

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Re-thinking the Immigrant Narrative in a Global Perspective: Representations of  
Labor, Gender and Im/migration in Contemporary Cultural Productions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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2007

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2007

## DEDICATION

Para mi madre, Irene Martinez de Mata.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Department of Literature for helping to fund my research and writing.

I would like to acknowledge all of the help and guidance from my committee members. Thank you to Lisa Lowe for sharing her vast knowledge of immigration and literature with me and for making teaching so enjoyable. To Shelley Streeby, many thanks for helping me develop an understanding of American Studies and making the study of the canon so much more enjoyable. My deepest gratitude to Michael Davidson for his encouragement and for introducing me to the literature of the Popular Front. Mil gracias to Jorge Huerta who, with his boundless enthusiasm and generous spirit, always made sure my education in Chicana/o Teatro extended beyond the classroom through his many sponsored trips to cultural events. I would especially like to thank the chair of my committee, Rosaura Sánchez, for six years of unwavering support and tireless mentoring and for teaching me the importance of responsible scholarship and activism. Regardless of the many challenges I encountered in graduate school, she always made me believe I could handle it all. My sincerest gratitude to her for providing me with a model of what a Chicana in academia can accomplish.

A very warm thank you to the staff of the Literature Department—Ana, Thom, Patricia, and Lucinda—for helping me successfully maneuver the endless red tape of graduate school. Thanks for your willingness to help me with everything from making copies to setting up department events.

I would like to thank my wonderful family for always being there for me and

giving me the motivation to keep going when I felt exhausted. To my partner Ryan, thanks for holding me up through the rough times and selflessly offering me all that you have to give and more. To my children, Alyssa and Jaime, who constantly remind me of what is really important in life and for making the journey so much more enjoyable. You all inspire me to want to make the world a better place.

Thank you to my family in Texas, who has always supported me and helped me survive my very rough undergrad years. To my father, Ernesto, gracias por todo papi, I couldn't have done it without you and my mother by my side. Thank you to my sisters, Tina and Mari, for their friendship and their unconditional love. Many thanks to my family in Fresno, Nancy and Terry, for all of your support. Your belief in me and your warm embrace into the family mean more to me than words can ever express.

To my best friend and sister in crime, Chris Guzaitis, thank you for helping me survive grad school. You have been the village that has helped raise my children and you have filled the absence that leaving my sisters left in my soul. I will always cherish our many shopping excursions—thanks for introducing me to the joys of designer shoes. My deepest gratitude to my friend and mentor Rita Urquijo Ruiz—your advice and your friendship have been invaluable to me. The guidance you have provided me with has helped me finish this dissertation. Finally, thank you to my comadres—Marla, Myrna, and Lorena—and to my good friends Axel and Tina, for making my time at UCSD so much more exciting.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Re-thinking the Immigrant Narrative in a Global Perspective: Representations of  
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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego 2007

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This dissertation project comes out of an interest in labor and gender and the ways in which laboring bodies, specifically those of female domestic workers, are represented in cultural productions. One of the most popular means of portraying immigrant workers is through the employment of the hegemonic immigrant story, an anachronistic narrative that continues to be perpetuated both in cultural productions and in the general debate about immigration. The hegemonic immigrant narrative is based on a storyline of progress that redeploys the constructed binary between the

country of origin and the host country. The introduction argues for a different way of reading immigrant narratives that deconstructs such a binary in order to situate the new immigrant narrative as occurring under a world-system, in which the movement of people across constructed national boundaries is no longer situated between spatially and temporally differentiated areas, but instead is seen as taking place within a global system—one based on various economic and political relationships. The cultural productions in the dissertation provide varying representations of immigration and domestic labor and include works of literature and film.

The first chapter looks at the ways in which the hegemonic immigrant narrative has been employed by two canonical Chicano texts and two contemporary films in order to trace the perpetuation of the myth of upward mobility and assimilation. Chapter two provides an analysis of alternative narratives written by Latina writers that challenge the ideological containment of the traditional story of migration. The third chapter continues to focus on representations of domestic labor, but also includes the labor performed in the public sphere of the hotel industry.

Ultimately, this dissertation is interested in looking at the ways in which cultural productions are using representations of labor and immigration to alter the narrative of immigration that continues to perpetuate ideas of success and assimilation. Cultural productions about marginalized immigrant communities whose immigrant experiences are not necessarily stories of progress serve to disarticulate the dominant immigrant narrative and ensure the visibility of immigrant patterns that have influenced the formation of the U.S. as a heterogeneous nation.

## Introduction

The issue of immigration is one of the most visible topics of discussion in the national arena, with everyone from right-wing Republican Pat Buchanan to California farmers offering their opinion. In Arizona, one of the states most affected by the influx of undocumented immigrants into the U.S., the *Arizona Daily Star*, a Tucson-based newspaper, sent an investigative team along the nearly 2,000 mile U.S./Mexico border in an attempt to provide their readers with an understanding of the issues surrounding the immigration debate. Their on-line four-part series, entitled “Sealing Our Border: Why It Won’t Work,” follows a group of journalists in their journey from San Diego to the Gulf of Mexico in a multimedia report that looks at the economic, cultural, and physical geography of the border.

One of the most interesting parts of the series, “The Legacy of Gatekeeper and Hold the Line” investigates the role that the construction of physical barriers has played in the deterring of undocumented immigration. Through various interviews, the report represents diverse views regarding the militarization of the border, and provides a comprehensive look at the conflicting sides of the debate. Of most interest to my project is an interview with Border Patrol Agent Christopher Bauder, who has patrolled the San Diego Sector for over nine years. For Bauder, Gatekeeper has not been successful and the closing off of the border will ultimately fail because he believes that the real issue in the immigration debate is employment, not border security: “Ninety-five percent of the people that cross the border are coming to find work.”<sup>1</sup> Bauder’s statement emphasizes the economic relationship that exists between immigration and labor. For Bauder, however, the resolution to the immigration

problem lies in going after businesses that hire undocumented workers. While Bauder, and those like him who argue for a crackdown on employers, understands the relationship that exists between labor and immigration, the discourse he utilizes is contained within a rhetoric of immigration that emphasizes the effects on the nation and the maintenance of nation-state boundaries.

While there are multiple positions on the immigration debate, one thing that most vocal proponents and opponents of immigration have in common is the emphasis they place on domestic effects of the growing number of immigrants. Scholars like Vernon Briggs and groups like Numbers USA and the Center for Immigration Studies argue that undocumented immigration adversely affects the U.S. because immigrants take away jobs from “Americans” and place undue strain on government resources. Briggs, in particular, contends that undocumented workers hurt the African American working class by competing for jobs and, in the process, suppressing wages. Some opponents of immigration rely on the racist rhetoric that situates immigrants as too different (read “inferior”) from white Americans and see the growing numbers of immigrants as a threat to the culture of the nation—a culture based on the mythology of a homogeneous white citizenry. Unlike those who oppose immigration, organizations like the CATO Institute and the Pew Hispanic Institute argue that immigrant workers are a necessary part of the national economy and contribute to the well-being of the nation through their labor and the taxes they pay. These organizations tend to see immigrants as adding to the cultural diversity of the country, a diversity based on liberal ideas of multiculturalism that gloss over important differences. Both sides of the argument concentrate their debates on the effects that

immigrants have on the U.S., but they situate immigration within the boundaries of labor and the nation, in isolation from the geopolitical realities that affect immigration patterns. In explaining why people chose to immigrate to the U.S., many employ the rhetoric of the U.S. as the land of opportunity, a place where dreams can come true. This rhetoric, however, obscures the changes that have occurred under a new global regime of interconnected economic and political networks.

My interest in the current immigration debate lies in understanding the ways in which cultural productions engage in the discussion of immigration, and participate in the dissemination of ideologies regarding immigration and labor through their depiction of immigrant women workers. One of the most effective ways of reading these representations is through a study that deconstructs the conventional immigrant story, an anachronistic narrative that continues to be perpetuated both in cultural productions and in the general debate about immigration. The traditional immigrant narrative, a genre in U.S. literature that became popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, continues to be used today in describing the process of the “Americanization” of immigrants.<sup>2</sup> The hegemonic immigrant paradigm is ultimately a narrative of progress, acting as an ideological tool that attempts to contain the experience of immigrants within a story line that promotes the idea of achieving success, i.e. the “American Dream,” through hard work and perseverance. Often left out of such a traditional narrative are stories of structural racism, sexism, and classism, obstacles which many immigrants find insurmountable, regardless of how hard they work. As a tool of analysis, the traditional narrative of immigration is no longer a useful framework for tracing the ventures of modern immigrants, nor for determining

the differences that exist among immigrant populations. In fact, new narratives are challenging these “success stories,” especially those dealing with representations of immigrant domestic workers and the importance of the connection between host country and country of origin, and act as a stepping stone to a new schema of narration that more accurately engages with the realities of contemporary immigrant experiences.

### **The Traditional Narrative**

Like the dominant immigrant narrative, a majority of scholarship on the genre has tended to look at more canonical texts like those of Mary Antin, William Carlos Williams, and Anzia Yezerskia. While the analysis of these texts has been instrumental in understanding the immigration histories of some European immigrants and in identifying the conventions of the genre, it has also tended to overlook the differences between a European immigration experience and those of non-European immigration. For example, literary critic William Q. Boelhower, in his essay “The Immigrant Novel as Genre” identifies the macroproposition of the immigrant novel as, “An immigrant protagonist(s), representing an ethnic world view, comes to American with great expectations, and through a series of trials, is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status” (5). In her/his journey to achieving the “final status” the protagonist must reconcile the tension between the Old World—the country of origin—and the New World—the host country. That reconciliation can take the shape of various outcomes, ranging in degree from attempting to hold on to old world culture in the new world, or completely assimilating into the new world, leaving the old world behind.<sup>3</sup> Boelhower also identifies the schema of narration that the narrative follows

in the protagonist's quest for reconciliation. The narrative, written in the traditional linear structure, follows the protagonist through three stages: Expectations, Contact, and Resolution. The immigrant's story usually begins in the phase of Expectations, which can occur in the old world or the new world and, is the moment of the immigrant's dream, the moment of imagining the possible New World. It is in this stage that the immigrant protagonist is often the most invested in the ideology of the U.S. as "America," the land of endless opportunity. Following the stage of Expectations is the phase of Contact, where the protagonist faces various experiences and trials in the new world. These trials often take the form of economic struggles, hard labor, and discrimination based on being a new arrival. The challenges survived during the phase of contact ultimately lead to the final phase, Resolution, where the protagonist achieves the process of assimilation, hyphenation, or becomes alienated and, according to Boelhower, it is this alienation that "leads the protagonist to idealize the old world—either through an attempt to preserve his old world culture, even though he may be assimilated into the new world, or through a stiff criticism of an alienating set of experiences in America" (5).

The phase of Expectations is an important one in the old immigrant narrative because it sets up the initial reason for movement in the story, that is, for the protagonist's leaving her/his home country for the new world. In the conventional immigrant narrative, economics tends to be a popular reason for immigration, with the myth of the American Dream of financial success as a powerful beacon. The idea of the U.S. as a "city on a hill" has been a prevailing ideological tool in perpetuating the notion that the U.S. is a place of enlightenment, a model of morality and democracy

for all others to follow. The phrase, uttered in a sermon by Puritan immigrant John Winthrop aboard the ship bringing him to the shores of what would become America, has since been used endlessly by politicians to proclaim the superiority of the U.S. While many Presidents and presidential candidates have employed the phrase, in one form or another, Ronald Reagan, ironically a strong anti-immigration proponent, remains one of the most referenced. His statement that “America is a shining city upon a hill whose beacon light guides freedom-loving people everywhere” continues to be a popular sentiment among immigrant narratives.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. is constructed as a place for economic success, but also a place of democratic ideals and personal freedoms. Under such a construct, any realities that do not conform to the image of the U.S. as the “city upon a hill” remain marginalized, lying outside of the narrative’s parameters.

In the schema that Boehlower identifies, the Contact phase incorporates the new immigrant’s experiences in the new world. These are typically challenges faced by the immigrant that function as a form of initiation into the new world culture. While the trials and tribulations encountered are often difficult, in the hegemonic narrative, they must be overcome in order to make the complete transition from the old world into the new world. The convention of the Contact phase works well ideologically with the American Dream ideal of success through hard work. Under such a model, the immigrant’s ability to overcome his/her obstacles ensures eventual victory.

In the dominant immigrant paradigm, the phases of Expectation and Contact advance the story line to a culmination in the last phase, Resolution. It is in this final



stage that the conflicts and challenges faced by the immigrant are resolved in a way that makes possible several endings. The immigrant can fully assimilate into the larger mainstream, having severed all ties with the old world and embraced the modernity of the new world. The immigrant can also assimilate into the new world culture, but at the same time, keep certain cultural practices of the old world, cultural practices that can be easily incorporated into the greater new world culture.<sup>5</sup> Some, however, do not assimilate but choose to live a life on the margins, in ethnic enclaves where they can attempt to live life based on their old world culture. In this last scenario, the immigrant chooses not to give up old world ideals, and in her/his isolation from the new world lies the lack of resolution of the narrative. The question of assimilation as a possibility, or in some cases an impossibility, is never addressed. Under such a model of immigration, the narrative ensures a conclusion to the immigrant story that is commensurate with the protagonist's successful or unsuccessful assimilation, as if it were an individual choice.

In the same ways in which the dominant rhetoric of the immigration debate fails to fully encompass the complexities of current immigration and labor, the traditional immigrant narrative is unsuccessful in representing the changing immigration experience. Boelhower's schema is based on an ethnic model of difference that functions well in analyzing the more traditional white immigrant stories, but doesn't meet the needs of immigrant stories of people of color who are not so easily able to assimilate because of the issue of race, or who do not see assimilation as something to be desired.<sup>6</sup> The traditional schema's inability to easily translate to narratives of people of color also illustrates the limitations of the hegemonic

immigrant paradigm in describing more modern immigration patterns and experiences. Despite the real differences in immigration patterns and experiences, hegemonic cultural productions continue to use the dominant immigrant narrative as a basis for the representation of the immigration of people of color; revisions of this narrative, on the other hand, are being undertaken by authors who are challenging such a storyline. As Lisa Lowe has argued, “cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality [...] intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the ‘immigrant’ before history or exempt the ‘immigrant’ from history.”<sup>7</sup> Cultural productions about marginalized immigrant communities whose immigrant experiences are not necessarily stories of progress serve to disarticulate the dominant immigrant narrative and ensure the visibility of different immigrant patterns that have influenced the formation of the U.S. as a heterogeneous nation.

The hegemonic paradigm of the immigrant story makes a clear distinction between the old world and the new world. The new world is supposed to represent modernity, while the old world stands for antiquated ideas that must be rejected in order for the immigrant subject to transition into a subject of modernity.<sup>8</sup> In revising the dominant narrative of immigration to include the different realities of immigrants of color, a new immigrant story should challenge not only the conception that one must reject the old world in favor of life in the new world, but ultimately reject the constructed distinction between the old world and the new world. The emphasis on creating new immigrant stories that more closely illustrate the lasting relationship that exists, not between old world and new world, but between countries of origin and host

countries, that is periphery and core, and between new and earlier immigrants, will allow the narratives to go beyond being just individual stories. These new narratives become cultural productions that demand a new way of representing immigration, a representation that rejects the old/new world binary in favor of a model that reframes the experience in terms of immigration relationships that exist within a connected global network. In such a representation, the links that exist between the country of origin and the host country become more clearly evident and immigration is seen as a condition that is not necessarily precipitated by the desire to achieve the “American Dream,” or one that ends with the arrival in the U.S.

### **A Global Framework**

The question today is whether this paradigm is appropriate for the study of late 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrant narratives.<sup>9</sup> In the more current immigrant narratives, the relationship between the country of origin and the host country can be much more easily understood if conceptualized as fitting into what scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein refer to as a world-system. In other words, the previous schema of old world and new world is no longer applicable. Within a world-systems analysis, the theory of modernization—one that is predicated on the constructed spatial/temporal differences between nation states—is rejected in favor of studying countries within an interconnected global system. For Wallerstein, such an analysis sees, “all parts of the world-system as parts of a ‘world,’ the parts being impossible to understand or analyze separately. The characteristics of any given state at T(2) were said to be not the result of some ‘primordial’ characteristic at T(1), but rather the outcome of processes of the system, the world-system.”<sup>10</sup> The world-systems analysis rejects the binary between

modern and pre-modern/less-modern and the hierarchy that such a binary makes implicit. Instead, Wallerstein argues for an understanding of the current capitalist global system as being predicated on the extensive division of labor that occurs between what he refers to as the core states and the peripheral areas. The core states exploit the peripheral areas through a range of methods, including the exporting of peripheral areas' natural resources and raw materials and the importing of manufacturing industries to employ cheap labor.<sup>11</sup> By referring to economically dominant countries as the "core," Wallerstein is underscoring the imbalance of power that exists between the core and the periphery, while emphasizing the interconnectedness of both areas. This is a crucial difference, because in situating the new immigrant narrative as occurring under a world-system, the movement of people across constructed national boundaries is no longer situated as occurring between spatially and temporally differentiated areas, but instead as taking place within a global system that is based on various economic and political relationships.

The acknowledgement of the relationship between the immigrant and the two countries s/he inhabits becomes an important tool in understanding the changes that have taken place in the immigration patterns of the U.S. In her work on immigration and globalization, Saskia Sassen stresses the importance of understanding immigration beyond domestic policies and internal effects of the movements of diasporic peoples. Sassen argues that while conditions of poverty, unemployment, and overpopulation do play a role in migration, they alone do not promote the large-scale emigration we are currently seeing. For Sassen, it is important to understand the processes that transform the above conditions into a "migration inducing situation."<sup>12</sup>

A focus on the more commonly acknowledged conditions of migration ignores the internationalization of production and migration in favor of an analysis that focuses on the domestic—making immigration a domestic problem for the host (receiving) country and isolating the process from the more global relationship between the sending and receiving countries, or the core and periphery. Sassen uses her analysis of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico to argue that these countries “accentuate, first, the fact that U.S. business, military, or diplomatic activities were a strong presence in countries that have significant migration to the U.S.,” and that “[s]econdly, it is important to emphasize that the combination of poverty, unemployment, or underemployment with the emergence of objective and ideological linkages probably operates as a migration inducing factor” (9). For Sassen, the massive increase in immigration to the U.S. can only be accurately studied if the connections—be they military, economical, or ideological—between sending countries and U.S. foreign policy are fully understood.

While Boelhower’s schema of narration may be useful in analyzing immigrant narratives that take place during the early part of the twentieth century, although here too the narrative serves to reinforce the dominant myth of the “American Dream,” the composition of immigrants to the U.S. has changed drastically to include many non-Western populations. The Immigration Act of 1965 led to an increase in migration from non-European countries, an unforeseen result of the policy’s emphasis on family reunification immigration. For Sassen, the 1965 Act “should be seen in combination with military and economic policies facilitating a wide range of U.S. activities abroad.”<sup>13</sup> The increase in economic intervention and military campaigns in Latin

America during this time period created what is now referred to as “new enclosures.” The term “enclosure” refers to the movement that began in the fifteenth century in which English peasants were forced off the common land and into wage labor. “New enclosures” is now used to describe the ways in which disadvantaged populations have been separated from various means of production, like their land, and have been forced to migrate to bigger cities or immigrate to countries dependent on cheap labor like the U.S.<sup>14</sup> Sassen describes this process as,

The incorporation of most areas of the world into the capitalist system resulted in the disintegration or subordination of non-capitalist forms of subsistence... Capitalism transforms land into a commodity. Because land was the basis for pre-capitalist modes of subsistence, its transformation into a commodity created a mass of landless peasants with little alternative to becoming part of the rural or urban labor reserve...labor reserves willing to be mobilized into the labor market. There was no longer a need for the direct, physical subjugation and mobilization of workers. The new social structure accomplished this by robbing them of their means of subsistence. (*The Mobility*, 33)

Along with economic restructuring, U.S. military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean has also created a mass displacement of people that has affected immigration.<sup>15</sup> The creation of “new enclosures” in the current world-system serves to further illustrate the correlation that exists between the core and the periphery.

The ideological containment performed by the hegemonic immigrant paradigm and the national debate on immigration functions to downplay or erase the initial reason for immigration and disregards the connection between the core and the periphery. Both the debate and the conventions of the genre place an emphasis on the economic opportunities (i.e. the “American Dream”) and the democratic system the U.S. offers immigrants (i.e. the “city on a hill”), but they ignore the reality of the role

U.S. foreign policy, alone and in conjunction with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank has played in restructuring countries of origin. Ultimately, the U.S. should be held accountable for the migration into the country. Also, the resolution at the end of the traditional immigrant narrative and the national debate on immigration assume that a level of assimilation is the ultimate goal that is eventually achieved. Proponents and opponents of immigration take for granted that an immigrant's life will automatically be more successful in the U.S. Again, the reality of immigrants of color, both documented and undocumented, resists such an easy resolution. Ultimately, the narrative schema recognized by Boelhower is insufficient in describing the experience of immigration under our present world-system. It is a very general schema that does not consider the very complicated relationships the immigrant subject must navigate before, during, and after emigration. Within such a schema, important issues that make up the current immigrant experience—such as an immigrant's documented status, or a community's dependence on remittances, or the militarization of constructed national boundaries—are completely absent. Even though some contemporary critics have attempted to insert narratives of immigration by people of color into the U.S. literary canon, they do not directly challenge many of the assumptions present in the hegemonic immigrant narrative schema.<sup>16</sup>

I contend that a new schema of narration is central in understanding the representations of immigrant workers in contemporary cultural productions. Instead of providing a linear narrative of progression of immigration, I argue that certain contemporary immigrant narratives of people of color provide us with a representation of immigration as a set of continuous conditions that do not end or begin with the

physical arrival of the immigrant into the new country. The narratives are not limited to the three linear and temporal stages of narration identified by Boelhower, but are made up instead of various positionalities based on the movement of individuals across space and place. Like theories of modernization, the older schema of narration is based on a continuum of progress and temporal movement. A country is said to go from pre-modern to modern, just as the protagonist of the hegemonic narrative goes from the phase of expectations to a final resolution, or from being a subject of the periphery to the possibility of becoming a citizen of the core. The linear movement in the story is easily mapped out as it moves through the narrative. Unlike the line of progression in these narratives of progress, the revised schema of narration resists being diagrammed on a straight line, but instead calls for an illustration of the various conditions encountered by the immigrant subject. There is no simple beginning or ending. The current narrative of immigration is instead made up of the negotiating of relationships and experiences, including the impetus for emigration, the journey and crossing of the border, and the relationship of the immigrant subject to family, community and labor. These continuous relations can exist simultaneously and are not necessarily experienced chronologically nor in different spaces; in other words, they take place in the core and in the periphery. There is no unequivocal temporal or ideological separation between the host country and the country of origin. By insisting on an understanding of the movement of peoples across constructed boundaries, as occurring under a world-system of connections, the revised schema challenges the ideological closure of the narrative of progress and immigration being redeployed by more hegemonic representations of immigration and the current debate



on immigration reform.

I want to further emphasize the role that work and the struggle for survival play in becoming an immigrant subject by reading the new immigrant paradigm through the lens of labor. In paying specific attention to gender, through an analysis of texts dealing explicitly with female immigrant protagonists and characters, I also want to place the new immigrant narrative within the changing gender composition of emigration under globalization. By employing a reading of texts through a contemporary immigrant narrative of labor, while also using, to borrow Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s term, a "culture-specific methodology" that places at its center race, gender, and class, I find that a much more historically situated analysis of immigration and labor becomes possible.

### **The New Narrative of Immigration and Labor**

In the film, *El Norte*, Gregory Nava provides a horrific visual representation of economic and military enclosures that prompt the migration of Enrique Xuncax and his sister Rosa from Guatemala. The Guatemalan Army, in order to ensure the interests of the coffee growers, terrorizes any worker who attempts to organize or resist extreme labor exploitation, and the Xuncax siblings must flee their home country in order to avoid being executed.<sup>17</sup> While not all contemporary immigrants stories so clearly illustrate the reasons for immigration, an important aspect of the modern narrative is the representation of the conditions under globalization that act as the impetus for emigration. Many of the narratives make mention of the inability to earn a living in their country of origin, due to the lack of work or the substandard wages that make survival virtually impossible. Some place emphasis on the

immigration taking place to avoid violence, while others represent the reasons for im/migration as a result of various displacements. Even though the conditions behind the diasporic movement of the immigrant protagonists is not always made apparent, the new paradigm of immigration and labor does reject conscription into the older hegemonic narrative that situates the decision to immigrate within the ideology of progress that envisions the U.S. as “the land of opportunity.” Instead, the current narratives place the motives behind the decision to im/migrate on economic and political factors that exist within the present phase of late-capitalism.

The previous phase of expectations no longer exists; instead, the impetus for immigration becomes a quest for survival and not the pursuit of an ideological “promised land.” Now people emigrate because they have no choice—they are pushed out. Many have been the victims of new enclosures created by the global restructuring of resources and industries. Some leave their homes as a result of natural disasters, while others are forced to flee the violence of wars and armed conflicts. The U.S.’s reliance on cheap labor provides immigrants with the possibilities of work and economic survival. However, while many hope for better lives in the U.S., the expectation of emigrating and achieving the “American Dream” is no longer seen as a universal truth. Within the new global network of immigration, the immigrant subject is much more aware of the economic realities of living in the U.S. and is no longer naïve like Enrique and Rosa Xuncax of *El Norte*, who believed that American streets were paved with gold. Immigrants have emigrated and returned, corresponded with those left behind, and exported cultural productions, actions that have altered the ways in which the immigrant subject sees the U.S. Because of the mass movement of

people and the immense sharing of information presently occurring, today's immigrants enter the country with a more realistic understanding of the challenges they will face as workers in the U.S.

Another characteristic of the new immigrant narrative that illustrates the changing composition of immigration in the contemporary moment is the emphasis on what I refer to as the navigation of spatial liminality that exists during the movement from citizen of one nation to immigrant in another. In a world where immigration laws no longer effectively function to keep out diasporic peoples, the journey to the host country and the crossing of the constructed borders of the nation become an important aspect of the immigrant paradigm. No longer is it just assumed that the immigrant is entering the U.S. through official channels, or through the previous ports of entrance like Ellis Island. Now immigrants are entering through official and unofficial channels, facing a new set of challenges and perils. Some texts choose to emphasize the journey that undocumented immigrants are confronted with as they make their way to the border. Transversing the terrain that lies between the border and the site of departure, the immigrant subject must negotiate the liminal space that denies her an official status and relegates her to an object that must be apprehended or kept out. Other texts choose to focus on the difficulties experienced by the immigrant at the point of crossing the border itself into the U.S. The border, as a site of state oppression and violence, gets represented in the new narrative as one more aspect of the immigrant experience with which immigrants must contend.<sup>18</sup> The movement across the border, however, doesn't completely alter the circumstances that the immigrant inhabits.

The conditions of immigration do not end at the point of arrival in the U.S., but continue to influence the life of the new immigrant subject. In the older model of immigration, the protagonist is often represented arriving in a new world, most often surrounded by a different culture and language. The sense of alienation encountered by the immigrant functions to cement the distinction between old and new world, and plays an important role in helping to linearly develop the narrative of the immigrant as a story of progression. In our current state of globalization and transnational movement of peoples, it is unlikely that an immigrant will not be able to find a community of fellow immigrants. Cities like El Paso, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago provide new immigrants with enclaves where they can make connections and find help in negotiating their way through the U.S. economic and political system. Within the older model of narration, the contact phase often positions the immigrant as the “other,” a process that occurs as soon as the immigrant arrives in the U.S. In the immigrant communities that now make up a vital part of urban spaces, the new immigrant is no longer the “other” but is instead just “one more.” It is only when the immigrant subject leaves the community of immigrants that she is confronted with being the “other,” but as soon as she returns to her immigrant community, she again belongs. The new narrative represents a fluidity in the positionality of the immigrant subject that is absent in the former narrative’s conception of the contact phase. Many immigrants are also comfortable in urban spaces, dispelling the myth of the periphery as existing outside the core in a pre-modern state. The heavy industrialization of Latin America and the Caribbean has helped facilitate the movement of individuals from rural areas to urbanized cities in countries of origin, and from those to urbanized cities

in host countries like the U.S. The new immigrant paradigm more effectively encompasses these changes and represents the conditions of an immigrant community existing in the margins of urban cities.

The current immigrant story also illustrates the changes in the familial relations of the immigrant experience. No longer are the majority of immigrants coming to the U.S. as a family. Instead, women arriving alone now make up a key number of immigrants. Female immigrants often leave behind families, further reinforcing the link between host and country of origin through their continued contact with those that remain. As a result of the mass migration of women, the practice of immigrating for work and sending money, or remittances, home has become a major source of income for countries in the periphery.<sup>19</sup> Not only do these remittances help support the families left behind, but they aid in the overall economy of the home country.<sup>20</sup> While some women return to their countries of origin and others eventually send for their families, many are forced to raise their children from afar, depending on the community to act as guardians in their stead.<sup>21</sup> The phase of contact in the hegemonic narrative cannot adequately encompass the relationships that exist between the immigrant protagonist and her family under the current conditions of globalization.

In the older immigrant story, labor often plays an important role in helping the immigrant protagonist achieve success through hard work. Contemporary narratives of labor and immigration instead represent labor and the protagonist's positionality as a worker in direct relation to the immigrant condition. Under the new narrative schema, the space of labor becomes a microcosm for the exploitation of the worker under a capitalistic system that takes advantage of the undocumented immigrant's

liminal position in the U.S. The current ethnic narratives often point to the ways that the protagonist's intersectionality—being a woman, a person of color, and an immigrant (often undocumented)—influence her experience in the work place. The conditions of labor represented emphasize the racism and exploitation faced by the immigrant protagonist, and while some texts attempt to reconcile the abuses of the laborer under the ideology of assimilation and success, most of the contemporary narratives do not offer a clear resolution to the difficulties experienced by workers in the space of labor. The immigrant subject's relationship to labor in the current narrative challenges the representation of labor in the contact phase of the hegemonic account of immigration. Instead of situating labor as stepping stone to economic success and as a way of achieving the “American Dream,” the contemporary narrative represents the laboring space of the home and as the place where ideologies of race, class, and gender get played out. The insular walls of these laboring spaces help to contain not only the exploitation of the worker, but also the physical and emotional violence to which many domestic and sweatshop laborers are subjected.

In the current age of im/migration, the undocumented status of immigrants cannot be reconciled under the old narrative of immigration. Instead, the new immigrant paradigm by writers of color pays close attention to the undocumented worker's constant state of living in the precarious position of being “unofficial.” Living in fear of detection is an aspect of the immigrant experience that does not exist within the old paradigm's phase of contact and is an important marker of the changes that have occurred in immigration to the U.S. Several texts represent the inhumanity of classifying human beings as “undocumented” and forcing them to exist in a

marginal space of constant hiding. Others represent the intensification of exploitation that takes place when the domestic worker is undocumented. While some writers do not clearly identify their immigrant protagonist as documented or undocumented, under the present movement of people across transnational boundaries, official documentation can no longer be assumed.

Even though many of the contemporary narratives being discussed in the dissertation follow a linear structure in narrating the story of the immigrant worker that culminates in the solving of various conflicts at the end of the text, they do not always offer a simple resolution. Some of the texts attempt to provide a happy ending through a certain level of assimilation, or more accurately, acculturation; others challenge the closing of the narrative by instead gesturing towards the protagonist's continual negotiation of the immigrant condition. Instead of the easy resolution advanced by the more hegemonic narrative of immigration and assimilation, the current immigrant narrative points to a continual experience of immigration under a structure of late-capitalism that often begins anew with the constant movement of the individual. The new immigrant subject does not always come to the U.S. with the idea of settling down forever, and some choose to return home after the conditions of the original immigration change, or after earning enough money to return. Some return home disillusioned by their inability to negotiate a racist system based on exploitation. Others, however, are forcibly ejected from the nation through the process of deportation. At the point of deportation, the movement of the individual might be southward, but there is always the possibility of a new journey to the north, gesturing to the continuous cycle of im/migration.

In the dissertation, I contend that certain texts by writers of color provide new immigrant paradigms that more closely engage with the conditions of immigration occurring in late-capitalism. I position these texts as challenges to more stereotypical representations of immigrant workers promoted by more popular cultural productions like Hollywood produced films. I argue that the discourse of the old narrative of immigration is redeployed by movies in an attempt to advance the ideology of the nation as the “land of opportunity.” In these popular cultural productions, it is imperative that the challenges faced by the new immigrant be simply resolved. The realities of exploitative labor cannot so easily be subsumed into the narrative, so those difficulties must be dealt with in a way that makes them simple and unproblematic. By providing the protagonist of the films with problems and conflicts they can fix, the cultural productions can justify a happy ending for the audience. In giving the audience the requisite happily-ever-after conclusion, the dominant immigrant narrative being perpetuated by current Hollywood films heads off any discomfort the audience might feel about immigrant workers and effectively acts as an ideological form of containment to ensure that the myth of the “city on a hill” remains intact. Each of the cultural productions I situate as counter-narrative to the hegemonic Hollywood movies emphasize different aspects of the new immigrant narrative being proposed. By mapping out the ways in which each cultural production situates the immigrant experience, in my conclusion I gesture towards alternative paradigms that encompass more current narratives of immigration.

The first chapter is interested in putting in conversation four very different texts that provide stories of immigration. I begin with an analysis of two canonical



Chicano texts, Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* and José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* in order to situate their narratives as examples of the traditional hegemonic immigrant story and read them alongside two contemporary Hollywood-produced films, James L. Brooks' *Spanglish* and Greydon Clark's *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*. By analyzing the texts together, I look at the ways in which the hegemonic immigrant narrative has been employed by earlier texts and how the more contemporary films continue the tradition of casting the immigrant story as a narrative of progress and upward mobility.

In my second chapter, I examine representations of domestic immigrant workers in the Southwest U.S. I argue that the representations of these workers in texts by specific Latina writers reject the message of success present in the Hollywood films. The texts analyzed in the first chapter perpetuate the ideology of the immigrant narrative as a narrative of progress, while works by Latina writers challenge stereotypes about domestic workers, while promoting a new narrative of immigration. The films *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance* stand in stark contrast to the representations of domestic labor advanced by Lucha Corpi's novel *Cactus Blood*, Marisela Norte's spoken word piece "Act of the Faithless," poems by Pat Mora, and the play *Latina* by Milcha Sánchez-Scott. This chapter looks predominantly at immigration from Mexico and other parts of Latin America.

Chapter three shifts the discussion of im/migrant domestic labor to the Northeast United States. I juxtapose the Hollywood movie, *Maid in Manhattan*, with Esmeralda Santiago's novel, *America's Dream*, Jamaica Kincaid's short novel *Lucy*, and the short story "Jasmine" by Bharati Mukherjee to analyze the various

representations of domestic labor that take place not only in middle-class suburbia, but also in the sphere of the corporate hotel industry. In this chapter, I examine Caribbean im/migration to the U.S. from Anglophone and Hispanophone countries in an effort to discuss the differing immigration patterns in the Southwest and in the Northeast, while paying special attention to the role of migration between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

While I have organized my chapters according to the different conditions I have identified in my argument, I do so for the sake of creating a sense of coherence. I do not mean to imply that the current conditions of immigration occur in a linear/temporal fashion or to recreate Boelhower's linear schema of narration. I also am not arguing that the literature I analyze in this dissertation exists completely outside of dominant ideologies, but the texts do provide more complex representations of contemporary immigration and labor. Instead of claiming that the counter-narratives that I discuss are somehow more "authentic" or "real," I want to read these works as offering a different perspective or representation of what has become a popular literary convention. Instead, I hope that by reading literature by writers of color through the lens of a new immigrant paradigm, I can contribute to a growing dialogue on what it means for individuals to live under the current global conditions of immigration and the role that cultural productions play in challenging or perpetuating anachronistic models of movement through national boundaries.

## Chapter One

### **Up by Their Bootstraps or Can you Dance the Spanglish Lambada in the Barrio, Pocho?: The Immigrant Narrative Across Time, Place and Gender in *Pocho*, *Barrio Boy*, *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada***

My overall project is interested in contemporary representation of immigration and labor, but I begin this chapter by analyzing canonical Chicano texts that illustrate an older phase of immigration. In order to understand the ways in which the ideologies of the traditional immigrant narrative have persisted, it is useful to place in conversation hegemonic immigrant narratives from the past with more current stories. In this chapter, I provide a reading of two canonical Chicano texts through the lens of the traditional immigrant narrative schema in order to look at the ways in which the conventions of that schema are then employed by more contemporary cultural productions. I read José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) and Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy's Acculturation* (1971) as two examples of Chicano texts that closely follow the hegemonic narrative of immigration that gets visually represented by James L. Brooks' *Spanglish* and Greydon Clark's *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*. While the two written works closely follow the more masculinist structure of the bildungsroman and the films have women as their protagonists, there are some very basic similarities between the four cultural productions, including a strong emphasis on the U.S. as the ideological "promised land" and on the role of education in assimilating. Together, the texts also offer a point of comparison for the new immigrant narratives being discussed in the subsequent chapters that follow.

