

Domestic Workers' Strategies of Resistance to Chronic Workplace Violence in Medellín,
Colombia

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Abstract for Masters

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In Colombia, 94% of domestic workers are women and they make up 7% of the female workforce (DANE 2020). Approximately 80% are Afro-Descendant or Indigenous and 25% of those working in Cali, Medellín and Bogotá have been displaced by the ongoing armed conflict. Domestic workers often work long hours in exchange for low wages; do not have access to social security or social benefits; are victims of physical, verbal and/or sexual abuse; and are not perceived by society as valuable members of the workforce (De Cicco 2014; Donaldson and Osorio 2016; Moreno-Salamanca 2017). This thesis examines the centuries of social, economic, and institutional persecution of “othered” races and classes that feed chronic violence against domestic workers in contemporary Colombian society. This structural violence also determines what strategies are used to resist workplace violence and the extent to which these strategies are effective. In addition, this thesis explores the impact of unionization on everyday resistance strategies. Findings from ethnographic research and semi-structured interviews in Medellín, Colombia indicate that resistance under the form of exit, confrontation and negotiation have allowed domestic workers to guarantee their survival (physical and mental preservation), promote contextual adjustments (attenuate oppression and improve access to resources) and cause positive transformations in the structural sources of abuse (Mayer 2021).

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Introduction

In 2014, Colombia became the fourteenth country to ratify the *Convention on Domestic Workers*, a tool developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that strives to establish international standards of working conditions for domestic workers (Donaldson and Osorio 2016; ILO 2014). Notwithstanding, very little action has been taken by the Colombian government in the last six years to implement the measures delineated in the accord and domestic workers in the country continue to endure various forms of abuse in the workplace (De Cicco 2014; Donaldson et Osorio 2016; ILO 2016).

Domestic work is an important sector of economic activity for Colombian women, but is characterized by intersecting forms of marginalization. Over 94 percent of domestic workers in Colombia are women and they make up 7 percent of the female workforce. All of them are poor, with 62 percent earning the minimum wage or less and 46.1 percent having only an elementary school level education (DANE 2020; DANE 2015; Donaldson and Osorio 2016). While official statistics for ethnicity and displacement among domestic workers do not exist, conversations with union leaders, researchers and domestic workers lead me to estimate that approximately 80 percent of domestic workers are Afro-Colombian or Indigenous and 25 percent of those working in the cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali were displaced by the country's decades old armed conflict.

Domestic workers often work long hours in exchange for low wages; do not have access to social security or social benefits; are victims of physical, verbal and/or sexual abuse; and are not perceived by society as valuable members of the workforce (De Cicco 2014; Donaldson and Osorio 2016; Moreno-Salamanca 2017). Over 98 percent of domestic workers remain unprotected by occupational risk laws and are not guaranteed a pension, paid vacation or sick leave because they are informal workers without employment contracts and are generally unaware of their rights as workers and citizens (DANE 2015; IDWFED 2014). In the case of Medellín, 90 percent of domestic workers work between 10 and 18 hours daily, although workdays exceeding 10 hours are constitutionally prohibited (IDWFED 2014). In sum, domestic workers tend to be systematically marginalized because of their gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic standing, and their economic activity reproduces this marginalization in the form of chronic workplace violence (Smith1991; UTRASD 2017).

This thesis asks: “How do Colombian domestic workers resist this violence? More specifically: what strategies do they use to resist chronic workplace violence? What is the impact of these strategies on working conditions?”. The study of domestic workers’ strategies to resist chronic violence and to see their rights as legitimate members of the labour force recognized and respected is important because the undervaluation of domestic work by both institutional and civil society actors contributes to the perpetuity of inequalities, sexism, racism, poverty and marginalization of the Colombian women in this type of employment. Furthermore, there is a paucity of academic books and articles published on the topic of domestic work in Latin America. This thesis brings visibility to a subject that has been overlooked in academia as well as visibility to women who have been overlooked in the homes they work in and the societies they belong to. It contributes to the literatures on individual resistance, informality and labour rights in Latin America.

To render explicit the precarious conditions and acts of everyday resistance of domestic workers, I will explore their relationship with employers and with the state and society as a whole. I will also analyze the impacts of resistance strategies, that is the extent to which they effectively enable domestic workers to improve their working conditions and assert their rights. I argue that though formal laws have been put in place to protect domestic workers in Colombia, centuries of social, economic, and institutional persecution of “othered” races and classes have created a set of social structures that maintain the way privileged groups think of and treat marginalized groups. The general pattern of structural violence (Weigert 1999) feeds chronic violence against domestic workers and also upholds the negative way domestic workers perceive themselves and their place in society. The latter in turn shapes how domestic workers resist routinized workplace violence. Building on the resistance literature (Scott 1989, Bayat 1997, Mayer 2021), I argue that domestic workers in Medellín engage predominantly in quiet, individual and daily forms of resistance, making small gains to combat chronic workplace violence perpetrated by their employers. They use exit, confrontation and negotiation to counter the physical, psychological and financial violence they experience.

The three resistance strategies have varying impacts on working conditions, depending on the worker’s age, social network connectivity and unionization as well as on the nature of the strategy itself. Exit is somewhat effective in guaranteeing immediate survival, promoting contextual adjustments and producing improvements in the structural sources of abuse. However, it does not lead to learning, as employers typically did not recognize their behaviour

as violent and domestic workers again encounter violence in their next workplace. This is also a particularly ineffective strategy for young, non-unionized and isolated, often live-in, domestic workers because without family or friends to rely on for support and without knowledge of their rights as workers, they find themselves in a situation of increased precariousness when they are unemployed. Confrontation is an effective strategy to promote contextual adjustments (attenuate oppression and improve access to resources) when used by domestic workers living outside of the employer's home, but is ineffective when used by live-ins. As was the case with exit, this outcome can be attributed to the heightened vulnerability created by the isolation of live-in domestic workers (Arcand 2020; Léon 2013; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Negotiation is an effective tool for live-out domestic workers to resist financial violence and for live-in domestic workers to resist psychological harm. Although the paper's primary focus is individual resistance, the data also shows that collective political participation, in this case unionization, strengthens individual resistance, especially with regard to rights claiming.

The thesis contributes to knowledge theoretically by adding detail to Mayer's (2021) typology of resistance strategies and empirically with new data on the case of Medellín, drawing attention to the country's unique history of violence and its impact on domestic workers' lives. It does this in five sections. The first section is a review of the existing literature on the topic of domestic work. The second section provides a discussion of the theories of everyday forms of resistance upon which this research project is predicated and how they relate to domestic work in Colombia. The third is a brief contextualization of the socioeconomic and political landscape of Medellín and the fourth, an overview of the fieldwork methodology. The final section analyzes the various types of violence and the strategies the participants of this research used to counter them.

I. Literature Review

This literature review examines the existing scholarly work on the topic of domestic work both globally and in Latin America. Though both offer important contributions to an often overlooked sector of the workforce, as mentioned in the introduction, there exists a gap within the literature of research that investigates the everyday tactics domestic workers employ to resist chronic workplace violence.

A. Domestic Work Worldwide

The following paragraphs will show that the literature on domestic work across global regions is dominated by two perspectives: globalization/migratory flows and collective mobilization analyzed through a structural, institutional and legal lens. I argue that although each of these perspectives contribute valuable insight to the literature on the topic of domestic work, they both neglect the everyday acts of violence perpetrated by employers and the small ways domestic workers resist them to attenuate oppression, which is the baseline of the issue and it is what this thesis examines.

First, the bulk of research that studies domestic work does so from a transnational, globalization standpoint in the aim of explaining how the flow of poor women from the Global South to the Global North to take on jobs as domestic workers shapes and is shaped by broad economic and social structures (Groves and Chang 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Killias 2010; Lindio-McGovern 2013; Momsen 2003; Parreñas 2002; Giles et al. 2014; Rosenbaum 2016). Though studying domestic work through this lens provides invaluable insights on global patterns of inequality reproduction with regard to low-income workers, the macro scale level of analysis inherent to this type of research results in the omission, or the very minimal discussion, of individual lived experiences of violence perpetrated by employers and of resistance carried out by employees within the household. Moreover, as de Casanova (2019: 3) denotes, local economic and demographic processes are also important to research since only 11.5 million domestic workers of 67.1 million are migrants, that is, 83 percent of paid domestic workers across the world are *not* international migrants (ILO 2016a: 27).

Second, scholars who analyze the relationship between domestic work and resistance tend to do so exclusively in terms of political acts of collective struggle against elites to change oppressive power structures (Boris and Fish 2014; Boris and Nadasen 2008; Nolde 1991; Shah and Seville 2011; Stasiulis and Bakan 1997). They tend to focus their research on domestic workers' unionization, efforts to achieve social justice and recognition in the public eye as well as organization specifically designed to attain national and international legal reform. This research perspective contributes to contemporary social movement and labour organization literature; contextualizing and fleshing out the issue of violence against domestic workers and the evolution of the movement(s) created to counter it. However, it fails to consider the day to day strategies domestic workers use on their own that do not require leadership or organization.

Both of these perspectives, though they provide valuable contributions to the literature on domestic work, discount the agency each domestic worker possesses to improve her working conditions either by suggesting that individual agency is constrained by long standing economic patterns of exploitation or by asserting that collective resistance strategies are the only adequate avenue for domestic workers to enact real change. This project is thus interested in uncovering what these women in vulnerable and disadvantaged positions *can* do rather than what they *cannot* do. Moreover, everyday strategies of resistance in the context of domestic work is also important to consider because most domestic workers do not mobilize and are not unionized. As Scott (1986) writes, mobilization is a moment of exception. Since definitions of domestic work differ from country to country and since the sector of domestic work is largely invisible and most employment takes place in an informal setting, there are no global statistics on levels of unionization (Schwenken and Heimeshoff 2011). It is nevertheless because of this knowledge of high levels of informality that it is possible to discern that very few domestic workers participate in formal, overt and collective acts of resistance (Schwenken and Heimeshoff 2011).

B. Domestic Work in Latin America

Publications in the field of domestic work in Latin America over the past four to five decades tend to complement rather than contradict each other. Indeed, research on the topic typically informs on the contemporary underlying power structures and longstanding patterns of oppression that stem from three centuries of colonial rule between the late 1400s and early 1800s and which are replicated in households all over the region between domestic workers

and employers (Vanden and Prevost 2018:19, 43). The works reviewed in the following paragraphs are therefore crucial to make sense of the dynamics at play in this particular research; where predominantly high to middle class white, European descendant or *Mestizo* employers reproduce colonial abuses through everyday acts of violence perpetrated against predominantly working class, Afrodescendant or Indigenous domestic workers. That is, this section of the literature review helps the reader understand the weight and significance of the colonial history in which everyday workplace violence is anchored and that resistance to this violence represents a subversion of these uneven power relations.

Smith (1991) pioneered the study of domestic work in Latin America with her trailblazing book *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*. The author offers an overview of domestic work in Latin America, bringing to light the oppression, neglect and difficult conditions; financial, psychological and physical violence that female domestic workers endure (Smith 1991: 5). Of particular relevance to this thesis are chapters 5 “What is bought and sold in domestic service? The case of Bogota: A critical review”, 16: “Domestic Labor and Domestic Service in Colombia” and 19 “The History of Our Struggle SINTRASEDOM (National Union of Household Workers, Colombia)” which all discuss domestic workers’ collective mobilization, but contain a wealth of knowledge on the Colombian case (Smith 1991: 105; 323; 373).

Brites (2000, 2013, 2014) has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the relationship between domestic workers and their employers in Brazil, arguing that domestic workers accept the violence and injustice they face in the workplace because of the emotional ties they create with the families they work for (Brites 2014). With regard to resistance, she finds that theft is utilized as more than a survival tactic, it is ritualized into a performance of reciprocity between individuals of unequal status (employer and employee) where the act of pilfering is one of rebellion and revenge for the subordinate actor and the act of accusation by the employer becomes one of domination (Brites 2014: 67-68). De Souza (1980) also studies Brazil, but argues that domestic labour is a reflection of income inequalities and the sexual division of labour in a context of industrialization and that the liberation of upper and middle class women has reinforced the subordination of domestic workers.

Blofield (2012: 5) is interested in how class and gender interact with the state and asks “how does a multiply disadvantaged group get political attention and recognition in a context

of high socioeconomic inequality?”. She operationalizes a legalistic and institutional framework to address this question and argues that the state must act as mediator (by enacting and enforcing laws that mandate better working conditions for domestic workers) between domestic workers and their employers, who have inherently opposed interests (Blofield 2012). de Casanova (2019) questions why domestic work continues to be an undesirable form of employment and what are the potential paths for change. She explores three dimensions of oppression —social reproduction, informality and class— to understand the exploitative and othering working conditions of household workers in Ecuador and examines potential opportunities for change. Casanova emphasizes that in Latin America, traditional relations between patrons and servants during the colonial era are reflected in contemporary class relations between employers and domestic workers (Casanova 2019: 56). Indeed, there is a consensus in the literature on domestic work that the reproduction of colonial patterns and race relations, particularly the racial discrimination of *mestizo* and white employers against Black and Indigenous employees, exacerbate the oppression of domestic workers and represent an important barrier (Blofield & Jokela 2018; Gorban & Tizziani 2014; Saldaña Tejada 2013).

Resistance by domestic workers is otherwise often examined in the context of broader studies on informal work (see Arizpe 1977; Avirgan, Gammage and Bivens 2005; Biles 2009) or on migration (see Araujo and González-Fernández 2014; Borgeaud-Garciandia and Lautier 2011; Jelin 1977; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2014; Lawson 1998). Moreover, scholarly research on domestic work tends to focus on what takes place *within* the household, but only examines the way workers come together to form a collective that actively struggles for the recognition of their rights *outside* of the household. This thesis thus strives to assess the ways domestic workers engage in acts of resistance in the same space where they experience abuse.

II. Theoretical Framework

It is essential to specify that although there is no consensus with regard to the definition of informality, researchers have reached the understanding that the formal and informal are not opposed, but rather intertwined. Indeed, this paper establishes itself within the substantivist perspective of informality, which argues that engagement in the informal is neither solely a product of rational-decision making nor the outcome of blindly following “customs, habits and norms” and that the way the formal, informal and illegal intertwine depends on what options, or economic practices are available, or are *perceived* by actors to be available as a result of the environment in which they are embedded (Granovetter 1985, 485; Morris and Polose 2015, xvii). Moreover, it is crucial to mention that this perspective considers that informality is not solely a tool for the poor and the marginalized; agents at all levels, including the state, its institutions and in the case of domestic work, employers in private homes fluidly and regularly engage in all realms of economic activity (Morris and Polese 2015, xvii).

