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Maria Eugenia López-García

Candidate

American Studies

Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Chairperson

Dr. Irene Vasquez

Dr. Alyosha Goldstein

Dr. Shanté Paradigm Smalls

Dr. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez

**CARTOGRAPHIES OF PRECARITY:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF FILIPINA AND MEXICAN
MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS**

by

MARIA EUGENIA LOPEZ-GARCIA

B. A., Anthropology and Political Science,
The University of Texas at El Paso, 2007
M.A., History,
The University of Texas at El Paso, 2012

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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American Studies

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Dedication

For my mother Martha, mujer guerrera, the strongest woman I know, my shero. For my father Rodolfo, a radical thinker, a rebel who has the kindest soul and the biggest heart. And for my brother Erasmo, the most resilient, caring, and brilliant person I know. All of you have taught me that love is patient, love is hope, love is courage, and that love is a revolutionary act. Together, we have navigated life's transitions and challenges, siempre juntxs.

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For my abuelos, Erasmo Calleros Vasquez and Rodolfo Lopez del Rivero. Your courageous and determined spirits, guide me, walk beside me.

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CARTOGRAPHIES OF PRECARIETY: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF FILIPINA AND MEXICAN MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS

By

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Ph.D., American Studies

University of New Mexico, 2019

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the cultural politics of migrant domestic work in the 2000s within popular culture, mass media, contemporary art, and grassroots national organizing. While scholars and activists have identified that migrant domestic workers are the hidden backbone of the U.S. economy, dominant cultural and social narratives reinforce the racialized and gendered logics of capitalism that work to devalue domestic work as informal, disposable and precarious. It was not until after the struggle of domestic workers achieved recognition through the ratification of the International Labor Office of Convention 189 in July 2011 that this labor sector gained more intense media attention. As expected, news outlets have prioritized sensationalist stories on human trafficking and modern-day slavery, obscuring migrant women's everyday struggles as testaments of the capitalist exploitation and appropriation of their emotional labor. As scholars Grace Hong and Lisa Lowe have endeavored to illustrate, it is crucial to situate the cultural production of immigrant women's labor as a site for the articulation of multiple and complex subjectivities that function as oppositional narratives to the disavowal/devaluation of migrant domestic workers' lives and work.

Considering the role of the fetishization of difference as a system of valuation/devaluation of domestic labor, this dissertation is focused on the cultural forms and practices of Filipina and Latina migrant workers in the United States. I juxtapose dominant narratives of the valueless status and disposability of domestic workers alongside the expressions, imaginaries, and cultural productions emerging from workers' spaces of individual and collective agency. Using visual, performance, discursive analysis and queer of color and feminist approaches to comparative racialization and cultural politics, I argue that the cultural forms and practices of migrant domestic workers in the U.S make legible the economic dispossession, emotional exploitation and the differential valuation of brown bodies in domestic labor. By looking at creative responses such as performance pieces, contemporary artwork, and film, this project relies on an interdisciplinary framework for the analysis of the affective power of racialized immigrant women's culture in the form of emerging political subjectivities, strategies of representation and alternative imaginaries.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Troubling Visibility

On April 24, 2016, CNN aired Episode 1, Season 7 of *Parts Unknown*, in which culinary icon and food critic Anthony Bourdain returns to “The Land of Lechon,” Manila, Philippines, during Christmas season to get a glimpse of how much had the city changed since his last trip in 2009.¹ I anxiously awaited the release of this episode because, by that time, I was already convinced that my dissertation project was going to explore the connections between Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers in the United States. Besides, I had read from different reviews that Bourdain’s episode was inspired by the story of a woman that worked for almost 30 years as a domestic worker/nanny with the family of one of the producers of the show. As I watched the episode, I noticed that the scenes in which Bourdain narrated the role of overseas domestic workers in the national economy resonated with my visual memories of the arrival of migrant Oaxaqueñxs at the Oaxaca airport and the expression of happiness in the faces of their families awaiting their return. I also remember witnessing moments of departure, sad faces with tears among the families that stayed, and a resilient look in those that had to leave. My memories of those moments seemed almost identical as those captured by the production of *Parts Unknown* in a sequel of scenes at the Manila airport. Throughout the episode, I kept drawing parallels between the circumstances that forced Filipinxs and Oaxaqueñxs to leave their homes and families in search of a living wage. It was not until Aurora Medina -the woman who for almost 30 years had been Erik

¹ Lechon is the national pork dish of the Philippines. Considered a culinary delicacy, lechon is a whole pig roasted over charcoal for a few hours. The dish is mostly prepared for communal celebrations and festivities. Sandy, CO. "John." Philippines Guide. September 27, 2015. Accessed May 26, 2019. <https://www.philippinesinsider.com/filipino-cuisine/lechon-philippines-favorite-delicacy/>.

Osterholm's (executive producer of the show) nanny- appears on screen with her family that I felt a sense of identification with her story. It is at that point that I remembered the multiple stories I heard while growing up about indigenous women from Oaxaca migrating to the United States to work as nannies and housekeepers: the aunt of my mother's best friend who spent almost thirty years in Los Angeles taking care of the daughters of one of the members of British rock band Queen; Toña, the kind and patient domestic worker that for many years took care of me while my parents worked full time; and Odilia, my mother's goddaughter who migrated from Latuvi, a Zapotec village in Oaxaca, to also work as a housekeeper in Los Angeles for many years. In just a few minutes of screen time, Aurora's story evoked both profoundly personal memories and a feeling of commonality that made me wonder about the importance of critical representations of domestic work in popular culture. But more importantly, I began to question why stories like those of the women I knew had never been exposed or presented in a public platform like *Parts Unknown* and in such a "dignified way."

This rumination continued until I read Bourdain's field notes on his trip to the Philippines, which he titled: "Why are Filipino workers so kind and giving?" Among the many thought-provoking statements he makes, I found the following to be particularly thorny:

This episode is an attempt to address the question of why so many Filipinos are so damn caring. Why they care so much -- for each other -- for strangers. Because my experience is far from unusual. Hundreds of thousands -- maybe millions -- of children have been raised by Filipino nannies. Usually mothers of their own children who they were forced to leave behind in the Philippines... Where does this kindness, this instinct for...charity come from?²

² Bourdain, Anthony. "Bourdain's Field Notes: Manila." *Explore Parts Unknown*. July 06, 2018. Accessed February 22, 2019. <https://explorepartsunknown.com/manila/bourdains-field-notes-manila/>

Bourdain's assumptions are not merely an expression of his appreciation and respect for cultural diversity, which seem to have generated a global appeal for his show. They are the result of the efforts conducted by the Philippine state as a labor brokerage state and the global service industry to disseminate the figure of the "caring Filipino" as *the* ideal global service worker.³ Also, Bourdain reproduces the emotional scripts that identify Filipina nannies as inherently caring and kind. In my mind, these racialized and gendered characterizations resonated with global assembly line tropes such as those of "productive femininity" and the "third world disposable woman," utilized as material, discursive, and cultural grounds for workers exploitation and subject formation. I began to wonder about how this language, as a function of the global economy, was now permeating into the "global care chains," and how it could be shaping emerging visual and textual narratives of migrant domestic labor in the United States.⁴ Moreover, engaging a politics of representation, this episode of *Parts Unknown* communicated an important message: Filipina women stand-in as the quintessential domestic worker within the American public imagination, and their "natural traits" (motherly feelings, docility, kindness, and compliance) set them in significant competitive advantage over other women of color laboring in domestic work.

Within the "new-world domestic order," as scholar Pierrette Hongdaneu-Sotelo refers to the globalization of contemporary racialized domestic work, certain groups are

³ Robyn Magalit, Rodriguez. *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

⁴ For more on the concept of global care chains see Arlie Russell, Hochschild, "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value." *Justice, Politics, and the Family*, 2015, 249-61. Accessed October 17, 2018. doi:10.4324/9781315633794-2; Salzinger, Leslie. *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004; Wright, Melissa W. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

deemed more productive as sources of affective labor, and more adaptable to social norms of domesticity and servitude as is the case in the United States.⁵ As I will show in this dissertation, to preserve the devaluation of migrant care work, a hierarchization of workers is necessary, and popular culture and mass media are fundamental aspects in the reproduction of narratives of differential devaluation.⁶ This project interrogates the differential racialization of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers, and the representational practices necessary to ascribe value to the affective labor of their differently devaluated brown bodies. It seeks to understand how racialized and gendered difference is articulated in migrant domestic work as the commodification of brown bodies through the formation of competing narratives of racialized suffering and vulnerability. In the vein of Lisa Cacho's methodological call in *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and The Criminalization of the Unprotected* to employ a comparative analytic centered on "relational process of devaluation," and to examine how "interconnected processes of valorization, devaluation, and revaluation work interdependently to reify value and relations of inequality as normative, natural and obvious," this project situates migrant domestic work within the dilemma of the recuperation of social value in order to address the mechanisms of representation and in/visibility that perpetuate the devaluation of domestic work.⁷

⁵ Pierrette, Hondagneu-Sotelo. *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 19.

⁶ Robyn Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, xxvi.

⁷ Lisa Marie, Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Even though as Cacho argues the examination of processes of differential devaluation does not explicitly require two or more racial groups, I have purposefully focused on Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers because I am interested in analyzing how mechanisms of (de)valuation of an/other function through the politics of visibility among subjects sharing the “often degrading trajectories of violence that mark the brownness of being the world.”⁸ My work argues that the current visibility of migrant domestic worker narratives in popular culture and news media further naturalizes and reinforces racialized criteria for the differential commodification of women of color laboring in the domestic workforce. It problematizes how migrant domestic work becomes knowable and legible mostly through narratives framed within the confines of humanistic discourse and white feminist universalism.⁹ Using visual and discursive analysis, and queer of color and women of color feminist approaches to comparative racialization and cultural politics, this project establishes that the cultural forms and practices of migrant domestic workers in the United States make legible the economic dispossession, emotional exploitation and the differential valuation of brown bodies in domestic labor. I show that dominant narratives of migrant domestic work in the U.S. propel the use of neoliberal grammars of precarity, racial performativity, and modern-day

⁸ José Esteban, Muñoz, "Vitalisms After-burn: The Sense of Ana Mendieta." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 191-98. Accessed December 23, 2018. doi:10.1080/0740770x.2011.607596.

⁹ Chandra Talpade, Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Longueuil, Québec: Point Par Point, 2007; Wendy S. Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2011;

slavery to disavow the multiple layers of violence that migrant domestic workers endure in embodying these imposed conditions.

Visibility Politics and the Cultural Politics of Migrant Domestic Work

Discussing visibility and representation in relation to migrant domestic in light of the rising social and political movement of domestic workers movement, implies moving beyond the analysis of the reproduction of racist stereotypes, or the Latinization of the immigrant maid, into the question of visibility as social value and recognition in the context of the devaluation of domestic work. Invisibility in the context of migrant domestic work constitutes in Marxist-feminist Silvia Federici's terms, the most "pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class."¹⁰ As activists, domestic workers, and feminist scholars have argued throughout the years, invisibility encompasses a different array of socio-cultural, economic and legal mechanisms operating in different ways and degrees to extract the maximum physical and affective labor while providing minimal or nonexistent benefits, labor protections, financial stability, and in the case of migrant workers, a lack of recognition of personhood.¹¹ These mechanisms are mutually constitutive and equally articulated by hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality,

¹⁰ Silvia, Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012, 15.

¹¹ For the initial conceptualization of domestic work as invisible, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, *Invisible Work*, *Social Problems*, Volume 34, Issue 5, 1 December 1987, Pages 403–415. Accessed February 13, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/800538>; For invisibility as a condition of domestic work see Crain, Marion G., Winifred Poster, and Miriam A. Cherry. *Invisible Labor Hidden Work in the Contemporary World*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016; Linda, Burnham, and Nik, Theodore, "Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work." National Domestic Workers Alliance. January 01, 1970. Accessed August 10, 2018. <https://www.domesticworkers.org/home-economics-invisible-and-unregulated-world-domestic-work>.

social class, and citizenship. Although domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in unregulated and informal employment, according to the International Labor Organization, there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide, and as a labor sector, domestic work remains socially and economically invisible, and unregulated.¹² In the United States, there are more than two million domestic workers, most of them women of color and immigrants who constitute a particularly vulnerable and marginalized workforce due to the physical and social isolation they work and live in, their race and gender, and their immigration status among many other factors.

The call of the domestic workers' movement to "make visible the invisible" is more than a call for a change in representational strategies; it is a collective outcry against society's ambivalence towards the crucial role of domestic work and affective labor in the social reproduction of American society. It is an ideological battle to convince the public that domestic work is real work that involves extensive physical skills, emotional labor, interpersonal skills and performative skills (adapting to a specific set of cultural and domesticity norms). To contextualize this ideological battle in regards to migrant domestic labor in the United States is to move beyond visibility as a measure of social value and recognition; it is to question the production of visibility as part of the technologies of American capital in its global phase to intensify the commodification of racialized, gendered and affective difference.¹³ It is within this context that I situate

¹² "Who Are Domestic Workers?" International Labour Organization. April 05, 2013. Accessed January 12, 2019. http://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_209773/lang--en/index.htm.

¹³ José Esteban, Muñoz. "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (2006): 675-88. Accessed February 6, 2019. doi:10.10

migrant domestic work's culture as a site of struggle that not only reveals the precariousness of visibility politics but also that enables an understanding of visibility in women of color feminist practice's terms as a rupture, an "impossible articulation."¹⁴ Taking this into consideration, this project aims to not only analyze the oppositional narratives and new forms of political subjectivity emerging from the culture of migrant domestic labor but also to examine how they are made visible and read in the liberal political imagination.

A Critical Approach Towards Migrant Domestic Work

This project follows the call made by critical ethnic scholars to advance and identify new analytics to expand the study of comparative racial formations beyond a framework of differences and commonalities among communities of color. It situates migrant domestic labor as an expression and mechanism of individual and collective identity through which interdisciplinary field studies such as American Studies can enhance the critiques of international institutions and liberal discourses of human rights and freedom (migration and women's empowerment) as structures of imperialist power. The project elucidates the theoretical and analytical value of the cultural politics of domestic work in mapping the cartographies and multi-dimensional layers of racial capitalist violence, specifically concerning the circulation and commodification of affective labor. It follows lines of inquiry invested in dissecting the intersection of processes of immigration, racialization, labor exploitation, neoliberal governmentality, and the traditional and modern forms of patriarchy and domesticity contained in the

¹⁴ Grace Kyungwon, Hong. *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, xxviii.

globalization of migrant domestic work.¹⁵ Extending these lines into a relational framework, my project is interested in the expressions, imaginaries and cultural productions emerging from the transnational migratory circuit of Filipina and Mexican domestic workers, while engaging questions about the commodification of intimacy, differential inclusions and exclusions, and the role of the forces of domesticity in naturalizing the precariousness of domestic labor. Like Grace Hong, Roderick Ferguson and Lisa Cacho, my project is invested in deconstructing the dynamics at play in contemporary regimes of power that find economic value in the devaluation and dehumanization of the poor of color, focusing mainly on the devaluation of racialized immigrant women lives and labor.

This project is a call not to abandon domestic work as an object of study, to not leave it undertheorized and unchallenged. Even though disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and history have enormously contributed to making visible the conditions of exploitation, marginalization, legal and social discrimination, family separation, sexual abuse, and many other situations that afflict migrant domestic workers, the question of the value of domestic work in relation to capital accumulation still requires a theoretical elaboration grounded on a critical interdisciplinarity. As I will show in this dissertation, it is only through an interdisciplinary approach that we can begin to deconstruct migrant domestic work as a site of some of the most perplexing contradictions of capitalism:

¹⁵ Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*; Grace, Chang, *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016; Rhacel Salazar, Parreñas. *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2015; Pratt, Geraldine. *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

society's systematical undermining of social reproduction at a time of care deficit and the exploitation of migrant women's emotional labor as one of the pillars of capital accumulation.¹⁶

An essential element in building a critical approach to domestic work was to integrate fields of study such as affect theory that could help me navigate on what for me where unknown terrains such as the affective value and sensorial corporality of domestic work, among other things. Affect, as I am employing it concerning migrant domestic work, is meant to address, on the one hand, the circulation of feelings/emotions as part of performing care work and the intimacies and emotional bonds embedded within this type of labor. On the other hand, the 'sociality' of emotions pertinent to the representation of migrant domestic work in the public domain. Analyzing migrant domestic work through the lens of the sociality of emotions enables me to situate domestic work as not only the site of social reproduction in the capitalist system, but also as an object of emotion which, in the aftermath of the sweatshop era, has emerged as a sticky object saturated with affect, animating personal and social intensities and anxieties. In addressing the affective character of migrant domestic work, we are dealing with both the feelings and emotions that are ingrained in performing care work but also with the expression, impression, and circulation of feelings in social, political and economic realms.¹⁷

¹⁶ Nancy, Fraser. "Contradictions of Capital and Care, NLR 100, July–August 2016." *New Left Review*. August 16, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2019. <https://newleftreview.org/II/100/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care>; Silvia, Federicci. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*, PM Press, 2012.

¹⁷ Sara, Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015; Encarnacion, Gutierrez-Rodriguez. "Domestic Work–affective Labor: On

Lastly, the project is inspired by the silent but permanent presence of domestic workers in the archives of power and dispossession, and by the rising voices of domestic workers around the world fighting the long battle against what bell hooks has coined as the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” It is a call to situate the devaluation of women of color lives and labor at the center of academic and intellectual debates on racial capitalism, the genealogies of liberalism, and the coloniality of labor and gender.

Cruising the Archive of Domestic Work

In “The ‘Stuff’ of Archives: Mess, Migration and Queer Lives,” Martin Manalansan encourages us to conceive an idea of the archive outside its normative institutional configuration. As Manalansan observes, an expansive notion of the archive enables “locating the quotidian within the messy physical, symbolic, and emotional arrangements of objects, bodies, and spaces” in migrant domestic worker lives, as is the case of my project. It was precisely in paying attention to the messiness of the archive what enabled me to expand this study into an exploration of the structures of affect that constitute domestic work and its visibility and representation. As part of this process, I was not only reading the cultural texts in the archive as repositories of the feelings and emotions emerging from the relations of domination and exploitation endured by Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers, I was also analyzing the ways in which their stories of suffering circulated in the public domain and with what purpose. Overall, the archive of domestic work is an unusual but generative archive that serves as a repository for individual and collective feelings, emotions and intimacies, as well as spatial

Feminization and the Coloniality of Labor." *Womens Studies International Forum* 46 (2014): 45-53. September/October 2014. Accessed April 12, 2018. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2014.03.005.

experiences and subjectivities marked by precarity and marginality, struggles, stereotypes, bodily sensations, affective intensities, and racial anxieties. Considering its complexity, I followed the pedagogical approach of performance scholars to enter the archive “phenomenologically,” to move and be moved by an unruly array of objects and materials that simultaneously distilled vulnerability, distress, and hope.¹⁸

Theoretical Framework

This project moves along the lines of the comparative turn within ethnic studies, in search for new paradigms to follow the continuity, discontinuity, and adaptation of instances of racialization in the “conjuncture of space and time.”¹⁹ While disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and history have enormously contributed to making visible the conditions of exploitation, marginalization, legal and social discrimination, family separation, sexual abuse, and many other situations that afflict migrant domestic workers, the question of the value of domestic work in relation to capital accumulation still requires a theoretical elaboration that can bring to light the logics of differentiation behind new conditions of dispossession. Herein, *Women of Color Feminism and Queer of Color* critique offer lenses to examine the contradictions of U.S. capital’s investment in normative ideals (defined by whiteness and masculinity) and the production of racialized, gendered, and sexualized differences necessary to preserve and manage the surplus labor pool. This critique sheds light on the racialization of working populations as an inherently violent process in which the production and ascription of human value

¹⁸ Martin F. Manalansan. "The "Stuff" of Archives: Mess, Migration, and Queer Lives." *Radical History Review* 2014, no. 120 (2014): 94-107. Accessed February 7, 2019. doi:10.1215/01636545-2703742.

¹⁹ Shih, Shu-Mei. "Comparative Racialization: An Introduction." *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1347-362. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25501940>.

(values of neoliberalism) disavow the devaluation of categorically marginalized communities.²⁰ In this context, migrant domestic work functions as a location for the analysis of processes of differential devaluation and commodification of what could be considered nonnormative, invisible, and racialized affective qualities.

Furthermore, my dissertation engages theoretically with the comparative analytic of Women of Color Feminism and Queer of Color Critique because of its deployment of *difference* as the uneven devaluation of racialized life, and its emphasis on the relational process of this devaluation as particularly useful to highlight the “differentials of power, value and social death within and among groups.”²¹ By engaging this analytic, this project attempts to dismantle homogenous notions of the oppression/domination of women in domestic work, by focusing on the particularities of their experiences as markers of the material conditions of racial and colonial violence. Equally important is to engage comparative racialization as an analytic of interracialism that disregards the hegemonic status of whiteness as the referent of social worth (value) against which the devaluated racialized and gendered subject defines itself and others.²² Instead, the framework of comparative racialization looks into the interarticulation of hybrid subjectivities and collective consciousness, as well as into the mutually constitutive formations of racial difference through which racialized communities negotiate their

²⁰ Cacho, *Social Death*, 17; Grace Kyungwon, Hong, and Roderick A. Ferguson, “Introduction,” in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Perverse Modernities: A Series Edited by Jack Halberstam and Lisa Lowe). Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 3.

²¹ Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*, 2,3,9.

²² Koshy, Susan. "Why the Humanities Matter for Race Studies Today." *Pmla* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1542-549. 2008. doi:10.1632/pmla.2008.123.5.1542.

claims to personhood and citizenship.²³ Beyond providing a reading of the relational experiences of migration and settlement of migrant domestic workers, my purpose is to juxtapose discordant and non-traditional representations of Filipina and Mexican domestic workers to examine the narratives of “cultural difference” that normalize the devaluation of domestic work. Like Grace Hong, I emphasize the role of racialized immigrant women’s culture in contesting the commodification of difference and in resurrecting the histories of exploitation and differentiation erased by a supposed universal global condition. Women of color feminisms and queer of color critique is a crucial analytic approach to situate domestic work within the context of global capital and the reproduction of racial, gender, and sexual difference for the purpose of accumulation, as well as to register oppositional formations that attest to the contradictions embedded in the liberal rhetoric of inclusion and universality.

