, (non) reproductive rights as part and parcel of women’s unfulfilled, or as Barrancos (2012) put it, incomplete or second-class citizenship status that persists to this day. This, Brown (2004) argues, is shown in what was at times not only restrictive but also criminalized access to contraception and as she and Barrancos (2012) argue, epitomized in restrictive access to abortion that persists to this day. These scholars, like others, and rightly so, primarily focus in their analyses on women’s lack of access to civil, political, and sexual and reproductive rights in tracing the history of lack of rights for women in Argentina. No attention is paid in the literature, however, to how the historical lack of access to full labor rights for household workers is part and parcel of this history of lack of access to full citizenship rights for women.

In this dissertation, I advance the feminist literature on citizenship by situating full access to labor rights for household workers in the context of access to full citizenship rights for women in Argentina more generally. I look at what happens on the ground when changes in the law that signify the end of *de jure* discrimination against an abstract “servant” is in fact the end of *de facto* discrimination against women, given that an overwhelming majority of household workers are women. I also look at the implications on the ground of the legal reconfiguration of paid household work as “work,” and consequently at the implications of the legal reconfiguration of intimate labor, including reproductive labor such as household work, as “labor.” I pay attention to the undoing at the legal level of the gendered divide between female reproductive/ male productive labor as non-

work/work. I also look at the shift in the gendered boundaries between the female private and male public spheres, as codified in law, with the partial reconfiguration of the putative private sphere of family into a public sphere of work. I also examine how household workers' rights activists and household workers deal with the changed status of paid household work from a private matter into a public one subject to state intervention, and with what Narayan (1997) would consider a reparation of historical gendered, classed, and racialized injustice. This is so given that, as will be discussed in the next section, the granting of labor rights for household workers came to remedy the historical institutionalization of discrimination against household workers, who are often working-class women of color.

1.3 A Brief History of Household Work in Argentina: From Colonial Servitude to Equal Labor Rights Under the Law

Paid household work in Argentina has gone hand-in-hand with the cultures of servitude in Latin America, historically placing women from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds into particularly precarious, culturally sanctioned and condoned situations of servility. This practice has considerable time depth, as household workers occupied a central place in the colonial household. For colonial elites, servants were central not only for the maintenance of the household but also for a reification and expression of higher elite status. The capacity of elites to have servants served the purpose of producing and maintaining rigid social hierarchies that inevitably posited household workers in situations of disadvantage. Moreover, the relationships that employers established with servants did not entail contractual labor relations of

rights and obligations; instead, they consisted primarily of familial relationships of pseudo-kinship where household workers were not recognized as having rights as workers (Blofield 2012).

The regulation of household labor via the language of family relations extended from the colonial period well into the democratic reforms that took place in a number of Latin American countries, including Argentina. While a central part of the Argentine economy, household work did not have the same legal status of “work” as other economic activities, such as waged labor in factories (Blofield 2012). Instead, household work has often been regulated by structures of pseudo-kinship, where employers and workers have relied on putatively affective bonds rather than on contracts to structure their exchanges. Drawing from ethnographic research with household workers and employers in Buenos Aires, Canevaro (2009b) shows how upper-class housewives tended to establish strictly hierarchical personal relationships with their household workers, while middle-class wage-workers tended to establish less hierarchical personal relationships with their household workers. In both cases, the management of affect went hand-in-hand with the management of the work relationship and the boundaries of class between workers and employers.

Employers and workers have also acted as if they were involved in gift-exchange economies, framing work benefits (including wages) in terms of gift-exchange rather than as labor rights and obligations between employers and employees. Drawing from ethnographic research, Curtis and Pacecca (2010) stress that household workers often entered into labor agreements rather than contracts with their employers in which their agency to negotiate their conditions of work was highly limited, and in which they accepted whatever jobs their employers were willing to offer them. They also underline that workers measured the quality of the relationship with their employers on the basis of their personal rather than work relationships, and that benefits such as

vacation days were perceived on the part of the workers as gifts from the employers rather than as labor rights they should be entitled to.

While scholars predicted that household labor would eventually disappear as a category altogether, the reverse has actually been true for Latin American countries, including Argentina. Since the second half of the twentieth century, changes in the orders of gender in the region have replaced the male breadwinner with the two-headed household model of family among the middle-classes. The fact that middle-class women have entered the labor force has not entailed a redistribution of reproductive labor within the household between middle-class women and men. To the contrary, middle-class women's entrance in the labor force has increased the demand for household work from lower-class women to complete the tasks of cleaning, cooking, and caring that middle class women are no longer carrying out (Blofield 2012; Tizziani and Pereyra 2014).

As of the first decade of the twenty-first century, household workers accounted for fifteen percent of the entire female labor force in Argentina. Within this fifteen percent, forty-two percent belonged to the strata with the lowest income. Household workers earn on average thirty-four percent of the salary of their average employed female counterparts and thirty percent of the salary of the average employed male. Sixty percent of full time household workers are paid the minimum salary established by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security (Pereyra 2012). Such undervaluation and underpayment of household work is related to, among other causes, the gendered character of the work in the context of systemic sexism. Given that a majority of household workers are women, the work is undermined because it is feminized labor. The worker-employer relationship also highlights its undervaluation: in cases in which both the employer and the worker carry out household work, an asymmetrical relationship exists in the division of labor. The household worker often carries out the most denigrating tasks within the array of household

tasks. In this asymmetrical division of labor, gendered, classed, and racialized inequalities between household workers and employers are reproduced (Chaney and Castro 1989).

In this context, and drawing from ethnographic research, Casas (2014) shows that women choose to become household workers as a last recourse in the absence of other jobs. This is linked to the notion of household work socially constructed as a “natural” activity for women, whether paid or unpaid. Also drawing from qualitative research, Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) show that while a number of their interviewees had worked other working-class jobs, they settled for household work given the flexibility that this kind of work provided them to combine work and family obligations. Given the gendered division of labor in Argentina, even in cases in which women work outside the home, housework and care work are still considered “women’s work,” shaping women’s choices in terms of the kind of occupations they would or would not hold outside their own home. There is then a direct correlation between women’s paid and unpaid household work. Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) also underline how their interviewees did not perceive their income as a source of income for the household but rather as a complement to their husbands’ income. This underlines how they responded to a nuclear family model in which, despite the fact that they also worked outside the home, the husband was still considered the primary breadwinner. In addition, towards the end of the twentieth century another purely economic factor contributed to the devaluation of household work: the constant supply of surplus labor that the emigration of women from the countryside offered the cities. In very basic economic terms, the supply of household labor was higher than the demand for it, which kept its price low (Chaney and Castro 1989; Jelin 1977). The demographics of this pool of surplus labor have included a significant number of young women who are internal, rather than international, migrants (Courtis and Pacea 2010).

In 2011, Argentina became one of, as of 2019, only twenty-nine countries to recognize equal rights for household workers, by ratifying Convention 189 of the International Labor Organization Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189).⁴ This Domestic Workers Convention of 2011 has been the primary tool that household worker rights' advocates have used in their demands to states for the implementation of changes to the national labor laws regulating this laboring activity, as well as by policy makers and legislators in charge of passing legislation and designing labor policy.⁵ This historic convention establishes international labor standards and guidelines for the improvement of the social and economic situation of household workers worldwide.

C189 was the first United Nations Convention to recognize household workers' rights as human rights. Through the International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN), which gathers household workers' rights organizations from across the globe, household workers' rights activists played a key role as a party in the tripartite negotiations that took place at the United Nations in Geneva in 2011. In the context of the negotiations for C189 at the ILO, household workers' rights activists resorted to a varied discursive repertoire in order to make their case for the passage of C189. These ranged from drawing on their own lived experiences of displacement and exploitation as household workers, to speaking of their experiences as migrant mothers leaving children behind to secure their future, to framing the passage of C189 as a moral, rather than merely legal, issue, and to characterizing the passage of C189 as the end of slavery for household workers (Fish and Shumpert 2017).

⁴ For an up-to-date list of ratifications by country, please refer to https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460.

⁵ For the full text of C189, please refer to https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189

Among its most significant provisions, C189 establishes the right of household workers to unionize, the abolishment of forced labor, the eradication of child labor and the establishment of a minimum age of employment, the guarantee of a workplace free from all types of discrimination, the right of household workers to a labor contract stipulating the conditions of employment, the right of household workers to a minimum rest period of one full day a week, the right of household workers to a minimum wage, the right of household workers to access to the social security system available in the country of employment, state oversight of the working conditions of household workers in order to guarantee that employers respect their contractual obligations, and the provision of access to the justice system for household workers in cases of dispute between household workers and their employers (Gallo and Santos 2014).

Following the ratification of C189, in 2013 the Argentine Congress enacted National Law 26844 and thus the Special Regime of Labor Contract for the Personnel of Private Households, incorporating all the standards established in C189. The promulgation of this legislation also came after then President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner sent a bill to Congress on March 8th 2010, International Women’s Day, following years of advocacy from civil society organizations such as *AMUMRA*. This landmark legislation reconstructed the legal status of household workers, from “servants” with almost no labor rights to “workers” with rights equal to all other workers under the law (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014).⁶

These monumental changes in Argentina in terms of labor rights for household workers happened within a regional and international policy context in which similar changes were taking place in the Latin American region and in the world at large. The changes should thus be

⁶ With the notable exception of sex workers, whose work remains unregulated and who do not enjoy equal rights and equal protection under the law.

understood through the lens of a regional diffusion model (Stokes Berry and Berry 2007), which theorizes that in their attempt to innovate on national public policy, states will draw from the policy practices of geographically close states sharing similar historical, social, economic, and political characteristics and will then emulate such policy practices in their national contexts. The drive of states to emulate their neighbors in their policy practices may stem from two factors: an assumption that their neighbors' policy innovations are good practices to learn from and try in their own national contexts, or in order to remain economically competitive within the regional context (Stokes Berry and Berry 2007). From this perspective, the changes to law and policy regarding household workers' labor rights that took place at the national level in Argentina in the 2011-2014 period were not an isolated instance but were part and parcel of an international and regional policy context in which similar significant changes were taking place. For example, Argentina's neighbor, Uruguay, was the first country in the world to ratify C189. While C189 was passed only in 2011, Uruguay had already passed legislation that equated the rights of household workers with all other kinds of workers in 2006 (Batthyány 2012; Gallo and Santos 2014). Similarly, Argentina's other neighbor, Paraguay, passed legislation ratifying C189 and advancing household workers' labor rights in 2012 (Heikel 2014).

These changes to household workers' labor rights at the national and regional levels in Latin America at this time should also be understood within the context of the "post-neoliberal turn," or the "counter-neoliberalization" in Latin America that took place at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century with the rise to power of Center-Left and Left governments in countries including Argentina (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012; Sader 2008; Yates and Bakker 2014). During the 1990s and up until the 2001 crisis, Argentina had presented a paradigmatic example of the consequences of neoliberal reforms (Cerrutti and Grimson 2013).

These included dramatic changes in the Import Substitution Industrialization economic model for an economic model that, just like in other parts of the so-called Third World, championed the deregulation of the economy, liberalization of trade and industry, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises (Ganti 2014). Perhaps most importantly in the context of this dissertation, neoliberalism in Argentina entailed a co-optation of labor unions by the ruling political elites. This put unions in a managerial rather than bargaining position in labor-state relations, with devastating consequences for workers' rights (Cerrutti and Grimson 2013).

Sader (2008) has characterized the period following the neoliberal debacle of the 1990s as a period of engagement with the state and a recovery of the public sphere, entailing a process of de-marketization of Latin American states (Sader 2008). Grugel and Ruggirozzi (2012) have defined post-neoliberalism as a complex hybrid of welfare-oriented state policies and market-oriented economic ones. These scholars characterize this period as one of reconfiguration of governance in countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia, where a new social contract was (temporarily) negotiated between society and the state. This new social contract, they argue, entailed a commitment on the part of the state to the promotion of social equality through measures such as increased social security. The authors highlight that this increased public spending was contingent upon the royalties that governments were able to collect from the boom in agricultural exports at the time, where so-called post-neoliberal reconfigurations of governance in the region were contingent upon governments' access to and participation in the global market (Grugel and Ruggirozzi 2012). Along the same lines, Yates and Bakker (2014) argue that post-neoliberalism in Latin America at this time is best understood not as the antithesis of neoliberalism, but instead as a set of ideologies, policies, and practices that usually existed concomitantly with neoliberalism.

According to these authors, post-neoliberalism did not entail a clear-cut break with neoliberalism but was instead a reality emanating from and structurally dependent on it.

García Delgado and Gradin (2017) discuss the period between the early 2000s until the mid-2010s as a cycle characterized by Center-Left, neo-developmental, national-popular governments in the region that was followed by another political and economic cycle characterized by the rise of the Right since the mid-2010s and a resurgence of neoliberal politico-economic projects. The authors characterize the latest cycle as one of “late neoliberalism” (p. 17), and thus point at the ways in which neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism do not constitute clear-cut periodicizations and at the ways in which there is no teleology between neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism. Instead, they show how neoliberal and post-neoliberal governments rise and fall contingent upon political platforms gaining and losing support in different social and economic moments. The authors make distinctions between the wave of neoliberalism that took place since the mid-2010s throughout the region and previous iterations of neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1990s. They highlight the ways in which such projects are characterized not only by economic and political dimensions of concentration of wealth and retrenchment of the state but also by the cultivation of neoliberal subjectivities aimed at the depoliticization of social conflict through the promotion of a business logic as mediator of social relationships.

In Argentina, during the most recent cycle of Center-Left, neo-developmental, national-popular governments (García Delgado and Gradin 2017), among the most significant changes brought about by Law 26844 and its regulatory decree 467 of 2014, it established that all household workers can and should be registered as waged or salaried workers regardless of the number of hours they work, and regardless of how many employers they work for (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). Such a change also made it clear that household workers should not under any

circumstances be hired as freelance or so-called autonomous workers. The new legislative framework also established provisions in order to make sure that employers do not abuse the so-called job training period to the detriment of workers (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). In addition, the law also established clear provisions not only for maternity leave but also for leaves of absence in the case of marriage, death in the worker's family, and exam periods, as well as protections such as accident insurance (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). Also, it stipulated the number of hours that a workday would entail for both live-out and live-in workers, as well as the number of hours of rest periods without detriment to the worker (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). The new framework also established clear provisions for the protection of workers who are employed as minors (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). Finally, the law established regulations for severance pay, with parameters for punishments for employers for firing workers due to pregnancy, or for firing workers who had been working for their employers on an informal basis (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014).

These changes to the legal regulation of paid household work were meant to remedy more than half a century of *de jure* discrimination against household workers under Executive Order 326/56 (EO 326/56) and its regulatory decree 467 7.979/56 of 1956, which until 2013 had been the primary instruments of regulation of paid household work in Argentine households (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). This executive order, signed during a dictatorial regime, severely limited the rights of household workers, and was in any event rarely implemented, resulting in high levels of informality for household workers (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014; Pereyra 2012). Significantly, this legal framework deliberately excluded household workers from the Law of Labor Contracts, which in Argentina regulates all activities recognized as “work” (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014). This type of state-sanctioned discrimination against household workers

enabled the entrenchment of highly precarious conditions of work. According to Canevaro (2017a), drawing from data provided by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, prior to the passage of Law 26844, only 7 percent of all household workers were formal workers. Consequently household workers' labor has been historically *de facto* regulated through custom rather than law (Canevaro 2009a; Courtis and Pacecca 2010; Tizziani and Pereyra 2014). In particular, and as mentioned previously, household work has often been mediated by structures of pseudo-kinship and economies of reciprocity (Canevaro 2014; Courtis and Pacecca 2010) and mediated by affective bonds that are usually ambiguous in nature (Gorban 2012b).

EO 326/56 established specifically that household workers included those individuals working for at least four hours a day for four days, or sixteen hours a week for the same employer. Employers who hired workers for less than four hours a day, four days a week or sixteen hours a week thus did not have the obligation to hire their household workers formally. In addition, those workers who did fall within the sixteen-hour-a-week regimen did not receive benefits that workers in other occupations would, such as, significantly, maternity leave in an occupation where 98.5% of workers are women (Gorban 2012b; Tizziani and Pereyra 2014). In addition, there were other types of discrimination, including “shorter leaves of absence than for the rest of workers, more extensive workdays, and less valuable severance payments” (Tizziani and Pereyra 2014, p. 174).

The failures of EO 326/56 in protecting workers were obvious. First, the definitions of what constituted a legitimate regime of paid household labor relied on a notion of household workers as live-in workers. This did not and does not correspond with the reality of the overwhelming majority of household workers, since only two percent of household workers today are live-in workers (Poblete 2015). Second, the law relied on a conception of the worker as genderless in conceptualizing rights and obligations between employers and employees, paying no

attention to the gendered character of household labor. When comparing the new labor regime with the old one, significant differences are apparent. The most obvious is that while EO 326/56 gave no consideration to the actual social positions workers occupied—namely, as members of a social group with distinct gender and class markers—the new legislation considers those issues up front. While the old regime of regulation constructed household work as a “service,” the current law defines it as “work” (Jaramillo Fonnegra and Rosas 2014).

In legally constructing household work as “work,” the state recognizes that household workers are not part of the private sphere but rather external to it even as working within it. In doing so, the state reconstructs the “home” into a “household” for household workers while maintaining the “home” for family members. Thus, the state establishes a partial redrawing of the gendered private/public divide by turning the “home” into a “workplace” for household workers, grafting onto the private sphere of family a household concept for non-kin. The social field of the household does not become completely public given that it remains primarily defined by the family connection, which remains mainly private. But such drafting of the concept of “public household” onto the “private home” when no such concept existed before the passage of Law 26844 does entail a partial undoing of what, as mentioned previously, Anderson (2000) calls the artificial public/private divide that has historically posited the home as the private sphere of family in direct opposition to the public sphere of politics and employment.

1.4 Research Methodology: Wearing Many Hats: Researcher, Volunteer, *Compañera*, Assistant, *Amumreana*, Informant

1.4.1 Preliminary Research

During the summer of 2014, after a brief stint in my home city of Rosario to gauge whether there could be organizations that could be potential research collaborators there, I established contact with and volunteered for *AMUMRA*, which is the only grassroots organization that attends the needs of household workers in Buenos Aires City. In that first pre-dissertation fieldwork trip, I volunteered at the office of *AMUMRA* as a way to assess the viability of that organization as a potential fieldwork site. As a volunteer, I had full access to the records of the organization which contained information on the organization's constituency. This, my conversations with other volunteers, and being present in the office on a day to day basis and observing the people who came in seeking help allowed me to determine that a significant number of *AMUMRA*'s clients were household workers who lived in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area and that they came mainly from other South American countries (primarily from Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay) and to a lesser extent from Argentina. *AMUMRA* was an extremely important actor within Argentine civil society advocating for the promotion of changes in legislation that resulted in the passage of National Law 26844. While not officially a labor union, it acts in part like one, providing household workers free legal counsel and representing them in cases against former employers in court, as well as carrying out educational activities related to Law 26844.

During the summer of 2014, I also made contact with and met for consultation with scholars within Argentine academia who work on issues of household labor and migration. This enabled me to become acquainted with the literature being produced in Argentina on my topic of research,

to identify research questions that had not yet been addressed, to situate my own study within the local scholarly context, and to gauge the possibility of dissertation research sites additional to or other than *AMUMRA*. During the summer of 2014, I also attended the 11th Argentine Congress of Social Anthropology, where I participated in a working group on Anthropology and Public Policy. Attendance at this congress and participating in this working group let me gauge the state of research on my topic and allowed me to make relevant contacts with local scholars. During this trip, I also established an institutional affiliation with the Department of Anthropological Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires (*UBA*) and conducted bibliographic research at the library of the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies of *UBA* and at the National Library of Congress and the Newspapers and Periodicals Library. I also established contact with the country office of the International Labor Organization (ILO) for Argentina and met with researchers working on the issue of implementation of C189. During this first pre-dissertation research trip, I obtained a Site Permission Letter from the President of *AMUMRA*, Natividad Obeso, who supervised my work as a volunteer at *AMUMRA*. I also obtained a Memorandum of Cultural Appropriateness from Dr Carolina Rosas, a prominent local scholar of migration and gender, who reviewed my CV and transcripts, and a first draft of my research design at the time.

During the summer of 2015, I re-established contact with *AMUMRA* as well as with various Argentinian scholars working on issues of household labor, gender, and migration. I also attended the 12th National Congress of Studies of Labor, gaining familiarity with the most recent scholarship produced in Argentina on the topic of “gender, labor market, and care” as well as on “contemporary issues in labor law.” I also conducted archival research in the National Library of Congress and in the National Newspapers and Periodicals Library of all the bills and legislation

related to household work, for the purpose of discourse analysis. I also attended a meeting of the Study Group on Migration, Family, and Public Policy (*MiFaPP*) of the Gino Germani Research Institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences of *UBA*, coordinated by Drs Sandra Gil Araujo and Carolina Rosas, where I had the opportunity to meet with them and also with Dr Veronica Jaramillo, another member of *MiFaPP*. In addition, I also met with Dr Santiago Canevaro from the Institute of High Social Studies of University of San Martín. As mentioned in the preface, these three scholars were crucial mentors during my field research. Dr Gil Araujo provided a letter of affiliation with the *MiFaPP* which I included as part of my application to the Inter-American Foundation Grassroots Development PhD Fellowship Program and Dr Canevaro provided an additional Memorandum of Cultural Appropriateness when my field research extended to additional research sites, as detailed below.

1.4.2 Field Research

The primary data on which this report is based were collected between June 2016 and December 2018 through ethnographic research methods in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area. The data are based on participant-observation and semi-structured, in depth interviews conducted at various locales, including all the major household workers' rights institutions located in Buenos Aires. In addition to *AMUMRA*, these included the Union of Assistant Personnel of Private Households (*UPACP*) and its affiliate institutions, the Capacity Building School for the Personnel of Private Households of *UPACP*, and the Health Insurance for Assistant Personnel of Private Households (*OSPAC*), which is *UPACP*'s health insurance. *UPACP* is the oldest household workers' union in Argentina. *UPACP* has the traditional structure of a large labor union while

AMUMRA has the structure of a grassroots NGO. *UPACP* and *AMUMRA* are independent of one another and work separately, even though they serve similar constituencies. Institutions with which I collaborated also included the office of the Assisting Program (*Programa Asistir*), a program of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security that provides pro-bono legal counsel to workers of all kinds, not just household workers. Finally, the institutions where I did my field research also include the Labor Tribunal for the Personnel of Private Households (hereafter referred to as the Tribunal) of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security. The Tribunal is an administrative court exclusively dedicated to solving disputes between household workers and former employers. The participants in the study included *AMUMRA* volunteer activists and labor lawyers, household workers, *UPACP* union representatives, *UPACP* Capacity Building School teachers, Tribunal and *Programa Asistir* lawyers working in various capacities as legal counselors, judges/mediators, and administrators, and higher level officials of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security. The bulk of the data come through participant-observation at the headquarters of *AMUMRA* or during activities carried out by that organization; and from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with workers I met at *AMUMRA* or at the Capacity Building School of *UPACP*, or with workers I met through other workers I had interviewed. Still, having had access to all the other stakeholders and institutions mentioned above and described below provided me with a broad view into the reality of access to rights and justice in the post-2013 context of full labor rights for household workers.

Following a recommendation from Dr Verónica Jaramillo, who has done participatory-action, activist ethnographic research with grassroots, migrant organizations in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area, and as done by other fieldworkers (see DeWalt and DeWalt (2011)), I adopted the methodology of volunteer-researcher and conducted participant-observation at the

headquarters of *AMUMRA* as well as in all the other activities organized by the organization, such as roundtable discussions, capacity-building workshops, and awareness-raising events. The headquarters of *AMUMRA* are located on the second floor of a building that houses other non-partisan, non-governmental organizations, as well as organizations formally affiliated with political parties, most notably United and Organized (*Unidos y Organizados*). The building is located in the neighborhood of Balvanera, right across from *Plaza Misere* and consequently nearby one of the major train stations in Buenos Aires, the *Once* Train Station, which is one of the major entry points for working people commuting everyday from Buenos Aires province into the city. Balvanera is a working-class neighborhood characterized by commercial activity, bustling with shops of all kinds. It is also characterized by the significant presence of migrant communities, primarily from other Latin American countries.

It is not an understatement to say that without my partnership with *AMUMRA* this dissertation would not exist. My contact with every person I met and every institution I collaborated with over the course of my field research, from scholars, to activists, to government officials, to union personnel, to household workers can be traced back to my affiliation with *AMUMRA* in one way or another. Given that it is the oldest migrant women's organization in Argentina, there have been numerous other scholars who have worked with *AMUMRA* in some capacity for the purpose of research. In fact, while I was doing field research with *AMUMRA*, there were other people who were also doing field research there, including journalists, local undergraduate students, study abroad students, and tenured faculty members.

The fact that there had been other academics doing research before me was advantageous, as academic research is something *AMUMRA* volunteers were very much familiar with and not only because there had been other people who also did research before me, but also because various

AMUMRA volunteers were also MA or PhD students themselves. In fact, I participated in my capacity as *AMUMRA* volunteer as an interviewee for a study by one of them who was conducting research on activism in migrant women's organizations for her MA thesis. At the same time, the fact that there had been other researchers before me also presented a challenge, as a number of these experiences had been anything but positive for *AMUMRA* volunteers and the organization. Some, in fact, were characterized by more than one volunteer as "academic extractivism" given that a number of researchers had never shared with the organization the results of their research or reciprocated with the organization in any way, failing to address the relationships of power that are part and parcel of the practice of fieldwork and that are not unique to the Argentine context (see Cabot (2019)). In order to prevent these dynamics from happening in my own work with *AMUMRA*, over the course of my fieldwork I tried to the best of my ability to establish as collaborative and equitable a relationship as possible.

Early on in my research I discussed with the leader of the organization and with another volunteer who had an interest in the topic of migrant household workers the ways in which I would be carrying out my field research there. I translated my field research work plan and my interview guides into Spanish and shared them with them. We discussed if there were things that they would like to add to them and they suggested some extra questions to the interview guide for my interviews with household workers, which I added (see Appendix A). I also made the results of my research available to *AMUMRA* in ways that could be helpful to the mission of the organization. These included, for example, participating in meetings with officials from the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security to describe the challenges that *AMUMRA* saw in workers' access to their newfound labor rights as well as co-authoring a report with another volunteer on the situation of migrant household workers in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area for the United Nations

Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW).⁷ More recently, I have drawn on my field research for a section on violence against household workers in the workplace in a report on violence against migrant women that *AMUMRA* submitted to the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). I have also shared with *AMUMRA* the papers I have presented at academic events in Spanish and plan in the future to create a report based on this monograph to submit to the organization and the other institutions with whom I collaborated over the course of my research. Over the course of my research I also helped the organization in matters such as translations of documents into English and grant-writing. Actively looking for ways to reciprocate with the organization has created bonds of trust between the volunteers of the organization and myself which persist to this day. This was key in building rapport and finding collaborators in the ethnographic research process.

I had unrestricted access to the office of *AMUMRA* and all its files and materials; I, like other volunteers, was given the key to the office by the leader of the organization—I was, in short, very much “in”—a volunteer like any other. I took part in the daily work of the organization, where I observed consultations between activists and the people who came into *AMUMRA*’s office, many of whom were household workers, as well as daily interactions among activists and with visitors to the office. I also took part in educational and exchange activities organized by *AMUMRA* including the “Brave Voices” (*Voces Valientes*) meetings, the Itinerant Tent for the Human Rights of Migrant Women, capacity building workshops on labor and migrant rights, round table discussions, and discussions, as well as other relevant events the organization took part in.

⁷ The CMW examines the implementation of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

The Brave Voices meetings were occasions for discussion and exchange on issues of relevance to migrant women that for a significant portion of my field research took place every week, usually in a meeting room located on the same floor of the building where *AMUMRA*'s office is located. The Itinerant Tent for the Human Rights of Migrant Women is the flagship project of *AMUMRA* and consists literally of a tent that *AMUMRA* volunteers take to different locations in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area to distribute information on migrant, women, and household workers' rights. The capacity building workshops on labor and migrant rights were usually carried out in partnership with other community organizations located in neighborhoods in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area with a significant number of household workers. The workshops provided workers with an overview of their rights under the household work and migration legal frameworks. The workshops' format included a presentation by *AMUMRA* activists, discussion, and Q&A. They were usually two hours long and took place on Saturdays given that Saturday was the day workers usually had off work. Roundtable discussions, which usually took place at the Annex building of the National Congress, addressed various topics on migrant women's lives, with the presence of representatives from civil society, academia, the government and lay people. One such roundtable discussion that took place during the time of my field research was on the rights of migrant household workers according to Law 26844. The discussions were instances of conversation and exchange with migrant women who came into the organization, similar to the Brave Voices meetings. I also attended with *AMUMRA* volunteers the 31st National Gathering of Women (*ENM*), a grassroots annual summit of the feminist movement in Argentina that takes place every year in a different city. At the *ENM*, I took part in a workshop on reproductive and care work, where I met women who were household workers whom I later had a chance to interview. This led to becoming acquainted with other household workers whom I interviewed

later on, in a snowball fashion. Finally, I also took part with *AMUMRA* in street actions, such as marches and protests. In addition to conducting participant-observation at *AMUMRA* or in locations related to the work of the organization, such as the headquarters of partner community organizations, I also conducted participant-observation in six classes imparted at the Capacity Building School of *UPACP*.

I initially had access to *UPACP* and its Capacity Building School after attending, on behalf of *AMUMRA*, the public presentation of the informational booklet “Informative Passport: Labor Migration with Rights – Household Workers” (hereafter “the Passport”), put together by *UPACP* and the ILO, among other institutions. In that event I had the opportunity to meet the National Director of the *UPACP* Schools, the Director for the Buenos Aires School, as well as *UPACP* personnel. After that meeting, I had the opportunity to explain to the Directors about my research and I was authorized to observe six classes at the school that were part of two courses. The courses were for household workers, with the aim of professionalizing the household work sector. I observed a class on the world of work and a cooking class as part of the course “Service in Private Households,” and a class that was part of the course “Care of Elderly Adults and Person with Illness.” I also interviewed one of the teachers whose class I had observed, and two Union representatives from *UPACP*. My participation in these classes at *UPACP* also enabled access to household workers whom I was able to interview and include as part of my interview sample.

I initially had access to the Tribunal after meeting a lawyer who worked there at a roundtable discussion organized by *AMUMRA* on the rights of migrant household workers according to Law 26844. I had initially gone to her office at the Tribunal to pick up a box with copies of the Passport and during this meeting I had a chance to talk to her about my research. After that, I had a formal interview with her and the President of the Tribunal, who then granted

me permission to conduct field research there. I had unrestricted access to all areas of the Tribunal. These included the waiting room of the Tribunal, the areas where the spontaneous agreements took place, and the areas where the lawsuits took place. The waiting room is where all parties who went to the Tribunal to solve a conflict would wait, including workers, employers, and lawyers. The spontaneous agreements were instances where a lawyer of the Tribunal would act as a facilitator between the two parties, when a settlement would be agreed and paid after the end of a work relationship. The lawsuits were instances in which workers would sue their employers and the lawyers at the Tribunal would act as judges, though not technically as this was an administrative court, not a judicial one. In addition to having a formal interview with the President of the Tribunal and another lawyer, I also conducted unstructured interviews with lawyers who worked on the lawsuits and agreements.

I initially had access to the *Asistir* Program through the same lawyer who provided me access to the Tribunal. At the *Asistir* Program, I conducted participant-observation at the waiting room and during consultations between lawyers and household workers whom I had met at *AMUMRA* and whom I had accompanied to the *Asistir* Program during a period in which there was no labor lawyer at the headquarters of *AMUMRA* to attend the needs of household workers. During the times I went to the *Asistir* Program, I also had a chance to chat informally with the lawyers who provided legal counsel there, as well as with the Director of the Program.

As mentioned before, *AMUMRA* is where and the organization with which the bulk of my fieldwork took place, so the bulk of the data for this monograph comes from that collaboration. The daily work of the organization took place Monday-Friday and varied during the time of my field research initially from 11 am to 7 pm, to then change from 2 pm until 7 pm, Monday through Friday, depending on the availability of volunteers. At the same time, I was a volunteer myself,

receiving the people who came into the office for consultations, adding their personal information to *AMUMRA*'s data base of visitors, chatting with them informally about their situations, and following-up with them on their cases. Following-up meant staying in contact even after they had left the office, finding out about their particular situation, going to the post office with them when they had to go there to send a certified letter⁸ to their former employers, putting them in contact with *AMUMRA*'s labor lawyers, finding out specific information they needed and then delivering it to them, going with them to the *Asistir* Program, and staying in touch, going with them and *AMUMRA*'s labor lawyer to the Tribunal, and making myself available and useful to them. My role and tasks within the organization were just like those of other volunteers who were in charge of projects within it.

Over the course of my field research, I became the go-to *AMUMRA* volunteer for all things related to household workers' issues. Other volunteers would often let me know of visitors I should talk to, or would even hand me out contact information of people they thought I should meet for an interview. I would be the primary point of contact between household workers and the organization, and I was the person they would get in touch with if they needed anything from the organization. The labor lawyer of the organization used to joke that I was "her assistant," while the leader of the organization used to introduce me as "the volunteer in charge" of all things related to household workers. In the context of Buenos Aires' racial formation (Cadena 2000; Omi and Winant 2015), my positionality, as a middle-class, educated Argentine of European descent in her 30s, situated me in a place where the household workers I did my field research with would often encounter people who looked like and sounded like me in situations of social hierarchy. Put another way, in Buenos Aires, people who employ household workers look and sound a lot like me.

⁸ This document initiates formal legal actions against another person.

Meeting my research collaborators through *AMUMRA* enabled me to be perceived by them as an activist-volunteer instead of as a potential employer, and consequently to establish the rapport necessary to learn about their experiences and their lives. My role as an *AMUMRA* volunteer was the key to the entrance into a field site, and what allowed me to establish trust even when many of my collaborators would find people of my characteristics outside the context of *AMUMRA* in situations of social hierarchy. Given that all of my collaborators were Spanish speakers, I had no problem talking to them. Many of them, particularly those from Paraguay, were bilingual in Spanish and Guaraní. While not an obstacle per se, engaging with them only in Spanish was certainly a limitation on my part as a fieldworker. Some of my collaborators found it odd that I as a woman in my 30s did not have children, or that I was not married, whereas the overwhelming majority of them had children and were in relationships. This was certainly related to our positionalities of class and levels of formal education: just like in other places, in Argentina it is common for working-class women with low levels of formal education to get married and have children before the age of 30, and it is also common for middle-class women with high levels of formal education to get married and have children after the age of 30. While this was not an obstacle per se, I was under the impression that it posed that some sort of limitation.

It was not uncommon for my collaborators to confuse me for a social worker, a lawyer, or a psychologist, confusions that I had to clarify by explaining what my role in the organization was and what I was doing there. A lot of the time I would have to move out of positions household workers inadvertently put me in, including job finder, even reproductive rights counselor. When this happened, I put them in touch with other colleagues at the organization or at other institutions who were qualified to assist them if *AMUMRA* did not happen to have the capacity to do so. Making myself useful to these women, or becoming a resource to them, is what enabled the

development of rapport and was the key to being able to conduct interviews. Every time a new visitor arrived in the organization, I tried to find out if they were a household worker, and if they were, what was the reason that brought them to visit the organization. Many of the cases that arrived in *AMUMRA*'s office were specifically related to visitors' labor rights as household workers, such as cases in which they would come to find out about how much their severance pay should be, about their corresponding salary raises, or about whether they would have to work on national holidays, to name but a few. Other cases were related to issues other than women's labor rights as household workers, and were instead related to visitors' condition as migrants or as women, such as cases in which they would come into the office regarding situations of intimate-partner violence or to find out how to regularize their migratory status.