### Stories from the Past

While *Pocho* is published twelve years before *Barrio Boy*, both texts place the immigration of their protagonist or their families as taking place at the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the Mexican Revolution. In *Pocho*, we get the story of Juan Rubio and his family who leave Mexico and eventually settle in the agricultural fields of Santa Clara, California. The narrative follows the coming-of-age story of Richard Rubio, the only son of the family, from his birth in Brawley to his enlistment in the U.S. Navy. *Barrio Boy* tells the autobiographical story of Ernesto Galarza and his family as they journey from their small village in Mexico to escape the violence of the revolution. The Galarzas eventually settle in an urban area of Sacramento, where Ernesto becomes “Little Ernie.” Even though *Pocho* is classified as a work of fiction and *Barrio Boy* as autobiographical, the texts similarly begin by telling the stories of their families, but in the end, the narratives deal with the boys’ quests to become individuals.<sup>22</sup>

The phase of expectations is an important one in the narrative schema of the hegemonic story of immigration identified by Boelhower and it plays a significant role in Galarza and Villarreal’s work. In both of the texts, the families leave Mexico in order to escape the violence of the revolution and in search of the better economic opportunities the U.S. is seen as representing. In order for the phase of expectations to function, the host country has to offer the immigrant something s/he is unable to achieve at home. As a result, the impetus for immigration is closely connected to the immigrant’s expectations under this narrative schema. The Mexican Revolution offers the characters a simple impetus for migration that can easily be subsumed under the

ideology of immigrating for a better life. Richard and Ernesto's families end up in the U.S. in search of the type of life they can no longer hope for in Mexico. The most effective way of ensuring that the U.S. is situated as the land of opportunity, where the families can hope to achieve the "American Dream," is to construct a binary between Old World and New World. The texts represent Mexico as the Old World in different ways, but both works ultimately represent the country of origin as existing in differing spatial and temporal phases.

In *Barrio Boy*, the Mexican Revolution is seen, in part, as disturbing the pre-modern and idyllic world in which Ernesto and his family live. The autobiography is divided into five sections, two of which take place in Mexico and make-up two-thirds of the actual text. The first part, "The Mountain Village," provides a picture of life for the Galarza family in their small rural village of Jalcocotán. The village is represented as a sort of land that time forgot, situated in the mountains of the Sierra Madres, "the location of Jalcocotán was meant to give protection against outsiders" (5). Life in the village is described as peaceful and edenic as its inhabitants are surrounded by deep woods, a "place of wonders" with its "huge umbrellas of the elms" and the fruit trees and coffee bushes (6). Galarza describes the dangerous animals that inhabit the forest like mountain lions and rattlesnakes alongside the beauty provided for the village by the "songs and colors of the flocks of parakeets, macaws, and loros" (6). In Jalcocotán, there are no hospitals or schools, and "books were rare" (33). Instead, the village is made up of villagers with dogs and roosters who guard chickens and vultures that act as garbage collectors. The portrayal of the village in Galarza's text helps to situate Mexico as a place where people remain frozen in the past, living simple lives

outside of the existence of modernity. While such a representation can be attributed to the perspective of the young Ernesto, it still works to position Mexico as existing not only in a different spatial location, but also in a different temporal phase. Even though the next part, “Peregrinations,” has the family come in contact with the Mexico that exists outside of their village, it is still a country that remains in the shadow of U.S. modernity.

The representations of Mexico as technologically backwards are made more evident with Ernesto’s arrival in the U.S. Once his family leaves the violence of Mexico behind, they end up in Tucson, where the young Ernesto comes in contact with technology. In a small hotel, Ernesto “began to explore the remarkable inventions of the Americans” (184). He is delighted with the electric light bulb in their room and the springs in the mattress. Ernesto’s greatest discovery, however, is the toilet, which he learns to use from the clerk. He “examined [the toilet] with great care...finally decided it was safe enough to try” (185). After using the toilet successfully, Ernesto recalls, “That night I got up several times to go to the toilet, until I was ordered to go to sleep” (185). The wonder of the young boy with the basic amenities of the hotel, while humorous, continues to situate the country of origin as existing in a pre-modern past. As a new inhabitant of the country, Ernesto is initiated into the more advanced world represented by the U.S., and as a result, not only does his family escape the violence of Mexico, but also the pre-modern state under which the citizens of Mexico reside.

Unlike the romantic representation of a pre-revolutionary Mexico, *Pocho* represents the country as a violent space filled with death and corruption. The country

that Juan Rubio leaves is in the midst of chaos. The dream of the Revolution has died and all of the democratic ideals and hopes for a new nation that Juan had fought to gain are destroyed with the death of Pancho Villa.<sup>23</sup> The ideas that Rubio has about democracy, however, are represented as extreme. He recalls,

“We took the Chinese and the Spaniards and killed them in bunches, and everyone said we were massacring chinitos and gachupines simply because of their nationality, and the truth was that we did it because we could not trust them. They would have inherited the city we liberated, and someday we would have to return and fight for it again. That is the only way to save México...” (27)

His image of democracy as being based on the annihilation of anyone considered untrustworthy—or more importantly, foreign—stands in sharp contrast to the liberal notions of democracy represented by the ideology of the U.S. as the “city on a hill,” the beacon of hope and equality for people of the world. Villarreal’s representation would have his reader believe that, unlike the U.S., which is imagined as absorbing its immigrants into the nation’s fold, foreigners in Mexico cannot function as part of the new nation envisioned by revolutionaries like Rubio. The ways in which Rubio shows no remorse for the bloodshed and attempts to rationalize it as a necessity for the success of the revolution helps to further represent Mexico as a country full of brutal individuals who cannot grasp the true meaning of democracy. Ultimately, Mexico’s revolution is reduced to a failed experiment as Rubio must flee the border area to avoid being captured by corrupt government officials.

Villarreal’s *Pocho* also differs from Galarza’s text in the ways in which they represent the initial crossing of the border and the expectations of immigrants. While *Barrio Boy* hints at racism encountered in Tucson, Galarza includes many positive

interactions Ernesto has with white Americans, including U. S. soldiers. *Pocho*, however, pays closer attention to the difference that exists between the expectations of immigrants and what they actually encounter.

Thus Juan Rubio became a part of the great exodus that came of the Mexican Revolution...They came first to Juárez, where the price of the three-minute tram ride would take them into El Paso del Norte—or a short walk through the open door would deposit them in Utopia. The ever-increasing army of people swarmed across while the border remained open, fleeing from squalor and oppression...The bewildered people came on—insensitive to the fact that even though they were not stopped, they were not really wanted. (15-16)

The immigrants Villarreal writes about are seen as leaving Mexico to escape the poverty and violence of a nation in chaos and they view the U.S. as their “Utopia.” The expectations of Villarreal’s immigrants are consistent with the expectations phase identified by Boelhower as the first phase in the narrative of immigration. Like in the more hegemonic immigrant story, the expectations of the immigrant subject are not necessarily rooted in fact, but are based on the ideological construction of the U.S. as the utopic “land of opportunity.”<sup>24</sup> These “bewildered people” are represented as being unaware of the difficulties they will encounter once they enter the host country.<sup>25</sup> These difficulties, however, are important in the schema of narration because they separate the phase of expectations from the contact phase and provide the narrative with a linear structure of development that follows the protagonist on the path to becoming a subject of the new nation. Once the immigrant protagonist encounters the challenges that must be overcome in the contact phase, the immigrant subject can reconcile his/her expectations with those challenges in order to resolve any contradictions that exist between them in the final phase of narration.



An important characteristic that both *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* share with immigrant narratives like those of Anzia Yezierska, Carlos Bulosan, and Pietro di Donato, is their emphasis on the labor of immigrants. While both texts are situated in California, Richard and Ernesto's families labor in the differing spaces of agricultural fields and urban construction. From the beginning of the autobiography, Ernesto is represented as always contributing to the economic survival of the family, and doing everything from helping set up the sewing machine for his mother, to delivering the meals his mother cooked for railroad workers. After their arrival in Sacramento, Ernesto finds ways of supplementing the family's income by collecting bottles around the barrio, selling newspapers on streetcorners, running errands for neighbors and working in the kitchen of Big Singh's boarding house.

In *Pocho*, Juan Rubio becomes part of the immigrant workforce that helps construct the infrastructure of the U.S. After leaving the El Paso area, Juan finds his way to L.A., where "he helped build the tall buildings, and was one day buried in a sand slide, but he survived" (28). Like the immigrant characters in di Donato's *Christ in Concrete*, Villarreal's writing of Juan's labor in the construction of L.A. helps to historically situate the work of immigrants in the construction of U.S. urban spaces. Unlike the protagonist's father in di Donato's text who gets buried alive in concrete, Richard's father survives the dangers of the construction zone and continues to work to support his wife and children. After his family finds him in California, the Rubios become part of the migrant labor force that works the fruit and vegetable fields in order to survive. While their labor provides them with enough to live on, theirs is not an easy life, even after they settle in Santa Clara. In the middle of the depression,

Richard remembers that his “family did not suffer as much as the others, because the depression had not changed their diet. They had never had much more than they were now getting” (47). His youth is filled with accounts of poor people coming and going, but also of various movements of resistance and unionization of farm workers during the same time. While the attempts to organize the various agricultural labor groups do not fully materialize, the text’s focus on what the movement was trying to accomplish illustrates the exploitation to which workers were subjected.<sup>26</sup>

Even though both the Rubio and Galarza families are forced to work hard in order to ensure their economic survival, they are represented as being rewarded for their hard labor. The idea of success through hard work is an integral part of the ideology of the “American Dream” and this is how it gets portrayed in *Pocho* and in *Barrio Boy*. In fact, both texts have the families achieving an important step in becoming part of that dream: they become homeowners.<sup>27</sup> Purchasing a house for Richard’s father becomes a significant action because it finishes severing his connection to Mexico and ends Juan’s ideas of returning to his country of origin. Villarreal writes that Juan “was unaware that he was fashioning the last link of events that would bind him to America and the American way of life” (129). While Juan had constantly spoken of returning home, by becoming a homeowner he provides Richard with a tangible piece of inheritance that is supposed to function as a way of making Richard’s life as a property-owning citizen more successful. In *Barrio Boy*, the family’s decision to buy a home acts as a physical sign of upward mobility since it gets the Galarza family out of the Sacramento barrio, crossing what Antonio Márquez calls the “frontier of socioeconomic lines.”<sup>28</sup> In their new neighborhood, they are

surrounded not by other immigrant groups, but instead Ernesto observes that “all the families around us were Americans” (248). In the text, being “American” is equated with being white and not foreign-born. By purchasing a home, the families can be seen as becoming part of “America,” but ironically, both texts are unable to fully obscure the tenuous position of immigrants. After Ernesto’s mother and Uncle Gustavo die of a fever, he must return to the barrio with his Uncle José while the Rubio’s status as homeowners cannot protect them from the dissolution of Juan and Consuelo’s marriage and the separation of the family.

Part of the challenge of reconciling the differences between being an immigrant subject and a subject of the nation lies in neutralizing any tensions that exist between old/new world ideas and beliefs. The most effective way of ensuring the transition from dated old world ideas to the enlightenment of the new world thought is the education of the immigrant subject. Just as for the immigrant protagonist labor becomes a way of physically proving worthy of being a national subject, education becomes a means of verifying one’s acceptance of new world ideas. Both of the texts place a strong emphasis on the role that education plays in Richard and Ernesto’s quest to become productive members of the nation.

In *Barrio Boy*, Galarza writes about Ernesto’s quest for knowledge from the very beginning of the novel. Ernesto doesn’t have access to schooling and so learns from watching others in his village because there, “the closest thing to a school were the catechism classes that the priest taught on his infrequent visits” (92). Even when schooling is available, it is only for a select few, as he discovers in Tepic. Here Ernesto observes “*niños decentes*”—decent boys—going to “private *colegios*” which

were only “for the children from the houses with patios and servants” (92). It is up to young Ernesto’s mother to educate her son, a task that Mexico as a nation is seen as failing to provide for its population.<sup>29</sup> The lessons he gets from his mother help to emphasize the family’s understanding of the importance of an education, while at the same time, setting Ernesto apart from the other poor boys of the area and providing him with the basic knowledge he will need when immigrating to the U.S.

Once he arrives in Sacramento, Ernesto’s relationship to education changes dramatically. No longer is he limited to schooling in an old factory or in his mother’s sewing area but can now attend a public school, Lincoln School. His experience with the school is a very positive one that does not include the intolerance and racism often encountered by immigrant children—especially those who do not speak the language. Because of its location in the barrio, Lincoln is made up of various immigrant groups that provide Ernesto with a diverse group of peers. The heterogeneity of his classmates and the ways in which they are treated by the school administration becomes an important aspect in the acculturation of Ernesto. While at school,

Miss Hopley [the school principal] and her teachers never let us forget why we were at Lincoln: for those who were alien, to become good Americans; for those who were so born, to accept the rest of us...The school was not so much a melting pot as a griddle where Miss Hopley and her helpers warmed knowledge into us and roasted racial hatreds out of us. (211)

Galarza’s description of the message of tolerance being promoted by the school is significant when one considers the ways in which the institutions of learning are used in the indoctrination of the nation’s citizens. The characterization of Ernesto’s school makes visible how the education system not only teaches young students basic skills

like reading and arithmetic, but also how to properly function as citizens of the U.S. In the text, the school functions as an allegory for the nation and the ways in which it is constructed as a space of acceptance, where one's worth is based on one's merits and not on where one comes from. The school is seen as representing the liberal ideals of the U.S. Also worth noting is the fact that the racial hatred which is "roasted" out is not represented as occurring with only white children, but as something that must also be taken out of the immigrant children. By situating intolerance as existing outside of the white community as well, the immigrant community gets implicated in promoting divisions, therefore making the immigrant subject responsible for discarding any archaic old world ideas that are not seen as functioning within the new world ideologies of acceptance.

Ernesto is represented as being helpful and a productive member of his community and he takes the lessons he learns at school into the barrio. Following the modeling set up by his teachers, Ernesto takes it upon himself to use the knowledge he has learned in school, especially his command of the language, to assist those around him. As an immigrant, language becomes extremely important because, as Juan F. Perea observes, "language is both our principal means of communication and a social symbol, malleable and capable of manipulation for the achievement of social or political goals" (571). Ernesto uses English not only to make himself understood to the Anglo community around him, but also in the service of those who do not have a grasp of English. He becomes a volunteer interpreter for those in the neighborhood who are unable to communicate with government and health workers. As he learns English, he is willing to help other immigrants, like Big Singh, acquire an

understanding of the language. The acquisition of the official language allows Ernesto to go beyond being a student to becoming an active participant in the initiation of others into America.<sup>30</sup> By tutoring Big Singh, he is aiding in the assimilation of his Hindu neighbor into the mainstream culture. His willingness to help Americanize his neighbors, however, gets sidetracked with his own family.

Attending school makes Ernesto aware of the different registers of English spoken in the barrio. While his family is able to function quite well with their understanding of the language, Ernesto believes that the English he is taught in school is the correct variety. He recalls that “the barrio invented its own version of American talk. And my family, to my disgust, adopted them with no little delight” (235). The hierarchy of language learned from school at first motivates Ernesto to teach his family,

Try as they did the adults in my family could see no difference between “wood” and “boor”...The grown-ups adapted the most necessary words and managed to make themselves understood...Miss Campbell and her colleagues lost no time in scrubbing out these spots in my own pronunciation. Partly to show off, partly to do my duty to the family, I tried their methods at home. It was hopeless. They listened hard but they couldn’t hear me...I gave up giving English lessons at home.  
(235)

When he realizes that his family is complacent with the English they have learned in the barrio in order to make themselves understood, Ernesto gives up trying to teach them “proper” English. The adults’ inability to properly grasp the language works to set Ernesto apart from his family and functions as a way of emphasizing his success in assimilating more completely. In the story of progress promoted by the hegemonic schema, the acquisition of language is an essential means by which the immigrant

subject becomes part of the new world. His family gets represented by the text as not being capable of making the transition from the old world. In contrast, by becoming a fluent speaker of the official language of the nation, Ernesto is seen as beginning the transition from immigrant subject to productive member of the new world. The hierarchy of language with respect to different varieties of spoke English is made clear at home where the hierarchy places Ernesto at the top, as he shows off his command of the language to those family members beneath him.<sup>31</sup>

Ernesto's mastering of the language is not the only thing that sets him apart from his family and other members of the barrio. His hard work in and out of school and intelligence make him a good student whose potential is recognized by his teachers and other adults in the neighborhood. Several of his neighbors take an interest in his education outside of school and provide Ernesto with ways of supplementing his official education. Mr. Charley gives him informal history lessons, Mr. Howard shares and reads various books with him, and Miss Irene gives Ernesto his first English dictionary and always asks about his school work.

Richard's relationship to education is much different from Ernesto's, but schooling still functions as a way of initiating him into the new world. Although his family works the agricultural fields around Santa Clara, Richard is able to attend school on a regular basis, unlike the children of other migrant workers.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the tolerance taught at Ernesto's school, Richard is often teased for being different. He is picked on for his lunch and called "Frijoley bomber" and "Tortilla stranger" (47). Instead of withdrawing, Richard recalls that, "for almost a year, he had purposely eaten where he could easily be observed, refusing to be driven into hiding

because they laughed about the food he ate” (47). School is not represented as an embracing space of learning, but Richard refuses to turn away from learning. Like Ernesto, Richard is an avid reader, but unlike Ernesto, he doesn’t have the support of the community in his quest for learning. While he is able to check books out of the library, Richard creates his own library at home from books he salvages at the city dump. He proudly displays these books to Mary, a young girl who moves to Santa Clara. It is through his various conversations with Mary that the reader discovers that while Richard has a deep respect for knowledge, he thinks very little of those who are supposed to be teaching him that knowledge.

“Well, the teachers teach us all kinds of things, and sometimes they’re not honest about it...Sometimes I read things in books that show me teachers are wrong sometimes. I guess they think we’re too dumb to know about two sides to a story [...] All of them—the teachers and the sisters and the priest—they all lie to us sometimes. I don’t know why, but they do, and it makes me feel real dumb.” (71)

Richard is represented as an intelligent young boy who is smarter than even his own teachers. Unlike Ernesto, Villarreal’s protagonist has the advantage of being born in the U.S., but his citizenship does not guarantee Richard the education he needs to be successful. It becomes the task of the individual boy to educate himself, even if that means rejecting the authority of those around him.

Richard’s initial experiences with education are positive because the teachers are able to recognize his intelligence. At school, what he refers to as “old-country manners” make him a favorite among his teachers. Richard “was also a good student, and stood near the top of his class without seemingly trying” (103). As he grows older, the novel would have us believe that his teachers do not understand how to



guide such a smart boy and he becomes disenchanted with the school system, but not with education itself. When he enters high school, he doesn't have teachers to mentor him like Ernesto and must rely on his own sense of importance to fight an unfair tracking system. Villarreal writes,

And the adviser in the high school, who had insisted he take automechanics or welding or some shop course, so that he could have a trade and be in a position to be a good citizen, because he was Mexican, and when he insisted on preparing himself for college, she had smiled knowingly and said he could try those courses for a week or so, and she would make an exception and let him change his program to what she knew was better for him. She'd been eating crow ever since. (108)

Richard and the advisor have differing ideas of what type of education he should be pursuing, but it is important to notice the ways in which the advisor positions knowledge of a trade as an integral part of being a good citizen. Her racism, however, reduces Richard to just another Mexican whose possibilities for life extend only to blue-collar labor and limits her ability to see the potential in Richard.<sup>33</sup> With no real support, Richard must take the initiative to create his own opportunities through continuing his education.

As the only male offspring in the family, it is expected that Richard will eventually join his father in working the fields and providing for his family. During a discussion with his mother, Consuelo, she tells him that,

“Already I can see that books are your life. We cannot help you, and soon we will not even be able to encourage you, because you will be obliged to work. We could not afford to spare you to go to school even if there was a way for you to do it, and there is great sadness in our hearts [...] it is inevitable that you will have to go to work soon, for you are the only boy in the family [...]” (61)

His mother's words acknowledge that Richard's life is heavily influenced by books

and that they, his parents, lack the necessary skills to help him with his studies. Even their support of his education is not without its limits, as it can only continue as long as Richard is required to attend. When he questions why his sisters, who are older, aren't expected to help the family earn money, he is told that, as women, they must get married and leave the family. The division of familial duties based on gender roles described by his mother is seen as an outdated concept by the young Richard, but not immediately rejected. At first, Richard accepts the fact that his family's economic survival is what might keep him from pursuing his education; later though, it becomes an issue of his parents, especially his mother, not being able to understand the importance of knowledge.

Richard's parents are represented as good, but uneducated, immigrants whose thoughts and ideas are still entrenched in the old world views of Mexico. His mother Consuelo, especially, gets portrayed as naïve and simple. During a conversation with her, Richard believes her reasoning is "silly" and "it occurred to him that his mother always followed rules and never asked the why of them" (62). Several instances in the novel describe the arguments Richard has with his mother because of her inability to understand what Richard finds in learning. She believes he will "ruin his eyes" with so much reading, and begins to see his questioning of the family's religious beliefs as blasphemous, not understanding that as an intelligent young boy, Richard is curious about the world in which he lives. Instead, she confesses to Richard, "I have told you I understand very little. I know only that you are blasphemous and you want to learn more in order to be more blasphemous still—if that is possible" (64). Again, Villarreal chooses to have the character of the mother admit her lack of knowledge,

emphasizing her ignorance, and juxtaposing it with Richard's embracing of new world learning. Even when Consuelo does attempt to embrace ideas that are seen as a rejection of an old world thought—when she tries to assert her rights as a woman and not just a wife—Richard believes she is wrong.

Although he loved his mother, Richard realized that a family could not survive when the woman desired to command, and he knew that his mother was like a starving child who had become gluttonous when confronted with food. She had lived so long with the tradition of her country that she could not help herself now, and abused the privilege of equality afforded the women of her new country. (134)

Richard views his mother as incapable of fully understanding the ways in which the U.S. functions. He sees her as too much a product of the old country for her to understand the transitions she must go through in order to become a part of the new country. The fact that Richard situates his mother's attempt to become a more assertive woman as misguided illustrates an important contradiction in the text.

Richard wants to be a modern citizen of the country of origin, but his position as male in the household is better served if his mother continues to exist in the role of the self-sacrificing mother/wife of the country of origin. As an educated man, Richard reverses the positions between his adult mother and himself and situates himself as superior to her based not only on their level of education, but also based on a gender hierarchy that further benefits him.<sup>34</sup>

Education thus plays a central role in the ways in which both Richard and Ernesto become a part of the nation. In a similar tradition in which Alfred Kazin reads Theodore Roosevelt's autobiography and internalizes the message of what a "real" American man is supposed to be, Richard and Ernesto are both given Horatio Alger

books to read. The emphasis on creating one's own success based on notions of hard work, education, and individuality are quite apparent in both novels and closely follow Alger's message in his work. Alger's texts emphasized the "pulling one's self up by the bootstraps" mentality that focused very much on the idea of the individual.

Because this message is such an integral part of the nation's myth of the American Dream, the fact that Alger was writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and his books are no longer as well read has not changed the power of the ideologies behind them, as is evidenced by the popularity that the bootstraps model of success continues to enjoy today. In fact, in our current moment, several organizations exist that persevere in actively promoting the ideologies of Alger's work. For example, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans writes that Alger's works "told everyone, no matter how poor, or orphaned or powerless, that if they persevere, if they do their best, if they always try to do the right thing, they can succeed."<sup>35</sup> Alger's novels come to personify what it means to achieve the American Dream. Even more importantly, the Alger Association claims that "through his body of work, Horatio Alger, Jr., captured the spirit of a nation and helped clarify that spirit." The association's argument that Alger's work helped define the spirit of the nation is vital because the American Dream ideology has been heavily promoted as an objective that one achieves by working hard to become a productive member of the nation. *Barrio Boy's* and *Pocho's* close following of the immigrant narrative of assimilation includes mentions of Alger's texts as being read by the protagonists.<sup>36</sup>

For the boys, success and the achievement of the American Dream comes with the rejection of old world values as embodied by their families. In order to embrace

the ideas and beliefs of the new world, Richard and Ernesto must ultimately give up their connection to the immigrant family and become individuals. Richard especially comes to see his family as a burden that keeps him from fully living up to his potential. After Juan Rubio leaves the family, Richard becomes the head of the household and Consuelo tells him, "I know how much you wanted to go to the university, and I am filled with sadness that you will not be able to do so, for it is your duty to take care of us" (171). Richard not only resents being placed in the position of being financially responsible for the family, but he blames Consuelo and makes it clear to her that he does so not because of duty, but because, "I do not want to do anything else at the moment" (171). His need to be an individual defined only by himself leads him not only to reject the "old world" customs that had made him so popular with his early teachers, or the archaic sense of duty in which his mother believes, but also some of Alger's ideas. While he follows the idea of hard work and education as a way of achieving upward mobility, he comes to realize that "he would never be ashamed again for doing something against the unwritten code of honor. Codes of honor were really stupid [...] and what people thought was honorable was not important, because he was the important guy" (108). Even when he begins to take classes at the community college, he disagrees with the ideas of some of his classmates "because they constituted a threat to his individuality" (175). Villarreal's emphasis on Richard's struggle to be an individual ultimately positions him against his family's old world beliefs and any other attempts at stifling his identity.

While Richard very forcefully divorces himself from his family, Ernesto becomes an individual more gradually. After the death of his mother and his uncle

Gustavo, Ernesto leaves the house his mother and stepfather had purchased and ends up living on the edge of the barrio with his uncle José. At the junior high he now attends, “there were no other Mexican boys or girls” in his classes (257). He continues his education, but now, “my clothes, books, and school expenses would be up to me” (257). While Ernesto receives encouragement and emotional support from José and his teachers, the text makes it very clear that it is Ernesto’s motivation that keeps him focused on his education. Galarza emphasizes the fact that Ernesto works hard because, “except for food and a place to live, with which José provided me, I was on my own” (259). He finds odds jobs around the barrio that allow him to work and still pay attention to his studies. During the summer vacations, he is employed in labor camps, where he becomes educated in the ways migrant workers are exploited. Through all of these experiences, he works with various members of the barrio, but his commitment to learning and his ambition set him apart. Ultimately, Ernesto is responsible for himself and his education.

Both *Barrio Boy* and *Pocho* offer endings that fit within the model of the hegemonic schema of narration. In the traditional immigrant narrative, the phase of contact is followed by the phase of resolution, where the immigrant subject achieves a level of assimilation, acculturation, or completely rejects the new world and lives in self-imposed isolation. This last stage in the narrative attempts to solve any conflicts or contradictions introduced during the contact stage. Usually it means overcoming hardships and prejudices in order to transition from immigrant subject to a subject of the nation. The novels culminate with the protagonists making decisions that will ultimately affect the rest of their lives. In *Barrio Boy*, Ernesto is seen as successfully

balancing his school and his work. In the fields, he gets involved in organizing farm workers for better working conditions. At school, he is able to excel in his studies and is encouraged by his teachers. Mr. Everett, the civics teacher, speaks with Ernesto and tries to motivate him by telling him “he thought I could easily make the debating team at the high school next year, that Stanford University might be the place to go after graduation, and making other by-the-way comments that began to shape themselves into my future” (257). The autobiography concludes with Ernesto returning to the barrio after working in the fields all summer. As he bicycles through the streets of his neighborhood, he observes that “the barrio seemed empty,” and he leaves it behind as he makes his way to the high school he will be attending. The last sentence of the text makes reference to the possibilities mentioned by his civics teacher: “Pumping slowly, I wondered about the debating team and the other things Mr. Everett had mentioned” (266). Ernesto is metaphorically moving away from the barrio and moving towards the future represented by the high school. While Ernesto never forcefully rejects his family or the ideas of the old world, he does move away from them and the novel ends embracing the ideology of success through education.<sup>37</sup>

In *Pocho*, we don't have an optimistic end to the protagonist's story, but are instead left with Richard's quest to define himself. Ironically, he ends up becoming just another enlisted member of the U.S. military, the one organization that demands complete adherence to rules and regulations. Because of the fact that the U.S. is participating in World War II, enlisting in the military becomes a possible option for Mexican Americans like Richard.<sup>38</sup> The military provides Richard with the opportunity to sever the connections with his family at last.<sup>39</sup> He comes to the

decision to enlist when he discovers that his father is going to have a child with another woman and is confronted with the possibility that the child will be a male. A big part of Richard's sense of self is based on the fact that he is the only male child, an individual among all of the female children. With his father having another child, Richard's position as the only male offspring is jeopardized and seems to finally push him to leave his family. He realizes that enlisting is wrong, "all very wrong that he should use the war, a thing he could not believe in, to serve his personal problem," but it offers Richard the chance to physically separate from his family while still providing financially for them (186). The decision to enlist not only breaks his connection to the family and the old world, but also makes him an active member of the new world through his military service for the nation.<sup>40</sup> While he might not be invested in the war, by joining the U.S. Navy, he does assert his position as citizen of the nation and fights for the U.S. in the same manner that his father once fought for the Revolution.

Even though both Chicano texts are written during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the narrative structure and schema they follow continue to be used today to describe the stories of new immigrants. The linear progression of the texts, the various experiences in the phase of contact, and the resolutions they offer are all aspects that we can see in contemporary immigrant narratives that continue to employ the ideologies of the American Dream. In the following section, I read *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance* through the same lens of the hegemonic immigrant narrative used in discussing *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* in order to show how the films continue to perpetuate the immigrant story of assimilation. With these texts, however, I pay special attention to the ways gender alters the immigrant story from that seen in the



Chicano texts. Because the next two chapters are focused on representations of domestic workers, I emphasize the role that labor in the domestic space plays in constructing the image of the immigrant subject.

### **Same Old Story, Different Protagonist**

In 1990, Columbia Pictures released the low budget film, *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*. Aimed at capitalizing on the Lambada dance craze of the end of the 1980s, the film was marketed as a love story, “the romance behind the dance.”<sup>41</sup> Even though the film attempts to weave the socially conscious story of deforestation into the story line, the movie trailer emphasizes the sexuality of the dance and the relationship between the protagonist Nisa, and her love interest Jason.<sup>42</sup> The film perpetuates racist and classist stereotypes of domestic workers and Latinas and, at the same time, employs the dominant immigrant narrative to provide a sanitized version of domestic labor that ignores the reality of the process and the role that the U.S. government plays in the international policies that affect the real indigenous communities of the Amazon. While it failed in its attempt to become a commercial success, as a film, it reached a much bigger audience than other forms of cultural productions—like Galarza and Villarreal’s texts—becoming a powerful visual tool in creating and perpetuating images of the immigration of people of color and providing a rich text for analysis because of the way it represents immigration, domestic labor and the enclosure of the Brazilian rainforest.<sup>43</sup>

In the film, the reason for the protagonist’s immigration is predicated on the ideology of the U.S. as the “city on a hill,” an enlightened democracy. The protagonist is Nisa, an Amazon princess who has been sent to the U.S. by her tribe in

an effort to stop the destruction of their home in the rainforest by the Petramco Corporation. The opening frame of the film sets the scene: “Brazil—The Amazon: Mankind is destroying the rainforest...” say the white letters against a black screen on the left-hand corner of the screen. The film is attempting to situate itself as a dramatic narrative, giving the audience visual clues as to the greater importance of the story that is beginning to unfold. In the first scene following the very serious opening lines, the audience witnesses some sort of tribal dance with semi-clothed “natives” performing acrobatics in the forest, with Nisa in the middle. The scene not only works to illustrate the “primitiveness” of the indigenous group, but to instantly set up the hegemonic narrative of immigration that situates the Old World as pre-modern, very similarly to the ways in which Galarza positions his Mexican village as frozen in time. The Edenic scene is disturbed by the sounds of gunshots and the entrance of trucks, symbols of modernity intruding into the village and destroying everything they come across. It is at this point in the film that the viewer discovers that Nisa knows English—she learned from the missionaries—and that Petramco is now in possession of the land the village stands on.<sup>44</sup> The character of Benjamin Maxwell, the hired gun of the corporation, is set up to embody the evil corporate henchman, claiming that it’s a shame to tear down such a pretty forest, but “business is business.” It becomes Nisa’s quest to find some way to stop Maxwell and Petramco, and the story becomes a combination of melodrama and immigrant narrative, attempting to elicit sympathy from the audience by emphasizing the nobility of Nisa’s cause and the moral corruptness of the Petramco Corporation, while employing the conventions of the immigrant story.<sup>45</sup> Her ability to speak English and her light skin function in the film

to facilitate her construction as individual that can more easily transition from the pre-modern Old World to New World modernity. Nisa leaves behind her village and ends up in L.A. working as a domestic worker.

A more current film representing immigration and domestic labor is James L. Brooks' *Spanglish*. Released in the fall of 2004 and distributed by Columbia Pictures, the same studio that distributed *The Forbidden Dance*, the film had an opening weekend gross of \$8.8 million.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the low-budget *Lambada* movie, *Spanglish* was heavily promoted, had an estimated production cost of \$80 million, and featured an all-star cast that included Adam Sandler, Téa Leoni, Paz Vega and Cloris Leachman.<sup>47</sup> The narrative of the film follows Flor Moreno and her daughter Cristina as they emigrate to the U.S. from Mexico in an effort to create a better life for themselves. In her attempt to provide for and protect Cristina, Flor ends up working as a domestic worker for the Claskys, a privileged, yet dysfunctional family made up of John and Deborah Clasky, their children Bernice and Georgie, and Deborah's mother Evelyn. The story is told through Cristina's perspective, as she discusses how important her mother's influence has been in creating her sense of identity in an admissions essay for Princeton University. The title is a reference to the ways in which the film attempts to represent the two different families, with their diverse languages and culture, coming together to create a way of interacting and understanding each other that transcends the cultural barriers.

The first time we see Flor and a young Cristina occurs in a scene that offers the audience a quaint picture of their Mexican home. Flor has decided to finally emigrate to the U.S. after having been abandoned by Cristina's father. For her, the U.S.

provides an “opportunity for change” from the lives they are currently living. The scene takes place in their Mexican home, which is a brightly colored and beautifully decorated abode. There is no sense of poverty or economic difficulties present. The scene presented to the audience is quite different from the original scene in the script of the film. In the script, included in the film’s DVD version, Cristina and her mother must leave Mexico to escape the poverty and desperation Flor’s criminal husband has left them in when he is carted off to prison. The filmed version, however, rewrites the story of the script in order to provide the audience with a much more palatable version of immigration. In the filmed version of the movie, it is easy for the viewer to assume Flor decides to relocate to the U.S. because it offers better opportunities, but the film ignores the reality and poverty and desolation that forces countless immigrants to leave Mexico everyday. Instead, the film perpetuates the expectation of the American Dream as the motivation for immigration.

In *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, the experience of immigration takes place in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when immigration from Mexico was not restricted in the same ways it is today. Even though it isn’t represented as traumatic, the crossing of the U.S./Mexico border is important in the books because of the transition from old world to new. The setting of the films, however, is more current. Because of their dependence on the visual, the films provide a much more sterile version of immigration for its audience, a version that will not offend or disturb a mass audience. A more easily consumed and popular form of cultural productions, film must cater to a wider audience in order to ensure large distribution.<sup>48</sup> As a result, there is a clear absence of the conditions of immigration encountered by today’s im/migrating

subjects. The border and all of the ideologies that construct it are missing. Also important is the fact that *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* are texts about young men written by male authors while the films are about young women and are directed by male directors. I would argue, however, that all of the texts are masculinist in their perspectives and representations of women.