Focusing on the study/analysis of the globalization of care work from a relational approach, my project delves into Asian American Studies transnational and transpacific considerations on migration, immigration, sexuality, gender, labor, exclusion, identity, and citizenship. Within the field of Asian American Studies, I draw on authors in the areas of feminist and queer migration studies to examine the historical and theoretical development of sexuality, gender, intimacy and domesticity in migration research.²⁴ Like Grace Chang and Catherine Choy have mentioned, “the empire of care work” needs to be

²³ Jun, Helen Heran. *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-emancipation to Neoliberal America*. New York: New York University Press, 2011; John D. Marquez. *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.

²⁴ Catherine C. Choy. *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2006; Rhacel Salazar, Parreñas. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.

addressed from a critical feminist and transnational perspective. This lens deconstructs immigration as a liberal logic of voluntarism and choice and discourses of the migrant as an “autonomous economic agent” by emphasizing how the global structures of inequality forged by colonialism, decolonization, imperialism, and global capitalism shape immigrant women’s lives.²⁵ The collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of Asian American transnational feminisms works has generated some of the most nuanced and critical interventions on how migrant domestic work embodies the contradictions between global capitalism and liberal-democratic societies. As Rhacel Parreñas argues, the migrant workers are “commodities of the state” whose production generates surplus value for sending and receiving nations, while at the same time still framed as “undesirable aliens,” becoming laboring nationless, rightlessness and valueless citizens.²⁶ She further contends that citizenship functions as a critical lens from which to understand the experiences of exclusion and placelessness of migrant domestic workers and the multi-layered process of valuation/devaluation of domestic work at a home, nation and state level.

From within Asian American Studies, my project is also theoretically engaged with the work of scholars developing critical ethnographies and providing an intersectional approach to sociological research in the study of transnational migratory

²⁵ Catherine Ceniza Choy analyzes the postwar nurse migration of Filipino nurse to the United States as a transnational process rooted in dynamics and desires of a gendered labor force rooted in American Colonialism and Imperialism in the late 20th century. Choy coined the term “empire of care” in reference to the legacies of colonialism and imperialism embedded in the creation of the international Filipino nurse labor force and the dissemination of cultural association, assumptions and stereotypes about women’s nursing innate abilities.

²⁶ Aihwa, Ong. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007.

labor of Filipinos. The work of scholars such as Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, and Rhacel Parreñas has been particularly critical in foregoing empire as part of the construction of migrant labor. Within this framework, the labor of transnational migrant Filipinas has functioned as the locus to understand the imbrication of neoliberal logics of labor-exporting systems, patriarchal assumptions of women as social reproductive laborers, and the commodification of racialized and gendered affect and intimacy in the global economy. Rodriguez's critique against the system of "labor brokerage" opened new lines of inquiry into the coloniality of migrant labor and the dynamics at play in marketing workers (Philippine citizens specifically) as preferred labor to a growing care work industry. In this context, as Rodriguez observes, the state plays a fundamental role in reproducing ideas of Filipinas docility and vulnerability to market-specific kinds of overseas jobs, and also in reifying patriarchal notions of domesticity and familial responsibility which function to regulate women's migration.

My dissertation has also been influenced by theoretical frameworks on queer migration scholarship, specifically on the construction of the "queer diasporic approach" towards the analysis of transnational/transpacific migration, emphasizing how racialization, class formation, gendering, and sexualization coexist within the global restructuring of capital.²⁷ Martin Manalansan's critique of the theoretical and conceptual construction of the "chain of care" from a heteronormative framework has been instrumental to my project, specifically his caution about reproducing the language of the global economy which has been complicit in the processes of dispossession that have pushed women of color into the migration regimes. As Manalansan argues, care has also

²⁷ Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

become a neoliberal idiom containing normative conceptions of maternal love, racialized affect, and corporeality. Hence, the study of domestic work necessitates a queer of color theoretical framework to situate the affective as a material force, and to dissect and refuse the affective status of Filipina and Mexican domestic workers as inevitable and “natural.”²⁸

Finally, in light of the way anti-blackness operates within people of color theorizing of hierarchical difference and within multiracial solidarity movements, this project engages black feminist theory to raise new inquiries into the relationship between blackness and migrant domestic labor in the American imaginary. Furthermore, this project is indebted to Saidiya Hartman’s theorization on the conditions of possibility for black subjectivity and the importance of reaching into the performative as means to assign agency and personhood to those condemned to death, suffering, and negation. Engaging the “the agency of the performative,” this project is an initial attempt to position black feminist genealogies of performance and aesthetics as a conceptual foundation and framework to analyze migrant domestic work.²⁹

Chapters Summary

This introduction functions as this dissertation’s first chapter. Chapter two, “Hidden in Plain Sight: The Violence of Representation of Modern-Day Slavery in the Narrative of Migrant Domestic Work,” provides a critique of the violence and disavowal operating in the deployment of the “modern-day slavery” trope in the representation of

²⁸ Martin, Manalansan. "Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm." *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 3rd ser., no. 6. July 1, 2008. Accessed April 4, 2018.

²⁹ Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 52.

migrant domestic work. This chapter's objective is to examine the epistemic violence of the term "modern-day slavery" within the context of migrant domestic work and to problematize the use of this framework to construct the visibility of non-black migrant domestic workers as means to elicit an affective response. Through the lens of black feminist thought, this chapter examines how narratives of inescapable suffering in the context of migrant domestic work function as antiblack technologies, interpellating non-black bodies as black through the use of the term "modern-day slavery."

Chapter 3, "Aesthetics of Precarity: Racial Performativity in The Archive of Migrant Domestic Work," examines the archive of minoritarian performance aesthetics which attends explicitly to the untheorized relation between the racial performativity of the domestic worker laboring body, and the emotional, corporeal and sensorial weight of being marked as "invisible" and disposable. In this chapter I set in conversation performance pieces such as the 2010 Diwang Pinay ("Spirit of the Filipina") annual performance and collaboration with the Kabalikat Domestic Workers Support Network, with the character Mexican performance artist Claudia Cano developed called Rosa Hernandez "La Chacha," a migrant domestic worker whom represents one of the two alter egos she utilizes to speak about what she considers the social dichotomy within Latina immigrants, among others. I use performance studies to understand precarity as an ontological condition of domestic work, by situating the laboring body as a performing body that when rendered visible unveils emotions, feelings, behaviors and affects not recognized by normative narratives of the docile migrant worker with the pleasant disposition. I offer a provisional analytic that I call the aesthetics of precarity to frame precarity as both subjectivity and performativity, refusing theoretical frameworks

provided by the language of the global economy which utilizes precarity as an undifferentiated condition, characterized only by economic conditions. Through this analytic, I can dissect precarity as a violent relationality, and more importantly, as a notion of “being in the world.”³⁰

Chapter 4, “The Affective Disposition of Brown Bodies: Cinematic Visions of Filipina and Mexican Migrant Domestic Workers,” examines the depictions of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers in global cinema to trace processes of racial valuation and devaluation of migrant work within contemporary popular culture. This chapter analyzes the stories of the Mexican and Filipina maid characters, respectively, in two drama films – Alejandro Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006) and Lukas Moodysson’s *Mammoth* (2009). Borrowing from critical ethnic studies’ critiques of the need to explore new analytics to compare racial formations, I set in dialogue different but interconnected filmic representations of migrant workers to analyze the mechanisms of visibility that enable the commodification and stereotyping of brown bodies’ innate caring skills in popular culture. Utilizing a relational approach and situating domestic work at the conjunction of neoliberal economic policies and globalization, this article focuses on the production of affective imagery of the Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic worker in the United States.

In the conclusion I set the ground for possible future research on several areas such as the limits of legal inclusion and recognition for undocumented and immigrant workers, as well as the possibilities opened up by migrant domestic workers activist

³⁰ Encarnación Gutiérrez, Rodríguez. "The Precarity of Feminization: On Domestic Work, Heteronormativity and the Coloniality of Labour." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 27, no. 2 (2013): 191-202. Accessed April 10, 2018. doi:10.1007/s10767-013-9154-7.

epistemologies, and the advancement of a more ethical representational field for domestic work.

Chapter 2: Hidden in Plain Sight: The Violence of Representation of Modern-Day Slavery in the Narrative of Migrant Domestic Work

“I was part of the Bronx Slave Market long enough to experience all the viciousness and indignity of a system which forces women to the streets in search of work”

-Marvel Cooke

“While slavery today doesn’t include the chains and horrors typically associated with it, it is unmistakably slavery, existing in modern America”

-Al-Jen Poo

Introduction

Over the last 25 years, American news media has consistently circulated stories on human trafficking deploying the term modern-day slavery as a quick reference to the violence and exploitation survivors endure. Headlines with phrases such as “Slavery still exists, we must confront it,” “Modern Day Slavery DOES Exist in America: How our children are victims today,” “Slavery Still exists in the US, You Just Can’t see it,” among others, have now popularized the notion of slavery as an invisible phenomenon whose presence has become impossible to ignore.³¹ The non-specific, ahistorical, and abstract deployment of the term hints at the need to create sensationalist narratives that can elicit shock from the audience without delving into a more in-depth conversation on the current ramifications of slavery’s history and its presence as an irreparable injury in the form of racialized state-sanctioned violence, dehumanization, and economic inequality.

³¹ John, Haltiwanger. "Slavery Still Exists In The US, You Just Can't See It." Elite Daily. May 07, 2019. Accessed February 6, 2019. <https://www.elitedaily.com/news/world/forced-labor-in-america-is-modern-day-slavery/809249>.

Considered an umbrella term, modern-day slavery is used to reference different forms of coercion, including human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, child slavery, and forced and early marriage. Its lack of consistency allows for its use as a universalist claim along the lines of “strategic essentialism,” which, as Gayatri Spivak invokes, posits an uncritical reading of the present into the past, collapsing historical identity and difference.³²

As scholars and activists have pointed out, the structural invisibility of migrant domestic work perpetuates a lack of recognition of this type labor as real work with economic and social value, rendering women of color lives and labor as exploitable and disposable. Even though invisibility continues to posit critical challenges for the plight of domestic workers across the globe, in the last decade we have witnessed the increasing deployment of feminized and racialized images of domestic workers as victims and survivors of forced labor, human trafficking and “modern-day slavery.” The images and narratives of exploitation materialize along the lines of narratives of bodily enslavement, captivity, and abuse. While local and national organizations of domestic workers have been pushing for the visibility of the movement and the advancement of rights and protections for all workers in all fronts, news media, international organisms, and human rights campaigns have focused their attention on exceptional and aberrational cases that specifically fit within their framework of slavery and human trafficking.

Whether in the form of narrative or visual journalism, the experiences and cases of abuse and exploitation that migrant women workers endure have become visible and

³² Gayatri Spivak, Chakraborty, and Sarah Harasym. 1990. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge.

legible by highlighting their lives under slave-like conditions. The use of this concept as means to identify a particular kind of experience marked by sexual/verbal/physical abuse, containment, low (or no) wages, racism, and classism in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism, posits serious questions in relation to how its re-signification to make legible experiences of migrant women of color leads to an epistemic violence. This epistemic violence promotes the erasure of subjectivities through the construction of slavery within a different temporality. This chapter seeks to set the theoretical framework to problematize the use of the “modern-day” (contemporary) slavery paradigm in the visibility and visualization of migrant domestic work. As Saidiya V. Hartman contends, the language of a return (of slavery or a return to the past) acts to disavow the pulsating injury and the irreparability of slavery. It precipitates the analysis of migrant domestic work into the tide of anti-trafficking and human rights campaigns, which have been found to function first, as discursive mechanisms that legitimize governmental practices to criminalize the self-willed migration of people and second, as spectacular rhetoric. As Wendy, S. Schor observes the spectacular rhetoric consists of practices of vision and discourses of sight which aim at making “formerly invisible subjects, visible to West, often specifically for American audience right holders.” It is within this context, that I’m interested in analyzing how the trope of “modern-day slavery” functions to interpellate the stories of non-black migrant domestic workers as those of black subjects (marked by slavery and its afterlife), while at the same time decentering blackness in the narratives reproduced both in news media and in social policy debates/institutions. Following black radical feminist theoretical work on the afterlife of slavery, anti-blackness, as well as on women of color feminisms’ critiques of the liberal narrative of freedom and the

commodification of difference under racial capitalism, I argue that there is a need to account for the violence and disavowal operating in the deployment of slavery and the interjection of the “modern” tense, into the narratives of migrant domestic workers, specifically within the United States context. News media narratives of migrant domestic workers in the United States are grounded on mobilizing a competitive spectacle of racialized suffering that posits Filipina and Latina migrant domestic workers in a hierarchy of politics of recognition and personhood. Deconstructing “spectacular texts” is an opportunity to critically analyze the epistemic violence embedded in the use of specific concepts such as “modern-day slavery” that serve to negate the experiences of migrant domestic workers.

The use of the “modern-day slavery” narrative enables losing the particularity of the current moment and the processes of devaluation of migrant domestic work in the United States and the mechanisms of racialized immigration under neoliberal multiculturalism. The circulation of slavery in its liberal tense “modern” within narratives of migrant domestic labor reveals how media and popular culture construct differential visibility of the brown enslaved body, reinforcing the differential devaluation of racialized groups and anti-blackness.

I argue that the term “modern day-slavery” in dominant public discourse makes visible narratives of contemporary racialized and gender exploitation of migrant labor through the use of the slave analogy which dislocates and usurps ongoing black suffering. My goal in this chapter is to remain hesitant, as Lisa Lowe points out, towards the use of “modern-day slavery” to “eradicate” the human trafficking and forced labor of migrant workers into the United States, and to the recovery of dominant rational categories and

narratives of slavery in the narrative of migrant domestic labor. Moreover, this hesitation leads me to consider that the popularization of “modern day-slavery” among domestic workers activists’ epistemologies has become a usurpation of black grief and suffering that advances not only the regime of liberal freedom but also sustains anti-blackness and the differential valuation of migrant women workers labor and lives.

The questions that frame the discussion in this chapter are the following: How is the modern-day slavery trope employed in the narrative construction of migrant domestic workers in the United States and what is the ideological, affective and rhetorical work this narrative is made to perform? If as Hartman argues, the normative character of terror within the context of slavery ensures the invisibility of the everydayness violence and routines of domination that characterize black life, how is the normative character of terror in the liberal tense in “modern day-slavery” constructed within the narrative of migrant domestic work? How is the narrative of captivity and dispossession that as Harman argues “exceeds the parameters” of the injury of slavery deployed within the context of migrant domestic labor and to what purpose? If we acknowledge the irreparable nature of this event, and the role of mourning as a practice of counter-memory, and the need for a space of mourning, does “modern-day slavery” function to dislocate the grief and mourning of black life and to locate it on brown bodies to claim that it is a healed injury that is now relocated to a different racialized subject? If, as Lisa Lowe argues, liberal freedom served as means to rationalize and implement slavery and its aftermath (90) what are some the current expressions and uses of this liberal freedom in the narratives of “modern day-slavery”? How is the analogy of slavery to the exploitative dynamics of migration and domestic labor contribute to the erasure of

others? How does the phenomenon of modern-day slavery of migrant domestic workers (brown bodies) erase that of black domestic workers? Furthermore, in this chapter, I reflect on the particular ways in which migrant domestic labor fits within the genealogies of liberalism, specifically concerning the current moment in which domestic workers activism is giving shape to an intersectional, global and feminist labor movement.

This chapter is concerned not in providing a reading of how differently racialized migrant women endure and experience slave-like conditions at work in the domestic space, but in examining the representations and discourse that news media and investigative journalism forward, utilizing the trope of “modern-day slavery” to reinforce racialized criteria for social (devaluation) in narratives of migrant domestic work. Expanding on the need to work on pushing the analysis of domestic work toward critical visibility as established in chapter 1, I now focus on how official narratives “colonize images and narratives” of enslaved Filipina and Latina migrant domestic workers.³³ Moreover, I am interested in understanding this process of marking brown bodies with the “primal scenes” of slavery and the material and vexed epistemic implications of the deployment of “modern-day slavery” to make visible the precariousness and vulnerability of non-black migrant domestic workers in the United States.

Domestic Work as Modern-day Slavery in the Human Rights Imaginary

As established per international law conventions, modern-day slavery and human trafficking are conjoined problems of global dimension that require the intervention of the state in conjunction with international organisms, non-profit organizations and human rights advocacy groups to raise awareness and disrupt the “return” of this violent phenomenon. Defined by the International Labor Organization as “work or service that is

³³ Lisa Cacho, *Social Death*, 27.

exacted under a penalty, and is undertaken involuntarily,” the term conflates concepts (exploitation, coercion, dispossession, captivity, among others), conditions and processes (of disposability, dehumanization, and devaluation). On June 2010, UN special Rapporteur Gulnara Shahinian presented a report on contemporary forms of slavery, centered on the global domestic work industry and its manifestations of domestic servitude and domestic slavery. As per the results of multiple visits to different countries in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, Shahinian observed that invisibility, physical and social isolation, exploitation and what she labels as conditions of “neo-bondage,” heightened the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers rendering their condition to that of domestic slavery. “Slavery still exists” and “contemporary forms of slavery” appear throughout the report as markers of slavery as temporally distinct, while situating the violence and exploitation of domestic labor as analogous to definitions established in the 1926 Slavery Convention. Through this lens, domestic work enters the realm of universalist human rights and international justice as one of the labor sectors that continues to uphold the “vestiges” of slavery in modern society, delaying the deliverance of the promised freedom. In the report, Shahinian specifies that domestic servitude is bound to conditions such as un-freedom, physical and social isolation, exploitation, and abuse (physical, psychological, and sometimes sexual.) As Shahinian states in her report on domestic workers living in domestic servitude, “there is perhaps, no greater denial of these universally shared values than treating human beings as mere chattels that can be owned, controlled, exploited and enslaved. Yet, human beings across the world still suffer this fate.”³⁴ Her use of the trope modern day domestic servitude reifies how

³⁴ United Nations. General Assembly. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, Including Its Causes and Consequences: Note*. By Gulnara Shahinian. Geneva:

domestic work is seen as the site in which slavery has unnoticeably dispersed and endured, becoming now a threat to the universal articulation of human rights and international justice.

The release of this report influenced the re-framing of the term “forced labor” introduced in 1930 by the International Labor Organization. In extending the narrative of human rights as liberal remedy under the effects of globalization, the ILO introduced the modified definition of forced labor in 2012 which reads as the following: ““Traditional practices of forced labor, such as vestiges of slavery or slave-practices, and various forms of debt bondage, as well as new forms of forced labor that have emerged in recent decades, such as “human trafficking” (also called “modern-slavery”) to shed light on working and living conditions contrary to human dignity.””³⁵ I consider this definition as fundamental in understanding how the term “modern-day slavery” has rendered certain subjects legible within the discourse of inherent human rights, and how this legibility is grounded on decentering blackness and black suffering from the term slavery. As deployed in the definition, slavery has no particular racial reference, enabling the incarnation of the black experience without the black body, the discursive mechanism through which human rights as a “privileged epistemic form of political violence” perpetuates antiblackness.³⁶

United Nations, 2010. June 18, 2010. Accessed October 7, 2018.
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Slavery/SR/A.HRC.15.20_en.pdf.

³⁵ Giving Globalization a Human Face. Report III (Part 1B) General Survey on the Fundamental Conventions Rights at Work in Light of the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008, Report of the Committee Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, International Labour Conferene, 101st, Session Geneva 2012.

³⁶ Randall, Williams. *The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Within the United States, the rhetorical use of “modern day-slavery” has provided visibility and a platform for domestic workers organizations to expose the lack of protection for workers in the sector and the pervasiveness of human trafficking and labor exploitation. Interestingly, the construction of this visibility has been grounded on how this phenomenon has been “hidden in plain sight,” and on the inadequacy of the “return” of slavery narrative. Scholars and activists have pointed out that the structural invisibility of migrant domestic work perpetuates a lack of recognition of this type labor as real work with economic and social value, rendering women of color lives and labor as exploitable and disposable. Even though invisibility continues to posit critical challenges for the plight of domestic workers across the globe, in the last decade we have witnessed the increasing deployment of feminized and racialized images of domestic workers as victims and survivors of forced labor, human trafficking and “modern-day slavery.” The images and narratives of exploitation materialize along the lines of narratives of bodily enslavement, captivity, and abuse. While local and national organizations of domestic workers have been pushing for the visibility of the movement and the advancement of rights and protections for all workers in all fronts, news media, international organisms, and human rights campaigns, have focused their attention on cases that specifically fit within the framework of slavery and human trafficking.

Mapping Black Geographies with Brown Bodies

The English edition of Israeli newspaper Haaretz published on November 26, 2016 an article titled “A ‘Modern Slave Market’: Day Laborers Tell of Exploitation by Hasidim in Brooklyn.” In this piece of ethnographic journalism, Haaretz contributor Neta Alexander conducts a series of interviews with mostly Latina migrant domestic workers

that congregate at an urban intersection in Brooklyn's Williamsburg section, and with Israeli actress and screenwriter Michail Birnbaum whose short film "Division Ave." depicts the dynamics between domestic day laborers and their Hasidic employers. The stories of these encounters marked by exploitation, racial difference and social devaluation had been a rare sight in news media. Organizations like the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network had tried to draw attention to how recruitment practices in spaces such as those seen in La Parada lay bare the vulnerability of migrant women of color in urban social landscapes. In the absence of a hiring site, migrant women (documented and undocumented) gather at the intersection of Marcy and Division Avenues in Brooklyn searching for domestic day labor. Scholars on immigration and labor argue that day labor markets are a national phenomenon, and that although women have been excluded from legislation and public policy designed to regulate and improve working conditions, the demand for housekeeping, child-care and other domestic services as part of the day labor market is growing.³⁷

Right from the beginning, the author offers a reference of the conditions of marginality of the domestic worker day labor market in Brooklyn: "There are no benches, shelters, heaters, cafes or toilets at this corner – a bustling urban intersection that's been dubbed "La Parada" (Spanish for "The Stop"), and has drawn unflattering comparisons to the notorious American slave markets of one and a half centuries ago, which were long

³⁷ Kennedy, Elizabeth J. "The Invisible Corner: Expanding Workplace Rights for Female Day Laborers." *Berkeley Journal of Employment and Labor Law* 31, no. 1 (2010): 126-59. Accessed April 12, 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26377728>; and Valenzuela, Abel. "Immigrant Day Laborers: Myths and Realities." NACLA. April 2010. Accessed April 19, 2019. <https://nacla.org/article/immigrant-day-laborers-myths-and-realities>.

supposed to be nonexistent.”³⁸ Interestingly, in providing a description of this space as part of the invisible geographies of modernity marked by racialized and gendered inhabitation, the author recurs to the use of the “no longer” temporality in relation to slave markets as means to argue that there is a return of the same racialized socio-spatial practices. Once again, domestic work is portrayed as the site in which the “the injuries not only endure, but are inflicted anew,” which in this particular case posits troubling assumptions of the particularities of slavery and the racialized exploitation of displaced migrant labor as equivalent across time and space. By drawing this equivalency, the author is making legible and visible the narratives of Latina migrant domestic workers by relocating the grammar of suffering of black domestic workers onto other racialized bodies.³⁹

In an attempt to make a statement about La Parada as a system of exploitation that has prevailed across time, the author emphasizes the existence of patterns of racial replacement in the history of this labor force, locating black women as the first wave, Eastern European women as the second wave, and finally migrant Latina women as the current wave. In articulating these shifts in the domestic labor force as sequential racializing processes rather than as “imbricated processes,” the author formulates a visual narrative in which the bodies of migrant Latina domestic workers are seen as “tractable

³⁸ Alexander, Neta. "A 'Modern Slave Market': Day Laborers Tell of Exploitation." *Haaretz*, November 26, 2016. Accessed January 13, 2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/americas/.premium.MAGAZINE-slave-market-day-laborers-tell-of-exploitation-by-hasidim-in-brooklyn-1.5466034>.