Scholars have discussed the ways in which precarity has become a widespread material condition of existence for workers everywhere in the context of neoliberal globalization (see, for instance, Butler (2009), Constable (2015), Standing (2012)). This was the case with my research collaborators, and it is not an understatement to say that precarity was the framework in which my entire research developed: it drew the boundaries of what I could and could not do as a researcher, determining every methodological choice. This became evident to me over the course of the research itself, as some of my strategies for recruiting participants for interviews failed. In the very beginning, I would review *AMUMRA*'s database of clients and call women who were marked as being household workers on the phone, to arrange to meet with them for an interview. Many times, during the morning or the afternoon they would not pick up the phone, as those were times when they were working. I thus learned to call people in the evenings or the weekends, as those were the only times in which they would be available. Many times, I would schedule an interview with someone and they would cancel or not show up to the interview if something had come up with

their families, if they had suffered an emergency, or if they had gotten a job for the day. While at the time these repeated cancellations were frustrating for me and a sign that I was clearly doing something wrong as a fieldworker, I later learned to see them as data—as indications of the precarious, unstable, unpredictable condition of existence of my collaborators' lives in the context of structural violence (Farmer 2004). These were clear signs of how their material conditions of existence determined the temporality of their lives and consequently my access to them as research collaborators.

An overwhelming majority of my collaborators lived either in the southern neighborhoods of Buenos Aires or crossing the border into Buenos Aires province. An overwhelming majority of them worked in the northern parts of the city, while some of them did so in the center of it. The contrast between the neighborhoods where they lived and those where they worked was staggering. As is the case with other Latin American Metropolises, Buenos Aires is an extremely segregated city economically and thus in terms of class. As I found during my field research, household workers usually must travel at the very least three hours daily to and from their workplaces and spend the majority of their day at work. Given that when my collaborators were not working they were going to or from work, this required flexibility on my part in terms of how to conduct an ethnographic study when my access to them was extremely limited.

Following a methodological suggestion by Dr Santiago Canevaro, a pioneer in Argentina in the study of paid household work from an anthropological perspective, I began interviewing my collaborators on the bus on their way back from work, rather than scheduling separate times for interviews. This was one of the many ways in which I expanded my interview sites from *AMUMRA*'s office, to meet my collaborators where and when they could. If they came in for a consultation into *AMUMRA*'s office, I would take the opportunity to interview them right after

that if they had time, or to arrange for a meeting at another time. I also followed-up with workers right after a capacity building workshop or other activity had taken place, in order to schedule an interview. I also arranged to meet with workers whom I had met at the classes I observed at the Capacity Building School of *UPACP*, and with whom I had created some level of rapport. Many times, it would happen that they would cancel or postpone until we finally managed to meet up after the second, third, fourth, or even fifth try.

Meetings would be either in the office of *AMUMRA* after they got out of work or right after another consultation, in their homes after work or on their days off, in squares when they had a free moment, in cafes right after they got out of work, in community centers in the neighborhoods where they lived, in bus stops and train stations waiting for the bus or the train after they got out of work, on trains or buses on their way back from work, in the streets while walking from one location to another, such as when workers were going to or returning from work or going to another location. Because of the highly precarious, unstable nature of paid household work, it would be the case that at times my collaborators would be unemployed or in-between jobs, which were also times when I interviewed them. In sum, I tried to the best of my ability to adapt to their circumstances, and saw the necessity of using these unorthodox venues for interviewing as windows into their lives and experiences as household workers.

I conducted a total of 50 formal interviews with household workers. Interviews lasted between 1 and 5 hours, depending on the availability of interviewees. These were in-depth, semi-structured interviews that traced workers' migrant and labor trajectories in household work in Argentina and that delved deeply into their experiences with the new framework of regulation of paid household work. The interviewees were selected from a purposive sample that included women who showed a history of horizontal mobility (Tizziani and Pereyra 2014) in paid household

work, were 18 years or older, were Argentine citizens or regular migrants from Mercosur and its associated states, and were familiar with the new legal framework of regulation of paid household work either from personal experience with registered paid household work and/or from education on the new legal framework via their contact with *AMUMRA* or with the Capacity Building School of *UPACP*. Using snowball sampling, after interviewing someone I had met through *AMUMRA* or the Capacity Building School of *UPACP*, I would find participants who were their friends, colleagues, or family members. The snowball usually stopped at one, maximum two additional participants after the initial interview. I usually called people on the phone, letting them know who had given me their contact, explaining that I was calling on behalf of *AMUMRA* where I was a volunteer, explaining what the organization was about and what were the different areas of work as far as household workers were concerned.

I explained to potential participants that the different areas of work of the organization included capacity building workshops on the new law that regulates paid household work, pro-bono legal counseling, distribution of information on household workers' rights, a WhatsApp group for household workers where consultations over rights and information on jobs were posted, and research on the impact of the changes in law on household workers' lives, which is what I did with the organization. I then asked them if I could meet them for an interview, which wouldn't last longer than one hour, and told them that we could meet wherever and whenever it was convenient for them. If they said they did not have time, I would tell them that what I had done with other people was talk to them on the bus or train on their way back from work. They usually said yes.

Once we met in person, I restated everything I had said over the phone and I also explained that in addition to this research being conducted for *AMUMRA*, I was also doing it for my doctoral dissertation. I did not mention my doctoral dissertation over the phone and only explained to

potential participants in person what it was about as, for the most part, doctoral research and ethnographic research in particular are not things my collaborators were familiar with. I would start the interview with this explanation in addition to the Institutional Review Board script, adapted to the local context. In addition to making the standard clarifications related to the fact that I would be using pseudonyms, that they could stop the interview at any time, and that they did not need to respond to any question they did not feel comfortable with, I also showed them the interview guide with the questions I was going to ask them and asked them if they wanted to read it. Most of the time they were not interested in reading the questions and preferred that we get going with the interview.

At the end of the interview, I would give the interviewee an assortment of *AMUMRA* informational leaflets related to household workers' rights. If she was a migrant, I would also give her an assortment of *AMUMRA* informational leaflets related to migrants' rights. I usually brought enough leaflets for the interviewee and quite a few more for her to give to other household workers she knew. At the end of the interview, I would also ask the interviewee if she knew someone whom I could interview in addition to her. Also after the end of the interview, I would provide the interviewee with a *SUBE* card, which is a public transportation card, with 100 ARS in credit. I would explain to her that I could not pay her for the interview because I was not allowed to do so, but that I wanted to give her the *SUBE* as a token of appreciation for her time and for having talked to me. Most of the interviewees accepted the *SUBE*, but some of them refused to do so. This was particularly the case with interviewees with whom there was a history with the organization, or with interviewees with whom we had established particularly good rapport. In fact, rather than seeing it as a token of appreciation, in some cases I could sense that they were annoyed or offended that I wanted to give them the *SUBE* card. It occurred to me that perhaps this was because in a way

my interview with many workers entered the economy of reciprocity of *AMUMRA* as an organization. *AMUMRA* does not charge anything for its services to anyone seeking assistance there. I was under the impression that workers saw meeting with me for an interview as a way to reciprocate with the organization for what it had done for them. With other interviewees our rapport was friendly enough that I was under the impression that it felt illogical to them that I would offer them the *SUBE* card, as if I was trying to “pay them” for “chatting.” I always gave interviewees my contact information so that they may reach out to me if they needed anything at all which *AMUMRA* could help them with.

As mentioned before, I generally did not have trouble accessing one or two more people from an initial interviewee, but at times I was not as lucky. When I followed up with an initial interviewee to check if someone in their social network would be willing to meet with me, sometimes they would tell me that they had inquired, but that nobody they knew wanted to meet with me. This was because they did not have time; because they were afraid that if they talked to me and their employers found out, they could lose their jobs; or because the interview did not entail any financial compensation. Whenever I met with workers, I was extremely careful to do so outside the purview of their employers. For example, when I met with workers after work, I would meet with them directly at the train station or bus stop; or if I met them on public transportation on their way to work we would say goodbye a few blocks ahead of their workplace. When we met at a café for coffee, I would pay for both of us, which is the local custom when inviting someone for coffee.

While the majority of household workers who came into the office of *AMUMRA* during my research were from Peru and to a lesser extent from Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, and Argentina, workers from countries outside of Mercosur and its associated states also sought

counsel there. These included household workers from the Dominican Republic, whose migration to Argentina has increased in recent years. Early on in my research and after an interview with a Dominican household worker, it became evident that tackling the situation of Dominican workers and of all workers who were not from Mercosur or its associated states was beyond the scope of my research, so I excluded such people from my sample. This is because the situation of these non-Mercosur migrants differs radically from that of migrants from Mercosur and its associated states, whose status is very similar to that of Argentine workers.

Since 2003, following the passage of the Migration Law 25871, migrants in Argentina coming from other Mercosur member and associated states enjoy the same residence rights and obligations as Argentine citizens (Domenech 2009). Migrants from this block of countries also enjoy equal access to “basic social services such as health care, education, justice, work, employment, and social security...” (Domenech 2009, p. 38). Following the passage of the Migration Law, in 2004 the Argentine government created a national program to promote the regularization of irregular migrants called “Great Homeland” (*Patria Grande*). The *Patria Grande* program has since 2005 categorically changed Argentina’s approach to migration from Mercosur and its associated states. Domenech (2009) shows that the state went from a discourse and practice of exclusion prevalent up until the early 2000s to a discourse and practice of inclusion that conceives of migration as a matter of “human rights, regional integration, and integration of foreigners” (p. 22).

The *Patria Grande* program has provided work and stay permits to all migrants from other Mercosur countries and its associated states (Paerregaard, et al. 2012). This has signified an extension of the boundaries of the nation-state that has significantly lessened the vulnerability of migrants and that has brought their social and legal status closer to that of Argentine citizens. This

was certainly something that was palpable in the field, where the challenges that regular migrant household workers faced were similar to those of the Argentine household workers I met over the course of my research, and where the fear of being reported to the police and deported, as happens in other, more restrictive migration contexts such as the US (see for instance Oliveira (2017)), was virtually nonexistent. The major difference that I found in my field research between Argentine household workers and regular migrant household workers was that more recent migrants often assumed that the labor laws of Argentina were similar to those of their home countries, where household workers' rights were severely limited. This lack of knowledge of their labor rights put them at greater risk of exploitation in their workplaces.

Like other parts of my methodology, the interview guide changed over the course of my field research, for various reasons. First, in interviews and when participating in *AMUMRA*'s workshops and other group activities with household workers and other migrant women it became clear that in many cases they were not used to voicing their thoughts in a public forum, or were not used to being asked about their own personal experiences. Secondly, and as mentioned previously, there were monumental structural material constraints that framed my field research experience, including significant constraints on time on the part of my interviewees. In the beginning I had an interview guide that included open-ended and overarching questions (see appendix A). This type of guide did not work for finding the information I needed, so I reformulated my questions drawing more specifically from articles in the new law regarding household workers' work that signified legal breaks with the past. I also added questions to the guide related to themes that would come up repeatedly. If I was short on time, I would make sure certain questions were covered in the interview and made notes of things to follow-up on, if there was time to do so.

Being in the household work sector did not necessarily mean that workers worked for the same employer for a long time. While that was the case with some interviewees, particularly older interviewees, the household work sector has extremely high turn-over, and many workers change employers every month or every few months. Numerous interviewees worked for several employers at the same time and had different contractual arrangements with them, working informally with some of them and under the new legal regime with others. With workers who worked more than one such job, at times the interviews would focus more on some relationships with employers and not others, or on current or recent employment relationships.

In addition to interviewing 50 household workers, I conducted 8 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current or recent activists, or as they would call themselves, volunteers, who were in the headquarters of *AMUMRA* on a regular basis. These activists attended the needs of household workers who came into the headquarters of the organization or, as they would put it, “the office” by providing assistance related to their different fields of expertise, whether it was labor law, migration law, or other. By a “regular basis,” I mean volunteers who were present in the office for at least an entire workday once a week and who hence interacted with and attended the consultations of household workers on a regular basis. I initially intended to conduct at least 15 in-depth interviews with *AMUMRA* activists who worked on a daily basis with household workers. Over the course of my fieldwork, it became evident to me that this design was problematic given that the organization is sustained primarily by volunteer labor, so the number of people involved oscillated over the course of my field research.

I took extensive notes during participant-observation and interviews. These were initially recorded with pen and paper, but I later switched to electronic notetaking via Evernote. I also audio recorded many instances of participant-observation in the office of *AMUMRA* during consultations

between household workers and activists, as well as during capacity building workshops on labor and migrant rights, as memory aids to my notes. I audio recorded interviews when it was physically impossible to take notes on the spot, such as when interviewing people on moving buses or trains, and then took notes from my recordings. I also recorded interviews when possible as memory aids to my notes when interviewing people at cafes or in the office of *AMUMRA*. An overwhelming majority of participants agreed to being recorded during interviews. The few who did not were household workers, and in those cases I only took notes. I was under the impression that the reason they refused to be recorded was because of the sensitivity of some of the information they shared about their current or former employers.

I transcribed field and interview notes into Microsoft Word and subsequently into NVivo, in Spanish. I conducted a thematic analysis of fieldnotes and interview notes. This entailed grouping into codes the patterns of similarity in the themes that appeared repeatedly in interviewees' narratives and fieldnotes. These went from the most concrete (e.g., "compensation," "health insurance," etc.) to the most abstract, informed by various literatures (e.g., "care-chain," "weapons of the weak," etc.). Many of these codes included sub-codes for sub-themes within themes (e.g., under "pseudo-kinship," "patron," "grandfather," etc.). I translated into English all interview quotes and fieldnotes included in this report. In addition to qualitative data, I also collected relevant background documents, including meetings' minutes, reports, and previous studies carried out by *AMUMRA*, documents of projects involving issues related to household work, informational leaflets, and internal e-mail correspondence. These additional documents also included my full access to two WhatsApp groups. One of these groups was for communication, discussion, and exchange between volunteers of the organization; the other group was for communication, discussion, and exchange between household workers and volunteers. Documents

also included all correspondence between household workers and former employers in cases of lawsuits that *AMUMRA* undertook and in which its lawyer represented workers. As is usual in Anthropology, all real names in this monograph have been changed for pseudonyms to protect research participants' privacy. The only exceptions are cases in which *AMUMRA* activists explicitly asked me to use their real names, in which case I honored their requests. Names of places, such as names of neighborhoods where household workers work or those where they live, or places where different *AMUMRA* activities took place have also been changed for names of places with similar demographic characteristics also to protect research participants' privacy.

1.5 Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Chapters #2 and #3 focus on the ways in which activists deal with the new framework of full labor rights for household workers to advance household workers' ability to make use of those rights. Chapters #4 and #5 focus on the ways in which household workers themselves do that. In Chapter #2, I analyze *AMUMRA* activists' advocacy on behalf of household workers through the prism of their counter-hegemonic linguistic practices. I build on the literature on language ideologies (e.g., Gal and Woolard (2001); Kroskrity (2000); Silverstein (1998); Silverstein (2004)) by developing the concept of "language ideology of egalitarianism." I argue that activists' use of counter-hegemonic linguistic practices are reflective of a language ideology of egalitarianism that aims to redefine the private household as a space of "work" as opposed to a "home," at instilling in workers the idea that they are "workers with rights" rather than "yet another member of the family" and that what they do is "work" and

is “valuable.” I argue that in this way, these linguistic practices are also semiotic practices, as they are aimed at assigning new meanings to spaces, peoples, and labors in the passage from customary to contractual ways of regulation of paid household work.

These semiotic practices go hand-in-hand with other strategies of citizenship and subterfuge promoted by activists among household workers to access their newfound labor rights. In chapter #3, I analyze *AMUMRA* activists’ advocacy on behalf of household workers through the prism of a discourse of rights and obligations among household workers, used in tandem with the promotion of practices of subterfuge to advance their newfound labor rights. I build on the feminist symbolic interactionist literature on “doing difference” (e.g., Deutsch (2007); West and Fenstermaker (1995); West and Zimmerman (1987)) by developing the concept of “dramaturgical citizenship.” I argue that activists’ ambivalent promotion of a discourse of labor rights and obligations in conjunction with strategies of subterfuge speak to the necessity to navigate access to rights in a way that would not disrupt the symbolic order that places workers and employers in hierarchical, unequal, positions vis-à-vis one another, and that hence would not represent a threat to workers’ livelihoods. The promotion and use of these practices also highlight the challenges inherent in rendering a private household partially into a workplace.

I explore these issues further in chapters #4 and #5 through an analysis of workers’ practices to access their labor rights. In Chapter #4, I look at the resources that they draw upon and the strategies that they implement to access rights in a context of entrenched, structural, intersectional inequality between them and their employers and lack of regard for the rule of law. I build on the literature on emotional labor, affective labor, and affective work (e.g., Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013); Hardt (1999); Hochschild (2003b); Lukacs (2015)) by developing the concept of “affective capital.” I begin from the premise that household workers occupy a peculiar position

as members of the working class, given that traditional labor movement strategies—such as strikes, protests, demonstrations, etc.—to gain leverage with their employers are next to impossible to be implemented. I argue that, in this context, while affect is often put to the service of exploitation, in other scenarios it is put to the service of advancement of the workers' labor rights, and in fact is often one of the main forms of leverage that workers can count on. I argue that such use of love and trust as leverage highlights the ways in which workers must navigate access to rights in ways that are not disruptive to the symbolic hierarchies that exist between them and their employers. I thus show that it is by using the relationships of trust and reciprocity that workers have built with their employers that they are actually able to access rights. I develop this point further in the next chapter.

In Chapter #5, as in the previous chapter, I build on the ethnographic literature on work and resistance (e.g., Heine, et al. (2017); Ong (2010); Paules (1991); Peña (1997); Scott (1985); Woodcock (2016); Zloliniski (2003)) and argue that when affect cannot be used as a resource, household workers often draw from a repertoire of performative practices to attempt to gain the rights to which they are entitled. Such practices include hiding information from their employers about their income, lying about government benefits, exercising patience and cordiality with the expectation of access to rights such as registration, exercising deference and condescension, complaining about disrespect of labor rights through humor, and finding allies in the cases of labor disputes. I argue that the use of such performative practices shows, once again, the necessity on the part of workers to engage in modes of access to rights that would not threaten the symbolic hierarchies between them and their employers and that hence would not represent a threat to their own livelihoods.

In Chapter #6, I conclude this monograph by bringing together and summing up the arguments made in the previous four core chapters. I synthesize my answers to the research questions stated in this introduction and elaborated throughout the dissertation, summarize the overall contributions made in this dissertation to the literatures on intimate labor and citizenship, and suggest directions for further research moving forward.

2.0 “You No Longer Say *Patrón!*”: Household Workers’ Rights’ Activist Praxis and Language Ideology of Egalitarianism-in-Action in a Migrant Women’s, Grassroots Organization

2.1 Introduction: The *Muqui* Saga

It was October 2017, and once again a scandal had broken out in Argentinian television involving Nicole Neumann and Carolina “Pampita” Ardohain, two models, reality TV personalities, and presenters prominent in Argentinian celebrity culture known for a long-standing rivalry that had, over the years, filled the pages of tabloids and gossip TV shows. This time, rumor had resurfaced that when Ardohain first started her modelling career, Neumann had given her the nickname *muqui*, which stands in short for *mucamita* or *mucama*, literally “little maid” or “maid.” Rumor had it that Ardohain got this nickname because she used to be paid by the hour, the way most household workers are paid in Argentina, instead of by event, the way most models are paid. Rumored also had it that Neumann had given Ardohain the *muqui* nickname because she looked a lot like a household worker who used to work at Neumann’s house. Other theories discussed at length in the media over the origin of the *muqui* nickname included that Neumann or other models had given Ardohain the *muqui* nickname because of her working-class origins, because of her short height in comparison to other models, because she comes from La Pampa province as opposed to Buenos Aires City, and because she is brunette as opposed to blonde. The saga over *muqui* seems to have no end in sight, with the most recent articles about it dating to June 2019 (Redacción 2016; Redacción 2017a; Redacción 2017b; Redacción 2019).

As Silverstein (2004) succinctly writes, “events of language use mediate human sociality” (p. 621). Discursive interactions make sense only if there is a context in which they take place that can render them comprehensible, while discourses invoke, in interaction, specific cultural contexts. Use of words and expressions have both a denotational and invocational capacity: they tell us something about the social world in which they are used, and they also speak of the ways in which people relate to one another as social subjects in a specific social field (Silverstein 2004). Silverstein (2004) argues that linguistic practices index participants in a discursive interaction, and that their uses of language tell us something about their social identities and positionalities in a specific social field. He also argues that individual discursive interactions take place in a broader context of competing or conflictive linguistic interactions. Discursive interactions accrue social significance, or value, within a larger context of value-making. As Silverstein (2004) states, “any individual event of discursive interaction occurs as a nodal point of a network of such in a field of potentially conflicting interdiscursivities across macrosocial spaces that may be simultaneously structured by other (e.g., political and/or economic) principles and dimensionalities as well” (p. 623).

Using *muqui* as an insult makes sense only in a context in which this nickname could be understood as an epithet, in this case a racist, classist, and gendered one, and specifically in one in which household work is racialized, classed, gendered and otherwise stigmatized. Calling someone *muqui* indexes that person as working-class, short, provincial, dark-haired, waged-working, cleaner in juxtaposition to the elevated image of an upper-middle class, tall, city-bound, blond, non-waged-working model. Simultaneously, the use of *muqui* also indexes the people using the word as racist, classist, and sexist.

Against the backdrop of the hegemonic racist, classist, and sexist language ideologies that make calling someone “a maid” in contemporary Argentina an insult, we find conflicting interdiscursivities (Silverstein 2004) that acknowledge such use of language as problematic. We also find other uses of language that speak to altogether different valuations of household work and household workers as a sociopolitical possibility. This chapter is about examining such varying uses of language on the part of household workers’ rights activists in a context of transition from primarily non-contractual to increasingly contractual ways of regulating paid household work in contemporary Buenos Aires. I look at what happens outside the purview of the media spotlight and in the context of discursive interactions in everyday life in sites of production of language ideologies (Irvine and Gal 2000), where hegemonic understandings of household work, household workers, employers of household workers, and the relationships between household workers and their employers are contested and problematized.

I draw from Gal and Woolard (2001) and Kroskrity (2000) in order to frame my understanding of the linguistic practices of household workers’ rights activists around the topic of paid household work as illustrations of language ideology-in-action. I make three arguments. First, I argue that the linguistic practices that take place within the context of activism for the rights of household workers problematize hegemonic language ideologies of household work in order to promote social, cultural, political, and economic changes in the lives of household workers. In this sense, they are not merely linguistic practices; they are also semiotic practices aimed at claiming a transformation of social relationships in the context of a new legal framework of regulation of paid household work. Second, following Silverstein (1998), I argue that activists’ linguistic practices are mediated by what I call a “language ideology of egalitarianism-in-action” aimed at redefining unequal social relationships of reciprocity, pseudo-kinship, and patronage into equal

relationships of contract. In this sense, these practices are aimed at making the legal definitions actual through use. Third, and perhaps most importantly, I argue that activists' micro-level, counter-hegemonic linguistic practices of egalitarianism reflect a macro-level context of transition of the regulation of paid household work from widespread customary to increasingly legal modes. These linguistic practices that activists engage in stem from the new legislation that regulates paid household work and are now, quite literally, normative. However, these practices are not commonly used in the broader society, where from the point of view of activists, discriminatory uses of language remain widespread. Activists' counter-hegemonic language use reveals how, from their point of view, changes in the law need to become reflected in changes to the common sense prevalent around household work, household workers, and the people who employ them.

2.2 Hegemonic and Counter-Hegemonic Language Use in Household Workers' Rights'

Activism

According to Gal and Woolard (2001), "in the simplest formulation, language ideologies are cultural conceptions of the nature, form, and purpose of language, and of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order (Silverstein 1987; Rumsey 1990; Irvine 1989)" (p. 1). In a corollary definition, Silverstein (1979) cited in Kroskrity (2000) defines language ideologies as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" while Irvine (1989), also cited in Kroskrity (2000) provides the following definition: "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (p. 5).

Taking these definitions into consideration, the linguistic practices of household workers' rights' activists are well analyzed as language ideology-in-action and, specifically, as a language ideology of egalitarianism-in-action. Activists' linguistic practices challenged entrenched cultural conceptions encoded in language commonly used to talk about household work, household workers, and employers of household workers. Activists' linguistic practices also reveal the collective order in which work relationships between household workers and employers have existed up until the passage of legislation that renders formally normative language categories that in use remain counter-hegemonic. Activists' linguistic practices also show a set of beliefs on the ways in which language use was part and parcel of their activist praxis for the rights of household workers. It also shows the ways in which changes in language use may reflect cracks in the predominant cultural system of ideas and social relationships around household work.

Silverstein (1998) points out at how “‘realities’ of meaningful social practices emerge from people’s situated experience of indexical semiotic processes that constitute them” and that “the crucial position of *ideologies* of semiosis is in constituting such a ‘default’ mediating metapragmatics” (p. 128). Such default function of mediating metapragmatics is what enables participants in a linguistic interaction to recognize a common context of understanding based on their positionality across the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and other variables of social differentiation. As Silverstein (1998) notes, “in short, ideology construes indexicality by constituting its metapragmatics.” Such function of ideology enables the analytic differentiation between what Silverstein (1998) names as first and second orders of indexicality. The first order of indexicality includes the explicit meaning of indexicals in a particular discursive interaction while the second order of indexicality includes that which is implicit in terms of ideology in a particular discursive interaction. In this sense, he suggests that

ideology mediates indexical processes dialectically as all linguistic practices are indexed. Ideologies provide an interpretive semiotic framework for indexicals and are thus central to rendering discursive practices hegemonic or “natural,” or as he put it, “...we recognize such schemata characteristically by the way that they constitute rationalizing, systematizing, and indeed most importantly *naturalizing* schemata: schemata that “explain” the indexical value of signs in terms of some order(s) of phenomena stipulatively presupposable by—hence, in context, autonomous of—the indexical phenomena to be understood” (p. 129, emphasis in the original). Silverstein (1998) notes that speakers’ capacity to notice the different ways in which indexicals are used enables social subjects to access the connection between indexicals and the sociocultural framework in which they are used. He also notes that ideologies of language can be apprehended in action in the context of specific patterned uses of language within a social group. In this sense, he highlights the significance of “interactional sites of understood ritualization of usage” in providing the “descriptive exemplification in metadiscourses that ground the semiotic value of indexicals in determinate, textualized ways” (p. 137).

Activists’ linguistic practices as social practices emerged from their situated experiences as household workers’ rights activists. The default mediating metapragmatics in the case of household workers’ rights’ activists was a language ideology of egalitarianism that rejected the notion of hierarchies of any kind between workers and employers—be it on the basis of class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, or citizenship. This was best exemplified through their consistent use of what I am calling here “counter-hegemonic indexicals” in their daily activist praxis. These counter-hegemonic indexicals served the purpose of naming a household worker’s occupation, of pointing out whether she worked formally or informally, and of pointing at a person who employs household workers in terms of the first order of indexicality. These counter-

hegemonic indexicals also said something else implicitly about household workers' position in Argentinian society, about their work, and about the nature of their relationships with their employers since the passage of Law 26844 in terms of the second order of indexicality. In doing so, activists' linguistic practices disrupted, in everyday life, and paraphrasing Silverstein (1998), the rationalization of the use of hegemonic indexicals to talk about household work, the ways in which they are systematically used, and most importantly, the ways in which they are naturalized. Activists' consistent counter-hegemonic linguistic practices provide indeed clear examples of the ways in which the value of the linguistic forms they used grounded them as egalitarian, anti-hierarchical, anti-discriminatory, and hence, given the ways in which household work continues to be gendered, classed, racialized, and stigmatized in contemporary Buenos Aires, counter-hegemonic.

Five sets of indexical binary oppositions were particularly salient and recurrent in the linguistic practices of activists. These included an emphasis on referring to household workers as *trabajadoras de casas particulares* or *TCPs* ("workers of private households") instead of *empleadas domésticas* ("domestic employees"); referring to employers of household workers as *empleadores* or *empleadoras* ("employers") instead of *patrones* or *patronas* ("patrons"); referring to formal work as *trabajo registrado* ("registered work") instead of *trabajo en blanco* (translated literally as "work in white"), and referring to informal work as *trabajo no registrado* ("non-registered work") instead of *trabajo en negro* (translated literally as "work in black"), and referring to household work as *trabajo en casas particulares* ("work in private households) instead of *trabajo doméstico* or *servicio doméstico* ("domestic work" or "domestic service").

Table 1. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic indexicals

Hegemonic Indexicals	Counter-Hegemonic Indexicals
Domestic employee	Worker of private household
Patron	Employer
Work in White	Registered Work
Work in Black	Non-registered Work
Domestic Work/Domestic Service	Work in Private Households

It is important to note that what I am calling here “hegemonic indexicals” constitute the predominant, widespread language forms utilized in the larger Argentinian society to talk about household work, household workers, and employers of household workers, outside the context of household workers’ rights activism as an interactional site of understood ritualization of usage. Also, what I am calling “counter-hegemonic indexicals” are used, to my knowledge and based on my fieldwork experience, only in the context of grassroots activism for the rights of household workers. They are currently linguistic and semiotic practices of limited impact, hence their counter-hegemonic character. The term “domestic employee” is ubiquitously used in the larger Argentinian society to refer to paid cooks, cleaners, ironers, and caretakers. The term “patron” is only used in the contexts of paid household work and rural work to refer to employers; in all other work relationships the term “boss” or “employer” is used instead. The hegemonic terms “domestic employee” and “patron” and other variants such as *muchacha* (“girl”), *chacha* (short for *muchacha*), *nana* (“nan,” for live-in household workers), *sirvienta* (“servant”), *criada* (“maid”) to refer to household workers and *señor/a* (“sir/mam”), *patrono* (“patron”), *caballero* (“gentleman”), and *don/doña* to refer to employers are also commonly used throughout the Latin American region. The terms “work in white” and “work in back” are ubiquitously used in all types of labor in

Argentina to refer to “registered” and “non-registered” work, and their use is not limited only to the context of paid household work.

Activists’ consistent use of counter-hegemonic indexicals are not only best understood as a language ideology of egalitarianism-in-action because they match seamlessly the various definitions of the concept of “language ideology” as outlined by the theorists whose work I briefly discuss above. Activists’ consistent use of counter-hegemonic indexicals also illustrates the four interrelated characteristics that are typical of language ideologies (Kroskrity 2000). These appear as consistent themes not only in my observations of activists’ praxis in specific instances of activism, such as during consultations, meetings, workshops, or public events; they also appear in activists’ narratives from interviews and conversations with them regarding their use of language regarding the topic of paid household work.

It is also important to note at this point that, as indicated in the Introduction to this dissertation, my methodology as a volunteer-researcher implied that over the course of my field research, I took on the role of activist and member of the migrant women’s grassroots organization with which I conducted my field research as much as the activists who I discuss below did, albeit also in an observational capacity. Being a participant-observer in the context of my research meant being an activist-observer. During the course of my field research, I also learned to use the counter-hegemonic indexicals that my research collaborators used, and taking seriously my research collaborators’ critique of hegemonic language ideologies of paid household work, they are the terms I now use in Spanish to refer to household work, household workers, employers of household workers, registered work, and non-registered work. Following my research collaborators’ critique of hegemonic language use, in this monograph I am also making a deliberate use in English of the terms “household worker” and “household work” instead of the more commonly used in academia,

“domestic worker” and “domestic work.,” thus incorporating my research collaborators’ critique of hegemonic language use in my own writing. The choice of using the terms “household workers” and “household work” is not new in the literature, even if less used (see for instance Chaney and Castro (1989)). In order to show the ways in which activists’ use of counter-hegemonic indexicals exposes a language ideology of egalitarianism-in action, I emulate the ethnographic writing methodology used in Malkki (1995), and present my ethnographic fieldnote observations in four thematic clusters concomitant with the four interrelated characteristics of language ideologies as identified by Kroskrity (2000).

2.3 First Thematic Cluster: Language Use and Activist Positionality

Kroskrity (2000) argues that “first, language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group.” Language use is ideological in the sense that ethical, moral, and aesthetical valuations of language are usually connected to the positionality of language users across vectors of social differentiation. In this sense, the social, political, and economic interests of a group are promoted, protected, and legitimized via language use (Kroskrity 2000). Activists’ use of counter-hegemonic indexicals illustrates this characteristic of language ideologies, as tied to their positionality as advocates for the rights of household workers and to promoting, protecting, and legitimizing the interest of household workers as a social group, in part via language. Activists did this by pointing at the ethical, moral, and aesthetical valuations of hegemonic language use and by proposing counter-

hegemonic uses of language instead. The panels below illustrate this first characteristic of this language ideology of egalitarianism in-action:

Panel 1:

It was an afternoon in the beginning of spring, and as had happened a number of times before, we had gathered in the annex building of the National Congress for an event organized by AMUMRA. This time, the occasion had brought us together for the presentation of, as the announcement for the event put it, “the activities developed during the year in the Observatory on Migration and Refuge,” which included the presentation of two reports on two different research projects concerning migrant women. One report, entitled “Study on the Advancement of Approaches to Gender-Based Violence of Latin American Migrant Women in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires” analyzed “the specificities of this problem among the migrant population and inquired into the mechanisms of care in non-governmental organizations.” The other report, entitled “Current Situation of Migrant Women in Buenos Aires,” provided “a diagnosis of the situation of migrant women in terms of access to rights” in the context of one of the long-standing projects of the organization, the Itinerant Tent for the Human Rights of Migrant Women, and analyzed data from an extensive survey carried out among migrant women by AMUMRA volunteers. As was usually the case with these kinds of events in the National Congress annex building, the room was packed with representatives from other civil society organizations, academics, and lay people.

As the afternoon unfolded, one of the volunteers and project managers, Ana, took to the stage to present via a PowerPoint the results of the report, “Current Situation of Migrant Women in Buenos Aires.” She presented the research results in the form of graphs that showed, among other things, the percentage of survey respondents who identified themselves as “workers of

private households” as opposed to “domestic employees” when asked about their occupation. Ana went on to disaggregate the percentage of respondents who identified themselves as “workers of private households” as opposed to “domestic employees,” “domestic workers,” or “caretakers.” Speaking on behalf of the organization, she found the fact that most respondents did not identify as “workers of private households” problematic. “Most of them do not recognize themselves as “workers of private households,” she said, “and we believe that these changes in language are also going to help in this recognition of rights [for household workers].”

In this first panel, the question of whether household workers use counter-hegemonic language to refer to themselves appears as a means by which to assess their social standing as migrant women and, incidentally, also as household workers. The inclusion of the survey question on whether respondents identified as “workers of private households” on the part of the activists of the organization is best understood as a question on whether household workers are using language to talk about themselves that promotes, protects, and legitimizes their interests as a social group. Asking about their self-identification is also best understood as activists’ query on what household workers’ self-identification could tell the activists about household workers’ level of access to equal social standing. There is an implicit correlation on the part of Ana as speaking on behalf of the organization, between the number of respondents who identified as workers of private households and the level of social inequality experienced by them as a social group: from the point of view of the organization, the more respondents did not identify as “workers of private households,” the more disadvantageous their position as a social group. This is particularly evident in the fact that Ana, in her role as spokesperson for the organization for the day (notice the use of “we believe” as opposed to “I believe”) underlined the juxtaposition between the terms used by most respondents to refer to themselves (“domestic employees,” “household workers,” or

“caretakers”) and the preferred term of the organization (“workers of private households”). She then made an explicit connection between the importance of workers’ recognizing themselves as “workers of private households” and the ways in which such use of language of recognition is tied to promoting, protecting, and legitimizing the interest of household workers as a social group and hence to changing their social position for their betterment. By problematizing, on behalf of the organization, uses of language other than “worker of private household” in the survey’s responses, Ana challenged the linguistic order of things, illuminating that using terms such as “domestic employee” is not “natural” or “normal” but is instead tied to a hegemonic way of conceiving social relationships between employers and employees, and in need to be transformed via counter-hegemonic language use in household workers’ rights activism. There is also an implicit questioning of the use of the term “domestic” which is even clearer in the following panel:

Panel 2:

It was a Saturday afternoon, and we had hopped on the train and travelled for two hours to San Antonio de Padua to carry out a capacity building workshop on household workers’ rights under the new labor rights framework. This time we had teamed up with a local parish that one of the activists of the organization had a connection to via a family member, and by virtue of living in the same neighborhood where the parish was located. As unfortunately had happened before in the context of a rainy day, nobody had showed up to participate. As we waited at the parish, in a move that was not unusual for her, the president of the organization, Natividad, suggested we not simply go back to Buenos Aires empty-handed, so to speak, and that instead we change the activity to something else to reach people where they were. She suggested we go around the neighborhood handing out brochures on migrant women’s and household workers’ rights to the neighbors we may encounter. “This is how things are built,” she said “first with no people, and

then they join in.” As we met several women along the way whom we asked, “ma’am, do you work in a private household? Let us leave you this information,” one of the activists of the organization, Sofi, noted “did you see how difficult it is for them to say that they are workers?” And Natividad replied “the thing is that they do not recognize themselves as workers, but as domestic employees, which now they are not because with the new law they are workers of private households.” “‘Domestic’ sounds horrible” said Sofi, and I asked her why she thought so. She replied, “because it is like the domestic animal that has to be tamed to be with Man [sic], like an animal that has to be tamed to work.”