The theoretical framework for this thesis consists of four main concepts; domestic work, chronic workplace violence, resistance and the success of resistance strategy. Each of these concepts are important to define because together they provide the structure through which it is possible to fulfill this thesis’ research objectives. In other words, the first and second portions of this framework explain that domestic workers in Colombia, by their race, gender, socio-economic standing and by the essence of their work, belong to a multiplicity of groups that have been systematically subjugated and disparaged and that the abuse they experience at the hands of their employers is an echo of this structural source of violence. The third and fourth parts of this framework explain that it is this background of “double” violence that shapes what tools of resistance are, or appear to be, available to domestic workers and the extent to which they can successfully wield these tools to improve their working conditions to the first degree and by doing so tear down embedded structures of violence.

To begin, as previously mentioned, domestic work may be defined differently depending on the geographic location, the scholar or the interest group and its definition was a topic of high contention during the 2010 International Labor Conference (Schwenken and Heimeshoff 2011: 5). The International Labour Organization (ILO), has identified four approaches through which domestic workers can be labelled; the task-based approach, the status-in-employment approach, the household-roaster approach and the industry approach,

each coming with its own set of advantages and drawbacks (ILO 2013: 9). This thesis opts for an inclusive definition of domestic work because the broader the definition, the more individuals can be protected by the labour legislations designed for domestic workers and can claim the rights afforded to this sector of the workforce. This will be presently discussed in further detail.

Domestic workers are remunerated for performing a variety of tasks in their employers' private homes including, but not limited to, cleaning, cooking, caring for children, elderly or incapacitated members of the family, gardening and driving (Chen 2011: 167; de Casanova 2019: 6). This thesis considers that individuals performing these tasks whether formally or informally, legally or irregularly, are domestic workers (Schwenken and Heimeshoff 2011: 5). In contemporary Latin America, domestic services provided by women belonging to the lower classes permit the middle and upper class women they work for to build careers and participate in the formal economy (Chen 2011: 168). Moreover, it is also the woman of the house, who without a domestic worker would herself be responsible for household chores, who typically oversees and assigns the domestic worker's duties (Keene and Quadagno 2004).

Finally, there are two broad categories of domestic workers; the first live with their employers where they usually have their own quarters, whereas the second live in their own homes and either work daily for a single family, or by-task in several homes (Vallente 2016). The proportion of live-in domestic workers compared to commuter, or live-out, domestic workers in Colombia has been reported to have decreased significantly over the past several decades, and based on conversations with union leaders in Medellín, it is estimated that less than 10 percent of domestic workers in 2019 were living in their employers' household (Smith 1991). It is worthy to mention that according to the Unión de Trabajadoras Afrocolombianas del Servicio Doméstico (UTRASD) —with whom I collaborated on this research— due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of live-in domestic workers in Colombia spiked over the course of 2020. Indeed, because of the imposition of curfews and social distancing measures, many domestic workers who were previously living outside of their employers' homes had to move in with their employers to keep their jobs. The cause for this overall decline is unconfirmed, but the ILO speculates that it could be attributed to several factors of socio-economic transformations such as a “decreasing ability or willingness of the employer to pay for a full-time live-in domestic worker; a reduction in the spatial capacity of employers to house a domestic worker; a more equal sharing of household responsibilities between men and women;

or a cultural change in which status is not defined by the number of live-in domestic workers in employ and (...) that 24 hour in-home service may no longer be necessary for the functioning of a household.” (Hobden (INWORK) 2013: 2). The distinction between live-in and live-out domestic work is an important one to make because live-in domestic workers face additional disadvantages; disproportionate amounts of their salary can be discounted for room and board, they can be expected to work well above the legal maximum number of hours in a work day and given insufficient time to rest, living conditions can be inadequate and their rights to freedom and privacy can be violated (Hobden (INWORK) 2013: 2). In addition, unemployment (either from being fired or from exiting a violent environment) for live-in domestic workers is worse than for live-out domestic workers because it often leads to homelessness (Hobden (INWORK) 2013: 2). The violence committed against domestic workers, both live-in and live-out will be further explained in the following paragraphs.

It is widely recognized by scholars of domestic work in Latin America and labour organizations that women employed to perform household tasks in private homes suffer workplace or work related abuse (Mayer 2021; Brites 2000, 2013, 2014; Blofield 2012; de Casanova 2019). However, although outright acts of physical aggression are generally recognized as violence, whether less overt harmful acts committed against domestic workers when they are psychological and particularly financial in nature should be labelled as violence is debated (Kodoth 2016; Mkandawire-Valhmu et al. 2009). As is the case with the definition of domestic work, this thesis chooses a comprehensive typology of violence because it allows for an extensive understanding of the complexity and severity of the way domestic workers are abused and oppressed in Latin America and Colombia.

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Krug et al. 2002: 4). In addition, an act can be considered violent whether it occurs in the public or private sphere, whether it is reactive or proactive and whether it is criminal or not (Krug et al. 2002, 5-6). Structural violence is defined as harm or damage in which there are clear victims, but in which there is no single actor to whom blame can be attributed (Weigert 1999). Indeed, structural violence is a product of an uneven possession of power and resources and as such, is established within social, statal and economic structures (Weigert 1999). It is crucial to include structural violence in the

framework of this essay for its direct link to both the colonial era and the decades of civil war in Colombia, during which current structures of privilege and oppression were built and consolidated and in which the chronic violence domestic workers face is deeply embedded.

The aforementioned comprehensive definitional elements serve as the foundation upon which is built the typology of chronic workplace violence that this thesis employs. The model of categorization designed by Mayer (2021) puts forward three types of violence domestic workers suffer; physical, psychological and financial (Mayer 2021). The model permits a precise and efficient examination of the violence domestic workers are subject to, particularly in informal settings, and is conducive to the subsequent study of the strategies used to resist different kinds of violent acts (Mayer 2021: 4). Workplace violence in particular is considered to be “any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work” (ILO 2003: 4). It is primordial to clarify that this then incorporates violence that transpires outside the workplace, but is considered work related. Workplace violence is chronic when it is repeated and entrenched, leaving lasting effects on domestic workers and their experiences (Mayer 2021). Furthermore, the term “violence” will be employed interchangeably with the term “abuse”. Indeed, both are considered rigorous enough to cover the entire scope of hardship and suffering undergone by domestic workers in the workplace. It is also important for the reader to be aware that each distinct form of violence explained in this section is typically accompanied by at least another.

First, domestic work tends to foster physical workplace violence because it takes place in private households thus facilitating both the “othering” and extreme subordination of employees to their employers as well as the avoidance of regulatory legislation guaranteeing the respect of human and labour rights (Smith 1991: 303; Gamlin et al. 2015: 214). Physical violence against domestic workers can take place in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, sexual violence, beatings, deprivation of food or breaks and spatial confinement or isolation (Gamlin et al. 2015: 218; Mayer 2021: 4; Shah and Menon 1997: 7). In relation to the disadvantages described in the previous section of this theoretical framework, the literature exposes that live-in domestic workers are more likely to endure physical violence than those who only spend the day in their employers’ household and return to their own homes after their shifts are over (Anderson 1997: 38). What is more, if domestic workers are migrants who came to the city from rural areas, they often do not possess the social networks necessary to prevent

nor put an end to violent acts, physical or otherwise (Smith 1991: 116; Cohen 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Smith (1991:121) observed in Latin America a decline in live-in domestic work and an increase in daily and by-task work therefore reducing the physical violence domestic workers generally experience in comparison to psychological and financial violence.

Second, psychological violence can refer to “verbal and written threats; humiliating or infantilizing treatment of employees; sexual harassment; screaming and insults” (Mayer 2021: 4). This enumeration is not comprehensive, but it encompasses the psychological acts most commonly perpetrated against domestic workers in the context of their work. An example of psychological violence is that domestic workers in Colombia have traditionally been perceived as the “daughter of the employer family” (Smith 1991: 118). This reinforces the power imbalance between the *patrona* and the *empleada* and prevents the former from forging an identity for herself as a valuable member of the working class, deserving of proper wages and overall “good” treatment (Smith 1991: 118).

Third, women do not become domestic workers because it is a career path they have chosen amongst a variety of other options available to them. As Smith (1991: 121) highlights, domestic work is often a last resort, survival strategy for Colombian women who live in poverty and are young or old, recent migrants or have little to no professional training. Employers aware that the women they hire have no other employment alternative for one or a combination of the aforementioned reasons and conscious that there is an abundance of other women in situations of similar precarity seeking employment, often take advantage of this to exercise financial violence against their employees (Smith 1991: 121). Financial violence manifests most frequently as the refusal to pay adequate or agreed upon sums for the amount of work performed, this includes the provision of any salary lower than the monthly minimum wage of \$ 828,116.00 COP (\$ 314 CAD) and work schedules that exceed the standard 48 hours per week without time and a half paid for overtime or the refusal to award a day of rest (Smith 1991: 119; DLA Piper 2019). Financial violence can also include the denial of social benefits owed to the employee.

Lastly, it is put forth that as the unique background of structural violence in Colombia shapes the way employers perpetrate abuse, so too does it mold the way domestic workers choose to resist it. This is why this section argues that whilst most of the literature on

contentious politics and social movements examines the exceptional mobilization of formally organized and distinctly labelled groups, it is by studying common, everyday scenarios that the resistance of informal, unorganized and invisible groups like domestic workers can be identified and understood.

There exists an array of diverse conceptualizations of the term *resistance*, which may vary according to scale, level of coordination amongst those resisting, the targets of resistance, the desired goals and the intentions and the shared characteristics of the group (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.) (Hollander and Einwohner 2004; McAdam et al. 1996; Pickering 2000; Tarrow 2011). Indeed, scholars such as Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and Weitz (2001) have denounced the lack of consensus and consistency on the definition of resistance in academia. This disagreement particularly stems from whether “resistance must be recognized by others and whether it must be intentional” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004: 533-534). Moreover, the bulk of research that deals with “popular responses to violence and oppression” exclusively examines overt, collective mobilization against the state and political elites, overlooking individual resistance (Mayer 2021: 5). The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the few scholars who have developed theories of acts of individual resistance committed by people belonging to marginalized groups. These approaches provide the foundation for this thesis’ conceptualization of resistance in the context of domestic work.

The study of ordinary acts of resistance to violence and oppression by the poor was pioneered by James C. Scott in the 1980s (Scott 1989; 1990). Scott has continued to theorize on the topic (2012) and his work remains seminal in the field. Rather than examining movements that attempt to enact large scale change that requires careful planning and extensive organization, Scott analyzes non-confrontational, individual actions performed on a daily basis by the poor and relatively powerless to ameliorate their living conditions and ease the economic exploitation and personal humiliation they suffer at the hands of elites (Mayer 2021: 5; Scott 2013: 65). In other words, Scott argues that the poor, using the example of peasants, but which can be transposed to domestic workers in modern day Colombia, deliberately conduct most of their resistance outside the scope of social movements (Scott 2012: 69-71). The mechanics of this theory will be examined in the section below.

The defining dimension of everyday forms of resistance is their hidden nature. It is contended that individuals purposefully use covert techniques to avoid detection by

powerholders (Scott 1989: 34). The methods Scott discusses are used in contexts where the discovery of their defiance could trigger terrible reprisals and where the consequence of engaging in open resistance can be death (Scott 1989: 34). Quiet methods of resistance are opted for because not only are they relatively safe, they also prove efficient in goal achievement (Scott 1989: 34-35). Scott cites the slow encroachment of state or privately owned land by peasant squatters and poachers that leads to full land occupation and “cascading military desertion” that renders an army too small to battle (Scott 1989: 34-35). Hence, Scott posits that it is necessary to read between the lines of, and investigate beyond, official records to identify resistance that appears invisible at first glance because it may have been too mundane for officials to report, or because it was in the state’s interest to erase its trace, but that cumulatively successfully alters outcomes (Scott 1989: 50; Scott 1990: 183). It is for this reason that interviewing domestic workers should unearth the most evidence of everyday resistance.

Although Scott considers the practices belonging to the hidden realm of political conflict to be mostly carried out individually and anonymously, there is a collective dimension to his theorization of lower-class resistance to domination (Scott 1989: 36-37). Indeed, on one hand, those carrying out everyday resistance “depend on the complicitous silence” of others in identical predicaments (Scott 1989: 36). That is, Scott argues that a certain degree of solidarity and group cohesion is required to guarantee the success of resistance (Scott 1989: 36). On the other hand, two or more poor individuals can participate in concealed and quiet resistance together (Scott 1989: 53). Concretely, this can manifest as members of the lower classes getting together and partaking in the character assassination of their superiors in lieu of insulting them face to face (Scott 1989: 53). This ties into the element of resistance Scott qualifies as “symbolic” or “ideological” (Scott 1989: 36). Despite the fact that domestic workers are motivated by self-preserving material needs, they are also largely incentivized to resist violence through acts of symbolic resistance such as “gossip, slander, the rejection of demeaning labels, the withdrawal of deference” (Scott 1989: 53, 56). Therefore, just as workplace violence can take place inside or outside the household, domestic workers’ resistance to this violence can also take place within or without the household. This is largely unexplored by Scott and will be further elaborated upon in this thesis’ discussion of Bayat’s theoretical framework below.

Scott’s work has served as a launchpad for other scholars to deepen and broaden theories of everyday forms of resistance. This research project will incorporate theoretical components from Bayat (1997; 2010), who defines resistance as “a silent, patient, protracted,

and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives” (Bayat 1997: 56-57). This conceptualization of resistance is more “proactive, dynamic and evolutive” than Scott’s defensive and reactive perspective (Mayer 2021). Indeed, whereas Scott asserts that poor people’s quiet resistance is a question of survival; a means to ensure material gains and avoid the retribution open and organized resistance would induce, Bayat holds that the daily, individual, mundane and ordinary practices —what he labels as “quiet encroachment”— of the disenfranchised are rather a result of barred access to institutional mechanisms through which they can express their discontent and strive to better their lives (Bayat 1997: 58). Bayat, like Scott, thus suggests that “individual direct action” is the most effective and most widely used form of resistance amongst the lower classes. However, unlike Scott, Bayat asserts that this unorganized and unplanned quiet encroachment ineluctably evolves into political struggle (Bayat 1997: 62; Scott 1990: 194). When individuals who carry out daily acts of resistance in their own spaces see their gains threatened, they tend to collectively mobilize to defend them (Bayat 1997: 57, 62). This is how, according to Bayat (1997: 57), periodic bouts of visible and intentional collective action are interspersed throughout spans of prolonged, individual contention.