³⁹ The grammar of suffering deployed in official narratives of migrant domestic work follows the language of humanism that centers alienation and exploitation rather than accumulation and fungibility, which as Frank Wilderson argues are constitutive elements in the Slave’s grammar of suffering. Frank B. Wilderson. *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

form of labor” that has replaced those of African American women workers.⁴⁰ In mapping brown bodies into what had been considered black geographies of domestic labor, the narrative of the modern-day slave market marks the experiences of black domestic workers as a thing of the past, and proceeds to relocate notions of black suffering onto other racialized and gendered bodies. Very briefly the article mentions that it was African-American journalist Marvel Jackson Cooke in the 1950s whom first described the exchange system of black women’s labor at specific sites as a “slave market.” Rather than making an argument about the continuity of informal systems and spatial practices that perpetuate the exploitation of women of color, the author ends up reproducing a narrative of emancipation by claiming that the current situation in places like La Parada (Figure 1) is a “troubling situation that for many evokes darker periods in American history.”

⁴⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman "The Time of Slavery." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 4 (2006): 757-77. Accessed January 27, 2019. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>; Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 8.



Figure 1. Women waiting for jobs at La Parada, in Brooklyn N.Y. This photo appeared as part of an article entitled, “A ‘Modern Slave Market’: Day Laborers Tell of Exploitation by Hasidim in Brooklyn,” published by Israeli newspaper Haaretz on November 26, 2016.⁴¹

My consideration of these spatial experiences as black geographies is grounded on the historical record of black domestic workers organizing and activism, which took place certain corners and streets of New York from the 1930s to the 1950s. As Katherine McKittrick argues, “black geographies demonstrate both the limitation and possibilities of traditional spatial arrangements through the ways the black subject is produced by and is producing, geographic knowledges...invisible geographies indicate a struggle, ways of knowing the world.”⁴² To make visible these black geographies activist Ella Baker and pioneer journalist Marvel Cooke recuperated the concept of slave-market to attract public attention to the precarious and exploitative conditions of domestic workers in America has its origins in the aftermath of the Great Depression. They took upon themselves the

⁴¹ Alexander, Neta. "A 'Modern Slave Market': Day Laborers Tell of Exploitation." Photo Credit: Natan Dvir.

⁴²Katherine McKittrick. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 7.

responsibility to make public the plight of African American women laboring as domestic workers during the 1930s and 1940s. In November 1935, *The Crisis* published Baker and Cooke's first co-authored article titled "The Bronx Slave Markets." The focus of their research was a street-corner between Jerome and Walton Avenues in the Bronx, in which affluent housewives went to bargain for domestic labor. Product of the incapacitating economic mobility and segregation generated by the Reconstruction era, domestic labor became one of the few sources of employment for African American women, leading to a large supply of human capital which enabled employers with the help of depressed wages to extract the most out of the workers for miserable wages. What Baker and Cooke found out was that the congregation of women in strategic places in search for work added to the bargain of employers on-site resembled the dynamics under which slave markets operated during slavery, keeping alive the dehumanization and disposability of black bodies. In labeling these spaces slave-markets, Baker and Cooke contextualize the moment of exchange of labor (physical and emotional) of black domestic workers as the continuity of practices of public objectification of black bodies in exchange for profit such as those of auction blocks in the nineteenth-century. Even though they resort to the use of the slave market as an analogy, they establish that although the act of economic exchange continues to transform black bodies and their labor into commodities, poverty and economic inequality are now significant elements driving this exchange. In Baker and Cooke's words: "Not only is human labor bartered and sold for slave wage, but human love also is a marketable commodity. But whether it is a labor of love that is sold, economic necessity compels the sale."⁴³

⁴³ *The Crisis*, November 1935. The Bronx Slave Market, Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke.

“The social production of space is inextricably tied up with the differential placement of racial bodies,” argues Katherine McKittrick, and La Parada without a doubt exemplifies the geographic arrangements and women of color spatial relationships to material geographies of migrant labor.⁴⁴ Herein, these palimpsests of migrant labor necessarily evoke an analysis that first of all acknowledge that the historical presence of black women marked the production of these spaces and that they were the ones who challenged the notion of these spaces as only references of dispossession and exploitation but also as sites of struggle. The narrative in the Haaretz article as well as that in *The Nation*, provide examples of the epistemological violence perpetuated in the current use of the term modern-day slavery and the analogy of slave-markets to make visible the experiences of Latina domestic workers in day-labor markets and to produce an affective response. This epistemic violence manifests in multiple ways: a) in marginalizing black women’s knowledges and imaginations in relation to urban geographies of racialized labor; b) exploiting the suffering of black domestic workers in the 1940s as something that can be analogized and used as a reference to make legible the neoliberal dispossession and dehumanization of Latina migrant workers; and c) presenting blackness in the racialization and gendering of spatial experiences as a condition that can be transferred and habitable by brown bodies.

In making a statement about the unchangeable nature of day labor markets as “spaces of precariousness,” scholar Eileen Boris mentions that although “slavery had ended, it continued to cast a shadow over Black workers,” as was the case of domestic workers searching for a day’s work standing on street corners in the Bronx Labor Market

⁴⁴ McKittrick. *Demonic Grounds*, 5.

in the 1950s.⁴⁵ In attempting to develop an analysis on the connections between the experiences of Black and immigrant women as day labor workers, Boris's logic reads as if the dynamics of exploitation of racialized and gendered labor under racial liberalism were equivalent with those we are currently seen under neoliberal multiculturalism. Following Jodi Melamed's temporal framework of these state-sponsored "race-liberal orders," it seems as if the use of "modern-day slavery" managed to erase the formation of anti-black technologies within scholarship and activism on undocumented migration. In reading these accounts as underwritten by liberal humanist thought and logic, I have been able to understand that the coloniality of domestic work operates through "spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection."⁴⁶

Lola's Story and the Neo-slave Narrative

On June 2017, The Atlantic's magazine broke the story of Eudocia Tomas Pulido, a Philippine woman who was forced to move to the United States to work for a family for 56 years without ever being paid. "My Family's Slave," written by Philippine American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Alex Tizon, captivated the attention of the American and global audience and stirred considerable controversy over the existence of so-called modern-day slavery in the "land of the free." As expected, the liberal audience rushed to make claims that displayed empathy for Pulido's case and acted "astonished and horrified" by the prevalence of exploitative systems within the United States. People of

⁴⁵ Eileen, Boris. "Force and Shadow in the Making of Precarity: Racialized Bodies and State Power." *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 15, 2015). October 15, 2016. Accessed February 16, 2019. doi:10.15367/kf.v2i2.68.

⁴⁶ Lisa, Lowe. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 8; Jodi, Melamed. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011, 3.

color, specifically women of color, classified the story as “disgusting” in reference to how the author obscured his complicity in the dehumanization of the Filipina woman. The exposure of Pulido’s tribulations uprooted discussions on sensitive and complex issues such as forced labor and migration, gender-based violence, exploitation and the dehumanization of domestic workers in the United States; it also raised important questions about privilege, race, culture, and class within the Filipino and Filipino-American community.

One response, in particular, unlatched this chapter’s inquiries on the possibilities and dangers (epistemological and political) of using the term modern slave to label the vulnerability and exposure of migrant domestic workers to dehumanizing and exploitative labor conditions. Vicente L. Rafael, a professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Washington, wrote a series of notes addressing Tizon’s ability to capture the history of Lola’s subordination and enslavement, and her ability to resist and survive “oppressive domestication.”⁴⁷ Within these notes, Rafael releases a through-provoking critique of Tizon’s telling of Pulido’s life within the framework of a master/black slave narrative, which, as the historian observes, erases the continuity of pre-colonial practices of enslavement in the Philippines in the form of coercive migrant labor. Moreover, Rafael argues that by translating Pulido’s experience through the figure of the black slave Tizon is incapable of grasping the complexities of her story (revolving around issues such as kinship and affective bonds) and interpret her struggle without

⁴⁷ Taken from Vicente Rafael’s Facebook post which was later published as part of an article on Colorlines online magazine. Among the three responses from Filipino writers and journalists, Vicente Rafael’s response is the only one addressing the problematic use of slavery (specifically chattel slavery) as an analogy to Pulido’s life story. Vicente Rafael’s Facebook page. Accessed 15, November, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/vicente.rafael1/posts/10158590503855328>

reproducing a narrative that mimics a public act of slaveholder repentance. In line with Rafael's analysis, I'm interested in examining this article as an example of the emergence of the narrative of migrant domestic workers as modern-day slaves in America as a technology of modern liberalism.

"My Family's Slave" is the newest report and more publicized article on the abuse of migrant Filipina domestic workers in the last 20 years. Among the many articles published throughout these years, there is a common and recurring thread that speaks of the troubling depiction of slavery in "modern" America: the fact that the figure of the "slaveholder" as portrayed through these narratives, is always a person of color. Herein, the ongoing existence of these expressions of slavery in migrant domestic work happens because all of the actors involved are incorporated into the social fabric of the U.S. state as devalued, deviant, non-normative subjects.⁴⁸ Within this framework, the non-normative subjects appear as the agents of dispossession of their own kind within the state, reproducing dynamics that disrupt emancipatory efforts and the promise of freedom. To demonstrate this, we can look at the following statement on Tizon's article:

In the old country, my parents felt no need to hide their treatment of Lola (grandma). In America, they treated her worse but took pains to conceal it... We spent our first decade in the country learning the ways for the new land and trying to fit in. Having a slave did not fit. Having a slave gave me doubts about what kind of people we were, what kind of place we came from. Whether we deserved to be accepted. I was ashamed of it all, including my complicity. Didn't I eat the food she cooked, and wear the clothes she washed and ironed and hung in the closet? But losing her would have been devastating.⁴⁹

The section to which this statement belongs is titled "The Old Country," and in this section, Tizon narrates how it was during his childhood that he began to question this

⁴⁸ Cacho, *Social Death*, 18.

⁴⁹ Alex, Tizon. "My Family's Slave." *The Atlantic Magazine*, June 2007, pp. 64-76.

notion of Pulido's "captivity" as a concealed family secret. In narrating Pulido's presence within this framework of secrecy of an Asian American family, Tizon reifies that within the context of "modern" America, what he considers as a dynamic of exploitation is the outcome of what through the imperial gaze could be seen as an expression of cultural backwardness and moral depravity. Interestingly many of the responses to this story, specifically those from the Filipino American community, brought up that Pulido's experience was part of the *katulong* (helpmate) structure: a structure of servitude resulting from the imbrication of Spanish colonization and African and Indian enslavement in the Philippines still prevailing in contemporary Philippine society. In the book *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed states that migrants are subject to what she refers to as the happiness duty: an extension of colonial duties in which the migrant in order to be recognized as a citizen of the nation (or empire) must leave suffering and the injuries of racism in the past.⁵⁰ Tizon's narrative is a constant reaffirmation of his family's desire and effort towards achieving the happiness fantasy of the American Dream. Beyond their desire, there is an imposition of this fantasy on a dispossessed subject (Lola) and the normalization of her condition as part of the happy fantasy. Tizon's feels ashamed not only for being complicit in the exploitation, captivity, and abuse of Pulido but also for disrupting their integration into the model minority ideal by bringing structures that reified his culture's "backwardness."

In response to Tizon's piece, labor historian Premilla Nadasen published the article "Interrogating the Master Narrative of My Family's Slave," on *Black Perspectives*, an online magazine by the African American Intellectual History Society. In the article,

⁵⁰ Sara, Ahmed. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, 58.

Nadasen whose most recent work explores the history of African American household workers organizing and activism, argues that the essay is fundamentally about the author's "emotional journey and liberal idealism, using the tragic story of a household employee as a backdrop."⁵¹ In centering the story around his love for Pulido and in framing her performance of affection as acts of love, Tizon tries to absolve himself from his guilt and complicity in keeping Pulido working for him until his death. Throughout the text, there are references of Pulido's display of motherly love and her life-long affectional bond with the author and later on with his daughters: "In many ways she (Lola) was more of a parent to me than either my mother or my father," "She got to know the details of our lives in a way my parents never had mental space for," "Lola was devoted to my daughters... she'd listen to their stories, and unlike my wife and me, Lola enjoyed every minute of every school event and performance. She couldn't get enough of them."⁵² In romanticizing the figure of the exploited domestic worker through the lens of emotional and affective bonds, the author is reproducing discourses and representations that justify racialized and gendered devaluation and dispossession. The claim of treating the worker as "being part of the family" is a reconfiguration of the "mammy" figure, which was commonly used in the early 1900's to provide, as Nadasen argues, a "source of comfort when racial strife was heightened" and to justify African American worker's status as household laborers and to reify racial hierarchies.⁵³

⁵¹ Premilla, Nadasen. *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016.

⁵² It is important to emphasize that the word Lola is the Filipino kinship term for grandmother and is a given term of respect and endearment. Tizon, *My family's Slave*, 67.

⁵³ Premilla, *Household Workers Unite*, 12.

In reiterating the emotional entanglement between himself and Pulido throughout the narrative, Tizon further begets the logic of “being part of the family” to ameliorate the abuse, violence, and exploitation in the story. Herein, in juxtaposing scenes that depict the precarity and vulnerability of Pulido as a subject in captivity with those of her as an authority figure who to a certain extent has the power to mediate and dissolve family disputes, the author develops a narrative in which the reader navigates through a different range of emotions such as rage, anger, compassion, and guilt. In analyzing the “emotionality” of this text, I have found that the author has successfully developed a narrative of individual morality in which he mobilizes different emotions and feelings leaving the reader with a general sense of uneasiness in relation to America as the “nation of freedom.” This uneasiness, when seen as part of the economic model of emotions, generates a “collective feeling” towards Pulido’s story as an extraordinary event rather than as symptomatic of a larger problem such as the dependence of the U.S. economy on the exploitation of migrant and immigrant labor and the increasing numbers of human trafficking in migrant domestic work in America. Moreover, the fact that Pulido’s voice is absent from the story and that no language can align her suffering outside of that of the author posits serious limitations as of where the collective feeling is guided towards. My use of collective feelings (both family and national) in this context, corresponds to the impression that the story of “a slave in contemporary America” left on a collective body, rather than on readers feelings for or about the story. Sarah Ahmed argues that collective feelings are produced by “the impression we have of others, and the impressions left by others are shaped by histories that stick, at the same time as they generate the boundaries that allow bodies to appear in the present.”⁵⁴ Taking this into consideration, I argue that

⁵⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others.” *Theory*,

the use of the word “slave” to identify and make legible Pulido’s experience is what made the story “stick” with the audience, which means that the collective feeling is produced by impressions grounded on black (slave) suffering as analogous to conditions of alienation and exploitation endured by migrant domestic workers. This is type of analysis is what scholar Frank B. Wilderson critiques as the “ruse of analogy.” As he observes, this ruse “erroneously locates Blacks in the world – a place where they have not been since the dawning of Blackness...analogy is not only a mystification, and often erasure, of Blackness’s grammar of suffering.”⁵⁵ Not only does the article perpetuates the erasure of blackness’s grammar of suffering by way of analogy, but it simultaneously exploits this grammar to diffuse the gruesome regularity of stories of violence and exploitation among experiences of migrant domestic workers.⁵⁶ Some examples of the multiple ways in which the author recurs to the failed analogy read as the following: “She lived with my family for 56 years. She raised me and my siblings and cooked and cleaned from dawn to dark- always without pay. I was 11, a typical American kid, before I realized she was my family’s slave...” I’m not Dad. You’re not a slave here,” I said, and went through a long list of slave-like things she’d been doing.” Herein, the author operates within a logic that can apprehend neither the suffering of Black people as slaves nor that of Pulido as captive labor. As Cristina Sharpe argues, the suffering of Black people cannot be analogized and in this particular context cannot be used as homologous to the suffering emerging from within new global economic and political structures

Culture & Society 21, no. 2 (April 2004): 25–42. doi:10.1177/0263276404042133.

⁵⁵ Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010, 37.

managing the distribution of precarity and vulnerability.⁵⁷ Besides, the fact that Tizon uses this analogy as a way to elicit an affective response to his acknowledgment of Pulido's suffering resonates with Hartman's critique of "emphatic identification" as means to reduce the humanity and sentience of the captive subject.⁵⁸

Multiracialism and Activist Epistemologies

In the previous sections, I have articulated the violence and disavowal operating in the deployment of the term "modern-day slavery" within the official narratives of migrant domestic work. In this section, I want to consider the possibility that activist and domestic workers can provide alternative epistemologies to liberal narratives of "modern-day slavery." If as Grace Hong observes, "women of color feminist practice and racialized immigrant women's culture emerge as the return of the repressed capital, naming the erasures at the very moment of the articulation," then perhaps these activist epistemologies can be used to understand how antiblackness permeates into social movements grounded on multiracialism.⁵⁹

On 2017, the Institute for Women's Policy Research in collaboration with the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), released the report "The Status of Black Women in the United States" as an effort to highlight the historical and current contributions of Black women to the broader domestic worker movement. The report utilizes available data collected since 1996, providing a detailed overview of the

⁵⁷ Christina Elizabeth, Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 29.

⁵⁸Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 19.

⁵⁹ Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital*, xxiv.

conditions that Black women are experiencing across the country, placing emphasis on areas such as employment, work, family, poverty, and health among others. In the foreword, activist Alicia Garza, specialist project coordinator of the NDWA, emphasizes the need to recognize that domestic work in America is rooted in the legacy of slavery, and that even though the care workforce today is comprised mainly of immigrant women from Central America, Latin America, and the Caribbean, Black women are still an essential part of the labor force. Along with these crucial assertions, Garza as one of the most prominent voices of the NDWA states the following “To reshape our economy and our democracy, we have to build a multiracial, multinational movement. Black domestic workers are critical to this movement because of our history in this sector, and because of a shared history of struggle against racism, enslavement, and patriarchy.”⁶⁰ The argument serves a double purpose. First, it responds to previous criticisms against the NDWA for failing at incorporating black women into their ranks.⁶¹ Second, it reinforces the notion that the domestic workers’ movement is grounded in multiracial solidarity and coalition politics. On its own, Garza’s statement might not be read as problematic, but when considered as part of the rhetoric of the larger movement, it certainly raises concerns in terms of how non-black workers understand, process and interpret these ideas. An

⁶⁰ Asha DuMonthier, Chandra Childers, and Jessica Milli. *The Status of Black Women in the United States*. Report. June 7, 2017. Accessed May 17, 2019. <https://www.domesticworkers.org/status-black-women-united-states>

⁶¹ In its early stages, the NDWA was composed mostly of immigrant women and it was not until 2014 that they established the first all-black NDWA chapter in Atlanta, GA. Building on the organizing work of the Atlanta chapter, the NDWA created the campaign We Dream in Black which seeks to expand the voices of Black domestic workers and to amplify their organizing efforts and contributions. Rinku, Sen. "As People of Color, We're Not All in the Same Boat." *The Nation*. June 29, 2015. Accessed February 13, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/people-color-were-not-all-same-boat/>.

example of this is the following statement by community organizer and domestic worker Silvia Gonzalez from the organization Casa Latina in Seattle:

We're living in an era of modern slavery. It's true. People who clean houses and farmers — they've been excluded from labor rights since slavery. Slaves worked inside homes and on the elders. Descendants of Africa. And who was excluded from labor rights after they were established in 1930? People of color. And they continue to be excluded, and yet we keep working. It's no longer just African Americans. It's people of color working in homes and on the elders today. We're living in an era of modern slavery.⁶²

Reading Gonzalez's statement, we once again encounter the violence of the deployment of the term modern-day slavery under the assumption that under the current precarious conditions of domestic work, non-black workers are "symbolically black" and that they "all suffer" in the same way. In addition, it posits the notion that blackness and black suffering are a permeable condition for non-blacks, based on the premise that the conditions of exploitation and subjugation workers endure are similar to those that black workers endured in slavery. Even though there is an intention of building cross-racial solidarity, there is more at risk in using the analogy of slavery. As Joao H. Costa Vargas argues, "it is the intimacy between blackness and death that both formulates blackness and renders it practically impermeable to non-blacks." Vulnerability and lack of recognition are the main logic behind Gonzalez's notion that slavery is now a shared condition which posits serious questions about the use of slavery to make visible conditions that are directly formed under the mechanisms of racial capitalism.

⁶² Lilly, Fowler. "Domestic Workers: 'We're like the Garbage They Ask Us to Clean Up'." Crosscut. June 22, 2018. Accessed March 18, 2019. <https://crosscut.com/2018/06/domestic-workers-were-garbage-they-ask-us-clean>.

Conclusion

What are the affects produced by narratives of modern-day slavery, and how do these affects reinforce liberal discourses of America as the ideal nation of freedom and democracy? As presented in this chapter, narratives of human trafficking in migrant domestic work are framed continuously within the notion of “modern-day slavery” as a means to elicit an affective response that appropriates black suffering by reducing the memory and the irreparable injury of slavery to merely exploitative conditions. The ruse of analogy of black suffering is continuously deployed in official narratives of migrant domestic work. Hartman’s analysis of “the time of slavery” established the ground to formulate a critique of the deployment of modern-day slavery in migrant domestic work as a current form of anti-blackness operating within the anti-human trafficking discourse and also within the domestic workers’ movement. Furthermore, the deployment of the term in the context of the rising domestic workers’ movement reproduces narratives of racial progress in which black domestic workers appear as a thing of the past, although in reality, they still constitute an important part of the care work industry. In these texts and visual narratives of migrant domestic work, the black body has been removed, and it is the grammar of suffering that is being commodified to continue reproducing the liberal narrative of freedom and emancipation. What we are dealing with is with the usurping of black suffering, which consolidates anti-black racism not just by the disavowal of the continuity of the gratuitous violence of slavery under neoliberal multiculturalism but also by placing blackness as an impediment to reach in full the tenets of freedom and democracy.