The problem with the term “domestic” had also been raised by Natividad before; I had often heard her say when the topic of calling household workers “domestic employees” vs. “workers of private households” that “we do not talk about ‘domestic employees’ because we do not domesticate anybody.” The exchange between Sofi and Natividad on that particular Saturday afternoon was also reminiscent of another situation that had happened at the office of AMUMRA during its usual business hours. Natividad was telling me about an upcoming general meeting that was going to take place of household workers’ grassroots organizations and unions. It was a meeting she wanted me to attend with her and which, of course, I also wanted to go to. As we were chatting, she showed me a few old leaflets she had found apropos the topic of household workers’ rights. “Look what I found!” she said, “this is from when we did the demonstration in 2009 [in order to advocate for a household workers’ bill of rights].” As we were talking, Nuria, who was also in the office with us on that day, asked, “and when did ‘worker in a private household’ start to be used? Because here [in the leaflet] it says ‘workers of homes’.” “When the law was approved,” replied Natividad. “We at AMUMRA have always used the term ‘workers of private households,’ because we knew they were not “domestic employees.” On another occasion, she

had also told me that, during that particular demonstration in 2009, the organization had proposed that the household workers' bill of rights refer to household workers as "workers of private households" as a core element of their demands for equal rights for household workers: "we proposed to [then President] Cristina [Fernández de Kirchner] to say 'workers of private households' [in the bill]."

In this second panel, the fact that the women we encountered in our stroll around the neighborhood in San Antonio de Padua consistently did not identify as "workers of private households" caught the attention of Sofi the same way the phenomenon of most survey respondents not identifying themselves that way had caught the attention of Ana in Panel 1. Sofi's problematization of the fact that a majority of the women we encountered who worked as household workers did not identify as "workers of private households" is echoed in Natividad's response to Sofi. In her response, Natividad explained to Sofi why the women we met did not identify themselves as "workers of private households" in terms of a valuation of household workers' social and juridical position. Natividad also spoke of the ways in which such valuation of household workers' social position is reflected in language use. "Workers," concur both Sofi and Natividad in this panel, is what household workers "are" despite them not identifying that way. Thus that is the language these two activists implicitly claim should be used to describe household workers' occupation when speaking from the positionality of advancing equal rights for household workers, as well as the language household workers should use in order to represent themselves and their best interests. This is further emphasized in Natividad's claim that this positionality reflected in language use gains legitimation by the law as a new order of things regarding household work. This is also further illustrated in Sofi's and Natividad's problematization of the term "domestic" per se. Sofi's valuation of the term "domestic" as aesthetically unpleasant is tied

to her association of the term “domestic” with the cultural trope of nature vs culture / savagery vs. civilization/ animality vs humanity in which culture/civilization/humanity stands in a hierarchically elevated position vis-à-vis nature/savagery/animality and consequently in which calling a household worker “domestic employee” implies an association with nature/savagery/animality in this hierarchical worldview. Hence the problem as she expressed it with using the term “domestic” to refer to household workers, when speaking from the position of an activist for their rights as well as when speaking from the position of a household worker herself. This is even more evident in Natividad’s vehement rejection of the term “domestic” and the explicit connection she makes between using the term “workers of private households” and the political goal of advancing household workers’ labor rights, to the point of including the issue of language use as a central aspect of *AMUMRA*’s activism in their demands for a household workers’ bill of rights.

In sum, both panels in this first thematic cluster illustrate that in the context of linguistic practices as in other practices of social life, “there is no ‘view from nowhere,’ no gaze that is not positioned” (Irvine and Gal 2000, p. 36). Activists’ linguistic practices reveal a worldview that conceives of the advancement of household workers’ rights as urgent, of the promotion of equality for them as important, and of the need to do so, among other ways, via the employment of novel language forms, as necessary. In doing so, activists’ linguistic practices also reveal ways in which the predominant indexicals used to talk about the topic of household work until now manifest a specific worldview in which hierarchy and inequality in household work have been naturalized. In their linguistic practices, activists decenter this predominant worldview and thus render it visible.

2.4 Second Thematic Cluster: Multiple (Activist and Non-Activist) Language Ideologies

As a second characteristic endemic to language ideologies, Kroskrity (2000) argues that they “are profitably conceived as multiple because of the multiplicity of meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that have the potential to produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership” (p. 12). In this sense, different social groups in the same social field espouse different language ideologies based on their experiences in that particular social field. This, according to Kroskrity (2000), points at the fact that where there is hegemony as far as language use is concerned, there is also conflict and contestation. Within a given social space, hegemonic understandings and uses of language by social groups who have become predominant are problematized by social groups striving for hegemony. This aspect of language ideologies is well illustrated by activists’ linguistic practices in the context of specific instances of contestation of other language ideologies. In these instances, activists made manifest hegemonic and problematic uses of language regarding household work while simultaneously indexing themselves as members of an activist organization for the rights of household workers, as can be seen in the panels below:

Panel 3:

It was one of my early days of fieldwork at AMUMRA’s office and, as I arrived there, I met one of the volunteers, the leader of the organization, Natividad, and other people. As we were hanging out there, in came a woman who had been waiting in the corridor, Elena. She had brought some food to share and, as Natividad introduced her to me, she told me that “Elena is a worker in private households” and that she was one of the first women to begin organizing women into what ended up becoming AMUMRA. “She started and then she left me with all of this” said Natividad,

while Elena replied “she always blames me” in between laughter and complicity. It was clear that they knew each other well and were close.

We then sat and while we shared food, Natividad read a certified letter that Elena had received from her former employer in which he basically stated that he had no relationship whatsoever with her. I asked Elena “is that your patron?” to which Natividad, smiling, told me “María Lili, we do not say patron anymore, we say employer!” “Yes, he is my ex-employer” said Elena. So I asked her, “and why is patron a bad word?” to which Natividad replied, “because it is like he is above you,” while Elena added, “yes, as if it was the time of slavery.” Then Elena told me that she had been suddenly fired, and that she used to take care of her employer’s mother. “He was already planning everything” (i.e., firing her) she told me, “he wanted me to send him a certified letter saying that I was resigning and he said that later he would pay me [her severance pay] and I did not want to sign [the letter]. He said he was going to do that as an act of good faith.” As she told me this story, she broke down, clearly hurt by the whole situation. “I can do anything for work, I can go on selling potatoes, what makes me angry is his attitude, I told him to his face, that he had everything planned [i.e., to fire her]; moreover his mother told me ‘enjoy your vacation, love you!’ If he had recognized me something, I would not have done this.” As Natividad finished reading the certified letter from Elena’ former employer, Elena said “I was about to call him on the phone” to which Natividad replied “Ay Elena, if you had done that, look [it would have been a problem]! Now everything is in the lawyer’s hands.”

In this panel, my interaction with Elena and Natividad illustrates the ways in which in the social field of contemporary Buenos Aires, where a transition is occurring from primarily informal to increasingly formal modes of regulation of paid household work, talk around household work is mediated by multiple and often competing language ideologies. In my own use of the term

“patron,” rather than “employer,” I was unconsciously reproducing language uses reflective of hegemonic and problematic understandings of household work. Such use of language was problematized by Natividad, who, when I used the term “patron” to refer to Elena’s ex-employer, quickly corrected me and urged me to use the counter-hegemonic term “employer” instead, a correction Elena emphasized as the right way to refer to employers of household workers now that equal rights for household workers exist and are the law of the land. In the discussion that ensued between Natividad, Elena, and me over the valuation of the term “patron,” when I asked them why in their view it carried a negative connotation, the multiplicity of language ideologies in this social field of transition to contractual modes in paid household work became evident.

For both Elena and Natividad as household worker rights’ activists, as well as a former, in the case of Natividad, and a current, in the case of Elena, household workers, using a term such as “patron” was reflective of a discriminatory language ideology that posits household workers as social subjects of lower standing vis-à-vis their employers. This was quite explicitly stated by Natividad. Elena took this notion further by pointing out to me that, from her point of view, referring to a household worker’s employer as her “patron” was descriptive of a relationship of bondage between the two instead of a relationship of contract between the two. Elena’s narrative shows how referring to the employer of a household worker as her “patron” describes a relationship that legally no longer exists in the context of formal recognition of labor rights for household workers. Hence the necessity to employ instead different language forms to talk about these relationships in the context of a new, more equal legal order in the striving for congruence between social and legal orders. This is even more evident in the following panel:

Panel 4:

We were sitting around a table at Mabel's garage in Guernica along with her, some relatives, and neighbors, in what was planned to be a capacity building workshop on migrant and labor rights. Instead, we had a conversation and session of deep hanging-out (Geertz 1998) with them, two activists of the organization, and myself. As organizational material on the rights of migrants and household workers laid on the table, we alternated between talking about Mabel's situation as a household worker who was still working informally, her brother's predicament as a construction worker, and making an online appointment for one of Mabel's neighbors to get a new ID after having been recently mugged.

"My mom worked her whole life as a domestic employee. She was 10 years in a house" said Mabel's husband. Mabel instructed me to "listen up." He continued, "and then she [the elderly person Mabel's mother-in-law used to look after] died." "His mom lives in the back [of Mabel's and her nuclear family's house]. She has not returned yet as she works as a live-in household worker" added Mabel. "She [the elderly person Mabel's mother-in-law used to look after] died and they gave her 7000 pesos. She [Mabel's mother-in-law] worked for 10 years and they gave her 7000 pesos and they took her to work at the house of a relative of the person who died" added Mabel's husband. Mabel continued, "and she [Mabel's mother-in-law] was really grateful because she said that the time she was there [working in the first house] she could take her own relatives [to the house], that they, [her employers], allowed her to do that. She [Mabel's mother-in-law] is very much a conformist. We [Mabel and her husband] told her [to ask for more money], but she is just like that." The current legislative framework stipulates that in the event of death of the employer, such as in the case of Mabel's mother-in-law, a worker should receive severance pay equivalent to half the severance she would receive in case of being fired, which

would consist of 1 monthly salary per year worked. In the case of Mabel's mother-in-law, this would have been equivalent to 5 monthly salaries, which would have been significantly higher than 7000 ARS.

Alicia, a neighbor of Mabel's and a household worker herself jumped in, "for example, for me, my daughter goes with me [to work], my husband also, he eats at the house, I am there, I cook, I serve them [i.e., her employers], and they [Alicia's husband and child] eat with me. She [Alicia's employer] never told me 'do not bring your husband in here.'" "Well," replied Mabel, "but that is different because he [Alicia's employer's husband] is at the same time your husband's patron." Upon hearing Mabel say this, Natividad interjected as if reprimanding her, and said "there is no patron Mabel! It is 'employer!'" and everyone broke into laughter. "Memorize it!" said Nora, Mabel's sister-in-law jokingly. "Yes, you have to memorize it" replied Natividad speaking seriously and echoing something else she had said earlier in the afternoon and which I had heard her mention many times before with different words and in other circumstances:

"Since law 26844, workers of private households are no longer called 'domestic employees,' the worker in a private household is on the same level with her employer. The employer gets to go on vacation, the worker also gets to go on vacation; the employer gets to have permission to study; the worker also gets to have permission to study, the employer gets to have maternity leave, the worker also gets to have maternity leave. But what happens? The only thing workers in private households do is be like machines who just work, work, work, just like men who are construction workers. The moment they wake up they go to work and they are working, working and get back home and are tired, just like the women [who are household workers], it is all the same for everybody. So our duty is to tell the worker of private households that she has rights. For example, if a relative in the first-degree dies, the worker of private households gets to go on leave

and she must get paid for those days that she is on leave. Because it is the law, not because I just feel like it, but because it is the law.” Everyone at the table listened attentively to Natividad.

In this panel, as in the previous one, the multiplicity of competing language ideologies that mediate talk of household work in contemporary Buenos Aires became particularly evident in a moment of contestation of hegemonic language uses. As had been the case in my own interaction with Elena and Natividad in the previous panel, when Mabel was describing Alicia’s and her husband’s relationship with their employers, Natividad quickly corrected Mabel when she used the term “patron.” In doing so, Natividad highlighted that such language use denotes social relationships that in the context of equal rights for household workers should no longer exist and urged Mabel to use the counter-hegemonic indexical “employer” instead. The ways in which using terms like “patron” remains naturalized in daily life is particularly evident in the reaction of everybody at the table, who found Natividad’s corrections humorous and evidently did not share in her conceiving of the term “patron” to refer to household workers’ employers as an offensive indexical, but instead as a normalized way to talk about employers of household workers, even in a context of equal rights for household workers. Natividad’s insistence to Mabel to learn the term “employer” by heart implied that while from Natividad’s point of view it is important for everyone to use counter-hegemonic terminology when talking about household work, it is even more important for individuals in Mabel’s position as a household worker to do so. This is the case given that, from an activist perspective, counter-hegemonic language use, such as using the term “employer,” is representative of the new legal order regulating relationships between household workers and their employers as opposed to hegemonic language use, such as using the term “patron,” which is representative of a legal order that should now be extinct. This is evident in the subsequent connection Natividad made on the significance of no longer using the term “domestic

employee” to refer to household workers and their legal status as workers. In her comparison of the labor rights of household workers and their employers, she drew a parallel between the two that quite explicitly emphasized that household workers are as much workers as their employers are, enjoying the same rights and privileges and consequently entitled to be named as “workers of private households” hired by “employers,” in the same manner that their middle-class employers are “workers” hired by “employers.” This is not a matter of opinion, as Natividad put it in this panel, but instead one of fact, where language use should, according to her and other activists like her, accurately signal changes in the social and juridical orders.

In sum, both panels in this second thematic cluster illustrate not only the ways in which language ideologies are conceived as multiple; they illustrate also and specifically how, in the social field of contemporary Buenos Aires, activists’ linguistic practices that are mediated by a linguistic ideology of egalitarianism contrast with predominant language ideologies of elitism and hierarchy that mediate the linguistic practices predominant in contemporary Buenos Aires. These linguistic practices often index social subjects in different, often unequal positionalities vis-à-vis household workers, which is quite evident when considering the anecdote over the *muqui* scandal with which I begin this chapter. Such hegemonic uses of language contrast with the everyday linguistic practices of household workers’ activists, whose work is about problematizing predominant uses of language and rendering their linguistic practices, which right now remain counter-hegemonic, hegemonic. Activists’ linguistic practices also contrast with the linguistic practices of social subjects for whom the hegemonic language use is not, as of now, problematic.

2.5 Third Thematic Cluster: Awareness (and Lack of) Hegemonic Language Ideologies of Household Work

As a third characteristic of language ideologies, Kroskrity (2000) notes that “members may display varying degrees of awareness of local language ideologies” (p. 18). In this sense, in a given social field, while certain social groups, or members of a social group, may overtly express a specific language ideology, it may also be the case that language ideologies in action be recognizable by paying attention to language users’ use of language. Members of a given social group may replicate in their discourse hegemonic language ideologies or they may in their discursive practices directly challenge hegemonic language ideologies. In any case, Kroskrity (2000) suggests that the degree to which social subjects are conscious of the language ideologies that mediate their discursive practices and the extent to which they can explicate language use is a central aspect of language ideology. Activists overtly expressed a linguistic ideology of egalitarianism through their uses of language, while hegemonic linguistic ideologies of elitism and hierarchy were evident in the uses of language of other social subjects, which activists often contested and explicated in sophisticated ways. This has already been alluded to in previous panels and is even clearer when analyzing the panel below:

Panel 5:

It was a weekday afternoon, and two volunteers, Natividad, and I were gathered in the office. Natividad was busy on the phone with Ruth, a household worker who worked primarily taking care of elderly people and who, along with other such caretakers, was planning to carry out a march from the Obelisco all the way to the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security to protest the conditions of employment by insurance companies that employed caretakers of elderly adults. The insurance companies acted as intermediaries between caretakers and

families, charging the families onerous fees for hiring caretakers via the insurance companies while at the same time exploiting the workers. The issue, as Ruth had communicated it to me, was that not only were they being paid poorly, the conditions of employment were such that they were being paid 120 days after the service they had provided. As I usually did with issues that were beyond my expertise or capacity to deal with, I had put Ruth in touch with Natividad so that she may advise Ruth on how to proceed. Natividad did not think the march was a good idea. “This is the last action you should be doing, and you are carrying it out as your first action,” she told Ruth. She then advised Ruth to come to the office and proceed with the support of an organization like AMUMRA, to prepare a document, leave it at the reception of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, and even to have an appointment at the Ministry. Perhaps Ruth and the other prospective marchers could form a “caretakers committee” as part of AMUMRA to deal with their issue, Natividad suggested. In any case, she strongly advised Ruth against marching without a permit given the risk that they would run into of being thrown in jail.

As Natividad was advising Ruth on the phone, Sofi and Nuria, two volunteers of the organization, were putting together a poster to publicize the capacity building workshop on labor rights we were planning to carry out in San Antonio de Padua in a few weeks’ time. Sofi was a volunteer who had been with the organization for a while now, while Nuria was a little newer, so to speak. In my double role as researcher-volunteer, I had before, via text, suggested the following text to Sofi: “CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP ON LABOR RIGHTS FOR WORKERS OF PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS: If you have doubts about your rights, if you have any problems at work, if you are not registered (i.e., working “in black”), COME OVER, WE ARE HERE FOR YOU! [Place, date, and time].”

As Sofi and Nuria were working on the poster, they consulted me if it was ok and I said yes, delegating the job completely to them. They also consulted Natividad on the content, to which she replied “no, we cannot say “working ‘in black’,” to which Nuria, the newer volunteer, replied “but perhaps it is better to put it that way so that it is comprehensible,” to which I replied “that is what I was thinking of,” and Natividad told us, “no, we cannot say that because it is stigmatizing blackness as our Afro comrades tell us. Last time when we were with Lucía (another volunteer) and a lawmaker, the topic of workers of private households came up and I said “work in black” and right there they told me “no comrade, don’t say ‘work in black,’ because that is stigmatizing blackness.” So, we cannot write ‘work in black,’ let’s write ‘non-registered work.’

As the day went by, in addition to organizing this particular activity, Natividad was answering the emails of a potentially new volunteer lawyer for the organization and making phone calls to a colleague who run a refuge for women victims of gender-based violence in a southern neighborhood of Buenos Aires to carry out a capacity building workshop on household workers’ rights in partnership with his organization: “I know that you work with workers of private households, wrongly named ‘domestic employees,’ so we wanted to do a workshop. We are going to train them on how to act before this situation. AMUMRA together with your organization. We are going to teach them that they have rights, that they have maternity leave, leaves to study, for everything, so we want to see the possibility [of working with you], because we have worked on this topic a lot, if we can offer a workshop on work in private households there where you are, it all depends on you to tell us when you have space and time.” As Natividad and Gustavo, the representative from the refuge discussed a possible time on the phone, Natividad continued, in an endearing and patient tone, “workers of private households, m’hijito, since law 26844 they are no longer domestics, or maids, or girls, they are workers with rights,” clearly correcting Gustavo,

who had probably said “domestic employees” instead when referring to household workers. She then continued, “that is right, we would do a capacity building workshop for women so that they can know what their rights are. We can go on a Tuesday, even with the lawyer, there is really no problem because we give the workshop and any worker who is fired, we are going to give her there a training so that she can know how to act if there is ever that situation, you see? We would put together a leaflet of AMUMRA with your organization, I can send you via WhatsApp and you send it to other people.” After she hung up and in a moment in which she was free, I tried to pick up the topic of “work in black” vs “non-registered work” with her and asked her,

ML: So you were telling me that you were in a meeting with a lawmaker and there were the women from which organization?

N: They are from an Afro-descendants’ organization, Carambenor, and they are also part of the commission for the rights of the entire Afro-descendant community here in Argentina and [they] also [work for the rights] of migrant women.

ML: So you were talking about workers of private households, and it was them, Lucía, and you.

N: Yes, and also the president of the senate’s human rights commission. We are working on having a roundtable discussion with the consulates.

ML: Right. And then you said “work in black.” And?

N: And when I said “work in black” the women [from the Afro-descendants’ organization were like] “ooohh, Natividad, all the human rights and you are the first one who is stigmatizing us!” So I apologized to them and obviously I told them, “you are absolutely right, comrades, truth be told sometimes we make mistakes, because for so long this system oppresses us, but I apologize, I won’t do it again.” [...]

As the afternoon went by, Sofi and Nuria continued organizing the event for the following weekend, and Alma, the labor lawyer of the organization, came in. The final version of the leaflet for the activity read this way: “LABOR RIGHTS WORKSHOP FOR WORKERS OF PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS: If you have doubts about your rights, if you have any problems in your workplace, if you are not registered... COME OVER, WE ARE HERE FOR YOU! [date, time, and place].”

In this panel, various situations illustrate different levels of awareness in regard to the language ideologies that mediate talk around household work. First, the interaction between Natividad and Gustavo echoed situations included in previous panels, in which Gustavo replicated, most probably by using the term “domestic employee,” hegemonic understandings of household workers. This, as in other panels, followed Natividad’s swift correcting of Gustavo’s language use in light of her awareness of how terms such as “domestics,” “maids,” or “girls” are mediated by a discriminatory language ideology that devalues household work and household workers. Second, the situation in which Natividad vehemently refused that the volunteers and I include the widespread and commonly used expression “work in black” in parenthesis along with “non-registered work” showed a greater level of awareness on the part of Natividad in comparison to the other volunteers or myself on the weight that such an expression carried as an expression that is problematically racialized and thus mediated by a discriminatory language ideology, despite the fact that it is commonly used in the larger society, even by academics and activists at other organizations. While Natividad overtly challenged such hegemonic and problematic uses of language, the other volunteers and I were unknowingly replicating hegemonic and problematic language ideologies.

For Natividad, it was not just a matter of writing a leaflet in a way that most people could understand, it was also about taking an explicitly anti-racist stance via language use by incorporating the critique of Afro-descendants' rights' activists into the ways in which communication took place in regard to the topic of household work, consistent with employing a language ideology of egalitarianism when talking about the topic of household work. In the same way that Natividad pointed at the volunteers and I the ways in which we were unaware of replicating hegemonic and problematic uses of language when talking about household work, the experience that she had with the activists from *Carambenor* also illustrates how she had in the past been unaware of replicating problematic uses of language, which shows the pervasiveness of the use of such problematic indexicals such as "in black" in everyday life in the larger society. Like the experience of the volunteers and myself with putting together the leaflet for the workshop and Natividad objecting to our use of the expression "in black," the experience Natividad had with the activists from *Carambenor* included in this panel showed hegemony in language use in-action on the part of Natividad, awareness of hegemony on the part of the Afro-descendants' rights activists and newfound awareness on the part of Natividad, to the point of apologizing to the *Carambenor* activists and never using the expression "in black" again, all of which she explicated to me as an explicitly central aspect of what I am calling here a language ideology of egalitarianism mediating the linguistic practices of household workers' rights activists.

It is significant to reiterate at this point that the commonly used expression "work in black" to refer to non-registered work finds its counterpart in the expression "work in white" to refer to registered work, denoting, as the Afro-descendants' rights activists did in the situation Natividad mentioned of her conversation with them, how uses of the expressions "in black," or its counterpart "in white," establish a problematic hierarchy via language use in which unequal valuations are

given to blackness and whiteness, widely used in other contexts as well as in “black markets” and “white markets.” This is particularly evident when considering how the expression “in black” is used to refer to precarious, informal work that takes place outside of the context of a labor contract, while “in white” is used to refer to secure, formal work that takes place within the context of a labor contract.

2.6 Fourth Thematic Cluster: Unequal Social Structures, Language Use, and Activist

Agency

Kroskrity (2000) identifies a fourth and final characteristic of language ideologies, which is that “members’ language ideologies mediate between social structures and forms of talk” (p. 21). In this sense, he identifies a dialectical relationship between the linguistic practices of social subjects and the social positions they occupy. In other words, language ideologies mediate between social structure and individual agency. A language ideology of egalitarianism certainly mediated between an unequal social structure, in which household workers occupy an unequal position vis-à-vis their employers, and household workers’ rights activists’ linguistic practices. Concomitantly, the same was true for language ideologies of elitism and hierarchy, which mediated the linguistic practices of social subjects who stood outside the context of household workers’ rights activism, as is most evident in the *muqui* anecdote with which I begin this chapter. A dialectical relationship was evident between the positions that activists occupied as activists for the rights of household workers and their linguistic practices, which took place precisely in relation to, and to comment on, the context of systemic inequality household workers experience. I have already alluded to this

in other panels I presented and analyzed previously; this aspect of this linguistic ideology of egalitarianism is even more evident when examining the panel below:

Panel 6:

It was a cold Saturday afternoon and we gathered with several activists in downtown Buenos Aires to participate in a festival celebrating Peruvian culture organized by the Buenos Aires city government. AMUMRA usually took part in this festival, which was celebrated every year. As usual, AMUMRA stood out as perhaps the only civil society human rights organization in the crowd of stands selling food, handicrafts, and the like, which covered the entire Avenida de Mayo, all the way from Avenida 9 de Julio to the Casa Rosada. Like the other volunteers, I arrived early to set up the Itinerant Tent for the Human Rights of Migrant Women. One of AMUMRA's project coordinators described "an itinerant project" thus: "there are projects with a permanent and itinerant approach [in the organization]; this, [the Tent], is an itinerant project. Given that we are not a political party, we are not permanently [in the communities]." As we set up the table, leaflets, brochures, and the like, we were all wearing T-shirts with the logo of the organization. This signaled our affiliation to passersby when we stopped them to offer informational materials, or when they stopped by our table to find out what we were all about.

Unlike the other stands in the festival, which made no reference to migrants' rights, ours exhibited well-known slogans of the migrant rights movement: hanging from the ceiling of the tent, there was a banner that read "we migrate to live." Right next to the tent, a banner stood listing the main rights migrants now have under Argentina's migration law, while another listed the services provided by the organization as a migrant women's rights organization. The brochures were varied and included many on household workers' rights. One of them, published by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, held the entire text of Law 26844 of the

Special Regime of Labor Contract for the Personnel of Private Households and showed female figures cooking, cleaning, and caring. Others, published by the organization, carried the legends “migrant and refugee woman worker of private household - without us the world does not move - help us help you – today you have the key to your rights – Law 26844 and Convention 189 ILO” and “migrant and refugee woman – worker of private household – help us help you – today you have the key to your rights – law 26844.” These showed images of a household worker swiping a sink and sweeping the floor of a bathroom.

As I and other volunteers set up the leaflets and brochures on the table, Natividad grabbed the microphone to call the attention of passersby to our table: “what are we? Neither maids, nor servants, we are workers of private households, with rights! You have rights! You are not alone! Inform yourself! Migrant woman worker of private household, you have the key to your rights in Law 26844! No more maids! No more servants! No more domestics! We have a right to a fair salary, to vacations, to a limited workday, to maternity leave! Help us help you!” As she kept on repeating the same phrases and the same list of rights all day long, people came by our table. The event was crowded, and we managed to get rid of practically all the informational material we had brought for the day. There were passersby curious to know more about what we did. Then there were others who shared their problems with us. One man stopped by with his daughter. His wife was a household worker. She had been working informally and she had been fired with no severance pay after years of service. As other volunteers and I listened to and wrote down his concerns, next to his contact info we jotted down three letters—“TCP” (trabajadora de casa particular, “worker of private household”), to remind us to call them and follow up on the next business day.

In this panel, a language ideology of egalitarianism mediated between Natividad's forms of talk as an activist for household workers' rights and the social and juridical structures that frame household workers lives in contemporary Buenos Aires. Speaking from the position of a household worker (notice the "we"), by publicly claiming that "maids," "domestics," and "servants" are "no more" and announcing that "workers of private households" are what household workers "are," she made an explicit connection between the juridical structures that existed until recently, in which the lack of equal labor rights for household workers was the norm, and the ways in which such inequities were reflected in language use. She also made an explicit connection between the juridical structures of equal rights for household workers that now exist and that, from her perspective as an activist for household workers' rights, should be reflected in language use. Through her public announcements of what household workers are and are not, she also made an explicit claim not only about juridical structures, but most importantly, about transforming the social structures that continue to exist and in which despite significant advances in labor rights, household workers continue in many cases to be de facto treated as "maids," "domestics," or "servants." Her "no more!" was in this situation as much an announcement about household workers juridical position as much as it was a demand to bring about change to their social position, about advancing a more equitable social order in which the nature of work relationships between household workers and employers and the social, cultural, economic, and political valuations of household work and workers would change to the benefit of household workers. Made in a public place, Natividad's announcement asked to put an end to the treatment of household workers as "maids," "domestics," or "servants" so that they may be treated as "workers with rights" instead and consequently as equal subjects under the law. In this way, through her public forms of talk, she made an explicit connection between changes in labor law, the changes in society that such

legal changes should represent and the forms of talk that can signal such changes. This was even more evident when she spoke directly to household workers (notice the “you”) as a household worker, and listed some of the labor rights extant under the current legal framework, which did not exist in the previous legal framework that regulated paid household work. Natividad thus illustrated the ways in which exactly “maids,” “domestics,” and “servants” are “no more” and thus the ways in which “workers in private households” exist instead in the current social and juridical order.

2.7 Conclusion: Language Use as “Worker Empowerment” and “Political Positionality”

In this chapter, I have argued that the recent transition from primarily customary ways of regulation of paid household work, which includes economies of reciprocity, structures of pseudo-kinship, and patronage, to increasingly contractual modes of regulation of this labor in Argentina finds its expression in the linguistic practices of household workers’ rights activists. Their linguistic practices in everyday life speak of a larger context of not only juridical, but also sociocultural, changes regarding the regulation of paid household work. I have identified the ways in which activists’ linguistic practices are best conceived as mediated by a language ideology and shown the ways in which they are, specifically, reflective of what I call “a language ideology of egalitarianism.” I have shown the ways in which this language ideology of egalitarianism is illustrated in action in the daily work of household workers’ rights activists: in public presentations of the organization’s research, while walking around in the streets handing out informational leaflets, in *AMUMRA*’s office during consultations between activists and household workers,

during educational activities in the neighborhoods where household workers live, while preparing capacity-building workshops for household workers in *AMUMRA*'s office, and during the Itinerant Tent for the Human Rights of Migrant Women. I have argued that activists' uses of language in regard to household work are illustrative of a language ideology of egalitarianism-in-action when considering the ways in which activists' use of what I call "counter-hegemonic indexicals" is grounded in an ideology of equality and justice for household workers, and is an integral part of their activist praxis of disrupting the status quo as far as the position of household workers in Argentinian society is concerned. At its core, activists' counter-hegemonic uses of language were as much about highlighting existing structural inequalities that household workers suffer and advancing ways of speaking conducive to questioning such inequalities as they were about promoting access to rights, and consequently, full citizenship for household workers. This was well expressed in my interview with Lucía, one of *AMUMRA*'s activists, and an excerpt of which I include below:

In the beginning I was quite reticent [about the language use] because I was coming at it reading researchers, anthropologists, sociologists, studying about "domestic work," and truth be told in the beginning I used to fight a lot with [one of the activists of the organization] because I was like, "well, from the [academic] spaces this is how people always talk [about household work]." And she used to tell me "no, because researchers talk wrong, because they do not know us" [...] And then I understood that it was not so much the fight over who was right or wrong, it was like we were talking about different things. And well, if I am here [at the organization], I have to choose from which site to talk, and I think in the other [i.e., the academic site], I also have to choose from which site to talk, because meanings

can also be problematized. I feel that it is a little bit like the issue of inclusive language now that is quite in vogue, that if I put an “x” on a word changes the meaning or not [(e.g., “latinx”)], or [whether] it is a matter of fashion, or aesthetics, or whatever. And for me it is the same thing [with language regarding household work]: if you think that language what it does is highlighting power relations all the time, naming in one way or another does have many consequences in people’s common sense [...] Recently we had a meeting [...] And there was a long table, you had Natividad on one side, and a guy [from another household workers’ rights institution] in front of her, and Natividad talking all the time about “workers of private households” and this man speaking the whole time about “domestic service,” “domestic employment.” And Natividad stated her case as of why it was important [that he do not say that] and the guy continued speaking in his own language. So I say, when someone is telling you why it is important for that person who is highlighting things and you pretend it is nothing, there is a clear dispute over power between who speaks how and why continuing to name something one way and not another [...] So when I understood all of this about power relations, about the things that they [household workers] struggled with and everything, [I thought], “hold on, they are right, it is not the same that I say ‘domestic employees’” [...] [Using terms like “non-registered work” vs. “work in black”] is a political positionality, it is clearly a political positionality, meaning if you went through a process of thinking that the meaning was racist in that word and you choose not to use it anymore, you are positioning yourself politically on which language to use and from there how to explain things to people [...] For some time I was working

at an NGO [...] that was like this, [like AMUMRA], that people [should] have access to knowing the law, and their rights and exercising them without having to have a lawyer act as a mediator or having everything end up in a lawsuit with a judge. *And I think that is the paradigm at AMUMRA, that not everything [should] end up in the hands of lawyers or the justice system and that the person [affected by it] be alien to all of that world; there are things that can be resolved with the person knowing her rights and being able to generate her own strategies in terms of what is most convenient for her. I think that is also AMUMRA's strategy: you need to know the law, you need to know your context and figure out what is most convenient for you and not leave everything in the hands of other people [...] Speaking of "workers of private households" the way it is thought about in AMUMRA is a whole political positioning, is "know the law," is "you are capable of solving your problems," is being part [of something bigger].* And speaking of "domestic employees" in my view it continues to be very much linked to the language of employers. They are the ones who, their entire lives, reproduce that language, mark those distances of class as if it was a matter of servitude of other times [...] But I also think there are other reasons why those words are used as well—to mark a distance; these are jobs that take place within homes that the only thing that is at play there is not only "I contract your labor force," there is a lot of affection, there are many things in the middle that are the things that are seen in the firings. In the firings is when all those terms that have never, ever been used are used: "she was our employee, she this or that," that language of formality and distance is highlighted in those moments when the bond has broken. [...] *Also, I think that*

from being an “employee” to being a “worker” it also marks a difference, right? Because the word “worker” makes you belong to a collectivity of “workers,” [like you are] being part of something else. I feel that the word “employee” is even more individualistic, it is between your employer and you. And all social movements here use the word “worker” to feel part of the collectivity [of workers]: the General Confederation of Workers, workers of this, workers of that [...] so for me it also has to do with taking the stand of being a part of, from this place, [being] able to make complaints, do things. It empowers you a little bit more, just the fact of thinking of yourself as a worker, as a larger collectivity than you and your particular situation of employment (emphasis added).