With a particular focus on actors belonging to the informal sector like street vendors and slum dwellers, Bayat (1997: 59) specifies that the transition from individual to collective action is mostly successful in democracies, where candidates require support from the masses and where poor people can use their vote as leverage for their demands to be heard. This is consistent with the argument that in Colombia, although domestic workers may usually use quiet, individual techniques of opposition, they also intermittently engage in collective action to pressure elected officials for social and structural change (Bayat 1997: 59). Such actions can include participating in marches to demand legal reform, attending workshops organized by unions to learn about their rights as remunerated employees and the importance of signing written contracts (UTRASD 2017).

In terms of outcomes sought through acts of everyday resistance, Scott emphasizes material gains that result from individual resistance. In contrast, Bayat presents two broad goals the disenfranchised express once they have collectively mobilized. These aims encompass a greater variety of smaller aims; first the “redistribution of social goods” which includes “acquisition of collective consumption”, “public space” and opportunities and life chances in general. The second is cultural and political autonomy from the state’s jurisdiction and from

any other type of institutional regulation (Bayat 1997: 59). The first goal is concordant with domestic workers' collective claims whether tangible or intangible; a safe work environment, decent wages, access to social benefits such as health care for themselves and their families and empowerment by changing public perception of themselves as legitimate workers and productive members of society.

Katz (2004: 247-251) contributes to the body literature established by Scott and Bayat by introducing the concepts of resilience, reworking and resistance. For Katz, "resilience" refers to hidden strategies designed to guarantee basic daily survival; "reworking" alludes to quiet strategies seeking to modify existing socioeconomic relations to enhance access to resources; and "resistance" designates overt strategies intended to transform the prevailing socioeconomic structures and distribution of resources (Katz 2004: 247-251). He puts forth that these three "Rs" occur as a reaction to oppression and inequality that is caused by global economic restructuring. This is valuable because it brings about a shift in perspective; in a context of globalization Katz outlines that the disenfranchised *do* exercise agency to meet their basic needs first, but that the strategies they use serve to restructure the political, social, economic and cultural conditions that constrain them with the awareness that they are social actors (Katz 2004: x). Similarly, Crossa (2013: 826, 841) argues that ambulant vendors and artisans in Mexico City resist change, specifically the implementation of exclusionary neoliberal urban policies, through playful forms of resistance that rely on the "symbolic and material importance of place".

In light of the works previously summarized, this project adopts the following definition of resistance: "individual and collective, sometimes overt but often hidden strategies undertaken by low-income and marginalised people, which aim at guaranteeing survival (i.e. physical and psychological preservation), promoting contextual adjustment (i.e. attenuating oppression and improving access to resources), and/or causing positive transformation in structural sources of abuse." (Mayer 2021: 5). Three categories are utilized to analyze resistance. The first is Exit, which consists of domestic workers permanently leaving their jobs when working conditions become unbearable. This category has been directly appropriated from Mayer (2021), but to which I contribute the sub-category of "micro-exit" where domestic workers may temporarily leave a room or space within the household to escape a perpetrator and thereby attenuate violence. The second and third resistance categories are Confrontation and Negotiation. They are heavily influenced by Mayer's (2021) Voice category, but I have

adapted them to the Colombian case, since a great deal of the negotiation that was reported by the participants in my research was non-verbal.

In terms of measuring a given strategy's success, or effectiveness is measured against the three criteria outlined in the definition of resistance. A strategy will be considered to have limited success if it only succeeds in guaranteeing the survival of she who employs it. It will be considered successful if it promotes a contextual adjustment, that is, if it provokes a positive change in the perpetrator's behaviour. A strategy will be considered very successful if it transforms the structural sources of abuse. Finally, a strategy will be considered unsuccessful if its use does not result in either a short term or long term reduction or elimination of the violence it was meant to counter. Beyond this, in the context of the present research it is impossible to establish specific indicators to measure the success of a resistance strategy because the threshold of tolerance for abuse and the consequent objectives of domestic workers when they employ resistance tactics are contextually dependent.

III. The Colombian Context: Historical Overview of Structural Violence in Medellín

This section serves to provide the reader with the geographic, historical, socio-political and demographic makeup of the environment that plays a significant role in framing domestic workers' day to day realities, including the resistance strategies they utilize to counter workplace violence, which are determined by the inherited barriers of poverty and discrimination. This section will demonstrate that the structural violence present in contemporary society in Medellín and Colombia has been built up in layers over the course of the city and the country's history and has caused, and been reproduced in, the chronic violence domestic workers experience in the workplace.

To begin, Medellín is located in the center of the Andes mountain range, in the Aburrá valley; it is traversed by the Medellín river and has a temperate climate throughout the year (Medellín Living 2017). It is the capital of the department of Antioquia, it is composed of sixteen *comunas* which are made up of over 200 *barrios* (Orange Smile 2019). The city has 2,223 million inhabitants with 13,4 percent of its citizens living below the poverty line, this is lower than the national poverty rate of 26,9 percent (DANE 2017; World Bank 2019).

Ethnic and racial discrimination is a crucial source of inequality that is essential to consider to position domestic workers in relation to the rest of Medellín's population. Between the sixteenth century and 1851, more than one million Africans were captured and taken to Colombia through the Iberian slave trade (Navarette 2005). During the colonial era, a caste system was established by the Spanish government which ranked African slaves at the very bottom of the social pyramid which left them deprived of rights, at the total mercy of white, Spanish (or Spanish descendant) landowners (Vanden and Prevost 2018: 32).

Between 1925 and 1958, Colombia's political arena was dominated by seven major civil wars fought between the Liberal and Conservative parties and their supporters (Vanden and Prevost 2017: 445). After a period of alternating rule between both parties, an episode of intense conflict between Liberals and Conservatives termed *La Violencia* begun in 1948 with the assassination of the Liberal party leader Jorge Gaitan in Bogota. The ensuing political violence triggered a rural exodus that led to the establishment of shanty towns up in the outskirts of the city (Sánchez Steiner 2007). During the second half of the twentieth century, the ongoing urban expansion, industrialization and migration to the city increased

unemployment rates, produced a shortage of infrastructural, security, health and education services in poor areas (Uribe 1981; Sánchez Steiner 2007). The result of *La Violencia* was thus the increased vulnerability of an already precarized tier of the population to which domestic workers belong.

Beginning in the 1960s, the emergence of left-wing guerrilla groups, state sponsored paramilitary and the rise of the Medellín drug cartel and the consequent United States subsidized “War on Drugs” led to an escalation of violence which resulted in Medellín being the world’s most dangerous city in the late 1980s (Guisao López 2017; Flores Ballesteros 2010). During the 1990s and 2000s, the conflict between the different armed factions continued and presidents in power adopted a variety of soft (Pastrana 1998 -2002) and of heavy-handed negotiation strategies (Uribe 2002-2010) to bring the conflict to an end, without success (Vanden and Prevost 2017: 453-454). In November 2016, the Colombian Congress ratified a peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). This officially put an end to the decades-long armed conflict between both groups. Despite the formal achievement of peace, the Colombian peace process is yet to be complete. Indeed, the demobilization of FARC-EP members remains ongoing and the national liberation army (ELN) remains active, although it announced a ceasefire in March 2020 for reasons related to the COVID-19 outbreak (González 2020). Far right paramilitary groups also contributed to the 76 massacres that took place in Colombia in 2020 (Deutsche Welle 2021). Efforts for reparation and reconciliation continue to be made by a multitude of organizations, notably by the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (JEP), a transitional justice body formed in 2015 designed to address the human rights violations committed during the conflict (Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz 2019). Many domestic workers in Medellín, particularly Afro-Colombians, are internal migrants as a result of the violence that has taken place in their hometowns within the department of Antioquia or the neighbouring, northern coastal department of Chocó, which has been the battleground for the conflict between the FARC-EP and the government armed forces (Caracol Radio 2015). The displacement caused by the conflict has increased poverty amongst and discrimination against this population in urban centers like Medellín making domestic work virtually the only opportunity for Afro-Colombian women in the city (Ibáñez 2008; León 2013).

According to a 2017 census, Afrocolombians represent 10 percent of the overall population with communities concentrated on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts as well as in

the country's major cities (UNHCR 2012). In Medellín, in 2018, 2.64 percent of the population self-identified as Black, Afrocolombian, Raizal or Palenquera, a 57.1 percent drop from 2005, when 6.13 percent of the city's inhabitants self-identified as belonging to one of these ethnic groups (DANE 2019). For Afrodescendants in Colombia, the vestiges of centuries of slavery and war translate to "disproportionate levels of poverty, social exclusion and severe discrimination" (UNHCR 2012: 1). In 2019, the municipal government of Medellín published an action plan to combat racial discrimination against NARP (Black, Afrodescendant, Palenque and Raizal peoples) and Indigenous populations in the city (Alcaldía de Medellín and Coalición Latinoamericana y Caribeña 2019). This document highlights the intersectionality of violences; multiple parameters of subordination born from historical contexts and social relationships produce overlapping conditions of vulnerability experienced in everyday life (Alcaldía de Medellín and Coalición Latinoamericana y Caribeña 2019: 12). The report provides as an example the unique experience of an Afrocolombian person, who is a woman who comes to the city in a situation of displacement to work as a domestic worker (Alcaldía de Medellín and Coalición Latinoamericana y Caribeña 2019: 16). That is, stemming from racial discrimination, Afrocolombian domestic workers in Medellín experience mutually reproduced inequalities linked to class, gender, level of education and displacement or internal migration (Moreno Salamanca 2017). As will be described below, this was the reality for the domestic workers who participated in this research.

Although this project is chiefly interested in the way workers resist violence and oppression individually, it is pertinent to provide an overview of Colombia's blue collar workers unionization because it helps contextualize the environment that urban dwelling, low-income Colombians navigate to survive and strive to prosper in. Colombia possesses a significant history of urban worker organization and mobilization as early as 1936, counting amongst the most organized workers in Latin America (Vanden and Prevost 2017: 441). In 1986, the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) was founded to unite trade unions (Vanden and Prevost 2017: 443). Vanden and Prevost note that although trade unions do have a degree of influence over policy making, they nevertheless hold a "relatively weak position in the balance of power among social classes in Colombia" due to low rates of unionization amongst the working class (approximately 4%), the exceedingly high rates of politically motivated assassinations of trade unionists and prohibitive legislation pertaining to labour protests and organization (Vanden and Prevost 2017: 443).

In addition, there are two crucial caveats to include about the struggle for labour rights in Colombia in relation to the topic of this research. First, there is no existent information available distinguishing the unionization of workers according to gender, meaning that although Colombia has had strong trade unions since the 1940s, it is unknown whether women workers belong to these unions and to what proportion compared to men. However, the Pulitzer Center reported in 2013 that there are trade unions representing workers in certain employment sectors that employ a majority of women, most notably the flower industry, but that only a small percentage are unionized —contradicting sources state that only 1% of flower workers are unionized while others claim it is 13%—.

Second, this tradition of workers' struggle to obtain better working conditions through trade unions brings focus to formal means of resisting workplace violence, but excludes the abuses and struggles of informal urban workers, which, as aforementioned, eighty percent of domestic workers are. In terms of unionization rates amongst domestic workers, there is no official (of governmental or NGO provenance) number for unionized domestic workers in Colombia and the information I have received from UTRASD and the Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS) is conflicting. First, UTRASD has 660 affiliates in five different cities across Colombia. According to UTRASD, counting all of the organizations in the inter-union group of domestic work, there are approximately 1600 members. However, according to the ENS, there are close to 900 unionized domestic workers in Colombia. When I spoke with an employee there, she specified that this number represents an estimate they are developing and has not been made public. Although the difference between both estimates may seem significant, with 800 000 domestic workers in the country, whether the percentage of them that is unionized is 0.11% or 0.2%, there is little doubt that unionized domestic workers only represent a small minority of total domestic workers in Colombia.

IV. Methodology

To begin, it is imperative to indicate that this thesis is intended to be part of a larger research project driven by Dr. Mayer at the Centre for Research on Resistance, Informality and Violence (CERIV) at Concordia University. Domestic workers' strategies of resistance to chronic violence have been investigated in Sao Paulo, Ilhéus and Joinville, Brazil by Dr. Mayer and in Lima, Peru by my colleague Anna Calderon. The case of Colombia is thus the third in this series.

Fieldwork for this project was conducted in Medellín, Colombia, during January, February and March of 2020. It is relevant to note that my time spent in Colombia was cut short by a month due to the COVID-19 outbreak and that this affected my data collection in two significant ways. First, my sample of 11 interviews is smaller than the 15 to 20 I had anticipated gathering. Nevertheless, because of the ethnographic nature of my research, which places emphasis on the quality and depth of individual lived experiences, a smaller sample is still sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions. Second, I had originally intended to include both unionized and non-unionized domestic workers in the pool of participants. However, I had succeeded only in meeting domestic workers who were union members by the time the Pandemic hit which made it impossible to proceed with further meetings. While I had begun to connect with some of these affiliated workers' non-unionized domestic worker relatives and friends, I was forced to return to Canada due to the pandemic before I could conduct interviews with this category of workers. As such, the trends identified in the analysis are mainly applicable to unionized workers. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that these greater tendencies in the perceptions, beliefs and experiences of unionized workers are often broadly applicable to non-unionized workers (Mori et al. 2011).

The methods employed to gather data were qualitative. Specifically, ethnographic techniques of participant observation and semi-structured interviews were utilized. Participant observation "is the process of establishing a rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally" which requires "being open to the unexpected in what is learned" (Musante and DeWalt 2010). Although the scope of analysis is admittedly constrained by the applied research methods if compared to methods that assess large scale samples through quantitative research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews allow for a depth and richness of detail that extends

the explanatory range of research in a manner that is unattainable through statistical or mathematical means. What is more, participants tend to modify their behaviour or the information they impart when they are conscious they are being observed. The establishment of a rapport of trust between the researcher and the participant in an ethnographic research environment serves to mitigate the impact of the former on the latter (Brewer 2000: 19; Edirisingha et al. 2014).