Chapter 3: Aesthetics of Precarity: Racial Performativity in the Archive of Migrant

Domestic Work

Introduction

On June 16, 2015, one of the New York Post's front-page articles ran with the headline 'My maid ruined my Balenciaga blouse, so I sent her to boot camp!'⁶³ The author begins by referring to what seems to be a common problem among wealthy Manhattanites: the lack of etiquette and efficiency among foreign domestic workers. In the article, the author interviews Jill Wilpon, wife of a Manhattan banker residing in Park Avenue and creator of the nanny boot camp. Modeled after basic military training but emphasized on the professionalization of the care workforce, the nanny boot camp originated when Wilpon received a call from a friend dealing with a "crisis" due to her housekeeper ruining one of her brand exclusive and expensive blouses because she did not know how to hand-wash it. In the article, it is this "cathartic" moment that inspires Wilpon (millionaire Manhattan elite) to launch what she has labeled as a domestic staffing firm, called Chorz. Aside from allocating "expert domestic helpers" in the Manhattan area, the firm claims to "identify talent" that will comply with the urgent demands of some of the wealthiest homes in the United States. The main photo in the article (Figure 2) portrays a white woman "Madam Paulette" (at the center) preparing/cleaning some herbs, surrounded by three women of color, one pouring olive oil on the herbs, the other cutting them, and the one on the far right observing the preparation. They are all smiling, enjoying what seems to be a cooking lesson, pleasantly posing for the photo, sharing a moment in a kitchen island. South Asian and Latino surnames accompany the

⁶³ Doree, Lewak. "My Maid Ruined My Balenciaga Blouse so I Sent Her to Boot Camp!" New York Post. June 16, 2015. Accessed October 3, 2018. <https://nypost.com/2015/06/16/rich-people-are-now-sending-their-maids-to-housekeeping-bootcamp/>.

photo caption along with the references in the article provide information on the ethnic backgrounds of the majority of women in the domestic labor force in the Manhattan area.



Figure 2. Screenshot of title and opening image of an article entitled “My maid ruined my Balenciaga blouse so I sent her to boot camp!” published by the New York Post on June 16, 2016. ⁶⁴

In the article, both Madam Paulette and Jill Wilpon argue that cultural differences and lack of access to technology are the main factors impeding migrant domestic workers to perform quality work. In labeling these factors as “weaknesses,” Wilpon emphasizes the need to provide training to domestic workers in order to learn how to set a table, understand a Manhattan building, use Uber, load a washing machine, moderate the use of “exotic flavors” in food preparation, and last but not least, to “keep your personal opinions to yourself.” What the Wilpon’s firm offers as services for the professionalization of employees for the service of the American household, is in reality,

⁶⁴ Lewak. "My Maid Ruined My Balenciaga,"2018.

the “civilizing” and “moralizing” of migrant women to perform the labors of white domesticity ideally. The discourses of proficiency, economic opportunity and skill development Wilpon uses to promote the firm, echo the workings of neoliberal multiculturalism, in which as Jodi Melamed observes the state establishes a framework for racial equality focused on “cultural integration” and full acceptance of racialized subjects into free-market and access to capital.⁶⁵ The training in “cultural integration” is not only meant to encourage the productivity of the migrant worker through models and strategies of adaptation to the modernity and technological advances of the first-world, but it is also expected to regulate and mitigate the markings of migrant subjectivity, identity and belonging that “obstruct” the worker’s efficiency. My read of the worker’s complacent smile/attitude falls within the parameters of an affective performance of racial normativity, that although unable to achieve for people of color given our embodied racialized affective excess, it is still an expected performance in specific contexts such as that of domestic labor.⁶⁶ As Wilpon’s arguments reflect, white female domesticity continues to be the “standard national affect” in American society.⁶⁷ I use this photo as the visual reference of the muteness and invisibility of the worker’s subjectivity within the narrative of neoliberal multiculturalism, but more importantly as a tool to set in contrast the emancipatory potential that aesthetic performances and installations offer to map the particularities of racial performativity as deployed in migrant domestic work.

⁶⁵ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 116.

⁶⁶ José Esteban Muñoz. "Preface: Fragment from the *Sense of Brown* Manuscript." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 4 (2018): 395-397. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed May 23, 2019).

⁶⁷ Muñoz, *Feeling Brown*, 69.

Chorz might qualify as the most explicit and grotesque expression of racism implicit in the corporatization of migrant domestic work. As scholars on migration and domestic work have elaborated, the corporatization of cleaning services as established by Merry Maids, Molly Maids and many more, transforms the home into a Taylorized workplace, in which workers are subjected to tiring, fast-paced work and low wages as part of the company's rules.⁶⁸ To show the ideal domestic worker that functions with operational efficiency, "attentiveness and respect," the companies –which mirror many of society's perspectives on domestic work- resort to normalized, dehumanizing representations of migrant workers as backward, monocultural, and unable to perform as required per neoliberal norms of productivity, and in need of constant discipline and surveillance. As neoliberal subjects, Latina and Filipina migrant domestic workers perform -physical and emotional labor - in accordance to the "demands and desires" of the host nations, and conform to expressions of micropower in the private household.⁶⁹ In this chapter, I suggest that there is an archive of minoritarian performance aesthetics which attends explicitly to the untheorized relation between the racial performativity of the domestic worker laboring body, and the emotional, corporeal and sensorial weight of being marked as "invisible" and disposable.

Through a close reading of art installations and performance pieces, this chapter identifies disablist markers embedded in the social construction of bodies in migrant domestic work, to access the banalities of violence embedded in emotional labor. I argue

⁶⁸ Wallace, and Vivian Shalla. *Work in Tumultuous Times Critical Perspectives*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007. Steve, Lombardi. "Expert Domestic Help." Chorz. Accessed May 25, 2019. <http://www.chorz.nyc.com/>.

⁶⁹ Balance, Christine Bacareza. *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*. Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2016, 17.

that close attention to the visual and nonvisual sensory, corporeal and discursive elements of what I call the culture of Filipina and Mexican immigrant domestic labor offers a particular lens to understand the particularities of performing emotional labor while “feeling brown.” As Jose Esteban Muñoz pointed, brownness as a minority affect is always illegible to the normative affect performed by normative citizen’s subjects.⁷⁰ In light of this, I’m intrigued by how a reading of the aesthetics emerging from feeling brown while caring for others in America charts the differential, untamed, and non-commodified feelings and emotions of migrant domestic workers. Often regarded as inherently linked to relations of exploitation, these feelings and emotions when rendered visible through aesthetic practices, I argue, function as a collective refusal to the devaluation and fetishization of brown lives and labor; as an emancipatory project that allows for the social recognition of their labor and for alternative ways of reclaiming subjectivity.

Aesthetics of Precarity

On March 2013, *TDR/The Drama Review*; a journal focused on studying performances in different aesthetic, economic, social, cultural and political contexts; devoted a two-part issue to the topic of “precarity” as consider in and through performance. The call for submissions, carefully written by performance studies scholars Nicolas Ridout, Rebecca Schneider, and Tavia Nyong’o invites contributors to think about analyzing precarity through a close reading of the performing body and to consider the labor of performance in the study of affective economies generated through neoliberal processes. Within the call, the editors raised the following questions: “How do we pay

⁷⁰ José Esteban, Muñoz. “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2006, pp. 675–688., doi:10.1086/499080.

attention to precarity through a close reading of the performing body?” “what of the performing body in an economy where the laboring body and its production of affect are the new commodity du jour.?” Based on these questions, I began to inquire about the implications of situating the laboring body of migrant domestic workers as a performing body, and about the use of performance studies to understand precarity as an ontological condition of domestic work. Moreover, I am interested in examining how the laboring body when rendered visible through aesthetic performances, has the potential to unveil emotions, feelings, behaviors, and affects not recognized by normative narratives and discourses of economic development and neoliberal transformation.⁷¹

The archive of performance analyzed in this chapter conveys valuable examples of the decolonial and anti-capitalist potential of domestic labor’s expressive culture. Beyond the transformation of labor and employment labor laws, the emerging domestic workers’ rights movement constitutes a cultural moment that resists the ascription of racialized and gendered stereotypes and rejects the economic and political discursive production of the disposable third world woman’s actual corporeality and subjectivity.⁷²

I begin this chapter with a look at what I call the aesthetics of precarity of migrant domestic work in two art installation pieces: “The Wife is a D.H.” (1995) by Philippine artist Imelda Cajipe-Endaya and “The Nanny” (1994) by Chicana artist Yolanda Lopez. Both artists executed in their installation the materiality and objects of domesticity, migration, labor, and difference. Both works provided a timely critique of the 1990s feminization of international migration (specifically in South Asia and Latin America),

⁷¹ Ridout, Nicholas, and Rebecca Schneider. "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction." *TDR/The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (2012): 5-9. November 19, 2012. Accessed October 18, 2018. doi:10.1162/dram_a_00210.

⁷² Wright, *Disposable Women*, 5.

and the displacement and migration of Mexican people to the United States as a consequence of the North American Free Trade Agreement by creatively presenting the laboring body of Filipina and Mexican domestic workers as an “agent of abjection.” Setting these works in conversation enables an analysis of difference and relationality regarding the social construction of bodies in migrant work, and the embodiment of precarity as a critical marker of migrant subjectivity. Furthermore, as Tavia Nyong’o argues, there is a need to reintroduce difference into theorization of precarity to understand what a precarious body can do and “how it comes into contact, into assembly, into collective and distributed agency into “being singular plural” with others.”⁷³ Framing precarity as both subjectivity and performativity in migrant domestic work implies refusing theoretical frameworks that imply embracing precarity as an undifferentiated condition, defined only by economic conditions, but instead to consider it as a violent relationality, and more importantly as a notion of “being in the world.”⁷⁴

Following my analysis of Cajipe-Endaya and Lopez’s installations, I move into a consideration of the aesthetics of racialized abjection in the laboring body of migrant domestic workers by setting in conversation two works: Rosa Hernández (La Chacha) by Mexican artist Claudia Cano, and in the photographic series “Bodyless” by Filipina American artist Kimberley Acebo Arteché. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the weight of emotional intimacy and the formation of emotional attachments as part of

⁷³ Tavia, Nyong’o. "Situating Precarity Between the Body and the Commons." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 2 (2013): 157-61. Accessed July 8, 2018. doi:10.1080/0740770x.2013.825440.

⁷⁴ Precarias a la Deriva. "Adrift through the Circuits of Feminized Precarious Work." *Feminist Review* 77, no. 1 (2004): 157-61. Accessed May 5, 2018. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400162.

the racial performativity of brownness in migrant domestic work. In examining the piece *Nanny and Child* by Ramiro Gomez and selected performances from the 2011 Diwang Pinay event in New York City in collaboration with the Kabilkat Domestic Workers Support Network, the objective is to further expand the notion of the precarity of domestic work as the objectification of feelings and emotions.

According to Diana Taylor performance is an epistemology of everyday life and the embodied practice of an entire spectrum of values, attitudes, and identities. Following this definition of performance, I argue that the archive of performance of Filipino and Mexican domestic labor deploys a relational vision and embodiment of the racialized and gendered emotional scripts underwritten by shared genealogies of colonialism and the global service industry. By setting in dialogue the cultural production and cultural politics of women of color immigrant labor -specifically of two groups racialized as brown- we can better understand the relationship between social reproduction and racialization. As Lisa Cacho argues, “race is the methodology of social value,” and examining the aesthetic practices inspired by or emerging from migrant domestic labor enables a decentering of whiteness as a model to discuss the racialization and devaluation of domestic labor.⁷⁵ As seen in the following chapter, a relational approach in the reading of Latina/o and Filipina/o aesthetic performances functions as an analytic through which we can read not only the particularities of racial formations but also conduct a collective mapping of feelings of nonbelonging, belonging and caring in relation to migrant domestic work.

⁷⁵ Lisa Cacho, *Social Death*, 17.

Staging the Laboring Body

Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of performativity as a process of reiteration and repetition, "productive of a discursive identity that is both open and constrained," I am interested in examining the 'social conventions' animating the laboring body of migrant domestic workers and the embodiment of economically and politically induced conditions such as that of precarity.⁷⁶ I situate precarity as a concept that reifies the outcome of capital's capture of life beyond the workplace; an articulation and inhabitation of disposability marked by survival and devaluation. Precarity in this context does not follow a universalizing vocabulary that limits its interpretation as merely one aspect of neoliberal governmentality (denial of rights and benefits of workers). Instead, as a feminist collective, *Precarias a la Deriva* from Madrid suggests that precarity has become an existential and relational condition of a social being.⁷⁷ My examination of *The Wife is a D.H* (1995), and *The Nanny* (1994) art installations consist of a reading of the performing body of the migrant domestic worker, its production of affect and its embodiment of precarity as part of what I argue is a *migrant domestic subjectivity*. Cultural production and cultural expressions that reformulate the complexities of this subjectivity can function as a refusal to the erasure and/or the stereotypes that dehumanize and devalue migrant domestic work.

Significant changes in economic and immigration reform shaped the 1990s decade reviving racial anxieties and anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States. The immigration act of 1990 (INMACT90) was signed into law by President Bush, providing

⁷⁶ Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds. *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 9.

⁷⁷ *Precarias a la Deriva*. "Adrift Through the Circuits."

a significant revision to the already established Immigration and Nationality Act, followed by the 1996 Illegal immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act under the Clinton presidency. In conjunction, these acts provided a legal language and framework to criminalize and deport undocumented immigrants, while also expanding the number of green cards and work visas to “skilled” labor immigrants. Interestingly, the passage of this act resulted in increasing numbers of both skilled and nonskilled laborers to immigrate. As Mae M. Ngai observes in her analysis of the United States immigration policy, mechanisms of restriction make illegal aliens while administrative discretion “unmake” them, which results in the formation of institutions and laws as “instruments of mass racial engineering.”⁷⁸ Herein, immigration laws have historically produced new categories of racial difference. Added to the changes in immigration reform, on 1994 the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect legitimizing the leadership of the United States in transnational capitalism, exacerbating forced displacement and land dispossession, and intensifying the feminization of labor and migration. According to reports from the International Labor Organization, by 1990, the Philippines and Mexico accounted for the second-largest immigration flows to the United States.⁷⁹

Scholar Jodi Melamed identifies the 1990s with the emergence of neoliberal multiculturalism, arguing that it is during this decade that the United States began utilizing the narrative of racial progress and equality as a market ideology (claiming moral superiority and leadership), and as a new system of racialization under global

⁷⁸ Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014, 27.

⁷⁹ In the case of the Philippines, migration flows have not been just a function of immigration legislation, but also the result of imperialist politics.

capitalism. Under this new system, neoliberal codes “fix human potentials and justify social fates,” based on market calculations.⁸⁰ The result of these calculations is the differential valuation of populations and the use of economic citizenship to continue normalizing relations of difference and inequality. As part of this reorganization of American capital in its global phase, immigrant women of color laboring in sectors like domestic work are situated in a condition of oscillation between “existentially” and “surplus” labor, which conditions their abject bodies to remain invisible and illegible as a form of devaluation, and so their labor and their social value is rendered worthless.⁸¹ As if working to destabilize and fracture these neoliberal technologies of devaluation and erasure, artist Imelda Cajipe-Endaya and Yolanda M. Lopez explore the invisibility of migrant and immigrant domestic work on mixed media art installations. Almost timely coordinated, their installations brought up important critiques on the invisibility and diversity of the migrant and immigrant domestic workforce in the United States, and more importantly, their work provides a visibility to the models of racialized and gendered subjectivity formulated in the transnationalization of care work.

On 1995, Filipina artist Imelda Cajipe-Endaya presented in her installation, the denatured laboring body of a domestic worker. The materiality of this body is built from objects referring to the migration experience, domesticity, labor, and identity. The sculptural installation titled ‘Ang Asawa Ko Ay DH’ (My Wife is a DH) has become an iconic piece representing what scholars have coined as the narrative of Philippine

⁸⁰ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 151.

⁸¹ Grace K. Hong. "Existentially Surplus: Women of Color Feminism and the New Crises of Capitalism." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): 87-106. Accessed May 14, 2018. doi:10.1215/10642684-1422152.

Postcolonial Avant-Garde. This moment in contemporary art has been characterized by the need of Filipino/a artists and curators to reflect the “Filipino Diaspora” as not only a socioeconomic fact but also as a cultural formation. Scholar Neferti Tadiar utilized Cajipe-Endaya’s installation *My Wife is a DH*, to examine what she refers to as the fantasy-production of the global domestic helpers. In her analysis, Tadiar reads the domestic worker mannequin/sculpture as a symbolism of the desubjectification and dehumanization embodied in the construction of the domestic helper as a racialized and gendered corporeal object and imaginary.

Moreover, Tadiar reads the assemblage of material objects as a visual reference of the use of the physical bodies and experiences of suffering and exploitation of domestic workers as what she calls a “national body for a national audience.”⁸² Filipina migrant workers are caught in the contradictions contained in the discourses of a paternalistic state and society which considers their absence from the home as a factor that destabilizes normative gender norms while acknowledging the product of their labor (remittances) as the element that secures the nation’s stability. Inhabiting this gendered partial citizenship means fulfilling the economic needs of the state and the market, and also performing the heteronormative morals and values required by the society. In this equation, a migrant woman’s journey can only be redeemed as valuable in the process toward inclusion and belonging when defined by suffering, pain, and drama. As seen in news media, the circulation of narratives of the Filipina migrant domestic worker in the United States is mostly defined by stories of physical and sexual abuse, ‘slave-like’ working conditions

⁸² Neferti X. M. Tadiar. *Fantasy-production: Sexual Economies and other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004.

and enduring isolation and other hardships.⁸³ The consumption of these representations of Filipina migrant domestic workers speaks not only to the economies of looking at them as racialized subjects and subjects of suffering but also to the use of these representations to frame a social and national fiction of inclusion to the nation and the family. As Lisa Lowe observes in analyzing the construction of multiculturalist inclusion, the fragmentation of racialized life contributes to the advancement of capitalist society and the permanence of structures of domination based on “fetishized” renderings of racialized groups such as Filipina migrant domestic workers through narratives of suffering, sacrifice, and martyrdom.⁸⁴ Reading the narrative of suffering against Cajipe-Endaya’s piece, complicates our understandings of inclusion through citizenship and rights, by incorporating the body of the migrant worker as a temporary presence and migration, an object of intervention (liberal state intervention) whose temporality challenges a permanent immigrant dependency.

⁸³ Newspapers such as the Washington post, the New York times, NBC news, and many other have a history of circulating stories that specifically highlight diplomats in the United States committing domestic-worker crimes. Over the last ten years there has been a slight increase on the coverage of stories related to Filipina domestic workers activism, but the common narrative still leans towards sensationalist journalism. For some examples of these narratives see, Tracy, Connor. "Diplomats' Exploitation of Domestic Workers a 'plague,' Activists Say." NBC News. December 19, 2013. Accessed January 27, 2019. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/diplomats-exploitation-domestic-workers-plague-activists-say-flna2D11775010>; Susan, V. Ople. "Slave Maids Cost the Price of a Smart Phone." CNN. August 09, 2013. Accessed March 7, 2019. <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2013/08/09/slave-maids-cost-the-price-of-a-smart-phone/>.

⁸⁴ To a certain extent the promise of inclusion through suffering relates to the notion of the subject of freedom which Mimi Thi Nguyen situates as an object of intervention through which the liberal imperial state justifies the violence of intervention or in the case of the migrant Filipino/a worker a benevolent exploitation. Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007; Mimi Thi, Nguyen. *The Gift of Freedom War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.



Figure 3. Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, *Ang Asawa ay DH (The Wife is a D.H)*, original installation 1995; this version 2013, BAAC Exhibition Department, Bangkok Art and Culture Centre.⁸⁵

Cajipe-Endaya's *The Wife is a D.H* (Figure 3), hinges primarily on creating a visual reference to the hypervisibility of the domestic worker as an object. Through the creation of a sculptural bodily installation in which she utilizes objects considered as domestic technology (mop, broom, electric iron, frying pan) in combination with personal/intimate objects such as a pañuelo (handkerchief), an effigy of the Virgin Mary, an envelope, and a book among other things. The assemblage of the material and the intimate exemplify how the Filipino performing body as a transnational subject is produced and producing within the context of a nation-building project and within the

⁸⁵ Imelda Cajipe-Endaya's Facebook page. Accessed April 6, 2018.
<https://www.facebook.com/ImeldaCajipeEndaya/photos/a.10152692414452814/10152692393392814/?type=3&theater>

uneven global cultural and economic system.⁸⁶ The installation compels us to consider the Filipina laboring body as an “archival embodiment” of the linkages between labor migration, the objectification of affective labor, and the production and circulation of domestic workers as subjectless bodies. Performance scholar, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, utilizes the concept of “archival embodiment” in reference to the role of the Filipino/a performing body at the intersection of multiple colonial histories.⁸⁷ In particular, Cajipe-Endaya’s piece emphasizes domestic work as affective labor. As scholar Encarnacion-Rodriguez argues, affective labor and the value it produces is not just an articulation of the bodily intensity of performing this type of labor, but it is the expression of the affective intensity associated with relations of dispossession and exploitation.⁸⁸ To analyze Cajipe-Endaya’s mannequin cyborg through the lens of affective labor implies considering the objectification of Filipina domestic labor as the transmission of affects that are intricately impressed by US imperial legacies. These affects fulfill the ideological imaginary of the imperial state through the consumption of an “exotic” racialized and gendered labor force, and the dependence of the neocolonial Philippine state on labor export to reproduce the social order.⁸⁹ In this context, the mannequin could be read as a representation of the domestic worker as an automaton, as a figure of the “ideal” worker which performance scholar Uri McMillan in his analysis of

⁸⁶ Lucy Mae, San Pablo Burns. *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire*. New York: New York University Press, 2013, 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Encarnación Gutiérrez, Rodríguez. *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect: A Decolonial Approach on Value and the Feminization of Labor*. London: Routledge, 2011.