In her narrative, not only does Lucía thoughtfully show and explicate the various characteristics of the language ideology of egalitarianism that mediates activists’ counter-hegemonic linguistic practices, illustrating the entire argument I have made throughout this chapter. She also makes an explicit connection between the promotion of counter-hegemonic uses of language and what she names as the strategies that *AMUMRA* promotes and that workers can use in order to, indeed, access their rights as household workers in everyday life. These strategies, as Lucía alludes to in her narrative, are not only about promoting the use of counter-hegemonic language forms that would lead workers to conceive of themselves as “workers,” of their employers as “employers,” and of their work as “work.” These strategies are also about equipping workers with the tools necessary to take charge of their situations and thus become part of a larger collectivity of “workers” like them. In other words, and as Lucía puts it above, these strategies are about worker empowerment. As I will show in the next chapter, such tools include not only teaching workers about the law and their rights and obligations within it; they include also

promoting the use of other, para-contractual strategies by workers as crucial ways to access full citizenship in a context of entrenched, intersectional, structural inequalities. It is to a discussion of activists' promotion of such strategies for use by household workers that I now turn.

3.0 “We Gotta Be Strategic, *Compañeras*”: Doing Difference and Dramaturgical Citizenship in Paid Household Work

3.1 Introduction: “You Catch More Flies with a Drop of Honey than with a Barrel of Vinegar”

It was a weekday afternoon, and I had arrived at the Capacity Building School of Domestic Service Personnel (hereafter, “the School”) to observe one of the classes that the School teaches to household workers. As I reached the reception, I told the School’s secretary that I was there to observe one of the classes and showed her the letter of authorization I had been given by the Director. She seemed to know what I was going to do there and after reading the letter instructed me to wait in the waiting room with the household workers-students, who were waiting to go into their classroom. They were discussing different dishes they had made for what I later learned was homework for a cooking class they were taking at the school that day, which I also got to observe after the class I was waiting to access. The secretary called me back in to introduce me to the teacher. We greeted and, as I explained to her that I had come to observe her class and other classes offered at the School, the secretary asked the students to go in, up to the second floor where the class was going to take place. As I was chatting with the teacher, who was a very cordial woman in her 60s and a retired high school history teacher, she encouraged me to take the elevator with her, and as we did I told her a little bit more about my research project and what I was doing there at the School. I sat in the back of the classroom with two student-workers. Then the teacher introduced me to the class, explaining who I was and what I was going to be doing there. I then

became just another student for the day, participating in all the activities carried out by the students while observing what they and the teacher were doing.

The class started with a little chit-chat between the teacher and students about a student being sick, before moving into the material for the day. The class began with the teacher asking “what was the title of the course?” to which the students replied “The Occupational Project.” The course was about “one’s life project,” “the way one sees oneself in the future,” about their “work project” and about figuring out one’s “skills and defects.” This particular class, the teacher explained, was going to be about “where to build our capacity and how to look for a job” and mentioned that, among other things, that included figuring out “our strengths, weaknesses, and temperament;” and that when it comes to looking for and finding a job, “one conquers the other person with a little bit of sweetness. It is always important to be good with the other person, one has to know how to tame the beast.” The other person in this scenario was the employer or the potential employer, the people with whom the students would be working.

We then carried out an exercise in small groups in which students were taught how to make use of classified newspaper ads in order to find a job. After working like this for a little while, we resumed as a large group again. As the teacher and students discussed the different kinds of classified ads, the teacher explained the importance of “reading very well the requirements for the job” as well as of leaving a job “with one’s head held high,” which prompted a class discussion on the importance of leaving a previous job “on good terms because one never knows,” and to never say negative things about a previous job. Then the teacher talked about the job interview itself, and on the importance of making “a good impression,” as the students took notes diligently. This is a theme that was reiterated in my second observation of this course, which took place the

following week in a class that covered the ins and outs of putting together a CV and doing a job interview.

As the teacher explained what a CV was, how to put one together, and the “do’s” and “don’t’s” of it, the students listened to her attentively. A discussion ensued on what information to include, and what information not to put on the CV. Then the teacher moved on to talk about the job interview itself. “A job interview is your personal presentation,” she said, noting that it was useful for the worker to determine “your schedule, the place [where you will be working], as well as which person [you will] deal with [i.e., who your employer would be were you to take the job]... You should arrive 10 minutes early [to the job interview], look around the neighborhood, look around the place... The ones who must look after our appearance the most is us [i.e., the workers as opposed to the potential employers]: no sneakers, no mini skirts, not lots of make-up, only a little bit to lighten up our faces. No calling attention to me, no high heels. Being very neat... I go in, I sit down, I do not show my anxiety, no looking down as if I was a poor thing, look under the eyes [of the potential employer instead of directly into their eyes], look after our gestures—no touching our ears, nose, or laughing loudly, not showing excessive closeness, no informal forms of address, responding [to their questions]... [If they ask us] “and why did you leave your previous job?” do not say “because the señora was unbearable;” say something like “because it was far away, because there wasn’t much to do, because the children were grown up.” Do not talk about your husband, or kids, or anything. I ask of you girls that you clarify everything [in terms of the job responsibilities]: if there are pets or if there aren’t, how many children you need to look after, which activities you need to carry out with the children—that which pertains to domestic service.” One student-worker interjected “we need to ask if we have to wash the car as well,” and other student-workers laughed. Then the teacher added “everything I am interested in knowing, in being

clear on, I ask. I also say I can give an answer by tomorrow and I thank them for the interview.” Then the teacher asked if there were questions about this and then they proceeded to do a role-play exercise, with one student pretending to be the potential employer, another one pretending to be a current employee, and another one pretending to be a potential employee, while the rest of the class, as the teacher put it would be “the judges” on how well they did.

From my observations in these two classes, it was clear that, according to the teacher, getting a job as a household worker and keeping it is at least as much about what Goffman (1959) would call “image management” as it is about knowing how to do the work. According to the teacher, it is in the interest of the students-workers to be punctual to a job interview and to engage in very specific styles of dress, make-up, body language, voice, and forms of address, as a way to seem an appropriate person in the eyes of a prospective employer. For the teacher, it is also often necessary to lie about the reasons for leaving a previous job as well as to refrain from voluntarily disclosing personal information, as a way to appear to be a peaceful and hireable worker. It is also necessary to clarify from the beginning all the responsibilities the job is going to entail and to show gratitude for the interview as a way to seem grateful and hence employable. For the teacher, image management is also crucial when it comes to accessing labor rights:

[...] Most of them [household workers] work with the fear of being fired. I have had girls [in my class] who work “in black” and when I tell them “you have to talk to your employer and tell him/her [to register the work relationship] they tell me “yes, but she doesn’t want to hear a thing about it, she told me that we are brainwashed here [at the School].” And well, there I cannot do anything. I mean, you tell them, you warn them, you explain to them, you teach them, but it is them [the workers] the ones who have to act... Because I am telling you, you hear and

see everything [...] Such as employers who, when they know the girls [i.e., the household workers] are about to leave the house to come here [to the School], impose on them something to do or make them go somewhere so that she [the household worker] won't come here. There was one employer who put her [the worker] between a rock and a hard place, and she had to choose between her job and the School. The girl chose the School and lost her job. Things like that. Or, for example, another one [employer] who did not pay her [the worker] the mid-year and end-of-year bonus and gave her presents instead of paying her the bonus [...]

[When it comes to confronting the employer], I always tell them: the nuns at school taught me something: you catch more flies with a drop of honey than with a barrel of vinegar. So [I tell them to proceed] always with sweetness, always with kindness, and never by confrontation. So, [it would go something like this], "ma'am, I have to talk to you because, well, you know there is a law and here" [she lowers her voice when imitating the hypothetical worker] and she [the worker] explains to her [the employer] the law, where there is fault [on the employer's part] you see? There are people; I am telling you, the people who have them "in white" have no problems, they are aware of the law, they know. The issue is the people who refuse to put the employee "in white," who do not want to know anything about the law and do not want to learn about it either [...]

[With those people, you go] well, slowly [she gestures as if she was screwing a screw]. [You go] slowly, making some comment [...]

According to the teacher, it is in the interest of students-workers to manifest kindness, sweetness, diplomacy, pedagogy, patience, and indirectness with their employers towards the goal

of getting employers to register the work relationship formally. Getting a job and accessing formal labor rights in it then entails putting on a show and engaging in a performance of amicability, punctuality, deference, formality, agreeableness, gratitude, kindness, sweetness, diplomacy, pedagogy, patience, and indirectness on the workers' part. In this chapter, I analyze the frequent promotion by activists of these kinds of performative practices as ways to access formal labor rights. I draw from West and Fenstermaker (1995) to frame my understanding of activists' promotion of the deliberate exercise of performative practices as "doing difference" in the context of intersectional, structural inequality. I argue that household workers' rights activists encourage household workers to "do difference" in order to "undo it" (Deutsch 2007). Activists encourage workers to engage in practices that would facilitate their ability to overcome some of the inequalities that mark their everyday lives. In this way, I argue that these practices represent a form of what, drawing on Goffman's metaphor, I call "dramaturgical citizenship," because it is by exercising these performative practices that household workers access labor rights in everyday life.

For activists, the promotion of "dramaturgical citizenship" aims to instill a consciousness in workers of the ways in which employers are not "family," the houses where they work are their "workplaces," and the ways in which the relationships they establish with the families they work for are those of contract. The dramaturgy thus has the aim of promoting a different conceptualization among household workers of the households where they work, of their employers, of the families they work for, and of their work. From the point of view of activists, these themes should also be symbolically conceptualized by workers in the context of transition from customary to contractual modes of regulating paid household work.

3.2 Doing Difference, Undoing Difference, Accessing Labor Rights

Social interaction is defined by Goffman (1959) as the capacity of persons to influence one another's behavior in the presence of one another. Utilizing a dramaturgical metaphor, social interaction is then defined as a stage that includes "participants" acting as "performers," "audience," "observers" or "co-performers." These different participants, in turn, engage in what he coins as a "part" or "routine," meaning the specific sets of behaviors that would be expected of participants in a given social interaction according to what is conceived to be socially acceptable in a given social circumstance. In this way, people occupy different social roles, where participants enact behavior in line with the positions that they occupy in a given social circumstance and context.

The enactment of performances for different social roles will in turn necessitate what Goffman (1959) defines as a "front," which includes, in addition to a "setting," a "personal front," which performers must put on when carrying out a performance in social life. For Goffman, successfully putting on a "personal front" in order to carry out a performance in social life would involve, among other things, cultivating "expressive control," by achieving consistency in performances before a particular audience so that coherence in the performance could be maintained. Goffman argues that performances vary according to whether they take place in the "front region" or the "back region." The "front region" is limited to the area of social life where the "performer" wants to make an impression on the "audience." The "back region" is limited to the area of social life where the "performer" feels free to act in ways that, were they to occur in front of the "audience," could damage the "performance." Such differentiations between "front" and "back" regions symbolically divide spaces and places in social life.

In this framework, successful performances in social interaction entail “defensive attributes and practices” (Goffman 1959, p. 212). These include “dramaturgical loyalty,” “dramaturgical discipline,” and “dramaturgical circumspection.” “Dramaturgical loyalty” entails engaging in a tacit agreement between performers not to make the audience aware of anything happening in the back region of the performance, so as not to “betray” it. “Dramaturgical discipline” involves rigorously adhering to the performance and swiftly correcting any mistakes that may occur in it in order to save face or salvage the performance. “Dramaturgical circumspection” entails that performers plan the performance’s execution ahead of time in order to devise the necessary measures for it to be successful, including anticipating adaptation during the performance itself.

Like the teacher in the School in the vignette I begin this chapter with, household workers’ rights’ activists frequently advised household workers to become such performers before their employer audience, playing a part by putting on a “front” in order to access labor rights in everyday life. Consultations between activists and workers and capacity-building workshops in *AMUMRA*’s office, in the locales of other community organizations, or in workers’ homes became the back regions, while workers’ direct interactions with their employers in the households where they worked were the front regions of their performances. Workers were frequently instructed to engage in dramaturgical loyalty, discipline, and circumspection. Activists’ encouragement of putting on such a show was not, however, merely about encouraging workers to occupy temporarily a given social role. It was also about acknowledging the ways in which household workers would be held accountable to their gender, their class, their race, and I may also add in this case, their ethnicity and nationality (West and Fenstermaker 1995). As people who were nearly all women, working-class, often migrant, and often of color who were interacting with employers who were frequently women, almost exclusively upper-middle class, almost exclusively Argentinian, and white in the

context of a city marred by systemic inequalities of gender, class, nationality, race, and ethnicity, activists' work was not only about suggesting that workers take on a certain role, but also about advising them on how best to navigate the inequalities that they experienced by virtue of occupying unequal positions in an unequal sociocultural structure.

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), while roles can be put on and left off at will, in the context of a society organized on the basis of gender inequality, it is not possible to choose how others will perceive our gender, as even "passing" in order to be successful will need to be enacted according to normative parameters of gender performance. A similar assessment, West and Fenstermaker (1995) argue, can be said of class and race, and I may add ethnicity and nationality. Gender, race, and class, argue the authors, are then not a "role" but a "doing," something that is accomplished in everyday life. People "do" gender, race, and class in their daily interactions with others who will perceive them as, in the case of household workers vis-à-vis their employers, as poor, often migrant, women of color and as consequently occupying socially lower positions vis-à-vis their employers. Employers' perceptions of household workers as working-class migrant women of color with the concomitant set of expectations on the part of employers on how household workers, because of their gender, race, ethnicity, and class, should behave in relation to their employers are perceptions over which household workers have no control.

As will be shown below, activists' strategies for household workers' access to labor rights in everyday life takes into consideration the ways in which household workers are not only being held accountable for their *roles* as household workers, but also to the *master categories* of gender, race, nationality, and, most importantly in Argentina, class. For women who are working-class, often migrant, and often of color, failure to comply to class, gender, migrant, and ethno-racial accountability could have significant consequences. At the same time, activists promote that

workers navigate gender, class, and racial accountability in order to access labor rights and thus in order to overcome, in some ways, extant inequalities in everyday life. In this way, they encourage workers to set out to “undo” gender, class, and racial inequality (Deutsch 2007) by accessing labor rights through their compliance with normative gendered, classed, and racialized behavior as working-class, migrant women of color, rendering “interaction as a site of change” (Deutsch 2007, p. 121).

Activists’ promotion of specific gendered, classed, and racialized performances on the part of household workers in relation to their employers had the aim of reducing social differences between household workers and their employers, through an instrumental use of gendered, classed, and racialized normative behavior. The strategies promoted by activists were at the level of interaction in the context of institutional—in this case, legal—change. Activists advised workers to behave within conventional behavior vis-à-vis their employers in order to access rights in everyday life in ways that would enable workers to gain as much as they could from situations in which their agency was constrained and in ways in which their economic situation would not be put at risk by behaving confrontationally. It is to a discussion of such scenarios that I now turn.

3.3 “Don’t Tell Her the Words ‘Severance Pay’”

It was an afternoon like any other, and Ruth (whom we met in the previous chapter) and I were hanging out while we were waiting for Alma to arrive. Ruth was a Peruvian caretaker of elderly people in her early fifties who had been living in Buenos Aires for four years. She was a regular migrant and a separated mother of two adult daughters who were, at the time, living in

Peru along with Ruth's grandchildren. Other than her brother, who had been living in Buenos Aires for the past 20 years, Ruth did not have any other family in Argentina. Ever since she arrived in the country she had been working as a caretaker of older adults. Ruth wanted to meet with Alma because she needed to consult her on her current situation with two of her employers. One situation involved two siblings who had been employing her for the past 10 months, most of that time as a registered worker, to take care of their elderly parents, a couple in their late 80s who both suffered from a degenerative neurological disease. The other case involved a woman in her 50s who was the daughter of an elderly woman whom Ruth had been taking care of for the past two years with whom tension had arisen recently and who had been deliberately delaying registering the work relationship with Ruth. As Alma arrived, her and I chatted briefly about another case of another household worker she was at the time dealing with and about a capacity-building workshop we would be carrying out the following weekend in partnership with another community organization. This happened often—Alma used to joke that I was “her assistant,” as I followed the cases she attended closely and served as a sort of liaison between her and the household workers who approached the organization. As Alma settled in, we jumped into talking about Ruth's current situation.

After discussing at some length her predicament with her employer of two years, Ruth proceeded to tell Alma about her other job: “It was a secure job for me” she told Alma, “their children asked me to please take it because nobody else would.” Ruth had started the work relationship being paid by the hour and a few months before her consultation with Alma had switched to being paid on a monthly basis. Her salary was within the minimum salary stipulated by the government for home caretakers like her. Given that Ruth needed the job, she took it. The job was stressful for her and the compensation not commensurate with the difficulty of it, as she

was charging her employers an hourly rate that was, at the time of her employment, usually charged for the care of just one person, not two. When she began working for her employers, she had told them that if the couple in her care became used to her, she and her employers would later talk about a raise, given that there were two people in her care, not just one. But as Ruth put it “10 months have passed and nothing:” she had never gotten a raise.

There had been times Ruth had gotten to the house where she worked and the gas was open or the elderly couple in her care had locked themselves in. There had also been instances in which they did not recognize who she was or thought someone had stolen from them and they had called the police. There had been other times in which they kicked her out of the house and shut the door in her face. She also often struggled with convincing them that they had already taken their medications. The job was both dangerous and stressful to the point that at times Ruth felt dizzy due to the stress she was going through. But she needed the job, so despite the challenges it entailed, she was willing to stay in it. She was working six hours a day, from the morning until the early afternoon, Monday through Friday, and then her employers had asked her if she could work 3 more hours a day, which she had accepted. So, Ruth and her employers had agreed that at the end of the month she would receive a salary raise so that she could work the additional hours they had asked her to work for them. But in the end, it seemed they had figured that it was going to be too expensive for them to do that and had gotten someone else instead. Her employers had recently told her that they had found a live-in caretaker to replace her and that their work relationship would, therefore, last only until the end of the month. So, Ruth wanted to know how much her final compensation should be, given that she was not resigning but that her employers, whom she lauded as “good people,” were firing her.

“We already got someone else, Ruth, but we do not want to lose you, we still want to keep you because mom and dad have become used to you. We are going to give you 4 hours Saturday and Sunday so that we don’t lose you; perhaps they do not get used to the new person,” had, according to Ruth, her employers told her. So, Ruth told them that 4 hours on Saturday and Sunday did not cut it for her, and that she preferred a salary settlement instead. Besides, she already had, thankfully, as she put it, found a job as a live-in worker in the weekends in which she clocked in on Saturday evening and clocked-out Monday morning. So, she agreed with her employers for them to pay her a salary settlement. At the same time, as Alma prodded Ruth exactly on how that was going to happen, it was clear there was no clarity to it, at least not yet: Ruth’s employers had not sent her a certified letter firing her, they had not mentioned how much money they were going to pay her, had not mentioned when that was going to happen, or whether they would go to the household workers’ court to do that. They hadn’t mentioned either whether they would, in the end, compensate Ruth for the three months she had worked as an unregistered worker, and Alma had a strong suspicion they wouldn’t. Ruth was working under the assumption that her employers would pay her severance pay at the end of the month when her salary was due, but she hadn’t really discussed any of the details with her employers. She was very understanding of her employers: she seemed to trust the fact that no discussion had taken place between her and her employers about any of this simply because her employers were not aware of the law and because she was the first household worker they had ever hired. She saw them as young and inexperienced, even though they were both middle-class professionals in their 30s.

Alma clarified to Ruth that, in her situation, her employers were obligated to give her severance pay, not a salary settlement, because she was not resigning, they were firing her. She explained to Ruth the difference between the two, and that in her case, she was entitled to seniority,

notification, proportional vacation days, proportional yearly bonus, 1 month salary, and calculated the amount of money they would owe her, which was more than three times her monthly salary. Alma was not sure they would be willing to pay Ruth all of that and she had a strong suspicion that they would offer her an amount of money that did not correspond with what Ruth was entitled to by law. “Perhaps she [her employer] will suddenly tell me that she is not [actually] firing me because she wants to keep me Saturday and Sunday,” said Ruth, to which Alma clarified that, were her conditions of employment to change from Monday-Friday 6 hours to Saturday-Sunday 4 hours it would not be “keeping her” because her job would radically change so they would be, effectively, firing her. In fact, as Alma explained both Ruth and I, it was illegal for employers to do that. In addition to explaining to Ruth the difference between a salary settlement and a severance pay, Alma explained to Ruth what her rights would be if, say, her employers did not officially end the work relationship. These rights included initiating legal actions against them. Alma advised Ruth to, at the end of the month, sign the receipt of her salary when she got paid for it, but not to sign anything else: if the receipt included the proportion of vacation days and yearly bonus Ruth, Alma advised her, should not sign it, because in that way she would be effectively accepting a salary settlement and her resignation.

Ruth listened to Alma attentively but was unsure on how to broach the subject with her employers. So, Alma advised her to tell them directly that they send her the certified letter in order to notify her of her dismissal. “Let’s see what they say” said Alma. She strongly suspected that they would refuse to do so—the way things were happening she could “see it coming”: that they would tell Ruth that a letter of dismissal was not necessary because they were not firing her but were instead giving her another schedule, that they did not want to lose her, that perhaps they might need her again in the future, that they still would want to take her into account, that they

would want for her to stay with them. Ruth in fact concurred with Alma in that this is, pretty much, what they had told her: that they might call her in the future because they might need her, that the new live-in worker had two children and might ask for leave sometime. But Ruth was clear that the relationship needed to formally come to an end and that she was not willing to wait for the hypothetical leave that the new person might ask in order for her to receive her severance pay. This was all, according to Alma “a typical strategy” on the part of employers to avoid paying workers, in this case Ruth, the severance pay. Ruth could, if she wanted to, wait for them to hire her again in the future, but in the meantime, according to Alma, they should pay her what they owed her now. And Ruth could not agree more: she knew “how to make employers respect her rights” so that they would not “get to her,” always sought help, and “never stayed” with her “arms crossed.” So she had in fact told her employers that she was ok with the fact that they perhaps hire her again in the future, that she understood that it was not convenient for them to employ her beyond the end of the month, but that they needed to settle the relationship now.

Alma and Ruth devised a course of action after Alma did the math: if at the end of the month when Ruth picked up her salary her employers paid her more or less three and a quarter times her salary in severance pay, it would not be a bad deal, if they paid her a lot less, she could file a legal complaint, which would make them a little bit worried as it would put pressure on them. So after talking to Alma, Ruth decided that she would, at the end of the month, go pick up her salary, and if her employer did not bring up the severance pay, she would. “Watch out how to go about it, go calm,” said Alma. “Ask her what she is going to pay you, and how she is going to pay you, meaning how much, in what way, and in concept of what, because in reality, what is she paying you? Because if she is firing you, she has to send you the dismissal letter, and she is not sending that” said Alma. So, Ruth figured that if her employer only included her monthly salary,

she would receive it, sign the receipt, and tell her employer “you have to pay me my severance pay.” Alma advised her against that: “no, don’t tell her anything, I mean, do whatever you want. If not tell her ‘It seems to me there is money missing,’ don’t tell her the words ‘severance pay’ because she is going to realize that you sought legal counsel, and perhaps she gets angry. Tell her that in actuality there is money missing, that she is firing you, and we see what she says. I see it coming: in actuality they do not consider this [severance pay] money, they consider that you have to be paid your salary and a little bit more that they are going to give you. They are going to consider they are doing you a favor by paying you the vacation days and the bonus, and they might add 4000 pesos or so,” said Alma. “Yes, they are going to say, ‘we are going to pay you 15 more days.’ So, what do I tell her in that moment? ‘no señorita, go and find out well, do the research, find out that there is money missing, and call me, or call me until x day and I will see what I do (in a conciliatory tone)” said Ruth. “That is right” replied Alma.

In this vignette, Ruth’s consultation with Alma and Ruth’s negotiation of severance pay with her employers are best conceived as two regions of the same performance. Ruth’s consultation with Alma, in a café right next to AMUMRA’s office, way outside the range of her employers’ sight and completely outside her workplace, is the back region of her performance. Everything she discussed with Alma during her consultation was certainly not information she would have felt at liberty to discuss in front of her employers, given that it would have harmed her performance in front of them. The conversation with her employers in which she was planning to negotiate her severance pay is the front region of her performance, since it is in that instance that Ruth was going to engage as a performer with her employers as her audience, when playing the part of negotiator of her labor rights and specifically her right to severance pay with them. Playing this part, as Alma advised her, entailed putting on a personal front that would require engaging in dramaturgical

loyalty, discipline, and circumspection. Ruth was not to disclose anything Alma and she were discussing during the consultation in front of Ruth's employers so as not to betray the performance. Ruth was also to do during the performance exactly as instructed by Alma and, by devising together how the performance was going to take place, Ruth was also to anticipate her employers' reactions and execute planned steps during the performance in response to her employers' reactions.

To access her severance pay, Ruth was to exercise refusal if her monthly paycheck included other benefits, in order to avoid inadvertently accepting that she was resigning. She was to exercise calmness and caution when broaching the subject of her severance pay, asking about the details of her payment but without mentioning the words "severance pay." She was under no circumstance to let her employers know that she had consulted with an activist of a migrant women's organization that focuses on advancing the rights of household workers on her labor rights. She was thus to pretend in front of her employers that she knew less than she actually knew about her labor rights in order to be able to access them. In the event that her employers gave her less than what she was entitled to by law in terms of severance pay, she was to let them know that she was under the impression that the sum should have been higher, not that she knew that for a fact. She was to be inquisitive but not confrontational, and if her employer refused to pay her in full, Ruth was to patiently encourage her to find out for herself how much it was exactly that she was obligated to pay. Ruth was not ever to lose her cool with her employers and was instead to exercise expressive control at all times.

Alma's encouragement of the exercise of calmness, caution, concealment, and patience on the part of Ruth did not put only the role of "negotiator" onto Ruth. It entailed simultaneously encouraging Ruth to adhere to gendered, classed, and racialized normative behavior so that she

could avoid the risk of being held accountable to the consequences of transgressing such behavior, which would have made it difficult if not impossible to access her labor rights. Ruth's position as a working-class Peruvian migrant woman put her at a lower, structurally differentiated position vis-à-vis her middle-class Argentinian employers. It was also quite evident in Alma's assessment that, very likely, Ruth's employers would consider that they were doing Ruth a favor by compensating her beyond her final salary at the end of the work relationship, not that they would be complying with obligations as employers.

From Ruth's narrative, it was evident that Ruth's employers felt entitled to her labor and consequently felt entitled to dispose of it as they best deemed fit: this was clear in their proposal to Ruth to "change her schedule" by drastically reducing her number of working hours, changing her workdays, not giving her a raise, and asking her to be on standby in case the new live-in worker took a leave or the elderly couple did not get used to her. For Ruth's employers to make these kinds of suggestions to Ruth was normative, or as Alma put it, "typical" of middle-class behavior vis-à-vis working-class household workers like Ruth, despite the fact that these proposals were against the law. Ruth's employers did not seem to find their suggestions problematic, or be concerned that they would be held accountable for their behavior in any way, or that their behavior would put them at risk of class, racial, or gender assessment of any kind, precisely because their behavior was not transgressive but, in the context of systemic sexism, classism, and racism, it was normative.

At the same time, Ruth was indeed at the risk of class, gender, and racial assessment if she showed them that she had sought legal counsel regarding her rights as a worker and that in fact she knew more than they thought she knew about her rights as a worker. She was also at risk of class, gender, and racial assessment if she was confrontational about asking her employers about her

severance pay and if she was impatient with her employer in the case that her employer refused to pay her severance pay in full altogether. Ruth's best option as advised by Alma was then to do difference in order to undo it: to access her labor rights by means of a performance as a working-class migrant woman that would not overtly challenge long-standing normative, discriminatory cultural understandings of class, race, and gender. Instead, she was to undo difference covertly, or, as I call it, she was to access citizenship dramaturgically.

3.4 “Those Things You Must Record with the Recorder”

It was a Tuesday afternoon like any other, and Diana had come into the office of AMUMRA to consult with Alma on her current situation. Diana was a Peruvian caretaker in her mid-sixties who had been living in Argentina for the past fifteen years, and who had been a naturalized Argentine citizen for the past four. Her daughter, who was one of Diana's five children, had been the first in Diana's family to migrate to Argentina, settling down in a small city in the middle of Buenos Aires province. When her daughter migrated, she had left her children to the care of Diana, and Diana and her grandchildren joined Diana's daughter in Argentina two years later. Diana settled with her daughter when she first arrived in Argentina but, given that she could not find work in the city where her daughter lived, she moved to Buenos Aires city in search of work. She had always worked as a caretaker in Argentina, and for the past nine years she had been working as a live-in caretaker of an elderly man in a middle-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

As Diana arrived in AMUMRA's office and made herself comfortable, she began telling Alma about her current predicament with her employers, while another volunteer worked on other things at her desk, and I listened and observed the consultation. Diana mentioned that for the past almost decade working as a live-in caretaker she had had no rest: she worked on national holidays, and if she had any errands to run, she had to do so during the five hours or so in which the señor, as she called him, was not there. She had to be always conscientious to return to the house by the time he got back. That afternoon, when she visited AMUMRA's office, she was in fact conscientious about going back to the house before her employer got back. He did not know that going to AMUMRA's office is what Diana was doing that afternoon. He did not like her leaving the house and rarely did he give her a day off, only on days when he was not in the house either, usually on Sundays. The "señor" was an elderly man in his late 80s who, while healthy when Diana first started working at his house, was now showing the signs of a degenerative neurological disease. He was her official employer on paper and used to pay for her salary from his pension money, but as of late his children had become her de facto employers. He was, according to Diana, a "very good" and a "calm" person. While her workplace was also her abode, Diana did not have a place in it that she could call her own. As she had been given by her employers "a room that was not for anybody to live there" she had moved to the common room of the small apartment where she lived and worked and slept in the sofa bed there.

Diana's official employer had four children who were business owners and whom, in another occasion, Diana had told me were snobbish upper-class people. While Diana first began working for her employer as a caretaker, her duties had over the years been increased to include cleaning responsibilities given that another household worker who used to work as a live-out cleaner twice a week had quit. She had to, as she put it, "do everything," even "combing his [the

señor's] hair because he says he doesn't know how to do it." Diana had expressed to me, at an earlier time, how hard this job was: it was "very stressful to be with an elderly person all day."

Diana was in a predicament with her employers for various reasons. She had asked them to grant her one month of vacation so that she could travel to Peru, offering them for her daughter to replace her during the time she would be gone, as she had done in other occasions, but her employers were refusing to accept her request, insisting that she was only entitled to 21 days of vacation (which by law was the case since she had been employed by them less ten years). She had not been receiving consistent salary raises and had only had 1000 ARS of raise per year. She was being paid less than the minimum salary required by the government for workers in her category of live-in caretakers. But most importantly, according to Diana, was that they were refusing to compensate her for the time she had been working as an unregistered worker.

Diana's employers had registered the work relationship in the late 2000s a few months into her employment. But once the labor laws changed, in 2014 they stopped complying with their previous legal obligations toward her of paying for her health insurance and pension and with their new legal obligation of paying her accident insurance, under the premise that it was "too much money" and that given that Diana was not going to retire, there was no point in them paying her pension benefits given that "it is like throwing money away, and it is a lot of money." Diana had realized that she had become effectively an unregistered worker in 2014 given that she had stopped receiving the public transportation discount she used to receive when she was a registered worker. She had also gone to the office of ANSES (the Argentine equivalent of the Social Security Administration) to find out about her contributions situation and she was informed there that she did not show up as a formally employed household worker. So after she figured that out, she demanded from her employers that they register again the work relationship. Initially, they

pretended Diana was mistaken; they pretended that in fact she was registered when in truth she was not. “None of them showed any interest [in registering again the work relationship],” Diana told us. “So I told them that I needed that [the registration] because of my contributions [toward my pension benefits]; in addition I lied to them, I told them that they do not want to attend to me at the hospital [because I am not a registered worker], that I have to get a surgery,” said Diana.

Diana continued to insist that her employers register the work relationship until in 2017 they registered again the work relationship: “I made them tired to the point that they ‘put me in white.’ I was tired, tired that they did not do anything [about her registration]” and as she said this, she showed Alma the certified letter she had sent to her employer, via a lawyer from the Asistir Program of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security, demanding that her employers register the work relationship. Alma was surprised that Diana had “dared to send the letter,” as Alma put it, and that, moreover, she had continued working at her employer’s house: this was not common. Work relationships usually ended when workers sent certified letters, but Diana’s relationship with her employers had continued. This continuation had, however, entailed a deterioration of an already difficult work relationship. The day the letter arrived, she had surreptitiously told her employer, the abuelo (“grandfather”), as she called him, that “a letter had arrived.” She also mentioned to one of the abuelo’s children that “a letter had arrived,” to which he acknowledged he had received it and did not say anything to Diana, simply looked at her. The abuelo was angry about the fact that Diana had sent that letter, to the point of telling her “you with that letter fucked up my life,” to which she had asked him why he thought about it that way, since she was just “claiming that which is fair.” Her purpose in sending the letter, as she explained it to Alma, was not to quit her job, but to find a way to get her employers to register the work relationship.

At the time when she sent the letter, she also wanted to travel to Peru given that her mother was sick with a terminal disease, so she needed to go see her. Diana told us that when the letter arrived, her employers told her they would register the work relationship, that their accountant was taking care of that now given that the previous one had done things wrong. It appeared that her employers had first lied to Diana about the fact that she was not, in fact, working as a registered worker and that they had later blamed the lack of registration on a mistake on their accountant's part. Diana had a small transparent bag with all of her documents, which included her ID, her citizenship letter, copies of her last five salary receipts, and a copy of the telegram she had sent her employers to put pressure on them to register the work relationship. She showed these documents to Alma as she explained her situation to her.

Alma fumbled through Diana's documents and figured out that Diana had contributions from 2017 onwards and that she had been working as a non-registered worker from 2014 to 2017. Alma wanted to know what Diana's plans were. Given that her employer had a neurological degenerative disease, if Diana wanted to quit, sending her employer another letter would not be possible, even when he was her official employer on paper, which made things quite complicated. "I behaved in good faith with them and I thought that they were going to behave in good faith as well" told us Diana. She seemed to be quite disappointed in her employers because of their refusal to comply with what she was entitled to by law. She also seemed disappointed in the offer her employers had made her, which was to "reach an agreement" making it seem as if the three years she was not a registered worker she had gone on travel to Peru and then gone back to work or had done odd jobs twice a week at the señor's house. This was not a satisfactory solution for Diana. According to her, the señor's son had told her he had consulted with a friend of his who worked at AFIP (the Argentine equivalent of the Internal Revenue Service) to "fix" the lack of

registration between 2014 and 2017, but Diana felt that he had said that to her to “frighten” her. How the lack of registration would be “fixed” was not clear. Alma told Diana that if her employers regularized the situation with the missing contributions it wouldn’t be “a bad thing” and she thought it would be convenient for Diana, but she doubted the AFIP people would lend themselves to doing that. Alma wanted to know, among other things, whether Diana had the names and addresses of her employer’s children. She had the salary receipt with the address of one of them, but the trouble was that he no longer lived there as he had separated from his wife. He was now living in an apartment whose address Diana did not know, and she did not seem to have the address of the other children.

At that point the other volunteer, who was working on her own stuff but also listening at the same time, intervened in the consultation. It was apparent to Alma that Diana’s employers wanted to treat her “as if she was dumb” given the offer they had made her verbally about wanting to pretend she had either been on travel or working odd jobs during the three years she had not been working as a registered worker. So, the other volunteer said to Diana, “what you need to do is record some things with the recorder on your phone.” She also told Diana, pointing at her small pile of documents, that she shouldn’t leave any of them in her room: “you should not leave that in your room, that is totally dangerous, you should leave that with your daughter,” as it had become apparent to Diana that her employers had entered her room without her consent when she was not there, given that some of her salary receipts, which documented her work relationship with her employers up until 2014, had gone missing.