In contrast to the romanticized notion of the “city on a hill” and Emma Lazarus’ words affixed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty of “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses,” or the friendly Anglo faces that Ernesto and his mother encounter, immigrants find a much different reality upon attempting to enter the U.S.<sup>49</sup> In the dominant narrative of immigration, how one enters the U.S. is either completely absent, or disconnected from the issue of documentation/undocumentation. In *The Forbidden Dance*, Nisa’s quest to stop the destruction of her home takes her to Los Angeles, where the Petramco offices are located. Unlike many undocumented immigrants, Nisa and her bodyguard/medicine man, Joa, fly into L.A. and then take a cab to the Petramco headquarters. The representation of the indigenous peoples of Brazil goes from one of primitiveness and overt sexuality to one of economic and political power—how else would it be possible for two members of their group to leave the country and enter the U.S. by plane? The film would have the audience believe that the pre-modern immigrant subject easily transitions into the modern world of technology and travel, contradicting the binary it set up earlier between the old world being represented as Brazil and the new world of the U.S. The improbability of the scenario is also telling of the ignorance that surrounds the reality of indigenous groups of countries like Brazil. The trope of survival against annihilation by the film,

recreates the “vanishing native” discourse popular in Hollywood productions, while emphasizing the melodramatic elements of innocence and virtue.<sup>50</sup> In order to further represent the Amazon group as “noble savages,” however, the film returns to characterizing them as pre-modern subjects, as seen when Nisa and Joa are represented as naïve and childlike once they reach the U.S., just like young Ernesto when he arrives in Tucson.<sup>51</sup> As a result of their naiveté, Joa is arrested and Nisa is left alone in the city to fend for herself. While Nisa and Joa face challenges once they arrive in the U.S., their initial journey to the country represents a contradiction within the narrative when it attempts to draw clear distinctions between what it sees as old and new world. More importantly, however, their arrival in the country by plane also makes the border they are crossing completely invisible.

*Spanglish* provides an even more ridiculous representation of crossing the border in to the U.S. Once the decision to leave their home is made, Flor stoically packs them up and they begin their journey. During a scene showing them walking across the desert with nice rolling luggage, the voiceover informs the audience that “our transportation into the United States was...economy class.” The euphemism used in describing their entrance into the U.S. and the comical scene of them lugging their bags behind them as they cross the desert makes light of the immigrant experience in entering the country. There is nothing dangerous in the way they cross the desert and no threat of being caught by law enforcement. Through its use of humor, the film alleviates any anxieties the audience might feel in watching the story of undocumented individuals unfold and easily conforms to the conventions of the traditional immigrant narrative. The fact that Flor and her daughter enter the country

illegally and are undocumented is never addressed. Flor is able to find employment easily and Cristina enters school with no problem. They never reveal any fear of being deported. The film weaves a fantasy of acceptance for the viewer that is completely divorced from the reality of undocumented workers who face countless dangers crossing the desert, the threat of physical violence at the hands of law enforcement individuals and vigilantes, and the constant threat of deportation.<sup>52</sup> The lived reality of an undocumented worker is completely absent in the film.

As in *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, the individuals with whom the immigrant protagonist comes in contact with are important in the development of the narrative. In the second phase of the hegemonic immigrant narrative, the immigrant subject understands the new world through the various interactions s/he has. The community the protagonist enters into tends to get represented as either helping to Americanize the protagonist or foiling the protagonist's attempts at becoming a national subject. Ernesto's story is full of supportive characters who want to help him, while Richard finds support with his neighborhood friends, but feels only misunderstood by the greater community. The supporting characters in *Spanglish* help Flor and her daughter make their assimilation process easier, while in *The Forbidden Dance* Nisa is surrounded with characters that function in both capacities.

As a cultural text interested in creating commonalities among two very differing families, it is no surprise that in *Spanglish*, the relationship between Flor and her employers is couched in the discourse of family. While Deborah Clasky is represented as eccentric and often selfish, her treatment of Flor and her daughter is based on a maternalistic model of white superiority and benevolence that the audience

is encouraged to view as well-intentioned. When she hires Flor, Deborah tells her, “Welcome to the family” as if by becoming their housekeeper, Flor has become part of the Clasky family.<sup>53</sup> By employing the rhetoric of the domestic worker as family, Deborah attempts to erase the economic power she holds over Flor, and tries to position herself as the liberal employer who doesn’t exploit her employee, whose generosity transcends the class and racial lines between them. In fact, Flor becomes the surrogate mother to Deborah’s children, further cementing the film’s attempts at situating her as part of the Clasky’s family. Even though there are several instances where Deborah’s power over Flor is clearly evidenced, the film attempts to reconcile these with the family rhetoric through its portrayal of Deborah as a well-meaning benevolent employer who is trying to make it easier for Flor to assimilate into the world Deborah’s family represents. Also, the Clasky family and their insistence on situating Flor as part of the family becomes a metaphor for the nation. Just like the ideology of America as the land of immigrants is predicated on the rhetoric of inclusiveness that attempts to obfuscate a stratified society, the rhetoric of family tries to conceal the power relation between the immigrant and her employer.

When the Claskys decide to rent a summer home in Malibu, Deborah just assumes that Flor will go with them. Her mother, Evelyn, questions Deborah’s assumptions, “Did you ask her if she could live in?” Deborah responds, “Come on. There are no buses from there to here. There’s no question. Double come on. The barrio or Carbon Beach?” she asks as if physically weighing the options with her hands. The scene illustrates Deborah’s expectations that Flor will do what her employer expects, regardless of her own feelings or opinions. Deborah, however,



disguises the way she abuses her power as employer by attempting to represent the decision as benefiting Flor. After all, isn't it better for Flor to stay with them at the beach house than being stuck at home, in what Deborah refers to as "the barrio," especially since Cristina is invited to live with them? Deborah never asks Flor if she can move in with them, she just commands, "I've rented this house for the summer and she needs to sleep at the house because of the bus schedule." When Flor declines, Deborah responds, "I'm sorry my friend, this is what I need. I don't want to lose you, but..." The threat of being dismissed stands in sharp contrast to Deborah referring to Flor as her "friend," making clear the position Flor is in as her employee and how easily she can be replaced. Flor is left with little choice but to acquiesce to Deborah's demands, understanding her disposability. While the scene is displaying Deborah's manipulation of Flor, it is quickly forgotten as Cristina arrives at the beach house and is thrilled to be allowed to stay there. Deborah's actions end up being justified by the film's treatment of the world to which Flor and her daughter are exposed—a world they would probably never have had the privilege of experiencing first-hand if it hadn't been for Deborah's "generosity" in sharing her summer home.

Deborah's kindness is not limited to just sharing the Malibu beach house with Flor and Cristina. As the summer progresses, Deborah continues making decisions for Flor and Cristina that she believes are in their best interest. Deborah's meddling in their lives culminates in her going behind Flor's back and arranging for Cristina to attend the elite private school her own daughter Bernice attends, going as far as arranging funding, "I think I could probably get her a scholarship." Deborah manipulates Cristina in order to get Flor to give in to her demands once again.

Deborah's actions are not necessarily motivated by her concern for Cristina, but are instead much more representative of the paternalistic attitude she feels towards Flor and her daughter.<sup>54</sup> As an immigrant domestic worker, Flor is seen as not knowing what is best for her and Cristina. Because she is a product of the old world, Flor is situated as not understanding the importance of the educational opportunity Deborah is arranging for Cristina. Deborah's character sees Flor as incapable of making the right decisions, so she makes them for her. Flor's position as her employee guarantees Deborah a level of power over Flor that she exercises repeatedly with little regard to Flor's own capacity as an adult to make her own decisions.<sup>55</sup> Deborah sees herself as a good employer, someone who goes out of her way to make Flor's life better, not understanding how her inability to see Flor as capable of running her own life is indicative of racist thought that automatically infantilizes the immigrant worker. For the audience, however, her actions come across as misguided, but done with good intentions. Ultimately, the film weaves a story line that makes it easy for the audience to see Flor's treatment as part of her initiation into mainstream U.S. culture and Deborah as helping her transition into the new world. After all, it is her employment by the Claskys that allows Flor to learn English, one of the most important steps in achieving an acceptable level of assimilation.

In the phase of contact, one of the trials that the immigrant protagonist faces is the issue of racism and prejudice. In *Barrio Boy*, Ernesto doesn't describe instances of racism or prejudice in his own life and *Pocho*'s Richard sees prejudice as more of an individual action, not part of an entire system. Racism is a subject that is completely absent in *Spanglish*, allowing the viewer to believe it doesn't really affect the life of

the immigrant worker. While *The Forbidden Dance* makes superficial attempts at dealing with the issue of race, it does little to actually question the structure of racism encountered by immigrants of color. Nisa's employers are a wealthy couple who, in the film, come to embody an affluent class of individuals whose over-the-top racism and classism makes it easy for the audience to disidentify with them. Their overstated prejudices are intended to parallel their material excess, making their incendiary statements ridiculous. While the rhetoric they espouse is intended to represent an exaggerated view of race and class, the Anderson's attitude towards Nisa is telling of the ways in which domestic workers are viewed and the ideologies that surround immigrant women laborers. Mrs. Anderson automatically assumes that Nisa is from Mexico, completely ignorant of the differences that exist between immigrants from differing parts of Latin America. In a conversation with her husband, Mrs. Anderson informs him that Nisa is "different from the other girls," which he assumes means Nisa is a thief. The way in which domestic workers are referred to as "girls" works to infantilize them and emphasize their inferiority. Mrs. Anderson reassures her husband that Nisa "might pocket change we leave out, but I'll watch her for that." The Anderson's attitude reveals the popular idea that situates domestic workers as thieves, individuals not to be trusted. Not only is it assumed that Nisa is a thief, the racist stereotype of the dirty immigrant is evoked by Mr. Anderson when he says, "I just hope she takes a bath every now and then." The Anderson's racist and classist rhetoric is supposed to be ridiculous because the audience is aware of Nisa's true identity, but it is also indicative of the types of ideologies that surround domestic workers. Even though it might not apply to Nisa, the notions espoused by the

Andersons are prejudices they hold against all domestic workers.

The film also attempts to draw a distinction between Nisa and “real” domestic workers. Nisa’s true identity as an Amazon princess is disguised by her masquerading as a maid, but her background cannot totally be hidden because it makes her inherently different from actual maids, something Mrs. Anderson is able to recognize, even if she isn’t able to name it.<sup>56</sup> By attempting to differentiate Nisa from women who are defined by the labor they perform, the film perpetuates the ideology that situates domestic workers as inferior. In making sure that she is completely identified as a maid, Nisa herself asserts that she is “not a maid” and “not a servant” several times through the film. By making the Anderson’s racism so exaggerated and by emphasizing Nisa’s nobility, the film provides experiences that can easily be overcome, in this case through her relationship with Jason. In contrast to the Andersons, their son Jason is representative of a much more egalitarian ideology and his love affair with Nisa helps to resolve the conflict of racism in the narrative.

Racism and the immigrant protagonist’s position within the domestic space are not the only aspects that receive a make-over. The type of labor represented also goes through a revision that makes it easy for an audience to accept. Following the tradition of the hegemonic immigrant narrative, the films use labor as part of the experience encountered by the immigrant protagonists in the contact phase. However, unlike the labor seen in *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, the work the female protagonists perform is not arduous and gets cleaned up for the screen. The absence or romanticization of domestic labor works to create an opportunity to achieve economic success and eventually reach the American Dream. Domestic labor is portrayed as a

rung on the ladder to upward mobility in the two films.

After being separated from Joa, the audience next sees Nisa asleep on a public water fountain in what looks like Beverly Hills. Here she is discovered, not by any law enforcement officer, but by a domestic worker on her way to work. Carmen, as she is introduced, quickly embraces Nisa and offers to help her find a job as a domestic when she discovers Nisa doesn't have immigration papers. She is represented as the stereotypical "happy domestic," all smiles and sunny attitude. Carmen cheerfully informs Nisa that she will have no problem getting a job because employers will love her; after all, she is "young and pretty." Having no place to go and no money, Nisa finds herself employed as a domestic worker by the Andersons in Beverly Hills. Her employment, however, is predicated on the fact that she is "young and pretty" and we don't actually see her performing any actual domestic work. She just stands around and looks pretty.

Similarly, in *Spanglish*, the character of Flor is portrayed as a strong and proud Latina woman. In the film, Flor is played by Paz Vega, an award-winning actress in her native Spain, well known for her beauty and sex appeal.<sup>57</sup> The film attempts to overlook Flor's "otherness" to focus on her incredible beauty, which is, of course, further emphasized by her exotic-ness. Everywhere Flor goes, her looks garner her attention. Men try to pick her up in several scenes, and the first thing Deborah Clasky utters to Flor is "you're gorgeous." In every scene, Flor's beauty is present, from the flowing of her hair in the wind, to her dazzling smile, or curve-revealing clothing. In the DVD packaging blurb, she is described as "a breathtaking new housekeeper." The viewer never forgets that while Flor might be a domestic worker, her beauty

transcends her status; in effect, her looks overcome her class position. To allow the viewer to forget her class status, we never actually see Flor perform arduous domestic labor. All she does is walk around looking beautiful, putting puzzles together, straightening up newspapers, and putting board games away.

The film romanticizes the position of being a domestic worker and the labor involved in such an occupation. Flor is hired by Deborah to help her run the household, “The job is six days a week. Seven, eight, twelve hours, it depends. All the housekeeping, driving the kids.” Deborah’s job description makes reference to the fact that domestic workers don’t always have set hours, but that their work schedule is dependent on their employer’s lives. The audience, however, never actually sees Flor performing any housekeeping tasks outside of picking stuff up. In one scene where she is unpacking dishes, upset over Deborah taking Cristina out without asking her permission, John stops her: “No. No. No, you don’t have to work. Give me that.” In a complete inversion of their roles, John takes the dishes out of her hand, serves her water, and attempts to comfort her. The ridiculousness of the scene, an employer telling his employee not to work and attending to the employee’s needs, is represented as normal. In fact, Flor has so much time on her hands that she decides to send away for a language program to learn the English language. She walks around with headphones, practicing her pronunciation of English words. We see her lying on the beach, listening to lessons, watching them on TV with Evelyn, or practicing as she plays catch with the Clasky dog. By romanticizing her labor, the film works to ensure that the audience remains comfortable with Flor’s occupation, making it easy to accept the practice of hiring domestic workers, and making invisible the exploitation that

most often accompanies the employment of the domestic laborer. It works to erase the moral ambiguity around domestic labor for the audience. Absent from the film is the hard labor performed by domestic workers that often includes menial and degrading tasks. The film, instead, conforms to the conventions of the immigrant narrative by ensuring Flor's eventual assimilation through her acquisition of the language and by keeping her from being seen performing what an audience would see as demeaning work.

While the Chicano narratives stress the importance of the individual's quest for the American Dream, the female protagonists of the films get a much different treatment. In the films, the immigrant's gender becomes a major focus in the development of the story. Unlike the male protagonist whose success must come through the rejection of the old world—by separating from the family—the female protagonist becomes part of the new world through her relationship with the white love interest. The female immigrant is represented as being dependent on the male national citizen for transformation from immigrant subject and as a result, becomes sexualized in order to appeal to the male gaze of her love interest. She doesn't earn her position in the new world through hard work like Richard and Ernesto. The sexualization of the domestic worker that occurs in the films helps to advance the plot line of the immigrant narrative as the protagonist is fully accepted by their American employer as an equal and their assimilation into the NW becomes insured through the romantic relationship.

*The Forbidden Dance* is for the most part predicated on the relationship between Nisa and Jason. Like any good melodrama, the innocent and helpless young

heroine must have a dashing hero come to her rescue, and in the film, Jason fits that role. While he is set up as the “white savior” who knows just what must be done to help save Nisa and her home—he is after all, quite knowledgeable on the subject of the ozone—he also functions as Nisa’s love interest. The relationship, while obviously problematic, becomes more so by the fact that when Jason first becomes interested in Nisa, he believes her to be his parent’s domestic worker. Jason’s initial encounter with Nisa comes after what can only be described as a voyeuristic scene reminiscent of soft-core porn. In the scene, Nisa is in her maid’s room alone, wearing a see-through white chemise. She lights candles and dances seductively in front of a mirror, watching herself as she touches her body, writhing and undulating in what the audience is supposed to assume is some sort of jungle rhythm, an expression of her primal urges, an embodiment of her primitive sexuality. The film goes to great lengths to emphasize Nisa’s Latina “hotness.” Not only is the audience privy to this private display of sexuality, but so is Jason, since Nisa left her door open enough to allow anyone to come by and watch her. As if the open door is not enough invitation, when she spots Jason watching her, Nisa is not appalled or embarrassed, she just smiles at him. After this scene, Jason takes Nisa dancing and learns from her the seductive dance of the Lambada. The film romanticizes the interactions between Nisa and Jason without ever acknowledging the power dynamic that exists between employer and employee. Nisa might not see herself as a servant, but Jason does. As his family’s employee, Nisa is accessible to him in a way that other women are not. Being a wealthy white man and a citizen of the nation, he already has a level of privilege and power over a woman of color, but as an employer, that power is



magnified in a way that goes uncomplicated in the film. In fact, he comes across as ultimately heroic for turning his back on his wealth when he is cut off by his family for refusing to leave Nisa and her cause. Jason ends up representing a new generation of Americans, one that is concerned with the environment and is no longer hindered by the past generation's racist and classist prejudices. For the audience, Jason comes to embody the negotiation between being a privileged son and being a humanitarian with a social consciousness. He represents the perfect model citizen of the "city on a hill," and ends up providing the audience with what Linda Williams argues is "the entertainment needs of a modern, rationalist, democratic, capitalist, industrial, and now post-industrial society seeking moral legibility under new conditions of moral ambiguity" (23). Even though Jason's activism is superficial at best, it does work to infuse the story with a strong moralistic position that would satisfy an audience while, at the same time, ensuring that the capitalist system that exploits underprivileged communities remains unquestioned. While Jason ends up breaking away from the stereotype that is embodied by his family, Nisa's character does not bode so well.

In attempting to market itself on the appeal of the sexy Lambada dance, the film does so at the expense of the Latina characters. Nisa is reduced to a sexual object wanted by all, the hot Latina Lover whose body is on display for everyone, including the audience. Jason takes their seductive dance off the dance floor into the bedroom. His friends think she is "hot" and also want her. Benjamin Maxwell kidnaps Nisa in an effort to keep her from dancing on television and forces her to dance the Lambada for him, as he devours her with his eyes. After fleeing the Anderson's home, Nisa ends up working in a sex club, where she dances the Lambada with men for money.

She becomes the club's main draw, and even the woman who runs the club wants Nisa. Ironically, as the heroine of the melodrama, her virtue must remain intact, and so she must paradoxically rely on her sexuality to survive, but at the same time, keep her innocence intact and remain morally strong for the audience. Nisa can only give herself over to Jason, her true love, satisfying the requirements of the virtuous heroine she is playing. The sexual appeal Nisa has might be chalked up to her youth and beauty, but the other Latina in the film, the domestic worker Carmen is also overly sexualized. In a scene that takes place in her apartment, Carmen encourages Nisa to share a room with Jason, even providing her with a condom, a supply of which is conveniently placed on a hallway table. Carmen also seduces Joa, whom she had just met when Nisa showed up at her door. Both Carmen and Nisa end up being represented as sexually available and willing, perpetuating the racist stereotype of the sexy Latina. It is also important to note that the character of Nisa is played by Laura Herring, formerly Laura Elena Martinez Herring, who was crowned the first Latina Miss USA in 1985. Having the first Latina national beauty queen, someone who represented the U.S. in the Miss Universe pageant, as the embodiment of the beauty of the American woman, playing a role that so forcefully connects her overt sexuality to her Latina background further perpetuates the sexualization of the Latina woman.<sup>58</sup>

Just as the romance plot in *The Forbidden Dance* romanticizes the relationship between Nisa and Jason, *Spanglish* attempts to create a relationship between John and Flor that transcends the racial, cultural and economic differences between them. With Deborah coming across as a narcissistic wacko who begins an extramarital affair, it is easy for the film to bring together John and Flor in what is supposed to be a

relationship based on deep respect for each other's parenting struggles. John is the one who is always apologizing for Deborah's actions and he convinces Flor not to quit when they have a disagreement and she talks back to him in a way she views as disrespectful. The sexual tension between them grows as they spend more time in the Malibu beach house and their attraction becomes facilitated by her new understanding of English. Their ability to communicate is supposedly what makes their relationship develop beyond the employee/employer relationship, which becomes much clearer during a late-night talk on the beach when they are discussing their daughters. Flor tells John, "I never know a man who can put himself in my place like you do." The audience can see that John is distracted by Flor standing in the wind, with her clothes molding themselves to her body. During their conversation, he mentions that it must be hard to be a widow, an assumption he makes because "I thought that would be the only way a guy would leave you." The setting of the scene is one that creates a feeling of intimacy, with them alone on the beach, casting furtive glances at each other. The tension between them is so strong that Flor scurries off, almost as if she is frightened by the emotions that connect them. Their attraction is finally confronted on a night when both of them have had enough of Deborah's treatment.<sup>59</sup> While their relationship never becomes physically consummated, the discussion they have works to reveal the deep feelings between them.

The pivotal scene in the film occurs in John's empty restaurant, as Flor and John are finally honest about their feelings for each other. Flor is in a beautiful dress that emphasizes her body and her long hair is soft and flowing, framing her gorgeous face. Like in a date, John cooks for her, making a meal that makes Flor moan with

pleasure. As they sit across from each other, John confesses how beautiful he thinks she is: “They should name a gender after you. Looking at you doesn’t do it. Staring is the only way that makes any sense. And trying not to blink so you don’t miss anything. All of that, and you’re you...It’s just that you are drop dead crazy gorgeous.” Flor’s beauty leaves John at a loss for words. Again, the beauty of the domestic worker is able to cross the employer/employee lines between them. His sentiments are followed by a tender kiss as the confession continues, “Ever since that conversation that night at the beach, if I knew you were in a room, I just wouldn’t go in there.” Even though he is extremely attracted to Flor, John’s character chooses to avoid her in order to avoid the feelings he has for her. The scene shifts and they are now sitting on the floor, leaning on each other. Flor’s dress strap has slipped off her shoulder and they share longing glances as she tells him, “There are some mistakes you cannot risk when you have children.” As they stand, Flor looks at John one last time, utters “I love you,” and flees the restaurant. The decision they make not to become physically involved is based on their roles as parents. They sacrifice their love for each other for the love they have for their children and become victims of their circumstances. It is important that the film places such emphasis on their morality because, as Linda Williams writes, “recognition of virtue orchestrates the moral legibility that is key to melodrama’s function” (29). However, in attempting to recreate the romance trope of the star-crossed lovers, the film’s representation of the connection between Flor and John disregards the difference in power that is at the center of their employee/employer relationship. It also perpetuates the racist stereotype that represents Latina domestic workers as “hot” and available. While they

might not have had a sexual relationship, John's feelings towards Flor are not unwelcome. In the end, Flor turns out to be the stereotypical sexy maid who becomes the object of her employer's desire.

Unlike the Chicano texts that gesture towards the achievement of the American Dream, the films resolve the narratives with the requisite happily-ever-after ending. For the film, *The Forbidden Dance*, the resolution of the immigrant narrative lies not only in the romantic relationship between Jason and Nisa, but also in the saving of the rainforest. The movie's attempt at creating sympathy for Nisa's community through the rhetoric of environmental responsibility is problematic because of the ideologies it helps reinforce. The dislocation of Nisa's community and the creation of new enclosures are ultimately reduced to the work of one greedy corporation, Petramco. The name implies a connection to petroleum, which would resonate with audiences, especially considering the Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster that occurred in 1989. It is easy for the film to create one bad guy, or bad company, but it ignores the much more widespread practice of deforestation taking place in the Amazon and the role that transnational corporations and the U.S. government have played in that process.<sup>60</sup> The film also places more emphasis on the condition of the rainforest than on the condition of those that are being dislocated.<sup>61</sup> The environmental rhetoric of the film focuses on the ozone layer and the effects that deforestation are having on the overall ecosystem.<sup>62</sup> When informed of Petramco's action in Brazil, Kid Creole, the host of the television dance show, tells his audience, "I say if Petramco is destroying the rainforest, we should boycott their ass." The last frame in the film informs the viewer that the film "is dedicated to the preservation of the rain forest." In both instances, the

community Nisa is attempting to save is conspicuously absent. The ending also emphasizes an aspect of melodrama that “offers the hope, then, that it may not be too late, that there may still be an original locus of virtue, and that this virtue and truth can be achieved in private individuals and individual heroic acts rather than, as [Sergie] Eisentein wanted, in revolution and change” (Williams, 35). While consumer boycotts have been a useful tool in resisting capitalist exploitation, like the UFW’s grape boycott, by calling for the boycott of one individual corporation and exempting the larger logging industry from responsibility, the film leaves unchallenged the capitalist system benefiting from the deforestation of the rainforest and the displacement of communities. Through its emphasis on the romantic plot and its simple solution to deforestation, the film provides an easy resolution to the immigrant narrative. Nisa’s tribe will be able to remain in the rainforest, while Nisa herself achieves the American Dream through her dancing and her relationship with Jason.

Similarly, *Spanglish* attempts to create an ending that follows the model of resolution in the traditional immigrant narrative. The film ends up making the argument that the relationship that develops between John and Flor is predicated on their understanding each other, as if somehow being parents is an experience to which they can both relate and connect through. The way in which the film attempts to make parenting the universal experience becomes problematic because it ignores the very real differences that exist between John, who is a successful chef with his own restaurant, and Flor, an undocumented immigrant worker employed by John and his family. While all parents face challenges when raising children, the types of difficulties faced by Flor are exacerbated by her racial background, her working-class

position, and her immigration status. The film not only romanticizes the relationship between employee and employer, but also the parenting relationship and the experiences of domestic immigrant women and their children, and chooses to ignore all difficulties.

In the end, the film ultimately becomes a project that perpetuates the ideology of the American Dream. After the restaurant scene, Flor quits her job with the Claskys and pulls Cristina out of the private school. Cristina is devastated, but she is so smart that she didn't need the advantages the elite academy provided for her. The final scene returns to the Princeton admissions office where Cristina's letter is being read. Her voice-over informs the audience that Flor's hard work has paid off and Cristina is about to finish high school. In her letter, she tells the Princeton admissions committee that,

I've been overwhelmed by your encouragement to apply to your university and your list of scholarships available to me. Though, as I hope this essay shows, your acceptance, while it would thrill me, will not define me. My identity rests firmly and happily on one fact: I am my mother's daughter. Thank you, Cristina Moreno.

The film wraps everything up in a neat package for the audience. Cristina has obviously succeeded in her studies and Flor has done a wonderful job raising and providing for her daughter. Regardless of what happened with the Claskys, Flor is ultimately successful in affording her daughter the opportunity to achieve the American Dream, in this case by being accepted for admission by an Ivy League university. The idea that Cristina is on her way to getting an elite education at one of the most competitive universities in the country is divorced from the difficult economic reality under which most children of domestic workers fall.<sup>63</sup> In the end, the

movie ends up romanticizing not only the relationship between John and Flor, but also the mother/daughter relationship between Flor and Cristina, in an effort to give the audience a happy Hollywood ending. Cristina ends up living the dream of assimilation through education perpetuated in the dominant immigrant narrative, a dream made possible, we are led to believe, through Flor's hard work and dedication.

At first glance, the texts in this chapter seem very different from each other. Not only are the genres not the same, but the time, the setting, and the protagonists all appear to be unique. It is easy to make comparisons between *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, or between *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance* because they are much more similar in terms of storyline and format. By reading them together, however, we become aware of the similarities that exist between all four texts. The most visible unifying aspect in the texts becomes the employment of the hegemonic immigrant narrative. The films and the written works all follow the narrative schema identified by Boelhower and promote the ideology of the U.S. as the "promised land," where hard work and perseverance pay off in the attainment of the American Dream. The following chapter continues the discussion of the employment of the hegemonic immigrant narrative by focusing on texts that challenge the linear structure of the narrative and reject the simple resolution of the immigrant story we see in the films and Chicano texts of this chapter.



## Chapter Two

### **Alternative Narratives: Representations of Domestic Labor and Immigration in the Southwest**

The representation of labor and immigration provided by the texts in the previous chapter are useful in understanding the ways in which the conventions of the hegemonic narrative of immigration continue to be employed, but they stand in sharp contrast to counter-narratives by several contemporary Latina writers. This chapter is interested in looking at the ways in which works by Pat Mora, Lucha Corpi, Milcha Sánchez-Scott, and Marisela Norte challenge the unproblematic portrayal of immigrant domestic workers and the hegemonic immigrant narrative of progress perpetuated by the films and texts previously analyzed. I pay specific attention to the representation of labor and gender and their connection to immigration and the Latina/o community. While the texts do not completely deconstruct the conventions of the immigrant narrative, they do provide much more complex representations of the lived realities faced by immigrant women. The portrayal of domestic labor and immigration in the following texts is not clean and clear cut, but instead is messy and complicated and cannot be easily subsumed into the myth of success promoted by the traditional immigrant narrative.

#### **Coming to America**

In the more conventional immigrant narrative, the impetus for immigration is an important aspect of the story because of the ways in which it situates the U.S. as the “land of opportunity.” While the female immigrant protagonists in *The Forbidden Dance* and in *Spanglish* and the young male protagonists in *Barrio Boy* and *Pocho*

provide differing stories for emigrating, all of their narratives ultimately situate the U.S. as a space that promises the possibilities of a better future. The following narratives, however, represent the reason for immigration as not necessarily based on the optimism of achieving economic success or the pursuit of becoming a part of the American Dream, but instead as the basic quest for survival. These narratives also choose to highlight the negotiation of the spaces of liminality that exist between the time they leave their country of origin, or the periphery, and enter the core.

In *Cactus Blood*, Lucha Corpi places at the center of her mystery novel the character of Carlota Navarro, a Mexican woman who immigrates to the U.S. as a young teenager. As part of a larger novel, Carlota's story is much more fully developed through the longer narrative. Unlike the more conventional immigrant narrative followed by *Pocho* or *Barrio Boy*, Carlota's story is not always told through her perspective and lacks the linear narrative structure popular in coming-of-age stories. The action of the story revolves around the protagonist, Chicana detective Gloria Damasco, attempting to discover the cause of death of Sony Mares, a Chicano poet and former UFW activist. Gloria's investigation of Sony's death leads her to Carlota, who is at first considered a possible suspect. As the novel progresses, though, Carlota's story reveals that she is in fact a survivor of rape and pesticide poisoning, a direct challenge to the notion that an immigrant's life becomes significantly improved with her movement to the U.S.

Carlota's story gives the reader a brutal look at the difficulties experienced by immigrant domestic workers and the dangers they face. Gloria first discovers part of Carlota's story by mistake, coming across a taped interview of Carlota that is part of a

compilation of various interviews of Chicanas who had participated in the political movement of the sixties and seventies, entitled *The Chicana Experience*. In this interview, Carlota recalls her journey from Michoacán, Mexico to Fresno California after the death of her parents. She remembers leaving,

“[...]with enough food and water to last me two days and a few pesos in my coin purse, I left my village, walked twenty kilometers to Morelia, and boarded the bus that would take me across the U.S.-Mexico border, where, on a dirt road a few miles from El Centro, California, Dr. Stephens waited for me. The doctor handed Chuchita’s uncle an envelope, led me to the car, and helped me into the trunk” (45).

Her narrative illustrates the difficult lengths she went through in order to reach the border. With her parents’ deaths and no other family to take care of her, Carlota has to leave her hometown in order to support herself. Unlike the mother/daughter protagonists of *Spanglish*, Carlota has no choice but to emigrate. The fact that Carlota leaves for the U.S. already having a job points to the connections that exists between the core and the periphery in the contracting of labor.<sup>64</sup> More importantly however, Carlota’s words allude to some sort of transaction that takes place between Chuchita’s uncle and her future employer Dr. Stephens with the exchange of the envelope that goes beyond just the labor contract. The fact that the doctor gave Chuchita’s uncle money is confirmed later in the novel when María Baldomar, the mother of Carlota’s friend Josie, tells Gloria that Carlota “was sold to the doctor by her best friend’s—Chuchita’s—uncle” (88). Being only fourteen and without a family, Carlota is in an extremely vulnerable position that leaves her open for exploitation. Carlota also does not fit the popular image of what an immigrant worker is supposed to be. Her gender and her youth challenge the contemporary stereotype of the immigrant as an adult

male; her story also rejects the mold of the traditional narrative of departure. She does not leave Mexico dreaming of a better life, or believing in the American Dream, but leaves having no other option. For all intents and purposes, Carlota is purchased by Dr. Stephens, a transaction beyond any narrative convention.

Like Lucha Corpi's *Cactus Blood*, Milcha Sánchez-Scott's *Latina* tells a very different story of why women choose to immigrate. The play, first performed in Los Angeles in 1980, is set in a domestic agency, where the lives of various women intersect. The Felix Sanchez Domestic Agency, aptly named after the owner, caters to a white population of middle-class housewives in L.A looking for cheap domestic laborers. The theatrical genre of the text provides a visual representation of various issues and allows for a multiplicity of voices and stories to be featured in the play.<sup>65</sup> The play's representation of crossing the border is starkly different from the sense of hope present in the scenes of departure in the films or the Chicano texts previously analyzed. The first scene in Act One opens with the character of Elsa María Cristina López de Moreno—referred to as the NEW GIRL—leaving her village in Peru. In the stage directions, she is described as a peasant girl, saying her farewells:

*The NEW GIRL's mother steps out and puts a St. Christopher medal around NEW GIRL's neck. She embraces NEW GIRL. NEW GIRL tears herself away to leave. NEW GIRL's mother falls to her knees weeping. People around her help her up to wave at NEW GIRL. (85)*

The description of Elsa's departure from her village is not represented as a joyous occasion. Elsa is not seen as wanting to leave her mother, as is evidenced by the fact that she has to "tear herself away." The mother is so overcome with grief that she must be helped up by members of her village. There is no happy dream of what the

New World holds in store for her. Sánchez-Scott's text dispels the popular notion that immigrants want to leave their homes, or migrate solely because they want better lives, an idea perpetuated in *Spanglish*. Forced to leave her family behind in the periphery, Elsa must make the journey to the core on her own, a very different representation from that of the migrating family seen in *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*. The play points to the dissolution of families and communities that takes place with the immigration of individuals and the pain that such a separation causes.

### **Making the Border Visible**

In our current moment of globalization and increased migration, core nations are using the policing of national borders as a means to control the immigration of people from the periphery. The plan to build a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border, estimated to cost more than \$1.2 billion is but one example of the attention being placed on regulating national boundaries.<sup>66</sup> The legislative measures being considered do not take into account the rise in unofficial border policing activities organized by civilian groups like The Minutemen and the Border Fence Project.<sup>67</sup> The official and unofficial policing of the border has made the crossing into the U.S. a much more dangerous project that challenges the construction of the U.S. as the ideological "city on a hill" and revises the contemporary story of immigration.

While violence is present in both *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* because of the Mexican Revolution, it is not aimed at them or their families and their entrance into the U.S. is seen as an escape from that violence. The entrance of Richard and Ernesto's families to the U.S. occurs before the current militarization of the border; the more current films, however, completely ignore the policing of the national boundary

and the violence directed at immigrants hoping to cross into the U.S. *Cactus Blood* provides a more complex version of crossing the border that refuses to ignore the violence and danger encountered in crossing the constructed boundaries of the U.S. Even after crossing the border Carlota's journey continues to be difficult, as she is forced to ride in the trunk of the car to avoid being caught by the border patrol.

“It must have been about six in the evening [...] But it was still so hot in-(...)-side the car trunk, that every mouthful of air I inhaled felt like an exhalation from the Devil's breath [...] Inside Dr. Mark Stephen's car trunk, not knowing which was worse, dying or being caught by *la migra* and sent back to Mexico” (44-45).

The description of the time she spends in the trunk of the car does not gloss over the dreadfulness of being stuck in what could potentially become a metal tomb. Unlike the films which downplay or ignore the physical trauma of crossing the border, Corpi's novel makes a conscious attempt at illustrating the horrific situations faced by undocumented immigrants in attempting to enter the U.S. In the trunk, Carlota not only experiences the appalling conditions of being locked up in a metal enclosure, but must also face the fear and anxiety of being caught by *la migra*. As the trunk opens and she is helped out, she remembers that ““Two hands held me up gently, and I knew they couldn't be the hands of a border patrolman or a sheriff's deputy”” (46). The way in which she is held up without being mistreated is an indicator for Carlota that she has not been caught. Carlota's story points to the violence experienced by undocumented immigrants at the hands of U.S. law enforcement officials.<sup>68</sup> After being let out of the trunk, Carlota is able to ride in the backseat until they reach Fresno.