⁸⁹San Pablo, *Puro Arte*, 45.; Martin F. Manalansan, and Augusto Fauni Espiritu. *Filipino studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

the mammy memory situates as a mechanical conception sharing the limits between objecthood and subjectivity.

Every technological bodily extension or object in this installation is connected to the main bone structure/body frame, which is an open suitcase, referring to the “migratory character” of Filipina/o laborers. This construct, when attached to women’s migration, is strictly rendered in heteronormative terms. As Martin Manalansan argues, Filipina domestic workers have been “subject to an implicit gendering and sexualizing” not only by a patriarchal state but also by progressive feminist researchers.⁹⁰ Defining domestic work in heteronormative terms not only marginalizes the experiences of individuals that do not fit normalized conceptions of reproductive work but it also reduces the domestic worker humanity to an existence that navigates between melancholia, maternal labor, suffering and blind trust in being included as “one of the family.” Reading the *Wife is a D.H* through a queer of color and performance lens is an opportunity to interrogate the terms of representation under which Filipina domestic workers appear as disposable and vulnerable victims. More importantly, it is an attempt at exploring the relation of performance, embodied laboring subjects and objecthood, focusing on women of color cultural productions which specifically engage the migrant domestic laboring body. Reimagining objecthood as performance as Uri McMillan argues is a method historically used by WOC performers to disrupt presumptive knowledges of racialized and gendered subjectivity.⁹¹ The prosthetic body of the migrant domestic

⁹⁰ Martin F, Manalansan. "Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies." *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (2006): 224-49. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00009.x

⁹¹ Uri, McMillan. *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*. New York University Press, 2015, 9.

worker in the *Wife is a D.H.* becomes a representation of the Filipina performing body as a laboring body, as an object of a nation-building project, regulated by gender logics established by the paternal state to preserve the family and to secure the nation's economic stability. Moreover, as scholar Robyn Rodriguez affirms the Philippine state racializing and gendering "marketing" practices contribute to the construction of Filipina migrant objecthood by emphasizing specific values and qualities such as 'vulnerability,' submissiveness, being hardworking and skilled.⁹²

Similarly to Cajipe-Endaya's critique of the objectification of the Filipina overseas worker as a marketable and commodified object, Chicana artist Yolanda M. Lopez presented the installation *The Nanny* in 1994 (Figure 4), calling for an analysis of the objectification of the Mexican migrant domestic worker in the United States. Included in the series of prints *Woman's Work is Never Done*, in *The Nanny*, the artist explores the invisibility of immigrant domestic work and the racial objectification of Mexican migrant women as a social and historical transforming process. Lopez's work is known for challenging cultural stereotypes of Latinos and Latinas in the United States. Her methodology consists of recontextualizing and reappropriating stereotypical images of Mexicans and Chicanxs and transformed them into iconographies that honor working-class "ordinary women and men." Beyond capturing and making visible the ordinary, Lopez utilizes intersectionality as a feminist aesthetic from which she examines identity, relations of exploitation, sexism, religion, hybridity, racial capitalism, indigeneity, and migration. In *The Nanny*, Lopez presents a mixed media piece in which the domestic worker uniform is staged in between two large advertisement campaigns; a promotional of the wool industry in a 1991 *Vogue* magazine, and an airline ad in a 1961 *National*

⁹² Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, 105.

Geographic magazine promoting tourism in Mexico. As scholar Laura E. Perez observes in her artistic critique of the installation, *The Nanny* is a study of domestic labor, gender, cultural difference and ethnicity in which the artist has staged the “historical asymmetry” of power relations between the First and Third Worlds.⁹³



Figure 4. Yolanda M. Lopez, *The Nanny*, from *Women’s Work is Never Done Series*, 1994. Installation.⁹⁴

In *The Nanny*, the objecthood of the Mexican migrant worker is first seen through the maid uniform. The loose-fitting garment as scholar Nicole Constable observes, is one of the multiple forms of body discipline domestic workers experience. Studies in the United States, Latin America, and South Africa suggest that the uniform is a traditional practice/symbol of oppression and exclusion, a visible marker of class and racial

⁹³ Naomi Helena, Quiñonez, and Arturo J. Aldama. *Decolonial voices: Chicana and Chicano cultural studies in the 21st Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, 52.

⁹⁴ López, Yolanda. "Women's Work Is Never Done." *Persimmon Tree*. Accessed July 24, 2018. <https://www.persimmontree.org/v2/summer-2009/womens-work-is-never-done/>.

difference.⁹⁵ The uniform situated at the center of the installation hangs from a white folding screen in between magazine advertisements portraying women of color as vendors and white women as tourist customers. In her study of Chicana visual arts, scholar Laura E. Perez pays specific attention to these advertisements as representations of racialized relations of subservience in the United States in which the majority of domestic workers are migrant women of color. Together with the potted cactus and the laundry basket filled with cleaning supplies, clothing and coat hangers, the uniform and the advertisements, the invisible brown body of the domestic worker becomes visually knowable through the assemblage of symbols and references evoking racial stereotypes of Mexican immigrant women.

An intertextual reading of these images suggests that it is possible to generate an emphatic identification with how migrant domestic workers inhabit precarity and the objectification of their racialized identities without recurring to scenes of suffering and melodrama as a “sentimental resource and/or locus of excess enjoyment.” As Saidiya Hartman argues, in analyzing the spectacle of black suffering during slavery, there is an extraction of enjoyment in the act of witnessing cruelty and terror. This economy of enjoyment has become a fundamental element in witnessing migration in the United States, and it seems to depend on the circulation of specific narratives and images of migrant suffering, melodrama, and victimhood. The art pieces analyzed in this section expose how the American imaginary constructs Filipina and Mexican migrant workers as transnational disposable subjects without reducing their humanity to a spectacle of cruelty or violence.

⁹⁵ Mary Romero. *Maid in the Usa: 10th Anniversary Edition*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Routledge, 2016, 113; Nicole, Constable. *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007, 102.

Making Visible the Laboring Object Body

The concept of invisibility as a determinant of the precariousness of domestic work has been theorized mainly within the context of informal employment relationships, the underground economy, and the feminized nature of care work. Concerning representation, the visibility of domestic work has mostly resulted in the production of racist and dehumanizing stereotypes, which leads us to question if there are alternative ways of claiming recognition. Scholars on labor, gender, and migration point to the ways that invisibility relates to a) the visual act, not seeing the workers, discursively erasing the bodies performing the labor; and b) a symbolic concept that refers to social and market devaluation, the naturalization of this type of labor as falling outside the legal structure and, a working condition in which protections are out of reach for domestic workers.⁹⁶ Marxist feminist scholars have argued that in the process of integrating women of color to global capitalist development, “women’s labor” is not only removed from public visibility but it is brought into a scheme of super-exploitation and non-protected production relations.⁹⁷ As the National Domestic Workers Association presented in their 2017 national report, the invisibility of domestic work materializes in economic hardships, hazardous working conditions, lack of employment benefits and vulnerability to disrespect and abuse on the job. In this section, I argue that in expanding this notion of invisibility of migrant domestic labor into the realm of aesthetics practices enables us to

⁹⁶ For more on the invisibility of domestic labor see, Arlie Russell, Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012; Pierrette, Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

⁹⁷ Maria, Mies. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed, 1998, 145.

theorize about the transformation of the non-visible body into an abject performance. Through this process, the visibility of the migrant body is constructed as an “alternative social organization” and as a dynamic of social recognition that destabilizes normative notions of inclusion and personhood.⁹⁸

Since 2003, performance artist Claudia Cano has been taking her what she refers to as her alter-ego Rosa Hernández “La Chacha,”(Figure 1.4) to clean public spaces. Cano defines Rosa Hernandez (The Cleaning Lady) as a woman who immigrated to the United States to earn a living and to build a better life. According to Cano, Rosa Hernandez represents more than a devaluated and invisible labor force, her interaction with the audience is intended to generate reactions and establish a dialogue in which the participant can question the act of having someone at your service.⁹⁹ Wearing the uniform of a domestic worker, Cano goes about her usual routine (cleaning, dusting, mopping, scrubbing, and so on) in a variety of public and private spaces. From art galleries to college campuses, public parks, and private homes, the only requisite for hosting a performance is to have an audience. By wearing a uniform, Cano disarticulates the optic of the United States as a racially egalitarian society through the insertion of a symbol of racialized and gendered subservience. Extending on the artists claim that the uniform is a symbol of “neo-colonialism,” its use in a performance becomes part of an “aesthetics of resistance,” in which the objective is to utilize images and visual elements to trace

⁹⁸ Leticia Alvarado, Fuentes. *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018,11.

⁹⁹ Rosa, Hernández, "Performance Y Arte Relacional." Museo De Mujeres. Accessed November 12, 2018. <http://museodemujeres.com/es/n38pi2hi7>.

histories of imperial control and legacies of colonial violence.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, in a context in which the employer-employee relationship is not necessarily based on race, the uniform as Mary Romero argues, functions as a visible sign of the hierarchical status distinguishing domestics from the employer, as a marker of social differentiation.¹⁰¹



Figure 5. Claudia Cano, *Rosa Cleaning the Oceanside Pier*, 2014, performance.¹⁰²

Rosa’s laboring brown body in uniform performs what scholar Leticia Alvarado refers to as an “abject collision” –a refusal to perform a proper subject status as established by narratives of normative inclusion- that reveals the inequalities of a “national body insistent on a legacy of freedom and equality.”¹⁰³ Additionally, it reveals

¹⁰⁰ Sarita Echavez, See. *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, xiv.

¹⁰¹ Mary, Romero. *Maid in the USA*, 165.

¹⁰² Claudia Cano, "Rosa Cleaning the Oceanside Pier." Claudia Cano. Accessed March 12, 2019. <https://claudiacano.com/artwork/3567034-Rosa-cleaning-the-Oceanside-Pier.html>.

¹⁰³ In *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*, Leticia Alvarado analyzes the potential of abjection as an aesthetic strategy that has the potential to destabilize notions of subject formation established through narratives of inclusion and

the contradictions within American capital, including the fetishization of migrant women's labor and caring skills and society's rendering of their laboring bodies as a ghostly but productive presence. I want to linger, here, on Cano's ruminations on transforming the ghostly and invisible presence of the domestic worker into a visible abjected body that forces the spectatorship to reflect on the collective dependence and reliance on migrant women's labor. In performing Rosa, Cano uses exaggerated corporeal movements and smiles, pushing spectators to in some way react to her excessive submissiveness. Rosa's performance replicates the dominant gender discourse constructs of Mexican women as the ideal labor force for domestic work due to their inherent docility, pleasantness, and servile attitude. The stereotype of the Mexican maid takes the form of a "performative excess" of loyal, faithful, and diligent service. Claudia Cano, the artist, describes her alter ego Rosa Hernandez as someone who is "always happy." I align my analysis of this performance with Jose Esteban Muñoz's notion of disidentification as a strategy that "tries to transform a cultural logic from within," working both "on and against a dominant ideology."¹⁰⁴ Cano's performance deploys Rosa's failure to identify with the stereotype of the maid, allowing for alternative forms of recognition in which visibility functions "within the flux of discourse and power." As Muñoz observes, conforming (or the failure to identify) also need to be considered strategies of refusal and/or ethics of survival.

assimilation and instead generate alternative forms of collectivity, expression and knowledge production. Leticia, Alvarado. See Leticia Alvarado, *Abject Performances Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ José E. Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 11.

Aside from the use of performative excess to make Rosa (as the embodiment of migrant labor) an unavoidable presence, what makes this performance so compelling is the transformation of the “ordinary” domestic cleaning chores performed by a migrant Mexican woman into a spectacle. In doing this, Cano invokes “the power of seeing through performance,” which as Diana Taylor states provide ways of recognition and visibility to specters that structure our individual and collective life.¹⁰⁵ By swiping, mopping and dusting across different public spaces including public parks, art museums, and community spaces such as Chinatown in Los Angeles, California, Rosa’s laboring body not only pushes against the capitalist and patriarchal split between the public and private structuring of domestic work, but also forces spectators to confront the materiality of “invisible” laboring brown bodies. My analysis of Cano’s performance is not focused on reductive articulations of visibility as social recognition. Instead, I consider Rosa Hernandez as a performance that reveals abjection as a strategy to critique the simultaneous fetishizing of the Mexican immigrant maid in popular culture and their social invisibility. Besides, Cano’s use of the laboring body as the performing body becomes a means of inserting and maintaining migrant domestic work into the space of politics of both the private and public sphere. Thus, by placing Rosa in spaces where her presence is already an act of confrontation, Cano is transforming the image of the Mexican migrant domestic worker into a politicized subject.

“Bodyless”

While Cano’s performance of her alter ego Rosa Hernandez “La Chacha” (The cleaning lady) utilizes the body to disrupt spectators’ lives and to “invade” public space,

¹⁰⁵ Diana, Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007,143.

Filipina American artist Kimberley Acebo Arteche creates a similar effect by focusing on the absent body of the Filipina domestic worker. In 2018, Arteche completed the photographic series titled *Bodyless*, in which she explores the personal and global narratives of Filipina bodies and their physical and emotional labor through a visualization of the seen and unseen elements of migrant domestic work. The photographs capture staged scenes in which colorful dresses shaped into an invisible body in motion appear to float in front of the viewer. In search of ways to express invisibility as an embodied subjectivity of Filipina overseas workers, Arteche transforms the laboring body into a ghostly figure; into a specter of the living labor of domestic work.¹⁰⁶ As Arteche states, the photographic series is meant to display “a body seen, but whose voice is not heard or validated,” and to encourage the viewer to reach an understanding of how problematic are the mechanisms of invisibility that structure domestic labor.¹⁰⁷ These mechanisms naturalize the idea of seeing, feeling, and enjoying the results of someone’s labor without ever actually ‘seeing’ the person.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri identify living labor as that which “produces life and constitutes society in a time that cuts across the division posed by the workday, inside and outside the prisons of capitalist work and its wage relation, in both the realm of work and that of nonwork.” As long as domestic work and specifically migrant domestic work remain unregulated and uncalculated by measures of productivity, it will continue to function as the central drive of capitalism exploitation. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of The State-Form*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Excerpt taken from the artist statement on her website. "Bodyless." ARTECHE. Accessed February 19, 2019. <http://www.kimarteche.com/bodyless.html>.



Figure 6. Kimberley Arteche, image from the photographic series *Bodyless*, 2017-2018. ¹⁰⁸

Central to the idea of visualizing the seen/unseen elements of Filipina domestic labor is the use of the dress in motion suggesting that although invisible, the worker lives in a constant state of readiness and availability. Moreover, this type of dress (Figure 6) conveys meanings about gender-specific domestic duties. The duster is a traditional Filipino house dress often made of cotton, typically worn around the house by women while doing housework and childcare.¹⁰⁹ Arteche purposefully places the colorful dusters amongst white spaces as a reference to her experience as an artist of color in white institutions but more importantly as a critique of the simultaneous commodification and disavowal of Filipina women's bodies and the reproductive and affective labor they perform for white families. In this context, the duster is not merely placed to make visible the invisible laboring body. It is meant to contextualize the Filipina laboring body as part

¹⁰⁸ Kimberley, Arteche. "Bodyless." ARTECHE. Accessed January 10, 2019. <http://www.kimarteche.com/bodyless.html>.

¹⁰⁹ "From Batchmates to Siestas: Philippine English." OxfordWords Blog. October 23, 2015. Accessed April 8, 2019. <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2013/09/23/philippine-englis>

of what performance scholar Lucy Burns refers to as scenes of “contestation and desire, disclosed in the ideological imaginary of the imperial state.”¹¹⁰

As presented in these performances, the body is used to exceed the constraints of domination, to problematize the notion of invisibility as only vulnerability. Instead, artists Rosa Cano and Kimberly Arteché utilize visibility as a refusal to disappearance and invisibility, to complicate understandings of the home/private sphere as the space that determines the conditions of domination and subjugation. The display and performance of laboring bodies and their everyday practices outside the home and in the public sphere functions to illuminate the role of the spectator (society) in naturalizing the invisibility of the reproductive labor of black and brown migrant bodies. Furthermore, by situating the Filipina and Mexican laboring performing body within the normative space of politics, Cano and Arteché’s pieces also enable a reading of the migrant domestic workers’ bodies as fungible brown bodies. The laboring bodies of Filipina and Mexican migrant workers can be read through Hartman’s analytic of black fungibility specifically in relation to the enslaved embodying the abstract “interchangeability and replaceability” endemic to the commodity. This is not to equate the experience of the migrant worker to that of the slave, but to understand how racialized bodies, in this case, brown bodies have figuratively and metaphorical value extending into the realm of the discursive and symbolic. In reading the Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic worker as “fungible bodies,” I’m evoking an emphasis of the elasticity and liquidity of their laboring bodies within aesthetic and everyday practices. As Hartman argues, “the fungibility commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of

¹¹⁰ San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte*, 51.

others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values," and it is through performance that these projections become legible.

Caring for Others While "Feeling Brown"

On Sunday, March the 6th of 2011, the New York city-based annual performance event Diwang Pinay (Spirit of the Filipina) put on show a collaborative and participatory staged play titled: "The Story Behind the Woman Worker." The play is centered around the journey of Maria, a domestic worker in the NYC area who has left the Philippines and her family in search of a living wage. To create an original piece of work, the organizers brought together a "multigenerational group of Filipinas, immigrant, and American-born," from non-profit organizations; Kabalikat Domestic Worker Support Network and FIRE (Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment), as well as academics, and community members.¹¹¹ Scholar Valerie Francisco, who collaborated in this effort, stated that Maria's story was created based on collective discussions that deployed how participants experienced oppression differently. This statement captivated my interest in analyzing the potential of this project in developing an aesthetic of the precarity of domestic work and its invisibilized subjectivities.

¹¹¹ "Diwang Pinay." VFM. March 04, 2011. Accessed August 28, 2018. <https://valeriefm.com/2011/03/04/diwang-pinay/>



Figure 7. Screenshot of *The Playground Scene*. Diwang Pinay (Spirit of the Filipina) annual performance event in New York city 2011. Photograph by Valerie Francisco.¹¹²

The *Playground Scene* (Figure 7) opens with the performer artist walking into an empty stage hugging a cardboard cutout of a boy. In the background, the projection of a furnished living room with stylish sofas and accent tables, emphasizes the actuality of a private household of a middle-upper class family. Maria (the performer) stops in the middle of the stage and begins a conversational monologue directed at the cardboard cutout. In an energetic and amicable tone, Maria informs the made-up child that his regular eating schedule indicates that it is time for a snack, and afterward playtime in the playground. “We are going to the playground, but you have to listen to me, I don’t want you to fall and get a bubu,” Maria says. Immediately after saying this, her face and her voice fade into sadness, setting the mood for a moment in which she shares with the audience memories of her child coming home with scrapes and bruises. “Just get a cotton ball and antiseptic and dap gently on the wound” she says with an energetic tone, “dap

¹¹² Valerie, Francisco. "Diwang Pinay 2011: Playground Scene." YouTube. February 22, 2012. Accessed July 27, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j5JYhezbc>.

gently on the wound” she repeats in a melancholic tone, and lastly a third “dap gently on the wound,” in which her face deploys anger and resentment, and her voice denotes indignation (coming to sense into her condition of dispossession/ a consequence of forced migration). She pauses for a few seconds, wiping away the tears from her face and then she transitions into a sprightly attitude, and talks again to the cut board saying, “I have to focus, I have to focus because there is still a lot of things that I need to do,” while putting it aside of the main scene.

This specific set of the play explores the sensorial and corporeal dimensions of transnational motherhood and the temporal detachment of domestic workers from their laboring body as a survival strategy. The emotional labor of migrant domestic work has mainly been discussed concerning the political and economic aspects of migration and globalization, neglecting/obscuring the emotional dimensions of the migrant experience. The disavowal of an analysis that incorporates emotions as both the psychological sphere of an individual and their function of “sociality,” reduce the complex dynamics and negotiations contained in emotional labor into normative gendered narratives of maternal love.¹¹³ Moreover, as anthropologist Jie Yang observes in her work on the political economy of affect, the emotional labor of domestic work -meaning the management and suppression of private feelings and the creation of a “publicly observable facial and bodily display”- is intended to not only follow a racialized and gendered emotional script ascribed to this occupation, but it should also aim at developing a relationship with those in their care. The suppression of the worker’s negative emotions becomes a measure of

¹¹³Sara, Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 8.

their caring qualities, meaning their productivity and effectivity depends on succeeding in becoming a subjectless laboring body.

Maria's performance, enacts an episode of "emotional dissonance," referring to a process in which workers are unable to feel the emotions they must display, but that has no choice but to fake them.¹¹⁴ Within this process, Maria challenges the objectification of her existence as merely a corporeal object through the juxtaposition of melancholic memories of her own child, while caring for someone else's son. This melancholic condition sheds light on the effects of forced migration and family separation for the migrant mother, specifically concerning the affective exploitation embedded in being "motherly" as part of the job while being absent in their children's lives. In the performance, this profoundly moving scene is characterized by brevity; brevity imposed by the countless daily chores that Maria has to complete before the end of the day. In the performance, seconds after Maria wipes her tears, and she begins listing the things the employers persuade her to do by using phrases such as "Could you do me a favor and wash the dishes?" "When you get the chance can you do the laundry, please" "Can you please clean the floors too?" and many others to which Maria addressing the audience responds "and how can I say no?"¹¹⁵ Altogether, this scene shows the dissonance between the employer claims of appreciation and recognition of the worker's labor which on the one hand can be interpreted as claims of affection, and in the other hand, as an internalized decoding of these claims as discourses that hide exploitation and oppression.

¹¹⁴ Eileen, Boris and Rhacel Salazar, Parreñas. *Intimate labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Sciences, 2010, 6.

¹¹⁵ Excerpt taken from live performance *Playground Scene*. Valerie, Francisco. "Diwang Pinay 2011: Playground Scene." YouTube. February 22, 2012. Accessed July 27, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j5JYhezbc>.

As scholar Quayim-Ray argues, employers mobilize a “rhetoric of love” based on notions of affection, gratefulness, dependency, and loyalty that perpetuates elements of domestic servitude within this “modern” labor relation.¹¹⁶



Figure 8. Ramiro Gomez, *Nanny and Child*, West Hollywood, 2013. Photograph by David Feldman¹¹⁷

In the series *The Caretakers*, artist Ramiro Gomez re-creates everyday scenes of migrant workers in Hollywood Park in cardboard cutouts and situates them around the park with the purpose of make them visible to the public eye. The cutouts have no facial features, and their brown skins as in the case of the piece *Nanny and Child* (Figure 8) are set in contrast with the white skins of the children under their care. In his book, Gomez

¹¹⁶ Raka, Ray and Seemin Qayum. *Cultures of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, 98.