Alma explained to Diana what she would be entitled to by law were the work relationship to end. “I asked the son for a raise and he told me ‘no’ because ‘he also has employees and he doesn’t give them raises just like that’,” said Diana, to which the volunteer who was present at

the consultation in addition to Alma advised Diana: “those things you must record with the recorder, you take your phone squashed against you and in your pocket and you record [him saying that]. He doesn’t know you are recording him.” The volunteer gesticulated and showed Diana how to do that.

Diana wanted to go on vacation but, “was afraid of asking for my vacation and that they tell me that it is abandonment of work,” as she put it. In the past, the son of her employer had bought tickets for her to go to Peru with his credit card, which he later had discounted from her salary. Alma reassured her that “the abandonment of work is not configured just like that,” that it would entail an entire legal process of her employers sending her a telegram accusing her of that. Alma advised her to, in any case, formally notify her employers that she would be going on vacation so that there would be documentation of that. The volunteer who was present at the consultation in addition to Alma advised Diana to also agree “by word” with her employers that she would be going on vacation and asked her not to be “afraid” because she was “with a lawyer” now. If she was fired because of her going on vacation, so it would be.

Diana had only five salary receipts, but in any case, if she was fired, Alma explained to her, given that there was a record of the contributions from her employers, it would be possible for her to make a complaint about the missing ones. In any case, Alma told her, “it is not convenient for you to resign.” She explained to Diana that if the señor passed away, she would receive half a salary; if they fired her, she would receive a severance pay equal to nine salaries because of her seniority. “If you want to leave with money without arguing too much the best thing would be for them to fire you” said Alma. “We don’t know yet [if they are not going to pay you everything], if you want, we can make the complaint for those contributions, it can be done,

but I am not sure how they are going to take it. Perhaps in that moment we make them a little angry and they fire you and we make a complaint over everything [they owe you]” said Alma.

In this vignette, as in the previous one, Diana’s consultation with Alma and the other volunteer in *AMUMRA*’s office and her interactions with the *señor/abuelo* and his children in her workplace are best conceived as two regions of the same performance. Diana’s consultation in *AMUMRA*’s office is best understood as the back region of Diana’s performance, particularly when considering that she hid from the man in her care and his children the fact that she was visiting the office of *AMUMRA* that afternoon in order to figure out how to proceed with them in regards to her lack of registration. As with Ruth in the previous vignette, everything Diana discussed with the *AMUMRA* activists during her consultation was not information she would have felt at liberty to discuss in front of her employers, given that it would have certainly harmed her performance in front of them. The course of action she was going to take in front of her employers, whether she chose to stay in the job or generate the conditions to be fired, is best understood as the front region of her performance, since it is in those instances that Diana, like Ruth in the previous vignette, was going to engage as a performer and her employers as her audience when playing the part of negotiator of her labor rights with them. Playing this part entailed when in the setting of her workplace, putting on a personal front in which she would, like Ruth in the previous vignette, engage in dramaturgical loyalty, discipline, and circumspection. Like Ruth, Diana was not to disclose anything she and the *AMUMRA* volunteers had discussed during the consultation in front of Diana’s employers so as not to betray the performance. Like Ruth, Diana was also, during her performance, to do exactly as instructed by the *AMUMRA* volunteers and, by rehearsing with them how the performance was going to take place, Diana was to anticipate her employers’ reactions

and execute planned steps during the performance in response to her employers' predictable reactions.

To access compensation for her lack of registration in the event of being fired, Diana was not to overtly contradict her employers' treatment of her, as if she were unaware of what they were doing, and did not know or did not understand that pretending that she had not been working the three years she had not been registered was harmful to her. She was not, either, to overtly confront them for their refusal to comply with the legal obligation of raising her salary when a raise was due according to the government. She was, as advised by one of the activists, to behave normally in front of her employers and record such attempts at breaking the law on her employers' part without their knowledge, so as to gather the evidence necessary to prove she had been working for them and that they had broken the law. She was also not to confront her employers directly about their violation of Diana's privacy and to take her documents to her daughter's house for safety instead. Like Ruth in the previous vignette, Diana was to pretend in front of her employers that she knew less than she actually knew about her labor rights in order to be able to access them, engaging in actions of concealment and subterfuge when in their presence in order to eventually access her labor rights. In case Diana wanted to keep her job, she was, as advised by Alma, to exercise caution in deciding whether or not to send her employers a certified letter demanding that they recognize the three years in which she had worked and in which she had not been registered. If she decided to leave, she could send the letter with the expectation that doing so would provoke her employers' anger, as had already happened the first time Diana did that, likely making them fire her.

As with Ruth above, the activists' encouragement of exercise of pretense, concealment, and subterfuge on the part of Diana vis-à-vis her employers so that she could access her

compensation for her lack of registration involved not only putting the role of “negotiator” onto Diana. She was simultaneously encouraged to adhere to gendered, classed, and racialized normative behavior in order to avoid the risk of being held accountable to the consequences of overtly transgressing what was considered normative in the context of systemic sexism, classism, and racism for a working-class, migrant woman like her. For Diana, transgressing normative gendered, classed, and racialized behavior would have included openly confronting her employers for refusing to compensate her for the missing years of registration and for offering her an illegal option instead, for refusing to raise her salary, and for violating her privacy by entering her room and apparently stealing her documents. In the case of Diana, being held accountable to her transgression of normative gendered, classed, and racialized behavior would have signified finding it difficult if not impossible to keep her job.

Diana’s position as a working-class Peruvian migrant woman put her, like Ruth, in a lower, structurally differentiated position vis-à-vis her upper-middle class Argentinian employers, a position that was exacerbated by the fact that she was a live-in as opposed to a live-out worker. This was quite evident in the *señor*’s enraged reaction when Diana dared send him and his children a telegram asking them to register the work relationship, an action that signified a transgression on the part of Diana of normative gendered, classed, and racialized behavior vis-à-vis her employers within the context of the hierarchies of power between her and them. Diana’s structurally differentiated position vis-à-vis her employers was also quite evident in their seeming lack of concern for being held accountable for violating Diana’s rights to rest, to a day off, to a private room, to salary raises, to a minimum salary, and to registration. From Diana’s narrative, it was evident that her employers felt entitled to her labor and consequently felt entitled to dispose of it as they best deemed fit. This was evident in their refusal to grant her days off or in their refusal to

register the work relationship simply because it was, according to them as per Diana's account, now more expensive for them to hire her formally. As in the case of Ruth's employers, despite the fact that Diana's employers' actions were against the law, they did not seem to find them problematic or did not seem to feel it was behavior that would put them at risk of assessment of any kind.

Diana's employers, like Ruth's, did not seem to feel at risk of class, gender, and racial assessment through their actions towards Diana, who remained at risk if she showed them she was informed about her rights as a worker. She had in fact already been held accountable by her employer's wrath after she sent the letter requesting registration and by their seeming stealing of the documents that confirmed Diana's work relationship with them up until 2014. She was also at risk of assessment if she was confrontational about asking her employers that they register the missing years of registration of the work relationship, that they give her a raise, and that they refrain from invading her privacy. Diana's best option as advised by the *AMUMRA* activists was then to "do difference" in order to "undo it": to access her labor rights by means of a performance as a working-class migrant woman that would not overtly challenge long-standing normative, discriminatory cultural understandings of class, race, and gender but by doing so covertly up until the moment in which it was desirable and safe in terms of class, racial, and gender accountability for her to do otherwise. This meant behaving in this way up until the moment Diana desired to leave her job and, by sending her employers a letter asking that they register the missing years of the work relationship, overtly challenging normative classed, gendered, and racialized behavior and thus, according to Alma, very likely causing her employers to fire Diana. In both scenarios, engaging in pretense, concealment, and subterfuge while still at the job and sending her employers a letter with the deliberate aim of causing her dismissal would be engaging in behavior at the risk

of gender, class, and racial assessment on the part of Diana: in the first scenario, complying with normative behavior; in the second scenario, challenging normative behavior after preventively complying with it. In both cases, Diana would be accessing her rights as a worker, or her citizenship, dramaturgically.

3.5 Conclusion: “The Household Worker Needs Know that She Has to Have Certain Strategies”

It was a Saturday afternoon, and various AMUMRA activists and I were in a neighborhood near the center Buenos Aires, where we had partnered up with a community organization to carry out a workshop on labor and migrants’ rights. As one of the activists kicked off the workshop, she explained to the attendees what AMUMRA was all about, as well as what the subject of the workshop would be. The workshop, as the activist explained, would count with the presence of Alma, who was a specialist in the labor rights of household workers. The activist then gave the floor to Alma, who proceeded to give a very thorough explanation of what Law 26844 was, what rights for household workers it included, as well as what household workers could do in cases of disputes with their employers.

As Alma talked, the other activist contributed to her explanation, adding “the household worker needs to know that she has to have certain strategies. Why? Because when she works, in the place where she works, as long as everything is fine with the employer, she is a friend of the janitor of the building, they are friends [..] But when she leaves [the job], she is going to go see the janitor and he is going to say that he does not know her [...] We always tell the household

worker that with the new cell phones, it is important to use them well: if I see a [utility] bill, I take a picture. It is necessary to take a photo because when they, [the household workers], leave, sometimes they do not even remember the exact address of where they were working, most of them. They know where it is every day that they go, back and forth, but there have been workers who do not remember the exact address, and to send a letter it has to be the exact address, the contact information has to be specific. Sometimes they do not remember the name [of the employer]. The name of the employer is “José Perez,” but he goes by “Pepe,” so you ask the worker “what is the name of your employer?” “Pepe,” “but how come ‘Pepe’? ‘Pepe’ what?” “I don’t know.” So it is all of those things that the worker really needs to know, so that when something happens [she is prepared]; she also needs to know that she cannot sign any document until she communicates with the lawyer, she must not sign any document. “Please sign here” “no señora, I cannot sign anything, I get home, I see who I need to consult (in a relaxed tone).” Or the people who are part of the organization, who know us [AMUMRA] tell them [the employers], “I am part of a human rights organization, first I am going to ask over there [and see] what they say.” So, we raise the awareness of the community so that their rights are no longer violated [...]

In this chapter, I have argued that activists’ routine promotion of performative practices among household workers as way to access labor rights in everyday life is best understood as a way to encourage household workers to “do difference” in order to “undo difference.” That is, they are instructed to engage in performances of normative behavior in order to overcome, albeit minimally, some aspects of gendered, classed, and racialized differences via access to labor rights in everyday life. The vignettes above illustrate such practices, in which the activist’s listing of the “strategies” that household workers needed to employ, from the point of view of AMUMRA, include reconceiving work friendships into potentially antagonistic work relationships,

reconceiving the homes of employers into workplaces, reconceiving employers as such, and, in that light, according to her, replacing relationships of trust and reciprocity with ones of contract.

At its core, the promotion of these practices on the part of activists entails encouraging workers to make use of modes of navigating their equal legal status as far as their labor rights are concerned against the backdrop of their unequal material conditions of existence as working-class, migrant women of color. These practices entail encouraging workers to access their newfound legal status as workers with full labor rights in the context of extant historic, entrenched, intersectional, structural, and also significantly, symbolic inequalities between them and their employers. In doing so, activists are working towards raising workers' consciousness of their position as migrant women of color and household workers with full labor rights, as the examples of Ruth and Diana make clear. I have argued that the exercise of such strategies on the part of workers is best conceived as what I call a form of dramaturgical citizenship given the fundamental role that, as the examples of Ruth and Diana make clear, engaging in these performative practices has in household workers' actual access to labor rights in everyday life. These practices encouraged by activists are not the only ones that workers make use of in their everyday lives in order to access labor rights, however: other strategies of the workers own making, such as the use of what I call "affective capital" and what Scott (1989) calls "weapons of the weak" do also just that. It is to a discussion of these strategies in the subsequent two chapters that I now turn.

4.0 “Sometimes They ‘Whiten Them’ Because They Love Them”: Access to Rights, Affective Capital, and the Political Economy of Feelings Within the Household

4.1 Introduction: “She is Like My Step-Granddaughter”

It was a weekday afternoon, and I had met Sara a few blocks from her house in the San Cristobal neighborhood of Buenos Aires—we had missed each other as I had ended up taking a different mode of transportation than I originally planned, and as she approached the corner where I was standing she waved at me, smiling. She crossed the street and then we chatted about the fact that she was waiting for me somewhere else, while I was waiting for her where I was standing, a slight misunderstanding. We walked to her place and upon our arrival, I encountered a patio and stairs, we walked up them and then we arrived into Sara’s home. As we were entering her home, she repeated again what she had told me over the phone—“it is a humble home”—as if feeling slight shame about it. I tried to make her feel comfortable by complimenting her on the couches, which were red, and I told her it was my favorite color, and she seemed content. She showed me around her house, where she was renting a room and a small living room. The house was composed of the living room, her room and those of her neighbors, and a communal kitchen, which we had passed by on the way to her home.

As one topic led to another, Sara told me about her son, how he was living in Santa Fe city and showed me pictures of him on her phone. There were pictures of the young man by himself and of Sara and him together. As she swiped the photos and told me about him, she was clearly feeling proud of him. He was her only son, I found out. She offered me coffee and mate and I opted for coffee, and as she walked into her bedroom to find the coffee, I looked around. On her fridge,

next to a photo of her son, there was the photo of a little girl. I also noticed that to the side of the fridge there was a drawing, which I assumed was done by the little girl on the photo. As she was coming out of the room, I asked her “who is she, Sara? Is she your granddaughter?” “That one? That one is Clari” and her face lit up when she mentioned the girl’s name. “I raised her” she told me. “she’s like my step-granddaughter,” she added.

Sara told me how she had known Clari since she was born, of the time when she was a baby, of holding her to calm her down, and of making her sleep, while showing me pictures of Clari, who was now six years old. “You have no idea how intelligent she is, when we are eating she tells me ‘Sari, no salt for you!’” in reference to the fact that Sara suffers from hypertension and the girl knows about it and brings it up when they are eating together. She also told me that even her own grown-up son, who was then in his early twenties, was jealous of her relationship with Clari, which she found humorous and laughed about when telling me about it—“my son tells me, “with you everything is Clari, Clari, Clari... And what about me, I am your son!”

Sara described her relationship with Clari, the daughter of Guillermina, her employer of seven years, in kinship terms, naming her as her step-granddaughter. Such naming was no minor coincidence. It reflected the nature of their relationship and that, despite the fact that their kin relationship may have been fictive, her love and care for Clari were genuine. Her relationship with Clari echoed the relationships between employers and household workers described by other researchers (Canevaro 2009a; Curtis and Pacecca 2010). As described by Brites (2014) in her ethnographic study of household workers and their relationships with their employers in Brazil, the economy of the household-as-workplace is characterized by circulation: of salary money, of gifts, of extra-payments, as well as of affection. Brites describes scenarios in which the strength of the bond between children and their caretakers often put the latter in jeopardy to access labor rights

such as fair compensation. As she puts it, “in fact, one reason that employees tend to endure poorly paid jobs is the difficulty of separating from the children they care for” (p. 66).

Along the same lines, in her study of Chicana household workers from rural New Mexico and Colorado in the city of Denver, Romero (1992) argues that the fact that oftentimes household work is considered a “labor of love” rather than merely “work” leads to household workers’ exploitation. She argues that given that household work does not produce commodities, it is socially considered to produce no value. While Brites refers to Brazil, in which household workers have equal labor rights under the law, as in the Argentine context, Romero examines a context in which, at the time of her research, household work remained unregulated in the United States, leading to informal relations between household workers and their employers that were often regulated by maternalism. Similar to Brites’ analysis, for Romero, who works from a Marxist framework of analysis, maternalism becomes a mode of value extraction on the part of employers: by casting their relationships with their workers in personal rather than strictly contractual terms, she argues, employers benefit from workers’ surplus-labor that the former do not pay for. For the author, there is then the replication of the logic of the factory as theorized by Marx in the home: in Romero’s view, intimacy is put to the use of exploitation.

Similarly, in their study of the different ways in which household workers access this particular line of work, its specific characteristics, as well as the relationships that workers establish with employers in Buenos Aires, Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) show how the workers they interviewed conceived of their relationships with their employers in terms of reciprocity rather than in terms of labor rights. The authors underline how workers rationalized their lack of access to various labor rights by highlighting other benefits they received from their employers. The authors draw from the experiences of women who worked full time for one employer, who worked

in the informal economy, and who evoked discourses and practices of family and patronage when thinking and talking about access to labor rights such as sick leave, vacation days, and mid-year and end-of-year bonuses. The fact that employers paid them for their sick leave, gave them partially paid time off to go on vacation, and gave them some money as mid-year and end-of-year bonuses rather than full bonuses was perceived by the workers in a positive manner and as indicative of the good will of employers, and deterred workers from pressing for the full respect of their labor rights. In the words of the authors, “the employers’ support of the workers, their good treatment towards the workers, and the quality of the relationship play an important role when it comes to weighing in the cost of giving up on formal rights” (p. 22).

The difficulty in resignifying the work relationship in terms of rights and obligations for both employees and employers and the fact that affect, reciprocity, and pseudo-kinship continue to play a significant role in the regulation of household employment even in the context of equal labor rights for household workers as discussed by Brites (2014) and Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) can be understood in part when conceiving of the household as a semi-autonomous social field. Such semi-autonomy is defined by Moore (1973) as a social field that “can generate rules and customs and symbols internally, but that it is also vulnerable to rules and decisions and other forces emanating from the larger world by which it is surrounded” (p. 720). Following Moore, the attempts on the part of states to generate new norms that would regulate social relationships through changes in legislation are imposed upon existing semi-autonomous social fields which are already regulated by entrenched customs and rules. As she puts it, “The social arrangements are often effectively stronger than the new laws” (p. 723). Such seems to be the case in the context of Buenos Aires’ Metropolitan area under discussion here.

While the arguments by Brites (2014), Romero (1992), and Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) are compelling, to name but a few of the various authors that characterize the role of affect, reciprocity, and pseudo-kinship in a negative light as far as access to labor rights are concerned, in this chapter I examine the ways in which affection may be not only a hindrance to the advancement of labor rights for household workers or a mere source of value extraction, but also a resource that workers can draw from and make use of in the advancement of their labor rights. Specifically, I analyze household workers' narratives of their experiences of access to labor rights in the context of the new legal framework of regulation of paid household work.

In what follows, I draw from Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013), Hardt (1999), Hochschild (2003b), and Lukacs (2015) in order to outline a theory of affective capital to discuss the cases of Ruth, a caretaker of older adults whom we met in the previous two chapters, Sara, the nanny with whose experience I begin this chapter, and Esther, a cleaner, as paradigmatic prisms through which to examine the experiences of household workers with access to formal labor rights in contemporary Buenos Aires. As discussed previously, workers often stand at structurally differentiated social positions from their employers at the intersections of class, status, nationality, race, ethnicity, and citizenship, and employers rarely face legal consequences for employing their workers irregularly. For support of this conclusion, it is sufficient to look at the current rates of registration of household workers, where 75% of all household workers continue to work in the informal economy, with no consequences to their employers, despite a legal framework that purports to protect them (Canevaro 2017a). In this context, the use of what I term “affective capital” becomes one of the few resources that workers can and do mobilize in order to access rights such as registration, salary increases, and severance pay.

4.2 Affective Capital and its Bargaining Power in Paid Household Work

In order to outline a theory of affective capital, I draw from the work of Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013), who defines household work also as creative and affective work, given that, in the words of the author, it “always implies producing well-being, habitability, affability, and comfort. This is always like this, even when it is not demanded explicitly as the goal of employment” (p. 130). According to the author, household labor as affective work mediates and organizes affects in the household. For the author, there is “the transmission of affects” as mobilizing everything that emotionally moves or motivates people. Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) examines the situation of Latin American migrant women who worked in the household labor sector in the UK and Germany, where the possibility of access to legal status as migrants and as workers was nonexistent. In these contexts, not only did the migration and labor regimes limit the citizenship and labor rights of women migrant household workers, but also the laboring activities that they carried out within the households where they worked fixed them in constant places of subordination. In this manner, while in their work as household workers they saw themselves, in the words of the author, as “obligated to infuse in the private household positive affective energies, the tasks and the dynamics around domestic work reminded them constantly of their subordinate position” (p. 131). Among other situations, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) analyzes the story of a worker who expressed her disgust about the lack of hygiene on the part of her employers in their use of the bathroom which she later had to clean up. The author analyzes how this act of disregarding and ignoring the worker through such an attitude toward the use of the bathroom made the worker feel disdained, small, and invisible. According to the author, in this way, the employers projected and expressed feelings of inferiority upon the worker.

In a related discussion, Hardt (1999) argues that in late capitalism, industrial, material labor necessitates non-industrial, immaterial labor in order to come to fruition. Hardt (1999) blurs the boundaries between the long-standing dichotomy between productive and reproductive labor. Drawing from Lazzarato (1996), Hardt characterizes immaterial labor as “labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication” (94), and that “is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community” (96). According to Hardt (1999), while affective immaterial labor has existed from time immemorial, the novelty in post-industrial society is that it is manipulated, controlled, and managed in the favor of capital, becoming central to the productive process as such. This includes “the production and manipulation of affects and requires (virtual or actual) human contact and proximity” (97-98).

In a corollary argument, Hochschild (2003b) shows that just as a worker can become alienated from the product of her labor in a product-based economy, so can a worker become alienated from the product of her labor in a service-based economy. Based on ethnographic research in, among other sites, the Delta Airlines headquarters, she shows how in the context of a service economy, emotion is standardized and instrumentalized and put to the use of profit for airline companies. Hochschild (2003b) shows how companies not only make use of workers’ physical and intellectual faculties but also of their emotional faculties, by making the requirement to smile and produce feelings of comfort and ease in passengers a requirement of the job itself. While a passenger may be rude to a flight attendant, such a response on the latter’s part is never an option. This appropriation of what Hochschild (2003b) calls the private face of the emotional system by corporations shows how the flight attendants’ do not own their emotions in the

workplace. This shows how the emotional realm becomes yet another site of value extraction beyond what Marx could have possibly imagined in the form of “emotional labor.”

Lukacs (2015) discusses Hardt (1999) and Hochschild (2003b) theorizations and sheds light on important distinctions between the concepts of “affective labor” and “emotional labor.” She studies net idols in Japan through interviews and correspondence with current and former such idols as well as through content analysis of their websites and other material from the net idol universe. In so doing, she shows how women in Japan become net idols and carry out significant emotional labor for free with the hope of eventually turning this activity, which they see as a path towards self-discovery and self-realization, into paid affective labor. According to Lukacs (2015), the key distinction between “emotional” and “affective” labor is that while “emotional labor” is unpaid labor, “affective labor” is paid labor. At the same time, both types of labor are sources of value extraction entailing the manipulation of affects. Lukacs shows how, to aspiring net idols, the internet becomes not the panacea of social mobility that hegemonic views of it would have it, but instead another realm of value extraction for the unpaid labor of women, as most net idols do not end up turning their internet careers into paid jobs. In this way, there is a continuum between the unpaid labor of the housewife, the extension of the domestic sphere in occupations such as office work, and the labor of net idols, precisely because their unpaid labor serves the purpose of buttressing economic growth in the digital economy even when they are not benefitting from it.

Taking this discussion of “affective” and “emotional” labor into account, I argue that the exercise of “affective work” within the household, as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) defines it, entails both the exercise of paid “affective labor” and of unpaid “emotional labor.” Going back to Sara as a paradigmatic example, in her transmission of positive affective energies towards Clari, as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) would put it, Sara is paid for her affective labor of securing Clari’s

physical and psychological care. At the same time, Sara is not paid for her emotional labor of loving and creating trust with Clari—laboring activities that entail, as Sara would put it, treating Clari as if she was kin to her. There is no doubt that as an employer Guillermina certainly profits from Sara’s exercise of affective and emotional labor—in other words, of Sara’s exercise of her affective work. If we consider how, following Hardt (1999), Hochschild (2003b), and Lukacs (2015), affective and emotional labor produce value, and if we take into consideration that, as I am arguing here, affective work as theorized by Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013), entails the exercise of both affective and emotional labor, we can argue that affective work, as exercised by workers like Sara, produces value. It then follows that Sara’s affective work then becomes a source of value-extraction for Guillermina, echoing the scenarios discussed by Romero (1992) and Brites (2014) above.

At the same time, Sara’s affective work is unmediated: it does not produce a commodity, it produces, in addition to the reproduction of Clari’s life, as Federici (2012) would put it, a social relationship with Clari and with her mother, Guillermina. Sara’s affective work also does not result in disdain, or in fixing Sara in feelings of inferiority, as the workers Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) studied recounted; instead, her work with Clari at Guillermina’s house produces positive affects and results in the establishment of social relationships coded in the idiom of family. In receiving Sara’s direct physical and psychological care as well as her love and trust, Clari reciprocates, such as in the vignette I include above in which the child told Sara not to eat salt while they were eating because Sara suffers from hypertension. In this context, the affective work of workers like Sara shows an ambivalent character: it can be both a source of value extraction, as the authors discussed above would conceptualize it, but it can also become a form of affective capital conducive to access to labor rights in daily life for workers like Sara, as I am arguing here.

Workers like Sara stand at structurally differentiated positions at what Crenshaw (1991) would describe as interlocking structures of oppression. In addition, while the rate of registration of household workers is now almost four times higher than it used to be prior to the passage of the current legal regime of regulation of paid household work (from 6% to 25%), the percentage of workers that continue working in an informal manner is extremely high (Canevaro 2017a). In this context of intersectional structural inequality and general lack of regard for the rule of law on the part of employers, the “affective capital” that derives from the exercise of affective work is one of the few resources that workers like Sara can draw from in order to advance their labor rights. It is to a discussion of such scenarios that I now turn.

4.3 “We Know What You Were Like with Mom, We Are Going to Give You What You Asked Us”

I first met Ruth at *AMUMRA*’s office, in the context of what was, at the time of our encounter, the end of her work relationship with the grown children of Clementina, an elderly woman who had until recently been in Ruth’s care. Ruth approached *AMUMRA* after receiving an informational brochure at an event in which *AMUMRA* usually takes part, “PeruBA - Buenos Aires Celebrates Peru,” a cultural festival organized by the Buenos Aires City Government. She told me that when she got a brochure from *AMUMRA* at PeruBA, and organization like *AMUMRA* is what she had been looking for. Ruth was a prime example of what *AMUMRA* activists would call an “empowered” household worker: she was in the past a member of *UPACP*, the Union of Assistant Personnel of Private Households, the oldest and largest household workers’ union in Argentina,

and she spoke fast and eloquently about her rights as a worker. During our conversation, she told me, humorously, that “she has always been like this” and that even her own mother often told her that “she should have been a lawyer.” She also mentioned that she often told her friends who were also household workers that “they have to complain” and that she often told a friend of hers who was afraid of her employer that she had nothing to be afraid of. In fact, as we were talking and I was explaining to her why I wanted to interview her, she pulled out a booklet of free distribution with the text of Law 26844 published by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security of Argentina. “I got it at the union and I always carry it in my purse,” she told me.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ruth was a native of Peru who was, at the time of our meeting, in her early 50s and who had been living in Buenos Aires for four years. Her experiences echoed the experiences of other Peruvian migrant women in countries like Argentina and Chile as discussed by other scholars (e.g., Cerruti (2005), Paerregaard, et al. (2012)) and shed light on a pattern of gendered labor migration from Peru to these other two countries of the Southern Cone. This pattern of gendered labor migration has been characterized by an overwhelming majority of Peruvian migrant women who not only work in the household labor sector but also engage primarily in care work specifically, who often arrive in the country of destination by themselves, and who often have a high level of formal educational attainment compared to their migrant counterparts from other countries such as Paraguay and Bolivia (Cerruti 2005; Paerregaard, et al. 2012).

Like other Peruvian migrant women, Ruth arrived directly in Buenos Aires by herself, first arriving at the house of her brother, who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had been living in Argentina for the past 20 years. As mentioned previously, she was a separated mother of two adult daughters, of whom she spoke with clear pride, emphasizing how they were “all professionals.”

She was also a grandmother to two children, one of whom suffered from a medical condition, was soon going to be hospitalized in a renowned children's hospital in Argentina, and about whom she showed clear preoccupation. It had been a hard year for her and her family, she told me. As was often the case with migrant women like Ruth not only in Argentina but in other parts of the world as well (see, for instance, Constable (2007)), Ruth often sent remittances back to Peru to support her daughter and granddaughter with a medical condition. Ruth had a high school diploma and a credential in Gerontological Assistance, which set her at a higher level of training than most home care workers. "I like to take care of people," she told me, and she also said that she preferred it to other household jobs such as cleaning. All three jobs Ruth had had since she arrived in Argentina had been in the care sector, taking care of elderly people specifically. Her experiences of endings of other work relationships prior to her experience with Clementina and her children spoke to her becoming aware of her rights as a worker and of judging on the basis of her personal relationships with employers when to make a formal legal complaint or not:

I started taking care of an elderly person in Acassuso, [an upper-middle class district in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area] Monday through Friday, for seven months. I was "in black" but they treated me very well. When I left, they gave me more money [than I was expecting] and I told my employer, "*señora*, you are overpaying me." So then my brother told me that actually it was the salary settlement and given that I was "in black" they should have paid me more [...] So that is when I decided to find out at the [household worker's] union to become a member.

Ruth recalled the experience and the sense of sheer surprise she felt when the first employer she ever had in Argentina attempted to pay her severance pay and recalled that, despite finding out

that she was entitled to a higher severance pay given that she had been working informally, she decided not to pursue legal actions against her employers given that “they had been good to her.” Her second experience of ending of the work relationship, however, showed a different scenario:

I had been taking care of an elderly man for three or four months, also “in black.”

The sir was a little crazy, he used to insult me or anybody who was nearby. So at the end of the year I told his daughter that she had to pay me my end of year bonus.

So she told me she did not have to give me anything as I was working “in black.”

So I told her she had to pay it to me regardless that I was “in black” and she fired me. So I told her that if she was going to be like that, I would go to the [household workers’] union.

As she was telling the story, Ruth reenacted the scene, waving the booklet with the text of Law 26844 she had gotten at *UPACP* as if doing so in front of her former employer, as if she was asking her former employer, in her words, *lo que corresponde*, meaning what is right, what is fair. Upon this blow-up of the work relationship evocative of the blow-ups described by other researchers in the context of paid household work (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001)), Ruth went to *UPACP* to find out what she was entitled to. Upon finding out how much she had to get paid, she communicated that to her then former employer who called her on the phone, crying: “I told her look, *señora*, what was there between us, a good relationship, is now broken,” Ruth said to her.

In his study of when, how, and why, in the context of business relations people resort to contract law to solve business disputes, Macaulay (1963) shows that, paraphrasing one of his informants, unless one is intent in breaking a business relation, contract law is usually not invoked to resolve disputes. Contract law is only invoked when, in fact a decision has been made not to continue doing business with the other party involved in the dispute any longer and when other

means of solving the dispute have not, in fact, worked. Macaulay provides convincing evidence of this being the case in the context of large corporations; as Ruth's experiences show, this is even more so the case in the context of paid household work, where affective bonds mediate the work relationship between workers and employers (see for instance Canevaro (2009a), Gorban (2012b), Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003)).

We can argue that Ruth's past experiences of endings of other work relationships corroborate the findings of Romero (1992), Brites (2014), and Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) discussed above. In the first scenario, her amicable relationship with her employer prevented her from demanding what she was entitled to according to labor law. Also, her break in the social relationship with her employer is what motivated her to go to *UPACP* and demand *lo que corresponde*, as she would put it. While such seems to be the case initially with Clementina and her children, Ruth's experiences show that, in fact, having an amicable relationship with Clementina and her employers is what allowed her, as it does other household workers, to access formal rights such as severance pay.

Ruth started working as a care worker at Clementina's house in the upper-middle class neighborhood of Recoleta first at night during weekdays. She later started to work also on public holidays and, by the time that we met, she had been working at Clementina's house three nights a week, on weekends, and on public holidays. At the time of end of the work relationship, she had been taking care of Clementina for three and a half years. Ruth had been hired formally for only half of her wage, so she was working "half 'in white' and half 'in black,'" as she put it. Despite working on an unregistered basis for a significant part of her salary, she spoke fondly of Clementina and her children:

They [Clementina's children] were very good people [with me]. They respected my schedule, were not overbearing, and the girl [(i.e., the other household worker)] who came to work during the day did all the grocery shopping. I felt very good there. They knew I liked beef, and when I got there [to the house] there was [beef] in the fridge. They always listened to what I told them, that is why I was flexible with them [in terms of tolerating the fact that they did not respect all of her formal labor rights]. The whole time I worked with them I only asked for two days off, but they have never denied them to me [...] They didn't pay me the weekends or public holidays double the wage [which is what the law stipulates], they paid me 400 pesos more for the public holidays, but the thing was that they were good to me, so I did my part and did not demand [much from them]. They used to leave me alone in the house because they trusted in me very much.

Ruth spoke of taking care of Clementina, of feeding her, of changing her, and of even spending Christmas and New Year's with her. She also mentioned her regimen of 14 pills a day given that Clementina suffered from psychiatric problems. "I love her very much, and so does she [...] She used to tell me not to go back to Peru, that she misses me" Ruth told me. Ruth's work relationship with Clementina ended when her sons and daughter decided to take her to live in a nursing home. Her children had decided to take Clementina to a nursing home after the live-in worker that used to care for Clementina had suddenly quit. Clementina's children had attempted to replace the worker who had quit with other workers, bringing in at least three different care workers to replace her, but according to Ruth, Clementina was not getting used to any of them, begging Ruth not to leave every time her shift was over. While all six of Clementina's children showed concern for their mother, Ruth's primary employer was Clementina's daughter, *señorita*

Fernanda, so she was her *de facto* employer and the person that took charge the most over her mother's situation.

Following the resignation of the live-in worker, the nights that Ruth did not work at Clementina's house, her daughter stayed the night to take care of her mother. This had become an untenable situation for Clementina's daughter, who lived in Buenos Aires province as opposed to her mother who lived in the city itself. Clementina's children, all five of whom were men except for the daughter who bore the brunt of her mother's care, lived outside Buenos Aires City. Some of them lived in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan area, as was the case with the daughter, others lived in Buenos Aires province, almost five hours drive from Buenos Aires City. All of them, according to Ruth, were in a privileged financial position. Their decision to take Clementina to a nursing home came as a shock for Ruth, and as she recalled it, she shared with me her feelings about the situation:

They told me from one day to the next "not to come anymore" because they were going to take their mom to a nursing home. I was going to work on Friday and they told me on Thursday. So at the union they told me that I should go see a lawyer and send her children a certified letter. So I told them that that letter is for times when things are not good, when they are not good to me, and that I was not going to do that [...] I have been sick to my stomach for the past month [...] I am very sad about what happened, what happened really hurt me, and I think it hurt me more than it did her own children that they took her to live in the nursing home. I used to tell her, [Clementina], that she was my only family here in Argentina. More so, the way they took her, deceiving her [...] I would not take my mom to a nursing home, blind as she is, we [Ruth and her family] change her, comb her and she is present

at all the [family] weddings [...] [Instead], every time there was a family event Clementina used to say “Oh, now she must be walking down the aisle!” [...] I used to say that whenever Clementina passed away, I would go back to Peru, and now I am thinking of going and then coming back to Argentina and finding a good job and then in January going back to Peru for good [...] I don’t know why it is so hard for her children, I think of her son who lives in the countryside—he could have a room made for me and another one for her instead of taking her to the nursing home, because I know she is going to die there. She is far away in Olivos, otherwise I would go see her every day. I have been twice since she is there, and there they tell me that she asks a lot about me, and her children also tell me so.