Ethnography is the ideal method for this project because for one, participant observation allows for a comprehension of the intricate and delicate circumstances in which domestic workers lead their lives -both in and out of the workplace- by meeting and exchanging with them in spaces in which they feel at ease. This then fosters a deeper discussion of the violence perpetrated against them by their employers and the strategies they use to resist it. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allow on one hand greater coherence and comparability in the participants' answers and on the other provide the researcher with the flexibility to explore alternative conversation paths that may lead to the discussion of violence and resistance strategies that would otherwise not have been brought up.

Finally, domestic workers in Medellín are confronted with the similar consequences of social inequality —such as systemic racism, poverty, gender discrimination and a general lack of opportunity for upward mobility— as domestic workers in most other Latin American metropolises (Blofield 2012; Tokman 2010). Furthermore, migratory tendencies and degrees of violence and insecurity in Medellín are also comparable to those of other cities in Latin America (Rodriguez-Vignoli and Rowe 2018: 263; Tokman 2010: 11). This compatibility thus enables comparison with other cases across the region and the seamless insertion of this research in the CERIV project.

Communication with UTRASD's Board of Directors was initiated in the fall of 2019 in anticipation of my travels to Medellín. To gather data as a participatory observant once there, I began my research by spending weekdays with UTRASD; attending union meetings, helping the members of the Board of Directors with their tasks on the computer and teaching them English. This was a way to become embedded in the participants' environment, to connect and interact with the women part of the organization and also a means of giving them thanks for sharing their stories and experiences with me. On the weekends I attended workshops organized by UTRASD in partnership with the Fundación Bien Humano, a nonprofit organization that

funds and supports UTRASD and whose aim is to develop capabilities in families in situations of social and economic vulnerability. It is during these workshops that I met and exchanged with unionized domestic workers and their families. Through these initial encounters it was made possible to exchange contact information and schedule one-on-one discussions.

Discussions were conducted using an open-ended questionnaire that was initially created for research conducted first in Brazil by my supervisor Dr. Jean-François Mayer and then in Peru by my colleague Anna Calderon, who translated it from Portuguese to Spanish. Utilizing the latest version of the questionnaire, I then altered it to the Colombian context. Modifications made included changing the names of places, laws and social benefit programs. For the questionnaire, see Annex I. Eleven interviews were conducted over a period of two months and participants were randomly selected; I met with whoever was most readily available from those I had contacted. Discussions were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions are safeguarded in my Google Drive and have been emailed to my supervisor Dr. Mayer. Lastly, after returning to Canada from Colombia, I utilized the mobile application Whatsapp to maintain communication with participants. This allowed me to fill gaps in the data by asking participants for clarifications and additional information once I was no longer in Medellín.

The following section will describe the general characteristics of the domestic workers who participated in this research. Age, race, town of origin/migratory status, level of education and the reason for their choice of employment will be disclosed.

The participants were between the ages of 30 and 57 years old. All of them were Afro descendant except for one, who was *mestiza*¹. Eight of the participants were from the department of Chocó -north west- or the neighbouring department of Antioquia; both are known for their high rates of poverty and for being zones of conflict (El tiempo 2018; Chica 2019). One of the participants was taken to Medellín as a victim of slave trafficking, four of

¹ In Colombia, someone *mestizo* is considered to be the descendant of white Europeans -generally Spanish- and Indigenous Americans
[https://www.colombia.co/pais-colombia/los-colombianos-somos-asi/colombia-un-pais-plurietnico-y-multicultural/#:~:text=En%20Colombia%20se%20dio%20la,descendientes%20de%20amerindios%20y%20negros\).](https://www.colombia.co/pais-colombia/los-colombianos-somos-asi/colombia-un-pais-plurietnico-y-multicultural/#:~:text=En%20Colombia%20se%20dio%20la,descendientes%20de%20amerindios%20y%20negros).)

the participants were displaced² because of the armed conflict and the rest were all internal migrants³ who came to Medellín due to a lack of economic opportunities in their town of origin. Most of the participants were employed as domestic workers when they arrived in Medellín in their teens.

With regard to education, six of the eleven participants did not complete their elementary school education as children. Of these six, five went to night school as teenagers or adults to complete their *primaria* (elementary school). Of these five, four had subsequently gone on to high school, though they all had stopped studying or had yet to obtain their *bachillerato* (high school diploma). The other five participants did finish elementary school before beginning work as domestic workers. Two of them were enrolled as part-time students in university, one was studying to be a lawyer and the other a social worker. Two others had obtained their high school diplomas and one of these went on to obtain a certification in geriatric care. The remaining participant studied until sixth grade, after which she got married, had children and never pursued her education further.

With respect to work status, six of the participants began to work between the ages of 10 and 14, two between the ages of 15 and 17 and two during their twenties. None of the participants currently work as *internas* -living in their employers' home- but all of them except for two started out that way. The majority who had experience as *internas* spoke of it as work under slave-like, dehumanizing conditions and all currently only accept contracts that permit them to work as *externas*, that is living in their own homes and travelling to and from work every day. Four of the participants had quit domestic work altogether, three worked part time either by the day or by the hour, for one or multiple employers and the last six worked as full-time domestic workers. The participants had worked an average of 26 years as domestic workers, the least having been 19 years and the most 44 years. Regardless of whether they were generally satisfied with their field of employment or not, every participant cited lack of

² In Colombia, “forced displacement is a consequence of Colombia’s armed conflict -often a response to fear generated by indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict but in many cases to massacres, selective killings, torture and specific threats” (Human Rights Watch 2005)
https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/colombia1005/5.htm#_ftn11

³ An internal migrant is “any person who has moved within a State far away from their habitual place of residence regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes of the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is”(UN Migration Agency 2019)
[https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html#:~:text=The%20UN%20Migration%20Agency%20\(IOM,the%20causes%20for%20the%20movement](https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html#:~:text=The%20UN%20Migration%20Agency%20(IOM,the%20causes%20for%20the%20movement)

opportunity as their reason for becoming a domestic worker. Most participants affirmed having aspired to a different career.

Finally, it must be specified that an outlier has been identified amongst the group of participants in the research. One domestic worker, both during discussions and during the time spent with her doing participant observation, claimed to have only had a single negative work experience, her first, at 13 years of age and altogether avoided discussing her past work experiences, repeatedly emphasizing the happiness and satisfaction she felt working with her current employers. This contrasts with my observations of the other participants, who have all testified to having been inflicted physical, psychological and financial harm on multiple occasions by their employers. That said, this sample is not representative of the entire population of domestic workers in Colombia. Hence, as formerly iterated, the aim of this thesis is not to provide a statistically significant portrayal of the research problem, but rather to contribute empirical data to an understudied field, by illustrating the scope of violence and resistance strategies in the context of domestic work in Colombia.

To organize the relevant content in the transcribed discussions, two excel worksheets were created, the first containing general information and the second served to compile experiences of violence and the strategies used to counter them. In the second worksheet each domestic worker had her own row where portions of testimonies were categorized according to type of violence; physical, psychological and financial and types of resistance; exit, confrontation and negotiation. These spreadsheets were useful to label and classify the data from which point trends could be established to ascertain how domestic workers resist chronic violence, the impact of the resistance strategies they use and the evolution of this resistance over time. The resulting analysis will be presented in the ensuing section of the thesis.

V. Analysis

A. Chronic Violence in the Workplace

To aptly analyze how domestic workers in Colombia resist chronic violence in the workplace, it is necessary to begin by examining the ways in which violence occurs. This will be accomplished using the theoretical underpinnings outlined in the previous section *Chronic Violence Against Domestic Workers: A Typology*. This typology is important because it helps isolate which labour rights and laws are being violated and highlights which former rules of oppression continue to be upheld. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, in reality the different types of violence are often entangled and mutually constitutive. With this in mind, the following section of this thesis will thus discuss the patterns of physical, psychological and financial violence experienced by the domestic workers who participated in this research.

Domestic work is still often linked to sexual violence, but this research's overall finding for physical violence is that in most instances it was not sexual in nature (Acevedo et al. 2009; Alcaraz, Mongelos and C. I. R. D. 2013; Mayer 2021). Moreover, when asked whether they had ever been physically abused in their workplace, a common answer provided by participants was that should their employer attempt to lay a hand on them, they would not tolerate it. This meant that although they subconsciously knew they were being abused by their employers, they did not think of sleep and food deprivation or confinement as violence. Analytically, this indicates that the structures of abuse are so deeply ingrained within them and within society, that they are so accustomed to mistreatment that they have internalized the informal rules that normalize it.

“It had always been clear to me, the day an employer would assault me, verbally, with a bad word, or would lay a hand on me, I would lay a hand on her so she would know how hard I hit. That I had always very much had this in mind all of these years. And thank god none [of my employers] ever tried.” (Conversation February 11th 2020, my translation). Paradoxically, Claudia, along with several other participants, despite having vowed that they did not let themselves be the targets of physical chronic workplace violence testified to having endured a panoply of physically violent acts at the hands of their employers and their relatives. This is because these participants initially understood physical violence as being limited to direct

assault like being hit, kicked or slapped. When my exchanges with them deepened however, they recognized that much of the mistreatment they had recurrently experienced corresponded to subtler, yet just as harmful forms of physical violence. The four predominant types of chronic violence identified were hunger, lack of sleep, rest or time off, being locked in the house or a specific space and illness or injury as a result of poor working conditions.

First, of the eleven participants, six reported having been deprived of food. Monica's employer would control her portions and does not recall ever not being hungry; "She would serve a little bit and I would be left with the same hunger. I was not allowed seconds, I could only drink water. or coffee." (Conversation February 4th 2020, my translation). Esther also shared that one of her employers hardly fed her and that she too would drink glasses of water throughout the day to keep hunger at bay. For Amparo, working as an *interna* meant waking up at 4 a.m. and permission to have her first meal seven hours later, at 11 a.m. She would eat her second and last meal at 9 or 10 p.m.

In addition to being underfed, in many cases the participants expressed having been forced to eat different food than their employers and their family. Here, 'different' meant food of lesser quality either because it had less nutritional value or was old. For instance, during a job where her employers would purchase separate, "cheap" food for the domestic workers, Nubia had to buy food with her own money to supplement her diet because she was forced to eat so little and so poorly that she used to faint. In Ruth's case, in one of her jobs her meals came from a separate freezer her employer kept full of old, frozen leftovers.

The second prevalent type of physical violence was physical exhaustion, most often related to long work hours and a lack of sleep. Eight of the participants felt chronic extreme fatigue due to being overworked in at least one of their jobs. Consistent with Smith's (1991) finding that domestic workers were victims of more physical violence in the workplace when they lived in the household they worked, I observed that physical exhaustion caused by poor workplace conditions happened predominantly, though not exclusively, to domestic workers working as *internas*. Being permanently on site makes domestic workers accessible to their employers twenty-four hours a day. For instance, Claudia's employer's son would come home late at night and though he knew that Claudia had already gone to bed, he would knock on her door and request she warm up his dinner for him. In a different house, one of Claudia's duties was to provide care for her employer who had tuberculosis. After caring for her employer all

day, Claudia recalls having to awaken at whatever time of the night the prescription indicated, to administer her employer's medication. In both situations, it was because Claudia lived in the same house as her employers that she was expected and required to work around the clock. With a 114 hour workweek, Amparo described being overworked to the extent that she became underweight: "I got very skinny, [...] skinny because I did not sleep enough." (Conversation February 25th 2020, my translation). Nubia testified that "They abused one's energy, one would get too tired. [...] But it's because one worked *interna*. Things today are different." (Conversation February 12th 2020, my translation). She and other participants described live-in domestic work as being akin to slavery and stated that their working conditions had greatly improved since becoming daily or by-task workers. As previously mentioned, the reasons for the trend away from live-in and toward live-out domestic work could be varied. However, in the case of the participants in this research, their establishment of a network with other domestic workers who could help them find employment living outside of the home in which they work and provide general support and stability, their membership to a union that taught them how to claim their rights, how to negotiate their conditions of employment combined with an increase in opportunities for daily or by task employment account for this shift.

Third, confinement was experienced by participants as *internas* and *externas* in equal measure. Esther, who worked by day, realized that her employer had locked her in the house whilst he was out when one afternoon she tried to go collect clothes that she had left in the courtyard to dry and found the door bolted from the outside. Monica recounted that when she lived in her employers' house, they would frequently lock her in and leave. She would stay in the house alone for hours with no way of getting out. This type of violent act puts the domestic worker's life in grave danger. In the event of a fire, an earthquake, a flood or should the domestic worker suffer any kind of medical emergency which would require her to travel to the hospital, she is trapped in the house with no means of escape. Thankfully, in 2020, most domestic workers have a cellphone to which they have access and can use to call for help (Trabajadoras Domésticas 2020).

Next, physical illnesses and injuries domestic workers have been subjected to on account of their precarious work conditions will be examined. After getting dental surgery on one of her molars, Claudia was forced to work despite experiencing high levels of swelling and pain. Beyond the physical effort and pain of the movement required to dust and sweep, when speaking about the matter, Claudia recalls feeling dehumanized by her employer: "They do not

see us as people. One is not a person.” (Conversation February 11th 2020, my translation). For Claudia, her employer valued her employee solely for the labour she provided, entirely disregarding her well being.

It had been affirmed at the start of this subsection that it was found that the physical violence committed against participants was preponderantly indirect. That being so, one participant was inflicted direct physical violence by her employer’s son and three participants experienced sexual violence in the workplace to varying degrees. In terms of injury, Diana’s employer’s son once took a lighter he had used to light the stovetop and put it, still hot, on her shoulder. “He said he did this out of affection. I thought to myself: “Affection?”, but I kept my mouth shut, I didn’t say anything. I don’t know if it was out of fear that if I were to say something she [her employer, the perpetrator’s mother] would be aggravated, but I left things as they were. I was passive, tolerant. [...] On the inside I knew that this wasn’t normal, that it was inappropriate.” (Conversation March 12th 2020, my translation).