From the very beginning of the play, *Latina* also challenges the erasure of the

border and its dangers by emphasizing to the audience the difficulties faced by immigrant women in their attempt to enter the U.S. and remain in the country after their arrival. The play's representation of crossing the border is starkly different from the comical scene in the film *Spanglish* when Flor and her daughter cross the desert lugging their rolling suitcases. The stage directions also draw attention to the hardship Elsa faces on her journey to the U.S.,

*At one point we see NEW GIRL paying off a policeman. Another moment a woman steals her shawl. Then a man accosts her at knife point and tries to rape her, but she escapes. Next, she is giving money to a slick city coyote, dressed in American type work clothes, who takes her to the end of the tunnel where it is night... We see a large barbed wire fence... They both hit the ground and crawl on hands and knees to the barbed wire fence. She crawls through... She stands up on the other side and looks back. There is triumph in the music with a moment of Peruvian flute. (85)*

Once she leaves her village, Elsa is no longer under the protection of her community and, like many real immigrants, is confronted with a corrupt justice system and the constant threat of physical danger. Being a woman, however, Elsa is even more susceptible to peril, because as Lola explains, "The policeman on the road wants his mordida. What the police don't get, the bandits take. Better for them if it's a woman. Then they try to get paid in other ways or sometimes they just kill the people" (107). As a woman, Elsa faces not only the threat of rape at the hands of the coyotes and other men she encounters, but also the possibility of being killed.<sup>69</sup> The play informs one that she is successful in escaping the would-be-rapist, but also makes allusion to the fact that many other women are not so lucky.<sup>70</sup>

While Elsa has succeeded in reaching the U.S., the triumphant music that plays as she crosses the border is misleading. Unlike the happy endings of Hollywood

movies, Elsa's triumph in crossing the border does not last as she is faced with the difficulties of being an undocumented worker in the U.S. In Los Angeles, Elsa, like the other women of the domestic agency, lives in constant fear of *la migra*. For Elsa, the journey of coming to the U.S., the "land of opportunity," becomes the challenge of remaining in the country, an aspect of immigration that does not fit within the hegemonic immigrant narrative. After being abandoned at a Ralph's grocery store in Beverly Hills by a coyote, Elsa is able to find her way to the domestic agency and meets Eugenia and Sarita. In a moment of panic, she bites Sarita in order to get away from her after Sarita mentions immigration, "She bit me...I don't believe it. Eugenia, did you see that? She bit me like some kind of animal" (90). Elsa's terror at the mere mention of immigration lead her to behave in a way that Sarita classifies as animalistic, based on pure survival instincts. Sarita's comment resonates later in the play when the women are discussing Lola's absence from work,

CLARA: Ay, pensamos que la migra got you. Like Hortensia, last week.

LA CHATA: ¿Y por qué no me dijiste? Important things you don't tell me.

CLARA: Porque te coges una rabia. She gets so mad.

LA CHATA: ¿Y por qué no? Makes me feel hunted, like an animal.

The character of La Chata voices the dehumanizing aspects of being an undocumented worker. Their constant fear of being deported makes La Chata see the migra as the hunter while she and the other women are the prey. Even though they have succeeded in entering the country, their undocumented status will not allow them any sense of security and they continue to live in fear of deportation. The instability of their presence in the U.S. stands in stark contrast with the idea promoted in the traditional



narrative of the immigrant making a stable new home in the U.S. The homes they have created for themselves are precariously balanced on their ability to remain undetected, a challenge considering the ways in which they are visibly marked by their race. In the hegemonic immigrant narrative, the immigrant does not have to face the constant danger of deportation or the threat of being detected as undocumented based solely on the color of his/her skin.

Faced with all of the difficulties associated with immigration, the women of the play choose to remain in a country that does not want them. Why would someone subject themselves to such treatment? For many immigrants, the reason they immigrate is based on the need to support family members in their countries of origin. We don't see the clear disconnection between the Old World and the New World. Clara remembers "...your [Evita] mama and I was killing ourselves for \$25 a week...we were killing ourselves to send that money home" (101). Elsa later informs a potential employer, "En mi país yo tengo tres hermanitos, viven con mi mama. Mi papa murió y me he propuesto a mantenerlos" (124). The audience discovers that the reason Elsa has been forced to leave her home and family is because her father has died and she is now responsible for the financial well-being of her family. Unable to remain in their homes and support their families, the women must emigrate in order to ensure their families' survival. As a result of the mass migration of women, the practice of sending money, or remittances, home has become a major source of income for their countries of origin.<sup>71</sup> Not only do these remittances help support the families left behind, but they aid in the overall economy of the home country.<sup>72</sup> In the dominant immigrant narrative, part of the tension between the Old World and the New

World is resolved by leaving the Old World behind for a new and better life in the New World. The dependence of those left behind on the immigrant worker make such a solution nearly impossible for those who choose to remain connected with their families. Sánchez-Scott's play revises the narrative of immigration to illustrate the interconnectedness of the core and the periphery, both on a mental level and on the very physical economic level.<sup>73</sup>

### **A Changing Migration**

The “Why” and “How” of immigration are not the only revisions being made to the immigrant narrative by Latina writers', Sánchez-Scott's text and Pat Mora's poetry are also interested in asking “Who.” Unlike the masculine *bildungsroman* structure of *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, these texts place the stories of women at the center. The protagonist of *Latina*, Sarita, a Chicana who aspires to be a professional actor, is the receptionist at the agency where all of the domestic workers are Latina women, some documented, others undocumented. The women who find employment through Felix Sanchez's agency are all Latinas, but the play makes it clear that they are not a homogeneous bunch, but individuals. By giving each of the Latina characters distinct stories and places of origin, the play dispels the notions that all Latina domestic workers come from Mexico because of the country's geographical location. In fact, the various sites of diaspora point to a much more complicated immigration pattern. Sarita is a second generation Chicana whose parents emigrated from Mexico and does not have to deal with the issue of immigration like the other women. Eugenia is an older woman who, like the characters of Alma, La Chata and Evita, also emigrated from Mexico. The character of Margarita is only referred to as

La Cubana, making her place of origin her main identifying characteristic. When discussing the fact that Margarita believes she is superior to the other women based on her Cuban background, the other women reveal their different places of origin.

LA CHATA: ...[Margarita] is from Cuba, those Cubans. Se creen mucho, like they are better than everybody.

EVITA: The ones from Colombia are the worst.

MARIA: No es cierto, I am from Colombia.

EVITA: You're the only person from Colombia I ever like.

CLARA: Los de Guatemala son los peores.

LOLA: I am de Guatemala.

CLARA: De veras, you are? I thought you was like me, from El Salvador.

LOLA: Poor people are the same everywhere. They are the ones that suffer.

The women are united not only based on their occupation, but also by their experiences as poor Latina immigrants. By focusing attention on the different sites of diaspora, the play points to the fact that the Latina domestic workers do not emigrate to the U.S. based solely on proximity to the border, but that location is just one factor.

The text's attention to immigration to the U.S. from various countries falls along the lines of a wider discourse on immigration that seeks to uncover the types of connections that exist between host countries and countries of origin, a strong rejection of the traditional immigrant narrative which ignores such a connection. The play is situated in the late seventies and early eighties, a time of changing migration patterns and policies.<sup>74</sup> Though the play does not specifically mention the U.S. foreign policies that affected immigration, by emphasizing the fact that the women have different countries of origin, the text challenges the commonly held assumptions that all Latinas are from Mexico and that immigration is a simple choice motivated purely by the idea of social/economic mobility or a search for democracy.

Even when placing Mexico as the country of origin, Latina writers like Pat Mora are changing the representation of the immigration as originating in the border cities. Being a resident of a border city, Mora would be aware of the history of the wide-spread practice of hiring immigrant women as domestic workers.<sup>75</sup> While poetry does not fit into the genre of immigrant narratives, it is an important genre in Chicana/o literature that enables the reconstruction of immigration.<sup>76</sup> The concise nature of poetry, with its economy of words, has made it a genre that can easily be overlooked when dealing with the issue of the immigrant experience. Even though the poems by Mora do not offer a linear story or a long narrative, they do offer glimpses into the conditions of domestic labor and immigration that are obfuscated in the dominant immigrant narrative. As such, they provide useful objects of analysis in challenging the conventions of the more popular narrative genre.

In her collection of poems situated in the Southwest, *Chants*, published in 1984, Mora includes a poem, "Mexican Maid," about an immigrant domestic worker, Marta.<sup>77</sup> Watching her employer sunbathe, Marta wishes, "that she could lie/ outside at night/ bathed by moonlight,/ lie with her eyes closed/ like the *senora* wake to a new skin/ that would glisten white/ when she stepped off the dusty bus/ at the entrance to her village" (13). The reference to her village, illustrates Marta's migrant status as a worker, but also emphasizes the connection she still feels to her place of origin. Mora's Marta is part of the immigrant labor force that supplies the Southwest with domestic workers; however, Marta is not from the border area, but from a village in Mexico. Mora's poem is situated in the early 1980s and points to some of the changes that have taken place in the composition of immigrant domestic workers.<sup>78</sup> Earlier in

the century, the city of El Paso depended on domestic workers from across the border, that is, from the city of Juárez. In fact, Anglo women created their own organization in 1954, the Association for Legalized Domesticity. The organization's primary aim was to get help from the INS in importing Juárez women to perform domestic labor. It proposed a "bracero maid" program with a specific contract for one year's service.<sup>79</sup> The program never materialized, but the fact that this organization pushed for its inception illustrates the reliance of the El Paso middle-class on domestic workers. By making reference to Marta's village, Mora's text situates the migration in a wider context. Now, domestic workers are not just crossing the border from Juárez, but are emigrating in much larger numbers from the interior of Mexico.<sup>80</sup> Unable to find employment in Juárez, many of these workers look to El Paso.

In 1996, Mora published another poem "Echoes," in *Borders*, which again makes reference to the fact that the immigrant domestic worker in the poem, Magdalena, is not from the border city of Juárez. Magdalena has emigrated from the state of Zacatecas, pointing again to the migration of workers to the U.S. from the interior of Mexico. She remembered "such laughter/ at fiestas in Zacatecas, enjoying/ the afternoon's songs and games" (23). Her memories are nostalgic, making one wonder why she would have left her home, but also keeping her connected to the place she has left behind. Her migration from the interior of Mexico leaves Magdalena in a much more precarious position. As a female immigrant worker separated from her home by long distances, her employment is vital to her survival. Magdalena represents a feminization of migration which is historically unparalleled. In their introduction to *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Global*

*Economy*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild report that half of the migrants leaving Mexico are women, and that “throughout the 1990s women outnumbered men among migrants to the United States” (6). While in the past, the role of immigrating for the financial survival of the family was often placed on men, the process of globalization has altered such patterns.<sup>81</sup> Magdalena also performs the most popular type of labor that immigrant women are funneled into once they arrive in the U.S.<sup>82</sup> Both of Mora’s poems revise ideas of Mexican immigration that use the proximity of the border as reasons for migration and by illustrating the changing migration patterns within the country of Mexico, expand the discourse surrounding Mexican immigration. Mora also calls attention to the feminization of the immigrant subject.

### **Labor and the Family**

The role of labor has been an important aspect of narratives of immigration and current stories continue the tradition of highlighting the experiences of work and the structure of the workplace. Unlike *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, both of which emphasize how hard the young male protagonists work to support their families, the texts by Latinas situate women as breadwinners. The women in these texts are not like the mothers represented in *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*, who must depend on the men of the family to support them and whose labor is restricted to the home. These characters are also starkly different from the female protagonists of the films, whose labor is glossed over and almost nonexistent. Instead, we get representations of domestic workers who are exploited and who are subjected to unfair labor practices, racism, and violence. Also of interest is the fact that the immigrant domestic worker must labor in a space

that relies heavily on patriarchal gender roles that construct her labor as a natural extension of her being a woman. Unlike the individual male protagonist of the Chicano texts, these women cannot escape the responsibility of the family, both their own and the ones for which they work.

In her short story, "Like One of the Family," Alice Childress' character Mildred, an African American domestic worker, recalls to her friend Marge a conversation she has had with her employer Mrs. C. When an acquaintance comes to visit, Mrs. C. discusses Mildred's position in the household, "We just love her. She's like one of the family"(1).<sup>83</sup> After the visitor's departure, Mildred confronts Mrs. C. and points out the ridiculousness of such a statement. As her employee, Mildred refuses to allow her employer to disguise their economic relationship in the metaphor of family. By emphasizing the economic power Mrs. C. holds over Mildred and the role that Mildred must play in the household, she rejects the idealized notion of domestic work that attempts to erase the realities of domestic labor and forces Mrs. C. to acknowledge her position of power based not only on Mrs. C.'s status as employer, but also as a white woman. Published fifty years ago, Childress' short story remains relevant because it illustrates the ways in which the labor of domestic workers is often romanticized in order to cover the exploitation to which many workers are subjected. Through the euphemism of the family, employers can naturalize the hierarchy existing between the employer/employee. By including the rhetoric of family into the immigrant narrative, cultural products can further that naturalization process while creating a representation of domestic labor that makes the exploitation of such labor absent.

The film *Spanglish* shamelessly uses the rhetoric of the family in erasing the economic relationship that exists between Flor and the Claskys. Hollywood films, however, are not the only ones guilty of representing domestic labor in idealistic terms. One of the most excessive portrayals of the immigrant worker as the caring nanny occurs in Mora's poem "Graduation Morning," a poem which uncritically participates in the discourse that romanticizes the relationship between domestic worker and her charge. Similar to the way that Flor comes to care for Bernice, the poem provides an idyllic representation of the bond that exists between a Mexican domestic worker and the son of her El Paso employer. Situated during the young man's graduation from high school, the poem informs the reader that the domestic worker had for years "cross[ed] the Rio/ Grande to clean his mother's home" (34). While there is no reference made to whether or not she receives payment for childcare, the poem makes visible the emotional labor of the domestic worker. We know that she refers to him as "*Lucero*, morning star" and that she "snared him with sweet coffee, pennies,/ Mexican milk candy, brown bony hugs" (34). Incredibly, not only does she work for his family, but she must also work to earn the young boy's affection. The love she has for the young boy is evident when Mora writes,

*"Lucero, mi lucero,"* she'd cry, when she'd see him/ running toward  
her in the morning, when she pulled stubborn cactus thorns/ from his  
small hands, when she found him/ hiding in the creosote. (34)

The way the domestic worker responds when seeing the young boy, or when caring for him, emphasizes the strong feelings she has for him. The nickname, which she has given him, is also significant. *Lucero*, or morning star, is an important figure in both pre-Western and Christian mythology. For the Aztecs, the morning star was



Quetzalcoatl while in Christianity, Jesus Christ is often referred to as the morning star.<sup>84</sup> The fact that she chooses this name for the young boy points to the centrality the young boy plays in her life.

The poem would have one believe that the love she feels for her young charge does not end with his childhood, but continues as he has grown into a young man. She is so attached to him that she attends his graduation ceremony, where

Though she's small and thin,/ black sweater, black scarf,/ the boy in the  
white graduation robe/ easily finds her at the back of the cathedral,/  
finds her amid the swirl of sparkling clothes/ finds her eyes. (34)

The class difference between employer and employee is clearly marked by the domestic worker's plain clothing that makes her conspicuous in a crowd of more finely dressed attendees. The ceremony is taking place in a cathedral, indicating that the young man is graduating from a private, parochial school.<sup>85</sup> The poem, however, would have one accept the idea that the love shared between the young man and the domestic worker transcends issues of class. The young man purposely seeks out the domestic worker in the crowd and when he finds her, he sees "Tears slide down her wrinkled cheeks./ Her eyes, *luceros*, stroke his face" (34). The pride and love she feels for him moves her to tears. In fact, the love with which she gazes upon him is reflected in her eyes. The ways the poem refers to her eyes as *luceros* and describes the manner in which they stroke his face emphasize the importance her love also plays in the young man's life. The love she has for him is a reciprocal love. While it is very possible that a domestic worker and the person she helps care for can share this type of bond, the poem romanticizes the economic relationship that exists between the employee and the family that employs her. The poem becomes a saccharine and

idyllic representation that overlooks important power differences that exist within such a relationship. It also participates in a discourse that places the children the domestic worker cares for as central in her life. The young boy acts as a substitute for the family of the domestic worker that always remains invisible.

In *Latina*, the characters of Mrs. Levine and Ms. Harris use the agency to hire child care providers and provide an alternative to the representation of the loving Latina nanny. It is significant that both women use the Felix Sanchez Domestic Agency when looking for someone to care for their children because it helps to make clear the connection that exists between paid domestic work and the unpaid emotional labor that takes place in the care of actual human beings. The women they employ are supposed to perform the duties of two separate jobs, those of a domestic worker and those of a nanny, without being paid for it.<sup>86</sup> Mary Romero reports that sometimes, “domestics are seen as ‘protomothers’: they are expected to perform the emotional labor of ‘mothering’ both the women employers and their families” and that employers assume that domestic workers will be naturally nurturing (137).

Mrs. Levine is represented as an ineffectual mother who has no control over her children and has returned to the agency looking for a replacement for her previous employee. The audience discovers that Mrs. Levine “always needs a replacement, the girls just leave her” (123). Her children are so poorly behaved that she asks Felix, “If you could find somebody that would even stay a week. Nobody has stayed a week” (123-124). Several times during her dialogue, Mrs. Levine has to scream out the door to her boys in the car to behave. It is obvious from the way the boys are represented and Mrs. Levine’s desperation that the job in her home is a difficult one. Clara reports

that “Carmela left Mrs. Levine porque los kids, they tie firecrackers around the toilets” (125).<sup>87</sup> Knowing the difficulties she will be faced with, why would Alma take a job no one has been able to handle? Having been “returned” by Mrs. Homes, Alma has little choice but take the job with Mrs. Levine. Her need for work does not give her much of an option and, as Sarita states, “Alma stays through anything” (123). Alma might have to work for Mrs. Levine, but she does display a strategy for dealing with the difficult boys.

MRS. LEVINE: Hola, yo me llamo Stephanie.

ALMA: Mucho gusto, señora. (*Car horn beeps.*)

MRS. LEVINE: Niños, muy malos. (*ALMA looks out the front door, turns back to MRS. LEVINE.*)

ALMA: Ay qué chulos, muy bonitos. (*Car horn beeps. ALMA opens the door, sticks her head out and yells out the door.*) Oigan chavalitos, les voy a dar una buena patada si no se me portan bien. (*All honking stops...*). (125-126)

Not only is Alma able to control the children, she is able to use Mrs. Levine’s lack of Spanish to do so. Mrs. Levine states, “I don’t speak Spanish too well. I just took one year in high school [...] Of course, I can say other Spanish phrases: niños watchando T.V? . . . lavando los windows? . . . Vacuuming aquí . . .” (124). The Spanish phrases she attempts illustrate the kinds of labor she expects her employee to perform, including watching the children and cleaning windows, both demanding jobs. While she may not speak Spanish, she has no problem knowing what phrases to utter in order to explain what she wants done. Alma tells Mrs. Levine what she wants to hear, but puts up a strong resistance to the boys’ bullying by making clear she is in charge. While the audience may feel sorry for Alma having to go off with Mrs. Levine, Sánchez-Scott makes it clear that the character of Alma is not just a victim of

exploitation, but will be able to handle her self.

### **Realities of Race**

The rhetoric of upward mobility inherent in the myth of the American Dream is predicated on the idea that the U.S. is a true democracy and that through hard work, anyone can achieve success. Racism and prejudice cannot easily exist under such a construct and so narratives must devise strategies to deal with the racial difference of the immigrant subject. Some pretend that racism is no longer an issue, merely a problem of the past. For example, the representation of the immigrant worker in *Spanglish* would have one believe that overt racism doesn't exist and the racism seen in the *Forbidden Dance* is such a caricature that it is easily dismissed as an isolated case. Others portray prejudice as just another obstacle that must be overcome in order to earn one's place as a subject of the nation. In *Pocho*, Richard claims to experience racism only once at the hands of police officers, but uses the incident as only one more in helping him become a strong man who earns the respect of the arresting detective, just like he earned the respect of his teachers. Ernesto, in *Barrio Boy*, never discusses facing discrimination based on his race, but instead focuses attention on all of the teachers and neighbors who inspire him to do well in school. As women of color, the domestic workers in the following texts cannot so easily escape the prejudices that follow them because of their race, their nationality, their gender, and their class. Also, because the domestic space is considered the private sphere and separated from the public sphere, it is easy for racism and exploitation to go unseen and unchallenged.

One of the most powerful critiques of racist and classist employers appears in *Latina*. Mrs. Homes is the first employer to make a physical appearance on the stage,

and gives the audience a tangible glimpse into the type of treatment to which the women of the agency are subjected. It seems like no coincidence that her name—unlike the more generic names of the other employers—directly connects Mrs. Homes to the work space, suggesting that her treatment of her domestic employee is representative of the type of attitudes domestic workers face in other homes. In Scene Three, Mrs. Homes enters the domestic agency with Alma in tow. The first thing out of the character's mouth is "I am returning Alma" (108). The short phrase works to dehumanize Alma, placing her in the position of object of exchange that can easily be returned to the original place of purchase. Sarita illustrates the ridiculousness of such an attitude when she mimics Mrs. Homes and tells the audience, "I am returning Alma. What does she think this is, the May Company?" (109). The character of Mrs. Homes, however, is just getting started.

MRS. HOMES: She is as sweet as can be, but not at all suited to our lifestyle. We take great pride in our surroundings. It has become obvious that Alma has never been around beautiful things. She has no respect for my blue and white Chinese porcelain, or any of our antiques, and these things are irreplaceable, you know. Where do you people get these girls? (109)

Mrs. Homes' dialogue is important because it shows not only the way that she objectifies Alma, but the lack of value she sees Alma possessing even as an object. Mrs. Homes respects her antiques more than she does her employee and views them as irreplaceable, unlike Alma whom she is exchanging for a different worker. Her disdain for Alma is based on her class status and on race, as illustrated by her reference to Sarita as "you people," drawing a clear distinction between herself and those of the domestic agency.

Mrs. Homes' dialogue points to the fact that, like many employers, she expects more than just cleaning from a domestic worker. Her attitude towards Alma and domestic workers unearths an important contradiction that exists in Mrs. Homes' expectations.

MRS. HOMES: I mean, you should make sure their references are in order.

SARITA: (*Looking at file.*) According to Alma's references, she is very clean, takes a great deal of pride in her work and...

MRS. HOMES: Oh, she is very clean. I wouldn't allow a dirty girl in my home, but she just doesn't understand antiques and fine things. Now, I want someone who understands these things. Someone who knows how to polish silver properly, knows you wax English pine, not just Pledge it. Someone who will value and understand our fine things. (109)

Mrs. Homes makes clear the class differences that exist between employer and employee, but at the same time she insists that her employee have knowledge of antiques, a form of cultural capital to which Alma and other working class domestic workers would have little or no access. While she expects Alma to remain in her place, Mrs. Homes also expects Alma to transcend her class status by having knowledge of "fine things." Of course, she isn't willing to pay much for this extra knowledge. When Sarita points out that it will be hard to find someone with such knowledge for sixty-five dollars per week, Mrs. Homes informs her, "Oh, I'll be more than happy to go higher for a proper person. I'd go to, say, \$100 a week. Of course that would be live-in with Monday's off (109). While she seems willing to pay more money for someone who understands about "fine things," in reality she expects more work for those extra thirty-five dollars, pushing her level of exploitation even further. Mrs. Homes, however, doesn't see what she does as wrong at all.

The character of Mrs. Homes gives voice to a racist rhetoric that attempts to rationalize or make it easier to exploit women of color. As she continues discussing what it is she requires from her domestic employee, her rhetoric becomes more and more racist and offensive.

MRS. HOMES: [...] What about a black lady. (*Excited by the idea*)

Or better still, an Oriental? How much would an Oriental run me?

SARITA: H . . . How much?

MRS. HOMES: Some of our friends have Orientals. I hear and I can see they are efficient. Oh, yes, indeed, and very clean, energetic too . . .

(SARITA *walks slowly to file cabinet area down stage right.*) no grass growing under their feet, but they are moody, surly too, I hear. No, I can't have that, now, you Mexicans . . . (*At this, SARITA turns her head with a start and looks directly at MRS. HOMES*) have the best dispositions. You people may not be the cleanest or most energetic, but I'll say this for you . . . you know your place. (109-110)

She discusses domestic workers of different racial backgrounds as objects to be purchased and assigns them traits and characteristics based on racist stereotypes. For her, these women are not individuals, but are defined by their race and class.<sup>88</sup> By seeing domestic workers as objects of labor to be differentiated solely by their racial classification, it is also easier for the employer to ignore the humanity of the employee. By claiming that Mexicans are not “the cleanest or most energetic,” Mrs. Homes can rationalize paying women like Alma pittance because they don't deserve anything else. The dialogue also makes it clear that Mrs. Homes expects the labor performed in her home be done with a good disposition by a worker who plays the role of the “happy domestic.” She would prefer a Mexican who “knows [her] place” to a surly “Oriental” because she assumes that a Mexican domestic worker's ability to perform her work without showing any visible signs of disgruntlement means that the worker is content with her position and her labor in the house—in other words, she

knows her place. Mrs. Homes would not want to be inconvenienced by having her employee display any dissatisfaction with the labor she is assigned. The character of Mrs. Homes is representative of the type of employer who believes women like Alma should be grateful for their jobs, grateful for their exploitation. After all, the classic immigrant narrative situates these domestic workers as part of an immigrant working class “pulling themselves up by their boot strap.” The play, however, refuses to participate in such a rhetoric and makes clear the racism inherent in the exploitation of immigrant workers and the fact that it cannot easily be overcome, or simply resolved, as in hegemonic narratives and films.

Racism and the immigrant protagonist’s position within the domestic space are not the only aspects that receive a make-over in Hollywood films. The type of labor represented also goes through a revision that makes it easy for an audience to accept. In terms of the immigrant narrative, the absence or romantization of domestic labor works to create the myth of the U.S. as the land of opportunity where any immigrant can achieve economic success and eventually reach the American Dream. Domestic labor is portrayed as a rung on the ladder to upward mobility in the two films. Unlike the cleaned-up version of domestic labor represented in the films, Corpi’s *Cactus Blood* offers a more critical representation. At first, it seems like Carlota’s story is a happy one. Once she reaches Fresno, she works for the Stephens family and begins to take English classes, making new friends like Josie Baldomar. She declares that,

“Since I had left my village in Mexico, I hadn’t been as happy as I was during the following year, living with the Stephenses in Fresno. I cleaned their house, cooked for them, did their laundry, and cared for their garden. I also took care of their six- and nine-year-old daughters on weekdays, and made sure they did their homework when they came



home from school” (47).

Carlota’s description of her labor points to the ways in which she functioned not only as a full-time housekeeper, but also as a childcare provider and gardener. Carlota, a young girl of fourteen, is performing the tasks of three different individuals. As part of an educated upper/middle-class couple, the Stephens would have been aware that not only is it illegal to hire an undocumented worker, but that at fourteen, Carlota is still considered a child and should not be employed as an adult. As an underage undocumented immigrant, Carlota is completely at her employers’ mercy. What makes her story even more tragic is the fact that as someone so young and alone, she feels happy working for the Stephens because their employment gives her a sense of stability she lacks in her own life. The Stephens are able to exploit the fact that Carlota has no family for their own benefit.

The emphasis on the actual type of labor performed by immigrant domestic workers highlights the role that their immigration status plays in their employment. Other cultural productions have focused attention on the fact that certain employers depend on the undocumented status of the worker, inverting the idea that it is only the domestic worker who is dependent on the employer for work. For example, in her poem, “Illegal Alien,” Mora turns her attention to the difference in power that occurs in the employer/employee relationship by discussing the ways in which the labor of domestic workers facilitates the creative activities of middle-class women. Unlike the anonymous employers of the previous poems, in “Illegal Alien,” the Chicana poet acknowledges the role that Socorro’s labor plays in her job as a writer when she says, “Socorro, you free me/ to sit in my yellow kitchen/ waiting for a poem/while you

scrub and iron” (47). Even in the stage of inspiration, the labor of her domestic worker is necessary in order to help the poet produce work, as the poet in the poem has the privilege of paying Socorro to perform the domestic duties she has no time, or inclination, to perform herself. Unlike the poet, Socorro’s labor is not creative and intellectual, but is instead repetitive and physically demanding. The fruits of the poet’s labor will be valued as artistic, while the results of Socorro’s labor will not serve her, but will instead ensure that the poet’s home continues to exist as a functioning domestic space. As Romero argues, “the ideology of domesticity connects women’s identities to their roles as wives and mothers,” and by hiring a domestic worker to perform the household work, the poet ensures that her home reflects her success as a woman in the domestic sphere (99).

The character of Cindy Harris in *Latina* must also use undocumented labor. Unlike Mrs. Homes and Mrs. Levine, Ms. Harris is not upper middle-class, but works and lives in the neighborhood where the agency is located. She is a single mother whose current promotion at work has forced her to find someone to care for her children. Ms. Harris tells María that she “really can’t afford anybody, but Silvia [her friend] said most of your women were . . . well, you know, illegal” (131). Being working class, Ms. Harris must rely on cheap child care and is very much aware that because of their immigration status, the women of the Felix Sanchez Domestic Agency work for very little. When Sarita informs her that the agency is not responsible for the immigration status of the women, Ms. Harris responds,

MS. HARRIS: Oh, hey, listen, it doesn’t bother me. I mean I wouldn’t dream of asking, it’s not my business. Everybody’s gotta do what they gotta do. I mean, as far as I am concerned, she doesn’t even have to

speak English. It would be nice, but I hear that's more expensive. I just want somebody young, clean, bright. I mean, I don't want one of those fat ones with the gold teeth. I always see those kind at the bus stop. God, I don't see how anybody can let themselves go like that and I guess they think the gold teeth are pretty. Anyway, I've never had a maid before, I mean, what do we do? Do you just send somebody? Could I get her today? Could I get somebody for \$50 a week?  
 MARIA: I explain everything, but first, I must put the little cross in this little box for child care? Cooking?  
 MS. HARRIS: Not much, they're into Mrs. Paul's Frozen Fishsticks. Do you think you have somebody? (131)

Ms. Harris' 'don't ask don't tell attitude' doesn't quite ring true in light of the fact that she has turned to the agency because she knows the majority of women are undocumented. Her new promotion is predicated on her ability to work extra hours, and she can only accomplish this by employing someone else to perform her parental duties. Ms. Harris' movement up the economic ladder is dependent on the labor of a fellow working-class woman.

As a working-class woman, Ms. Harris does not have the economic power to make exorbitant demands like Mrs. Homes and Mrs. Levine, but she too has specific traits she is looking for in an employee. As long as she is "young, clean, [and] bright," Ms. Harris doesn't care about her immigration status or whether or not she can speak English (131). In other words, as long as the domestic worker doesn't look like she is undocumented, Ms. Harris has no problem with her immigration status. While her class status places her in position where she can understand that "[e]verybody's gotta do what they gotta do," her racist assumptions about the women she refers to as "those kind" reveal her own ideologies about race. When she is told that Elsa Maria, the New Girl, is going to be her employee, she asks, "New girl? From Peru? She didn't just get here, did she? Because Sylvia said they're not any good when they first come

here” (131-132). The way she objectifies new immigrants illustrates that while she claims not to care about their immigration status, she does expect them to possess a certain level of cultural knowledge that Ms. Harris associates with time in the U.S. This assumption is predicated on the stereotype that any knowledge immigrants might have is not worth much, and that only the knowledge one learns in the U.S. is of value.<sup>89</sup> When Sarita is going to introduce the New Girl to Ms. Harris, she tells her not to introduce herself as Elsa María Cristina López de Moreno but only as Elsa Moreno; however, this makes no difference since Ms. Harris decides to rename her, saying “I’ll just call you Elsie” (134). Not only is it easier for her to pronounce Elsie, but by Anglicizing her name, Ms. Harris attempts to further remove Elsa María’s immigration status and racial background, and sever Elsa’s ties with the OW. In the traditional immigrant narrative, the work that an immigrant performs becomes an integral part of her/his becoming a good “American” worker, as it reaffirms the desire to work hard and profit from the fruit’s of one’s labor and ensures a smooth transition into the NW. However, by acknowledging the role that a worker’s immigration status plays in the type of labor one performs, the cultural productions by women of color disrupt the rhetoric that equates hard work with success. The work these women perform is not only undervalued in terms of status and economics, but it goes mostly ignored, confined to the domestic space to be enjoyed by the employing family and not the domestic worker.

### **Rejecting the Romance Plot**

One of the most troubling trends in the representation of domestic workers is the need to cast them as the romantic interest of the employer. It seems to be one of

the easiest ways to ensure the upward mobility of the protagonist. The plot of the romance between the employer and employee, a la *Jane Eyre*, provides the narrative with an uncomplicated way of ensuring a happy resolution that will please a mass audience. Such a casting, however, is dangerous because it ignores the level of power an employer wields over the domestic worker, but more importantly, it erases a history of violence perpetrated on domestic workers of all racial backgrounds in the privacy of the domestic space. The sexualization of the domestic worker that occurs in the films helps to advance the plot line of the immigrant narrative as the protagonist is fully accepted by her American employer as an equal and her assimilation into the core is guaranteed through the romantic relationship. The romantization of such a relationship stands in stark contrast to the dangerous conditions represented by Sánchez-Scott's *Latina* and Corpi's *Cactus Blood*.

At the beginning of scene two, the opening shot of the domestic agency shows two dummies in the window—dummies meant to signify the kind of worker available for purchase. The stage directions describe the two dummies, “*one in a white uniform holding a pink baby dummy, the white dummy looks very maternal like a Madonna, the second dummy is in a short black uniform with a white frilly apron, holding a feather duster. She looks like a naughty French maid*” (86). The display in the window is recreating the virgin/whore dichotomy and reinforcing the popular type of ideologies that see domestic workers as natural caregivers or as sexually available objects. The window sells the image of the worker as either the Latina nanny or the sexy Latina Lover, stereotypes that hold consequences for the women identified as Latinas.<sup>90</sup>

While she is an actor and not an immigrant, Sarita herself is subjected to the sexualization of domestic workers while waiting outside of the agency. Even though she has taken extra care to dress in a way she believes will not mark her as a domestic worker, standing by the domestic agency and being Latina make her available in the eyes of passing cars.

MALE VOICES: [1<sup>st</sup>] (*off stage*) Oh, oh, oh, (*loud kissing sounds*) baby. [2<sup>nd</sup>] Oh, Señorita, I am in love. [3<sup>rd</sup>] Hot tamale! Hey little beaner. [2<sup>nd</sup>] What a cute little maid! [3<sup>rd</sup>] Hey Señorita! Hey little maid—you sure are pretty. You want to come to my casa? (*SARITA at first looks embarrassed, then bored. She has been through this before and knows how to stop it. She puts a stupid expression on her face, picks her nose and says...*)  
 SARITA: (*Like goofy.*) Yuk, Yuk. (*Loud sounds of car peeling off.*)  
 (86-87)

The sexual harassment of Sarita by the three men in the car is an example of the intersecting ideologies of race, class, and gender that make it acceptable to objectify women of color, especially domestic workers. The fact that she is Latina, and the men's unwillingness to see Sarita as anything other than a domestic worker, makes her accessible to their male gaze, and leads to their propositioning her as if she were a prostitute. By referring to her as a "hot tamale" and "little beaner," the racism inherent in the sexualization of Sarita is made clear, and by calling her "a cute little maid," the men's classism comes through. It makes no difference that Sarita is not employed by any of these men; sexist, classist, and racist ideologies about domestic workers pose a threat to any woman identified as such a worker. The fact that the stage directions make reference to Sarita's experience with this type of treatment points to the widespread attitude the men exhibit. However, unlike the victims she has portrayed on television, Sarita is not a passive victim in real life. She has learned that the only

way to effectively resist such advances is not through open confrontation or pretending it isn't happening, but through the employment of strategies such as dumbing herself down. Such strategies ensure she will not be further harassed by the men, but while comical, Sarita has had to find ways of dealing with the threat present in the harassment.

Corpi's text provides a much more chilling representation of the threat of violence that domestic workers live under. As a female domestic worker, Carlota is vulnerable to more than one form of exploitation.<sup>91</sup> Even though she is only fourteen, Carlota is aware that there is something wrong in the way that Dr. Stephens begins to interact with her,

“‘The cactus is really growing now,’ Dr. Stephens said. ‘And so are you. You’re getting to be a lovely girl.’ I smiled, but I avoided his gaze. I didn’t like the way he had been looking at me lately, the way he would pat my butt, or peck me in the mouth with his wet lips” (50).

Carlota is uncomfortable with Dr. Stephens' physical displays of affection and the ways in which he gazes upon her body. As her employer, Dr. Stephens has power over Carlota, a power that grows exponentially with her undocumented status. Carlota has grown weary of the doctor's attitude towards her, but she has no choice but to put up with it. Being undocumented and underage, she cannot simply quit and find a new job. She is also dependent on the Stephens for her lodging. With no family, Carlota has few options available to her. All she can do is smile and “avoid his gaze” (50). Pretending it isn't happening, however, does not protect Carlota for long, and Dr. Stephens corners her while his family is out of town. As he comes towards her, Carlota is terrified of what is about to happen,

“A chill ran up my spine, but I didn’t move. I wasn’t sure what I should do. First, he put his hot, sweaty palm on my face. Suddenly, he tried to force my lips and teeth open, to stick his tongue into my mouth. I was determined not to let him do it. I turned my face away, my revulsion for him beginning to stir around inside my stomach [...] I began to push him away, but he overpowered me and pushed me down on the ground [...] Fighting him off made my tears rush out. Oblivious to my cries and pleas, he began to suck and bite my lips harder and harder [...] Die. I would rather die. No. Live! Contradictory thoughts crossed my mind, back and forth [...] Nothing was going to stop him, I realized helplessly [...] The burning pain inside me and my rage made me scream. Despair and impotence took over, making me wish for sudden death [...]” (50-51).