Ruth became visibly upset when recalling this situation, tears rolled down her cheeks. We stopped the interview, I got her some water, and comforted her while she composed herself. Her love for Clementina, her care, and her preoccupation for her well-being were genuine, and while questioning her children’s decision to put her in a nursing home, she also emphasized the good relationship she shared with them. This relationship is what would seem, initially, to prevent her from accessing her rights to a severance pay in her refusal to send Clementina’s children a notification letter, echoing the findings of Brites (2014), Pereyra and Tizziani (2014), and Romero (1992) as discussed above. However, it is precisely this relationship that allowed her to, in fact, access the severance pay she was entitled to by law and beyond:

So, when I talked to her children about my severance pay, I told them that I hope they are just and conscientious with me. The day they took her to the nursing home I could not contain my emotions; it was too much for me. They had asked me to help them take her to the nursing home, but when they saw how upset I was, they

told me to go because “they know I love their mom.” She even asked me if I knew anything about it [her children’s plans to take her to the nursing home] and I told her I did not, because I did not. When I went the day that they were going to take her to the nursing home I told her [Clementina] she looked pretty, because she had make-up and jewelry on, the way she did when I used to take care of her [...] They [Clementina’s children] paid me that week I didn’t go [to work, the week they took Clementina to a nursing home]. So when I talked to her children about my severance pay, they told me “we know what you have done for mom, how good you have been to her, so tell us what you want and we will give it to you.” So they offered me an amount of money that I thought was very little and they offered me to take a check on that day and the rest on another day. They told me they wanted me to leave on good terms. So I told them “sorry, I do not mean to distrust, but I prefer to take the whole pay another day. I need a lawyer to represent me.” So they told me it was okay, that they were going to give me what I was asking for. So then I talked to the lawyer [of *AMUMRA*, Erica] and she told me not to accept less than a certain amount. So then I talked to them and they told me that they love me very much, that they were going to give me what I asked them for, for the relationship we had and for how I had treated their mom [...] *Señorita* Fernanda told me I can count on them for anything [...] Her son gave me 10,000 pesos more [...] When we made the agreement, they told me “Ruthi, here you go.” So then I told them that I wanted more, and they asked me how much. And even when we were going to the lawyer’s to sign the papers, her son was holding my arm when we were crossing

the street. They made me feel very loved [...] I told the lawyer [from *AMUMRA*] that I solved it on good terms.

In Ruth's narrative, the children of Clementina did not invoke a discourse of rights and obligations when considering paying Ruth her severance pay. They invoked the personal relationship they shared with her and an economy of reciprocity: in exchange for her love and care for their mother, they reciprocated by paying her severance pay, beyond what they were obligated to by law. Ruth's affective work, as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013) would call it, in the form of paid affective labor (Hardt 1999) and unpaid emotional labor (Hochschild 2003b), as Lukacs (2015) would distinguish them, produced economic value. This value was not merely extracted by her employers in the work relationship she shared with them, since in a structurally unequal relationship as the one she shared with her employers, Ruth's love and care for Clementina became her primary source of bargaining power for severance pay. Her intense emotional investment in her relationship with Clementina, to the point of naming her as her only family in Argentina when she had a brother in Buenos Aires, became, in a rather literal way, an investment. Clementina's children did not pay her the severance pay stipulated by law plus an extra 10,000 pesos merely because it is the law, they did so because "they loved her" and wanted to end the relationship "on good terms with her." Such seemed to be the case as well with their initiative to pay Ruth for the entire week she did not work as Clementina's caretaker when Clementina's children took her to the nursing home. Ruth's love and care for Clementina thus became a form of affective capital that she could put to use to negotiate the conditions of the end of her work relationship with Clementina's children in the political economy of feelings within the household.

4.4 “I Know What You Are Like with Clari, I Am Going to Pay You Everything”

I met Sara in the context of a visit to *AMUMRA*'s office with her friend Chela, who is also a household worker. Sara and Chela have been good friends for many years and almost always came into *AMUMRA*'s office together: it is impossible to think of one of them without thinking of the other. They visited *AMUMRA* relatively regularly for consultations and to attend some of the weekly Brave Voices meetings organized by the activists of the organization, which as explained in the Introduction to this monograph were instances of conversation on different issues affecting the lives of migrant women. They also went there to receive legal counsel in what was, at the time, an acrimonious dispute between Sara and Marisa, one of her most recent employers, who had fired Sara without severance pay after she had been employing Sara informally. It was in the context of this acrimonious dispute that I managed to get to know Sara better and to build true rapport with her, by observing her consultations with one of *AMUMRA*'s lawyers, accompanying her to the post office to send a certified letter to her former employer, listening to her fears and apprehension at initiating legal action against a former employer when she had never done anything like this before in over three decades as a care and household worker in Buenos Aires, and making myself available to her. While during group activities she was usually quiet, and more of an observer than a talker, in our one-on-one encounters she was open and more than willing to share her experiences with me. I was in fact surprised at how open and at ease she was at being interviewed considering how quiet and seemingly shy she was in other, more public circumstances in which I had met her at before.

A native of Paraguay, Sara was at the time of our meeting in her late 50s and had been an Argentine citizen for about half a decade. She had been living in Buenos Aires for over 30 years and, as she put it, she was “the only one from Paraguay” in her family, as her only son was born

in Argentina. Like Ruth, her experiences as a migrant woman echoed the experiences of other migrant women in the Southern Cone (Cerrutti and Gaudio 2010), where a majority of Paraguayan migrants are women who work in the household labor sector (Cerrutti (2009) cited in Kofman and Raghuram (2012)) and who, like their Peruvian counterparts, usually migrate independently (Cerrutti and Gaudio 2010). Sara was a single mother and prided herself on being economically independent and on being able to live on her own, having politely declined her employer Guillermina's invitation to move in with her and Clari. As she put it,

She told me that if I move in with her, I won't need to work on Saturdays and Sundays anymore, but I am very independent, so I just don't want to ask her [for anything], since I am still able to work [...] She told me she wants me to move in with her because she is now living together with the father of the kid and they bought a house in Villa Urquiza, but I do not want to do that for the time being, because it is different living at somebody else's house, you see? It is a two-story house, with two gardens, you have no idea how beautiful the house is! But for the time being I like having my space. For example, now she left to go abroad and I have the key [to her house] and I go [there] every day. There is another lady who comes in to clean the house and she [Guillermina] doesn't want me to do anything.

Like other Paraguayan migrant women, Sara arrived directly in Buenos Aires in her twenties by herself to work as a live-in household worker and had spent the past three decades in the household work and care work sectors. She had worked as a cleaner, nanny, and caretaker of elderly adults both in private households as well as in nursing homes. She had completed up until 10th grade of high school and, in the context of her work as a caretaker of elderly adults, had received training through classes imparted by the Association of Health Services Workers (*ATSA*),

a labor union she was a member of for 10 years. In addition to her affiliation with *ATSA*, Sara had been involved with *AMUMRA* since at least 2009, when she participated in the advocacy activities organized by *AMUMRA* activists to promote the passage of changes in the household work legislation. Along with other members of the organization, she visited the *Casa Rosada*, met with lawmakers, and attended meetings. Even though, as mentioned before, she had only once initiated legal actions against an employer (which she later dropped), she seemed well-aware of the possibility of accessing formal law as a resource to access labor rights. While we were talking in her kitchen, we interrupted our interview when her friend Celia called her, and after that she told me a little bit about her friend's situation:

[...] She is with Guille's grandmother, for like 12 years already. The *señora* is like 98 years old and you have no idea how much Celia takes care of her. She is strong, and she loves the *señora* very much. So last time she wanted to quit because she doesn't get along with the grandchildren, with Guille's brother, because there are two of them who have all the money, and they don't want to pay Celia what she wants [...] So I told her that if they don't want to pay, "I have a doctor⁹ that is going to help you out" (laughs).

Sara's work as Clari's nanny at Guillermina's house had been the longest she had held a job at a private household. Although she would have rather worked as a caretaker, she started working at Guillermina's house as a cleaner when Guillermina went to live by herself in the lower level of her parents' house. Sara described Guillermina's house in detail as a three-story house in an upper-class neighborhood of Buenos Aires. She had always liked working there given that, as she described it, Guillermina was different from other upper-class people and treated her, in her

⁹ In Argentina, lawyers carry the title of "Doctor."

words, like family. For Sara, to be treated “like one of the family” was “to be treated well,” as she put it. And “to be treated well” meant for her, “that it is a good relationship, that she trusts in you, that she understands that you are working attending to their aunt or mother. [A relationship in which] she [the employer] tells you “this is what I pay you for, you have to do it,” that I do not like.” By way of examples of the ways in which her relationship with Guillermina was good, Sara told me that, in addition to Guillermina’s insistence that Sara move in with her and Clari, Guillermina often advised her “to take care” of herself because of “her age,” and often worked alongside her in the cleaning of the house when Sara was there. “She doesn’t want me to do so much,” Sara told me. Guillermina was also often affectionate towards her (for example, by hugging her) and Sara “felt good” at Guillermina’s house and in their relationship. Sara also shared with me other details of the nature of her relationship with Guillermina that showed how close they were:

She pays me everything, even if I miss work because I am sick, with notification, she anyway pays me everything, for many years I worked like that with her, she knows me [...] If I need [money], she tells me “do you want [some money];” For example, last time I was a little tight with money when I went to speak with the doctor [AMUMRA’s layer, when she was in an acrimonious dispute with another employer] and she [Guillermina] told me “don’t worry, Sara, if you want money, I give it to you.” Anyway, I didn’t tell her [to give me money in the end]; I told her “hold on a little bit,” I told her, “because you see when you get paid you have to distribute all your money and other things” and she told me “no, I won’t discount anything [from your salary]. I am going to give you [money] as a present because I know what are like with me” [...] She [Guillermina] always tells me that if I need

to, there are two empty rooms for me at her house, and that when I am an old lady, I can count on her. When I was sick, she came to the hospital with her mother, and they talked to the doctors, who treated me like a queen [...] Her mother told the doctors and nurses that she was a friend of the head of the hospital, that her husband was a lawyer and a friend of the hospital also, and that they should treat me well [...] She tells me that she doesn't see me as an employee, she sees me as family, and her mother is also very nice to me. If it is raining, her mother tells me, "Sara, take a cab, go home" and she gives me some extra pesos [...] She pays me for three hours, but I stay longer because I feel good when I am at her house. I go in earlier, we drink *mate*, we go on a walk with the dog for like an hour [...] I told Nicolás, [Guillermina's partner], that I was going to come in earlier and she, [Guillermina], told me to feel free to do whatever I want [...] The relationship between us is good because she treats me well. We sit down to talk about my son, her stuff, the situation in the country, her mother [...] She tells me "if anything happens, I will help you out" and that I can just give it back when I have some money [...] She gifts me clothes, and when she travels abroad, she brings me gifts, like something artisanal, or coffee, candy, chocolate, or a shirt [...] [The family of Guille's partner] are snobs, you can tell, because they have a driver, a cook, a maid, a housekeeper, you can tell that is how they are, and the first time Guille went to their house she told me she didn't like it because everything was like "you have to serve left and right" and her mother-in-law makes her [the household worker] wear a uniform [...] [At Guille's place] I do not [wear a uniform] [...] I do not like it, I rather earn less money than wearing a uniform, it makes me feel uncomfortable, it makes me feel

bad [...] there is necessity and there is crisis, but I am not going to do that [i.e., wearing a uniform] [...] [At Guille's place] I feel good because for example we all eat together at the table, she tells me "stay for dinner" and we all sit and eat together at the table, even my son sits at the table to eat with them, and I tell Guille, "look, my son is here [visiting with me]" and Guille tells me "tell him to come over" [...]

When Clari was born, she [Guille's mother-in-law] looked at me like this [in a condescending way] and I told Guille, "look, if your mother-in-law tells me something I am going to tell her off." And she told me, "don't worry Sara, I already talked to her, I do not like her telling you 'here is a fork, the knife this, the spoon that'" [i.e., giving orders to Sara], Guille didn't like it [her mother-in-law's attitude] either.

Like in the case of Ruth discussed above, we can argue that Sara's exercise of extra emotional labor (Hochschild 2003b) and of extra care work, by going into Guillermina's house before her actually scheduled working hours, also echoes the findings by Romero (1992), Brites (2014), and Pereyra and Tizziani (2014) discussed before. That is, being "like one of the family" actually deterred Sara from considering what she did in that extra hour—like chatting with Guillermina or walking the dog—to be actual "work." It thus also deterred her from making claims to formal labor rights for that extra time that she worked. However, as in the case of Ruth, it is her kin-like relationship with Guillermina, and specially with Clari, that enabled her to access formal labor rights such as registration:

When Clari was born, I went to live with her (she smiles). I don't like to stay at other people's homes, but for Clari I had a lot of love. When she was born, she was not able to sleep because Guille's father died when she was eight months pregnant,

and she swallowed all those nerves, you see? So she was born nervous because she swallowed all that anguish, so she could not fall asleep. So I stayed with them for two weeks. She is like a step-granddaughter for me. She later started to talk, to crawl; I love those things because it is as if she was a step-granddaughter. She is lovely, and intelligent, and you have no idea how much she loves me. She tells me “I miss you Sari” [...] Now she goes to school all day because she is in first grade and it is a full school day [...] Nicolás, [Clari’s father], came to live with Guille because of the baby; when Clari was a few months old, he came to live with them. By that time, I had been working for Guille for one year already [...] He is very good, very attentive, and he is also humble, he is not like his mother. But one day he tried to raise his voice with me and I told him “what is your problem? When Guille was pregnant and completely alone I was there for her, you have no reason to come and give me orders. I take orders from Guille and her mother only, excuse me.” He looked at me, turned around and left, he didn’t even say “bye” or “see you later”! Guille was on a business trip when that happened and afterward I told her what had happened and she told me I did alright. I told her “when you were alone, pregnant, the baby was born, your mom was not doing well, who was there by your side?” “You were, Sara” she told me. “Well, then here I do not receive orders from him for anything” I told her. “You did well Sara, I applaud you [for doing that]” she told me. I met Guille when she was single. So she used to tell me, “Sara, a friend is going to come over” and I used to tell Elena, her mother, “but I don’t sleep with a friend” and she used to tell me, “shut up Sara” (laughs). That is why, I am telling you, I feel comfortable with them. And then Guille got pregnant, and when

she told him that she was pregnant, he wanted to solve it in another way, and she didn't want to. So then Clari was born, and when he came to live with them, they fought like cats and dogs because Guille was used to living by herself, and so was he. So I used to pick Clari up and take off, [I used to tell them], "you two figure it out" (laughs). And then [one day] Guille asked me "Sara, are you leaving already?" And I said "yes," so she picked up Clari and locked herself in her room. And then Nicolás came out and told me, "Sara, I want to talk to you." And I said, "yes." And he said, "I am going to come to live here with Guille, for Clari, for the baby, and I am going to pay you everything Guille has not paid you." I didn't have mid- and end-of-year bonus, I didn't have vacation days (laughs). And he said "look, I pay you everything, the mid- and end-of -year bonus, everything that you have worked with Guille, because Guille did not register you "in white." I am going to pay you all of that because I know what you are like with Clari, with the baby," he told me. "So I pay you all of that and now I take charge of everything, and I register you 'in white' and I am going to pay you everything. Let's start in white with me because I am going to live here with Guille, for Clari." So then I told Guille (chuckles), and she told me (gesticulates as if she was Guillermina), "yes, that's right, because I told him to, because I told him, 'I am not going to fire Sara and I do not want another person.'" So he paid me everything, mid- and end-of-year bonus and vacation days of 2 years when I was "in black" with Guille. He paid me everything, bill on bill, he paid me everything." And that is how I started "in white" with her.

Like in the case of Ruth, in Sara's narrative of access to formal registration, neither Nicolás nor Guillermina invoked a discourse of rights and obligations when considering registering the

work relationship with Sara formally. They also situated formal labor rights in the idiom of reciprocity, justifying, as Nicolás did in the vignette I include above, that he was going to register the work relationship formally because he knew what Sara was like with Clari, not merely because it is the law and, by violating it, he would run the risk of being legally penalized. This was shown in the previous vignette as well, in which Guillermina also invoked an idiom of reciprocity when offering Sara money when Sara was going through an economically strenuous time and telling her that the money she gave Sara would be a gift because she knew what Sara was like with her. This was therefore not a formal salary advance, which Guillermina would have later on discounted from Sara's salary, but a form of compensation that Sara received from Guillermina in addition to her actual salary.

Like in the case of Ruth, Sara's exercise of not merely paid affective labor (Hardt 1999) as Clari's caretaker but also of unpaid emotional labor (Hochschild 2003b) generated economic value and actually became a source of bargaining power. The affective capital that Sara could make use of to access formal labor rights can also be seen in the reaction of Guillermina, who emphasized to her partner that she would not be willing to end her work relationship with Sara and replace her with someone else due to the close relationship she shared with Sara, as shown in the other vignettes I included previously. As with Ruth, Sara's access to formal labor rights shows the ambivalent character that affect can have within the home. Being "like one of the family" can signify a real obstacle when it comes to accessing labor rights, but it can also be the way through which household workers access such rights in a context of structural inequality between them and their employers.

4.5 “You Deserve So Much More”

I met Esther through her co-worker, Selmira, a Peruvian caretaker of elderly adults, and through Isalis, a Peruvian household worker whom I had also interviewed and whom I had met through *AMUMRA*'s client data base. When I met Selmira, she was working as a live-in caretaker at Graciela's mother's house in the upper-middle class neighborhood of Núñez in the northern part of Buenos Aires. Selmira used to care for Graciela's mother—or as Esther and Selmira called her, the *abuela* (i.e., “grandmother”)—6 days a week; Esther used to take care of the *abuela* during Selmira's day off. At the time, Esther was also working Monday through Friday as a cleaner at Valeria's house in the upper-middle class neighborhood of Olivos. At the time of my interview with Selmira, Esther was not interested in meeting with me, as she was afraid that Graciela, who was employing her irregularly, could be impacted negatively in some way by our encounter, or that the information that Esther would share with me if made public could put Graciela in trouble. Her decision to eventually meet me and allow me to interview her and stay in touch changed when a dispute arose between her and Graciela.

At the time, Selmira and Esther were under the impression that Graciela had been withholding information from each of them. It had become apparent to them that Graciela was pitting them against one another. They concluded that Graciela was doing this in order to reach a point in which Esther would willingly resign rather than be fired by Graciela. As with other workers in a countless number of occasions, when Esther contacted me in order to seek advice on how to proceed, I put her in touch with *AMUMRA*'s lawyer, provided her with the organization's informational leaflets on household workers' rights, and reminded her of the hours of operation and location of the office in case she was able to pay a visit in person. While the dispute between Esther and her employer was eventually solved without Esther resorting to contract law, I was

under the impression that Esther's willingness to meet with me, stay in touch with me, and allow me to interview her was her form of reciprocating my helping her during her predicament with Graciela. As with Ruth and Sara, it was wearing the double-hat of volunteer-researcher that allowed me to create rapport with Esther when initially she was quite wary of meeting with me. As a researcher, I had nothing to offer her, but as an advocate, I offered her services which she found valuable.

Like Sara, Esther was also a native of Paraguay. At the time of our meeting, she was in her early 30s and had been living in Argentina since she was 14 years old, having left her home country to fulfill what Cranford and Chun (2017) would call her filial duty as the eldest of six children. At the time of Esther's migration, her father had suffered an accident that had disabled him from continuing to work, and her mother owned a small "mom and pop store" that was not enough to support the entirety of Esther's family. At the time, Esther's family was in debt and her younger siblings were in school, so Esther had to migrate for work in order to support the family to cover those expenses.

Esther first arrived in her aunt's home, which was located in a neighborhood in Buenos Aires' southern Metropolitan Area, in order to work as a live-in household worker. Given that she was a minor, her employer at the time ended their work relationship after three months under the premise that she did not want to employ a minor and a migrant without documentation. Esther remembered her first employer fondly, as it was through that first employer's assistance with a lawyer that Esther managed to obtain documentation that would allow her aunt to become her legal guardian while in Argentina. While still a minor, Esther lived at her aunt's house and worked for the most part at her aunt's shop, as given that she was a minor most prospective employers refused to employ her as a household worker. Repeatedly throughout our interview, Esther expressed

gratitude toward her aunt for the help she received from her when she first arrived in Buenos Aires and during the first few years of her stay in the city. It was through her aunt that she managed to become a documented migrant and a resident of Argentina.

Esther mentioned turning eighteen years old as a turning point in the jobs that became available to her. Since she became legally an adult, she mentioned being able to find many jobs primarily in the household work sector as a caretaker of elderly people and as a cleaner. Esther spent the first five years of her life in Buenos Aires sending remittances to her parents back in Paraguay in order for them to be able to pay off their debt. Nowadays, as she put it, “I still send them money but because I want to, in order to help them out a little bit, but it is not like before when it was mandatory to do it.” In addition to her aunt, she counts with an extended social network in Buenos Aires, including her husband, seven-year-old son, her brother and his family, her cousins, her friends, and her godchildren. She speaks fondly of her neighborhood in Villa Soldati, where she feels “more in Paraguay than in my country, because everyone is from Paraguay in my block.”

Esther’s awareness of the possibility to access contract law in order to advance her labor rights became particularly evident to me when she explicitly outlined the reasons why she first wanted to meet with me. At the time, she was going through the predicament with Graciela I describe above, and she mentioned that she wanted to use the interview as evidence in case she had to press formal charges against Graciela, or as she put it, “as some sort of proof” that she had been working for Graciela. I clarified to Esther that for various reasons, including the fact that our interview was anonymous, it would not be possible to use it in such a way before a court of law or anything like that. Regardless of that, she still met with me in more than one occasion to share her

experiences as a household worker, not only with Graciela but with Valeria, her other employer, as well.

Esther began working in Graciela's mother's house to take care of the *abuela* in the weekends. She had taken that job in order to replace her aunt's mother, who had decided to quit in order to leave for Paraguay. The *abuela* suffered from Parkinson's disease, which meant that she had to be in constant care, either from Selmira or from Esther. Esther took care of the *abuela* until she died, and despite the at times conflictive relationship that she had with Graciela, when Esther looked back on her relationship with Graciela she talked about her fondly. As in the cases of Ruth and Sara, at first it would seem that her feelings for Graciela and her mother inhibited Esther from accessing formal labor rights. However, it was her relationship of trust with Graciela that enabled her to not only get another job, with Valeria, but specially to access formal labor rights in that job:

At Graciela's home, I used to work "in black." I used to ask her to register our work relationship "in white" but given that the *abuela* passed away I did not ask her for anything. I used to see that pain that she was feeling because her mom had passed away, so I did not demand anything from her. She was devastated and they are not people with lots of money. She is a teacher, a fighter, the situation is not such to tell her "I want you to give me 1000 pesos." I did not have it in my heart to tell her "give me [my severance pay]." To this day she continues to work. To this day I am in touch with her, always. With her aunt, Teresa, who was everybody's friend [and who used to go visit the *abuela*], we are also in touch. Your heart tells you neither 100, nor 20, nor 30, I am going to spend that money just like that and when she does not give it to you, well, that's that. She paid me everything, my salary, my end-of-year bonus, she didn't pay me my severance pay. But she did pay the other

[household workers], I think one of them sued her because Graciela wanted to give the worker who came in after Selmira less money, something like that, I don't know the story well. For me it was more important that we have a good relationship, I did not end up in bad terms with Graciela. I could not bring it up [i.e., the severance pay]. Money comes and goes. My husband also suffered because he also knew the *abuela*, we had a lot of affection for her. My son also knew the *abuelita* (i.e., “granny”) who passed away and the other one, Teresa, the aunt—we had coffee with her a few months ago. So I could not tell Graciela anything [about the severance pay], I think that is why she did not pay me. Perhaps if I demanded it from her, she would have paid me. She paid me my salary, the end-of-year bonus, and vacation days [in the form of] the 15 days I did not go to work [...] I work at Valeria's house thanks to Graciela, because she used to be Valeria's child's teacher. Since I began working at her house I am in white. I did not ask her to register me in white; I came in on a Monday and she gave me the key because Graciela spoke very well about me. It was quick, she told me to bring my ID and within one month I was “in white” [...] I was surprised because that had never happened to me before, I had always worked “in black” up until then, nobody had ever offered me before to work “in white” [...] Valeria has helped me out a lot, like when I bought a car and when I got a credit card and she explained to me what I needed to do. She is like Graciela: we talk a lot, we don't seem like an employee and her patron, she is very open with me, like if I have doubts about something, I tell her and she tells me to look it up online. She is not like previous ones [i.e., employers] I had, in which you are the employee and you have to know your place [...] Like when you are in

a house you don't sit to have coffee with the family the way we are doing now [...]

In a house I was in years ago it was like that. It is like your place is one and the place of the *señor* and the *señora* [i.e., the employers] is another, but with Graciela and Valeria it is not like that, it is like the whole time you can share with them some *mates* but before with the other ones I met it was like you are in the kitchen and they are in the living room [...] I wouldn't say I feel like part of the family but I do feel that we are friends, because we give each other a lot of advice. Because, for example, you know how we girls are with our partners, our boyfriends, our husbands; I do not want to tell my mom, "look, mom, this happened at home." So instead of asking my mom I ask her [...] We began a very open relationship, I feel very well there [at Valeria's house]; thanks to Gra that happened. Valeria advises me, helps me with errands, knows my family. Her son has been to my house three times already, she took him to my house so that I would take care of him and when my son is sick, I bring him to work. Her son shares with my son, like when her son's clothes don't fit him anymore, I take those home with me, because her son is older than mine. This past winter I didn't buy anything, she even gave my son a bike [that used to belong to Valeria's son] [...] She gifts me everything, I do not buy clothes for my son, given that her son is older he grows out of things and everything she gives me is not stuff to be thrown away, the clothes are all new. There are people who think "what is her problem, I am working, why does she have to give me gifts?" But I don't think that way, I love the fact that she gives presents to my son, I love the fact that she has courtesies with me and my son. Given that she always has courtesies with me for example today I gave her a present. I would

love to give [her] a proper present if I had the money, but like she told me, the gift is what is important. And now she went to a friend's house and will be there till the weekend and then on the weekend she will leave to Uruguay for her vacation. I gave her a beautiful little blouse that cost me 120 pesos in a very inexpensive shop that is here nearby. So she told me that she is going to take it with her to wear at the beach, but I know it is not the kind of thing you wear at the beach, that she says it to make me happy. When you give someone a gift and they are nice about it; there are some people that you give them a gift and they say "thank you, it is nice," just like that (she gesticulates someone not being very excited about a present), they are not nice about it [...] But with her it is not like that [...] When someone talks you realize how they are; she is very sweet, I am very well [at Valeria's house].

As we were talking, Esther showed me a WhatsApp audio message and a written note from Valeria so that I "would believe her," as she put it, about how close the relationship was with her and about the fact that she was "sweet" towards Esther. In the audio message, Valeria asked Esther in a very sweet manner to get some clothes ready for Valeria's son, told her that she loved her, and that she wished her a good vacation, as Esther was about to travel to Paraguay a few days later. In the audio, she also apologized for not buying her a birthday present, and that she was leaving her some extra money for that. She also repeatedly called her Esthi, shortening her name as one does in Spanish to signal informality and closeness with someone, the way Esther does when talking about Graciela and calling her "Gra" instead. The note reiterated a lot of what the audio said, and read as follows:

"Esthi,

If I don't see you, I wish you a beautiful holiday. I know this has been a really hard year for you and your husband. So I want to wish you all the best for the next year. I love you very much and I thank you for always being by my side. I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart. I love you. I leave you payment for your vacation days, end-of-year bonus, the week, plus an extra for your birthday. You deserve so much more.

Vale.”

4.6 Conclusion: “I Make Myself Necessary”

I was sitting at a café right next to the train station in Berazategui, a neighborhood in Buenos Aires' southern periphery, where I had arranged to meet up with Edith, a household worker from Peru who had extensive experience in the household work sector, in her case, as a caretaker of elderly people. At the time of our meeting, she was not coming into the city as she was looking for a job, so we had arranged to meet up where it was most convenient for her, and as she lived in Berazategui, that is where we met. As with Esther, I had met Edith through another household worker whom I had interviewed before. As we started talking, I was witness to one of those pearls of fieldwork when a pattern appears over and over again, in a much more explicit manner than I had ever seen before. As she sat down and we ordered a couple of coffees and I reiterated to her what I had told her over the phone about why I wanted to interview her and what the interview would be all about, this is one of the first things that she told me as far as accessing formal labor rights is concerned:

If I get on well at a job, later on I have to tell them to register me “in white” [...] First, I am going to win her, [the employer], over and afterwards I tell her (laughs) [...] I go slowly, I make myself necessary [...] I have a way of thinking that if I arrive at a job, I do not ask how much they are going to pay me. First, I see how it is. If I like it, I get on with the job, I treat the mother [i.e., the person in her care] well so that they [i.e., the employers] will also treat me well. Because if I treat the mother well, the daughters are going to treat me well because they see that their mom is dressed, fed, that she has her medicine, that I am treating her well and she herself tells them “the girl [i.e., the household worker, Edith] treats me well.” So then the daughters feel good [...] So I try to reach that point. Once I get there, I can ask with a base, I am already necessary. Only then do I tell them to register me “in white.”

Edith’s narrative not only shows her intelligence to navigate unequal social relationships and her profound understanding of how power operates in the context of paid household work. Her narrative also underscores in an explicit manner what the stories of Ruth, Sara, Esther, and other workers like them, show more implicitly: that it is not by reaching out to formal law that access to formal rights happens in a context of intersectional, structural, profound social inequality and lack of regard for the rule of law such as is the case with paid household work in contemporary Buenos Aires. It is first and foremost, as Macaulay (1963) showed long ago, by workers’ forging of a *social* relationship with the employers and other people involved, be it with children or elderly people in the workers’ care, that workers can actually access formal labor rights.

In the semi-autonomous social field of the household (Moore 1973), rights circulate almost like a gift, and as such their circulation follows, as Mauss (1954) put it long ago, the obligations

of giving, receiving, and reciprocating. Workers like Ruth, Sara, and Esther give love and care, which in turn, creates trust. In exchange, as I have discussed in this chapter, they receive formal labor rights such as registration, mid- and end-of-year bonus, paid vacation days, and severance pay. Love, care, and trust accrue economic value and hence provide household workers bargaining power. Examining workers' experiences with access to labor rights in the context of their exercise of unpaid emotional labor (Hochschild 2003b) and paid affective labor (Hardt 1999) in the form of affective work (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2013) brings attention not only to the highly ambiguous character of the relationships between household workers and their employers, as Gorban (2012b) would put it. It also brings attention to the ambiguous character of affective work as such, which can be both a source of exploitation, as others authors have discussed, as well as a form, and perhaps the only form, of capital, or as I call it, affective capital, that workers can make use of in order to actually access labor rights in their everyday lives. Because of the highly ambiguous character of work relationships within household work, as Gorban (2012b) would put it, affective capital is not the only resource that household workers draw from in order to access formal labor rights in everyday live. When the use of affective capital is not an option, household workers resort to what Scott (1985) would call "weapons of the weak" to access formal labor rights. It is to a discussion of such scenarios that I now turn.

5.0 “Who Am I Going to Complain To? The Law Doesn’t Exist for Them”: Access to Rights, Weapons of the Weak, and Performances of Servanthood in Paid Household Work

5.1 Introduction: “I Always Throw Things at Her That I Read in the Group”

Alma and I were hanging out at AMUMRA’s office on a Tuesday, an afternoon like many others we had shared together. On Tuesdays, she usually volunteered her time in her capacity as a labor lawyer to attend to workers of all stripes who came into AMUMRA’s office. Many household workers showed up without notice after hearing that AMUMRA was “going to be able to help them out,” while others had notified me that they would be arriving into the office to meet with Alma. On that particular Tuesday, I had arranged to meet up with Isalis, whom we met in the previous chapter and who had been my point of contact with another household worker, Selmira, and thus eventually to Esther, whose story I discussed in the previous chapter.

Isalis was a household worker from Peru who had been connected to AMUMRA for many years and who had been one of the first household workers I interviewed during the course of my field research. Isalis and I agreed that she would stop by the office after work to pick up some informational materials, which at the time AMUMRA was trying to distribute to as many migrant women as possible, for her to pass them on to other women migrant workers. These included leaflets, brochures, and the like on migrant women’s rights and on household workers’ rights. When Isalis arrived at the office, rather than merely picking up the informational materials and leaving, she instead took the opportunity to have an impromptu legal consultation with Alma about her current situation, which she had already told me about when we spoke over the phone.

Isalis was at the time working as a waged, live-out cook, cleaner, and ironer, five hours a

day, three times a week, for an upper-middle class family in the Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires. At the time, this was one of three household work jobs that she was holding and the one that paid her the most. She had been working for this family for the past year and a half, and they were planning to move out of Argentina in the coming months, since one of Isalis' employers, who was working as an executive manager for a large corporation, was being relocated to Panama. Isalis was thus going to be out of a job soon and wanted to consult with Alma on how much money her employers would have to compensate her with, or, as she put it, on "what would be appropriate" for them to pay her. As was the case almost every time Alma met with a worker, and to my delight as an observer, she delved deeply into Isalis' current situation, asking her when her employers were going to leave the country in order to figure out a timeline for Isalis to obtain her severance pay. She also asked Isalis about her registration status, what her pay was, and about Isalis' employers' socioeconomic status. Alma also asked where the house where Isalis was working was located, whether in Buenos Aires City or in Buenos Aires province, since these were two different jurisdictions, so whether a worker worked in one or the other made a difference when it came to filing a suit. According to Isalis, not only did they own the home where she was working and where they had been living for most of the past decade, they also owned a "4x4 truck," which in the context of Argentina is usually code for "an expensive vehicle," and sent their children to "good schools," a phrase that is usually code for "private schools." In short, Isalis' employers, as other household workers would put it, "had money."

Isalis had begun working for her employers through Marina, a friend and co-worker of one of them and also a former employer of Isalis', with whom Isalis, it seemed, had gotten along with really well, given the affection with which she remembered Marina. Isalis emphasized that she loved and trusted Marina, who had always been respectful of Isalis' rights as a household

worker. During the time Isalis worked for her, Marina gave her the key to her house, gave her a raise every time the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security determined it, and had registered Isalis as a formal household worker who was working as a cleaner at her house. So Isalis doubted that her current employers would neglect to pay her severance pay, given the relationship that both they and she had with Marina. She also doubted her employers would simply leave for Panama without compensating her, given that there were other relationships that would remain after their absence: in addition to the relationship that both Isalis and her employers had with Marina, Isalis worked for one of her employers' aunts. And, finally, there was the relationship Isalis herself shared with her employers, which was a good one. "I am very happy" she had told me, about her experience working with them when we spoke previously about it. During her consultation with Alma, Isalis emphasized that after only two weeks of working at their house, one of her employers had brought up the issue of registration, asking her whether she would like to continue working there and be registered formally. She also had the key to the house of her employers and used to go into work at noon, feeling free to take it easy as far as her work schedule was concerned and being able to do whatever she wanted, as she put it. These relationships, it seemed, gave Isalis a sense of security that her employers would behave as she was expecting that they would.

Given that Isalis was working formally, Alma was also confident that Isalis' employers would pay her everything she was entitled to by law. Upon learning the details of Isalis' current employment, Alma informed her that her severance pay should be equal to four times her current monthly income. Isalis was surprised: she was usually talkative and hence a dream collaborator but, upon hearing Alma mention the sum her employers would have to compensate her, her jaw dropped, and she was silent for a few seconds. Never had she imagined it would be this much

money, she told both Alma and me; she had thought they would only have to pay her the amount equivalent to, on average, one monthly salary, her vacation days, her bonus and nothing else. She was pleasantly surprised, to say the least. Alma then recommended that Isalis start talking with her employers about the end of her work relationship, given that she was not leaving the country, they were, so it was only fair that they formally terminate her job and pay her what they owed her. Isalis told both Alma and me that under no circumstance would she resign, and that she was planning to sit down with one of her bosses that week to talk over the end of her work relationship with them, starting off with the fact that despite her employers' departure from Argentina, they would still have a relationship.

