

Review / Reseña

Hutchison, Elizabeth Quay. *Workers Like All the Rest of Them. Domestic Service and the Rights of Labor in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021). 206 p.

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Workers Like All the Rest of Them by Elizabeth Q. Hutchison tells the unknown history of Chilean domestic workers during the twentieth century. It explores how the leaders of the domestic service movement organized and struggled to be recognized as workers and gain labor rights and dignity “like all the rest of them.” At the beginning of the book, Hutchison, who has dedicated her career to studying Chilean gender and labor history, recognizes that historians have ignored the domestic worker’s movement in Chile. This book fills this gap by demonstrating how these marginal workers were primary actors in Chilean labor history and politics. Placing domestic workers at the center of Chilean history, her book demonstrates that domestic workers activists and their allies fought to be recognized as workers and obtain labor rights, rights that the Chilean state denied until the end of the twentieth century.

Hutchison argues that the story of domestic worker activism was not isolated from Chile’s broader national political context. In other words, domestic worker activism benefited from early twentieth-century debates about poverty and labor as well as 1960s revolutionary movements inspired by Social Catholicism and Marxism. Similarly, in the 1980s, democratic and feminist movements supported the struggle of domestic workers. Domestic worker activists made strategic alliances with actors across

different political sectors to improve legal protections by the late 1990s. Hutchison also argues that many of the obstacles that domestic workers faced (and continue to face) emerged in the twentieth century, challenging common assumptions about the colonial origin of domestic service inequalities in Latin America. Instead, she posits that modern ideas about labor and gender contributed to preserving and deepening labor inequalities. Nonetheless, some actors committed to modern and progressive ideas, such as political leaders, labor office officials, journalists, Catholic priests, and legal and social work professionals, were allies of domestic worker activists who supported moving beyond the exploitative practices tied to domestic services that were rooted in patronage and kinship.

Hutchison situates workers' agency within the cultural structures and representations that have constructed intersectional hierarchies around class, gender, and ethnicity that persist in Chilean society today. At the same time, she avoids victimization in the story of these workers. The author does not deny that domestic workers faced structural conditions that made meeting their demands especially difficult. However, structural forces could not prevent improvements to material and labor conditions. She highlights how domestic workers successfully organized and achieved recognition and uplifted their living conditions. Although Hutchison emphasizes the role of key figures in this fight, such as Elba Bravo, Aída Moreno, and Bernardino Piñera, she also explains that activism was a collective struggle that went beyond any single individual.

In her book, Hutchison consults a robust corpus of written documents that are combined with oral sources to enrich her argument. In addition to laws, newspaper articles, social worker theses, and official documents, she also had access to the archival records of the main domestic worker unions of the second half of the twentieth century, the Sindicato de Trabajadoras de Casa Particular (SINTRACAP) and the Asociación Nacional de Empleadas de Casa Particular (ANECAP). She conducted oral histories with Chileans involved in Catholic associations and secular unions from the 1950s through the 1980s. Furthermore, to reinforce her point about the ubiquity of domestic workers in Chilean culture, Hutchison also examines songs, plays, and scripts from popular culture, such as the famous Chilean character "la Desideria" and the contemporary film "La Nana".

The book consists of five chapters that cover the twentieth century chronologically. In this way, the reader obtains a clearer view of how and why the political and cultural forces of the modernization period contributed to increasing the

lack of social protection for domestic workers and their invisibility. Chapter One explains how the first domestic service unions fought to recognize their members as workers instead of servants in the early twentieth century. During that time, public debate was focused on how to respond to social inequalities, such as urban poverty and poor access to education and healthcare for most of the population. Also known as the “Social Question,” these debates prevailed not only in Chile but throughout the rest of Latin America. The chapter also shows that men were part of domestic service until the 1940s, when gardeners, chauffeurs, and valets became considered “independent contractors.”