One of Monica’s employers, the husband, had the custom of slapping her backside everyday when he returned from work. Esther once worked for a man who asked her to give him daily massages. During the massage, there would come a moment when the man would flip from laying on his stomach to lay on his back, exposing his naked front to her and requesting she continue the massage. Finally and most severely, when she was still a teenager, Erica was repeatedly raped by the man she worked for. When she denounced what he had been doing to her to his wife, she did not believe Erica. The way each participant implemented strategies to resist the sexual violence she experienced in her workplace and the extent to which they were effective will be examined in the forthcoming portion of the analysis.

From my discussions with the participants of the psychological acts of violence they experienced, three comprehensive categories were established; verbal abuse, segregated practices and job description abuses. The first form of psychological violence, verbal abuse, has been subdivided into three groups; racial slurs, general insults and aggressive tone of voice/yelling. I have chosen to add this subdivision to Mayer’s (2021) typology because it allows a more minute and tailored analysis to the Colombian case.

Domestic workers in Colombia are predominantly Afro Descendant or Indigenous (Léon 2013: 199). Within the total population of Colombia, black people make up 9.34 percent

of the population and Indigenous people represent 4.4 percent (DANE 2018). The remaining 85 percent of the Colombian population identifies as *mestiza*, of European -most often Spanish- and Indigenous descent. Despite the absence of data depicting the exact distribution of domestic workers according to race, it is evident that Black and Indigenous women are overrepresented in domestic labor. A study conducted in 2014 revealed that ninety percent of UTRASD members had been victims of racism (Bedoya Monsalve 2014). Concurringly, the ENS reported in 2013 that black domestic workers are much likelier to be discriminated against and abused than their *mestiza* counterparts (AIL 2013). In the frame of this research, eight out of the ten participants who were Afro reported that one employer or more had made racist remarks on at least one occasion when addressing them. For example, Monica shared that her employer once told her; “You black women are only useful for cleaning, keeping the house looking tidy and cooking good food. You are not useful for anything else.” She said about this kind of comment: “It is mental harm that they [employers] have done to me my whole life.” (Conversation February 4th 2020, my translation). Esther recalls about her employer, “Everything was always “*Negra!*”, “*Negra!*”, “*Hagale pues negra!*”⁴”. He didn’t call me by my name.” (Conversation March 8th 2020, my translation). Both Erica and Claudia expressed that employers used to call them by the offensive name “Maria Jesu”. Historically, in Colombia, the name “Maria” has been utilized to designate black slave women. Indeed, Claudia clarified that the use of ‘Maria’ to designate a domestic worker is not a direct reference to the virgin Mary, rather ‘Maria’ has traditionally been a very common name amongst Afro women in Colombia. When a domestic worker is addressed as “Maria” it is doubly derogatory because it is on one hand an attempt to reduce her to the social status she had during the era of slavery and on the other, because everybody has a name, it is dehumanizing to assign the name “Maria” to every domestic worker. The addition of ‘Jesu’ adds a dimension of disrespect to the insult. Afrocolombians, particularly from the coastal region of Chocó, have an accent in which the last letter of words is not pronounced, for example, instead of saying “*Por Dios*” a Chocoana would say “Po’ Dio’ ”. Therefore, when employers omit the “s” and put an emphasis on the last syllable “su” in an imitation of the Chocoano accent when they call their domestic worker “Maria Jesu”, they are also using intonation and pronunciation as a mechanism of discrimination against the black, Colombian woman. In such cases, it is clear that the employer intends to inflict psychological harm to the employee through the use of racist comments and

⁴ This translates to “Do it then” meaning, “Get back to work black woman”. “Negra” in Spanish means Black woman, not the brutal English equivalent.

language. Claudia said that every time she was called “Maria Jesu” by her employer, she felt she was being made fun of.

With regard to general insults, participants have testified to being called “*chacha*”⁵ and “*la cachifa*”⁶, which are slang words for “domestic worker” or “servant” that are considered to be offensive in Colombia and used by employers to deprecate domestic workers. Some participants’ employers insult their employees’ intelligence by calling them “stupid” or “idiot” and another targeted her employee’s weight, calling her “*la manteca*”, which literally translates to “the butter”, but is a way to call someone fat.

Psychological violence can be inflicted verbally through the content of the words spoken, but also through the manner in which they are delivered. Eight of the eleven participants had been yelled at or had been addressed in an aggressive tone of voice by at least one of their employers or members of their employers’ family. Indeed, participants have also been spoken to disparagingly by the children, or visiting aunts, uncles and parents of their employers.

Segregated practices were an extremely common non-verbal psychological method employers use to deliberately ‘other’ and belittle the domestic workers in their employ. Over the course of my discussions with the women of UTRASD, it became clear that participants particularly experienced segregation with regard to meals; having to eat at different times and in different places than members of the household are two examples of this. Amparo’s employers would forbid her to have breakfast before she had fed every other member of the household, including the dog, and only then did she have permission to eat herself. There is no reason for Amparo, who had been up since four a.m. to have to wait until the rest of the household had risen and eaten to feed herself. Moreover, the specific request that she eat last after the dog is dehumanizing, it implies that she ranks lower than the household pet. Monica says: “Never in my life have I eaten at the dining table with them [members of the household]. I always ate in the kitchen with everything apart; plate, glass, utensils.” (Conversation February 4th 2020, my translation). Forcing a domestic worker to eat with a separate set of tableware -

⁵ “chacha” is short for “muchacha”, in this case “muchacha del servicio”, essentially translating to “maid” or “servant girl”.

⁶ An offensive term in Colombia to designate a woman who is paid for cleaning a household.
<http://diccionariolibre.com/definicion/cachifa>

often in poorer condition, with chips and stains- than that used by employers and their family is the third segregated practice I observed that serves no other purpose than to denigrate the domestic worker. Claudia expressed that the humiliation of having to eat in dingy, tarnished plates was so great that it left her without appetite. Similarly, Esperanza shared “One of the ladies would give me a separate plate, spoon, glass and I had to eat in those. I attended everyone at the table and then I could eat. I could not use the glasses they drank from, the spoons they ate with. I didn’t last in that job because I thought to myself: “I don’t have an infectious disease, so why do they have everything separated? A plate and a spoon. That is discrimination. I’m the one who keeps everything clean so how are they going to separate my spoon? There is no logic.” (Conversation February 15th 2020, my translation). As mentioned in the literature review, the comparative literature which explores race and class in domestic work explains that segregated practices are normalized within the workplace; Essed (1991: 46) poses that in Colombia, racism is upheld and fortified by everyday, routine practices that are deemed normal and largely go unnoticed (Goldstein 2013; Posso 2008: 222).

The final acts of psychological violence encountered fall under the umbrella category of abuses of power. Three accounts from participants will be conveyed to delineate certain maxima psychological violence committed by the employer against their employee can reach. First, Esther had an employer who had the habit of interrupting the task Esther was performing and asked her to do something impractical and counterproductive out of malevolence. Esther was once preparing a meal in the kitchen when her employer summoned her to her bedroom and asked Esther to bring over her shoes, which were lying on the ground a few feet from where she was laying on the bed. This is something the employer could have perfectly done herself, it cost Esther unnecessary time and effort and was undoubtedly a baseless display of power and superiority from the employer. Second, the same employer, rather than use calm and polite language to express discontent, used to throw her food at Esther’s feet when she was displeased with her meal. Third, Diana was humiliated by her employer at a large gathering that was being held for family and friends. “I was carrying wine glasses on a tray when she tripped me so the glasses would fall. She humiliated me, she threw me a scarf to clean up the mess because she did not let me go fetch a broom and dustpan. I sensed that she and her friends were watching me and I felt bad because I was kneeling, collecting the pieces and she was telling me: “This is what you are.” And she called me *igualada*⁷ [...], as if I were equating myself to something.

⁷ Literally translates to “equalizer”, meaning here “poser”.

I remained stunned because when you come from a village, and in the moment they call you *montañera*⁸, *montañerita* [...] I wanted to run out because I felt like I did not deserve what I was going through.” (Conversation March 12th 2020, my translation). Diana’s narrative is notable because it illustrates that multiple categories of violence can and do occur together. In fact, what happened to Diana demonstrates that two types of violence can overlap not only within one singular workplace, but in the very same moment. Tripping Diana was an act of physical violence and calling her *igualada* and *montañera* was verbal abuse. Abuse of power is represented in the employer’s act of forcing her employee to collect broken glass and spilled wine with a scarf rather than with a broom and mop.

Financial violence against domestic workers is widespread. In Colombia, there are laws in place designed to ensure domestic workers earn minimum wage, have access to social security and a pension plan and are awarded paid vacation and sick leave (Código Sustantivo del Trabajo 2011) . A lack of compliance with these laws on the part of the employer is a deliberate impetus for the domestic worker in their employ to continue to live in poverty and an infringement upon her dignity.

Every participant, except for the outlier, whose particularity was previously explained in the methods section, reported having been paid under minimum wage by at least one employer. The minimum wage in January 2021 in Colombia was 908 526 pesos per month, equivalent to \$311.02 CAD (Salariominimo.net 2021). This finding is concordant with a study conducted by the ENS which found that in 2012, 85,7 percent of domestic workers in Medellín earned less than minimum wage, which at the time was 566 700 pesos per month, equivalent to \$194.06 CAD (Morales Mosquera and Muñoz Caña 2013). For instance, Diana used to earn 120 000 pesos (\$43 CAD) per month as compensation for 90 hours work weeks. That is the equivalent of a \$0.11 CAD hourly wage. Those of the participants who began working as *internas* during their childhood or in their teens were typically not compensated for their labour at all. Erica recounts; “In those times, they did not used to pay me. When I worked caring for children they gave me everything, my clothes, food and a roof, but no money. I did not receive any money.” (Conversation March 12th 2020, my translation). It is illegal for children under the age of 15 to work in Colombia and to work between the ages of 15 and 17, teenagers must

⁸ Translates to “Woman from the mountains”, but contains a pejorative connotation. The use of *montañera* by a person from the city to designate a person from a rural area of Colombia is meant to insinuate that the former is uncultured, uncivilized.

obtain special authorization from the Labour Inspector (Ministerio del Trabajo 2013). According to the Organización Internacional del Trabajo, child labour in domestic work is nonetheless common in Colombia, but because it takes place in a “private” and “hidden” environment, it is easily concealed by employers and therefore more difficult to detect (González 2004).

Beyond the issue of minimum wage, unpaid overtime, late payments and the negation of vacation days or sick leave are problems the group of participants have had to contend with on a regular basis. Colombian labour law dictates that domestic workers cannot work more than ten hours in a day and no more than six days in a week⁹. Chronically working more than ten hours -often up to fifteen- occurred to every participant who had been an *interna*. Notwithstanding, domestic workers living outside of their workplace experienced this type of violence as well. Esther recalls: “The commitment had been that I arrived at work at 7 and left at 6. [...] But when I was ready to leave at six, Mr. Rodriguez would ask me to make him dinner. I would leave around eight at night. I would get home very late. For that reason I had many problems with my husband.” (Conversation March 8th 2020, my translation). This expropriation of time depicts not only a financial loss for the domestic worker, but also a greater sacrifice of her personal life (Léon 2013: 200). Finally, employers are required to pay for their employees’ first two days of sick leave as well as for fifteen days of vacation, during which employees must receive their salary in full. Many of the domestic workers interviewed never received either. The structural and attitudinal sources of the multifaceted and overlapping oppression for poor, black and indigenous women which generate chronic workplace violence as well as invisibilize domestic workers account for the consistent underpayment of domestic workers.

Contract (formal) or agreement (informal) violations by the employer, was also a recurring issue in discussions with the participants. Such acts of financial violence can entail requiring the domestic worker to perform more tasks than what the agreed salary had been predicated upon. For instance, several participants who were initially hired as caretakers for

⁹ In 1998, the Colombian Constitutional Court ruled that ‘an excessive workday contradicts the principles of human dignity’ and imposed a limit on the number of hours a domestic worker can work daily when before there was none. However, other workers can work no more than 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week, spread over six days. <https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/1998/C-372-98.htm#:~:text=C%2D372%2D98%20Corte%20Constitucional%20de%20Colombia&text=Los%20cargos%20de%20direcci%C3%B3n%20de,realizaci%C3%B3n%20concreta%20de%20sus%20fines>.

elderly or ill individuals found after accepting the terms of their employer that cooking and cleaning for a large household were also part of their workload. Being fired for discriminatory reasons or being undercompensated or not compensated at all after being fired without cause were frequently brought up in discussions. Indeed, Amparo was fired for being pregnant and Ruth was fired after taking a day off to take her daughter to the hospital.

Domestic workers in Colombia must be affiliated to the social security system which includes health, pension and occupational hazards (Gerencie 2020). Both employer and employee are required to contribute. In spite of this legislation, in 2014, 34.1% of domestic workers had access to health and pension coverage (UNDP 2016 :17). Out of the eleven participants, seven were affiliated at least to a health insurance plan or a pension plan if not to both, although most shared that this was not the case in jobs they had held when they were much younger. As the previous statistic demonstrates, this high rate of affiliation to social security is not representative of the majority of domestic workers in Colombia. Since the participants had all belonged to UTRASD for several years by the time this research was conducted, they had learned about their rights and how to demand they be respected. This will be discussed further in the *Evolution* section of the thesis.

B. Strategies of Resistance

This thesis adopts the following definition of resistance: “individual and collective, sometimes overt but often hidden strategies undertaken by low-income and marginalised people, which aim at guaranteeing survival (i.e. physical and psychological preservation), promoting contextual adjustment (i.e. attenuating oppression and improving access to resources), and/or causing positive transformation in structural sources of abuse.” (Mayer 2021: 8). Resistance is divided into the strategies of Exit, Confrontation and Negotiation because upon data compilation and analysis, this stood out as the best way to precisely encompass resistance without falling prey to over-generalization or over-specification.

Exit is one of the chief strategies domestic workers use to resist chronic violence in the workplace. In the literature, ‘exit’ is typically considered to be an individual’s permanent departure from a harmful environment (Hirschmann 1970; Mayer 2021: 7). However, this research has found that although the domestic workers who participated in this research predominantly withdrew themselves permanently from a violent workplace by quitting their

job, they also occasionally performed temporary exits by leaving a room in which their employer was perpetrating, or was likely to perpetrate, a violent act against them. Both types of exit will be analyzed below.

First, ‘macro-exit’ is the label this thesis assigns to the act of resistance to workplace violence carried out by domestic workers which consists of quitting a job without prior notice when work conditions become unbearable or unacceptable. Every participant except for the outlier had abandoned her job to put an end to abuses she had been enduring at the hands of her employer on at least one occasion.