“They really should pay you your severance pay, if you are ‘in white,’” Alma mentioned to Isalis, who replied, “one thing I told her, [her employer], is that I was in a maids’ union; I always throw things like that at her. I always throw things at her that I read in the group.” By “the group,” Isalis was referring to the WhatsApp group “TCPs – AMUMRA,” which, as mentioned in the Introduction to this monograph, was my main medium of collective communication with the household workers I had met throughout my fieldwork and who lived in various parts of Buenos Aires’ Metropolitan area. This WhatsApp group was also the main communication channel household workers used to communicate with AMUMRA, talk to one another, and consult with AMUMRA and with one another on all matters concerning household workers’ rights. TCPs stands for *trabajadoras de casas particulares*, which as mentioned earlier translates literally as “workers of private households.” Both Isalis and Alma laughed at Isalis’ ingenuity, and I asked Isalis if she could elaborate further. She told me, “I tell her things that I read on the group like, ‘look, they fired her!’” (i.e., that someone posted on the group that she was fired), but here is the lawyer, and the lawyer told her not to worry, that she is entitled to her pay.” Isalis burst out

laughing when sharing this with Alma and me, and she also told us that she had been saying things like that to her employer for a while now.

Upon finishing her consultation with Alma, Isalis and I proceeded to talk about the informational materials she had come to pick up to distribute not only among friends and acquaintances, but also among women at the bus stop where other household workers and migrant workers like her used to gather. This time in my role as volunteer, I proceeded to go through the piles of different sorts of informational materials located in one of the shelves in AMUMRA's office, to gather the materials, and to explain to Isalis what each of them was all about. There were business cards with AMUMRA's contact information, leaflets on migrants' rights to health and education in Argentina, brochures with a summary of migrant household workers' rights, and guides with information on all institutions of relevance to migrant women in Argentina. Isalis seemed very excited at the possibility of distributing these materials among other migrant women and she also mentioned, quite amused, that she would give these materials to her employer. "I will tell her 'we had a meeting, we are fighting for the new law' [...] I will throw that one at her, and, discretely, I will let her know what I think" (como quien no quiere la cosa se la mando a guardar).

As we were reaching the end of AMUMRA's working hours, Alma and I started closing up shop while continuing to chat with Isalis, making sure we left the office clean, all computers shut down, and the relevant extension cords unplugged. Isalis was disappointed that she would not be able to attend the capacity building workshop on household workers' rights that was going to take place the next day in the office, since she was going to talk then to her employer about what she had consulted with Alma about, but was planning to attend the next one that AMUMRA was going to organize. We started chatting about her family, and she told me they were all doing well. As it was the first time Alma had met Isalis, she asked her about other things regarding her

personal life, such as if she lived in the city or in the province of Buenos Aires. Isalis mentioned that for the time being she was living in Buenos Aires City. “I live three blocks from the metro station, but when she, [her employer], asks me where I live, I tell her ‘I’m in the province!’” Alma found it humorous that Isalis would do that and I asked her, “so you tell your employers you live in the province?” and she replied, “right, so when they ask me, ‘Can you work on a Saturday’ I tell them, ‘Oh, no, I can’t, I’m in the province.’ I have my brother’s address and my brother lives there, but I don’t.” As we continued wrapping up for the day, Isalis asked me about how my research was going and also told Alma and me about another employer with whom she had been working for many years. In her words, he was “like a son” to her and among the details of their relationship, she told us that she used to joke with him that whenever he fired her, he should brace himself because she would sue him, since she was working irregularly for him.

After we closed the office, got to the corridor, then the hallway, and started walking down the stairs, we heard Peruvian music coming from one of the rooms on the first floor, where another migrant rights’ organization was located. Isalis recognized the music, smiled, and told me about it. As we were talking, I thanked her for distributing the informational materials and followed up with her about being unable to come in the next day, given what she had said before that she would have to talk to her employer. As we were leaving the building and saying goodbye, she mentioned that from now on she would not be able to miss a day, to which, in what turned out to be yet another amusing moment of that afternoon, Alma responded “yes, you have to be good now so that she pays you everything she owes you, everything that is right and fair” (ahora tenés que estar buenita para que te pague todo lo que te debe, para que te pague todo lo que te corresponde).

Alma’s comment before we left the office for the day went straight to the crux of the matter, as far as Isalis’ access to labor rights was concerned: her employers were leaving the country soon,

they were going to terminate her job, and she needed to receive her severance pay. She had to gain leverage in this situation, and in order to do so, she had to “be good” (*estar buena*), which can be most closely translated as, Isalis would have to play being subservient, obedient, and compliant. Alma’s comment that *ahora* (now), at that very moment of Isalis’ relationship with her employers would have to *estar buena* as opposed to *ser buena*, using that specific form of the verb “to be” in Spanish also underlined the temporality of Isalis’ actions: playing “good” was what was *temporarily* required of her if Isalis was to be able to obtain her severance pay. In Spanish, *estar* usually indicates a temporary state of being—e.g., *yo estoy contenta*/ “I am happy right now”—while *ser* indicates a permanent state of being—*yo soy feliz*/ “I am a happy person.” Alma’s comment about Isalis having to “be good” corroborated Isalis’ own thinking: right now, at this very moment in the work relationship with her employers, she could not miss a single day of work, not merely because it was her obligation to go to work, but above all because she wanted to show her employers she was a good worker, deserving of severance pay.

In the same manner that Isalis wanted to show her employers she was a good worker, she also engaged in other performative practices that avoided any sort of confrontation with them. Her communication with them was primarily indirect. She did not tell her employers directly that she was aware of her labor rights and that she would take them to court if necessary; instead, she mentioned in passing her affiliation with *AMUMRA*, naming it as a “maids’ union” instead of a “migrant women’s NGO” or a “human rights association,” even though the organization is not strictly a household workers’ union. In Argentina, as in other places, naming an institution as “a union” carries a specific set of associations with organized labor and workers willing and ready to sue their employers in the event of violation of labor rights that an association or an NGO does not. Never did Isalis tell her employers that if they fired her she would consult with *AMUMRA*’s

lawyer in order to receive the payment she was entitled to. Instead, she used another worker's situation as posted on the WhatsApp Group *TCPs – AMUMRA* as a proxy to talk about this kind of situation. And she planned not to tell her employers directly that she knew what her labor rights were; instead, she was planning to simply share with them the informational materials she got at *AMUMRA*, to mention in passing that she had attended an informational meeting on household workers' rights, and that she was involved with the pursuit of implementation of the new legal framework. In this manner, not only did Isalis engage in a performance of the "good worker" but also in a performance of the "empowered worker," aware of her labor rights, without ever explicitly talking about them with her employers. Her plans to start off by saying that despite her employers' imminent departure from the country they would still have a relationship with Isalis, thus beginning her negotiation with the social relationship instead of with the law, also spoke to her awareness of cordiality as a resource that she could mobilize to negotiate the conditions of the end of her work relationship.

Isalis and her family were certainly in a position of socioeconomic vulnerability, and by every measure were people who could be considered part of the urban working poor. But her residence in Buenos Aires City, and in a relatively well located neighborhood at that, put her at an advantageous position compared to other household workers who lived in Buenos Aires province, who often, as I encountered in my fieldwork, had to travel up to 6 hours roundtrip every day to get to and from work, often changing mediums of public transportation to do so. Marking herself in front of her employers as a worker who lived "in the province" by lying about where she actually lived also positioned her in front of them as a worker who was at a higher spatial and socioeconomic disadvantage than she actually was. This allowed her to never have to tell her employers directly that she did not feel like working on the weekends but instead enabled her to

portray herself as a “poor worker” who lived far away, always willing and ready to go to work but unable to do so due to circumstances beyond her control.

In sum, in order to access formal labor rights such as rest day or severance pay, Isalis employed the strategies of using indirect communication, being cordial, performing loyalty and subservience, and lying and hiding information from her employers. This chapter analyzes the use of such performative strategies in everyday life on the part of household workers as means to the end of accessing formal labor rights when affect is not an available resource to do so. I draw from the ethnography of work and resistance (e.g., Heine, et al. (2017); Ong (1988); Paules (1991); Peña (1997); Scott (1985); Woodcock (2016); Zlolniski (2003)) in order to conceptualize my understanding of workers’ use of such performative strategies as “weapons of the weak” or “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 1985). These strategies are used to exercise agency and gain control over the conditions of their work by social subjects in positions of subalternity (Guha 2012). Such use of “weapons of the weak” entails next to no organization, takes place in spare moments of everyday life, often involves acting individually, and entails a deliberate avoidance of overt defiance of employers or other social superiors as a way to avoid the transgression of hierarchies of social differentiation. Examples of the exercise of such everyday forms of resistance by workers in the ethnographic record include spirit possession (Ong 1988); gossip, character assassination, “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth” (Scott 1985, p. 29); work avoidance and output slowdown (Peña 1997; Woodcock 2016; Zlolniski 2003); feigned subservice (Paules 1991), and “putting up with it” as an “agentive act” (Heine, et al. 2017).

While these acts on the part of household workers were tied to their material conditions of existence and their position of material structural inequality between them and their employers, I

argue that they were also tied to an exercise of their own agency in circumstances in which such agency was severely limited. It was not that workers did not understand the importance of class struggle, or that they had internalized the worldview of their upper-middle class employers to the point of being unaware of their exploitation, as a Gramscian analysis of class relations would have it. Household workers were very much aware of class relations, as well as of viewing having labor rights as a positive thing in their lives. However, as is true of other subalternized workers, outright defiance to the intersectional symbolic order of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality risked inducing too high of a price for them to pay. Very often, in the context of capacity building workshops run by *AMUMRA*, workers would say “if I ask them to ‘whiten me,’ they will fire me.” I discuss their use of everyday forms of resistance next.

5.2 Concealing Information: “I Did Not Tell Them That I Get the Alimony Money”

Vanesa takes the bus at 7:30 am from Quilmes and arrives in the Retiro train station, to then take a train to arrive at 10 am in the house where she works as a nanny in Núñez, in the northern part of Buenos Aires City. Between 10 am and noon she cooks for the girls whom she takes care of, who are 8 and 12 years old. If she has time, and if her employer, who is also the girls’ mother, is home, Vanesa tries to work as much as she can and makes the beds, does the laundry, and irons. If her employer is home, Vanesa irons while the girls are having lunch; if their mother is not home, she sits down with the girls to chat, to keep them company, or to prepare their school things for the afternoon. After the girls return to school in the afternoon, Vanesa does the dishes, cleans the kitchen, finishes ironing, and cleans the furniture and the floor. The apartment

where she works is small, and she works there every day, so for the most part it is a matter of keeping the space clean, except for the days in which she goes in earlier and engages in a more thorough clean-up. Her job is usually the same, she told me: some days she has to take the girls to school in order to return them in the afternoon, and then around 2:30 or 3 pm she finishes her work and leaves to return back home. Her main task, she told me, is to ensure that the girls have their food ready.

Vanesa has been taking care of the girls for the past 8 years. A separated mother of two girls herself and in her early 30s, she participates daily in a care-chain (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003) of leaving her own girls to the care of her parents in Buenos Aires' southern periphery while she takes care of other people's children in Buenos Aires City. In this case, she cares for the daughters of a middle-class heterosexual couple where both parents work outside the home. She respects her employers' attitudes towards parenting as people who are very much involved in their children's lives, and speaks affectionately about the children in her care:

The little one was in the belly when I started working there. I started in December and she was born in the beginning of January. So in the beginning she called me *mami* (mommy), until, well, she started differentiating between her mother and me as she went on growing up, but they are like my daughters too, you see? [...] When she was growing up it was *mami* and *mamá* (mom), *mamá* was the mother. Of course, given that she stayed with me [...]

Vanesa told me that she has “always worked in private households,” illustrating the horizontal mobility characteristic of household workers in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Area (Tizziani 2011). She inherited¹⁰ her work relationship with her current employers from her own

¹⁰ I owe this idea of “inheritance” of the work relationship to Dr Santiago Canevaro, personal correspondence.

mother, who had worked for the parents of one of her employers for almost two decades. A native of Catamarca, her mother was a participant in the pattern of internal migration in the 20th century of women from the poorest regions of Argentina into Buenos Aires in search of work (see Jelin (1977)). Vanesa described her relationship with her employers as being “like one of the family,” echoing the idiom of kinship used by other household workers (Canevaro 2017b). Before working for her current employers, Vanesa had also worked for the parents and sister of one of them. Repeatedly, she described her relationship with her employers as a harmonious one, where no conflict was evident. She had always worked as a registered worker for her current employers, and they had always been respectful of her labor rights, she told me. As she put it, she had never “had to fight for anything” with her employers. Her compensation, however, had been a point of contention. As Vanesa travelled 5 hours daily roundtrip in order to access her workplace, she had, on a number of occasions, thought about quitting her current job, as financially speaking, the benefits of leaving outweighed the benefits of staying:

I really travel a lot, and there was a time in which I would leave their house at 5 in the afternoon, [I was there] from 6:30 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, and I would get home around 8:30 in the evening, because you know what it is like to commute. In the beginning [when I started working there] my girls were 4 and 6 years old, they were without their dad, without their mom, because at home we have dinner at 8 in the evening, so it was a matter of getting home, having dinner and going to bed. So I got tired of commuting, not of the job, I am telling you, I do not feel I am forced to work, or that I am uncomfortable or anything like that, but I was tired and I told her, you see, that I resign because I could not take commuting anymore, that I couldn't take it anymore, that it wasn't about the money, because,

I am telling you, overall they pay me what is paid working this job. And she, [my employer], started crying. You have no idea how much that woman was crying, [she gesticulates imitating her employer] “please don’t leave me, the girls are going to miss you, this and that.” So I ended up arranging my schedule with her and told her “well, if I work, I work until 3 in the afternoon so that I can be home by 5:30, because it is not as complicated to commute at 3 compared to commuting at 5 or 6 in the afternoon, which is the rush hour, to be able to be home by 5:30 and be able to be with my girls, because they are little, and even though my parents take care of them, I am their mom and I must be with them.” And well, they got it and as long as I don’t leave them [...] I even told her “but it is not like if I stay you are going to lower my salary, because it is not like I am earning ‘wow,’” I told her, you see (she smiles). So they respected my salary that I had and I started leaving at 3 in the afternoon [...] This was about 5 years ago, otherwise I had to stay until 5 in the afternoon. That is why I am telling you, they would not let me go [...] It broke her heart, not even in my house they cry for me like that (laughs).

Vanesa acknowledged that her relationship with her employers was quite familial, but that, at the same time, “there is a limit” between them. “I never stop thinking that they are my employers and that whenever they don’t need me anymore, they are going to kick me out,” she told me. “I do not think they would do it, but it could happen... The limit is there, for instance they hide things from me, and moreover they make the girls lie about it.” By way of an example, she told me about a time when her employers travelled to Punta del Diablo in Uruguay for a long weekend while they had been telling her they would be travelling to Tortuguitas in Buenos Aires province instead. She found out about their trip to Uruguay by seeing the ship and plane tickets on the table in their

home. She found it quite silly that they would hide such a thing from her—“I really could not care less where they go, I mean, if you work for something, if you earned it is because you worked for it, because you studied and you earn what you do and you can go wherever you want, you see?”

Vanesa did not invoke the idiom of contract when she negotiated her resignation attempt. Her employers did not invoke the idiom of contract when determining when to give her a salary raise, either: they gave her a raise usually once a year around the month of March, after they returned from their holidays, instead of giving her a raise whenever the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security determined it. As mentioned before, her working hours did not follow the mandated contractual framework, either: her salary was equivalent to the salary of someone who worked full time as a live-out household worker (i.e., 5 days a week, 8 hours a day), but on three days a week she worked only for 5 hours. On some days, she worked even a little less, because her employer arrived from work and granted her permission to leave half an hour or so before her formal “clock-out” time. Her employers did, “what the law says,” as she put it, but she hoped they would pay her more because, as she put it “it is little money.” According to Vanesa, given her job, and her responsibilities within it, they should have been considerate enough toward her to raise her salary. But, as she put it,

It is difficult to bring it up, because, I am telling you, I am earning within what the law says for 8 hours, I mean, they base the salary on that, but I should be earning a little more [...] Last year I began the year with a salary of 4200 pesos, last year, 4200: nothing. And then they went on raising it 200 pesos per month, I don’t know, because I glared at them, you see. It was hard for me to talk, you see, but I looked at them as if saying “aren’t you going to give me a raise considering how things are [in Argentina in general],” you see? [...] In December I reached 6000 [ARS]. And then

well, in January my house caught on fire. I lost everything, I was at work when that happened and she [her employer] saw me, how desperate I was and then, well, they raised my salary 1000 pesos more. So from December to January I earned 7000, you see? It was like a kind of help so that I could go on, because imagine [the situation] with my two girls, I had made everything anew. Everything anew and everything caught on fire [...] So now it is going to be the one year anniversary [of the fire]. So she raised my salary, otherwise I was going to continue earning 6000 until this year. They do have [money] to pay me more [...] I am a little bit in disagreement in that issue, even if they pay me what the law says, they should have a little bit of consideration with me because they can pay me a little bit more [...] I'm telling you, I am quite a slacker with that [i.e., asking her employers to pay her more], but that should also come from them [to offer her a raise] [...] Later with a lawyer I managed to start getting the alimony money [from the father of her two daughters], but I spent like 3 years without getting a dime. But once I started receiving it, I did not tell them anything. I did not tell them that I get the alimony money. Because otherwise what [is going to happen]? they are going to base [my salary] on that? [...] You see? Because they also calculate my salary given the fact that I don't pay rent because I live with my parents and they are not going to charge me for rent. Because who can live with 8000 pesos?

Following this, I asked Vanesa whether she was under the impression that given that her employers know she lives with her parents, they took that into account when it came to calculating her salary, and she replied:

In order not to raise it. I mean, they are not going to do less than what the law says, but they are not going to give you more. If I tell them that I'm going to rent [a place] and that it is not going to be enough? I don't know [...]

In her narrative about how her employers granted her salary increases, Vanesa did not invoke the idiom of contract: she invoked the idiom of reciprocity. Repeatedly, she mentioned that she felt that her employers should show consideration and recognition towards her by paying her above the minimum salary, even though she worked less than the minimum number of hours required of her, given that she felt her salary was still low and she considered her employers had the financial means to pay her more. In her own view, Vanesa was a “good worker” who treated her employers’ daughters like her own kin, so she expected her employers to be “good employers” who valued the relationship she had with their daughters in return in the form of compensation. In her capacity as a nanny, she did more than was strictly required of her contractually and she expected the same kind of treatment from her employers in the form of a salary increase. But, as she put it, “it is difficult to bring it up” given, on the one hand, the repetitive trade-off she engaged in with her employers: she got paid for 8 hours but worked 5, she often left half an hour before her official clock-out time, and she also got paid a full month of vacation even though she did not work that full month.

It was also “difficult to bring it up” because of the position Vanesa occupied vis-à-vis her employers: she was well aware that they could fire her at a moment's notice. In this context, just like Isalis as discussed above, she engaged in performative practices that enabled her to avoid discussing a salary raise directly and engaging in a potential direct confrontation: she employed indirect communication by glaring at her employers and, most significantly, she concealed information from them. Her dissatisfaction with her salary never became a topic of explicit

conversation with them. Vanesa hid her discomfort with what she perceived as her employers' lack of recognition and consideration towards her, and also hid the fact that she was now having a source of extra income she did not have before in the form of her daughters' father's alimony money. Hiding the fact that she now had that source of extra income was Vanesa's way to exercise control and gain leverage in relation to her employers, in order to avoid that they keep her salary stagnant and in order to avoid that they do not give her a raise. Like the maquila workers Peña (1997) worked with, Vanesa could not negotiate a salary raise as an equal with her employers: the only time she was able to do that was when she threatened to quit her job altogether. But she could, like the workers Ong (2010), Scott (1985), and Woodcock (2016) worked with, perform. She could communicate with her employers indirectly, she could glare at them, and she could hide information from them, and that is what she did.

5.3 Lying: "I'm Going to Leave, *Señor*; Look for Someone Else!"

On Monday morning, Beatriz leaves her house in a neighborhood of Buenos Aires province bordering the south of Buenos Aires City, at 5:30 am, in order to get to her first job at Berta's house in Colegiales, an upper-middle class neighborhood in the northern part of Buenos Aires, by 7:30; she stays there until 12 or 12:30. Her job in Colegiales is one of six such jobs she has as a waged-cleaner, which obligates her to navigate the city in a regular South-North movement of hop on and hop off several buses. However, when asked how many jobs she has, Beatriz mentioned she had four, as her Monday work was only sporadic and unregistered, while the other five were four registered and one unregistered. Two of the five jobs she counted as one, as she works five

hours twice a week in Erica's house and five hours once a week in Erica's mother's house. On the books, however, Erica appeared as her only employer, as if all work took place at her residence. Beatriz would very much like to have a regular job as a registered worker on Mondays, but for the time being, this is her situation. On Tuesdays, she commutes to Villa Ortuzar to work at Sabrina's house from 7 am until noon, and after that she takes the bus to Parque Chas and stays there from 12:30 or 1 pm until 5:30 or 6 pm, to work at Erica's house. After she is done, she takes the bus back to Villa Ortuzar to then take another bus back to her home. On Wednesdays, she leaves her home at 5:30 to get to Núñez by 7 am to work at Araceli's house, and at noon she travels to La Lucila and works there until 6 in *señor* Horacio's house, as she calls him. She arrives home around 8:30 or 9 pm. On Thursdays she works for 5 hours in the morning at Erica's mother's house in the Belgrano neighborhood. On Fridays she repeats her Tuesday routine. "My commute is two or two and a half hours long [in each direction] everyday, that is my schedule more or less, I leave early in the morning and arrive [home] very late. From Monday through Friday, that is how my days are," she told me. She often works between 9 and 10 hours, every weekday.

Beatriz started working in all but one of these six houses on recommendation from Marisa. Beatriz worked for Marisa for over nine years, and over the course of her relationship with Marisa she met her other employers. She was already well established in these other jobs when her relationship with Marisa suddenly ended, after Marisa decided to fire Beatriz without notice given that, according to what Beatriz told me Marisa had told her, she could no longer afford to have a household worker. "I am very disappointed in her," she told me at the time of the dispute. "She told me that she considered me like a daughter, but would she do such a thing to a daughter?" At Berta's house, she started working upon recommendation from Erica, who was Berta's daughter-in-law. Beatriz had been working for these different employers for different lengths of time: five

years for some, seven years for one, nine years for another. Ever since she arrived in Argentina from Peru 18 years ago, she has always worked as a waged-cleaner, going through many jobs of that specific kind. “I even used to work on Saturdays” she told me,

but I decided to stop working because they used to rob a lot in my neighborhood.

Some guys wait for you at the bus stop with knives, wasted, so that is why I no longer leave my house on Saturdays, because I leave at 5 in the morning [to go to work]. I was robbed twice, because they don’t know what they are doing when they are on drugs, so two years ago I decided to stop working on Saturdays, when I used to work for half a day, because for half a day of work I could lose all week. I also used to do odd jobs, like serving special lunches [i.e., catering] on Sundays, but I also stopped.

Now in her early forties, Beatriz began working as a cleaner because economically she needed to work and also because “I was tired of being at home, because I do not like to be at home so much.” She had never worked outside the home in Peru, and only began to do so when she moved to Argentina with her husband and two children, one of whom was an adolescent girl who remained in the care of Beatriz and her husband and another who was now an adult man, who no longer depended on or lived with them. Beatriz described the different jobs where she was then working as varied: “in some you work more, in others you work less,” she told me. Erica and her family “are very messy [...] but they do not have too much stuff, so when I tidy things up, it is quick.” Sabrina “is very neat [...] I try to take my time because there is not much to do [...] The floor is shining but for her, it is necessary to mop it because it is dirty [...] You only go and brush up, it is not like you have to remove the filth with a spoon, as I have [seen when I] have been to other houses, so you do not waste time.” Echoing the strategies of work avoidance of other workers

in the ethnographic record (see for instance Woodcock (2016), Zolniski (2003), Scott (1985), and specially Peña (1997)), which could be interpreted as Beatriz's resistance to, in Marxist terms, the extraction of her labor's value, she described her use of time as follows:

[...] More or less, one has to organize the time, so that you do not overwork, as I say it. Because otherwise they get used to me doing things very fast, so they are going to think that I always have to do it that way and I end in less time. And no, I try to go slowly, not so much in a hurry, so that I can make my time, so I say "it is already 11, I go to the kitchen, 11:50, I start wrapping up so that I can leave at 12 sharp." All my times, I have them limited so that I can reach my end time (laughs). In other jobs no, in others I have to do things rushing, because there it is dirtier, because it is only once a week [...]

An example of where she needed to rush because the house was dirtier was her job at *señor* Horacio's: "everything is a disaster: he makes everything dirty and leaves things all over the place [...] His coffee falls on the floor and he leaves the whole kitchen dirty and leaves, he does not care, until I go on Wednesdays. All week that I am not there, he makes things dirty and he leaves everything until the next Wednesday, so there I have a bit more work to do." At Erica's mother's house "everything" is also "a disaster." Given that Beatriz goes to her house only once a week "there it is dirtier, because she has a little dog that makes things dirty all over the place, and she doesn't clean anything up [...]" At Berta's, she often found a pile of dishes to wash upon her arrival at her house, given that "she has her cook who comes in to cook once a week, and she soils a lot."

Beatriz described her access to formal labor rights after several years of working informally immediately after the labor laws changed as something her employers who registered her did, so

that “there would not be any problems.” In none of the cases did she find herself compelled to ask to register the work relationship; they took the initiative instead. Beatriz described her relationship with her employers as “regular.” Like her work as a cleaner, which in the spectrum of intimate labor is perhaps the least intimate, so was her relationship with her employers a lot less intimate than those of people doing other kinds of household work, such as caregiving:

I am not too attached, neither too distant from them, [only] what is right and necessary (*lo justo y lo necesario*) with all of them. I talk whatever I need to talk about and I ask whatever I need to ask about work, and there I finish my hours and I leave, with all of them. I do not talk much about my personal life to people at my jobs [i.e., her employers]. My life, my personal matters—I have those at home, my troubles—I have those at home. If I am upset, I get upset at home, but not at work. At work, I go to work; from the moment I arrive, I work. They ask me something, “Beatriz, is there any cleaning item missing?” Or “Beatriz, are you feeling bad? I see you are not well, you can leave before your end time” and in that case I leave, but they are not the kind to ask much, because they know what I need to do; they are not the kind to ask. Sometimes they ask me about my daughter, about how is my family, and I answer “good, good.” Even if things are going bad, I always answer “good, I am good.” I do not say much, so our relationship is so so, neither good nor bad, with all of them.

Her access to labor rights in these “regular” relationships with her employers varied. Beatriz divided her employers between those who were “conscientious” (*conscientes*) and those who were not. Those who were *concientes* did everything “as is appropriate by the law” (*como corresponde la ley*), as she put it, and respected such things as paying for her vacation days and

the public holidays that she did not work. Then there were others, like *señor* Horacio, with whom accessing rights such as paid public holidays, salary raises, and paid vacation days was a struggle. Despite Beatriz's being a formally registered worker, he had refused to comply with his obligations. "I have talked to him already, but you tell me, how can I go and tell him, 'look, you have to pay me?'" she told me, expressing clear frustration at the situation with *señor* Horacio and, as she told me, preferring to look for another job rather than continuing to deal with him. She thus echoed the strategies of leaving the job by other subalternized workers such as those discussed by Woodcock (2016):

[...] With *señor* Horacio, I tell him "I am not coming in" [when it is a public holiday] and he doesn't pay me. With him I barely tell him "look, I won't come in" and he says "ok Beatriz, don't come in" [...] I told him to raise my salary, and I told him "*señor*, it has been several years that you don't raise my salary and truth be told, everything is more expensive now, and even the bus ticket is more expensive, so I am going to charge you more." So he told me "no, Beatriz, but right now I can't give you a raise." "Well, *señor*" I said "when you registered me we said there was vacation, we said that there was mid- and end-of-year bonus, and that if I got sick and did not come in to work you had to pay me, because I do not miss work because I want to but I miss work because of an illness." So he tells me "No, Beatriz, but that was just registered on paper, nothing more than that." That is why he registered me, in order not to have any problems [...] Because afterwards I do not have a right to anything and that is what he told me, it is what he made me understand. So that was it. And then I talked to him again, after, I don't know, one year, I touched upon this topic again and I tell him "*señor*, as you know I am 'in white' and this week it

is a public holiday.” So he said, “so you won’t be coming in, Beatriz? No problem! I won’t be here either.” And that was it. That is why, I am telling you, he is curt and he doesn’t touch upon the subject [of payment of public holidays] anymore because he knows I am going to talk to him about the fact that I am going to charge him more and that’s it [...] It doesn’t come from him, it is me who has to complain: “well, *señor*, I am going to charge you so and so, look, *señor*, I am going to charge you for my bus ticket because it is more expensive now,” it is not like he doesn’t know that the ticket is more expensive, but he does not raise my wage [...] That is why I am not interested in continuing to work with him, and I am telling you, for the past two years I keep on insisting, telling him, I mean, lying to him: “I am going to leave, *señor*” I tell him, “look for another person.” And he tells me “yes, yes Beatriz, do not worry, I will, but for the time being there is nobody, so keep on coming [...]” [I lie to him] to see if he raises my wage, [but he doesn’t]. And he tells me “stay calm, I will see if I can find someone,” and there it ends.

In her narrative of access to labor rights, Beatriz did not invoke an idiom of contract. She did not invoke an idiom of reciprocity, either. Like Vanesa with her employers, she could not confront *señor* Horacio directly because of the position she occupied vis-à-vis him: like Isalis and Vanesa as discussed above, she engaged in performative practices that enabled her to avoid discussing labor rights directly and engaging in a potential direct confrontation. Beatriz exercised patience with *señor* Horacio, waiting for him to decide to pay for her non-worked public holiday, and when he did not, she exercised leniency as being preferable to the impossibility of negotiation. When negotiating her salary increase, rather than telling *señor* Horacio what he had to do, she tried to persuade him to do so, by bringing up the higher cost of living in Argentina and the higher cost

of public transportation, rather than bringing up simply the fact that a raise was due because the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security had determined it. She also patiently justified missing work days in the event of an illness and waited for one year to bring up the topic of taking the day off during a public holiday, once again being lenient with *señor* Horacio because of the impossibility of access to negotiation of labor rights. And as a last resort, when all else failed, she lied to him about leaving her job soon, as a way to persuade him to raise her salary.

As Beatriz would put it, it didn't come from *señor* Horacio, she had to complain: she had to do the work of trying to make sure her rights were respected in the passage from non-contractual to contractual modes of regulation. Like Vanesa above, who hid information from her employers to access salary raises, lying to *señor* Horacio was Beatriz's way to try to gain leverage in a situation where she had very little power. Like Isalis and Vanesa, Beatriz could not negotiate a salary raise as an equal with *señor* Horacio but she could engage in a performance of the lenient, patient, non-confrontational worker. She could also lie to him, and that is what she did. Unlike other workers, her strategy of lying did not work with *señor* Horacio in the end, as he did not end up raising her salary. However, it remains an example of strategizing and trying to exert agency over her own circumstances, however unsuccessful such strategy may have turned out to be.

5.4 Using Humor: "I Told It to Her a Little Bit Like a Joke"

"Tomorrow is my favorite day," Mabel told me, as we shared a couple of cold sodas at a café in Parque Chacabuco, where she worked as a cleaner in four houses. "There are fairs everywhere, and I love to go around the fairs, it is like a hobby of mine (laughs). I do not go to a

mall or anything but I love the fairs, because it is so great to go seeing around, one by one, in Lugano or Pompeya”. “Tomorrow,” Saturday, was Mabel’s day off given that her employers had recommended she “get some rest” and that she also do so on Monday and Tuesday, which were going to be public holidays. Mabel had been in various work relationships with Perla and several members of her family for the past 20 years. “My sister used to work for my patrons: she got pregnant, and I came in to substitute her, so it was through me doing that that they got to know me,” she told me. “My sister left and was almost 30 years with them, she raised all of their children, and they never gave her anything, she was never ‘in white,’ ever. I am not ‘in white’ either, but they are planning to put me ‘in white.’” At the time of our meeting, Mabel was working regularly as a cleaner at Perla’s and at her husband’s house, at their adult daughter Francisca’s and her husband’s house, and at their adult son Mariano’s clothing store. She also used to work sporadically as a cleaner at Perla’s brother’s house and had just began another job as a cleaner at the house of a man she had met at Mariano’s store.

Mabel was in her late-thirties, and while she was born in Paraguay, she had spent most of her life in Argentina. Her parents, both from Paraguay, had been seasonal workers in Argentina for many years until they resettled in Paraguay permanently. “It was a lot of back and forth from [and to] Paraguay” she told me. She migrated permanently to Argentina when she was 19 years old, after getting married to her first husband, and first arrived in her sister’s place in a district in Buenos Aires province that borders the southern borders of Buenos Aires City. In addition to her sister, eight other siblings also lived in Argentina. She lived with her husband and three children, two of whom were teenagers and one of whom was in primary school, in a house in Guernica, in a district located in Buenos Aires’ southern periphery. Ever since Mabel arrived in Argentina, she had been living either in neighborhoods in the southern area of Buenos Aires or in districts in

Buenos Aires province bordering the southern part of the city. “Sometimes I think, ‘damn, this is how I have to live, commuting. My dream is to come back to [live in the] Capital. My dream is to come back [here] [...] one travels every day to work and run errands [...]’” As a matter of fact, from Monday through Friday and a number of times on Saturday, Mabel’s commute, like those of many other household workers, was quite cumbersome: she usually took one bus from her neighborhood to the Guernica train station, with the added complication that “now many buses broke down; [so] you wait for one hour for a bus to pass;” and then she took the train to the Constitución train station, where “there is a terrible line that sometimes you cannot even get on [the train];” and then from Constitución she went to Parque Chacabuco. “It is three hours one way and three hours back; it is six hours that I lose commuting.”

Mabel worked six hours a day, four times a week, at Perla’s and her husband’s house, whom she called her patrons: “I have one main *patrona* (i.e., “female patron”) but I work for the whole family,” she told me. In the same neighborhood, in walking distance from her patrons’ house, she also worked for four hours twice a week, at Francisca’s and her husband’s house. Whenever she could, she went to work at Mariano’s clothing store, although that was not a fixed job, and if on Tuesdays and Thursdays other jobs came up, she took those as well, such as the job she had just started when we met for the interview. She also sometimes cleaned Perla’s brother’s house, but that job was not regular either. As part of her job with Perla and her husband, she sometimes also cleaned an apartment they owned in the San Nicolás neighborhood of Buenos Aires, which they rented to tourists and other people visiting the city. Mabel worked as a waged-cleaner for all of her employers and, in her words, she was “really stretching myself thin [the exact translation of the expression she used was “I turn myself into chewing gum”], because there are

so many people who want to work and they cannot find anything, and for me, having my children all the money (*pesitos*) I can make is useful for me.”

Mabel carried out only cleaning tasks at all of these houses. She liked cleaning more than any other jobs she had had, she told me, including taking care of hospitalized people, caring for pets, or working construction. She described her days at Perla’s house as quite hectic. “I have to rush because otherwise I do not make it, I am not one to steal hours, no: I arrive, and stay put, and do everything.” Mabel arrived at 8, and if she found her employers having breakfast, she sat down to have breakfast and chat with them. After breakfast each one of them did “their own thing,” as she put it. If everyone in the house was awake by the time she got there, she usually began by doing the laundry first after breakfast, because it took quite some time to do it; if not, she begun by cleaning the floors in the yard outside and doing the dishes, trying to be as quiet as she could when doing so and only walking upstairs once she heard the people in the house had woken up. She then cleaned the bathrooms, did the beds, ironed, and “that [is my] whole round about the house... Sometimes if they are there they call me to have lunch with them; ‘Mabi, just leave that [what you are doing], come eat [with us].’” After lunch she washed the dishes, vacuumed the floors, cleaned all three bathrooms and all three bedrooms, and all the windows. “The good thing is that when she, [Perla], is not there, I can work calmly, because when she is there she wants to chat,” Mabel told me. After her workday finished at Perla’s, she went to Francisca’s in the afternoon and did, as she told me, all the things one normally does when cleaning a house.