Chapter Two focuses on the public debate around the Labor Code of 1931 and demonstrates that legislators excluded domestic workers despite their effort to be protected alongside “industrial males.” Despite the actions of unions such as the Sindicato Autónomo de Empleados de Casa Particulares de Ambos Sexos and La Sociedad del Porvenir de Empleados de Casa Particulares, legislators maintained a paternalistic view and argued that the state should not intrude in a “private relationship.” Nonetheless, the Labor Code (1931) recognized them as workers, marking one of the first triumphs of these unions. Hutchison argues that it was during the Popular Front, the coalition that governed Chile between 1936 and 1941, composed of Marxist and liberal parties, when “domestic service became even more closely associated with the economic and sexual exploitation of poor women” (Hutchison 2021, 66).

Hutchison uses the oral testimonies of activists and Church written documents to explain how progressive forces of social Catholicism, particularly Juventud Obrera Católica (Young Catholic Workers) and the leadership of Bishop Bernardino Piñera, helped support domestic workers’ activism. Chapter Three explains how these forces facilitated the foundation of the first Federación de Empleadas, “one of the largest sectors of lay Catholicism mobilized through the JOC” (Hutchison 2021, 100). According to Hutchison, *empleadas* found spiritual and personal support in these Catholic allies, while building together a space where they could find shelter, material resources, educational training, sociability, legal services, and public support. Hutchison uses activists’ narratives because they offer the possibility of knowing their life experiences from their point of view. Nonetheless, Hutchison also recognizes that their experiences in activism made them an exception among domestic workers. By the 1960s, the Catholic domestic worker’s movement was influenced by the high levels of

politicization of the country, engaging with Liberation Theology movements and the Christian Democratic Party (DC).

Chapter Four argues that the politicization of the country in the late 1960s, as well as the dispute between the DC and the leftist parties to win over the representation of women and poor workers, contributed to giving visibility to the movement of *empleadas* and transforming their demands into a bill presented by the Socialist Carmen Lazo. “By deftly cultivating these alliances, *empleadas* gained ground in their quest for dignity and protection, just as the Church and the Left gained greater access, respectively, to capturing their souls and votes” (Hutchison 2021, 104).

Finally, Chapter Five holds that, ironically, it was during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-90) that the organization of domestic workers organizations flourished. Specifically, ANECAP and SINTRACAP were legally recognized as associations representing *empleadas de casas particulares*. Despite the fact that the Pinochet’s dictatorship truncated the bill to protect domestic workers, they benefited from their invisibility as workers and their association with religious movements. Both elements allowed them to create new allies with Women’s Study Circle, a middle-class feminist organization, and international agencies that directly contributed to finally obtaining protection through labor laws.

Workers Like All the Rest of Them contributes to Chilean and Latin American historiography on gender and labor by demonstrating the achievement of domestic workers’ rights is not a recent phenomenon that began when workers finally achieved some of their historical demands. Instead, it proposes that domestic workers struggled strategically and made alliances with other social actors throughout the twentieth century to obtain labor rights and recognition. The book establishes that the domestic worker struggle was not isolated from international and national political conjunctures. The Social Question and the Popular Front, as well as Liberation Theology, Cold War polarization, and Pinochet’s dictatorship, all shaped the movement in significant ways. Finally, this book demonstrates that some of the inequalities that *empleadas* faced were not only the result of colonial structures but modern ways of understanding labor and gender.

Hutchison recovers this history from the perspective of the workers themselves, which resolves a contradiction between workers’ experiences and their perception by Chilean society. As Hutchison points out, contrary to popular understandings, workers did not perceive themselves as “part of the family.” Instead, they perceived themselves as workers. Avoiding victimization but recognizing the

structural oppression that service workers faced during the twentieth century, this book offers a historical perspective of why and how despite the ubiquity of domestic workers in Chilean society, their circumstances as some of the country's most exploited workers contributed to silencing their individual experiences and collective struggles from history until now. Finally, Hutchison's book reminds us that one of the contributions of history to society is to use cultural constructions of the past to reveal the inequalities that remain among us. In this way, her book contributes not only by illuminating a hidden history, but as a tool to combat the inequalities that it uncovers.