This research has revealed that macro-exit was used by participants as a response to experiences of physical, psychological and financial violence in almost equal measure. Ruth, Nubia, Monica, Amparo, Esther and Claudia had all quit jobs because they were being starved. Claudia recalls a conversation she had with her ex-husband; “He told me “You are dying of hunger just to stay in a job like this.” So he started getting angry and so did I. I started thinking ‘I have other incomes’. My ex-husband, thank god, was a responsible guy, so why would I work to go hungry? So I called to say that I was not returning.” (Conversation February 11th 2020, my translation).

Monica, Nubia, Esperanza, Amparo, Esther and Diana all reported having left jobs because they were routinely humiliated, discriminated against and disrespected by their employers. For example, Esperanza once quit a job because she was forced to eat with separate tableware. “They want to separate my spoon, my glass, my plate? I am leaving! I cannot be in a place like this. Without being rude, I simply said: I will not take it anymore. And I left. If I cannot assert my rights, I cannot assert anything.” (Conversation February 15th 2020, my translation). For Esperanza, extricating herself from a workplace in which her rights were not respected was a means of empowerment and emancipation. Diana, who was also psychologically abused by her employer —she was called names, publicly humiliated and frequently told she was incompetent— said she quit to “demonstrate to her that I am capable of doing other things, that I am capable of leaving.” (Conversation March 12th 2020, my translation). This was Diana’s strategy not only to protect her mental health against psychological harm, but also to carry out an act of resistance in a space of oppression and discrimination (Keith and Pile 2004: 1-2).

Norma said she frequently quit jobs because she was paid too little for too much work: “That was almost always why I would leave. Sometimes another offer would come up in which I was offered higher pay. That’s what I needed. So I would leave.” (Conversation February 23rd 2020, my translation). Like Norma, many of her fellow participants reported having quit on grounds of financial exploitation. For example, Claudia decided to quit because she was being denied affiliation to social security by her employer: “I once resigned because they were not paying for my social benefits —and I was already with the union— so I had no interest in continuing in a job without my social security. I felt deceived because my employers had asked me for my documentation when I started so I thought they had affiliated me. I thought it was strange that the package that always arrives and says “Welcome, your ARL¹⁰ is this or that, your EPS¹¹ is this or that” had never come. Then, I got sick and I went to the emergency room and the doctor gave me a three day medical leave. When I went to the counter for laboural inability, the man working there told me that according to the system I was not affiliated. This bothered me very much so I called my employer and told him I was not going to go to work because the doctor had given me medical leave. The following Monday, I returned to work and when I asked my employer to affiliate me to social benefits, he got angry. He told me I should not be making so much trouble when so many people were looking for work. ‘Yes I know Don José’ I told him, “employees are fired around here for claiming their rights and I am not about to work under these conditions.” I had been there for fourteen months. So that was it. They gave me my settlement and I left.” (Conversation February 11th 2020, my translation). Quitting in this scenario was therefore a means for Claudia to put an end to the financial violence her employer had inflicted upon her, but was also a refusal to be threatened and bullied into accepting to continue working without her rights being met.

The following paragraphs will discuss the impacts of macro-exit on working conditions. The findings of this study indicate that exit was mostly an ineffective strategy for improving workplace conditions. It is true that an immediate positive effect was observed; by removing herself from the workplace, the abuse the domestic worker was subject to immediately ceased. This fulfills the primary intent of quiet, individual resistance; survival (Scott 1989: 35).

¹⁰ ARL stands for *Administradora de Riesgos Laborales* and are insurance companies in Colombia that cover expenses generated by work accidents and occupational diseases. https://safetya.co/que-es-una-arl-en-colombia/#Que_es_una_ARL

¹¹ EPS stands for *Entidad Promotora de Salud* and is the entity responsible for basic healthcare affiliations in Colombia. By law, citizens are required to be affiliated to an EPS. <https://actualicese.com/eps-ips-y-pos-terminologia-del-sistema-de-salud-nacional-para-tener-clara/>

However, it has been found that after quitting there is no guarantee a domestic worker will obtain better working conditions in her next job. In the context of this research, although all of the participants attested to an overall improvement in their working conditions from when they had first started domestic work to the time of the interview which they attributed to experience, connections and unionization, no evidence from the interviews or my observations indicates that quitting directly impacted the small material gains —higher wages and access to social benefits— and immaterial gains—better life opportunities, rights claiming, empowerment— made by the participants during their years employed as domestic workers (Bayat 1997: 59).

When Amparo's employers did not even give her a full day of time off after a ninety hour work week, she decided to quit. When she was working in another home and her employer required her to perform tasks that went above her job description, she also quit in the middle of a work day. When yet another employer threw a cup at Amparo, screamed at her for having forgotten to serve a plate at the breakfast table and told her she was useless, she also decided to quit. Amidst her employer's protests for her to stay, Amparo left on the spot, precisely to prove a point to her employer, "She told me that I am not useful for anything. So since according to her I was useless, I went to see if I could be useful somewhere else. I left my keys and I left. I was not going to work one more day for those ungrateful people." (Conversation February 25th 2020, my translation). Amparo's subjection to three different types of abuse in three successive workplaces illustrates that chronic violence did not cease in the long term as a result of her exits. Indeed, this data suggests that in spite of providing domestic workers with momentary satisfaction as well as ensuring immediate survival, utilizing exit generates no learning of how to change the structures of violence that take place in work environments that can be implemented into new employment contexts afterwards (Mayer 2021: 8). That is, it has been found that it is not through the use of exit that domestic workers become informed about their labour rights and how to assert them. For many participants, especially when they were young and had little experience in domestic work, leaving a violent workplace only meant winding up in another one.

In Colombia, when a work contract is terminated because the employee resigns a settlement must be paid by the employer (Gerencie 2020). This settlement includes; wages owed, social benefits, compensation for unclaimed vacation days, contributions to social security, parafiscal contributions and compensation in the event that they are owed (Gerencie 2020). Nevertheless, before becoming unionized, participants were either unaware of this right

or aware yet unequipped with the proper tools to claim it. Consequently, employers frequently paid participants less than the full amount of the settlement or did not pay it at all. Thus, in the process of attempting to resist the violence they had been experiencing at work by resigning, participants were dealt another instance of violence to contend with; that of finding themselves in a situation of unemployment without the support or resources necessary to provide for themselves and their families. Such experiences depict how, in certain scenarios, the cost of choosing macro-exit as a resistance strategy, beyond being ineffective, can have the reverse effect of being more costly than beneficial for domestic workers. Notwithstanding, exit was considered to be a viable method of rights claiming when dialogue had failed or when participants felt uncomfortable using it. This attitude toward exit was exhibited by participants who were unionized, informed about labour laws and who could afford to turn down jobs because they had access to other opportunities particularly when they faced financial violence. Earlier in their lives, before becoming empowered, participants who perceived that they could not afford to leave their jobs (which often also meant leaving their homes), performed what I label as “micro-exits”.

Micro-exit refers to the resistance of chronic workplace violence by temporarily moving from a dangerous space within the workplace to a safer one. This research has found that micro-exits were used to resist physical violence and sexual assault in particular. Every participant who had been a victim of sexual assault or rape utilized micro-exits as an initial resistance strategy and when this proved to be unviable, resorted to macro-exit.

First, to avoid getting groped by an employer who had the habit of slapping Monica’s behind as a means of greeting, in the mornings and evenings upon his return from work she would flee to a room he was unlikely to find her in. Second, during the daily massages Esther’s employer would ask her to give him, he would flip over and ask her to continue the massage while exposing his naked front. For her first several days on the job, every time her employer would flip over during the massage, Esther would make an excuse, like say that she had to tend to food in the kitchen to prevent it from burning, and leave the room. After a week of this, she quit the job. Third, to prevent her employer from raping her, Erica had developed several micro-exit tactics. She would generally do everything in her power to avoid being alone with him. If it did so happen that he and she were home alone together, she would lock herself in her room or go out to the parking lot and wait for her employer’s young son to return from school. However, other than in the immediate short-term, these strategies were almost completely

ineffective; far from allowing Erica to mitigate the oppression she faced or to generate a positive evolution of the structural sources of abuse she faced —meaning that hiding from her employer did nothing to make him understand the harm he was inflicting nor alter his violent behaviour— micro-exiting did very little to help Erica preserve her physical and psychological health. She expressed that being repeatedly raped, including being under constant threat that it would occur again, had made her “sad and psychologically sick, always wondering when he would be back” which is why she eventually left the job for good. (Conversation February 15th 2020, my translation).

In all three cases, performing micro-exits was an effective silent and hidden strategy of subordinate resistance for domestic workers to obtain a brief relief in a context where their limited knowledge, support networks and resources prevented them from successfully denouncing their assailant, with whom they had a relationship of extreme subordination both as employees and as victims of abuse (Scott 1989: 34). Notwithstanding, for Erica, Monica and Esther, micro-exits were ineffective in the long term since they did not lead to changes in their employers’ violent behavior. As a result, the structures of abuse are preserved for the employers, who may repeat these patterns with their next domestic worker, as well as for the employees, who have not, by means of exiting, acquired aptitudes to help them better defend themselves against abuses in their subsequent jobs.

Overall, both macro and micro exits proved effective, to varying degrees, domestic workers’ survival, but ineffective at promoting contextual adjustment and producing positive transformation in the structure of chronic violence (Mayer 2021: 8).

Confrontation is the second strategy I found domestic workers use in the workplace to counter workplace violence. Confrontation is a domestic worker’s verbal expression of a grievance pertaining to an act of physical, psychological or financial workplace violence routinely perpetrated against her by her employer or a member of her employer’s family. Confrontation specifically refers to the domestic worker’s unequivocal requirement of a change in her employer’s violent behaviour.

In the context of this research, it has been found that participants primarily used confrontation to promote contextual adjustment (attenuate oppression and improve access to resources) though some also used it as an attempt to guarantee their survival or to cause positive

transformations in the structural sources of abuse. Confrontation was used by seven of the eleven participants. Several of these seven attested to using confrontation more than once. This strategy was used in equal measure by the participants in situations of live-in and live-out domestic work. No pattern according to age, social network and unionization is discernible among domestic workers who use confrontation. However, these factors play a role in the effectiveness of this strategy. This will be discussed in the assessment of the impact of confrontation on working conditions.

As was the case for the exit strategy, participants confronted their employers to resist physical, psychological and financial violence in equal proportion (four recorded confrontations for both physical and financial violence and five for psychological violence). Claudia, Erica, Ruth and Esperanza all used confrontation to confront their employers about a variety of physical abuses such as sexual abuse, overworking and sleep deprivation. For example, when Claudia was a teenager and working as an *interna*, her employer's son would return home late at night, knock on her bedroom door, wake her up and ask her to heat up his dinner for him. On one such occasion, Claudia got angry and told him she wasn't going to get out of bed to prepare his meals in the middle of the night for him any longer. For Claudia, this confrontation arose out of a need to preserve her physical health in a job where she was already working over twelve hours a day, six days a week.

Esperanza, Nubia, Monica, Esther and Amparo used confrontation to express their grievances and demand that their employers adjust their violent behaviour, manifested as racial slurs, unfounded accusations of theft, angrily yelling and shadowing. Nubia had a conflictual relationship with her employer's mother, an elderly woman who always greeted Nubia with a snide remark or a complaint about Nubia's attitude. Nubia shared that this woman, Doña Rosario, on one occasion asked Nubia why she always appeared to be angry when she was around. Nubia replied, "Angry? Why would I be angry? You haven't done anything to me. I am just not the type of person who's always laughing. I don't need to have a laugh with you whenever you're here. I laugh when I feel like it, not when you tell me to." (Conversation February 12th, 2020, my translation). Through this confrontation, Nubia openly challenged the asymmetrical power relation between herself and Doña Rosario.

The types of financial abuse participants confronted their employers about ranged from violations in the terms of their contracts —employers set additional tasks or prolonged work

periods without prior consultation with the employee— to violations of Colombian labour laws, like imposing more work hours per day and days per week than legally permitted and remunerating below minimum wage.

This study sought to assess the impact of confrontation on working conditions. In comparison to Exit, Confrontation proved more effective to instigate contextual adjustments and structural transformations in the sources of abuse. That is, employers were much more likely to change their violent behaviour when confronted by their employee than when she left her job. Notwithstanding, of the thirteen recorded instances of confrontation, seven (54%) had a positive impact on working conditions whereas in the other six (46%) , conditions either worsened or remained unchanged. Due to the divided results encountered in this sample, whether confrontation is an effective means of resistance against chronic workplace violence for domestic workers cannot be confidently determined. Trends identified within each grouping (effective and ineffective) can nevertheless provide insight as to how and why confrontation does or does not improve working conditions by measure of change in employers' —or the perpetrating family members'— violent behaviours.

Of the six documented cases in which confrontation was ineffective, five of the domestic workers lived in the household in which they worked and one did not. This suggests that confrontation is less effective for live-in domestic workers. This is supported by the literature on domestic work in Colombia, which indicates that live-in domestic workers are generally isolated from other workers in this line of work, from the rest of the workforce and from their friends and family (Léon 2013: 200). Research on the distinction between live-in and live-out domestic workers demonstrates that live-in domestic workers are more vulnerable and more mistreated than live-out domestic workers. Specifically, isolation, or a lack of social network, coupled with a stronger internalization of inferiority in *internas* can help explain why it is more difficult for them to improve their working conditions through confrontation than their *externa* counterparts (Arcand 2020; Borgeaud-Garcia and Lautier 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Lan 2006).

When Monica worked as an *interna*, she got accused of stealing her employer's wallet. During our exchange Monica told me “I may come from the countryside and I may be black, but I am not a thief. I was raised in a household where I was taught that I cannot steal anything from anybody.” (Conversation February 4th, 2020, my translation). Monica recollected that at

first, after the incident, all she could do was cry when she thought of all the awful things her employer had screamed at her, but she built up her courage for six days and finally told her employer: “Respect me. Do not raise your voice at me. I did not take anything from you.” The employer later found her wallet somewhere she had misplaced it. When I asked Monica how her employer had reacted to her defending herself by speaking up as well as whether she had apologized when the wallet turned up, she shared that the employer continued to blame Monica, who eventually quit because she could no longer bear the hostile work environment. Monica understood that her employer had accused her of theft because of the prejudices she held against Monica’s race, class and rural background and attempted to subvert these structural sources of abuse by demanding respect from her employer. Living in her employer’s home meant Monica did not have the resources nor the network to turn her employer’s unresponsiveness into compliance to her demand, which was recognition that she had wrongfully accused Monica and that she addressed her with respect and a polite tone of voice. Indeed, Monica’s inability to induce a change in her employer’s psychologically violent behaviour through confrontation eventually led her to resort to exit.