Mabel described her relationship with Perla, whom, as mentioned before, she considers her main employer, in profoundly ambivalent terms, which mediated her access to rights at Perla’s and Mabel’s capacity to have leverage with her. On the one hand, she described her relationship with Perla and her family as kin-like. On the other, she objected to Perla’s lack of appreciation,

invoking, like other workers, such as Vanesa as discussed above, an idiom of reciprocity rather than contract law. Mabel was perfectly aware that the possibility to sue Perla and her husband, in the current context of labor rights for household workers, was real and would play in her favor:

“...[I came in to work at their house] because of trust, and that, she [Perla], does not value; she does not value trust. Because, I mean, if I am someone’s patron, whom I know where she comes from, whom I know wakes up at five, and commutes more [hours] than she works, and I know that is someone I can trust, I would value it more, I would give that person a prize and everything, if it was me, but well, not all of us think the same way... Now they [the government] are also demanding from my patron, and she is also afraid because they are demanding a lot [from employers]. They, [my employers], already found out how things have to be, and moreover if tomorrow something were to happen to me, they would lose, because my thing [i.e., my job] is secure [i.e., steady] and everyday; they [my employers] can’t say it is not. Moreover, I have pictures with them, so if I wanted to sue them, I would peel them [i.e., I would get a lot of money in severance pay] [...] Sometimes she, [Perla] tells me, “Look Mabel, we have been drinking *mate* for half an hour, you give me a discount for that, right?” And I laugh, because, I don’t know, at the end of the day it is my time I am losing. And she always does that, she discounts it from my wage [...] And I take it from the point of view that I have known them a long time and I calm down [...] What does it affect me to give her half an hour of my time and talking, because she has lots of problems, I am not the only one, and sometimes it is good for her that we talk, she says [...] My sister feels like part of the family, and now I feel that they are my support, that if I am in need

they are going to be there for me, they are very good people, whatever I need they are going to be there, like for instance if I am tight, and I need money, they lend me [...] they have no problem with lending me, I mean, I hope we never have problems, I feel good, I feel I have support from them [...]

In this context, Mabel struggled to access labor rights such as formal registration and salary raises in this way:

In actuality, my transportation I am spending more than 100 [pesos] and they pay me 60, which is not enough at all, but it is like I do not want to attack them because they know the situation with [President] Macri, because we are all tight [with money]. For once the ticket went up [...] but it is like, I shut up because at the same time, I have a job, because I start reproaching something and they [could] tell me “look for another job,” I don’t know, and that is why I shut up. But there will be a time in which I will have to explain to them. That is why I do not complain that they put me “in white,” because I am afraid that they will tell me to look for another *laburo* (i.e., “job”), that is why I am waiting for them to put me “in white.” It is my understanding that now they [the government] are demanding a lot, because my situation is not easy, I do not commute for half an hour, I commute for three hours, what if something were to happen to me [...] For them if it were possible, they would take away your raises, no way they give you those! She [Perla] used to pay me 130 pesos and she would add up, add up, add up, she always adds up, that is one thing that makes me angry, because at this point to be adding up! Leave my money alone! And she starts “how much is this hour worth, this much, we leave it at that,” she is counting the number of hours I am [at her house], if I go [to work]

six hours, [she pays me six hours], but if I go five hours, she pays me five hours. And I'm like, "the way your president, Macri, is taking all prices through the roof, you are going to have to pay me more." Just like that, I told her. "You talk about Macri a lot and we can't make ends meet" (*ustedes mucho Macri, Macri y a nosotros no nos alcanza nada*) I told her. That is how I usually talk to her (laughs). "You are one crazy woman," she tells me (laughs). I told it to her a little bit like a joke, that is how I am, and sometimes if I do not like something I directly change my face, because she is not right, I am the one who is right, and that is why she tells me "oh well;" if she is right, I tell her she is right [...] That thing [about "Macri, your president"] I told it to her a little bit like a joke, because they tease me, they send me all sorts of things about Cristina to my cellphone, you have no idea, they hate Cristina, and "I love Cristina," I tell her, "she is my mom," I tell her (laughs). "The only *kirchnerista* I have to put up with is you because I have no choice" she tells me.

In her narrative of access to labor rights, Mabel described the tension inherent in her relationship with her employers: on the one hand, she felt close to them, as she had been working with them for the past twenty years, and on the other, her position vis-à-vis them as someone who lived under the constant threat of being fired put her in a difficult position when wanting to negotiate labor rights. Mabel was perfectly aware of her rights as a worker, but she did not invoke an idiom of rights and obligations when discussing why she thought her employers should give her a raise: she invoked an idiom of reciprocity instead. Despite the fact that she felt close to her employers, she did not feel at liberty to discuss her formal registration or any other rights with them directly, or to tell her employer to refrain from chatting with her and continuing to discount

her wage. Like the workers Heine, et al. (2017) worked with, she put up with it: she laughed off the situation instead, and left it at that, avoiding any sort of confrontation with her employer, not because she did not find her employer's behavior problematic, but because engaging in a direct discussion could have meant a dismissal from her job. This is a fear Mabel expressed explicitly when talking about asking her employers to register their work relationship formally. Instead of talking to them about her registration, she exercised patience with them, waiting for them to take the initiative instead. She avoided talking explicitly about her salary raises as well, and instead used the running joke she had with her employers about President Macri and former President Fernandez de Kirchner to bring up the issue. Humor in this case served as a non-confrontational medium through which to make a grievance and gain leverage in a situation where, as in the cases of Isalis, Vanesa, Beatriz and other subalternized workers like them as discussed above, her leverage as a worker was quite limited.

Mabel used humor in order to voice her need for a salary raise, exercised cordiality with her employer at her repeated discounting of her wage, and exercised patience with her at the impossibility of negotiating her formal registration directly. This was Mabel's way to exercise agency in a situation where her agency was significantly constrained by the structural conditions of her existence as a household worker, and her way to gain leverage in a relationship like the one she had with Perla, where her leverage was extremely limited. Like Isalis, Vanesa, and Beatriz, Mabel could not negotiate salary raises, working hours, wages, and registration rights as an equal with Perla, but she could engage in a performance of the cordial, patient, non-confrontational, amicable worker. She could also joke around with her employer, and that is what she did.

5.5 Conclusion: “You Have to Talk it Over From the Beginning, Otherwise You Can’t Make a Complaint”

Carmen and I were sitting at a bench at Plaza de la Misericordia, a square nearby Carmen’s house. She had suggested we met there on a Saturday for our interview, which was her day off and hence the only day she was free, although not completely: at the time of our meeting, she used to take care of an elderly person 12 hours a day during the week as a live-out household care worker and had also another job as a household caretaker of an elderly couple on the weekends, which was a live-in job. At that one, she used to enter at 8pm and used to leave at 8am. The fact that she was spending part of her only day off with me was a real privilege for me, as something as simple, from a middle-class point of view, as meeting with someone to hang out and chat was a luxury for her. In her early 50s, ever since she arrived from Peru in Buenos Aires, first by herself and then gradually bringing her children from Peru to live with her, she had worked as a caretaker of older adults. “It is my specialty,” she told me, so she was quite experienced at what it took to access rights in a context such as paid household work, particularly when first starting a work relationship:

From the beginning you have to say [what the job will consist of and how many hours you will be working], because otherwise you cannot make a complaint (*reclamar*). From the beginning, you have to negotiate everything, because otherwise later it is more difficult. One has to go looking, finding out [about one’s rights], because there are people who shut up [...] When I am at the [job] interview, I say [i.e., discuss] how much it is that I have to do, [what my] public transportation [will be], from the beginning you have to clarify everything to them, how many hours [you will work], if they will pay for your public transportation, what you will be doing at the job, everything. [I learned all of this] from my personal experience

and also the law helps, because you are talking in a justified way [*con base*], you are not talking because you just feel like it.

Carmen's observations on the importance of negotiating labor rights and obligations from the start and on the impossibility or difficulty of doing so well into the work relationship speaks to the experiences of Isalis, Vanesa, Beatriz, Mabel, and other household workers like them. As we saw with Isalis, Vanesa, Beatriz, and Mabel, the difficulty, or the impossibility of negotiating access to rights lies in the ways in which rights are mediated by social relationships between household workers and their employers. As we saw with them, under circumstances of intersectional, structural inequality, and when love and trust fail to be resources workers can mobilize to negotiate their labor rights, it is difficult or impossible for household workers to negotiate access to their putative equality before the law for various reasons. These include, first, their very material, and precarious, conditions of existence as household workers, who need to work and for whom the fear of being fired is an immediate and real possibility. But the difficulty, or impossibility of negotiation of labor rights, as Carmen would put it, also lies on the ways in which being vocal, confrontational, direct, and assertive about one's rights as a household worker would signify a transgression of the symbolic boundaries of social differentiation in a profoundly intersectionally unequal context. This does not mean that workers have no agency, or that they unreflexively adopt the worldview of the upper-middle class families that purchase their labor. But it does mean that their exercise of agency is circumscribed by the material and symbolic orders they inhabit. Like other subalternized workers before them, by being indirect, patient, lenient, cordial, non-confrontational, and amicable, they are not acting "submissively" or "not fighting for their rights." Quite the contrary, they are using the few resources they have in order to gain

leverage with their employers and access formal rights in a way that would not threaten their own material conditions of existence.

6.0 Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

6.1 Concluding Discussion

It was a Tuesday afternoon, and Alma, Natividad, and I were hanging out in the office of AMUMRA. As was usually the case, Alma had come in that afternoon in order to provide pro-bono services to workers who came into the office with their concerns. While most of the people she counseled were household workers, she took on all sorts of cases of other workers who had legal concerns related to their jobs. Alma is a labor lawyer with a commitment to social justice. Before becoming a labor lawyer, she had considered becoming a social worker, and that vocation really showed in her work with the household workers, who often were absolutely devastated after having been suddenly fired. Alma listened patiently to them, counseled them, and accompanied them through the entire process of juggling through the justice system to get, as many workers usually put it, lo que corresponde (i.e., what is right, what is fair). Every time she won a lawsuit, which was often, she donated part of her honorarium to AMUMRA. As we were waiting for people to arrive, Alma was explaining to me the merits that she saw in the legal framework that now regulates paid household work in Argentina:

Back in the day it was nothing like the way it is today. Back in the day there was an executive order that was applied that had a different kind of legislation [...] That law was a disaster. Besides, it did not legislate vacation, it did not grant the right to risk insurance, to pension, forget it—there was nothing of the kind. Nothing. [The worker of private household] got half the salary of what a different kind of worker got [sic], got half the severance pay, it was half a salary for every year worked,

[she] did not have the right to mid- and end-of year bonus, and it was not that long ago, since 2015 [sic]. That was the law that was applied, that is why lawyers did not do a lot of household labor law, we didn't even bother to file a lawsuit because it was very little money, you see? The Tribunal of Domestic Service was in Esmeralda Street, I might have gone once or twice to go do an agreement, I think, obviously *SECLO*¹¹ for domestic service did not exist, people agreed on very little money, most went on to court and it was very little money, because for a person who worked before [as a household worker], six months, half her salary was the severance pay, half a salary and the notification of firing [...] And now he [sic] is a worker, if you are [working] "in black," there is a penalty for work in black, before it did not exist, you could be in black if you did not comply with a certain number of hours, you had to work a minimum of 16 hours a week in order to be able to file a lawsuit [...] So if I worked for two hours, did you notice that sometimes they [household workers] go to clean your house and work for two hours, say [if someone worked] 4 hours a week, you did not have the obligation to register it [the work relationship] [...] It was not considered a job, it was considered a civil prestation of services, as if you come to do a job for me that I contract as something civil, not labor-related, not with the protection of the state but in a private manner. It is as if someone goes to do a painting [for you], get it? You contract a service. And why is that? Because it was considered that domestic service does not generate profit. Work generates profit, so it has to be protected by the state. Someone goes

¹¹ *SECLO* stands for Service of Mandatory Labor Conciliation, which is a procedure that expedites the resolution of disputes between workers and former employers.

to clean your house and it does not leave any profit to you, the cleaning [she does], but in reality it does: it leaves you the profit that this time you invested in that woman whom you are paying you were able to work also, or do something else with your day, your life. It was not considered a worker, domestic service, in a certain time frame [...] It was between you and me, the state does not intervene.

In Alma's description of the previous and current legal regimes regulating paid household work, she lauded the current legal framework for the state's capacity to intervene in the household in the advent of the end of the work relationship: through penalties to employers for having employed workers irregularly, through higher severance pay for workers than stipulated in the previous legal framework, by doing away with the rule that only from 16 hours onwards were employers obligated to register the work relationship with their workers, making it easier for workers to seek justice in the advent of the end of a work relationship where they worked less than 16 hours a week, and by extending the *SECLO* legal procedure to legal disputes over household work as well. For Alma, the new framework has also made it easier for household workers to find lawyers willing to take up their cases, as the current framework of higher penalties has also meant higher honoraria for lawyers and an incentive to take up these kinds of cases. It is thus that the state, as she eloquently explained, has reconstructed household work from a "service," with its implication as a private activity not worthy of state intervention into "work," as a public activity worthy of state intervention. As she also told me on a different occasion, "the state intervenes when the relationship ends." In this monograph, I have looked at what happens in the meantime as far as the regulation of paid household work is concerned, outside the courtroom, in everyday life, by paying attention to what happens prior to state intervention through penalization of employers who do not comply with the law once the work relationship has ended.

I have examined how the regulation of intimate labor, here the regulation of paid household work, as an advancement in women's citizenship rights in Argentina translates into the lives of household workers and the activists who advocate on their behalf, against a legacy of sexism, classism, and racism historically codified in law and only recently undone legally. As stated in the Introduction, these changes in the law manifested a problematization on the part of the Argentine state of the gendered public/private divide, a redrawing of its boundaries, and a reconfiguration of what counts and does not count as labor, and what matters and what does not matter as an issue of public concern. But as Alma eloquently put it, the fact of the matter is that even with these monumental, qualitative changes in labor law that by every measure signified an advancement in household workers' and women's rights, the state only intervenes through penalization of the employer when not complying with the law when the work relationship ends. The gendered public/private divide, foundational to the state, does not fully disappear, even in the context of full labor rights for household workers when the "household" becomes in law also a "workplace." On the one hand, the ideal of domesticity as Abrams (1999) calls it, is disrupted, on the other, it remains intact. On the one hand, the changes in the law signify a partial legal break with the notion of the domestic sphere as one defined only by family relations by having the household concept grafted onto the home concept for non-family workers. On the other, this sphere does not become completely public, given that it remains primarily defined by the family relations. The public/private divide is thus not fully undone. This presents a peculiar situation of access to public rights in a private setting with its concomitant set of challenges, a situation that is not new.

When placing the granting of full labor rights for household workers as yet another iteration in the long struggle for equal citizenship for women, we find parallels between the regulation of paid household work and the regulation of other relationships of power within the home. Feminist

scholars (e.g., Okin (1989), MacKinnon (1989)) have discussed how, for instance, dramatic changes in family law that resulted in the criminalization of wife battering and incest signify interventions into the ways in which power exists and is exercised in the private sphere and where heteropatriarchal oppression is reproduced through the control of husbands over wives and parents over children. I add here that such oppression is also reproduced through the control of employers over household workers, which ranges from disrespect of labor rights to instances of humiliation, verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment and assault, and psychological and emotional violence, which in my field research showed up in conversations and interviews with workers enough to consider it a pattern endemic to the nature of many relationships between employers and household workers and not merely of isolated instances of mistreatment and discrimination. How household workers and activists maneuver within the system of challenges that they cannot solve has been what I have been seeking answers to in this monograph, given the legacy of the gendered public/private divide and its foundational and structuring role to the modern systems of law and policy.

If there is a way to characterize the ways in which activists and workers deal with these challenges, the word is ambivalence. On the one hand, household workers rights' activists promote for household workers a resignification of the "home" into a "household" as it applies to them as non-family members, working in a sphere that for others involved in it remains a locus of family relations. Activists also promote for workers a resignification of their activities as "work," and a concomitant resignification of their relationships with their employers, thus pushing for a replacement of the economies of trust, reciprocity, and pseudo-kinship for a conscience of contract. As I have shown, a particularly salient example of this are the counter-hegemonic linguistic and semiotic practices that activists engage in, aimed at instilling a different kind of subjectivity in the

workers that come into contact with household workers' rights organizations such as *AMUMRA* or *UPACP*. These practices are aimed at encouraging workers, as I heard countless times over the course of my field research, "to make the law their own" (*apropiarse de la ley*), to become citizens responsible for advancing their own rights through their knowledge of the law and their empowerment as "household workers with rights."

On the other hand, household workers' rights activists are aware that promotion of a consciousness of citizenship does not take place in a vacuum: it happens against the backdrop of systemic inequalities of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender between household workers and employers and in the context of private households where workers are virtually always by themselves advocating for, negotiating, and accessing their putative equality before the law with their employers. This, as I have shown, entails the promotion on the part of activists of practices outside the idiom of citizenship and contract that take full account of the systemic disparities extant between household workers and employers. The strategies of subterfuge that activists promote, or of "dramaturgical citizenship," as I call them, are para-contractual practices that become crucial in workers' access to formal rights. The repertoire of these para-contractual practices is not limited to activists' promotion of ways to act in the workplace in manners that would not disrupt the intersectional symbolic systems of differentiation and inequality between household workers and employers; they include also strategies of household workers own doing and making.

The strategies employed by household workers illustrate their ingenuity and creativity at finding ways to exercise their agency and access rights in a context of monumental intersectional structural constrains. As I have shown, these para-contractual practices entail turning what is often, as other scholars have documented, an obstacle to labor rights—affect—into a resource to do so, in a context of generalized lack of respect for the rule of law. When affect cannot be used,

household workers resort to other para-contractual practices, best summarized as “weapons of the weak” (Scott 1989), evocative of the practices of resistance employed in the workplace by precarious, subalternized workers around the world to gain control over their conditions of work and, ultimately, their own lives. Both the use of “affective capital,” and of “weapons of the weak” illustrate the ways in which household workers engage with the contradiction of access to public rights in the private sphere: they show the ways in which household workers must navigate power relations not of their own doing, making sure they do not transgress the symbolic order of things in order to access their putative equality before the law when resources to do so, other than affective capital and weapons of the weak, are not available to them.

The ways in which household workers’ rights’ activists and household workers navigate a new legal framework of equal labor rights before the law and the practices they engage in not only show ways in which they navigate the contradictions inherent in grafting onto the private sphere of the home, as place of family, the public sphere of the household, as workplace. They also highlight the necessity of not divorcing a politics of recognition of rights from a politics of redistribution (see Fraser (2000)), and of thinking of them jointly when implementing law and policy aimed at ending social inequality, given that lack of recognition and lack of redistribution are two types of injustice that mutually reinforce one another.

Paraphrasing Fraser (2000), the practices that household workers’ rights activists and household workers must engage in daily life to access rights highlight the ways in which socioeconomic injustice does not exist divorced from cultural or symbolic injustice. Their practices point at how formal recognition of rights is not enough to access them if the recognition of such rights does not go hand-in-hand with laws and policies aimed at reducing the intersectional, systemic inequalities that mar household workers’ lives. If there is anything that the experiences

of household workers and the activists that advocate on their behalf can teach us are the ways in which household workers, like other social groups, are what Fraser calls a “bivalent collectivity” with politico-economic and identity dimensions in need of both redistribution and recognition, as workers whose rights should rightly be enshrined in law as such but who are also people whose access to rights is contingent upon disparate material conditions of existence as virtually always working-class, often migrant, virtually always women, often of color. This is perhaps the most immediate conclusion drawn from this study, and the most significant one, as an ever-increasing number of countries ratify C189 and pass legislations at the national level that guarantees equal rights for household workers, similar to Law 26844.

As I discussed over the course of this dissertation, the challenges that household workers face in accessing their putative equality before the law are tied to cultures of patronage and servitude which, through activist praxis, organizations like *AMUMRA* are working on changing for cultures of contract. They are also tied to a context in which, and this is worth reiterating, an overwhelming majority (75%) of household workers continue to be employed in the informal economy. The challenges that workers face in accessing equality before the law are also tied to a context in which many workers do not know about their labor rights and consequently cannot make claims to them. But a monumentally important factor, perhaps the single most important one in the challenges that household workers face in accessing rights is intrinsically tied to what Holston (2008), calls universal recognition vs. unequal distribution, where full inclusion before the law stands in stark contrast with exclusion from access to state power and, consequently, to the actual right to the exercise of citizenship. The unequal are treated unequally, entrenching a notion of differentiated citizenship for the rich and the poor. As Holston (2008) argues, and as my study shows, access to citizenship—in this case, for household workers—is as much tied to the

recognition of formal rights as it is to other demands for a dignified existence. This certainly does not diminish the importance of formal recognition of labor rights for household workers, nor the monumental work that advocacy organizations like *AMUMRA* are carrying out. It only points at how structural changes to household workers' material conditions of existence in the form of reduction of grotesque levels of social inequality could greater facilitate their access to their labor rights under the law.

Household workers cannot access their putative full labor rights if, as I encountered during my fieldwork, they work ten hours a day and spend an additional four hours every day on public transportation, lacking the resource of time to, for example, see a lawyer Monday through Friday during business hours. They also cannot access their labor rights if, in order to see a lawyer, they have to miss work and when working for a wage consequently miss their pay for the day. They also cannot access their labor rights when all the information about the changes in legislation is on the internet and they lack access to it. In the case of migrant women, they cannot access their labor rights if, when working as live-in workers, they are denied days off and consequently cannot go to the National Direction for Migration to regularize their migratory status. They also cannot access their labor rights when being put in the position to make the decision to either become regular workers and earn less money or continue to work informally for a higher wage, when the minimum wage stipulated by the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security is lower than the price of such wage in the market and when living paycheck to paycheck. And they cannot access their labor rights when, as I encountered in my fieldwork, they live in informal settlements where the post does not arrive and, in that way, face a significant obstacle to having a postal exchange with their former employers as dictated by law. In sum, perhaps the single most important conclusion drawn from this study is that access to labor rights for household workers is not only about formal

recognition of rights, but also about access to a living wage, to the city, to housing, to social networks, to public transportation. It is, as Holston would put it, as much about entrenched as it is about insurgent citizenship, as much about the local dimension and concrete experiences of people who have historically lacked access not only to the state but also to civil society as much as it is about the national dimension and abstract dimension of citizenship.

During a panel on household and care work in which we presented together, one of my colleagues, Dr Verónica Jaramillo, mentioned, when discussing the situation of migrant household workers, that for Paraguayan women, household work is “practically a destiny” when arriving in Argentina. I add to that accurate comment that such is the case for most waged-working, urban poor women in Buenos Aires’ Metropolitan Area, and that as the ethnographic evidence shows, unless a recognition of the status of workers as such goes hand-in-hand with social and public policies to drastically reduce social inequality there is not only little hope for that to change, but also little possibility for workers to be able to negotiate with their employers and access labor rights as equal subjects before the law. This, again, does not mean that formal recognition of labor rights has been irrelevant or that the impact of the new legislation has been nil—I hope, as a matter of fact, to have successfully shown the contrary in this study: the experiences of household workers and activists speak to that. However, formal recognition of labor rights is only one fundamentally important component of a full vision of social justice for household workers, with access to social equality being another.

6.2 Directions for Further Research

This dissertation focused on the experiences of household workers and household workers' rights activists with the new framework of regulation of paid household work. It did not focus on the experiences of employers of household workers, and further research needs to pay attention to their experiences to understand why, even when being entitled to tax deductions or being threatened with penalties, the overwhelming majority of them continues to employ their workers informally. I also focused here on the experiences of household workers who were Argentine citizens or citizens of countries in Mercosur and its associated states. Further research needs to focus on the experiences of extra-Mercosur migrants who work in the household work sector and who lack the privilege of formal citizenship or permanent residence. A topic that came up in my field research, but that I did not pursue, was household workers' problems with access to health care and to private health insurance in particular; subsequent research should focus on that. Further research should also focus on the situation of home caretakers who are not hired by private persons but by health insurance companies to work in private households, a labor whose regulation is outside the framework examined in this dissertation. Subsequent research should also look at employment agencies, which often act as brokers between household workers and employers. Further research should also examine ethnographically more in-depth both the *Programa Asistir* and the Tribunal in order to better understand household workers' relationship with institutions of the state. Further research should examine ethnographically workers' relationship to *UPACP* and its affiliated institutions as the oldest household workers' union in Argentina. The grassroots initiatives for the rights of household workers located in various places in the country, in the form of grassroots organizations and unions, should also be studied in order to better understand the political practices that are emerging on the ground outside the context of the capital city in the

context of full rights for household workers, as well as the challenges that activists and workers face outside of the capital city context. Finally, the challenges inherent in the regulation of paid household work as examined ethnographically in this dissertation could inform subsequent studies and attempts at regulating other forms of intimate labor, including sex work and surrogacy, not only in Argentina but in other contexts as well.

Appendix A Interview Guides

Appendix A.1 Original Interview Guide – Household Workers

1. Tell me about your experience as a household worker. Let's start with when you began to work as a household worker. What was your first job? Tell me about the kind of job it was and what your relationship was like with your employer.
2. Tell me about other jobs you have had as a household worker. What were those other jobs like? What kind of jobs were they? And what was your relationship with your employers?
3. Tell me about your current job as a household worker. How is it? How is your relationship with your employer?
4. Tell me about your working conditions. What kind of contractual arrangement have you made with your employer? What are the conditions of your contract right now?
5. Tell me about the conditions of your contract before and after the new law was passed. How did the conditions of your contract change?
6. Tell me about what was your reaction and your employer's reaction to the passage of the new law. Was it your initiative or your employer's for the conditions of your contract to change?
7. Tell me about the relationship with your employer before and after the new law was passed. How did your relationship with your employer change after that?
8. Tell me about your current situation after the passage of the new law. How is it better than it used to be? How is it worse? How is it the same?

Appendix A.2 Revised Interview Guide – Household Workers

1. Tell me about your experience as a household worker. Let's start with when you began to work as a household worker. What was your first job? Tell me about the kind of job it was and what your relationship was like with your employer.
2. Tell me about other jobs you have had as a household worker. What were those other jobs like? What kind of jobs were they? And what was your relationship with your employers?
3. Tell me about your current job as a household worker. How is it? How is your relationship with your employer?
4. Tell me about your working conditions. What kind of contractual arrangement have you made with your employer? What are the conditions of your contract right now?
5. Tell me about the conditions of your contract before and after the new law was passed. How did the conditions of your contract change?
6. Tell me about what was your reaction and your employer's reaction to the passage of the new law. Was it your initiative or your employer's for the conditions of your contract to change?
7. Tell me about the relationship with your employer before and after the new law was passed. How did your relationship with your employer change after that?
8. Tell me about your current situation after the passage of the new law. How is it better than it used to be? How is it worse? How is it the same?
9. Are you aware that there is now a law of workers of private households?
10. What benefits did this law bring about for you as a worker?
11. Do you know which rights you have under this new law?

Appendix A.3 Rerevised Interview Guide – Household Workers

Current Work Situation

1. Tell me about your current work situation.
 - a. Do you work in white or in black?
 - i. If you work in white, tell me how was the deal about them putting you in white
 - ii. If you are in white, do you have work risk insurance?
 - iii. How are you registered?
 - iv. Do you prefer to be in white or in black? What benefits do you think offers you working in white/in black?
2. Do you work as a live-in worker, as a waged live-out worker, or as a salaried live-out worker?
3. Tell me about your employers
 - a. Do you work for one or for several?
 - b. How was it that you started working for each one? Through an agency? Through a family member? Through friends? Through acquaintances?
 - c. How long have you been working for each one of your employers?
 - d. How is the relationship with each one of them?

- e. What is a “good” relationship for you?
4. Tell me about your tasks. What activities do you carry out in the houses of your employers?
 - a. Do you carry out other tasks? What are they? Do they pay you for those separately?
 5. Tell me about your day. How many hours do you work per day?
 6. Tell me about your rest. Do you have a rest between your morning and afternoon tasks? How are they?
 7. Tell me about the work clothes and the things you need to work. Do your employers give you the work clothes and the things you need for working?
 - a. What is your opinion on the uniform? Do you like it or would you prefer not to wear it? Why?
 8. Tell me about the issue of food. Do your employers give you meals? How many times a day?
 9. How much time does it pass between the moment you leave and the moment you go back to work?
 10. Tell me about your days off. How many days off do you have? From which day?
 11. How is it when you work extra hours? Do they pay you 50% more?
 12. How is it when you work on weekends? Do they pay you double?
 13. April 3rd was Household Worker’s Day.

- a. Did you go to work or did you take the day off?
 - b. If you went to work, did they pay you double?
 - c. If you did not go to work, did they pay you that day?
14. Tell me about the topic of bonuses. Does your employer pay you the bonus? When and how do they pay it?
15. Tell me about the topic of vacations. Do you have to ask for them? Do they give you vacations? How many days of vacation do they give you?
16. If you work as a live-in worker,
- a. How many hours do you sleep each day? Do you ever suffer interruptions? For which reason?
 - b. In case of interruptions, do you have compensating rest? Do they pay you those hours of sleep you lose as extra hours?
 - c. Do you have your own room? How is it?
17. Are you satisfied with your salary?
- a. Do you know if it is in accordance with the table from the Ministry of Labor?
 - b. What is your salary?
 - c. How do they pay you generally? On business days? In your workplace during your working hours?
 - d. How do they pay you per month?

- e. Do they pay you at the end of the workday or at the end of the week?
 - f. Do they give you a receipt? What information does it have?
 - g. How do they pay you? With cash? With a check? Through bank transfer?
 - h. In regard to the raises, do they give you those? Do you have to ask for those?
How is it?
18. Have you ever gotten sick while working? Were you able to take sick leave? How was it?
19. Have you ever suffered an accident at work? Were you able to take leave? How was it?
20. Are you studying? Were you able to take leave because of exams? How was it?
21. Did you get married before beginning to work in houses or during? If you got married during, were you able to take marriage leave? How was it?
22. Have you ever suffered the loss of a loved one while you were working? Were you able to take grief leave?
23. Have you ever been pregnant during your job? Were you able to take maternity leave?
How was it?
24. Did you have children while you were working? Were you able to take leave for their birth? How was it?

Work History

25. Before your current jobs, did you have other jobs in private households? Can you tell me about each one of them?
- a. What kind of jobs were they?

- b. How was your relationship with your employer?
26. Have you ever resigned? How was it? Did you notify them beforehand?
27. Have you ever been fired? How was it?
- a. Did they notify you in advance?
 - b. Did they pay you the severance pay?

Training

28. Which courses did you take in the union's school? How do you think they have been useful to your current work situation?
29. In what ways did law 26844 help you in your daily life?

Demographic data

30. How old are you?
31. Are you from Buenos Aires or did you migrate to the city? Where are you from? How long have you been here? Do you have friends and family here?
32. What is your migratory situation? Do you have your ID?
33. What is your marital status?
34. Do you have children?
35. Do you have other dependents?
36. What is your completed schooling?

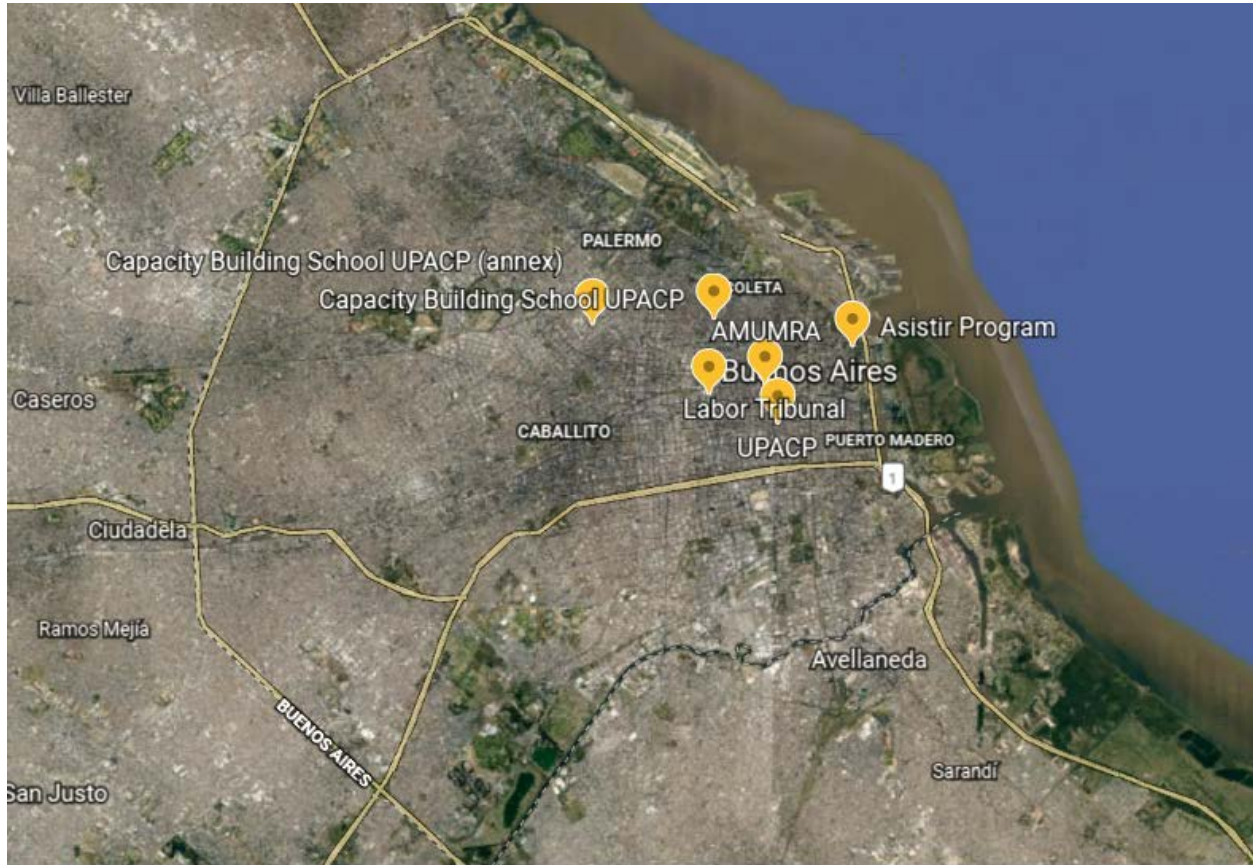
37. Are you unionized? Since when?

a. Do you have people in your social circle who are unionized?

Appendix A.4 Interview Guide – Activists

1. Tell me about your role in the passage and implementation of the new law. What do you think that has been?
2. Tell me about your work. What are the challenges you have found in the implementation of the new law?
3. Tell me about the things that have been difficult about working towards the implementation of the new law. What obstacles have you faced from the employers and the Argentine state?
4. How do you think you have empowered household workers? Can you tell me about specific examples, without mentioning any specific names of the household workers you have worked with?
5. What do you think “empowerment” consists of?

Appendix B Locations of Household Workers' Rights Institutions



Appendix C List of Acronyms

AFIP.....	Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos
AMUMRA.....	Asociación de Mujeres Unidas Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina
ANSES.....	Administración Nacional de Seguridad Social
ATSA.....	Asociación de Trabajadores de la Sanidad Argentina
CMW.....	Committee on Migrant Workers
C189.....	Convention 189 of the ILO Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers
ENM.....	Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres
EO 326/56.....	Executive Order 326/56
GAATW.....	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women
IDWN.....	International Domestic Workers' Network
ILO.....	International Labor Organization
MERCOSUR.....	Mercado Común del Sur
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
OSPAC.....	Obra Social del Personal Auxiliar de Casas Particulares
SECLO.....	Servicio de Conciliación Laboral Obligatoria
SOMU.....	Sindicato de Obreros Marítimos Unidos
TCP.....	Trabajadora de Casa Particular
UPACP.....	Unión Personal Auxiliar de Casas Particulares

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