Corpi’s description of Carlota’s rape is a brutal representation of the abuse of power that can occur in the relationship between employer and employee. Unlike the films which choose to romanticize the connection between the domestic worker and her male employer, the novel offers a much more critical assessment of that association. As a fourteen-year-old girl with no legal protection, Carlota is in a precarious position that leaves her vulnerable to abuse at her employer’s hands. Corpi’s decision to make Carlota’s employer a doctor is important in that it illustrates the fact that the abuse of domestic workers can occur in any setting with any employer. The doctor is considered an upstanding member of his community, an educated and dedicated family man. As a doctor, one assumes that he would understand the politics of rape, making his crime against Carlota a deliberate abuse of his power as a man. The fact that a man like the doctor could so easily take advantage of a young girl is indicative of the ways in which domestic workers are seen as inferior, or less than human. Being a Mexican immigrant marks Carlota’s brown body as accessible to her white employer. Not only is the doctor in a privileged class position, but as a white man, his racial background ensures him a greater level of power over Carlota. The rape of the



young Carlota is an atrocious experience that strongly challenges the ways in which domestic workers are viewed in many texts and represented as sexually available.

Carlota's narrative makes visible the violence that is perpetrated on the body of the immigrant domestic worker, but at the same time, represents active resistance to that violation. From the moment Dr. Stephens begins to touch Carlota, she resists his advances. Corpi's text refuses to portray Carlota as a passive victim. She isn't physically able to stop the rape, but Carlota does not allow Dr. Stephens position as her employer, or his physical strength to silence her objections. Carlota asserts her voice when she "cries and pleads" in an effort to stop the doctor from raping her (50). Once she realizes she cannot stop him, Carlota's rage and pain make her scream out. The pain Carlota feels goes beyond the physical and manifests itself in a rage against her abuser. She refuses to just lay there after he has violated her, but acts on the fury she feels when he tries to tend to her. Dr. Stephens,

"[...] then tried to clean my legs with a soapy cloth. I was grinding my teeth so hard, my jaw was beginning to hurt. Without saying a word, I pushed him back. Then I slapped him with all my might; I kicked him in the groin and on both his shins repeatedly. I then fell to my knees and started to pray aloud" (51).

She might not have been able to stop the rape, but Carlota uses her wounded body in an effort to physically hurt the doctor. Carlota also refuses to allow the doctor to wash off the visible evidence of his attack, making it impossible for him to wash away his crime. By praying out loud, Carlota is further condemning Dr. Stephens and turning to a higher power for justice.

After being attacked, Carlota doesn't have many options. As an undocumented worker, she has no legal recourse open to her. By going to the police and accusing Dr.

Stephens, Carlota would end up being deported. Dr. Stephens is considered a model citizen, and as a brown woman and a non-citizen, Carlota's accusations would instantly be dismissed and the victim would become the criminal. She is not, however, willing to ignore the rape that has occurred and vows to find a way to get revenge. As a way of making sure he remembers what he has done, Carlota sneaks back into the house,

“In his drunken stupor, the doctor wasn't aware I had reentered the house. He didn't hear me take the sharp shears in one of the kitchen drawers or walk up to his bed. He didn't even stir when I deposited next to him on the mattress the sheet of paper on which I had written with Mrs. Stephens's lipstick, 'WATCH YOUR BACK, ALWAYS.' He didn't move when the cloth and the paper ripped as the scissors pierced and cut through the mattress, a finger's width from his left flank” (53).

The message she leaves on the mattress next to him is intended to act as a warning for Dr. Stephens, but is more importantly aimed at insuring that he does not forget what he has done. The warning is supposed to act as a constant reminder of his actions and the fact that Carlota plans on making him pay. In this way, Carlota is making certain that the rape haunts the doctor and not just her. She uses Mrs. Stephens' lipstick, a symbol of feminine beauty and allure, to write her message to the doctor. By stabbing the message with the shears into the mattress, Carlota is physically embodying her violation. In performing this gesture while he sleeps, Carlota makes Dr. Stephens aware of the fact that while he was able to overpower her, he will have moments of vulnerability when he will be powerless. Carlota attempts to take back some of the power that was so brutally taken from her, but even after trying to assert herself, she acknowledges the way the rape has changed her, “I would be fifteen in two more days,

but I felt a thousand years old. I was the violated sister, the dark face of the moon. But I would regather myself, I swore, and some day I would get my re-(...)-venge” (53). Her refusal to be just a victim is apparent in the way in which she believes she will be able to grow strong again and avenge her crime. Being a young undocumented worker, Carlota knows that justice is something she will have to seek herself. Unfortunately, Carlota is never able to achieve her revenge.

Leaving the only home she has had since immigrating, Carlota walks many miles through pesticide infested fields to get to her friend Josie Baldorama. As a rape victim, Carlota attempted to erase the physical imprint of Dr. Stephens off her body by viciously scrubbing herself and washing away any outside evidence of the rape. At the same time, she made her skin extra sensitive, allowing the pesticides to more easily enter her body. María Baldorama recalls that,

“After the rape, Carlota was very sick for days on end. At dawn, the day after the rape, Josie brought her to me, vomiting, convulsing, screaming. Her skin was red, partly because she had scrubbed herself so hard, but there was more. Carlota didn’t know it then, but the fields she went through on her way to Josie’s house had been sprayed with the *Devil’s blood*” (85).

Carlota’s body becomes contaminated not only through the rape, but through the poisons used in the fields. Her body ends up embodying the abuse of both the domestic worker and the migrant worker who is forced to work in venomous fields. Not only does Carlota become the victim of rape and pesticide poisoning, she also comes under scrutiny when Dr. Stephens dies the day after the rape,

“Two Fresno homicide detectives came snooping around, asking us questions about Carlota [...] But a few days later, the medical examiner and Dr. Stephens’s own doctor said it was a heart attack. By that time, the immigration officials had been called in, and they were also looking

for Carlota. Mrs. Stephens herself came to Josie's house the day after her husband died [...] she wanted to talk with Carlota. Mrs. Stephens didn't say how she had found out about what had happened [...] Mrs. Stephens told Josie that she wanted to beg Carlota not to tell anyone about the rape, for her daughters' sake [...] Ironically, that day was Carlota's fifteenth birthday" (85).

All of a sudden, Carlota goes from being a victim to a possible murderer. Even after the death of Dr. Stephens is attributed to his weak heart, Carlota is still wanted by the authorities for being undocumented. In the eyes of the law, she is the criminal, not the victim. Mrs. Stephens, who knew about the rape and had used Carlota for her labor, makes no attempt to help Carlota, but instead wants her to remain silent about the rape in order to protect the Stephens' daughters. It makes no difference to her that no one protected Carlota from her husband. As an undocumented worker, Carlota would have no access to justice for her rape, but her immigration status also denied her the medical care she needed,

"Josie wanted to take her to a hospital, but Carlota had no papers; she had come into the country illegally. She might have been charged with causing the doctor's death. Josie said, and she could go to jail before being sent back to Mexico" (87).

Because of the doctor's violent attack, Carlota is sentenced to a life of pain and suffering. Even though Carlota goes on to become a vocal advocate for the banning of pesticide spraying in the fields, she is never able to get well herself and must live with the consequences of the rape. Corpi's text does not allow romantic narratives of domestic workers who fall in love with their employers to stand unchallenged. Through Carlota's story, the text makes visible the dangers that exist in the domestic worker's line of work and the abuse of power that is a lived reality for many. The very different representation of the sexualization of the domestic worker in *Latina* and

*Cactus Blood* reject the romance plot popular in the traditional immigrant narrative portrayed in the films. The two texts make clear the role that intersectionality plays in the positionality of immigrant domestic workers and refuse to provide experiences in the narrative that can be easily reconciled in the path towards resolution.

### **No Happy Ending**

The ideology of the American Dream and its connection to the immigrant story dictates that the narratives provide a resolution that perpetuates the myth of success. For Richard in *Pocho*, his rejection of his family and his decision to enlist in the Navy ensure his participation in the nation through his military service. *Barrio Boy's* Ernesto looks forward to the education ahead of him and the book ends on a positive note. Both of the films also end with the prerequisite happy ending, with Nisa and Jason winning the dance contest and Cristina applying for college admission. The neat and tidy ending of the films is rejected in the endings provided by the cultural productions by writers of color. In Corpi's *Cactus Blood*, Carlota is forced to live a life riddled with illness. While the detective story ends with the uncovering of the mystery and the resolution of the crime, the text rejects the convention of the happy ending. Carlota's experiences in the contact phase of the immigrant narrative have been so dramatic that they are, in the end, insurmountable. In the end, Carlota must return to her country of origin, the "home" she hasn't seen for most of her adult life, to die in peace. The narrative rejects the Old World/New World binary and instead reasserts the connection between the core and the periphery that the immigrant domestic worker has maintained through her many years in the U.S.

The text that most directly challenges the narrative containment of the

immigrant story convention is *Latina*. In part, the play becomes the story of Sarita's burgeoning solidarity with her fellow Latinas, and her confrontation with one of the employers, Mrs. Camden, brings to the forefront the types of attitudes many employers have towards women of color domestic workers, and the resistance of domestic workers to being objectified. When Lola does not show up for work and refuses to return to Mrs. Camden's home, Sarita must pacify Mrs. Camden the way she pacifies and caters to all of the other clients. Mrs. Camden's sense of entitlement makes her a force to be reckoned with and her attitude towards Lola and the women push Sarita to the edge. In her entrance on stage, the first thing she says is, "Well, I see my maid is here, Sara" (137). She refers to Lola not by her name, but as a possession, claiming ownership over her. Lola defies such an identification, and asserts, "I am not your maid," making it clear that she is not a thing to be owned (137). Mrs. Camden, of course, is infuriated to be contradicted and goes on to berate Lola and the other women of the agency.

MRS. CAMDEN: Oh, you people. What you are doing is criminal and unethical and I'm not about to put up with it [...] You people don't seem to understand that when a busy person pays for competent, reliable help, they expect a competent, reliable person, comprende? [...] Ah, let me tell you something . . . (*Looking at everyone.*) You people think you are so downtrodden. Well, you bring it all on yourselves. Most of you know nothing about running a modern house. The repair bills I've had to pay for all the appliances you people have broken would support your families in Mexico. Most of you can't even take a simple phone message . . . no sense of responsibility. (138)

Mrs. Camden's disdain for Lola and the other women is evidenced by the clear distinction she draws between herself and them, constantly referring to the women as "you people." Mrs. Camden's words situate the women as ignorant and inferior, not

living up to their work responsibilities. Her classist and racist rhetoric emphasizes her status and the level of power she has in making such claims. Her dialogue also makes reference to the idea that an employer's purchasing power extends to the actual person performing the labor. Most importantly, Mrs. Camden represents a racist attitude towards women like Lola, an attitude characterized by a refusal to acknowledge the humanity and individuality of the immigrant domestic worker.

Mrs. Camden makes several prejudiced assumptions that justify her treatment of domestic workers. She claims that the reason those she refers to as "you people" are "downtrodden" is because of their own incompetence. By projecting blame on the domestic worker, Mrs. Camden, like Mrs. Homes, rationalizes taking advantage of her employee. In this way, she is not responsible for any kind of treatment of Lola that might be perceived as abusive or exploitative. Like many Americans that assume all Latino immigrants are Mexican, Mrs. Camden cares so little about who Lola is, she takes for granted that Lola and all of the other women at the agency are from Mexico. In her mind, there is no distinction between Latina immigrants, and their history before immigrating is not important. Again, the idea that there is little of value in their home countries is emphasized by her assumption that the money she has spent on repairing appliances is more than enough to support their families. This assumption also rationalizes paying immigrant domestic workers less because they don't need as much money as native-born women raising families in the U.S. Unlike Alma, who silently stood by when Mrs. Homes insulted her, Lola is not willing to passively stand by and be offended by Mrs. Camden.

In the play, Lola is represented as a strong, intelligent immigrant woman who

works as a domestic worker because she needs to support her family. Unlike popular representations that represent domestic workers as happy domestics who never complain, Lola is outspoken and opinionated. Her refusal to put up with poor treatment stands in stark contrast with the image of the passive Latina domestic. The fact that Lola is willing to quit a job necessary for the economic survival of her family illustrates the point that while her cleaning services are for sale she, as an individual, is not. Mrs. Camden however is furious that Lola has quit, “That maid (*Pointing to LOLA.*) with no previous warning, quit. It is customary to give two weeks notice. She didn’t even call” (138). Again, she refers to Lola as “that maid,” never using her name. Not only is she angry that Lola has quit, she is infuriated by what she sees as lack of courtesy on Lola’s part. By not giving her two weeks notice, Lola has further inconvenienced Mrs. Camden. While Mrs. Camden does not have the common courtesy to refer to Lola by her name, she does expect Lola to exhibit what she believes is a certain level of consideration for her own needs as an employer. Lola, however, refuses to treat Mrs. Camden with a level of respect she herself has been denied. She strongly responds to Mrs. Camden’s claim of bad manners by pointing to Mrs. Camden’s inhumane treatment, “You look at me like I’m a machine. So I act like machine. Machine don’t give notice” (138). She uses Mrs. Camden’s treatment of her against her employer and, at the same time, makes clear that Mrs. Camden does not treat her like a human being.

The attitude of Mrs. Camden towards Lola is representative of a certain type of ideology that places the employer of the domestic worker in the role of benevolent patron. She sees herself as doing Lola a favor by employing her and providing her



with what she believes are tokens of her generosity.<sup>92</sup> As a middle class woman who is interested in keeping her image of munificence intact, she attempts to prove her generosity to the women of the agency.

MRS. CAMDEN: Oh, we treated you very well, you took advantage of it. (*Addressing all women, even SARITA on the phone.*) Understand, please, that she had her own room and bath with her own T.V. It is a very lovely room. I am sure she has never seen anything like it before in Mexico. She had nothing, so out of the goodness of my heart I bought her some nice uniforms. She eats the same food we eat. I gave her the advantages and protection of my home and this is the way she thanks us? (138)

Mrs. Camden truly believes that by providing Lola with her own room and a television, she has fulfilled her obligations as a good employer. Again, she makes racist assumptions about the kind of residence Lola has had in the past, claiming that it was much nicer than anything Lola had before leaving Mexico—even though Lola is not Mexican. Somehow by eating the same food the family eats, Mrs. Camden assumes that Lola should be content and feel well treated. Lola, however, refuses to acquiesce to Mrs. Camden's idea of benevolence.

Why, no one in your house call me by my name. I hear you, your husband, the children, all of you speak about me as your Mexican maid. Always you say, "Ask the maid, tell the maid." Each day you make me more nobody, more dead. You put me in nice white uniform so I won't offend your good taste. You take away my name, my country. You don't want a person, you want a machine. My name is Lola. I am from Guatemala. (138)

Lola strongly asserts her individuality and her identity and adamantly resists the process that turns a working person into a machine. She refuses to be referred to simply as "the maid" and emphasizes the fact that she is not from Mexico, but from Guatemala. Lola strongly vocalizes the stripping away of identity that takes place

when one is seen as just a domestic worker. She also confronts Mrs. Camden's claim that the uniform was a favor to Lola. Lola is a perceptive individual who is more than aware of what it means to be forced to wear a uniform, and the class distinction that Mrs. Camden is attempting to cement by having Lola take off her own clothes.<sup>93</sup>

Lola's words are a powerful testimony to the ways that domestic labor can slowly rob an individual of an identity and make them feel dead, like a nobody. She is invisible to the family as a human being and exists in their mind only as the Mexican maid.

The constant erasing of her identity—her name, her country of origin—have a deep psychological impact on Lola and she refuses to become completely invisible. More importantly though, by ignoring the fact that Lola is from Guatemala, it becomes easy for employers like Mrs. Camden to ignore the violence that is occurring in Central America during this period and the role the U.S. government plays in that mass violence.<sup>94</sup>

Living in the U.S. and being a part of the bourgeoisie, Mrs. Camden can either continue to ignore or deny the history that Lola represents. Confronted with Lola's reasons for quitting, Mrs. Camden persists in her refusal to acknowledge Lola's humanity and responds, "She is an illegal. She is an alien"(139). Even after Lola's assertion of her identity, Mrs. Camden rejects the idea of Lola as an individual. She reverts to emphasizing her immigration status and derogatorily refers to her as an "alien," a word that completely strips Lola of her humanity.<sup>95</sup> By emphasizing her home country, however, the play makes visible the different migration patterns that are taking place in the U.S. during the late 70s and early 80s. Lola rejects the identification label of "alien" and, as a result, her character comes to embody the

displaced immigrant Latina worker. Lola, however, is not the only one who stands up to Mrs. Camden, Sarita is no longer able to stand silently by as Lola is insulted.

Lola's refusal to endure poor treatment from her employer pushes Sarita to confront her complacency and her own role in the exploitation of the women. Sarita finally understands that by helping to place the women in various domestic jobs with no regard to the conditions the women will be working under makes her just as guilty as Felix in taking advantage of the women. She begins to see that forcing the women to change who they are in order to accommodate to the needs of their employers is a way of selling them out. Faced with Mrs. Camden's racist and classist insults to Lola and the women of the agency forces Sarita to make a stand and choose between solidarity with the women or acquiescence to employers like Mrs. Camden. When she refuses to place anyone else in Mrs. Camden's household, Mrs. Camden threatens Sarita, "You'll hear from my lawyers. You, whatever you are, and your illegal aliens" (139). Mrs. Camden asserts her economic and political power when she is refused a new employee to mistreat. She again makes reference to the women's undocumented status, and while Sarita is not an immigrant, Mrs. Camden does not acknowledge Sarita's identity as an American citizen. Mrs. Camden refers to Sarita as "whatever you are" illustrating her discomfort in being unable to place Sarita as either an undocumented immigrant or a citizen, so she emphasizes Sarita's "otherness" and makes it clear that Sarita is not like her, a white citizen. Even though Sarita is a second generation American citizen, her race has physically marked her and prevented her from being seen as an "American."

The interactions that Sarita has had with various employers has placed her in a

position where she is able to understand the motivation behind the hiring of undocumented workers. Sarita is a smart woman who is more than capable of comprehending the economic impetus that brings middle class white women to the domestic agency. She confronts Mrs. Camden with the reality that the reason she hires undocumented workers is because she can pay them less, “Oh, oh, you! You, you. All my life, you, you hypocrite! You talk ‘legal,’ you hired her because you didn’t want to pay the salary a legal person gets” (139). The anger she feels towards women like Mrs. Camden is evidenced by the way she repeats herself several times, almost at a loss for words to describe the hypocrisy of Mrs. Camden. Employers like Mrs. Camden pride themselves on the idea of being law abiding citizens, productive members of society. Sarita’s words point to the ways that these employers have no problem breaking the law when it means benefiting from it, even at the expense of another human being. By circumventing immigration laws, women like Mrs. Camden can hire labor cheaply. The hiring of an undocumented domestic worker gives employers even more power because they can use the threat of deportation to expand their control over their employees. Mrs. Camden alludes to this power when she states “if I wanted to, I could call immigration so fast it would...” (139). Mrs. Camden never finishes her threat and Sarita questions Mrs. Camden’s intentions because she knows that Mrs. Camden would not want to risk exposing herself as someone who would hire an undocumented worker—it would damage her reputation as benevolent law-abiding citizen.

Mrs. Camden is a privileged middle class white woman whose sense of entitlement prevents her from examining her behavior, and her economic position

exempts her from having to acknowledge any wrongdoing. When confronted with the reality of hiring a domestic worker for the economic reasons, she refuses to acknowledge the truth of Sarita's statement about paying undocumented workers less, she retorts, "Why should I? My taxes support your people's welfare" (139). Mrs. Camden takes no responsibility for her actions and instead chooses to espouse a racist rhetoric that situates all immigrant people as welfare recipients. She again connects Sarita to immigrant workers, ignoring the differences that exist within the Latino community. Sarita, however, refuses to validate her racist rhetoric,

SARITA: You! Your support? No! You depend! You're cheap, you're greedy. You want their labor, their cheap abundant labor. You don't care about the "legalities," sí, your "legalities," "chinga tus legalities." If you did care, you wouldn't be here whining for me to get you a maid.

MRS. CAMDEN: Whining? This person is crazy. I don't deal with your kind. Mr. Sánchez? Mr. Sánchez! (139)

Sarita's dialogue makes it clear that employers like Mrs. Camden are dependent on the labor of domestic women, inverting a model of dependency that attempts to place domestic workers as dependent on their employers. While it is true that domestic workers depend on the employer for employment, the employer is as reliant, if not more so, on the domestic worker to perform labor they are unwilling to perform themselves. The fact that Mrs. Camden has returned to the agency and will not settle for a refund illustrates the dependence that exists in the employer/employee relationship and the tension that this reliance places on Mrs. Camden. Instead of acknowledging the fact that she needs the agency to help find someone to work in her home, she continues to belittle Sarita. In order to suppress or gloss over her own lack of power in attempting to bully Sarita into complying with her demands, she insults

Sarita's mental state and refuses to deal with what she refers to as "your kind" (139). The use of "your kind" could be Mrs. Camden's racist attempt to again draw attention to Sarita's "otherness," but it might also be a reference to someone who doesn't automatically cow down to her demands, someone she clearly sees as an inferior. In Mrs. Camden's mind, the refusal to acknowledge her superiority would make Sarita crazy. While Sarita's refusal to give in to her demands would be a good lesson, it gets undermined by Félix's acquiescence.

As owner of the domestic agency, Félix is in a position where he can support or undermine the stance Sarita has taken. As the ultimate capitalist, however, Félix prefers to protect his financial interests by siding with the abusive client, "Do not worry, Mrs. Camden, I will take care of this matter myself. I will personally deliver to your home a fresh maid [...] It's been a pleasure serving you" (140). Félix is represented as the ultimate *vendido*, who literally puts the women of his community up for sale on the market. Félix's actions help to strengthen the ideology that domestic workers are commodities available for purchase. He speaks about the women as one would a piece of fruit or meat to be consumed, promising to deliver a "fresh" maid to Mrs. Camden. Félix's attitude not only pacifies Mrs. Camden, but works to endorse her racist and classist treatment of Lola and other immigrant women.

Sarita's refusal to allow the verbal abuse of Lola and her repudiation of the exploitation of domestic workers point to her understanding and embracing the commonalities that exist between her and her fellow Latinas. In a traditional narrative, Sarita's new-found consciousness would provide for a happy ending. Her championing of the women would be seen as the triumph of the "little guy" against the

rich and greedy bully, as we see in *The Forbidden Dance*. In reality, however, the immigration status of the women and their lack of economic and political power do not make a happy ending possible. After the altercation with Mrs. Camden, Lola embraces Sarita and acknowledges the importance of what she has done, “Sarita, I only wanted you to stand up for us, not to kill the woman. Andale, un abrazo. [...] Ahora, sí, eres una Latina completamente Latina” (140). Right after the women assert themselves and Sarita is accepted as one of them, the INS performs a raid on the agency. The women are rounded up and, we assume, deported.

The conclusion of the play reveals the very precarious position under which undocumented immigrant women live. As strong as Lola might be in the face of exploitation, she has no power in dealing with the migra, and she becomes just another immigrant expelled from the country. The only women spared are Sarita and Margarita, La Cubana. Don Félix attempts to calm Margarita down in order to ensure she remain with the agency,

Don't worry honey. They can't touch you. You're free to go and my lawyer says they can't hold me. I didn't break the law. I didn't bring them up here [...] Honey, you got a green card. You got no problems [...] They'll all be back. They just put them on the bus and drop them on the other side. When they get the money, they'll be back. You'll see. [...] (SARITA walks over and sits on the bus bench. Flute music, helicopter lights and sounds, barbed wire fence as we see creeping towards the fence another new girl and her coyote.)

As someone who is working for the system that seeks to exploit these women, Félix has the least to lose. He is secure in his immigration status, and his economic position prevents him from being punished for placing undocumented workers. Once the INS raid the agency, Felix protects himself by claiming that he didn't break the law

because he didn't "bring them up here," and divests himself of any further responsibility towards the women. He isn't held accountable for his exploitation of the women, pointing to the ways that only the immigrant worker is criminalized. Félix's conversation with Margarita also works to bring the narrative full circle. Sarita ends up on the bus bench, while the stage directions point to the arrival of a new girl. The cycle begins to repeat itself. Félix is aware that the women will return when they have raised the money for the trip. Even though the play concludes with a realistically grim ending, the narrative suggests that the INS will not be successful in keeping immigrants out and it points to the possibility of building solidarity between different Latino communities, regardless of immigration status. This possibility, however, does not provide the ideological closure on which the resolution of the immigrant narrative is predicated. Instead, the audience is left to grapple with the implications of the unhappy ending of the play.

### **Domestic Labor Outside of the Home**

I end this chapter with another immigrant narrative that does not easily fit into the form of the traditional genre. Like poetry, spoken word texts are concise and compact. They tell a story in a few short lines, giving us some basics, but also leaving gaps for our own imagination to fill. Less accessible than poetry, spoken word texts are often available only to those who attend performances. While some spoken word performers publish their texts, the only way to fully understand the impact of the words is to hear them. In 1991, one year after the theatrical release of *The Forbidden Dance*, Marisela Norte, known as the "Poet Laureate of Boyle Heights," released a CD spoken word collection *Norte/word* that incorporates a collage of stories based on her



reflections and observations riding the public transportation system in L.A.<sup>96</sup> One of her performance pieces, “Act of the Faithless” discusses the life of Norte’s aunt, a worker employed by an El Paso Holiday Inn. Unlike the domestic workers represented in the previous texts, Norte’s aunt has a work permit that allows her to cross the border between El Paso, Texas, and Juárez, Mexico. Norte’s narrative makes the connection between the long history of immigrant domestic labor in El Paso, and the growing number of hotels who are now dependent on immigrant workers. In the piece, the aunt has brought a young Norte to the worksite with her, and this experience gives Norte an idea of the kind of life her aunt leads as a housekeeping worker.

One popular ideology regarding the crossing of the border situates immigrants as migrating to the U.S. for better lives. While the ideology of the American Dream plays an important role in the conventions of the immigrant narrative, Norte’s spoken word piece challenges the assumption that crossing the border means social mobility. In discussing her aunt, Norte makes the statement, “El Paso, mal paso que das al cruzar la frontera.” The play on words is used to signify the idea that crossing into El Paso, into the U.S. is a bad move. There is no glorification of crossing the border and no romantic illusions of what awaits her aunt on the other side. In El Paso, the aunt is reduced to an invisible worker, one of many, who cleans up after tourists in a hotel. The hotel that employs her becomes a symbol of the concrete class differences that exist between the housekeeping worker and the individuals who enjoy the fruit of her labors. She cleans rooms she herself will never have access to because she lacks the capital, like the honeymoon suite she daily cleans knowing that she and El Cura (Norte’s uncle) will never be able to use it. Twenty stories up, she cleans windows

that overlook a city, El Paso, that does not claim her as one of its own. When she takes Norte up to the pool area, she tells her,

“If there is no one up there, you can take your shoes off and put your feet in the water.” [...] she whispers, “But if someone’s up there, I can’t let you do that. They’ll know that you are not from here. Que no eres de aqui mija.”

The aunt’s words to Norte help reinforce the reality of the alienation that occurs between the worker and the results of her labor. It also works to explain the ways in which race is intimately connected to the aunt’s status as a worker. As women of color, Norte and her aunt are visibly excluded from the amenities of the hotel, and their skin color identifies them as “other.” Even though Norte is from L.A., her status as “other” and non-paying guest excludes her from belonging there.<sup>97</sup>

Norte’s narrative also observes the ways in which the housekeeping worker is treated when her presence is acknowledged. While cleaning the area around the pool, Norte and her aunt come across a couple that has fallen asleep by the pool. Norte looks at the couple and thinks the man looks dead. The man, however, comes awake and sees Norte’s aunt cleaning up.

“Excuse me, uh Señorita. Can you come here por favor?” [...] He waves an empty glass at her [...] Señorita, the name stings like the sun. My aunt smiles at him and cusses him out real good in Spanish under her breath. She puts the sunglasses on and leads me back to the elevator [...] The man in the chair is still trying to get her attention. “Maria, uh Maria?” Only I can’t hear it anymore. Only his lips are moving. I tug on her arm, I point at the man now gone silent.

The tourist assumes that because she is hired by the hotel as a housekeeper, Norte’s aunt is there to serve him. While he may not know who she is, he assumes she only speaks Spanish and attempts to get her attention through the few Spanish phrases he

knows. The way he shakes his glass at her, though, makes clear that he expects her to refill his glass. The tourist sees her only as a maid, a “Señorita,” or worse, as a “Maria” because he views all domestic workers as the same. By hailing her as a “Maria,” the tourist reduces Norte’s aunt to a generic stereotype, a maid named Maria, someone who is not an individual, but just a worker there to serve him.<sup>98</sup> The tourist’s treatment of the aunt suggests that immigrant workers are invisible laborers who only become visible when their services are needed. Norte recognizes the offensiveness of the way the man addresses her aunt, as she recalls how the “name stings like the sun.” Her aunt, however, refuses to be defined as just another “Maria.”

Norte’s aunt understands that as an employee of the hotel, she cannot openly react to the rudeness of the tourist. She masks her real feelings behind a smile, but under her breath, cusses him. Norte hears her aunt telling the tourist off “real good” in Spanish, using his inability to speak Spanish to her advantage. By smiling at him, she pretends to acknowledge his superior position, but by placing the sunglasses on her face and walking away, Norte’s aunt refuses to acknowledge his request. Through her disregard of the tourist’s request, she resists not only labor exploitation, but also the identification of the “Maria” stereotype. In refusing to serve him, she rejects the role of the submissive maid the tourist wants her to play, and asserts her individuality. She also provides a model of resistance for the young Norte to remember.

The importance in Norte’s text is the way it represents immigrant domestic labor outside of the traditional sphere of the home. The labor taking place in the performance piece is situated in the much more global context of hotels which cater to a tourist clientele. The major employers of immigrant domestic workers are no longer

just middle-class families or the upper-class white women represented in Mora's poems or Sánchez-Scott's play, but now include transnational hotel chains, like the Holiday Inn. Norte's text is making reference to what Sassen sees as the new phenomena of migration to global cities. Sassen argues that,

The technological transformation of the work process, the shift of manufacturing to less-developed areas domestically and abroad, in part made possible by the technological transformation of the work process, and the ascendance of the financial sector in management, have all contributed to the consolidation of a new kind of economic center—the global city from where the world economy is managed and serviced.  
(*The Mobility*, 127)

The global city that Sassen sees becoming a major trend has certain labor needs. Not only is there a need for financial managers and other high-income/professional workers, but also for low-income workers to provide services for the inhabitants of these global cities. Hotels and office buildings that cater to these economic centers are now heavily relying on immigrant labor for services, including domestic workers. The labor of domestic workers is no longer just occurring in the privacy of the domestic sphere of the home, but has now become a more visible component of international business and trade. The lives of these workers, however, continue to exist outside of the traditional narrative form of the immigrant story. By rewriting the story of domestic labor and migrating workers, Norte forces her audience to envision a different kind of reality that does not end with the myth of success, but poses a challenge to that myth instead. Her text also works to embody the connection that links the core and the periphery and the working women who regularly negotiate the space between them. The next chapter continues the discussion of domestic labor in the global space of the hotel industry, while paying attention to how im/migration

from the Caribbean functions in the employing of domestic workers.

## Chapter Three

### **“Above All...Strive to be Invisible.” From the Suburbs to the Hotel: Representations of Domestic Labor in the Northeast U.S.**

My analysis of the representation of domestic work, labor, and immigration in the previous chapters has been geographically concentrated in the Southwest. In order to provide a wider context for the project, I now turn my attention to the Northeast part of the U.S. While important differences exist between the conditions of labor and immigration in the two areas, there are similarities that have to be emphasized in an effort to illustrate that the subject position created by the intersection of gender, race, immigration, and labor is not a process that exists solely in the Southwest. For example, the image of undocumented immigration is popularly represented as the crossing of the U.S./Mexico border when, in fact, there are many communities of undocumented immigrants in the Northeast from various places in the Americas. While immigrants from the Caribbean might be from a geographical location that often gets collapsed into a single place, a chain of islands, the immigration status of im/migrants from the area include both documented and undocumented. Furthermore, the Northeast is an important area for analysis because of the role that it has played in the traditional immigrant narrative. The location of Ellis Island and the ideologies that surround it are clearly grounded in the Northeast where the Statue of Liberty stands as a visual reminder of the ideology of the U.S. as the “promised land.” The Northeast is also popularly considered to be the place where the first “immigrants” to the new world arrived. As such, it remains an important point of focus in any project that

attempts to look at immigration in the U.S. through a comparative framework.

The representation of maids extends beyond the home to other sites, like the hotel industry, where women perform housekeeping tasks in a commercial context, as I will explore through a reading of *Maid in Manhattan* and Esmeralda Santiago's *América's Dream*.<sup>99</sup> These two texts provide varying portrayals of housekeeping work in the public space of a hotel. I will also read Santiago's novel alongside Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Bharati Mukherjee's short story "Jasmine" to compare the ways in which these different texts represent the labor of maids and immigration in the U.S. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the Hollywood film configures housekeeping labor much like previously analyzed films about domestic workers in the Southwest and that the written texts by Santiago, Kincaid, and Mukherjee provide not only more complex representations of housekeeping and domestic labor, but immigration stories in the Northeast that challenge the hegemonic immigrant narrative.

In the previous chapter, the analysis of Marisela Norte's "Act of the Faithless" provided an opportunity to briefly discuss the extension of domestic labor into the public space of the hotel industry. This chapter continues that discussion through a reading of texts that represent the work of im/migrant hotel housekeepers. In popular ideologies of women and labor, the work performed in the home is often situated as "women's work," not "real" labor, and naturalized as a simple extension of the role of women as keepers of the home. As such, the labor that takes place in the domestic space of the home is highly devalued. Because of the ways in which domestic labor has been constructed as simple, or unimportant, women are expected to perform it as part of their jobs as wives, mothers, sisters, etc. These ideas affect domestic workers,

because when hired to perform such labor, women are paid wages that are not commensurate with the level of physical work involved. The ideologies of women and work in the home are not contained to the private sphere, but also play a role in the popular ideologies regarding the labor of housekeepers in the public sphere—the hotel industry. Women who are hired as housekeepers are seen as performing labor that extends the work of the home into the larger space of the hotel. Like domestic workers, they clean bathrooms, make beds, wash linens, vacuum rugs, clean up after guests, etc. Overall, they ensure that the hotel patron is made comfortable in his/her (temporary) residence. While it would be easy to assume that because housekeepers are no longer working in the private space of the home they would be safe from exploitation because they, and their labor, are more visible, such is not always the case.<sup>100</sup> The following texts illustrate that the housekeeping staff of hotels is many times rendered invisible or often subjected to racist, sexist, and xenophobic treatment by the hotel guests they serve.

### **Brincando El Charco<sup>101</sup>—Migration from Puerto Rico**

At first glance, it would seem like a difficult task to employ the lens of the immigrant narrative when analyzing *América's Dream* and *Maid in Manhattan*. After all, both of the protagonists of the texts are Puerto Rican or of Puerto Rican descent and have American citizenship.<sup>102</sup> I am in no way attempting to collapse the differences between Latina/o populations in the U.S. in trying to make such an argument. Instead, I am interested in looking at the similarities and differences that exist between representations of domestic labor and housekeeping in the Southwest—which is for the most part focused on Mexican and Latin American immigration—and



immigrant and migrant domestic work in the Northeast—including Puerto Rican and Trinidadian im/migration. What similarities do they share? What role does citizenship play in the stories? Most importantly, is it possible to read migrant narratives through the lens of the immigrant narrative? This chapter argues that it is definitely possible, especially when dealing with the Puerto Rican Latina's racialized body and her conditional position as citizen of the nation. The Puerto Rican migrant must confront the same racist and sexist U.S. society encountered by her immigrant sisters from Mexico and Latin America. While her citizenship provides a certain level of protection from unfair labor practices and the fear of deportation, it does not make her immune to the nation's racial hierarchy that places women of color at the bottom of the social ladder.<sup>103</sup> The cultural differences between the Puerto Rican community and the mainstream Anglo population also mark the Puerto Rican migrant as "other" or "outsider."