In Colombia, live-in domestic workers typically receive all of their meals without any sort of deduction to their salary and lunch is customarily included in live-out domestic workers’ salaries. In a job where Amparo was already earning far less than minimum wage, her employer one day announced that she would discount 10.000 pesos (\$3.50 CAD) for her two meals out of the 30 000 pesos (\$10 CAD) she earned daily working as an interna. Indignant, Amparo replied, “I eat once at 10am and again at 10pm. With all of the work that I do here, I have to pay for the little food you give me? I do not earn it in this house? That’s not right.” (Conversation February 25th, 2020, my translation). Her employer barely gave Amparo a second glance, turned her back and did not answer anything. The 10.000 pesos were deducted from Amparo’s wage. Unlike Monica, Amparo’s confrontation had the sole objective of earning enough to get by and thereby guaranteeing her survival. Amparo attributed her inability to effectively resist workplace violence in this situation and in all others when she was younger to her lack of knowledge, experience and support in the city: “There is nothing worse in this life than working in a family home as a live-in domestic worker. It is the worst there is. I cried day and night.” [...] “I was exploited, harassed, taken advantage of and robbed by employers” because “in the countryside, nobody explains anything to you so that when I first moved here [to Medellin] I was scared.” Like Monica’s experience, recounted in the previous paragraph, when Amparo tried to confront her employers, they denied and ignored her demands: “I would

say, “Si señora” and start to cry. I had no one I could go to to report abuses, [...] especially when you are Afro, no one will listen.” (Conversation February 25th, 2020, my translation).

In every situation where confrontation was ineffective but one, the participants were living in their employers’ homes. Conversely, in every situation where confrontation was effective but one, the participants were *not* living in their employers’ homes. This will be presently discussed.

“I was once working a job and one day my daughter fell ill. I asked the *señora* for permission to leave work at 5pm, but that day she ate dinner at 7:30pm. When I took the bus that goes downtown, all of the pharmacies were closing. Then when I finally arrived in my neighbourhood -because I had to take two more buses to get there- my daughter was in very poor shape. I gave her some medicine, from the pharmacist and homemade recipes and the next day I went to work. I took a taxi to la Avenida El Poblado. I got there about 20 minutes late and she [the *empleadora*] got very angry. “Look at the time!” she said. I responded, “Be grateful that I came at all, because in the state my daughter is in, I should not even have come to work.” I stayed very calm. She recognized that I had unburdened her by coming, that I was doing her a favor.” (Conversation February 11th 2020, my translation). Although she did not explicitly evoke rights that protect her as a worker from workplace harassment, Claudia told her employer to “be grateful”, obliging her employer to reassess and adjust her behaviour toward Claudia¹². Indeed, Claudia stood up for herself, challenged her employer’s position of superiority and stepped out of the bounds of her own subordination making this a clear example of resistance to an instance of psychological workplace violence. Furthermore, the employer’s recognition of her misguided position and consequent change in the situation represents a contextual adjustment that attenuated Claudia’s oppression. In this case, the strategy of confrontation was successful. However, Claudia shared that other patterns of violence perpetrated by her employer and her family members, which were directly related to the fact that she lived in the house where she worked (she was overworked and underfed), continued

¹² Bill 1010 was passed in 2006 in Colombia and defines workplace harassment as “any persistent and demonstrable conduct exercised upon an employer or worker by an employer, boss or a immediate or mediate hierarchical superior, a coworker or a subordinate aimed at instilling fear, intimidation, terror and anguish, to cause labor injury, general demotivation at work, or to induce resignation from work.” The Colombian Supreme Court sanctioned a complement to this definition in 2008, adding that workplace harassment also applies to conduct that leads to occupational illness of the worker, especially stress. Safetya 2020. <https://safetya.co/acoso-laboral-ley-colombiana/#:~:text=Por%20su%20parte%2C%20la%20Ley,subalterno%2C%20encaminada%20a%20infundir%20miedo%2C>

to take place. This data thus indicates that confrontation had a partially positive impact on Claudia's working conditions; despite her employer's one-time recognition of her wrongs, the accumulation of persisting abuses and Claudia's consequent continued resistance to these through confrontation led to her being fired.

For others, it has been found that confrontation improved their working conditions in a more permanent way. At the time of my exchange with her in February 2020, Amparo had recently started a new job and within her first few days she confronted her employer when he yelled at her because she had not brought to him the hot water he had requested for his tea fast enough. Amparo responded to him by asking him to lower his voice and address her in a respectful tone. She then proceeded to calmly explain why the hot water was not ready for his tea. She told him that what he was doing had a name, that yelling and insults were psychological abuse and that she could file a complaint, but that it wouldn't be necessary if he never repeated this behaviour again. Amparo recounts that he never raised his voice at her again, and always spoke to her with delicacy and respect from that moment on. She compares this situation with that of her former employer, who would bark orders and scream insults at her, but "no longer" she says, "At this point in time, whether it is in the street, at work, wherever, if anyone thinks they can yell at me, insult me, infringe upon my rights? They better come down from the clouds because I know that there are laws, there are decrees and norms." (Conversation February 25th, 2020, my translation). Beyond achieving a contextual adjustment, by informing her employer of her rights, Amparo caused a positive transformation in the structural sources of abuse, addressing, and redressing, the imbalanced power relations in place that typically allow a wealthy man like her employer to mistreat a working class, Black woman like her.

Beyond age, experience or the live-in/live-out divide, this testimony may also represent a sign of the times. Indeed, since none of the participants were live-in domestic workers when this research was conducted, the experiences of live-in domestic work presented in this thesis took place from 1985 to 2010. Participants who said they felt too much fear and powerlessness to oppose their employers when they were *internas*, but now unhesitatingly use confrontation to resist workplace violence frequently evoked the evolution in Colombian labour law and workers rights as important tools that gave them the backing they needed to transform the structural conditions of violence and improve their workplace conditions. For example, all of the participants knew that Colombia had ratified the International Labour Organization's Convention 189 on Domestic Workers and were aware that Colombia passed Law 1788, or *Ley*

de Prima, in 2016 which made them legally entitled to bi-annual payments totalling 30 days' worth of salary. Esther, Erica and Norma have all used confrontation to get their employers to comply with the *ley de prima*. This institutional shift empowered Amparo and the other participants to claim the rights and benefits they are now entitled to through confrontation. Unionization also played a crucial role in enabling participants to effectively resist chronic workplace violence and collective mobilization will be analyzed further on in this paper.

A final element to consider pertaining to confrontation is that this research has found that for one participant, threatening to quit during a confrontation was particularly effective to generate contextual adjustments. Where this was a more prominent strategy in Mayer's research, this type of confrontation remains worthy of examination (Mayer 2021: 11).

First, Esperanza's employer used to closely follow her around the house as she worked and criticized her execution of every chore. Esperanza disclosed that enduring this caused her to suffer from severe mental exhaustion. "Until the day I had to stop her," Esperanza recollected. She addressed the problem by telling her employer, "I have always had stable jobs, I know how to work. Let me work. If you think you know better than I do, then do it yourself, because this is workplace harassment!" (Conversation February 15th, 2020, my translation). Esperanza went on to say that if this behaviour continued, she would resign. Esperanza shared that her employer ceased her violent conduct from that moment on, promoting a contextual adjustment by eliminating the oppression she had experienced in the workplace. Thus, through this confrontation Esperanza tackled the problem of her toxic work environment and evoked her right to a harassment free workplace. In addition, Esperanza implicitly leaned on her economic stability and network of fellow domestic workers —she shared that she had friends and family who could quickly find her another job should she need it— which empowered her to confidently and successfully threaten her employer with resignation should she not comply with Esperanza's demand.

Second, in the household where Esperanza is currently employed, she previously worked from Monday to Saturday. However, the six-day work week exhausted her and caused her to neglect her own household and children. Indeed, during the little time that she was home on evenings and Sundays, she was too tired to properly care for herself or her family. Esperanza decided to threaten her employer to leave and find a different job if she did not give her Saturdays off. Her employer conceded, but on the condition that Esperanza prepare meals for

the weekend before she left on Fridays. Although preparing meals for the weekend consisted in an increase in Esperanza's workload during the week, she specified during our exchange that she continued to work precisely the same hours from Monday to Friday, taking care to leave the instant the clock struck three, indicating the end of her shift and leaving any unfinished tasks for the next day. Moreover, this arrangement suited Esperanza because it provided her with the full weekend off to care for herself and her children. Confronting her employers with a threat to leave her job forced them to acquiesce to her demand for an additional day off, making this an effective act of resistance that contributed to her physical and psychological preservation. The bond of affection between Esperanza and her employers, who she believes consider her indispensable and part of the family, contributed to the effectiveness of this strategy. As previously mentioned, this finding is echoed by research in the literature on domestic work in Brazil, which suggests that affective attachments between employers and domestic workers bolsters the domestic worker's capacity to effectively resist workplace violence (Brites 2014; Mayer 2021: 11-12). Esperanza took advantage of this close relationship to negotiate better conditions for herself such as more time off, a wage increase and access to a better healthcare plan. Negotiation will be further considered in the following portion of the analysis.

Negotiation is the third, and less frequently used resistance strategy. Negotiation is a strategy used by domestic workers to resist acts of physical, psychological and/or financial workplace violence routinely perpetrated by employers or members of their family and in which the domestic worker negotiates her working conditions to guarantee her survival, promote a contextual adjustment or cause a positive transformation in structural sources of abuse (Mayer 2021: 8). Although negotiation is traditionally considered to be verbal, this thesis puts forth that domestic workers who are unequipped to negotiate out loud can use non-verbal tactics to negotiate space and set boundaries. Both verbal and non-verbal negotiation will be examined in this section.

In the scope of this research, negotiation was used significantly less than exit and confrontation. Indeed, only two participants used verbal negotiation and six used non-verbal negotiation. Verbal negotiation was used exclusively to resist financial violence, that is non-remunerated hours of work or requiring extra tasks than what had been contractually agreed upon. In the case where verbal negotiation was effective, the participant was working as an *externa* and in the one where it was ineffective, the participant was working as an *interna*.

Although this is consistent with previous findings in this research and in the literature on domestic work, this sample is too small to extrapolate a trend.

Working as an *interna*, Amparo had Saturdays off (out of a 90 hour, six day workweek). In reality, however, her employer kept her working on Saturdays until 3 or 4pm. Thus, in an attempt to negotiate a small amount of rest and personal time, Amparo would sometimes ask her employer if she could leave the house for a little while during the week. Her employer always firmly replied: “No! When it’s your day off you can leave, but on weekdays you stay here.” As she shared this story, Amparo reflected on it by saying “What was I going to answer if I did not know anything?” So, I would reply: “Yes Ma’am” and start to cry.” (Conversation February 25th, 2020, my translation). Amparo’s inability to properly negotiate rendered futile her repeated attempts to attenuate the oppression of quasi-constant work without time off (other than to sleep and eat) by obtaining some time away from the workplace during the week.

On the other hand, Norma was capable of effectively negotiating with her employers to find a solution to her grievance that both were satisfied with. Norma’s current employer’s grown up and married children used to come to have lunch at their mother’s every day; “I had to cook lunch for all of them for the same salary and that was a form of exploitation.” she revealed. Until one day Norma pointed out to her employer that when she started working for her, she had not informed Norma that she would have to cook for her entire family and that it seemed like a lot of work for what she was being paid. Norma recounted, “Afterwards the family stopped coming for lunch, but this didn’t seem like a good solution to me, so I said that I didn’t mind the extra work if I was compensated for it. Now I am paid an additional 15.000 pesos (\$5 CAD) on the days the family comes to lunch.” (Conversation February 16th, 2020, my translation). Norma’s employers were responsive and adjusted their behaviour twice; once when the initial solution did not prove suitable and again when Norma proposed an improved arrangement. Through this negotiation Norma achieved a contextual adjustment.

For some domestic workers, blatantly ignoring a disrespectful employer, not responding when addressed or adopting a particular facial expression that conspicuously communicates discontent consists of a negotiation of space and boundaries that, by their non-verbal and therefore subtler nature, allow them to resist chronic workplace violence in contexts where verbal denunciation may prove too high a risk. Non-verbal negotiation was primarily utilized to resist psychological violence/for psychological preservation. No discernible pattern

with regard to age, live-in/live-out status, social network or unionization was found for this strategy.

Body language was used by three of the participants as a mechanism of self-defense against verbal abuse in the workplace in their early years as domestic workers. Claudia and Diana shared that they kept their facial expression serious to avoid being yelled at. According to Claudia, generally maintaining a serious facial expression at work, or making an angry face at her employers when she thought they had raised or were on the verge of raising their voice at her was an effective way to signal her anger and make her employers back off. In one job, Diana's employers were extremely possessive and controlling. Of putting on a serious facial expression Diana said, "It was the only manner available to me in which I could make my employers understand that there was a barrier between us, that I was their employee. When they arrived, I would always put on a serious face." (Conversation March 12th, 2020, my translation). When Amparo was an *interna* she did not just use her face as a channel for resistance, but her entire body; when she got yelled at, she would turn away from the yelling employer and carry on with her work, ignoring the verbal assault.

Two other participants gave accounts of jobs in which they ignored acts of psychological violence directed at them. In these instances, the participants did not respond when they were expected to. First, when Norma's employers would speak to her using the term "negra" she would ignore them and continue her work as if she had not heard. Second, Monica's employers' children had the habit of asking her to do things for them that were unreasonable and only served to take advantage of her. She listed as an example being called over by a child to fetch a glass of water for him when he was standing right beside the refrigerator. When asked whether she reacted to such excessive demands, she said, "I would pretend I was deaf, that I had not heard." Here, verbal and non-verbal intertwine because if she was confronted for not executing the demand that had been made, Monica revealed, "I responded by saying I had not heard, but in reality, of course I had heard. This is a method of resistance." (Conversation February 4th, 2020, my translation). The practice of "pretending she was deaf" enabled Monica to shroud her resistance in a semblance of obedience.