¹¹⁷ Lawrence, Weschler. *Domestic Scenes: The Art of Ramiro Gomez*. New York: ABRAMS, 2016.

mentions that he has worked as a nanny. “You were expected to heap all this love on the children (and children, being children, how could you help but to do so?), and yet you could be dismissed on a moment’s notice, on a whim, as others around you were being all the time,” he mentioned when asked about the idea that inspired this piece.¹¹⁸ This piece is a statement not only to the lack of visibility and recognition of the affective investment in caring for a child, but it is also a statement about the worker’s embodiment of the condition of disposability.

Conclusion

Reading these performances through a relational analytic enables the formation of a critique of the vocabulary of universality embedded in the notion of precarity. It also forces us not only to pay attention to the shared vulnerabilities of women laboring in domestic work but also to the uneven distribution of those vulnerabilities and the differential ascription of value to racialized and gendered bodies. Furthermore, by juxtaposing these cultural productions we can decipher the ways in which globalization/racial capitalism manage and combine the desires/anxieties of United States as an imperial-nation state along with those of “post-colonial” societies in order to produce a hegemonic discourse of women of color disposability and the devaluation of their racialized and gendered labor.

Although each one of the installations and performance pieces speak of the particularities of the migrant domestic worker experience, when brought together they provide a relational medium in which the spectator is presented with an aesthetic that speaks of a collective sense of precarity. This collective sense offers a reading of the vicissitudes of racialization in domestic work and its aesthetics of abjection as a political

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

strategy of identitarian refusal and as a claim of personhood. Making visible the “differential forms of disempowerment” through aesthetic practices help us grapple with different histories of exploitation but also in the case of migrant domestic work to affective structures and systems of disempowerment that enable a hierarchy of racialization related to the valuation/devaluation of brown bodies and their labor.

Chapter 4: The Affective Disposition of Brown Bodies: Cinematic Visions of Migrant Domestic Work

Introduction

After a year of auditions, Filipino actress and producer Marife Necesito landed her first English-language role in the film *Mammoth* (2009) of Swedish writer-director Lukas Moodyson. In what she considers a breakthrough point in her career, Necesito shared the screen with Hollywood stars, Michelle Williams and Gael Garcia Bernal, playing as one of the three principal characters in the movie which debuted at the Berlin international film festival in 2009. Following the release, a wave of reviews situated the multi-story global narrative as a dull copy of Mexican director Alejandro Iñárritu's award-winning film *Babel* (2009.) Film critics provided for the most part, a general overview of the importance of multicultural representations in transnational cinema and repeatedly compared these films with one another regarding cinematic format paying little or no attention to how each film engaged diasporic communities and captured relational migration stories. Both films center the figure of the migrant domestic worker in the United States as one of the links in the chain of intertwined stories and complex realities of globalization they aim to capture. For both Filipina actress Marife Necesito and Mexican actress Adriana Barraza, this was their first English-language role, and coincidentally this was the first time the story of a Filipina migrant domestic worker and that of a Mexican cross-border domestic worker were made visible in mass media productions.¹¹⁹ Characterized by multi-character and multi-story narratives portraying the

¹¹⁹ Revolvly, LLC. "'Marife Necesito' on Revolvly.com." Revolvly. Accessed May 28, 2019. <https://www.revolvly.com/page/Marife-Necesito>; "RT Talks With Babel's Adriana Barraza." Rotten Tomatoes Movie and TV News RT Talks With Babel's Adriana Barraza

interlacing of economic, social and cultural realities of the free-trade market era, *Mammoth* and *Babel* provide a shift in the representation of the immigrant maid in American popular culture. In presenting a profound look into the daily dynamics of providing emotional labor through the lens of migrant workers, these films not only make visible the diversity of migrant experiences and the heterogeneity of domestic labor in the United States, they also render the Hollywood “Latina maid” stereotype as an obsolete and discontinued representation of domestic workers in the film industry.

Within the Hollywood imaginary, racialized and gendered labor has been historically set in the shadows, and when made visible, it has functioned to sustain the “burdens of representation” of Latinxs in the film industry.¹²⁰ The stereotyping of the Latina immigrant maid has led to the formation of racial essentialism, which homogenizes the narrative and figure of the migrant domestic worker. Moreover, the continuous circulation of this essentialism bolsters the erasure of the coloniality of domestic labor, exacerbates the multiple migration regimes embodied in domestic work, and obscures the relationality between Mexican and Filipina domestic workers’ experiences.¹²¹ As scholars Ellen Shohat and Robert Stam observe essentialism

Comments. Accessed May 28, 2019. <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/rt-talks-with-babels-adriana-barraza/>.

¹²⁰ Emerging from cultural studies, the concept of “*burdens of representation*” evokes a meditation on the politics and meanings of media representation. Scholars such as Stuart Hall, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, analyze the “burden” as part of a continuum in which the media constructs, places and disseminates negative stereotypes of particular racialized and gendered bodies. The media promotes and perpetuates dominant modes of representation and constructs hegemonic and homogenized notions of ethnic identity following predominantly white and aesthetics and cultural discourses. See Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994, 183-185; Procter, James. *Stuart Hall*. London: Routledge, 2004.

¹²¹ Aníbal, Qujano. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-32. doi:10.1177/026858090001500200

concerning popular culture generates a certain ahistoricism that ignores the “historical instability of the stereotype.”¹²² Breaking away from the ahistoricism built around the *Latinization* of domestic work, this chapter focuses on the representation of the Mexican and Filipino immigrant maid in contemporary transnational film, as means to map the processes of racial valuation and devaluation of migrant domestic workers in contemporary popular culture. My reading of cinema with regard to *Babel* and *Mammoth* is inspired by Rey Chow’s examination of the “sentimental” in contemporary Chinese films, which she defines as the dramatization of “an indomitable collective will” emerging from situations such as poverty, migration, illness, and isolation embodied by patriarchal structures within the family and nation, or by the complexities of globalization.¹²³ The objective is to examine the visual imagery constructed around the dynamics of global labor, specifically regarding the sentimental gendered and racialized representational practices of migrant domestic work within transnational network narratives.¹²⁴ Given that a feature of transnational film is to create a “mosaic” of storylines intertwined by the forces of globalization, it becomes necessary to pay attention at the elements that frame the imaginary of the transnational and transpacific migrant domestic worker. How do *Babel* (2006) and *Mammoth* (2009) provide an emotional validation of Filipina and Mexican domestic worker stories through the

¹²² Ella, Shohat, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994, 199.

¹²³ Rey Chow. *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007, 24.

¹²⁴ According to film scholar Charles Bordwell, the network narrative centers on several protagonists and how their stories casually intersect and in which the characters inhabit the same space-time framework. The ways in which the stories intersect lead to an understanding that although rare and incomprehensible, casual convergence is possible. Bordwell, David. *Poetics of Cinema*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008, 199.

reproduction of narratives of racial suffering? How is emotional labor visually constructed to recognize the humanity and personhood of migrant workers, and how does a relational reading of Filipina and Mexican performing bodies in domestic labor enables an understanding of differential racialization as a mechanism to preserve labor disposability? Although both films provide similar experiences of racialized subjects laboring within the “survival circuits of globalization,” the narratives that accompany their racialized brown bodies reinforce a differential valuation of the emotional labor they provide.

In this chapter, I analyze two film productions: *Mammoth* (2009) by Sweden director Lukas Moodyson and *Babel* (2006) by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu. Both films have been classified as *multiplex cinema*; a new genre of cinematic production defined by cultural theorist Hamid Naficy as productions that deal with dual globalization as displacement and migration, and that utilize a “multilingual, dialogue, multicultural characters, and multi-sited diegesis.”¹²⁵ Both productions focus on globalization and the relationship between location, globality, and possibility. In these films, storylines and characters are brought together violently by economic dispossession, forced migration, and neoliberal policies, among other things. At the center of these narratives of contingency, the characters of the Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic worker complicate the representations of the maid in American popular culture. The emergence of conflicting and analogous representations of Latina and Southeast Asian maids/housekeepers/nannies evoke an urgency to analyze the differential incorporation of laboring subjects by transnational capital as presented through the lens of the liberal

¹²⁵ Hamid, Naficy. "Multiplicity and multiplexing in today's cinemas: Diasporic cinema, art cinema, and mainstream cinema." *Journal of Media Practice* 11: 11-20. (accessed March 6, 2014).

cinematic imagination. As shown in these films, brown female bodies and their emotional labor are figured and valued as an indispensable element of American life, a status always contingent upon levels of exploitation and subordination they are willing to endure. Rather than looking at the similarities and differences between two racialized laboring subjects, this chapter explores affect as a link in the representations of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers. Evoking Sarah Ahmed's work on affective economies, this chapter aims at exploring the particular feelings and emotions that become 'stuck' to the visual imagining of migrant domestic work.

In examining the representation of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers, their relationships, and their encounters with the systematic violence of globalization and the state, the effort is directed towards mapping affect as a material force, which the film industry utilizes to reproduce the feminization and precarity of transnational and transpacific domestic labor. By putting in dialogue the representation of two racialized groups codified as ideal laboring subjects, we can better ascertain the function of transnational cultural production in reproducing heteronormative racialized discourses of affective labor. From this perspective, my way of reading cinema focuses on understanding the linkages between affective economies, migrant labor, and formations of racial difference.¹²⁶ Under global capitalism, the ideal migrant domestic worker, has been constructed through racialized notions of motherhood, docility, and flexibility. In transnational film, I argue, these racialized notions have materialized visually in a maternal aesthetic, which embedded with a heteronormative reproductive logic preserves the interests of transnational capitalism and patriarchal systems in

¹²⁶ Sara, Ahmed. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117-39. Accessed February 25, 2019. doi:10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117.

multiple nation-states. I set in dialogue the stories of migrant domestic workers in *Mammoth* and *Babel* as means to push for a relational approach through which I will be able to trace the formation of a hierarchy of racial specialization in care work and the ascription of emotional and affective articulations in differently racialized laboring subjects.

Moving along the lines of feminist film theory, the intention is not to limit the analysis of the representation of immigrant domestic labor to a matter of becoming visible in the visual sense. Instead, the effort is directed towards analyzing visibility as Rey Chow suggests, as a means to participate in a discursive politics of representation, and to foreground the “condition of possibility of what becomes visible.” My reading of these films is grounded on the use of a relational lens, which Chicana scholar Natalia Molina defines as the process of thinking about race relationally to “understand the relationship between racial representations and structural forces, power and inequality, and how these relationships change over time.”¹²⁷ In juxtaposing cinematic representations of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers, I situate the relational approach as a tool to trace the particular dynamics of the global economy of domestic work that are rendered visible and those that are purposefully disavowed in the commodification of the emotional labor of brown bodies. The stories of Amelia and Gloria in *Mammoth* and *Babel* offer visibility of the migrant domestic worker that when reading it through a relational lens, evince how cultural production naturalizes the devaluation and disposability of domestic workers, exceeding the filmic narratives.

¹²⁷ Natalia, Molina. “Examining Chicana/o History through a Relational Lens.” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2013, pp. 520–541., doi:10.1525/phr.2013.82.4.520.

Furthermore, extending from Lisa Lowe's argument on cultural production as a site for the formation of new political subjects, I contend that film representations of migrant domestic workers deploy an immigrant marginality and subjectivity, which embody the US nation's dependence on the intimate and affective labor of the racialized and feminized abstract citizen.¹²⁸ I suggest that an examination into the cultural production of the migrant domestic worker's experiences can lead to an understanding of affective economies operating relationally within the politics of representation; a mechanism through which women of color in the care work industry become disposable in the American imaginary. As such, I began with a discussion of the use of melodrama to obscure the mechanisms and migration policies that have historically enabled the transnational mobility of authorized and unauthorized migrant domestic workers across the United States southern border.

Migrant Worker Melodrama and Transnational Mobility

One of the characteristics of diasporic cinema is the traveling cinematography that articulates a visual rhetoric of transnational communities' feelings and collective identities. Multiplicity is an essential component in this new genre because it materializes the intersections and interactions of people, languages, cultures, beliefs, and values taking place in the globalized world. Challenging the traditional linearity and coherence of storytelling of Hollywood cinema, the multiplex form traces the movement of displaced and dispersed populations across national boundaries, which requires engaging fragmentation, diasporic identities, and transnational spatiality. Following the parameters of multiplicity in diasporic cinema, both *Mammoth* and *Babel* move back and forth between United States metropolis (New York and San Diego) and Third-World countries

¹²⁸ Lisa, Lowe. *Immigrant Acts*, 29.

(the Philippines, Morocco and border city Tijuana) tracing interrelated stories of displacement, inequality and dispossession, as well as other conditions structured by the power differentials of globalization. At the center of these storylines of multiple displacements, the characters of Amelia and Gloria provide a glimpse of the emotional burden of care work and the power dynamics at play in American households employing a migrant domestic worker. Moreover, taking advantage of the traveling cinematography, Iñarritu and Moodyson take us across transatlantic and transnational borders to witness the reality of the worker's families in the home country as a consequence of the painful but inevitable absence of the mother.

Among the relatively “new” representations in diasporic cinema during the post-NAFTA era we find that of the Filipina maid/nanny; a figure that is slowly becoming legible in the American imaginary, “diversifying” the racist stereotype of the foreigner maid/housekeeper. Similarly to other problematic images of Asian American women as commodity objects in the form of categories such as the “picture bride”, “war bride” and “mail-in order bride,” circulating within American popular culture, the image of the Filipina maid stands on contested terrain for discussions on racial difference and politics of representation. These categories, as Rhacel Parreñas argues, are part of the limited epistemologies of Asian American women constructed in reference to immigration laws dominated by paradigms of racial exclusion and restricted gender constructions.¹²⁹ Consequently, these epistemologies translate into visual renderings in American popular culture, perpetuating the formation of racial stereotypes which obliterate variegation patterns within the social, political, and cultural fabric of the Asian American

¹²⁹ Rhacel Salazar, Parreñas *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and globalization*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 2008, 116.

community. While depictions of Filipina migrant domestic workers in the United States are infrequent, films like *Mammoth* (2009), and Anthony Bourdain's Manila Episode of "Parts Unknown" (2016), have given some exposure to the sacrifices of Filipina overseas workers. Although somewhat problematic in portraying individualized melodramas rather than emphasizing the crises migrant women face, these depictions have been able to speak to the complexity of the experiences of Filipina migrant women as domestic workers and as immigrant mothers. That said, it is crucial to consider that the visuality of Filipina domestic workers has been reduced to a dynamic of compassion in which the workers' suffering is overshadowed by the moral superiority of the compassionate or only by a sense of inevitable doom and dispossession.¹³⁰ Similarly, recent representations of Mexican migrant domestic workers such as those portrayed in films like *Under the Same Moon* (2007) and *Babel* provide a different angle to the stereotypical image of the Mexican maid. The characters are built within a larger narrative that includes dangerous border crossings and daily commuting across the U.S.-Mexico border. Herein, the effort is directed towards humanizing a character that has been historically decontextualized, ridiculed, and objectified. These representations are designed to elicit a particular kind of identification from viewers. A problematic identification in which the spectator develops empathy for the disenfranchisement and isolation domestic workers experience but leaves unexamined and uncriticized the role of the state, global capitalism and American imperialism in the commodification of the emotional labor of brown bodies.

The melodramatic representation of the migrant domestic worker recently incorporated into the diasporic cinematic industry makes visible the personal struggles

¹³⁰ Laura, Podalsky. "Migrant feelings: Melodrama, Babel and affective communities." *Studies in Hispanic Cinema* 7, no. 1 (2010): 47-58. doi:10.1386/shci.7.1.47_1.

and the unbalanced power dynamics within the intimate setting of the private home. Although this visibility is much needed to advance the dignification of the domestic worker labor force, it does not transgress the scripts established by the liberal cinematic imagination. Diasporic cinema can capture and critique the most blatant acts of violence embedded in the process of globalization such as the economic dispossession, marginalization, and displacement of communities across the global south, but always within a framework of universality that reifies an ideological structure of imperialist intervention.¹³¹ Gloria and Amelia's stories were carefully crafted to emphasize the suffering of the individual as a result of forced migration while at the same time presenting visual references of the global south as rural, messy and backward. Through the lens of suffering, the violences embedded in the contrast between developed and undeveloped countries are normalized and perceived as inevitable. Theater and performance scholar Ana Puga coined the term "the political economy of suffering" in reference to the commodification and circulation of performances of undocumented migrant suffering and the use of "suffering" -as conceived in essentialist terms- as a necessary feature in processes of inclusion and belonging. As Puga argues, representations of migrant suffering are "exchanged in attempts to promote empathy, tolerance of mobility, and respect for migrant human rights."¹³² While the spectators' affective response to narratives of undocumented migrant children is grounded on emotions such as compassion, acceptance, and protection, for narratives of migrant

¹³¹ Randall, Williams. *The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, XVX.

¹³² Ana Elena, Puga "Migrant Melodrama and the Political Economy of Suffering." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2016, pp. 72–93., doi:10.1080/0740770x.2016.1183982.

workers the response is driven by emotions and anxieties formulated under a particular political moment and/or by a specific political discourse, i.e., anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric. *Mammoth* and *Babel* were released in the aftermath of the introduction of the Sensenbrenner bill in 2006, which led to the “Day Without Immigrants” massive protests across the country. Within this context, the representation of migrant domestic workers moving across borders provided a different account of melodrama, one that expanded the political economy of suffering into the realm of neoliberal value systems and transnational care regimes.

According to director Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, *Babel* is a film about the politics of the human and the commonalities of human suffering in a globally interconnected landscape. Even though personal human conflicts are at the center of the film, the narrative structure also illustrates how neoliberal economic policies have deepened inequality, poverty, and exploitation, and how post-9/11 nationalist anxieties materialized in significant border security and stricter immigration policies. By choosing to incorporate the story of a cross-border domestic worker on the Texas-Mexico border, Iñárritu explores the contradictions between processes of globalization, American capitalism dependence on immigrant labor, and discourses of nationalism. Amelia is a 50-year-old single woman who works as a live-in nanny and domestic worker in the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Her story refers to a long but hidden history of cross-border labor dynamics in the southwest region. Amelia’s physical mobility across the border mirrors the contradiction of immigration law as the site in which the liberal state sows fear, anxiety, and distrust towards immigrants, while at the same time promoting the commodification of a workforce imprinted by a submissive, docile, and

“loving” Third-world culture. As Christina Mendoza mentions, the concept of “gendered geographies of power” enables an understanding of how gender and the state regulate movement, but also the informal regulations in which border officials turn a blind eye to the cross-border movement of women workers.¹³³ The fact that border officials concede the border-crossing mobility of Mexican women workers, situates the state in a position of complicity in the brokering of legal and illegal work. This complicity is found in Lisa Lowe’s analysis of the contradictory imperatives of the nation and capital. U.S. capital and the social reproduction of the white heteropatriarchal state depend on laboring racialized and gendered bodies and official narratives that cast immigrant and migrant labor as an inevitable “necessary evil.” The state’s complicity also implies perpetuating the precarious standing of racialized labor as “abstract labor nor abstract citizens” to obfuscate an analysis and understanding of processes of inclusion/exclusion of specific groups such as migrant domestic workers.¹³⁴

Along with this critique against the contradictions of capital and the state’s complicity in the commodification of immigrant and migrant labor, it is crucial to consider the paradoxes of partial citizenship as an experience of integration to the global economy in which there is a demand and desire for the production of the labor (emotional labor), disregarding their needs and social practices. As sociologist Rhacel Parreñas states, the position of “partial citizenship is a conjuncture that the structural processes of globalization produced,” and it is a condition shared by many groups of migrant domestic

¹³³ Christina, Mendoza. *Women, Migration, and Domestic Work on the Texas-Mexico Border (The New Americans: Recent Immigration and American Society)*. LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2011.

¹³⁴ Lisa, Lowe. *Immigrant Acts*, 1996, 27.

workers in the U.S.¹³⁵ In dissecting this complicity, we need to recognize that the receiving state shares the blame with the exporting state. Under the specter of an ongoing care crisis in the United States, third-world countries like Mexico and the Philippines become labor suppliers (sending-nations), concealing forced migration as a result of neoliberal reforms through a discourse of economic opportunity and empowerment. This discourse hinders the nation-states dependence and reliance on the exporting and commodification of migrant women's affective labor. Given this, it is essential to touch upon the role of the Philippine government in the export of domestic workers. Contrasting the "illegality" of Mexican domestic workers, the Philippine government legitimizes the export of women workers to high demand areas around the world. The examination of transnational Filipina worker migration represents a significant opportunity to trace the mutability of neoliberal governmentality and to map what Saskia Sassen refers to as the 'counter-geography of globalization.'¹³⁶ Similar to the Bracero program era in Mexico, in which the corporatist state, regulated and managed the labor market by exporting surplus labor into the United States agricultural sector, the Philippine state mobilizes, exports and regulates migrant labor to meet the demand for a gendered and racialized labor in the care sector. As scholar Robyn Magalit Rodriguez asserts, the Philippine state has become a model of migration management for other

¹³⁵ Rhacel Salazar, Parreñas. "Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and 'Imagined (Global) Community' of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2001, pp. 89–107., doi:10.1057/9780230101821_6.

¹³⁶ Sassen defines the counter-geographies of globalization as cross-border circuits that have become a source for livelihood, profit-making and foreign-currency. These circuits of revenue-making as Sassen mentions develop on the backs of the disadvantaged, in particular on the backs of women in search for work. Saskia., Sassen. "Women's Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival." *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 2002, 255-74.

developing states which suffer the destabilizing effects of neoliberalism. Rodriguez uses the term “labor brokerage” to conceptualize migration management, which involves a series of state practices including the establishment of labor recruitment agencies that produce and legitimate discursive constructions of Filipina workers as “docile,” “patient” and “hardworking.”¹³⁷ These gendered meanings have proven to function as disciplining mechanisms and operate via the mobilization of affect.