In her text, *Puerto Ricans in the Unites States*, María Pérez y González makes the argument that in defining the movements of Puerto Ricans to and within the U.S., both the terms "migrant" and "immigrant" apply because while they might have U.S. citizenship which allows them to move freely between the island and the mainland, the island is not an incorporated part of the U.S. For Pérez y González,

Puerto Ricans who have relocated to the Unites States since the Spanish-American War in 1898 to the present time, can be considered immigrants because they are relocating from one country to another; although Puerto Rico is not a sovereign nation, that does not negate the fact that it is a country. (33-34)

While some might question labeling Puerto Rico as a "country," the fact that it is a colony does allow for a consideration of an ambivalent status for the relocated Puerto

Rican. The im/migration of a Puerto Rican individual is very different than the migration of someone from one state to another. While a person who moves from a dynamic urban space in Southern California would experience a certain level of culture shock in moving to a small New England town, the language and overall customs remain basically the same. Puerto Ricans who im/migrate to the U.S. mainland encounter a much more pronounced sense of culture shock. Even though Puerto Ricans are constructed as citizens, the Puerto Rican culture—including its food and traditions—is certainly different. In Puerto Rico, Spanish remains the island's predominant language, marking another important difference between a state-to-state migration and the im/migration between Puerto Rico and the mainland U.S.

The posited dual position of Puerto Ricans as both immigrants and migrants allows for the reading of Puerto Rican narratives of migration through the lens of the immigrant narrative. In fact, several stories of migration by Puerto Rican authors follow the structure of the traditional immigration narratives. For example, Esmeralda Santiago's first book, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, follows the paradigm of the more hegemonic stories found in *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy*. Even though Santiago plays closer attention to the issue of gender, the protagonist moves from being a subject of the periphery to a full citizen of the nation through education, as occurs in Galarza's and Villarreal's texts. While it would be interesting to focus on additional similarities and differences between migrant narratives like Santiago's text and hegemonic narratives of immigration from the Southwest, in this chapter I am more concerned with looking at the ways in which texts exploring Latina and Caribbean migration and immigration differ from narratives of success and assimilation that are popular in the

traditional story of immigration. Santiago's *América's Dream* especially offers a rich text for analysis because of the movement of her protagonist from Puerto Rico to New York, and between the laboring spaces of the home and the hotel. Wang's film and Santiago's novel are both narratives of migration, but they offer different representations of what it means to be a housekeeping worker in the hotel industry.

In the film, *Maid in Manhattan*, director Wayne Wang updates the classic Cinderella story to provide audiences with a contemporary fairy tale that casts Jennifer Lopez as the modern day rags-to-riches heroine.<sup>104</sup> Released in 2002, the story revolves around Marisa Ventura, played by Lopez, a single mother who works as a maid at The Beresford, an upper echelon hotel in Manhattan, in order to provide for her son Ty. The hotel is important not only as a space of labor, but also because it is a place where Marisa, a woman from the Bronx, has the opportunity to interact with wealthy individuals. Through her position at the hotel, Marissa comes in contact, and eventually falls in love with Chris Marshall, an idealistic politician played by Ralph Finnes. The film revolves around the love story between Marisa and Chris, but also includes the storyline of Marisa's ambition to step into a management position at the hotel.<sup>105</sup>

Initially, it may seem like a stretch to read Wang's film as a narrative of im/migration. After all, the story's protagonist is not an im/migrant subject. Marisa has been born and raised in the Bronx and is represented as a savvy New Yorker. I argue, however, that the film can still be read through the lens of the hegemonic narrative, of the immigrant's social mobility, because it represents the story of assimilation and success envisioned as a possibility for an immigrant's children. In

the traditional immigrant story, it is often the second generation, rather than the immigrant first generation, that is represented as able to achieve success through the hard work of the parents. In the traditional immigrant narrative paradigm, the first generation immigrant is often the one who has had to negotiate the old world and the new world, a challenge not necessarily encountered by the children of the immigrant subject. The simple resolution of the hegemonic narrative in suggesting the immigrant subject's ability to assimilate sets the groundwork for the success of the next generation, and further implies that the second generation's firm foothold in the nation is guaranteed. In Wang's film, Marisa comes to embody the success of the second generation. Not only is she fully assimilated, but the film's emphasis on Ty's schooling and Marisa's investment in his intellectual growth continues the narrative of success through hard work and education.

The casting of Jennifer Lopez as the protagonist in the film further emphasizes the importance of reading the narrative through the lens of the hegemonic immigrant story. As a visual text, there is a strong significance in who visually represents the characters of the story on the screen. Unlike books, where the reader can create an image of the protagonist, films provide the viewer with a concrete representation of the characters, so that the selection of actor to be cast in the role of the protagonist becomes an important decision. The fact that Jennifer Lopez plays the lead in the film is significant because of what Lopez represents to the audience. Even though her racial background has allowed Lopez to play a wide array of ethnically and racially diverse characters, her music and interviews have emphasized her identity as a Nuyorican artist.<sup>106</sup> The audience would most likely be aware of her background and

the fact that she herself is supposed to be the embodiment of the American Dream.<sup>107</sup> As the daughter of parents who migrated from Puerto Rico, Lopez has achieved the success envisioned by countless im/migrants.<sup>108</sup> Lopez has, in fact, become the poster child for the successful Latina. By casting Lopez as Marisa, the film visually promotes the ideology of success and assimilation through hard work on more than one level.

The film takes off where the traditional immigrant story ends, but continues with the ideologies of upward mobility so important to the initial narrative of immigration. Wang's movie makes a clear distinction between Marisa and her mother, Veronica Ventura. While Marisa occasionally uses phrases and words in Spanish, her English is unaccented. Veronica, however, speaks the language with a heavy accent which, along with the color of her skin marks her as different. In the film, Marisa is represented as being much more ambitious than her mother would like. During a conversation, Marisa drops her application for the Beresford's management program and upon picking it up and reading it, Veronica realizes Marisa's intentions and sarcastically comments "Management?...Que fancy." Her attitude makes it clear she sees Marisa as not knowing her place. The fact that Marisa had not informed Veronica about the possibility of applying for the promotion is significant because she doesn't see her mother as supporting or even understanding her need to get ahead.

The more hegemonic immigrant narrative is based on the binary between old world and new world ideologies and the eventual embracing of new world ideas, especially those of democracy. In a similar way in which *Pocho* positions Richard's mother as the symbol for old world thoughts and values, the film situates Marisa's

mother as representing archaic ideas about class and social position. It becomes the job of Marisa to reject her mother's ideas in order to fully live up to her potential as an American citizen. While one can argue that the divergence in views between the mother and daughter is based on the generation gap, differences in generation do not fully explain Marisa's investment in the ideology of the American Dream or her mother's inability to embrace the myth of equality on which the dream is based. Later in the film, the differences between Marisa and her mother become more apparent.

### **Domestic Labor in the Hotel**

As in the previous chapters, the ways in which labor gets represented is an important aspect of the type of ideological narrative being promoted. Even though the film provides the audience with a typical Hollywood storyline, one of the things it does well is critique the ways in which workers are rendered invisible by the type of labor they perform. From the very beginning of the story, the film makes it clear that the purpose of the staff is to serve the needs of the hotel's elite clientele. During a scene which at first seems unimportant, the manager of the domestic staff Paula Burns, played by actress Frances Conroy, informs the new domestic workers that, "A Beresford maid is expedient. A Beresford maid is thorough. A Beresford maid serves with a smile. And above all, a Beresford maid strives to be invisible." Her words are visually emphasized by a sign on the wall that instructs one to "Strive to be Invisible."<sup>109</sup> Burns' speech illustrates the contradictions under which these domestic workers must labor. For the hotel, the ideal maid works hard, fast, and with a happy disposition, but at the same time, is supposed to remain unseen. She is supposed to embody the image of the happy domestic whose presence is hardly felt and rarely

acknowledged. The irony of such a contradiction is not lost on the domestic workers, as Clarise, Marisa's co-worker, sarcastically mutters "Maybe we can disappear altogether."

The film attempts to critique the ways in which Marisa and her fellow domestic workers are rendered invisible, not only through the manager's words, but also by illustrating the ways Marisa is unseen by the hotel guests unless she is needed to serve. In one scene, a hotel guest, Caroline Lane begins her request to Marisa with the condescending "I know this isn't your job and I'd never normally ask..." When Marisa attempts to inform her that it is the concierge's job to run errands for guests, Caroline politely insists Marisa get her the stockings she needs, while also unpacking her wardrobe and returning clothes to the hotel shop. Caroline not only expects Marisa to do as she wishes, she does so while constantly referring to her as "Maria."<sup>110</sup> While Caroline's polite condescension is grating to Marisa, it is nothing compared to the hostility she experiences at the hands of Caroline's friend, Rachel Hoffberg. Rachel snaps orders at Marissa in broken Spanish and takes pleasure in referencing her as "the maid." She assumes that Marissa "barely speaks English" and speaks down to her. Rachel's assumption that Marissa does not speak English gestures towards the film's acknowledgement that the major part of the housekeeping labor in the hotel industry is, in fact, performed by immigrant workers. The racism displayed by the two women gets downplayed, however, through the films' emphasis on the ridiculousness of the characters.<sup>111</sup> Caroline and Rachel are so outlandish that it's easy for the audience to dismiss them as elitist versions of Cinderella's evil stepsisters.<sup>112</sup> It is also important that Marisa is able to assert herself, especially in reacting to Rachel's

treatment. While remaining polite, she makes biting comments aimed at Rachel and “accidentally” snaps her with the sheets while making the bed. The audience is entertained by Marisa’s acts of resistance and the fact that there are no consequences for her actions. The scene ends up becoming a humorous one that glosses over the treatment of the domestic worker and situates racism as a trial easily overcome and therefore more effortlessly subsumed under the hegemonic narrative of immigration.

In true Hollywood fashion, though, we don’t actually see Marisa and the other members of the housekeeping staff performing arduous tasks. Again, the audience has to be presented with an image of labor that does not make it uncomfortable and can be reconciled under the rhetoric of work performed as a way of gaining upward mobility. During their working hours, the labor we see performed includes Marisa and her best friend Stephanie laughing as they make a bed together, or Marisa running errands for demanding guests like Caroline Lane. In another scene, the housekeeping staff is stocking their cleaning carts with supplies while Stephanie, Clarise, and Barb are playing around. Laughing and joking, they tell Marisa “We need more fun in our lives...you only live once.” The women Marisa works with are represented as happy maids who laugh while they work and find ways of making their labor fun.<sup>113</sup> They act as Marisa’s comic foils. In turn, Marisa is represented as being more serious than her fellow workers, but this doesn’t necessarily mean the audience actually sees her work. We do, however, see Marisa putting together lovely sprigs of lavender for pillows in order to make the bed more inviting for the guests, a scene similar to Flor’s flower arranging in *Spanglish*. Like Flor, Marisa is never seen actually cleaning up after the hotel guests in a way that would make the audience completely disidentify



with her, or would interfere with her position as the love interest in the film. The audience doesn't see how dirty the job can be.

Unlike *Maid in Manhattan*, which often attempts to alleviate the tension around the invisibility of the housekeeping worker through humor, Esmeralda Santiago's *América's Dream* provides a much more biting critique of the ways in which domestic workers are treated by those they serve. The novel follows the story of América Gonzalez, a woman whose life in the tropical island of Vieques is anything but a paradise. América works full-time as a maid in a hotel, La Casa del Francés, in an effort to help raise her fourteen-year-old daughter Rosalinda. Correa, América's lover and Rosalinda's father, is married and has another family, so it is up to América to provide for her daughter. While the hotel is not in the same league as The Beresford, it does cater to wealthy tourists, especially Americans.<sup>114</sup> Along with her mother Ester, América cleans the rooms of the hotel's guests and occasionally baby sits for those who travel with children.

From the first page of the novel, the reader is given a picture of domestic labor in the hotel that is not fun or easy. Santiago introduces América to the reader with the description: "On her knees, scrubbing behind a toilet at the only hotel on the island" (1). By opening her novel with the scene of América having to clean up after the guests' bodily functions, a job that would be seen as demeaning, Santiago illustrates the very low position of her protagonist. As she scrubs the uneven tiles, América "catches a nail on the corner of one and tears it to the quick...the bright pink crescent of her nail hangs by the cuticle...drawing salty blood" (1). The description of her working on her knees without gloves and hurting herself comes right after Santiago

writes that América is always humming while she works, and that she is “surprised when tourists tell her how charming it is that she sings as she works” (1). América’s humming and singing can be seen as a way for her to break up the monotony of her labor, as a way to mentally escape the physical work she is performing. While the tourists attempt to position her as the stereotype of the happy domestic, by misrecognizing her singing as proof of her contentment with her tasks, the manner in which Santiago juxtaposes América’s labor and her injury with América’s singing rejects such a representation. Instead, we get a portrayal of domestic work that cannot be easily reconciled under the stereotype of the happy domestic or the beautiful housekeeper.

América’s work at the hotel gets described as difficult and physically exhausting. The representations of the tasks she performs challenge the labor scenes found in *Maid in Manhattan* and other films. In the films, the absence of hard labor works to advance the plot line of the domestic or housekeeping worker as visually desirable. Unlike the light tasks—placing flowers on a pillow or changing sheets—projected in the films, domestic and housekeeping labor is a physically challenging form of work that takes its toll on the body of the worker.<sup>115</sup> Santiago describes how exhausting América feels in her work:

She’s so tired! The five days of the month in which she allows herself to feel depressed are also the five days in which she feels the exhaustion, the aches and pains caused by hours of lifting, scrubbing, mopping, polishing, bending, and straightening up numerous times as she picks up the clutter tourists leave behind. (80)

Her need for steady work and an income does not allow her to focus on the effects that her labor has on her body. It is only a few days out of the month that América allows

herself the luxury of concentrating on the pains and aches caused by her line of work. There is nothing glamorous or fun in the work she describes. We don't get images of happy housekeepers laughing and joking with each other in the novel. Instead, Santiago provides the reader with a representation of domestic labor as hard work that gets performed by poor women who have few options.<sup>116</sup>

In the novel, América performs tasks that an audience would have a hard time seeing Marisa doing on the screen. It's one thing to see Marisa and the other maids making beds and teasing each other over rolls of paper, it is quite another to actually see them on their knees scrubbing the toilet. América not only has to clean the hotel rooms, she also has to clean up the mess the hotel guests make. On one occasion, the guests of one room leave behind remnants of the previous night's activities.

They have left two condoms on the floor near the bed, all snotty and slimy. She picks them up with a paper towel, rolls the whole thing into a ball. “¡No les da vergüenza!” she mumbles as she dumps the mess into the trash can. (79)

The utter lack of respect exhibited by the guests' decisions to leave used condoms on the floor with the understanding that the “maid” would pick them up is just one example of how little the guests think of América and other women who clean their rooms. América might have to clean up after them, but she expresses her disgust with them and wonders at their lack of shame. Santiago goes on to describe América's bewilderment with American tourists:

That's one thing she has never understood about Yanquis. They do things like leave their used condoms on the floor, or bloody sanitary pads, unwrapped, in the trash cans. But they throw a fit if there's a hair in the shower drain, or if the toilet is not disinfected. They don't mind exposing other people to their germs, but they don't want to be exposed to anyone else's. (79)

Nothing like the representation of the maid as the happy worker who enjoys taking care of others, América's character vocalizes the frustration of the housekeeping worker who is expected to provide a clean space for the hotel guest regardless of the guest's behavior. The fact that the guests so easily leave disgusting messes behind for América to take care of shows their level of entitlement and feelings of superiority. While they do not want to be exposed to anyone else's germs, they have no problem exposing workers like América to their potentially dangerous body fluids.<sup>117</sup> It is also important to notice that América identifies the tourists as Yanquis, or Americans, because it emphasizes that although she might have American citizenship, she does not see herself as an American, as one of them.<sup>118</sup> While the disidentification could be a result of the class difference between them, it is more likely due to the ways in which tourists view service workers as "other." América understands the ways in which even those guests who see her and acknowledge her presence actually view her as part of the landscape they are consuming through their tourism.

Unlike the representation of invisibility we see in *Maid in Manhattan*, which focuses on the hotel industry's attempts to make the guest more comfortable by training their employees to be as inconspicuous as possible, the novel illustrates the ways in which hotel guests automatically render the housekeeping worker invisible. América recognizes the manner in which the hotel guests perceive her.

She notices how they look right past and pretend not to see her. She feels herself there, solid as always, but they look through her, as if she were part of the strange landscape [...] Those who do see her, smile guardedly, then slide their gaze away quickly, ashamed, it seems, to have noticed her. (30)

América might not be noticed by them, but she is aware of how they view her. Even though they see right through her, she does feel herself “solid as always.” By refusing to internalize the hotel guests’ practice of rendering her invisible, América rejects becoming part of the landscape. While she might not be able to forcefully assert herself to the tourists by demanding they acknowledge her presence, in emphasizing the ways in which she feels solid, she reaffirms her position as more than just an object to be guiltily gazed upon, or completely ignored. She also denaturalizes the act of rendering one invisible by observing the ways in which the hotel guests “pretend” not to see her. The guest must make the conscious decision to attempt to erase América’s presence, be it out of guilt or out of a sense of superiority. Either way, América does not let her erasure go unchallenged.

Compared to the type of labor seen in *Maid in Manhattan*, the representation of labor in *América’s Dream* is so unpleasant that it cannot be reconciled with the discourse of hard work as a way of achieving success. América’s labor resists being categorized alongside glamorized versions of domestic work, as in *Spanglish* and other popular cultural productions. Santiago’s novel is also important because of the connection the text makes between the hotel industry, tourism, and imperialism. Unlike the hegemonic narrative of immigration which attempts to sever the ties between old/new world, or situates the story of the immigrant subject as beginning only at the moment of entrance into the U.S., *América’s Dream* illustrates the connection that exists between the periphery and the core. Even though in popular discourse Puerto Rico is positioned as a U.S. commonwealth and not a separate country, the U.S. has exploited Puerto Rico in the same ways in which core countries

exploit those in the periphery.<sup>119</sup>

### **Migration in Colonial Context**

In the novel, the binary between old/new world is rejected in favor of a representation that positions América's experiences as occurring in a space that is temporally and physically connected.<sup>120</sup> Situated in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the hotel where América is employed ends up becoming a metaphor for the colonial history of the island. The first owner of the hotel was a Frenchman who had it built as a house "by the peons [he] inherited with the hacienda," hence the name of La Casa del Francés (77). The Frenchman planned to use the house and the riches he acquired through the acres of sugarcane surrounding the hacienda to bring home a French wife. Santiago writes that the Frenchman had "envisioned his bride floating through the airy rooms [...] without having to mingle with the dark natives whose work made his fortune possible" (76). After the Frenchman, the hacienda was "passed on to a Venezuelan who visited the casa in the summers" (77). The house went through various owners until Don Irving, another transplant to the island, "bought the decaying plantation house and converted it into a hotel" (36). In all of its various stages of ownership, one of América's female relatives has cleaned the house and been involved with the owner, beginning with Marguerite, the maid of the Frenchman's wife. The various foreign owners of the house make visible a history of colonial powers exploiting the Caribbean for its land and its labor. The fact that the hacienda goes from being a home built on the labor of the island's people to a hotel that caters to white tourists illustrates the continuation of imperialist practices in Puerto Rico.<sup>121</sup> Through the novel's emphasis on the connection of América's female descendents to

the hacienda, the colonization of the land as a masculinist project that is predicated on the labor and body of the island's female population gets further accentuated.

The status of Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory has not ended the long line of imperial projects within the island. In fact, tracing the history of the hacienda from one foreign owner to another, from the original French owner to Don Irving, works to position the U.S. as an imperial power in a long line of colonizers. He is "the latest in a long history of foreigners to own the house that is still referred to as La Casa del Francés, The Frenchman's House" (77). The character of Don Irving is represented as a nice man, but as outsider none-the-less. Even though he is a U.S. citizen, as are América and her fellow employees, he is still seen as a foreigner and placed in the same category as the previous owners of the hacienda. Although he is an outsider, his position as owner allows him to assert his power over his Puerto Rican workers. It is significant that when América and the other hotel employees refer to him they use the title of "Don," not only because it is a term of respect, but also because of the class and racial distinction the term implies.

As one more foreign owner of the hacienda, Don Irving has converted the old house into another money-making venture by turning it into a hotel. Like other imperial projects, the hotel is intended to benefit Don Irving and not the inhabitants of the island.<sup>122</sup> The reader discovers that Don Irving "has never learned Spanish and speaks as if it didn't matter, as if it were the person he's talking to who has to make sense of what he's saying" (36). While it would seem to make sense that Don Irving would learn to speak Spanish, not only because it is the language his employees speak but also because it is the language of the island, he instead chooses to force his

employees to decipher what he means when he speaks to them in English. Don Irving behaves the way a tourist often does, expecting those that serve the tourist to understand his/her language. His disdain for the language of Puerto Ricans speaks loudly of his racism and sense of superiority. As a hotel that must cater to the needs of the tourist, Don Irving seems to worry only about communicating with the guests, all of whom speak English. In fact, Don Irving is interested in creating a vision of Puerto Rico for the tourist that meets with their image of the island as a colonial tropical paradise. The colonial architecture of the hotel, along with the colorful flowers and singing birds are just part of the picture. América observes that,

Don Irving greets his guests on the back porch, seated on a rattan chair with peacock back. He's always dressed in white, looks like something out of a movie, large, white-haired, with a white mustache, a straw sombrero shading hazel eyes under severe white brows. (35)

América's description of Don Irving is reminiscent of the romantic image of the hacienda owner or Southern plantation owner who sits on his porch and oversees the labor of his servants. Don Irving positions himself as the hacienda owner whose peons are now the housekeeping workers who clean the hotel. The picture Don Irving provides for his guests ensures that they feel as if they have stepped back in time. He feeds into their ideas of what a tropical paradise should look like—a place where the power of whiteness continues to be revered. It doesn't matter that Puerto Rico is considered part of the U.S., for Don Irving and his guests, the island and its people continue to be the exotic "other."<sup>123</sup>

Tourism is just one connection the novel makes between the Caribbean and U.S. imperial practices. After discovering that her daughter, Rosalinda, has run off



with her boyfriend, América makes her way to El Destino, the rich neighborhood of the island. On her way to El Destino, she passes the lowlands of the island, which were once,

a sea of sugarcane, which elegant señores oversaw atop sprightly Paso Fino horses. But when the U.S. Navy appropriated two-thirds of the island for its maneuvers, the great sugar haciendas disappeared and the tall stacks that dotted the island were bulldozed out of the way. (16)

Like the story of La Casa del Francés, the lowlands point to a long colonial history of the island. Here, the land has gone from growing a cash crop to being used solely for purposes of the U.S. military. The Navy's "appropriation" is just one more transference of land from foreign plantation owners to imperial naval powers. Also, the description of the overseers of the sugarcane plantations of the past is very close to the ways América describes Don Irving.

The presence of the U.S. military in Puerto Rico is again mentioned when América reaches Camp Garcia. The camp is a U.S. naval base situated on the shores of the island. She observes the various vehicles as they line up at the gates of the camp, "waiting to gain admission into the hidden beaches owned by the U.S. Navy" (17). Here we have a second example of the appropriation of land at the hands of the U.S. military. The beaches in the area have been taken away from the people of the island and privatized. What was once part of the island has become the territory of the U.S. Navy, whose agents have the power to decide who can or cannot enter the beaches.<sup>124</sup>

The ways in which the land has been used to grow cash crops for colonial powers, or taken over for use by an imperial military can be seen as examples of

enclosures. While it would be convenient to try and situate the enclosure of Puerto Rico as happening in the past, before the island became a “protected” territory of the U.S., the practice of enclosing the land cannot be relegated to history. The mansions of El Destino are a visual representation of the practice of enclosing land. El Destino is situated on top of the hill that looks out on the Phosphorescent Bay. The novel informs the readers that the previous community that lived on the land was devastated in 1989 by Hurricane Hugo. It took little time, however, for foreign interests to take over the land decimated by the hurricane.

Within a year of the hurricane, however, the lots were owned by Yanquis who have built cement-and-glass mansions dangling from precipitous slopes, adorned with elaborate wrought-iron rejas at the windows, doors, and marquesina gates. Rejas that seem to be decorative but are meant to protect the part-time residents from the vandalism and robbery they fear is imminent the minute they turn their cars in the opposite direction. (18)

Instead of providing housing for the island’s residents, the land is now converted into vacation homes for wealthy Yanquis. The gentrification of the area is made possible by taking advantage of the natural disaster that cleared the area for the development of a new neighborhood in order to create high cost spaces that call for the expulsion of previous inhabitants. Again, the novel makes the core-periphery connection between the U.S. and Puerto Rico much more complicated than is typically represented by emphasizing the imbalance of power that exists in that relationship. Like with previous colonial powers, the land of the island is used for the benefit of the national government in control, not for the people of the island.

América’s constant reference to “Yanquis” is important not only because it identifies those with the economic and political power on the island, but also because

it marks a clear distinction between Puerto Ricans and Yankees. She might have U.S. citizenship, but this means very little to her on the island. Like others in Vieques, América is forced to rely on tourism for work.<sup>125</sup> Tourism has become the newer form of imperialist exploitation of labor and land resources.

The changes in the Caribbean because of various imperial practices by the U.S. have affected im/migration to the U.S. In the novel, América has had previous opportunities to migrate to New York to escape the violence of her lover Correa. Her mother's sister, Aunt Paulina, and her family live in New York City and could provide América with access to the U.S. However, it isn't until she meets the Leveretts that América seriously considers leaving Puerto Rico. As an employee of the hotel, América often baby sits the children of the hotel guests in order to give the parents the opportunity to go off on their own. It is through her work as a part-time child care provider that América meets Karen and Charlie Leverett and their children Meghan and Kyle. After her daughter, Rosalinda, leaves to live with Correa's aunt and Correa beats her yet again, América makes the decision to leave Vieques and go work for the Leveretts.<sup>126</sup>

Another text that makes the connections that exist between communities in the core and periphery visible through its representation of immigration and domestic labor is Bharati Mukherjee's short story "Jasmine," not to be confused with her novel *Jasmine*.<sup>127</sup> The short piece tells the story of a young Trinidadian of South Asian descent that ends up immigrating to Detroit. Unlike the stereotypes that represent immigrant domestic workers in the Northern U.S. as being all Afro Caribbean or Latinas, the text points instead to an immigrant population often overlooked in popular

cultural productions. The story informs us that Jasmine “came to Detroit [...] by way of Canada” (1008). In a scene similar to Carlota in *Cactus Blood* having to be smuggled in a vehicle, Jasmine “crossed the border at Windsor in the back of a gray van loaded with mattresses and box springs,” hiding from custom’s officials (1008). The way in which Jasmine enters the U.S. is important to discuss because it challenges the misconception that only immigrants from the south enter the country illegally, or that the only undocumented immigrants are Latina/os. Jasmine is also different from the stereotype of the poor immigrant who migrates only for financial reasons, as we discover that she is the daughter of a doctor.<sup>128</sup>

Like Carlota, Jasmine emigrates knowing she has a job waiting for her. She is employed by the Daboos, a Trinidad Indian family that owns the Plantations Motel and has arranged for Jasmine’s immigration.<sup>129</sup> In a similar way in which Carlota is exploited for her labor by the Stephens, the Daboos take advantage of Jasmine’s immigrant status. The Daboos agree to let Jasmine stay in one of their motel rooms in exchange for her keeping the books and cleaning the rooms. Mukherjee writes that “all day every day except Sundays Jasmine worked” (1009). Not only did she keep the books for the motel and clean the rooms, she was also asked to work for Mr. Daboo’s match-up marriage service.<sup>130</sup> Unlike the happy maids that work in The Beresford in *Maid in Manhattan*, Jasmine’s labor in the hotel is not fun or full of adventure. While the labor she performs is similar to América’s, Jasmine’s work in the motel does not provide her with an income. In fact, the only wages she makes come from her work unloading crates on Sunday mornings for Mr. Anthony’s shop. Jasmine, however, uses her work experience in the motel to learn about the U.S. and,

like América, makes the transition from housekeeping labor in the hotel industry to the suburbs.

### **From the Public to the Private--Back in Suburbia**

The housekeeping and domestic female immigrant workers have more than similar labor duties. Like the representations of domestic labor in the Southwest offered by the Chicana writers in the previous chapter, Santiago's novel provides a narrative of racism and exploitation that challenges the visual romantization of immigration and domestic labor. América's decision to leave Vieques is a difficult one motivated by her need to escape the abusive relationship with Correa that she fears will lead to her death. After Correa takes Rosalinda to live in Fajardo, effectively severing the physical connection between mother and daughter, América decides to accept the Leverett's offer of employment in order to start a new life for herself. Even though Puerto Rico is considered a U.S. territory, for América, New York is "so far away" (117). The physical distance is not what she finds daunting, but the very different life she will experience. Some of América's neighbors who have migrated to New York and return "talk about how hard life is over there, about apartments infested with roaches and mice, about drive-by shootings and drug deals on their doorsteps" (117-118). Unlike the immigrant protagonist in the hegemonic narrative whose expectations for life in the U.S. are full of hope for the possibility of success, América has no illusions about her emigration. She is aware of the difficulties she will be facing and doesn't migrate with the idea of becoming a part of the American Dream. Her migration is much more practical—she is afraid Correa might kill her during his beatings.

Once in New York, América enters the Leveretts' world of privilege as she transitions from being a hotel worker with set hours to a full time domestic worker/nanny who works all day long. After touring their huge home, América is "exhausted. Not just from the up and down the stairs, in and out of rooms. But from seeing so much in one place" (145). Faced with the size of the house, América wonders, "How will I ever find time to clean this huge house with two kids to look after?" (145). As a live-in employee, América becomes responsible not only for taking care of the children, a job unto itself, but also for taking care of the house.

With Karen and Charlie gone all day and the children in school, she has the house to herself most mornings and is able to tidy the rooms, load the dish and clothes washers, iron the children's and Karen's and Charlie's casual clothes. The Leveretts spend most of their time at home in the kitchen, their bedrooms, the family room, and den, so that the other rooms don't get as messy and don't require deep cleaning as frequently [...] América gets in the car at eleven-fifty in the morning and spends most of the afternoon driving Meghan to or from a play date, picking up Kyle from school, driving them to swimming lessons at the health club, Meghan to gymnastics, Kyle to karate. They don't usually return home until 5:00 P.M., at which time América prepares and serves dinner for the three of them... (175-176)

She is employed to perform the labor of at least two individuals, a detail the Leveretts conveniently overlook. Also unacknowledged is the fact that América's work day begins before the children even wake up and doesn't end until Karen gets home in the evening. América's work load only increases as her employers become used to her daily presence.

Once América gets acquainted with the schedule Karen Leverett has set for her, it becomes easy for Karen to take a new job without concerning herself with América's already heavy work load. She also feels no qualms about asking América

to change the agreed upon work schedule in order to avoid having to pay for a sitter to watch the kids on América's day off. While América resents her employer's treatment, there is little she can do. During a phone conversation with her mother, América admits that while she's getting used to the new schedule,

“The hours are long, though. I'm exhausted by the time I go to bed.”  
 “Do they pay you extra for working late?”  
 “It's just for a little while, until Karen settles into her new job.” (207)

Even though her work hours have been increased and América is saddled with more responsibility, she isn't paid overtime. It is just assumed that because she is a live-in worker, the hours she spends in the Leveretts' home are not her own.<sup>131</sup>

América, however, is not just a passive employee that accepts her treatment at the hands of her employer or doesn't understand the ways in which she is being exploited. She is aware of the wealth of her employers based on the size of their home, their possessions, and the cars they drive, but even this knowledge does not prepare her when she discovers the incredible amount of money Karen spends on everyday items. While cleaning up her drawers, América realizes the cost of her employer's undergarments:

Seven hundred and fifty dollars, she mutters, in underwear. It would take me two and a half weeks to earn enough to hold up my breasts and cover my culo. Karen Leverett must make a lot of money at that hospital. (218)

América is disgusted when she realizes that the wages she makes in half a month equal the value of Karen's undergarments. She doesn't understand why someone would pay so much money just to cover one's body in bras and underwear no one would really see under clothing. As she examines Karen's shoes, she finds out that “one week of

my work puts her out of the price of a pair of shoes” (218). América’s observations function to illustrate the excess of the Leverett’s— an excess she does not admire, but instead finds objectionable. Through Karen’s clothing, América comes to understand just how little her wages are compared to the amount of money the Leveretts spend on what she considers frivolities. To América, “it doesn’t seem right” (218). Instead of just being upset by what she finds out, however, she decides instead that at the end of her trial period, she’s “asking for a raise” (218). The novel highlights how América is being unfairly used by the Leveretts and the ways in which her labor is not valued in the same way in which Karen values ridiculous possessions like bras and panties.

As América continues to work longer hours because of Karen’s hospital job and Charlie’s traveling, she comes to the conclusion that a raise is in order to compensate her for the extra work she is performing. Working fifteen-hour days, América figures that “a woman who spends fifteen dollars for a pair of panties should be able to afford a couple of extra dollars for the woman who cares for her kids” (255). While it seems only fair to América that she be paid for her labor, her employer doesn’t quite see it that way.<sup>132</sup> When she informs Karen that she works more than the eight hours that was part of their initial agreement, Karen questions América:

“How can that be? The children are in school most of the day.”  
 “I clean house when kids in school.”  
 “For six hours? Really, América...” Karen shakes her head, chuckles to herself. (255)

Karen automatically dismisses América’s attempts at asking for fair wages. América understands that Karen has no real conception of the amount of work being asked of her because she has never had to perform it herself. She thinks to herself, “Have you



ever cleaned a house? América wants to ask but knows that would be rude. Of course Karen Leverett has never cleaned her own house. That's what maids are for" (256).

While she cannot openly confront Karen with her ignorance, América, however, does not easily back down and continues to try and make her case. When she informs Karen that it takes a long time to clean the house, Karen again refuses to acknowledge the extent of América's labor.

"I still can't believe it takes you six hours every day to clean this house, come on...I tell you what, you should take some time off in the mornings, when the kids are not here, okay?"

She's not being fair, América tells herself. "But if house not clean?"

"I'm sure you can work this out, América. You just need to be more efficient, so you can have the time. I know you can do it, okay?"

"Okéi," América says, not because she agrees but because she's angry and doesn't know what to do with her anger. (256)

While América is aware of the unfair way in which Karen is treating her, she feels helpless and frustrated. She knows that even if she were to try and explain to her employer that she not only cleans, but cooks and washes and irons for the family while the children are in school, it would make little difference to Karen. For the employer, the solution is for América to perform her tasks faster in order to avoid working longer hours. Karen places the blame for América's overtime labor on the employee and refuses to acknowledge the ways in which she is exploiting América's live-in status.

América is only asking for what she believes is fair compensation for the amount of extra work she is being expected to perform. As she comes to understand the Leveretts and their spending patterns, América also begins to comprehend the value of her own labor and how her employers attempt to diminish her work in order

to pay her less. Unlike Flor in *Spanglish* who makes a good wage for little work, América's experience with the Leveretts represents a much more exploitative relationship between the domestic worker and her employer. América, however, is not naïve, and recognizes the fact that she is being taken advantage of by Karen and Charlie. After her failed discussion with Karen,

She gets ready for bed but knows she won't get much sleep tonight. She's too upset. If she had given me twenty dollars more a week I would have been happy. She didn't need to double my salary. Just twenty dollars more a week. That's less than she pays for a bra. (256)

América's anger and frustration challenge the representation of the domestic worker as happy and content. She is not the cheerful nanny who loves her charges and her work. Instead, we get a representation of domestic labor that rejects the romantic version of domestic work perpetuated by the films. América is unhappy with the long hours and hard labor for which she doesn't get fairly compensated. Her experiences working for the Leveretts are also not easily reconciled with the hegemonic narrative of im/migration because the trials she experiences cannot be simply resolved, as evidenced by Karen's refusal to admit a problem even exists.

While "Jasmine" is a much shorter narrative than *América's Dream*, it does provide a brief representation of domestic labor. Unlike América, however, Jasmine's age and lack of experience makes her attitude towards her labor much more similar to the young Carlota in *Cactus Blood*. Like Carlota, Jasmine is grateful for the job she has because she is undocumented and knows her options are limited. For Jasmine, though, working for the Moffitt's is also an escape from the many jobs she had to perform at the Daboos' motel. In fact, the Moffitts offer Jasmine a salary "which was

three times more than anything Mr. Daboo was supposed to pay her but hadn't" (1011). Passing herself off as a college student, Jasmine is hired by Bill Moffitt, a molecular biology professor, and Lara Hatch-Moffitt, a performance artist. Jasmine is initially hired to take care of Bill and Lara's daughter, Muffin, "though for the first few months she might have to help out with the housework and cooking because Lara said she was deep into performance rehearsals" (1011). Several months pass, during which time, Lara also travels, leaving Jasmine to care for the family. Even though Muffin "didn't need much looking after" and Bill cooked Sunday brunch, Jasmine is responsible for the rest of the household duties while Lara is gone.