Finally, Ruth was given old, broken and stained tableware to dine in, but she was too fearful to directly bring up the issue with her employers. Instead, to protect herself against the offense to her dignity, she refused to eat out of the crummy plates. Choosing to skip lunch

altogether rather than use was her technique of quiet, everyday resistance. For Ruth, this technique certainly did not improve her working conditions since it caused her to spend the day of work doing difficult manual labour in a state of hunger. In addition, this technique did not induce any form of change in her employer's violent behaviour nor was any clear evidence obtained from Ruth's testimony that she learned how to better dismantle the structure of violence in which she was inserted as a Black, displaced domestic worker in Medellín.

The refusal to engage in situations of workplace violence in which they were victims allowed the participants to exert a small amount of control in contexts where they felt virtually powerless. According to de Casanova (2019: 56), domestic workers sometimes “embody docility and passivity as a strategy for remaining employed”, because they reason that “for the moment, a bad job is better than no job”. The hidden strategies delineated above simultaneously fulfilled the purpose of safeguarding the participants' employment and that of guaranteeing their basic survival, which in these instances was the preservation of their sense of worth and dignity (Katz 2004: 247; Mayer 2021: 8). Notwithstanding, what was true for Ruth's situation holds for the other participants', beyond being a good strategy for immediate psychological preservation, this sub-strategy does not result in the improvement of working conditions for those who use it.

Finally, it is imperative to discuss the role of the union as a promoter for individual resistance. The confidence, know-how, preparation and support required for a domestic worker in Colombia to set her own terms of employment, especially in accordance with the law are monumental. Most of the participants who were capable of successfully doing so was because of their membership in the union. Indeed, UTRASD taught the participants their rights, how to extend information about them to employers and how to then make claims. Diana said: “I attended all of the workshops, and with the help of all of the women on the board of directors, I learned many things. What UTRASD does is teach you what your rights are and that you can also teach those rights to your employers which is how you develop a better labour communication.” (Conversation March 12th, 2020, my translation). When the participants were asked whether their working conditions had worsened, remained the same or improved since they first started domestic work, all of them responded that they had improved and all of them credited this improvement to UTRASD. This is exemplified in Norma's statement of the following: “At first, I was exploited. I did not have social security, I knew that my shift started at 6:30, but I didn't know what time my shift would end. My sister invited me to UTRASD and

I was empowered with information. From then on, I did not let them [my employers] abuse me. [...] When I joined UTRASD I received so much information that I went to assert my rights. I now have social security, benefits, bonus, everything. Today, I no longer work indefinite hours; I arrive at 8am and at 4pm sharp, that's it, I am gone. I am very grateful for UTRASD.” (Conversation March 12th, 2020, my translation).

In the case of the domestic workers in Medellín who participated in this thesis project, it is evident that the collective mobilization that occurs outside the workplace impacts the everyday individual resistance that occurs within the workplace. It is primordial to remind the reader that the vast majority of domestic workers in Colombia are not unionized¹³ and that the aim of the following analysis is not therefore to speak on whether collective mobilization leads to an increase in individual resistance for domestic workers in general in Colombia (OIT 2012). It seeks only to piece together the dynamics of how it *can* happen as it did in this sample. Thus, within the confines of this research, for the participants who were all members of UTRASD, participation in monthly marches, bi-weekly workshops and seminars and for some even travelling to Bogotá, the capital, to promote a bill set to advance equal rights for domestic workers in front of Congress all contributed to empower and embolden domestic workers in their individual acts of resistance. Moreover, belonging to a domestic worker's union breaks the isolation of domestic work, which, as previously explained, exacerbates oppression and vulnerability in the work environment. This was even extended to non-members via word of mouth. Esperanza illustrated this when she shared that “For many who don't belong to the union, I pass along the information and I invite them to come with me on a Saturday or a Sunday to hear the information for themselves.” Thus, individual resistance is strengthened by involvement in collective mobilization and the knowledge this involvement brings to its members; upon the conclusion of our discussion, Esperanza said: “Thanks to UTRASD —the talks are very beneficial, we obtain information and can then speak with confidence to our boss, tell them I know which rights are mine and which are theirs.” (Conversation February 15th 2020, my translation).

¹³ As mentioned at the start of this thesis, there is no official (of governmental or NGO provenance) number for unionized domestic workers in Colombia. Based on information I have received from UTRASD and the Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS) the percentage of unionized domestic workers in Colombia is between 0.11 percent and 0.2 percent, leaving little doubt that unionized domestic workers only represent a small minority of total domestic workers in Colombia.

Bayat (1997: 62) proposes that individual resistance leads to collective political struggle. In this thesis, although I have shown that participants individually resisted chronic workplace violence prior to unionizing, I have demonstrated in the previous paragraph that collective political participation strengthens individual resistance, particularly with regard to rights claiming. Domestic workers' use of individual acts of resistance and participation in a collective political struggle appear to be intertwined, but with the current available data, a causal chain cannot be established. Lines of questioning such as this one that arise from the findings of this research will be considered in the concluding segment of this thesis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis sought to examine how domestic workers in Medellín resist chronic physical, psychological and financial workplace violence and assess the impact of each of the three resistance strategies that were identified. The research question, and hypotheses of the project were outlined. Furthermore, a review of the existing literature on domestic work and domestic workers' resistance was provided and a significant gap in academic publications was identified. The theoretical underpinnings and the context of the country were presented. The methodology used prior to, during and after the fieldwork conducted in Medellín in early 2020 was then explained. Finally, the different types of violence encountered and the various strategies participants employed to resist them and the impact of each strategy were analyzed. As it has been put forth, resistance, —especially of the individual sort— to violence by domestic workers in Latin America is highly relevant not only because it is overlooked in academia, but also because domestic work is typically undervalued and underrecognized by governments and citizens. This project's primary purpose was thus to collect and present data. In this thesis, I have also contributed to theory by making small changes to Mayer's (2021) typologies of violence and resistance strategies. With this thesis, I aspire to draw attention to the poor working conditions domestic workers face in Latin America through the dissemination of the data collected and in turn prompt action toward improving their work environment and lives.

It was shown that macro-exit and confrontation were used to resist physical, psychological and financial violence in equal proportion whereas micro-exit was used to resist physical violence in particular, verbal negotiation was used exclusively to resist financial violence and non-verbal negotiation was used to resist psychological violence. Moreover, exit, both macro and micro, although useful for instantaneously putting an end to violence, proved to be ineffective because on one hand it plunged participants into the financial precarity that comes with unemployment —enhanced by their already vulnerable positions as poor, Black, internal migrant women— and on the other hand by leaving their job, participants did not change either their employers' or their own conducts related to labour rights. Confrontation had a null or negative impact on working conditions for participants when they were live-in participants due to their inexperience and lack of knowledge regarding their rights. Contrastingly, confrontation had a positive transformative impact on the structural sources of abuse which resulted in improved working conditions for live-out participants who, by their

experience, broader social network and union membership were able to successfully stand up to their employers. Lastly, like confrontation, negotiation had varying impacts on working conditions for those who used it. Notably, non-verbal negotiation allowed participants to reclaim space and subtly set their own boundaries in situations where they felt quasi-absolute powerlessness thus preserving their physical and psychological well-being in the short-term, but this strategy was not useful for producing a change in the entrenched, structural causes of violence. These findings revealed that resistance strategies and their effects evolved over time and were contingent on factors such as age, social network and unionization. For instance, when participants were young, live-ins and knew either very few or no one other than their employers in Medellín, they withstood poor working conditions (typically an amalgamation of all three types of violence) as long as they could and used exit as a last resort. In contrast, at the time of my exchanges with them, with strong social networks, a union that had taught them labour laws as well as what their rights were and how to claim them, the participants had adopted a zero tolerance approach to exit; the instant an employer committed an act of violence toward them, particularly financial, they quit. Nubia shared that when she started a new job, if her employer denied her pension, her vacation, bonus or contribution to any other social benefit, she left knowing she would have no difficulty finding another work opportunity. Lastly, but most importantly, it was demonstrated that at the crux of the dynamics of violence and resistance between employers and domestic workers in Colombia lie the long-established structures which reproduce and reaffirm unequal power relations.

To further research on the topic, I suggest that an in depth examination of the external elements that have contributed to shaping the Colombian socio-political context, specifically the fluctuations in the political opportunity structure in Colombia over the past forty years, would shed light on how, why and when domestic workers employ different strategies to resist chronic workplace violence.

Furthermore, a repeated instance of symbolic resistance was encountered over the course of my research that extended beyond the scope of this thesis. Several participants mentioned that they addressed their employer as *jefa* instead of *patrona*. Both words mean “boss”, but the former carries a negative connotation derived from the colonial era where *patron* designated the wealthy Spanish landowner who was all-powerful over his land and those he employed or enslaved to labour on it (Vanden and Prevost 2018: 32-35; 440-442). Indeed, as previously mentioned in Latin America, traditional relations between patrons and servants

are reflected in contemporary class relations between employers and domestic workers (Casanova 2019: 56). Hence, participants claimed that in the context of modern day domestic work, employers tended to internalize the label *patrona* which gave them inordinate impressions of power and superiority. The refusal to use *patrona* and the adoption of *jefa*, which does not carry the historical and racial weight *patrona* does, is thus a quiet strategy of symbolic resistance used in the aim of uprooting the traditionally violent narratives that shape the relationships between domestic workers and their employers. Unfortunately, because of its inherent passivity, there is no way to measure whether this particular act of resistance successfully contributes to changing the employer's perception of her relationship with the domestic worker in her employ or the consequent violent behaviour she has toward her. Therefore, whether this strategy effectively plays a role in the subversion of entrenched socioeconomic frameworks of violence and power could not be ascertained. Nevertheless, a study of this, and other ways domestic workers use symbolic resistance to subvert deeply rooted patterns of violence and oppression would prove valuable to our understanding of the issue (Scott 1989: 36).

Finally, the natural progression of this thesis would be to carry out a comparative analysis between the Brazilian, Peruvian and Colombian cases. Indeed, violence against domestic workers is pervasive across Latin America, but equally as present are the everyday strategies they use to defend themselves. A comparative analysis would allow for an appraisal of the scope and significance of the strategies encountered in each country and ultimately perhaps lay the groundwork for an eventual international collaboration between scholars and social leaders toward the development of a broad range of solutions to enact meaningful change in the lives of the millions of domestic workers in Latin America who are victims of workplace violence.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire / Cuestionario

Este estudio está basado en el método etnográfico, donde los participantes están incentivados a compartir experiencias de vida con la investigadora.

Esto permite a la investigadora obtener acceso privilegiado a las perspectivas, actitudes y creencias de las participantes. Estas experiencias serán la fundación de la investigación y esencial para el proceso analítico de la investigadora. Las preguntas hechas serán abiertas por lo que las participantes tendrán la oportunidad de expandir y desarrollar sus respuestas en la dirección que ellos elijan. El proceso que resulte se asemejará mucho más a una discusión fluida que a una entrevista formal y estructurada. Mi objetivo es recopilar historias de las experiencias vividas por las trabajadoras domésticas que han encontrado violencia en el lugar de trabajo, centrándome especialmente en las estrategias de resistencia de estas trabajadoras. Lo que sigue es una serie de preguntas generales, que serán más refinadas.

Preguntas para las trabajadoras del hogar:

1. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva trabajando como trabajadora del hogar?
2. ¿De dónde es originalmente?
 - a. (Si corresponde) ¿Cuándo llegó a Medellín y por qué decidió venir a vivir aquí?
3. ¿Tuvo la oportunidad de ir a la escuela, cuando era un niña?
 - a. ¿Por qué o por qué no?
4. ¿Por qué decidió trabajar como trabajadora del hogar?
5. ¿Ha trabajado en varios hogares, o solo uno / pocos?
 - a. (Si es relevante) ¿Por qué ha cambiado de empleador?
6. ¿Vive en la casa de su empleador?
 - a. (Si es así) ¿por qué decidió vivir allí?
 - b. (Si no) ¿por qué ha decidido no vivir allí?
7. ¿Es un problema para usted vivir / no vivir en la casa de su empleador? ¿Por qué?
8. En general, ¿está satisfecha con su trabajo como trabajadora del hogar? ¿Por qué?
9. ¿Cómo la trata su empleador, en general?
10. ¿Cómo se dirige su empleador (y otros miembros de su familia) hacia usted?
11. ¿Su salario siempre se paga a tiempo y en su totalidad?
 - a. ¿Su empleador contribuye a su pensión en su nombre?
 - b. ¿Su empleador considera otras cosas como parte de su salario (comida, ropa, comida)?

12. ¿Tiene tiempo libre? ¿Otros beneficios?
13. ¿Alguna vez su empleador u otros miembros de la familia le han gritado, insultado o le han hecho comentarios críticos?
- a. ¿Por qué?
 - b. ¿Cómo le hizo sentir?
 - c. ¿Qué hiciste entonces / cómo reaccionaste?
14. ¿Alguna vez ha sido abusado físicamente en su lugar de trabajo?
- a. ¿Que pasó? ¿Quién perpetró el abuso?
 - b. ¿Cómo le hizo sentir eso?
 - c. ¿Cómo reaccionó? ¿Qué hizo para protegerse?
15. En el día a día, ¿hay cosas que haga para evitar abusos verbales o físicos por parte de sus empleadores?
- a. (Si es relevante) ¿Qué es lo que hace?
16. ¿Alguna vez ha buscado información sobre cómo protegerse de los abusos?
- a. ¿Con quien?
 - b. ¿Fue útil esta información?
17. ¿Pertenece a una unión?
- a. ¿Por qué eligió convertirse (o no) en miembro?
 - b. (Si corresponde) ¿Alguna vez su sindicato le ha dado información sobre cómo defenderse de los abusos verbales o físicos?
 - c. ¿Han demostrado que estas estrategias son útiles? ¿Cómo por qué?
18. ¿Sabe usted que el trabajo doméstico está completamente protegido y regulado por la legislación laboral del país?
19. ¿Ha visto algún cambio en su situación laboral desde que se enmendó la Ley N° 1595 de 2012 y la Ley N° 1778 (Ley de Prima) en el 2016 para reconocer los derechos laborales de las empleadas domesticas?
- a. (Si es relevante) ¿Cómo cambiaron las cosas desde entonces?
20. En general, ¿ha mejorado su contexto laboral, se ha mantenido igual o ha empeorado en los últimos años?
- a. ¿Como y por qué?