Unlike the Philippine state that configures domestic workers as national heroes, the Mexican state has played a minimal role in the regulation and management of women’s migrant labor in the United States. In her research, sociologist Mary R. Goldsmith establishes that after decades of neglect and as a result of the activism and work of feminist organizations, the Mexican state has begun to include domestic workers in the census, surveys and national accounts.¹³⁸ Similarly, Vicky L. Ruiz and Pierre Hondagneu-Sotelo have emphasized that the delay in applying a gender lens to immigration research has been detrimental to the study and recognition of Mexican women’s long history of migration/immigration and labor. Furthermore, by marginalizing women’s migration history, particularly regarding vulnerable and precarious labor sectors such as migrant domestic workers, the state hinders its responsibilities to generate law and policy that could influence migration choices and protect women abroad. The Mexican state came to implement a model of migration management in 1953, responding to the immigration restrictions set by the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act of 1952. A group of white housewives from El Paso, Texas formed an organization called the

¹³⁷ Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, X.

¹³⁸ Mary, Goldsmith. "De Sirvientas a Trabajadoras. La Cara Cambiante Del Servicio Doméstico En La Ciudad De México." *Debate Feminista* 17 (1998): 85-96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42624469>.

Association for Legalized Domestics. The purpose of this organization was to seek the assistance of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the legalization of domestic labor of Mexican women. The called “Bracero Maid” contract, as it was called was supposed to function along the lines of the bracero program; specifying a prospective employer, establishing a minimum weekly salary, limiting the working period to one year, and classifying the worker (maids) as “non-immigrants.”¹³⁹ Mexican authorities were required to provide the prospective employer with a certificate clearing the employee from any civil or criminal record. The program stirred controversy among Mexican-American household workers who argued that there was an abundant supply of this kind of labor in the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border. It was well known that cross-border Mexican domestic workers were willing to work for lower wages, which debunked the idea of establishing a minimum wage salary. Amidst this controversy, the Department of Justice discarded the initiative, leaving the regulation of domestic labor to the confines of the private sphere.¹⁴⁰ Even though U.S. immigration laws are intended to regulate and restrict migration flows, the practice of working across the border has deep historical roots in border regions such as Tijuana. *Babel* illuminates the role of the state in utilizing this migration model to ensure the constant supply of cheap household labor while capitalizing on immigrant women’s vulnerability due to political and economic instability and socio-cultural constraints. Amelia’s character complicates dominant representations of “illegal” immigration by showing how the state transforms racialized

¹³⁹ Juana, Moriel-Payne. “La Trabajadora Domestica Mexicana en la Frontera Mexico-Estados Unidos: Historia de Esfuerzo y Fe.” *Aletheia*, volumen 2, número 3, noviembre 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Vicky L. Ruiz. "Mexican Domestic Workers in El Paso." Edited by Carol Groneman. In "To toil the livelong day": America's women at work, 1780 - 1980; edited by Mary Beth Norton. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Pr., 1989.

immigrant women's labor into a commodity, enabling the mobility of bodies across the border to supply the specific demand for foreign domestic helpers.

Lukas Moodyson's film *Mammoth* (2009) also captures the contradictions articulated by Lowe whereby immigrant women of color are entrusted with the nation's homes and children, yet socially devalued and constructed as disposable and 'deviant' in media and popular culture. Following the "globalized" style introduced by Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu in *Babel*, the film conveys an international plot connecting three different geographical locations (New York, The Philippines, and Thailand). *Mammoth* follows the Vidales family, an upper-middle-class family living in New York City and their brief encounters with working-class people and their everyday struggles. Ellen Vidales (Michelle Williams), the mother, is a surgeon in New York, working endless night shifts that challenge her ability to spend quality time with her daughter Jackie (Sophie Nyweide) during the day. Jackie is under the care of Filipina nanny Gloria (Marife Necesito) who has left her children under the custody of the grandmother. Leo Vidales, the husband, and father, is a video gamer entrepreneur whose internet-gaming company is on the rise which results in him becoming the absent figure in the family. The film captures his absence and emotional distancing from the family while he travels to Thailand to close a business deal. Leo's journey into Thailand, from the perspective of a bourgeois bohemian tourist, becomes an exploration into the harsh realities of the developing world, which translates on the screen as stereotypical images of exotic landscapes, poverty, and prostitution. Ellen and Leo represent the ideal subjects of the American global neoliberal community; an economically thriving inter-racial couple embodying the values and benefits of a post-racial democratic society including mobility,

meritocracy, and equal opportunity.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, by situating Gloria's daily struggle and that of her family at the center of this dynamic, the film explores the relations of inequality and exploitation naturalized by narratives of development and cultural inclusion.

Filipina nanny Gloria's migration and settlement in New York depicts the patterns of the labor brokerage system in which the state's construction of "migrant citizenship" is framed around notions of national belonging, moral and civil obligation, and discourses that rest on heteronormative logics of marriage, family and biological reproduction. As presented in this film, Gloria, as a single mother of two, has no other option but to leave her children and mother behind for several months, in search of a "temporary" job to earn a living. This "temporary migration" as Geraldine Pratt calls it, is marked by intense pain, anger, and loss associated with the separation of her family. While the Philippine sending/exporting state promotes the feminization of domestic migrant work as a "win-win" situation -improved living standards of the worker's family-, Filipina women as depicted in the film, suffer in silence the invisibility of their experiences of separation. In *Mammoth*, the scenes that show Gloria's interactions with her eldest son Salvador through telephone calls, deploy the emotional and affective exigencies and anxieties of the families back home. "I want you to come home, I know you need to earn money for the new house and everything but I'm bigger now, and I can help you. I'll work and make money so that you can come home," says Salvador to Gloria in a sea of tears. Gloria holds back her tears and rushes to finish the call. As soon as she hangs up the phone, she bursts into tears alone in her bedroom while staring at the few pictures of her sons hanging on the wall. This scene captures the feelings of mourning, grief, and loss

¹⁴¹ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 69.

experienced as Sara Ahmed argues as an expression of the impossibility of love carried out by the failure of the nation to deliver the ‘promise for the good life.’¹⁴² Gloria and her son’s grief is a byproduct of national ideals and the idealization of migration as providing a better future and quality of life for its citizens. This scene highlights how the Philippine state utilizes the discourse of “new national heroism” to extend moral obligations and an affective set of expectations to its overseas citizens, specifically to women. As ‘new national heroes,’ migrant women are celebrated for working towards fulfilling liberal ideals of autonomy and economic success, while also socially charged with a burden of guilt for disrupting the moral fabric of the patriarchal family. Citizenship in this context comes with an attendant set of affective expectations and social and moral obligations that serve as a form of disciplinary violence. Thus, the ‘new national heroes’ discourse is inherently linked to processes of massive reorganization and disorganization of intimacy and family life, and the dynamics of state-violence, unveiling the precariousness of temporary labor migration underwritten by notions of “sacrifice.”¹⁴³ Following Sarah Ahmed conceptualization of the nation as a love object, we can assume that the Philippine state utilizes these notions of “sacrifice” to coerce its citizens to endure the hardships of migration as part of their labor of love for the nation and in pursuit of the “promise of being loved in return.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 131.

¹⁴³ Geraldine, Pratt. *Families Apart: Migrant Mothers and the Conflicts of Labor and Love*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Rodriguez, Robyn M. "Migrant Heroes: Nationalism, Citizenship and the Politics of Filipino Migrant Labor." *Citizenship Studies* 6, no. 3 (2002): 341-56. doi:10.1080/1362102022000011658.

¹⁴⁴ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 133.

Furthermore, thinking about the patriarchal constituency of the “new national heroism” discourse, it is crucial to analyze the structures of moral economy, nationalism and state-sponsored market practices as working in tandem to reproduce and perpetuate scripts of “female disposability,” by assuring the employer that bodies are easily replaceable from within the reserve army of Philippine labor. Expanding Melissa Wright’s notion of the “myth of the third world disposable woman,” I consider the disposability of Filipina domestic workers as a neoliberal logic that rationalizes and normalizes the violence, labor exploitation and the devaluation of the lives and labor of the workers and their families. The Philippine state and the labor-receiving states avoid their responsibility on the economic dispossession of the migrant labor force by positioning labor brokerage as an inevitable consequence of neoliberal globalization.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, since entering the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the Mexican state, utilized the logic/rationale of female disposability to attract foreign investment. The narratives of Mexican third-world women workers being “cheap, docile and dexterous,” set the parameters for the exploitation of a large sector of the female labor force in Mexico while also intensifying patriarchal attitudes, misogyny and the objectification of poor working-class women. Maquiladora industries across the country became the sites for the construction of the transnational working woman as a gendered and racialized trope of global capitalism. Beyond the materialization of this trope within the workplace, the process of marking the racialized female body as disposable serves to legitimize the colonial logics of female servitude, captivity, and docility within the nation and across its borders. Even though, the characters of Gloria and Amelia provide alternative representations of the migrant domestic worker experience, their South Asian

¹⁴⁵ Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, 53.

and Mexican bodies (respectively) are only made legible through the embodiment of nationalist affects and expressions of racialized and gendered disposability.

Racialized Motherhood

In *Mammoth*, Gloria's sons-Salvador (Jan Nicdao) and Manuel (Martin Delos Santos)- live with their grandmother and uncle while she works to support their schooling and the construction of their own home. Many of the scenes that show Gloria's few private moments, take place in her room –the assigned room for the live-in help-, and they are centered on showing her looking at the photos of her two sons that she has temporarily attached to the wall. In this space, under marginalized and limited privacy, Gloria regularly drowns in nostalgia and sadness for not being present in their son's life. Without a doubt, *Mammoth* is one of the few films which attempts to incorporate a representation of Filipina migrant domestic worker into the narrative of the phenomenon recognized as “transnational motherhood.”¹⁴⁶ This effort is significant because it exposes the audience to the complexities of gendered migration while also presenting an optic of the maternal legibility embedded in the service economy within the logic of neoliberal globalization.¹⁴⁷ Given the increasing demand for care in the globalized economy, women from the Philippines have been one of the largest groups to supply the labor.

¹⁴⁶ Heather, Hewett. "Mothering Across Borders: Narratives of Immigrant Mothers in the United States." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 37: 121-139. (accessed April 29, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ In *The Work of Mothering: Globalization and the Filipino Diaspora*, author Harrod J. Suarez observes the production of certain nations such as the Philippines as providers of specific emotional and affective forms of labor including domestic work. Suarez argues that by providing access to this type of migrant labor, the Philippines imperial image is constructed to serve a maternal role in globalization. Harrod J. Suarez. *The Work of Mothering: Globalization and the Filipino Diaspora*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

While the erasure of the stories of Latina transnational motherhood have been subjected to constant criticism under normative and oppressive ideologies of motherhood or demanding neoliberal performances of “super mothering,” the invisibility of Filipina transnational motherhood speaks of the invisibility of the history of American imperialism in the Philippines. As Allan Punzalan asserts, building on Amy Kaplan’s analysis on the invisibility of American imperialism, the invisibility of Filipinos and their history is part of the process in which “the operation and production of empire is predicated on the legislative and cultural institutionalization of disavowal of these other American subjects.”¹⁴⁸ This process of erasure and disavowal referred to as an ‘imperial grammar,’ works in tandem with the coined grammar of neoliberalism; the hierarchical invisibility of “unincorporated subjects” enables an extended allocation of precarity and a gendered, racialized and sexualized valuation and revaluation of human life. Trapped in between these normative grammars, the Filipina domestic worker experience is rendered illegible but still useful in the consequent formation of an uneven devaluation of racialized life in the spectrum of US liberal multiculturalism. Gloria’s character challenges the imperial grammar at work in media representation of domestic workers, by introducing the emotional difficulties and risks of intensive mothering from afar, issues explicitly related with the positionality of an overseas domestic worker.

Gloria’s embodiment of transnational motherhood is a reiteration of the gendered scripts fashioned by nationalism and globalization that assume motherhood, and the accompanying narrative of migrant women leaving behind their children to raise other’s people children as a universal condition. The different scenes in which Gloria talks to her

¹⁴⁸ Isaac, Allan Punzalan. *American tropics articulating Filipino America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 3.

children on the phone, flesh out the emotional stress and anxiety that geographic separation generates for both the mother and the children. Her absence in the children's lives portrays a lack of adequate supervision, bringing forward problematic perspectives on care deficit or child abandonment as a long-term effect of women's migration.¹⁴⁹ Governmental officials in the Philippines utilize this concept of "care deficit" to expand the feminization of the domestic, making moral judgments about women's absence from the private sphere and casting the blame of family deterioration on migrant mothers. The stories of the suffering children become the perfect narrative for sensationalist newspapers in which the government reifies and publicizes its role as guardian of society's morals and values. As Rhacel Salazar Parreñas mentions there is a genuine care crisis, but the Philippine media has sensationalized the issue of child "abandonment," rendering a narrative which situates the children of migrants as a burden on the larger society.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, the Mexican state attributes "the problem" of to "bad" or derelict mothering rather than seeing it a function of neoliberalism. Official reports on women's migration, exploit narratives of educational consequences for children left in Mexico with substitute caregivers. While the state normalizes the absence of the fathers as part of a historical pattern of migration and reduces their paternal role to that of breadwinner, migrant women become the repository of the blame for deficient parenting. The discourse of the "good mother" is not only meant to reinforce hegemonic constructions of femininity within the domestic space, but more importantly, it is intended to utilize women's image of homegrown docility as part of the gendered tropes of global

¹⁴⁹ Barbara, Ehrenreich, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003, 39.

¹⁵⁰ Rhacel Parreñas, Salazar. "The Care Crisis in the Philippines." In *Global Woman: nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002. 40.

capitalism. As Leslie Salzinger states, the formation of the ideal transnational worker as female, cheap, docile, and dexterous is grounded on heteronormative notions of femininity and social reproduction.¹⁵¹

In *Mammoth*, the grandmother (Maria del Carmen), runs the household and directs the education of Salvador and Manuel while Gloria is absent. Her duties go beyond administrating the money Gloria sends for the food, shelter, and education of her children. Challenged by Salvador's fixation with becoming the male provider to bring back his mother, the grandmother must move beyond her comfort zone to teach her grandson about how privileged he is in having a mother working overseas, by drawing comparisons between his reality and those of the children working in the landfills. After taking Salvador on what seems to be a tour of disheartening misery and poverty, grandmother and grandson nosh on ice cream while watching a group of street children playing. The grandmother, in an attempt to teach her grandson a lesson about the inevitable consequences of social inequality, reveals that there is something worse happening in the streets of Manila: "the children sell themselves to the tourists...they take the kids and take them to their hotels," she states. Perplexed and interested in this situation Salvador asks if they get paid, if so, what precisely do the children need to do in order to get paid. Not aware of how this situation resonates in Salvador's head, the grandmother censures and avoids a detailed explanation by affirming tourists "just want someone to sleep with," to which Salvador replies "that's it?" Realizing the interests this has awakened in the kid, the grandmother reaffirms several times that tourists sleep with the children, nothing else, firmly cuts the conversation. The camera focuses on Salvador and, as seen through his eyes, the scenery of unaccompanied children working in the

¹⁵¹ Salzinger, *Genders in Production*, 154.

streets selling balloons, lollipops or merely roaming around becomes a possibility to become the provider of the home and finally bring his mother back. Salvador's perceptions of these scenarios as possibilities of earning a living appear to the viewers as a glimpse of the concealed epidemic of homelessness and street children in the Philippines. These images convey the silences and disavowals of the colonial legacies of neoliberal development, which materialize in the growing numbers of children in prostitution, akin to labor exploitation, and involved in drug production and trafficking. All in all, *Mammoth* recreates what has become a paradigmatic Third World scene of kids, squalor, and vice.

The grandmother performs the ideal of motherliness with wisdom, goodness, love, and responsibility. Her character, then, is purposely constructed to generate a reproach to the mother for abandoning her children. In other words, the grandmother embodies the contradictions of the Filipino state in facilitating the gendered and racialized exporting of women for care work while also perpetuating what scholar Robyn Rodriguez refers to as the state's castigation of female migrants as deviant mothers.¹⁵² In one of the darkest moments of the film, Salvador escapes from his house in the middle of the night in which he gets lost among groups of street children. The scene shows multiple interactions; drunk adults eating at food stands, children playing and fighting, and white male tourists talking with, and in some cases holding hands with, children. Walking through the plaza, Salvador is suddenly intercepted by a mob of children who verbally and physically attack him to steal his bicycle. An inconsolable, fearful, and innocent Salvador catches the eye of a white male tourist who approaches to comfort him. The film leaps from the scene of this encounter to the next morning in which Maria del

¹⁵² Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, 100.

Carmen wakes up to realize her grandson is gone. Images of a grandmother's desperate search to find her missing grandson led the events that occurred during Salvador's disappearance up to the audience's interpretation. The subsequent, where townspeople find an unconscious and injured Salvador on the side of a river provide enough references to think he was beaten and raped. The tragic scene reinforces heteropatriarchal narratives of the physical and psychological consequences that women's migration could have for their families. Salvador's traumatic experience determines Gloria's failure as a mother; a visual representation of the construction of deviant motherhood.

While *Mammoth* challenges the imperial imaginary by introducing Filipino transnational motherhood and its imaginary as an "anomalous" form of immigration within national space, as well as a different gaze of "inclusion" of a subordinated legal subject," *Babel* de-stigmatizes traditional representations of the "good mother" as defined by Catholic-inflected and patriarchal ideologies.¹⁵³ The film introduces Amelia as an aging single mother that has embraced the role of primary breadwinner for her family. Amelia's character defies cultural practices that continue to cast employment as opposition to mothering and demystifies narratives of migration as a male-dominated phenomenon. Besides, her character provides a nuanced visual manifestation of the female cross-border worker whose mobility deters border militarization, surveillance, and security industry. By introducing a character that illuminates on the cross-border working experience of a single mother, *Babel* advances a notion of transnational motherhood that follows cultural, political, and economic scripts specific to the borderlands. Considering theorizations of the border as an area that signifies a permanent disruption of the space of the U.S. nation-state in which communities regularly negotiate identities and notions of

¹⁵³ Punzalan. *American Tropics*, XXVI.

belonging, Amelia's character embodies an unfamiliar and unintelligible racialized vision of the maternal. Contrary to common manifestations of the young, attractive and oversexualized migrant Latina maid à la Kate del Castillo in the film *Under the Same Moon* (2007) or Paz Vega in the film *Spanglish* (2004), Amelia is depicted as an aging lifelong domestic worker who has raised her now-adult son and daughters as a single mother. The wedding sequence functions as an exploration of Amelia's wordless affection toward her son and daughters, and their respect and admiration for her.

Both *Babel* and *Mammoth*, complicate the "good" and "bad" maternal imaginary by introducing visions of motherhood at the intersections of empire, nationalism, and globalization. Analyzing what Harrold J. Suarez refers to as the diasporic maternal through a relational lens, enables an understanding of the different visions produced of the brown maternal body as part of the racial project of the transnationalization of care. Albeit, exposing the precarity of migrant domestic work as an articulation and inhabitation of disposability, survivability, and devaluation, the films strive to capture the complexity of transnational motherhood outside from frameworks of victimhood and suffering. Furthermore, in their attempt to map global capitalism through multiplicity and fragmentation, they are unable to escape the neoliberal narrative of inclusion in which regardless of race, gender, class and/or sexuality we all experience suffering in the same way. Placing the visions of the Filipina and Mexican migrant women within this narrative resurrects notions of responsible parenting through a lens of heteronormative whiteness. Even in a context of global dispossession and forced migration, the maternal bodies of

women of color as Ruby Tapia argues, continue to be seen as “racialized, sexualized threats to moral and civic ‘responsibility,’ family values,’ and ‘public health.’”¹⁵⁴

The visibility of Filipina and Mexican migrant domestic workers as seen in *Mammoth* and *Babel* is inherently attached to notions of motherhood and suffering. It is through a white liberal lens and reading of these notions ascribed to gendered brown bodies that the American viewer develops empathy and acknowledges the migrant worker’s personhood. As pointed by queer migration scholars, transnational cultural production normalizes the gendering of migrant care work by privileging the narrative of the migrant mother as means to reify heteronormative tendencies through biological terms and maternal love.¹⁵⁵ Amelia and Gloria not only become a representation of heteronormative motherhood across borders but also provide a visual and affective imaginary of the racialized immigrant mother. Their emotional labor is marked by an affective disposition -meaning their brown bodies are always available- and their racialized motherhood is constructed as both deviant and sacrificial, which results in representations that perpetuate the devaluation and disposability of migrant domestic workers.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ruby C, Tapia. *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death, and the Maternal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011

¹⁵⁵ Manalansan, “Queer Intersections”, 169-190.

¹⁵⁶ For an account of the use of term affective disposition in relation to care work, see Megha, Amrith, and Nina Sahraoui. *Gender, Work and Migration: Agency in Gendered Labour Settings*. London: Routledge, 2018; Fraser, N. (2016). Contradictions of Capital and Care. *New Left Review*, [online] (100). Available at: <https://newleftreview.org/issues/III100/articles/nancy-fraser-contradictions-of-capital-and-care> [Accessed 28 Mar. 2019].

Banalities of Violence and Disposable Emotional Bonds

Several scenes in *Mammoth* portray the growing love and affection between Gloria (the nanny/housekeeper) and Jackie (the child under Gloria's care). As shown in the film, intimate affective bonds between caretaker and the child occur during moments in which the child is exposed to different cultural values and community spaces; specifically, a Filipino Christian church in Manhattan. In this case, as a live-in worker, Gloria is overwhelmed with heavy responsibilities, including playing a role in Jackie's daily education. Such intimacy and closeness in the relationship result in the girl's development of a sense of belonging to Filipino culture and a particular interest in learning Tagalog. In finding a way to spend some quality time with her daughter, Ellen acquires an expensive and powerful telescope to capture Jackie's attention. After a long and intense day at work at the hospital, Ellen comes back home right before Jackie's bedtime, looking forward to enjoying the telescope with her daughter. In the scene, we see Gloria and Jackie laughing and giggling while reading a book together sitting on a couch. The book is a children's book to learn Tagalog words, something that Jackie has become passionate about. Ellen interrupts this moment of happiness and joy, asking Jackie to join her on the rooftop to try the telescope. Jackie does not seem too excited about this and instead begs Ellen for a few more minutes to finish reading one more page. This request triggers an outburst of jealousy in which Ellen brings down the façade of benevolent maternalism marked by notions of charity, friendliness, and pity, revealing the nature of the mistress-maid structurally exploitative relationship and her subtle articulations of white superiority and national/personal racial prejudice.¹⁵⁷ After

¹⁵⁷ Bridget Anderson mentions Judith Rollins analysis on benevolent maternalism as a problematic scheme of relationships in which the employer coalesces racial scripts with a sense of

conceding to her daughter's request, Ellen asks Gloria if she could talk to her in private. Arguing that children many times get fixated over "unimportant things" or that there is a potential risk of distraction from her daily duties/homework, Ellen chastises Gloria's emotional labor, and to a certain extent the cultural values she embodies, as unwanted features of the job she was hired to do. The subtle message Ellen sends to Gloria, in this case, reflects more than "nanny jealousy"; it evidences the porous and many times unidentifiable dynamics of power which characterize the live-in arrangements that expose migrant domestic workers to racialized and sexualized violence and discriminatory working conditions.