As an undocumented immigrant, Jasmine considers herself lucky to be employed by the Moffitts. While her days are spent working for the Moffitts and she has no life outside of the home she helps run, as a young immigrant with no family or friends, Jasmine uses her employment as a way of building a life for herself.

Jasmine knew she was lucky to have found a small, clean, friendly family like the Moffitts to build her new life around. "Man!" she'd exclaim as she vacuumed the wide-plank wood floors or ironed (Lara wore pure silk or pure cotton). "In this country Jesus givin out good luck only!" By this time they knew she wasn't a student, but they didn't care and said they wouldn't report her. They never asked if she was illegal on top of it. (1012)

The ironic juxtaposition of her counting her blessings as she performs her labor is quite clear. Mukerhejee's deliberate mention of the types of clothing Lara wears, and Jasmine must iron, points to the very clear class distinction between Jasmine and Lara. While Lara can choose to wear only certain types of clothing, Jasmine doesn't have such a choice, and is instead reduced to caring for Lara's clothing. Even though she wants to see herself as part of their family, Jasmine's presence in the home is

predicated on her labor.<sup>133</sup> After becoming accustomed to Jasmine performing the work of a nanny and a cleaning worker without complaining, it seems only obvious that the Moffitts would not mind the fact that she isn't a student. Her status as a non-student only works to ensure Jasmine's complete loyalty, and more importantly, dependence, on the Moffitts. As a young immigrant woman, Jasmine may not be able to fully recognize the ways in which she is being exploited, but Mukerhejee's text does not allow for the complete erasure of that exploitation.

In contrast to Jasmine, Jamaica Kincaid's character Lucy, the protagonist of the short novella by the same name, is much more aware of her identity as an individual and not just a worker. The important difference between Lucy and Jasmine is based on their status as immigrants. While Jasmine is an undocumented immigrant, Lucy has the official documents that allow her to be recognized by the state as a legal worker. Lucy's state-sanctioned ability to work in the U.S. affects the type of labor she agrees to perform and allows her the freedom to experience the world around her without the fear of detection. In the novella, Lucy is hired by Mariah and Lewis to care for their four daughters. Unlike Jasmine or América, who are asked to perform the labor of two individuals, Lucy is only hired as a nanny. Lewis and Mariah have a domestic worker who cleans up after the family and Lucy is not expected to take on extra work. The representation of domestic labor that Kincaid offers rejects the stereotype of the happy domestic, not through an emphasis on exploitation, but through Lucy's attitude towards her employers and her refusal to see herself as part of Mariah's family.

While films and certain cultural productions continue to employ the rhetoric of

family that Alice Childress so eloquently debunks in her short story, Kincaid's *Lucy* offers an intricately more complicated representation of the relationship between Lucy and her employers. Like Flor in *Spanglish*, Lucy is invited to see herself as part of the family that employs her:

How nice everyone was to me, though, saying that I should regard them as my family and make myself at home. I believed them to be sincere, for I knew that such a thing would not be said to a member of their real family. (8)

The narrative does not represent Lucy as embracing Mariah and her family, but instead portrays Lucy as a savvy young woman who understands the employee/employer relationship is not easily overcome through the use of the rhetoric of family. Living in the small room off the kitchen, the “maid’s room” Lucy is very much aware of her position in the household.<sup>134</sup> The room is small, but the description is significant because it illustrates how Lucy views herself in relation to the family.

The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to the ceiling, enclosing the room like a box—a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid’s room, and I was not even the maid. (7)

The description of the room actually precedes the family’s claims that she should think of herself as one of the family, revealing the contradiction between the family’s words and their actions. By relegating Lucy to the “maid’s room,” a room Lucy views as a physical enclosure, while attempting to at the same time employ the discourse of family and belonging, the employers reveal the real intent behind the strategy of containment inherent in the rhetoric of family. Even though Mariah and Lewis are represented as well-meaning employers, the text refuses to perpetuate the discourse of

family and its use in erasing the economic relationship. Lucy's rejection of the rhetoric of family is so strong that Lewis and Mariah begin referring to her as the "Visitor" because she "seemed not to be a part of things...as if they weren't like a family to [her]" (13).<sup>135</sup> While the text does not portray Lucy's employers as being cruel to her, or openly exploiting her for her labor, it does challenge the popular stereotype that attempts to enclose the labor of the domestic worker as occurring within the structure of the family and it refuses to promote the idea of a simple assimilation of the immigrant subject.<sup>136</sup>

In the novel, Lucy is represented as a strong and intelligent young woman who may not be able to fully understand how everything functions in the host country, but whose understanding of the world at large is much more sophisticated than her employer's, inverting the ideology that situates the immigrant subject as less intelligent than the citizen of the host country. While Lucy is employed to care for the children, it is her interactions with Mariah that become important in the telling of her immigrant story. During one conversation, the differences between the two women are made even more apparent.

[Mariah] said, "Have you ever seen daffodils pushing their way up out of the ground? And when they're in bloom and all massed together, a breeze comes along and makes them do a curtsy to the lawn stretching out in front of them. Have you ever seen that? When I see that, I feel so glad to be alive." And I thought, So Mariah is made to feel alive by some flowers bending in the breeze. How does a person get to be that way? (18)

Lucy's reaction to Mariah's delight over daffodils is a humorous one because Mariah comes across as somewhat ridiculous. Lucy is baffled by Mariah's claim of feeling alive simply by watching flowers, not only because it seems like such a trivial thing,

but also because it illustrates the difference that exists between the women's understanding of the world around them. For Mariah, simple flowers make her happy because of the privileged position which she inhabits. As an upper-middle class woman whose class status ensures that all of her needs are met, it is easy for Mariah to sit back and enjoy the spectacles of spring, unencumbered by work or family responsibilities. Lucy, however, has a much more practical understanding of life and the beauty of nature, an understanding predicated on a very different history.

As an immigrant subject, Lucy brings with her a knowledge of the world that is not easily discarded when she emigrates. Unlike the representation of the immigrant as making the transition to citizen of the new world through a separation with the old world, *Lucy* offers a representation of an immigrant whose life in the host country is directly connected to her experiences in her country of origin. The daffodils Mariah is so crazy about are a different type of signifier for Lucy.

I remembered an old poem I had been made to memorize when I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girl's School. I had been made to memorize it, verse after verse, and then had to recite the whole poem to an auditorium full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me [...] I was then at the height of my two-facedness: outside false, inside true. And so I make pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem [...] I had forgotten all of this until Mariah mentioned daffodils, and now I told it to her with such an amount of anger I surprised both of us. (18-19)

Lucy's reaction to Mariah's description of the spring daffodils comes from her experiences in a peripheral country. As the citizen of a former colony, Lucy views the flower through the eyes of a colonized subject who sees in the daffodil a symbol of the

imperial education to which she was subjected.<sup>137</sup> For Lucy, the flower signifies a colonial history that cannot be totally forgotten. As an immigrant, she has brought with her the memories of the periphery with her, disrupting the idea that the old world and its histories and ideologies are left behind at the point of entry. Like América's story, Lucy's narrative makes clear the connection between countries and the unequal relationships that exist between them.

In sharing her experience with Mariah, Lucy informs the reader of the imperial history of her country of origin. At the same time, she also refuses to allow Mariah, and the reader, to romanticize that time.

Mariah reached out to me and, rubbing her hand against my cheek, said "What a history you have." I thought there was a little bit of envy in her voice, and so I said, "You are welcome to it if you like." (19)

Mariah tries to soothe Lucy's anger by containing her experience through the rhetoric of sympathy but Lucy rejects Mariah's attempts to simplify her history or gloss over it. Lucy understands that Mariah's comfortable life of privilege could cause her to see Lucy's past as exciting or romantic, adhering to the representation of island life as exotic and idyllic, the type of image of the Caribbean perpetuated by those like Don Irving in *América's Dream*. Later in the text, Mariah attempts to impose her enjoyment of the flower on Lucy by taking her to a field of blooming daffodils she loves. While Mariah had hoped to replace Lucy's imperial memory of oppression with a new memory of joy and beauty, Lucy rebuffs her efforts.

[...] I felt sorry that I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes [...] But nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers I saw sorrow and bitterness [...] I was glad to have at last seen what a



wretched daffodil looked like. (30)

The colonial past represented by the daffodils cannot be reconciled with the image of the flower as purely aesthetically pleasing. Lucy cannot simply forget the history she has lived in her country of origin, and no matter how hard Mariah might try to erase that past by providing new memories in the host country, Lucy's connection remains intact.<sup>138</sup> Even though Lucy acknowledges that Mariah means well, she sees Mariah's actions as a strategy of containment intended to make Lucy content, and by extent, make life more pleasant for all of them. Lucy's understanding of her position in the household and in the host country allows for a representation of domestic labor that goes beyond accepted stereotypes by providing insight into immigration and the immigrant subject's relationship to the host country and the country of origin, and rejecting the ideological enclosure inherent in the traditional immigrant narrative.

### **Creating Systems of Support**

Unlike the hegemonic immigrant narrative that places emphasis on the story of the protagonist as an individual, the stories of immigration in this chapter emphasize instead the role community plays in the subject formation of the immigrant worker. One of the ways in which domestic workers are represented as resisting the isolation and feelings of disconnection that come along with being a live-in worker is through the creation of a support network. Living in the suburbs, away from city life and separated from one's family, domestic workers rely on fellow laborers for friendship and advice. Like the domestic agency in *Latina* that functions as a space of solidarity for the women, the park in the neighborhood in other narratives functions in a similar way by connecting the various domestic workers and offering them a space where they

can openly discuss their experiences and frustrations with the families that employ them.

In *Lucy*, the young protagonist meets Peggy, who becomes her best friend, while taking her young charge for a walk in the park. While Peggy is not a domestic worker, Lucy meets her through her acquaintance with Peggy's cousin, an *au pair* from Ireland. Lucy "had seen the cousin a few times with the children she took care of; immediately recognizing each other as foreigners, we tried to form a friendship. It was not a success" (61). Even though Lucy is not employed by a family who mistreats her, or exploits her, in the same ways in which other domestic workers are exploited, she too feels the need to create a friendship with someone who can understand her experience. Becoming friends with Peggy allows Lucy to have a meaningful connection to the world outside of the home in which she works.

We exchanged telephone numbers, and after that we spoke to each other at least once a day, sometimes more. We saw each other every weekend and sometimes during the week. We told each other everything, even when we knew that the other didn't quite understand what was really meant. (63)

Peggy provides Lucy with an adult relationship that is not connected to her labor.

While Mariah is kind to Lucy and wants to see herself as a friend to Lucy, the economic relationship between them is not simplistically overlooked or ignored in the narrative. Unlike film representations, which attempt to erase the economic connection between domestic worker and employer through the rhetoric of family or friendship, Lucy's relationship with Peggy, as a non-work-related friendship, works to highlight the class differences between the family and the domestic worker and explains why Mariah as her employer, cannot be seen by Lucy as a friend. Instead,

she turns to a fellow immigrant for friendship, a decision Mariah doesn't like. Lucy comments that her friendship with Peggy "drove Mariah crazy" (63). Unable to fully dictate Lucy's life outside of the domestic space, Mariah resorts to lecturing Lucy about the bad influence "a person like Peggy could be" (63). While Mariah might have objected to Peggy's smoking, her tight jeans, and her tough attitude, her attempts to dictate Lucy's relationships outside of the work space can also be read as her need to assert control over her employee, a control Lucy resists. In fact, it is her relationship with Peggy that allows her to eventually leave Mariah's employment.

*América's Dream* also offers a representation of the domestic worker's need for a system of support. Faced with a growing sense of isolation, América befriends other domestic workers in the neighborhood. The women América meets at the playground are immigrants from various parts of the periphery. The presence of these women and their various backgrounds is representative of the very different migrations occurring in the Northeast.<sup>139</sup> In the past, the majority of Latina im/migrants in the area emigrated from the Caribbean. Today, though, the composition of Latina immigrants is changing. In New York, for example, the Pew Hispanic Center, using the tabulations of the 2000 Census and the 2005 American Community Survey, reports that the Hispanic population has increased 8.8 percent in between those years.<sup>140</sup> While Puerto Ricans continue to be the largest Latino/a group in New York, immigrants from Latin America are surpassing other Caribbean immigrants in the population. Of the total Foreign Born in 2005, immigrants from Latin America (997,752)—specifically Mexico, Central, and South America—outnumbered immigrants from the Caribbean (967,645) by a slim margin.<sup>141</sup>

Just like Jasmine's immigration to Detroit challenges the stereotype of where the immigrant worker originates, so do the women working in Westchester County. The first Spanish-speaking domestic worker América befriends is Adela, a Guatemalan immigrant who "worked as a nurse in a private clinic" in her country of origin (209). Through her friendship with Adela, América becomes part of a group of women who use their time at the playground to discuss work and their own families.

Through her, América has met other women who work in the mansions and large homes tucked at the end of long driveways that light as you drive up. Liana, from El Salvador, was a bank teller. Frida, from Paraguay, was a school teacher. Mercedes, from the Dominican Republic, was a telephone operator [...] They all have one thing in common. They've entered the United States illegally, and they're amazed that she, an American citizen, would work as a maid. (219)

Not only does the description of the women point to the various migrations to the U.S. Northeast, but it emphasizes the role that their undocumented status has on their decisions to work as domestic laborers. All of the women held positions in their countries of origin that did not involve physical labor. Employed as educated and skilled workers in the periphery, their knowledge does not fully translate to the core.<sup>142</sup> With no social security number or documentation officially acknowledging their presence in the U.S., América's fellow workers are limited to domestic labor. Like the undocumented domestic workers in *Latina*, these women are more easily exploited because of their lack of options and the fear of detection. Even though the play is situated in the Southwest and the novel takes place in the Northeast, the experiences represented in both texts illustrate the commonalities that exist between the two immigrant communities and the rising demand for workers that Sassen sees are needed to "service the lifestyles and consumption requirements of the growing high-income

professional and managerial class” (*Globalization*, 48).

The description of the domestic workers in Santiago’s novel is also a significant part of the narrative because it illustrates the very important difference between América and her fellow workers. As a citizen of the U.S., América has a social security number and the ability to live in the country without the fear of being sent back home. Even though she does not have the education or work experience that the other women have, she does have more options than they do because of her status as a citizen. However, the narrative complicates the meaning of citizenship. When discussing her status in the U.S., América explains to the women,

“But I’m not Americana,” América protests, “I’m Viequense, Puerto Rican I mean. It’s just that Puerto Ricans have citizenship.”  
 “But doesn’t that mean you’re Americana?”  
 “No, I’m Puerto Rican, but I’m a citizen.” (218)

América’s identity as Puerto Rican does not get displaced with her movement to the core. In fact, she consciously disidentifies with the construction of citizenship that the label of “Americana” implies. There is no embracing of national belonging or any concerted effort to assimilate, even though as a citizen, it would be easier for her to do so than for the other women. The character’s name, “América” with the ever present accent, clearly points to another “America” that is not the U.S., but is more along the lines with José Martí’s “Nuestra América.” In fact, América has more in common with the undocumented immigrants from Latin America than with the white citizens of the area.

The relationship between América and the other domestic workers also points to the fact that the importance of the support system they create cannot be

underestimated. While it would be easy for the women to remain isolated in the suburban homes that enclose their labor, like Mukherjee's Jasmine, they use play dates to provide them with time to spend together and make connections outside of their workspace.<sup>143</sup> Their discussions inform the reader that all of the women had "left behind children to come to the United States, where they care for other people's children" and that several of them haven't seen their children for years (223).<sup>144</sup> The women also use their support group to network, "If a maid wants to leave her employers, she notifies the other maids first, in case they know of a better situation" (225). Most importantly, they are able to share their frustrations with each other and help each other resist the racism they face on a daily basis.

As immigrant domestic workers, the women are very much aware of the ways in which they are viewed by those around them. They share their anger at constantly being confronted with suspicion and the "why don't you go back where you came from" look they get from the white members of the suburb community (227). When they aren't being gazed upon with derision or distrust, "people avoid looking at them, as if not seeing them will make them disappear" (227). The women, however, refuse to simply accept the racist behavior of the community and instead focus on revealing the contradiction between the community's necessity for labor and their refusal to acknowledge that need. América understands that the situation is "incomprehensible" and that, "If it weren't for us, none of these women would be able to work. And their husbands wouldn't have it so easy, either" (228). Like her fellow workers, América is aware of the fact that they are an integral part of the community and that the families they work for are dependent on their labor, regardless of how they are dismissed or

treated as replaceable. By sharing their frustrations, América and the women resist internalizing the racism they encounter and provide each other with alternative ways of understanding the world around them. While the women are able to rely on each other for support, their circumstances cannot be easily reconciled under the narrative of assimilation in the traditional immigrant story.

### **The Romance Plot Revisited**

A major aspect of the traditional immigrant story represented in Hollywood films has been the romance plot. By adhering to the conventions of the romance, the narrative provides the audience with an easily developed storyline that ends with the happy ending and *Maid in Manhattan* is no different. The relationship between Marisa and Chris is very similar to that between the domestic worker and employer in the previous films. Even though Chris is not her employer, as a paying hotel guest, he does have a relative amount of power over Marisa. After all, the domestic worker is there to serve the needs of the guest. What makes *Maid in Manhattan* different from *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance* is the fact that when Chris first encounters Marisa, he doesn't know she is a maid. As when Cinderella meets the prince, Marisa is wearing borrowed clothing when she meets Chris. In a scene that demands complete suspension of disbelief, Marisa ends up trying on a Dolce and Gabbana outfit Caroline Lane asked to be returned to the hotel shop. As the proper heroine of the story, however, the idea is not hers, but Stephanie's, who urges her to try on the clothing because, after all, "When will you or I ever get to try on a \$5000 anything?" Marisa's reluctance to try on the designer outfit ensures that the viewer not feel uncomfortable with the idea of a domestic worker going through a hotel guest's

possessions. It also helps to set her apart from the other maids because her lying is not seen as necessarily morally ambiguous because she is inadvertently caught up in the situation.<sup>145</sup>

The hotel workers are not only represented as a bunch of carefree employees who find humor in their everyday situations, but also end up playing the role of Cinderella's little helpers. Marisa's masquerade is discovered by Lionel, the head butler, who is training her for the management program. Played by Bob Hoskins, Lionel is cast in the role of the fairy godmother that advises Marisa and provides her with words of wisdom. He urges Marisa to end her flirtation with Chris, at least until she becomes a manager.<sup>146</sup> Encouraged by her fellow domestic workers, Marisa decides to break things off with Chris at a political fundraiser. Just like Cinderella attending the ball, Marisa must prepare for the event with the help of her friends. While Cinderella had mice and birds to help get her ready, Marisa must rely on the aid of all of her hotel worker friends, who ensure she gets a complete make-over. Marisa goes from being a hotel maid to a modern-day princess, decked out in a beautiful designer gown, glorious shoes, and a Harry Winston wreath of diamonds.<sup>147</sup> Just like Cinderella, Marisa goes to the ball, dances with the prince, and runs out. The modern day story, however, doesn't just have Marisa leave the dance, but has her end up in Chris' room for a romantic rendezvous that cements the feelings she has for him and ensures the audience a glimpse at Lopez' scantily clad body.

Unlike her novel, *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee's short story tells a very different story of the relationship between immigrant domestic worker and employer. While both protagonists are named Jasmine, and both enter the country as



undocumented immigrants, the short story does not reduce the relationship between Jasmine and Bill Moffett to a simple love affair. As a young woman who feels disconnected to her community and whose entire day revolves around the Moffett's, it becomes easy for Jasmine to feel comfortable with them. With Lara Moffett's constant traveling, however, Jasmine's position in the home becomes more complicated. Having only Muffin to look after, Jasmine begins to spend more and more time with Bill. She develops a girlish crush on Bill, and with Lara's absence, begins to romanticize her relationship to her employer: "Bill, Muffie, and she were a family, almost" (1014). Given Jasmine's age, isolation, and lack of experience, it isn't surprising that she would try to make a meaningful connection with those around her. Unlike Lucy and América who are able to create a support system with fellow workers, Jasmine is alone. As an educated adult, however, Bill Moffett would be aware of Jasmine's position and need for interaction. He uses Lara's traveling and Jasmine's naiveté and takes advantage of his position to seduce Jasmine.

While it might seem like the relationship between Jasmine and Bill follows the similar path of the developing romance portrayed in *Maid in Manhattan*, especially with Jasmine's crush on Bill, Mukherjee's text actually challenges the romance plot. Jasmine's affection for her employer is not represented as a conscious decision to engage in a sexual relationship. She is not Marisa Ventura, who understands the consequences of a sexual encounter. Mukherjee describes Jasmine wanting "to stay awake and think of Bill" (1014). The way she thinks of Bill, however, is very telling of her innocence: "Even when she fell asleep it didn't feel like sleep because Bill came barging into her dreams in his funny, loose-jointed, clumsy way" (1014).

Jasmine dreams of Bill as an endearing character, not as an object of desire. When she handles Bill's possessions, "she felt sick in a giddy, wonderful way," underlying the fact that she doesn't even know how to describe her feelings to herself (1014). Most importantly, Jasmine believes that her feelings for Bill are not exactly real because, "when Lara came back things would go back to normal" (1014). In all of the descriptions of Jasmine's feelings for Bill, there is never any mention of her actually desiring a physical relationship with him. On her part, the feelings she has for Bill are innocent, which cannot be said for Bill's desire for Jasmine.

"Jasmine" culminates with the relationship between Bill and Jasmine crossing the boundaries between employer and employee. In what can best be described as a seduction scene, the story depicts the sexual encounter between Jasmine and Bill. After speaking with Lara and discovering that she is in Nebraska, Bill tells Jasmine, "Let's dance" (1014). Having missed dancing, Jasmine silently agrees by taking off her apron. The discarding of the apron, the visual symbol of her employment as domestic worker, allows Jasmine to momentarily forget her position in the household. Bill uses her acquiescence to set up a seduction scene:

Bill went around the downstairs rooms turning down lights. 'We need atmosphere,' he said. He got a small, tidy fire going in the living room grate and pulled the Turkish scatter rug closer to it. Lara didn't like anybody walking on the Turkish rug, but Bill meant to have his way. The hissing logs, the plants in the dimmed light, the thick patterned rug: everything had changed. This wasn't the room she cleaned every day. (1014)

The knowledge that his wife is hundreds of miles away provides Bill the opportunity to act out what is obviously not a spur of the moment idea, but a more carefully orchestrated plan. Mukherjee's words that "Bill meant to have his way" are not only

about the rug, but more importantly about Jasmine. Instead of the room Jasmine is familiar with, Bill creates a setting right out of a romance novel. He is using her lack of experience, her need for human contact, and her romantic ideals to tear down any objections she might have. A savvier individual would be able to see through Bill's set up, but Jasmine is too caught up in the romance scene he has constructed. He goes as far as making her believe that she is in control of the situation, asking her to choose the music for dancing: "I want you to pick," he said. "You are your own person now." His words, however, are only a smokescreen aimed at making Jasmine feel like this is a choice she is making as a liberated woman. Bill's words and actions, however, make it clear that he doesn't see Jasmine as an individual, but as the "exotic other" that can fulfill his island fantasies.

Even Jasmine's choice of music demonstrates the fact that she is in way over her head. Looking through Bill and Lara's collection of records makes Jasmine realize how much she still has to learn about living in the U.S. She picks out "Music for Lovers," which might seem like a deliberate action on her part, but as Mukerjee informs the reader, the music is familiar to Jasmine because the record is "something the nuns had taught her to fox-trot to way back in Port-of-Spain" (1015). Again, Jasmine is portrayed as not fully understanding the fact that she is being seduced. She picks music to which she feels connected. As they begin dancing, Jasmine enjoys being held by Bill, thinking that "she didn't care what happened" (1015). While she seems not to care about what is about to happen, Bill still has to coax her into participating.

"Come on," Bill whispered. "If it feels right, do it." He began to take

her clothes off.  
“Don’t, Bill,” she pleaded.  
“Come on, baby,” he whispered again.

Bill uses his words to talk Jasmine into submitting to the seduction. While he continues to coach his actions as if being guided by her, giving her the choice to “do it,” he is the one that initiates the removal of her clothes. Even though she said she didn’t care, Jasmine pleads with Bill “don’t.” Jasmine’s beseeching for Bill to stop very clearly demonstrates that she is conflicted by what is happening. It is as if all of a sudden, reality filters in to her consciousness. Bill, however, doesn’t stop and successfully continues to persuade her through his words and actions.

Unlike the perfectly staged love scene in *Maid in Manhattan* with Marisa and Chris, Mukherjee’s short story rejects the romance plot represented in the employer/employee relationship. While convincing Jasmine that she is an empowered individual, who makes her own decisions, Bill’s actions are contradicted with his words. He calls Jasmine “a blossom, a flower” (1015). The image of the flower, however, is not just predicated on her being a beautiful woman, but much more specifically on the fact that she is from the Caribbean: “You smell so good. You’re really something, flower of Trinidad” (1015). Bill’s words reduce Jasmine to the “exotic other,” the object of the white male gaze and desire. Jasmine becomes just another island woman for Bill to fantasize about conquering. Her body allows Bill to play out whatever fantasies he has about women of color, and his position as a white male and her employer allows him to do so without any real consequences. Jasmine’s position as a domestic worker and an immigrant strips her of any power, or illusion of equality, in the relationship.

In contrast to the representation of the domestic worker as naïve, or sexually available, Kincaid's *Lucy* rejects the romance plot even while allowing Lucy to participate in various physical relations. When Lucy accompanies the family to their summer home on the Great Lakes, she remains in contact with Peggy by phone, but also gets involved with Hugh, the brother of Mariah's best friend Dinah. She isn't seduced by Hugh, but decides to strike up a relationship with him because she liked him from the moment he asked her, "Where in the West Indies are you from?" (65). Unlike Dinah, who lumps all of the Caribbean islands into one, Lucy is impressed by Hugh because he understands the important differences. While Lucy is attracted to Hugh and decides to act on that attraction, she does so in a pragmatic and not necessarily romantic way. After kissing him, Lucy ponders:

If I enjoyed myself beyond anything I had known so far, it must have been because such a long time had passed since I had been touched in that way by anyone; it must have been because I was so far from home. I was not in love. (86-87)

Lucy's attitude towards her relationship with Hugh challenges the representation of the domestic worker as the object of the male employer's sexual gaze and desire. Instead, Lucy is portrayed as a young woman who chooses to become involved with Hugh to meet a need for human connection that she has missed since leaving her home. It is important to point out that Lucy does not come to her sexual awakening through her relationship with the white protagonist.<sup>148</sup> She is educated in the realities of sex and is very much aware of her own desire before her immigration. For example, during her first sexual encounter with Hugh, she forgets to use protection. Afterwards, Lucy recalls that "I did not spend the next two weeks worrying about my

period. If it did not show up, there was no question in my mind that I would force it to do so. I knew how to do this” (69). In this situation, Lucy has taken the knowledge she gained from her mother back home with her and knows she can use it if need be.

Lucy does not confuse her physical reaction to her lover with being in love. Even as her relationship with Hugh further develops and brings her a measure of happiness, Lucy refuses to define her friendship as anything more than temporary. Unlike Mariah, who can only see Lucy and Hugh’s relationship within the construction of romantic love, Lucy “was not in love with Hugh” (70). Lucy does not position Hugh as her knight in shining armor, or as a way of becoming more assimilated, but instead, “I could tell that being in love would complicate my life just now” (71). Hugh is not the only lover Lucy takes during her first year in New York, but also develops relationships with Paul, an artist, and Roland, a fellow immigrant. In all of these relationships, Lucy is represented as being in charge of her sexuality and consciously choosing her lovers. She is not a sexual object that gets used by the men around her, but instead acts on her desire as she sees fit. Lucy sexual agency challenges the representation of the romance plot advanced by *Maid in Manhattan* and the other films and the stereotype of domestic workers as naïve or sexually available.

América and Lucy’s narratives also reject the positioning of the white male employer in the role of romantic love interest. Unlike the image of the employer as seducer or Prince Charming, the men who employ Lucy and América are represented as deeply flawed individuals who are rarely home and are, for the most part, disinterested in their family lives. In *América’s Dream*, Charlie leaves the house each morning before anyone else is up and “doesn’t come back before 7:30 and sometimes

not until long after the family has gone to bed” (151). América observes the conflicts that Charlie’s constant absence cause between her employers, but remains silent.

Lucy is also aware of the tension between Mariah and Lewis, and while she acknowledges that Lewis is a handsome man, she acknowledges that, “I was not in love with him, nor did I have a crush on him. My sympathies were with Mariah” (48).

In the two texts, the representation of the male employers is a critical one that highlights the position of power the male has in the middle-class family and refuses to advance the image of the male employer as romantic ideal.

### **Happily Ever After?**

The four texts all provide differing endings and resolutions to the women’s stories. The conclusion of the film fits in well with the stage of resolution in the traditional narrative of im/migration. After Marisa’s masquerade as a hotel guest is discovered and she is fired, she is forced to finally confront her mother and the ideas Veronica represents. In the scene that represents Marisa’s rejection of her mother’s beliefs, the elder Ventura confronts Marisa and asks, “What were you thinking going out with someone like that?” The assumption in Veronica’s question is that Marisa is not good enough to date a man of Chris’ position. Marisa refuses to allow Veronica’s question to go unchallenged and she refutes “People like you make people like him some kind of God. Why, because he’s rich? White? He has things we don’t have...that we don’t want to dream about? It must really burn you that I think I have the right to go out with him.” Her mother’s reply of “You don’t” cements the differences between the mother and daughter. Marisa gets represented as someone who does not believe in the hierarchies between rich and poor, or brown and white.

Instead, she comes across as someone who believes in the ideals of equality and democracy that allow one to dream about a better future. She chooses to believe Lionel's parting words about being a domestic worker:

To serve people takes dignity and intelligence. But remember, they are only people with money. And although we serve them, we are not their servants. What we do Miss Ventura does not define who we are. What defines us is how well we rise after falling.

Lionel's last piece of advice, given in Hoskin's beautifully accentuated British English, provides Marisa with an alternative way of thinking about herself and her labor.<sup>149</sup> In contrast to Lionel and Marisa, Veronica becomes the embodiment of old world ideas of rigid boundaries and unattainable goals.

Veronica is upset not only because she feels Marisa was dating above her station, but also because she cannot understand Marisa's ambition. Her solution to Marisa's problem of getting fired is to clean houses for Mrs. Rodriguez. Marisa, however, doesn't want to clean houses because for her, "there is no where to go from there." Veronica doesn't comprehend why Marisa won't just take the job and questions "Hasn't this taught you anything Marisa? Wake up, little girl [...] You want to end up back in the projects? Keep dreaming dreams that will never happen." Veronica's frustration with Marisa is based on her inability to fully believe in the possibility of dreaming for a better life, as she herself has been unsuccessful in assimilating. For her, earning a day-to-day living is the most important goal Marisa should have. Ultimately, Marisa ends up rejecting her mother's ideas.

I'm a good cleaning lady. I'll start over. But not with Mrs. Rodriguez. I'm going to find a job as a maid in some hotel. After some time passes, I'm gonna apply for the management program. And when I get the chance to be a manager...And I will, Ma. I know I will. I'm going



to take that chance without any fear. Without your voice in my head telling me I can't.

Marisa comes to the realization that she is the only one that can keep her from fully achieving her goals. By separating herself from her mother's influence and doubt, the film would have the audience believe Marisa can use her abilities as a good worker to help her get ahead. The main difference between mother and daughter comes down to the fact that Veronica is not invested in the ideology of the American Dream and the movie ends up representing her assimilation as a failure because of it. Like in the hegemonic immigrant narrative, it is up to Marisa to achieve that dream. Ironically, Veronica's doubts are much more realistic than Marisa's ambitions.<sup>150</sup>

Marisa's relationship with her mother, however, is not the only one that gets resolved in the film. Like the romance plot in *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*, the romantic relationship between Marisa and Chris needs a satisfactory resolution. Because of its heavy emphasis on the Cinderella story, the only ending that would appease an audience would be the reconciliation between the two lovers. As the embodiment of true American ideals, Chris has no problem in accepting Marisa as a domestic worker. The film would have one believe that their love, just like in the other movies, is so strong it can overcome all of the obstacles and barriers between them.

The film's conclusion resolves all of the different conflicts experienced by Marisa. Not only does she end up with her Prince Charming, she also ends up achieving her dream of becoming more than just the maid. Unlike Cinderella who gets carried off to the prince's castle, Marisa becomes successful not just in love but

also in her career. The last scenes of the film have Marisa on the cover of trade magazines, illustrating her success. In order to make the ending even happier, not only has Marisa become a member of management, she has inspired Stephanie and Clarise to do the same. The film promotes the ideology of success and assimilation through hard work and perseverance. Marisa's mother gets represented as unable to fully assimilate because she lacks the vision and belief in the American Dream. As her daughter, however, Marisa comes to embody the successful national citizen by embracing the new world ideas of the country.

In contrast to Marisa, who gains upward mobility through her relationship with Chris, Jasmine's sexual relationship with Bill does not fulfill the function of the romance plot and the happily ever after ending.<sup>151</sup> In the hegemonic immigrant narrative perpetuated in the films, the immigrant protagonist's relationship with the white employer helps her gain a certain level of assimilation, but Jasmine's narrative rejects such a simple resolution. While she sees her physical relationship with Bill as making love, she cannot help but think about her life back home, where girls have sex with men "always for favors" and not because they want to (1015). Jasmine uses that memory as "they made love on the Turkish carpet" to distinguish herself from the girls back home (1015). She attempts to situate her affair with Bill as different from the sexual relationships back home, but the fact that she is thinking about the use of sex as a form of exchange at the exact moment that she is "making love" with Bill only emphasizes the imbalance of power in the relationship. Jasmine might want to see herself as a "Flower of Ann Arbor [...] not Trinidad," but her status as an undocumented immigrant is not so easily resolved. She might have left the island, but

the gender disparities she observed in Trinidad continue to exist in Ann Arbor and reject the presupposition that the U.S. as the new world is different from the old.

Jasmine's effort to see her relationship with Bill as special and different from what she has known in the past only works to underscore the similarities that exist between her sexual relations with Bill and those she has seen on the island. While she might not have asked Bill for any "favors" in exchange for sex and Bill abuses his power as employer to seduce her, Jasmine ends up using their physical relationship as a way of escaping her situation. She sees herself as "a bright, pretty girl with no visa, no papers, and no birth certificate. No nothing other than what she wanted to invent and tell. She was a girl rushing wildly into the future" (1015). While Jasmine wants to imagine herself as free in the absence of official belonging and tries to convince herself of the possibilities the future holds, the last line of the story offers a much bleaker picture. As she lay there, Bill's "hand moved up her throat and forced her lips apart and it felt so good, so right, that she forgot all the dreariness of her new life and gave herself up to it" (1015). In this last line, she is finally honest about the "dreariness" of her life in Ann Arbor, a dreariness that stands in sharp contrast to the image of herself as "rushing wildly into the future." By giving in to Bill, Jasmine gives up what little control she has in an effort to escape her current life. The narrative does not provide a happy ending for Jasmine. While she might be able to temporarily break away from her life as an undocumented immigrant worker, the ending rejects any simplistic resolution to Jasmine's story. Unlike the more hegemonic immigrant narrative, for Jasmine, there is no assimilation and no clear division between the old/new worlds. Instead, knowing that Bill only sees her as an

exotic object of desire, Jasmine is left in an ambivalent position. The narrative thus leaves the reader with no happy ending.

Based on the title of the novel and the end of the narrative, it would seem like *América's Dream* also resolves the conflicts encountered by the migrant protagonist. However, the novel does not provide the happy ending we see in *Maid in Manhattan*. In leaving Puerto Rico, América and her mother arranged to keep the location of the Leverrets' home a secret in order to keep Correa from finding her. After writing to Rosalinda, however, Correa discovers the town América is living in and comes to take her back to Puerto Rico. Faced with América's resistance to returning, Correa brutally assaults América and almost kills her. After surviving the attack by Correa, América gets fired by the Leverrets and ends up working in the hotel industry again. The title of the novel does not end up being the achievement of the American Dream, but instead is a reference to the ways that América is able to free herself from the very abusive relationship in which she was trapped. She does not escape the drudgery of work and her relationship with Rosalinda continues to be a complicated one. Unlike the ideology promoted by the hegemonic immigrant narrative that has the immigrant subject severing her connection to the place of origin, América remains connected to Puerto Rico through her relationship with her mother, who refuses to move to New York when América sends for Rosalinda. While América allows herself to become romantically involved with Darío, a Nuyerican friend of Paulina's family, he is not represented as a prince charming who will rescue her. Instead, he is cab driver, a gentle father of two and a recovering drug addict. In the end, América rescues herself by fighting back.

While Lucy is no longer employed as a domestic worker at the end of her story, the narrative also does not provide the simple happy ending. After leaving Mariah's employment, as a result of feeling stifled, Lucy's documentation allows her to find work outside of the confines of the domestic space. Lucy finds work as a receptionist at a photography studio that allows her to combine her interests in photography with employment. Even though she has a job she enjoys, shares an apartment with Peggy, and is in a relationship with Paul, aspects that under the hegemonic narrative would be represented as a sort of successful assimilation, Lucy's story does not offer a simple resolution. At the end of her narrative, Lucy "was not happy" (161). Sitting alone in her apartment, Lucy begins to write in the journal Mariah gave her and laments the fact that she lacks any real connection to those around her. The story ends with Lucy's tears blurring her words on the page.

While the film *Maid in Manhattan* seems very different from *Spanglish* and *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*, it shares with them a representation of housekeeping labor that is aimed at erasing the exploitation and difficulties encountered by maids. Like the other films, *Maid in Manhattan* also closely follows the hegemonic narrative of im/migration that functions as a structure of containment. The narratives by the ethnic writers in this chapter, however, also pose challenges to those representations by advancing portrayals of immigration and domestic and housekeeping labor which resist being submerged under the rhetoric of assimilation or upward mobility. At the same time as *Lucy* provides readers with an image of a strong immigrant woman able to leave domestic labor in view of her immigration status, "Jasmine" and *América's Dream* provide representations of the difficulties

encountered by both undocumented and migrant workers in the Northern part of the U.S. Like the Latinas writing about domestic labor in the Southwest, Santiago, Mukherjee, and Kincaid offer alternative narratives that strongly challenge the erasure or romantization of domestic work.

## **Conclusion**

Having grown up in the El Paso/Juárez area, I have always felt a deep sense of responsibility to locate at the center of my academic work issues affecting the community from which I came. The projects I have undertaken in graduate school have, in one way or another, been informed by my experiences growing up in a working class immigrant family in the El Paso/Juárez border area. I originally began this dissertation project with the intention of expanding on my research and analysis of the representations of the femicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez, México.

Understanding the ways in which migration to the northern part of México had not only altered Juárez but had also affected the U.S. city of El Paso, I sought a way of situating my research on gender, migration, and labor within a U.S. context. While the original project looked at the exportation of labor spaces and the migration of workers to the border, my new research shifted its focus to look at the importation of the worker to the laboring space in the U.S. I knew that at the center of my project necessarily lay an analysis that refused to situate immigration to the U.S. as occurring in isolation from international policies, and that rejected seeing the practice of immigration as a simple movement of people across borders.

As I sought to enlarge the scope of the femicide project, I found myself turning more and more to a form of labor that is widely used but rarely acknowledged: domestic service. The practice of hiring immigrant domestic workers has a long history in El Paso, and growing up in a working class neighborhood, I was witness to the constant presence of domestic workers from Juárez. The fact that my neighborhood was working class did not mean it was exempt from the practice of

hiring “muchachas” from the other side of the river. The employment of domestic workers in El Paso has never been just a privilege of the wealthy or the upper-middle class. In fact, the economy of the border is very much predicated on the ability of workers to cross the constructed boundary between México and the U.S. on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, and, in my neighborhood, it was common to see immigrant domestic workers getting rides to the border on Friday afternoons, only to return on Monday mornings. Unlike the Cinderella fairytale, however, the women I saw did not gain any upward mobility through their labor; most of them would work for a while in the U.S. and then return home to México. None of the domestic workers who often came to visit my mother, a Mexican immigrant herself, ever remained long in the U.S., frequently finding it too hard to make ends meet or finding the sense of isolation from their families not worth the low wages they made. This experience, however, does not deny the fact that many of these domestic workers do in fact stay in the U.S., often bringing their families from Latin America or the Caribbean in due time. These types of stories, however, are rarely told in popular representations of immigrant domestic laborers.

My decision to frame an analysis of labor and im/migration through a discussion of the immigrant narrative emerged as I considered that the traditional immigrant narrative, in containing the story of immigration within the rhetoric of the “American Dream” myth of hard work, assimilation, and upward mobility, failed to account for other immigrant labor stories that I knew from personal experience. Like most ideological constructs, the hegemonic immigrant narrative has rarely accurately represented the immigrant experience of those who have entered the U.S., especially



immigrants of color; yet it continues to be referenced to discuss the immigrant experience today. Given the focus on immigration in the current general debates surrounding the nation's security and economics, it seems no coincidence that cultural productions persist in employing the ideologies of the hegemonic immigrant narrative in their representations of domestic immigrant labor. By perpetuating the ideas of assimilation and upward mobility through hard work, certain cultural texts provide an audience with a simple resolution to the immigration problem that reduces it to a good/bad binary: "good" immigrants are capable of becoming part of the nation through their hard work and perseverance (like immigrants of the past) while "bad" immigrants fail to achieve success because of their own lack of initiative or inability to function within the nation. The "good" immigrant becomes worthy of living the "American Dream" while the "bad" immigrant is made to feel that she should return to the country of origin. Absent in this construct are the very real structures of oppression faced by immigrants, including racism, sexism, and classism, which cannot be easily overcome.

Ultimately, what is at stake in this project? In order to explain the purpose of this dissertation and my overall analysis of race, gender, labor, and im/migration, I invoke Inés Hernández-Avila's question to Chicanas and Native American women:

How can we be sure that we have divested ourselves from the imposed stereotypes of Native American women as submissive, passive squaws and drudges (or more recently as mystical, unintellectual 'bringers of good feelings'), and of Chicanas and Latinas as fiery, dumb, promiscuous sexpots? (193).

I would answer that one way to do so is through our intellectual labor. As literary critics, one can read cultural productions through a critical lens that positions gender,

class, race, sexuality and labor at the center of our analysis and that challenges the stereotypes that continue to be placed on the bodies of im/migrant women of color. As a responsible scholar, one must also teach students to read cultural texts through a critical perspective, giving them the tools to question and ultimately reject those stereotypes. In producing cultural texts, the importance of creating counter-narratives cannot be over emphasized. Popular cultural productions have the ability to provide representations that refuse to participate in the degradation of women of color and the ideological containment of the immigrant experience, although that is not often the case, as is clear in sexist rap lyrics. While critical texts are more often than not rarely available to a wide audience, their presence in the classroom as objects of literary analysis becomes another way of challenging the racist, sexist, classist, and xenophobic representation of immigrant women.

This project attempts to respond to Hernández-Avila's query through an analysis of a variety of contemporary cultural productions. In the previous chapters, I illustrate the ways in which certain cultural productions uncritically continue to employ the hegemonic narrative of the immigration paradigm in their stories of immigrant domestic workers. There are, however, some texts that do contest the ideological enclosure of these narratives. Among these counter-narratives are several by Chicana, Latina, and Caribbean writers who challenge the racist and sexist stereotypes of immigrant women of color and domestic labor. In my analysis I include a variety of texts that resist the narrative and ideological conventions of the traditional immigrant story by providing representations of im/migration and labor that are situated in a late-capitalist moment in which the connections between core and

periphery—country of origin and host country—are intricate and no longer easily reducible to the old/new world binary.

### **Structures of Containment**

As discussed in my Introduction, William Boelhower's schema of narration identifies how the traditional immigrant narrative has been structured into three distinct phases: expectations, contact, and resolution. The schema lays out the fundamental elements found in the hegemonic narrative, elements which are supposed to be so general that they can easily be applied to a variety of stories of immigration in U.S. literature. In my analysis I do refer to several texts that neatly fit into such a schema. In fact, Boelhower's paradigm is appropriate for the analysis of hegemonic texts characterized by what Frederic Jameson calls a "structure of containment." These hegemonic immigrant stories are contained by structures of assimilation and upward mobility through hard work and perseverance. By enclosing the story of immigration within a rhetoric of individualism these stories further perpetuate the myth of the "American Dream." The traditional schema of narration thus functions to contain the story of immigration within a narrative that promotes the idea of the U.S. as "America," the land of endless opportunity.

All three chapters have offered an analysis of various cultural productions that employ the hegemonic narrative of immigration in their stories. Both *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* provide examples of older texts whose emphasis on the individual's journey from old world to new world subject is predicated on the protagonist's ability to overcome challenges in order to prove his worth as citizen of the nation. These texts privilege the masculine perspective and stress the importance of education as a

way of achieving upward mobility. Written during the late 50s and early 70s, a time when Chicanos' status as second-class citizens was beginning to be forcefully challenged, it is easy to see why both Galarza and Villarreal would position their protagonists' stories within the genres of the immigrant story and the *bildungsroman*. What is surprising is the persistent popularity that the traditional immigrant narrative enjoys.

The films, *Spanglish*, *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*, and *Maid in Manhattan*, have all been produced within the last couple of decades but continue to use the story of immigration seen in traditional immigrant novels. While the protagonists are women, the films are masculinist texts that reduce the representations of immigrant domestic workers to Latina stereotypes and situate their stories within the myth of success, causing the viewer to believe that if the protagonist merely tries hard enough, she can overcome all obstacles. Differing from the novels, however, the films use the female protagonist to advance a romance plot in an effort to provide the audience with a happy ending that resolves the immigrant subject's position in the new nation through her relationship with the white male love interest. In the end, the three films promote the ideology of assimilation through the use of the gendered and racialized body of the immigrant workers and subsume their story within the hegemonic narrative of immigration.

### **New Narrative of Immigration**

In the last two chapters I turned the focus of my analysis to cultural productions by Chicana, Latina, and Caribbean writers whose stories of labor and immigration pose a direct challenge to the strategies of containment found in the

hegemonic narrative. The texts by Lucha Corpi, Pat Mora, Milcha Sánchez-Scott, Esmeralda Santiago, Marisela Norte, Jamaica Kincaid, and Bharati Mukherjee offer narratives of immigration that reject the old/new world binary in favor of a representation of the connections between country of origin and host country. These connections play a role in the decision to im/migrate and remain an important part of the immigrant experience. Immigrant women's decisions to im/migrate are no longer represented as fitting into the phase of expectation that sees them entering the U.S. in pursuit of the "American Dream," but are instead portrayed as being predicated on the need to survive economic hardships or escape various forms of violence. Several of these texts also emphasize the difficulties encountered by the immigrant subject in her attempt to negotiate the liminal space between the country of origin and the U.S., the crossing of the border, and the need to make herself as inconspicuous as possible when lacking the documentation that provides official recognition of her place in the host country.

The texts analyzed also challenge the representation of domestic labor portrayed in the films. Unlike the "happy domestic" or the "sexy maid" stereotypes popular in cultural productions, the various novels and poems illustrate the physically demanding and often degrading aspects of domestic labor that cannot so easily be subsumed under a rhetoric of upward mobility through hard work. The texts also focus on the exploitation of the domestic worker at the hands of racist and classist employers who rely on the labor of the immigrant worker while, at the same time, often resenting her presence. Through the rejection of the romance plot, some of the novels also strongly object to the sexual exploitation of the domestic worker at the

hands of her employer that occurs because of the precarious position the immigrant subject inhabits in the host country, especially if she is undocumented. By analyzing both Southwest and Northeast based cultural productions, I illustrate the commonalities that exist between immigrant domestic workers based not just on gender and labor, but also on un/documented status.

### **The Next Chapter**

In the future version of this project, as I continue to revise and expand my work, I hope to develop additional strategies for reading new immigrant narratives that address the hegemonic model's failure to encompass contemporary stories of immigration. The analysis of the counter-narratives in the previous chapters suggests that a simple paradigm like Boelhower's is inadequate in describing the experiences of the more current immigrant subject. My analysis instead gestures towards the likelihood that more than one paradigm is needed to fully understand the representation of present day im/migration. When looking at new stories of immigration, it would be useful to read the texts in relation, for example, to a paradigm of gender that distinguishes the differences between female and male experience of im/migration. Clearly, we also have to employ a class paradigm that acknowledges the disparity in resources that exist between immigrant subjects and rejects the assumption that all immigrants are poor agricultural workers. It would also be helpful to identify a paradigm that better describes a transborder im/migration within the Americas as distinctly different from an East or West immigration that crosses oceans. And obviously, there exists a need to identify a paradigm of the undocumented immigration story that cannot be reconciled under a model of

documented and state-sanctioned im/migration. Is it possible to find a schema of narration that encompasses an intersection of these different types of paradigms? Or will such a schema become reductionist? These are some of the questions that I hope to continue addressing as I further develop the dissertation.

A future expansion of the dissertation, given the rise of immigrant workers caring for the elderly population of the U.S., will surely include texts that portray that aspect of domestic labor, like Angie Cruz's novel, *Let it Rain Coffee*. I also want to increase the scope of the project by looking at representations of sweatshop labor, another sector in which immigrant workers are heavily concentrated. By looking at films like *Real Women Have Curves* in conjunction with texts like John Rechy's novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*, Luis Alfaro's spoken word piece "Lupe," and Josefina Lopez' play *Real Women Have Curves*, I can analyze the ways in which immigration, gender, and labor get represented in the manufacturing space of the sweatshop, another enclosed space that renders its workers invisible. Given more time, I want to concentrate on further theorizing various spaces in and around the place of labor, the role that governmentality plays in the immigrant experience, and the ways in which the construction of citizenship is changing under a more globally connected world.

The discussion on immigration reform and the physical and ideological attacks on immigrants in our current moment make the importance of understanding popular representations of immigrant subjects an urgent project. It is vital to analyze, critique, and recognize the ways in which cultural productions disseminate ideas about immigration and labor in furthering or challenging the traditional story of

immigration. Ultimately, the hegemonic narrative reduces the immigrant experience to the individual level and attempts to erase structures of oppression. Understanding how the employment of such a narrative continues to perpetuate the myth of assimilation and upward mobility will produce critical work that challenges the containment of the immigrant experience and allows for an analysis of cultural productions that promote new perspectives on immigration and labor.



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<sup>53</sup> In chapter two, I discuss the rhetoric of family and domestic labor in a more in-depth analysis.

<sup>54</sup> On her first day of school, Deborah purchases all of Cristina's school supplies and presents her with a necklace as a "little first-day-at-a-new-school present," setting herself up as the generous benefactor and not understanding how she is undermining Flor's role as provider for her child.

<sup>55</sup> In her pivotal text on domestic work, Judith Rollins observes that "the female employer, with her motherliness and protectiveness and generosity, is expressing in a distinctly feminine way her lack of respect for the domestic as an autonomous, adult employee" (186).

<sup>56</sup> While Mrs. Anderson's racism cannot be overcome in the film, even after discovering Nisa's true identity, Mrs. Anderson refers to her and Joa as "barbarians," she is the only one of the characters who does not embrace Nisa in the end. She ends up representing a rigid older generation that will eventually make way for the much more tolerant generation to which Jason and his friends belong.

<sup>57</sup> By casting a Spanish actress to play a Mexican character, the film collapses the differences that exist between Latinas. The widespread practice of using Spanish actors to play Mexican characters perpetuates the idea that all Latinos are the same, and the only difference that exists is the racial one that separates them from white America.

<sup>58</sup> Laura Herring was born in Mexico, but had settled in El Paso, TX and I remember the huge parade that was organized when she returned to El Paso, a predominately Latino city, after being crowned Miss USA.

<sup>59</sup> Flor is upset because Deborah arranged for a sleepover for Cristina at her home without her permission, and John has just found out that Deborah had an affair.

<sup>60</sup> The U.S. government's involvement in helping put into power a government that guaranteed structural adjustment policies that benefited the U.S. and other foreign investors, and the role it had in the reorganization of Brazil's labor movement are but two examples of U.S. interventionist policies (Shenk, Green).

<sup>61</sup> The film also reduces the issue of the people being affected by the deforestation of the Amazon to indigenous groups, ignoring the multitude of peasants being forced to move into, and then out of, the rainforests as a result of new enclosures (Maurer).

<sup>62</sup> It makes no reference to the types of transnational industries that provide resources for American consumption, including the oil industry, the cattle industry, and the lumber industry, at the expense of Latin American natural resources.

<sup>63</sup> While this is a possibility (for example, see Mary Romero's introduction to *Maid in the U.S.A.*), it is much harder than the film portrays it to be. In her research on domestic labor, Judith Rollins reports that "All of the mothers of the domestics I interviewed, except one, had been domestics themselves" illustrating that the daughters of domestic workers are not always able to achieve a higher level of social/economic status than their mothers (112).

<sup>64</sup> The practice of contracting workers from the periphery to the core has grown exponentially. The United Nations Population Fund's *State of World Population Report 2006* reports that "Singapore and the Philippines, for example, are home to an astounding 600 and 1,000 agencies (respectively) devoted to the recruitment or deployment of overseas workers, many of whom are domestic workers" (54).

<sup>65</sup> As a play, however, access to the performance is limited as only a few individuals actually see the play performed. Even when published, plays do not have access to the same number of audience members that a film enjoys.

<sup>66</sup> Hsu, Spence H. "In Border Fence's Path, Congressional Roadblocks." *Washington Post*, Oct. 6, 2006. A01.

<sup>67</sup> In *No One is Illegal*, historians Mike Davis and Justin Akers Chacón draw important parallels between the Minutemen Project and a long U.S. history of white vigilante violence.

<sup>68</sup> One of many examples includes the death of 18-year-old Guillermo Martinez-Rodriguez, a Tijuana resident who was shot in the back by a Border Patrol Agent Dec. 30, 2005. The actions of the agent were justified by the INS as being part of the administration's "zero tolerance" policy (Van Uken).

<sup>69</sup> Julia Watson reports on the practice of female migrants taking birth control several months before their migration in order to avoid becoming pregnant as a result of rape.

(<http://www.ncdsv.org/images/WomenRiskRapeDeathUSJourney.pdf>)

<sup>70</sup> In "Rape as a Weapon of War: Advancing Human Rights for Women at the U.S.-Mexico Border,"

Sylvanna Falcón argues that rape is one outcome of the militarization of the border.

<sup>71</sup> Ehrenreich and Russell Hochschild report that, “[t]he governments of some sending countries actively encourage women to migrate in search of domestic jobs, reasoning that migrant women are more likely than their male counterparts to send their hard-earned wages to their families rather than spending the money on themselves” (7).

<sup>72</sup> Sassen reports that in 1998, remittances sent home surpassed \$70 billion and that in countries like the Philippines, “remittances were the third largest source of foreign currency” (270).

<sup>73</sup> For a more current theatrical representation of the difficulties of immigration and the connections between the core and the periphery, see Culture Clash’s *Bordertown: Tijuana/San Diego*.

<sup>74</sup> Sassen reports that, “Legal immigration to the United States increased to 500,000 entries a year in the 1980s, up from 265,000 in 1960. The 1970 U.S. Census recorded 9.6 million immigrants, representing 4.7 percent of the population. The 1980s Census recorded 13.9 million immigrants representing 6.2 percent of the population” (*The Mobility*, 43). These figures exclude the number of undocumented immigrants “estimated to range from three to seven million” (44).

<sup>75</sup> For an interesting history of domestic labor in El Paso, see Vicki L Ruiz’s, “By the Day or Week: Mexican Domestic Workers in El Paso.”

<sup>76</sup> In her book on Chicana poetry, Marta Sánchez traces the history and importance of Chicana poetry. For Sánchez, “poetry was better able to meet the needs of the Mexican-Chicano community, which urgently wanted to redefine its relationship to American society” (17).

<sup>77</sup> Mary Romero reports that “researchers estimate that anywhere from 18,000 to 26,000 domestics are [currently] employed in private residences in El Paso” (121)

<sup>78</sup> For an earlier representation of domestic labor in El Paso, see Arturo Islas’ “Judgment Day” from *The Rain God*, published in 1984, but set in the fifties and sixties.

<sup>79</sup> Ruiz, 274-275.

<sup>80</sup> As a result of industrialization projects, the population of Ciudad Juárez has grown exponentially. Janice A. Corbett, in “Ciudad Juárez 4<sup>th</sup> Largest City” reports that the population in 1970 was estimated at 407,370<sup>80</sup> while current estimates place the city’s population at 1.3 million and growing by 170,000-190,000 annually because of the migration of workers.

<sup>81</sup> According to Laura Velasco Ortiz, a researcher with Tijuana’s Colegio de la Frontera Norte, more than 60 percent of the estimated \$20 billion dollars in remittances received by Mexico are now sent by women as opposed to about 39 percent sent by men. (*FNS*, “The Century of the Woman Migrant” 03/07/06)

<sup>82</sup> Sassen reports that “about half of all immigrant women are concentrated in two occupations, operatives and services, with variations by nationality. Nearly 70% of all Hispanic immigrant women in these five states [CA, NY, TX, FL, IL] held operative, service or laborer jobs” (*The Mobility*, 77).

<sup>83</sup> For her insightful discussion of Alice Childress’ short story and the ways in which the rhetoric of family has worked in the construction of race and notions of nationhood, see Patricia Hill Collins’ “Like One of the Family: A Tale of Two Races.” Fathom Knowledge Network: <http://www.fathom.com/feature/35639/>

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.rjames.com/Toltec/myth2.htm>

<sup>85</sup> In El Paso, the most popular private school for boys is Cathedral High School.

<sup>86</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo reports that today, “most Americans who hire a domestic worker to come into their homes on a daily basis do so in order to meet their needs for *both* housecleaning and child care” (38).

<sup>87</sup> The play provides a portrayal of children that provides an alternative to the loving child represented in “Judgment Day,” *Spanglish* and “Graduation Morning.”

<sup>88</sup> Judith Rollins reports that “there is [an] additional dimension to ethnic choices that must be taken into account: some employers actually prefer women of color as servants because [...] their presence makes the employers’ status clearer to neighbors and because [...] women of color function better as contrast figures for strengthening employers’ egos and class and racial identities” (129).

<sup>89</sup> Mary Pat Brady convincingly argues that “[n]ational borders function to create the image that countries on opposite sides of the border exist in different temporal development phases and, as such, their citizens transform as they cross these borders. They become less advanced or more advanced

(etc.) depending on their movement across the border” (50).

<sup>90</sup> Both *Pocho* and *Barrio Boy* represent the women in their lives as such stereotypes.

<sup>91</sup> In her article, “America’s Dirty Work: Migrant Maids and Modern-Day Slavery,” Joy M. Zaremka documents the widespread sexual harassment and sexual assault of domestic workers (142-153).

<sup>92</sup> Grace Chang writes that, “[work] done by immigrant workers is defined as an opportunity or privilege bestowed on the worker by the employer [...] Employers of immigrants in private households live out their fantasies of nobility, seeing themselves as beneficent ‘padronas’ or padrones’ in middle- and upper-class homes across the nation” (168).

<sup>93</sup> Romero argues that “uniforms are used to distinguish the maid from families and friends, particularly when employers fear that others might mistake the reason for her presence...[and that they function] as a symbol signifying [the] employers’ position to family members and friends” (143).

<sup>94</sup> The U.S. government was instrumental in the coup that toppled Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and that eventually plunged Guatemala into a civil war and the creation of U.S. trained death squads that cost the lives of hundreds and thousands of individuals.

<sup>95</sup> Brady argues that, “The abjected aliens are fundamental to the creation of insider/outsider citizen/interloper, nation/not-nation” (53).

<sup>96</sup> Like many independently produced CDs, Norte’s *Norte/word* is hard to find, which limits its accessibility to the public even further.

<sup>97</sup> Even if Norte was a paying guest, as a woman of color, she is positioned outside of the construct of what a hotel patron is supposed to look like.

<sup>98</sup> “On the basis of the stereotype that all Mexican women are named Maria, white employers in the Southwest frequently refer to all Latina domestics as ‘Maria’” (Romero, 146).

<sup>99</sup> The analysis of housekeeping labor in the hotel industry is important because of the rising number of workers employed by hotels. The hotel workers union reports that the lodging industry is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest retail industry in the country and that it employs about 1.3 million workers, one fourth of which are housekeepers ([www.hotelworkersrising.org](http://www.hotelworkersrising.org)).

<sup>100</sup> Working in the hotel industry, however, does provide housekeeping with the possibility of unionization, a support to which the domestic worker laboring in a private home has no access. For a fictionalized account of the effort to unionize hotel workers, see Ken Loach’s *Bread and Roses* (2000),

<sup>101</sup> In her essay on her documentary *Brincando el charco*, Frances Negrón-Muntaner writes that the phrase “brincando el charco” a phrase used by Puerto Ricans to describe their migration to the U.S., “aims to minimize the impact of crossing [...] although it is widely acknowledged that one is never the same afterwards [...] Our stay in the United States, permanent or not, is a curiously continuous experience that produces cultural anxiety precisely because of its ambiguities” (512)

<sup>102</sup> While the 1916 Jones Act included “the imposition of U.S. citizenship,” the 1922 Supreme Court decision in *Balzac v. the People of Porto Rico* ruled that “the Jones Act did not make Puerto Rico a part of the United States and that the protection of the U.S. Constitution did not fully extend to the island” (Pérez y González, 29-30).

<sup>103</sup> Puerto Rico is still identified by the political status of the 1940s and 50s that officially refers to it as a commonwealth and, as such, it has “a popular elected governor and legislature, but its residents [...] have no voting representatives in Congress, and may not vote in national elections” (Rivera-Batiz and Santiago, 1).

<sup>104</sup> The film earned \$93.8 million at the U.S. box office ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

<sup>105</sup> Marisa’s ambition to move into hotel management at such an exclusive hotel seems misguided at best considering the fact that managers at top hotels are often recruited from hotel management programs such as The School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University and Les Roches School of Hotel Management.

<sup>106</sup> For example, in the film *Selena*, Lopez played the title character, a Mexican American singer, while in *The Wedding Planner*, Lopez was cast in the role of an Italian American woman. Her production company is named Nuyorican Productions, highlighting her identification as Nuyorican ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)).

<sup>107</sup> Lopez has at times tried to market herself as just a girl from the barrio who has been able to achieve success. For example, her song “Jenny From the Block” discusses her background.

<sup>108</sup> Ironically, in what can only be described as a way of “whitening” Lopez, emphasis has been placed on the fact that while both of her parents were born in Puerto Rico and met in New York City, one of them is in fact of “European ancestry” (www.imdb.com). While some sites report it is just one of her parents, others claim both of the parents’ families were European immigrants.

<sup>109</sup> Rollins discusses the practice of rendering domestic workers invisible and the ways in which it makes the domestic worker a “non-person.” She points to the fact that it is a practice with a long history and argues that “the servant as a non-person is a perfect fit: the position is subordinate by definition, the person in it disrespected by centuries of tradition” (210).

<sup>110</sup> For a discussion on the importance of naming and domestic labor, see the analysis of Marisela Norte’s “Act of the Faithless” in the previous chapter.

<sup>111</sup> A similar strategy of deflection used to dismiss the racism of Jason’s parents in *The Forbidden Dance is the Lambada*.

<sup>112</sup> In fitting with the Cinderella storyline, Caroline becomes romantically interested in Chris Marshall.

<sup>113</sup> This representation is quite different from the one offered by the Hotel Workers Rising’s statistics on occupational injuries suffered disproportionately by housekeepers in the hotel industry (www.hotelworkersrising.org).

<sup>114</sup> In her text on the effects of tourism on the Caribbean, Polly Pattullo reports that in 2002 Puerto Rico was the American tourist’s favorite destination in the Caribbean with 28% of all stayovers (169).

<sup>115</sup> For another example of the physical toll of domestic labor on the body, see Barbara Ehrenreich’s chapter “Scrubbing in Maine” in *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (51-119).

<sup>116</sup> Pattullo reports that “throughout the Caribbean, an estimated one in seven jobs is to be found in the tourist industry; a higher percentage than in any other region of the world” (66). In her work on tourism and gender, Janet Henshall Momsen finds that “the main form of employment for women in the tourist industry is as maids in hotels” (112).

<sup>117</sup> Mimi Sheller theorizes that the representation of the Caribbean as Edenic and bountiful, “where others labour and living is easy” has encouraged tourists “to believe that they can engage guiltlessly in sensuous abandon and bodily pleasure,” a practice she identifies as “hedonism” (177-178).

<sup>118</sup> América’s refusal to see herself as “American” is not only due to the fact that she lives in Puerto Rico. Once she migrates to New York, she continues to identify herself as Puerto Rican.

<sup>119</sup> For a brief history of U.S. imperial policies in Puerto Rico and the effects on the Puerto Rico economy, including the inception of Operation Bootstrap and the development of the petrochemical industry, see Ch. One in *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s* (1-21).

<sup>120</sup> Just like Sassen argues that immigration policy “is shaped by an understanding of immigration as the consequence of the individual actions of emigrants; the receiving country is taken as a passive agent, one not implicated in the process of emigration,” the hegemonic immigrant narrative perpetuates the idea of immigration as an individual choice through its new/old world binary (*Globalization*, 7).

<sup>121</sup> For an account of the role that foreign interests, including the IMF, have played in making Caribbean nations dependent on tourism, an industry that often only benefits transnational corporations, see George Gmelch’s chapter “Island Tourism” in *Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism* (1-24).

<sup>122</sup> A common practice of improving infrastructure for the tourist industry that Cynthia Enloe sees is occurring in various areas around the world: “In reality, tourism may be creating a new kind of dependency for poor nations...Countries such as Puerto Rico, Haiti, Nepal, Gambia and Mexico have put their developmental eggs in the tourism basket, spending millions of dollars from public funds to build the sort of facilities that foreign tourists demand” (32).

<sup>123</sup> A dangerous practice because, as Sheller argues, “depictions of Caribbean edenism underwrite performances of touristic hedonism by naturalizing the region’s landscape and its inhabitants as avatars of primitivism, luxuriant corruption, sensual stimulation, ease and availability” (170).

<sup>124</sup> The practice of the U.S. military taking over Puerto Rican land is a long one. During WWII, the U.S. built the naval base that was supposed to be temporary and would deprive Vieques of 65 percent of its best lands—land previously used for agriculture (Fernandez, 229). By 1950, the military permanently “owned 70 percent of Vieques” and a considerable part of the Puerto Rican Island Culebra; by 1991, the U.S. military bases occupied “roughly 14 percent of Puerto Rico” (Fernandez, 279, 427).

Even though the U.S. military finally pulled out of the area in May 2003, part of the property remained under U.S. ownership, this time through the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.

<sup>125</sup> In her text on women and international politics, Enloe reports that “Women in most societies are presumed to be naturally capable at cleaning, washing, cooking, and serving. Since tourism companies need precisely those jobs done, they can keep labor costs low if they can define those jobs as women’s work. In the Caribbean in the early 1980s, 75 percent of tourism workers are women” (34).

<sup>126</sup> The practice of turning to Puerto Rico for workers is not a new one. Rivera-Batiz and Santiago note that in the 1940s and 50s, Puerto Rico’s Department of Labor arranged contracts between U.S. employers and Puerto Rican workers (45). Similarly, Don Irving arranges for América’s employment by the Leveretts.

<sup>127</sup> Mukherjee’s novel also has an immigrant protagonist named Jasmine who works as a domestic worker, but her country of origin is India and not the Caribbean. The novel provides a narrative of immigration and has been widely reviewed. For example, see Anu Aneja’s article, “‘Jasmine,’ the Sweet Scent of Exile” in which she reads the character of Jasmine as a recolonization of the third world woman.

<sup>128</sup> Jasmine’s middle-class status in Trinidad is further evidenced by the ways in which Jasmine looks down on the Daboos and sees herself as better than them.

<sup>129</sup> For a history of U.S. military imperialism in Trinidad, see Ronald Fernandez’ *Cruising the Caribbean: U.S. Influence and Intervention in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>130</sup> Mr. Daboo’s match-up marriage service, which fixed up “illegals with islanders who had made it legally” is an example of the ways in which immigrant communities learn to circumvent immigration laws in order to remain in the country (1009).

<sup>131</sup> In *Doméstica*, Hondagneu-Sotelo writes that “many Latina domestic workers in live-in jobs earn less than minimum wage for marathon hours” and that “the lack of privacy, the mandated separation from family and friends, the round-the-clock hours [...] prompt most Latina immigrants to seek other job arrangements” (35-36).

<sup>132</sup> Romero reports that “in an effort to escape the diffuse duties of their housewife roles, employers do not acknowledge work boundaries. Even when the worker’s tasks were agreed upon in a verbal contract, employees frequently reported that employers requested additional duties” (101).

<sup>133</sup> For a discussion on the rhetoric of family, see Ch. 1.

<sup>134</sup> In her text, *From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*, Trudier Harris argues that the kitchen, while being the most comfortable space in the home for the domestic worker, is also the place that most tangibly signifies her subservient status in the home (15).

<sup>135</sup> In her essay on *Lucy* and postcolonial literature, Brooke Lenz argues that Lucy’s position as outsider “allows the reader to see particular truths or realities that are not apparent to someone more fully assimilated into dominant ideologies” (101-102).

<sup>136</sup> For an alternative reading that positions Mariah as a mother figure for Lucy, see Kristen Mahlis’ “Gender and Exile: Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*” or Rosanne Kanhai’s “‘Sensing Designs in History’s Muddles’: Global Feminism and the Postcolonial Novel.”

<sup>137</sup> See critic Moira Ferguson’s chapter on *Lucy* in her collection of essays, *Jamaica Kincaid: Where the Land Meets the Body*, for an interesting reading of ways in which the daffodils and the color yellow come to signify domination in the text.

<sup>138</sup> In fact, for critic Edyta Oczkowicz, Lucy’s “acceptance of her post-colonial past [is] an important part of who she is and who she may want to become” and that “denial and self-dispossession of her past will not liberate her unless she appropriates her past in the process of exploring the present” (145, 146).

<sup>139</sup> For a comprehensive look at the changing immigrant population in the New York suburbs, see Sarah J. Mahler’s *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*.

<sup>140</sup> “A Statistical Portrait of Hispanics at Mid-Decade,” Table 10. Hispanic Population by State 2000 and 2005 (<http://pewhispanic.org>).

<sup>141</sup> “A Statistical Portrait of Foreign Born Population at Mid-Decade,” Table 9. Foreign Born by State and Region of Birth: 2005 (<http://pewhispanic.org>).

<sup>142</sup> This is similar to the practice of negating knowledge gained in the periphery we see represented in *Latina* (see Brady footnote in chapter two).

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<sup>143</sup> In the narrative, the women discuss Nati, a young immigrant from Peru who worked for two brothers in the neighborhood. Left alone for the majority of the day and unable to communicate with them, the young woman has a mental breakdown and attempts suicide (225-226).

<sup>144</sup> For information on the effects on the communities left behind, see Rhacel Salazar Parreñas' study on children in the Philippines in *Children of Global Migrations*. Also see Sonia Nazario's recounting of a young boy's journey to be reunited with the mother who left Honduras to work in the U.S. in *Enrique's Journey*.

<sup>145</sup> The scene is so reminiscent of the Cinderella fairy tale that Wang even has Marisa trying on Caroline's shoes, which conveniently don't fit because Caroline's feet are too big.

<sup>146</sup> The viewer is encouraged to assume that once she becomes a manager, she can openly date Chris, making very clear the hierarchies that exist within the hotel employee structure.

<sup>147</sup> While the idea of a housekeeping employee being allowed to borrow such valuable merchandise seems completely absurd, it would be very easy for the viewer to accept the change of Marisa from domestic worker to socialite because of the fact that Jennifer Lopez has become known as fashionista and her framing on the screen in designer gown and jewels would be a familiar image.

<sup>148</sup> Helen Tiffin argues that in the story, "sexuality becomes something powerfully experienced, not constructed within a European theoretical frame, and something through which women can themselves exercise a control over men's bodies" (920).

<sup>149</sup> Lionel's speech also provides the audience with an easy resolution to any discomfort they might have about domestic labor. By emphasizing the individual's actions in persevering, the speech also conforms to the ideology of success being based on the individual and not on the outside forces one encounters.

<sup>150</sup> Pérez y González writes that for many Puerto Rican im/migrants, "what they expected in terms of decent, good-paying jobs, affordable housing, and education did not materialize for many of them" (64).

<sup>151</sup> In my reading of "Jasmine" I oppose the representation of upwardly-mobile eroticism that critic Bruce Robbins argues "Jasmine" and *Lucy* perpetuate. Among my many critiques of Robbins' essay is his inability to significantly differentiate between the novel and the short story and his assumption that Jasmine is an au pair who is "willingly seduced by the paterfamilias" (138).