As Mary Romero observes in her study of the experiences of Mexican domestic workers in the United States, the 'violences of privacy' reveal the fluidity and complexity of social exclusion and social inclusion embedded in discourses of successful assimilationist stories and fictitious membership as "one of the family." This construction of the worker as "part of the family" is a form of violence and disavowal through which the employer consolidates his/her power over the worker through a simulation of inclusion, relegating more responsibility and demanding more labor. Studies on the employer-domestic worker relations have emphasized that the "one of the family" discourse often functions as a symbolic expression to recognize the worker's skills, their social and physical needs, and their presence. To be treated like one of the family implies social recognition, to be treated like an equal, essentially "like a human

kindness and sisterhood, perpetuating the formation of abusive power structures. Bridget, Anderson, in "The Commodification of Labor," in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Barbara, Ehrenreich, and Arlie Russell Hochschild, eds, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004, 110.

being.” While this treatment allows for a less rigid and supervised work environment, workers are left more vulnerable to the manipulation and authority of employers. To dissect the complexity of this treatment, it is important to consider two things: first, to recognize that the notion of private space as a structure is bound to colonial logics of racialization, femininity, domesticity and unpaid labor. Second, within the context of the transnationalization of care work, the home becomes a bounded space in which notions of nationhood, citizenship, and difference as well as social and economic inequality regulate power relations while also shaping and informing the circulation of affects. As Brian Massumi, Michael Hardt, and Encarnación Gutierrez-Rodriguez articulate, domestic work as affective labor implies an understanding of affect as an experience of intensity which deploys both notions of biopolitical production and sensorial incorporation of the social, economic and political inequality in which the employee and employer relations are built upon.¹⁵⁸

Caring is constructed as a particular kind of racialized affective labor, which operates at multiple levels and across multiple contexts. The analysis of the aesthetic representation of Filipina migrant domestic worker in film requires considering care and caring as concepts delimited by “racializing affects” in American culture and by emotional scripts underwritten by the Philippine state. As Martin Manalansan argues, care is a neoliberal idiom that serves to perpetuate the colonization and commodification

¹⁵⁸ Brian, Massumi. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Parables for the Virtual*, 2002, 23-45. doi:10.1215/9780822383574-002; Hardt, Michael. *Affective labor*. *Boundary 2*. 26, 2, 89, 1999. ISSN: 01903659.

of the affective, the intimate, the emotional, and the sensorial.¹⁵⁹ In this context, the Philippine state has produced and disseminated gendered and racialized logics (e.g., vulnerability, servility, loving, docile), which have proven to be instrumental in the marketization of its citizens as ideal migrant workers in the global service industry. Furthermore, these logics materialize in notions of nationalism and citizenship that brand affective and intimate excess as a gendered collective national identity and immigrant subjectivity. Additionally, affect becomes a modality of power/discipline/violence that serves to manage and regulate migrant workers.

Focusing on the dynamics at play in the mobilization and circulation of affects in domestic work, we need to consider how, through affect, employers reinforce and perpetuate the coloniality of domestic work. Affect, as a transnational material force cannot be construed as an inherent personal attribute. As deployed in *Mammoth*, Gloria seems to move “freely” and “confidently” across the private space (home) and also in the public sphere. Aside from the scenes in which the viewer witness Gloria’s cleaning and cooking routine, several other scenes provide an insight view into her daily trajectory, including dropping off and picking up Jackie from school. Furthermore, the absence of the employers from home and from the life of their daughter situates Gloria at the intersection of being treated as ‘one of the family.’ This functions as a mechanism to cultivate a particular affect by providing emotional maintenance to the neglected child, while still imposing a “spatial deference” on domestic workers the few times they inhabit

¹⁵⁹ Martin F. Manalansan. "Feeling Filipinos: Unraveling Thoughts about the Emotional and the (Trans)National An Introduction to the Special Issue." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 19, no. 1 (2016): 1-4. doi:10.1353/jaas.2016.0004.

the home.¹⁶⁰ Some of the scenes in which mother and daughter appear together are disrupted by still footage of Gloria in her room, isolated and constricted from spatial movement and interaction in the home. The scenario presented in *Mammoth* speaks to how affect has become objectified and commodified for consumption: the domestic worker's emotional labor becomes a disposable commodity in the market economy, and the circulation of stories of migrant suffering generates profit for the cultural industries.

As happens throughout the film, scenes of the strong relationship and display of a mother-daughter affection between Gloria and Jackie, such as kisses and hugs, are juxtaposed with moments of melancholia, sadness, and solitude that Gloria's children back in the Philippines go through every single day due to the absence of their mother. As a review of the film in the *New York Times* states, "in *Mammoth*, when a rich child eats her lunch in New York, a poor boy in the Philippines cries." Or as Geraldine Pratt observes, the importation of women from the global south to first-world nations read as an instance of sovereign power and unveil the dynamics through which domestic migrant workers and their children are "sacrificed for the vitality of neoliberal societies."¹⁶¹ The "emancipatory" narratives of the laboring independent woman constructed by white liberal feminisms and neoliberal discourses of migration as an "individual choice" perpetuate the erasure of the violence of transnational labor particularly concerning the separation of families. As recent studies on transnational families have indicated, even when children benefit economically from remittances, they suffer emotionally from the

¹⁶⁰ Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*, 98.

¹⁶¹ Dargis, Manohla. "Bourgeois Bohemians, There's a Price to Pay." *The New York Times*. November 19, 2009. Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/20/movies/20mammoth.html>.

prolonged separation. The increasing consumption of migrant domestic work reveals the intimacy and complexity of geographical entanglements in which liberal discourses of responsibility and belonging deriving from normative nationalisms, exclude some families from liberal forms of familial intimacy and deem some children unworthy of protection and investment. As a result, the dynamics of the globalization of care confine the possibilities and lives of migrant workers and their families to spaces of social death.

Moreover, it is essential to consider that amid geographical complexities of power relations and asymmetries of uneven development, the affective value of domestic work is never considered as labor power per se. Instead, the circulation of affects embedded in domestic/care work is merely seen as emanating from normative notions of female socialization and part of women's innate attributes needing no special skills. As depicted in *Mammoth*, Gloria's attentiveness to Jackie's well-being remains unintelligible and invisible in the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, the analysis of the affective as a transnational material force opens up possibilities to dissect the multiple expressions and dimensions of migrant domestic work's affective intensity and their association with exploitation.¹⁶²

Similarly, in *Babel*, being treated as "one of the family" serves as a form of violence overdetermined by a normalized intimacy and intensity of life invested and produced as affective labor. Absent from home, in what seems to be a reconciliatory vacation, the employers Richard (Brad Pitt) and Susan (Cate Blanchett) leave Amelia in charge of their home and their children. In the scene which introduces the story of the Jones' family, we see Amelia playing hide and seek with the children and later on putting

¹⁶² J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff, eds. *Class and Its Others*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

them to bed, kissing them goodnight and walking away to sleep in the service room. Amelia's duties extend beyond cleaning the house and providing primary care to the children to the production of affects such as well-being, physical security, and parental closeness. The initial imagery of the Mexican domestic worker as a member of the Jones' family is interrupted by a phone call in which an agitated Richard commands Amelia to prioritize the care of Debbie and Mike over her own son's wedding due to an emergency which threatens one of the employers' lives during their trip overseas. "I'll pay for a better wedding...we are really counting on you Amelia, I'm sorry, but you have to do this" asserts Richard, and while Amelia tries to come up with words to refuse his orders, he abruptly hangs up the phone. Richard frames his authoritative order as "family duty," transferring his guilt, fear, and responsibility onto Amelia. The phone call scene provides a visual reference to the grammar of servitude embodied in domestic work. Richard's reasoning purposely aims at exposing the subordinate economic position of Amelia as a domestic worker, as well as her "inferior" status a racialized and gendered subject.¹⁶³

Left without any other resource, Amelia decides to take the children with her to her son's wedding in Tijuana, Mexico. On their return from the wedding, Santiago (Gael Garcia Bernal), Amelia's rebel nephew, responds aggressively to the typically racist treatment of U.S. Customs and Immigration agents at the border crossing. This situation is aggravated by the fact of two Mexicans traveling with two white American children. Rodrigo's defensiveness towards the abusive attitude of the border agent leads to a verbal altercation and Rodrigo forcing his way into the United States. After several minutes of an intense police chase, Rodrigo leaves Amelia and the children in the middle of the

¹⁶³ Merike, Blofield. *Care Work and Class: Domestic Workers' Struggle for Equal Rights in Latin America*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

desert and drives away. The next scene shows a frightened and devastated Amelia in a U.S. Customs and Immigration office held in custody, awaiting interrogation. When Amelia asks about the condition of Debbie and Mike, the border agent responds that those are matters that do not concern her anymore. Amelia replies, “I raised these kids since they were born. I take care of them day and night. I feed them breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I play with them. Mike and Debbie are like my own children.” To this, the agent responds, “But they are not your children, ma’am.” Here, the film crudely depicts how the intimate and emotional bonds between domestic workers and employing families underscore the structural relations of difference and subordination embodied in domestic work. This particular scene denotes the importance of situating care work as a field saturated with and mediated through affects. More than merely emotions and feelings, affects, in the context of domestic work deploy intensities, sensations, and bodily reactions or sensorial corporealities that reaffirm power relations and conditions of exploitation. As Encarnación Rodríguez notes, *affect* within domestic work emerge in a space delimited by historically, socially, and culturally located power relations. This space is heavily charged by histories of oppression and, in this particular case, haunted by memories of servitude, slavery, subjugation, and exclusion. Besides, affection as “the element of relationality and conviviality” spurs emotional scripts that many times are used by employers to exploit and manipulate migrant workers.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the precariousness of domestic work is constructed through the manipulation and commodification of emotions and thus ascribing value to the bodies that perform emotions as part of the everyday labor relations in the private household. We, therefore, need to view affect as the disclosure of a language of difference, a “language of the self”

¹⁶⁴ Rodríguez, *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*, 158.

which exposes how women of color and queer of color navigate systems of oppression and structures of violence. Thus, analyzing affect and the affective economies of domestic labor through the lens of women of color feminism elucidates different forms of subjectivity and knowledge, as well as alternative modes of living and embodiment.¹⁶⁵

Whereas both films depict differences in migrant domestic worker's embodiment of notions of disposability, as well as differential experiences of subordination and miscegenation, there is a common thread that unifies these stories: the devaluation of affective labor within capitalist and neoliberal scripts. Furthermore, the normalization of domestic work as de-skilled and disposable labor ascribed to racialized and gendered bodies sheds light on the use of care as a neoliberal idiom that carries within its structure a grammar and epistemology of servitude; a mechanism which obscures the dignification of care work and its recognition as a source of "surplus value." Moreover, as Romero posits, the experiences of immigrant women of color in domestic labor facilitate a microanalysis of issues that occur nationally at a macrostructural level, enabling an understanding of the contradictions of assimilation in liberal-democratic societies that under the veil of multiculturalism continue to define citizenship based on whiteness.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Claudia, Garcia-Rojas. "(Un)Disciplined futures: Women of color feminism as a disruptive to white affect studies." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 2016, 1-18. doi:10.1080/10894160.2016.1159072.

¹⁶⁶ Mary, Romero. *The Maid's Daughter: Living Inside and Outside the American Dream*. New York: New York University Press, 2011, 24.

Conclusion

Even though Gloria and Amelia provide an alternative representation of the maid through narratives that explore the embodiment and violence of transnational capitalism's gendered meanings and nationalist affects, their stories still fit within the "imaginary of the internationalist capitalist system." This imaginary, as Neferti Tadiar asserts excludes migrant labor from the privilege of subjectivity and limits the representation of domestic workers' political power to the realm of collectivity. Taking this into consideration, I want to highlight two specific moments in these films in which both Gloria and Amelia assert agency and reclaim their subjectivity by prioritizing their lives and family relationships over the emotional and caring demands of their employers. The minute Gloria gets the unfortunate news that her son is in critical condition at the hospital; she realizes she has to return home. Without hesitation, Gloria packs as much as she can fit in one piece of luggage and heads out of the Vidales' residency to the airport. The last appearance of Gloria in the film, is in a scene at the airport, in which we see her waiting for her flight sitting at a gate. We get a glimpse at her grim and exhausted face, but also a sense of relief knowing that she will soon be reunited with her children. As Filipino scholar Jose Capino observes, the airport in many of the films depicting the migrant experience, becomes the liminal space that shows how "living in America and being Filipino as mutually incompatible," and as seen through Gloria's experience, this realization confirms her decision of rejecting the sacrificial migrant experience as a lifestyle. ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ José B. Capino. *Dream Factories of a Former Colony: American Fantasies, Philippine Cinema*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 123.

In *Babel*, the liminal space that provides as Capino argues a visual and affective reference of living the American dream and being a racialized migrant as mutually incompatible is no other than the U.S. Mexico border. As seen in the film, Amelia makes the conscious decision to attend her son's wedding and to take the children with her to Mexico for one night. There is a pivotal scene where on the way to the wedding the camera captures in multiple frames, the chance of scenery in the journey across the border from San Diego to Tijuana. Wooden crosses on the border wall, street vendors, the red-light district, and the waiting line at the international bridge are among the images juxtaposed to those of the children gazing out of the window in the car. Cumbia music enlightens the visual references of the border, and amid this composition one of the children asks Amelia if they are already in Mexico, with a reassuring smile on her face Amelia replies "Si mijita, esto es Mexico," (yes my dear, this is Mexico.) Her expression displays excitement, a moment of confidence in which Amelia reassures herself that she has made the right decision in attending her son's wedding, a temporary sense of agency that later on vanishes at the hands of the U.S. border and Customs protection agents. Unfortunately, for both Gloria and Amelia, their actions/decisions are reduced to irresponsible choices rather than as utterances of their limited forms of subjectivity as migrant workers. Despite claims that diasporic or transnational cinema offers culturally diverse and compelling narratives of the economic, political and social entanglements of globalization, an in-depth analysis of specific representations such as those of migrant workers shows the persistent need to regulate and structure the visibility and subjectivity of brown bodies to awake the affective empathy of liberal gazers and spectators.

As I have suggested in this analysis, a relational reading of the cinematic exposure and representation of stories of migrant domestic workers in the United States can help us understand how racialized and gendered differences are played upon Filipina/o and Mexican brown bodies to exacerbate the hierarchical devaluation of their emotional labor. The ending of both journeys speaks not only to the disposability of their lives and labor but also to the systematic devaluation of differently racialized migrant populations. For Gloria, repatriation is deployed as voluntarily, while the tragic reality of deportation curtails Amelia's future. Altogether, identifying the cinematic ways of seeing the modes of difference operating in the devaluation of migrant domestic work also draws attention to the importance of the material politics of everyday life and the daily struggles of women of color performing emotional labor.

Conclusion

In *Preface: Fragment from The Sense of Brown Manuscript*, Jose Esteban Muñoz introduces the idea of the brown commons as a thought experiment that considers Brownness as always, a being-in-common, as a lived and shared commonality that conveys different ways of feeling brown. The brown commons, as Muñoz observes, is not about the production of the individual or about enacting a collectivity; instead, it is about a “movement, a flow, an impulse, to move beyond the singular and individualized subjectivities...it is about the encounter and all that it can generate. Brownness is about contact...Brownness is a being, being alongside.”¹⁶⁸ It is through this notion of Brownness as a commonality that acknowledges affective difference that I begin to wonder about how Latina and Filipina migrant domestic workers within the context of a labor struggle have been able to articulate the being-in-common of Brownness beyond Latinidad, unleashing the radical potential of the commons against the differential devaluation of racialized domestic workers.

On May 1, 2010, also known as International Workers’ Day, DAMAYAN Migrant Workers Association, a New York-based grassroots organization established in 2002, joined countless other community groups to protest the passing of Arizona’s infamous SB 1070 bill, signed into law by Governor Jan Brewer. The DAMAYAN contingent -composed mostly by domestic workers- became a pivotal figure in the New York massive mobilization against SB 1070. Their participation in the protest challenged media narratives of undocumented immigration as only a Latino (Brown) issue,

¹⁶⁸ José Esteban Muñoz. "Preface: Fragment from the *Sense of Brown Manuscript*." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 4 (2018): 395-397. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> Accessed May 27, 2019

marginalizing the many stories of other undocumented Asians, Black Caribbean immigrants, and Afro-Latino immigrants. Even more so, it brought critical visibility to undocumented domestic workers. In addressing the crowd, Juana Dwyer stated the following:

We risk everything to come to this country for the American Dream. But what we find is our worst nightmare. As a domestic worker, I have taken care of other families' and their most precious properties... but I have been given little to no respect. While the US government bails out banks and corporations, the 14 million undocumented immigrants are blamed for the crisis, deported and criminalized... We are the backbone of the US economy. Isn't it only fair that we are treated like human beings? Isn't it only fair that the law recognizes us? Isn't it only fair that we, too, live with dignity.?¹⁶⁹

In this speech, Dwyer not only dislocates every assumption presented in official narratives about the Latinization of the undocumented migrant experience, but she does it by emphasizing the crucial role that domestic workers play in the national economy of the United States and in the social reproduction of American life. More importantly, Dwyer's statement alludes to how Brownness in relation to the daily lives and invisibility of migrant domestic workers in the United States connotes a sense of rightlessness and a lack of personhood.

While media and popular culture utilize official narratives of “cultural difference” to make unintelligible the racialized and gender violence of the neoliberal value system, Filipina and Latina activists embrace the plurality of being brown to solidify their struggle against the devaluation of their labor and the ascription of disposability to their lives. The scarce coverage of Filipina and Latina migrant domestic work activism in news media reifies the differential devaluation of groups by presenting relations of inequality

¹⁶⁹ Obias, Leah. Filipino Domestic Workers, Youth and Allies in New York take action against Arizona's anti-immigrant law. *The Filipino Express*; Jersey City [Jersey City]07 May 2010: 1,3.

and processes of dispossession as normative. Even though this mechanism is constructed as inescapable, Filipina and Latina domestic worker activism embodies the possibilities for coalitional practices which challenge the commodification difference and the racialization of affective labor. Migrant domestic worker activism is a site of alternative epistemologies of knowledge and subaltern representations that confront and challenge the allocation of disposability and precarity under the new neoliberal racial order. It is essential to consider that Filipina and Latina domestic worker activism and organizing in the United States has emerged under a particular set of circumstances, which are the commodification of the affective labor of brown bodies and the predominance of moralistic narratives of economic productivity and moral behavior framing the discussion of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrant. Within this context, Filipina and Latina domestic workers in the United States organize through an intersectional model that interrogates women’s differences while also consolidating a commonality based on their oppositional political relation to the devaluation of reproductive labor. An example of the potential of their politics of relationality is the passing of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in January 2017. Community organizer and activist for domestic workers rights Katie Joaquin observed that the process of fighting for legal protections strengthened the solidarity and connection between Filipinos, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, and Black workers. According to Joaquin, “sharing about the conditions at work and why we even have to take this work” enabled a deeper understanding of the need for solidarity.¹⁷⁰ The bill took effect extending much needed and deserved labor protections (extend

¹⁷⁰ Christine Joy, Ferrer. Interview with Katie Joaquin "Filipina Domestic Workers on the Move." *Filipina Domestic Workers on the Move | Reimagine!* 2011. Accessed June 25, 2019. <https://www.reimaginepe.org/18-1/ferrer>.

minimum wage and overtime) for the over 300,000 domestic workers serving as housekeepers, nannies, and caregivers in private homes in California. For over two decades, immigrants' rights organizations such as Mujeres Unidas y Activas, the Women's Collective of the San Francisco Day Labor Center Program, the Filipino Workers Center and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Organizations mobilized and organized Latina and Filipina domestic workers in San Francisco and Los Angeles counties predominately.

As critical ethnic studies and queer studies scholars have pointed out, the struggle for political inclusion and legal recognition as means for achieving social justice is a limited and narrowing strategy, misled by the assumption that the "distribution of life chances" will be restored or that somehow the inequalities and disparities will dissipate for marginalized groups throughout the years. Thus, I think it is necessary to begin formulating a critique of the different possible outcomes of the legal recognition of domestic work for undocumented and immigrant workers. Here, my concern is based on the state and its modes of power to discipline and manage populations through the law. As Dean Spade observes in relation to legal rights as technologies of population-management:

legal inclusion and recognition demands often reinforce the logics of harmful systems by justifying them, contributing to their illusion of fairness and equality, and by reinforcing the targeting of certain perceived "drains" or "internal enemies," carving the group into "the deserving" and "the undeserving" and then addressing only the issues of the favored sector.¹⁷¹

Lastly, I say that it is imperative to extend the discussion on the limits of visibility without falling into abstract considerations that neither provide an alternative of

¹⁷¹ Dean, Spade. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Duke University Press, 2015.

recognition nor acknowledge that the domestic workers' labor movement plight for dignity and social value is inherently linked to bringing domestic work out of the shadows. More importantly, I think we, as scholars, should pay attention to the critiques emerging from the activism of domestic workers regarding their visibility and representations. In light of the broad reception and the global emotional commotion caused by the release of the film *Roma*, the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance Al Jen-Poo mentioned that what we are witnessing is a "cultural moment" in which domestic workers are becoming increasingly visible. This moment requires from us to not only pay attention to the politics of representation of domestic workers in news media and popular culture but to understand how domestic workers activists are using material cultural productions to expand their base and to prompt discussions on the intersections of race, gender and class oppression in domestic work. *Roma* is an example of how critical visibility of domestic work can enhance cross-racial solidarity through the plurality of a brown commons. In a *New York Times* video op-ed, domestic worker organizer and nanny Jacquie Orlie from Saint Lucia says that when she saw the film *Roma* she immediately identified herself with the story and thought "this is what I do, this is my life." Although the film is set in Mexico in the late 1960s, Jacquie argues that the film sparks important conversations on the value of domestic work. The film has become a handy tool among workers nationally and internationally to organize around the demand for basic protections and equal recognition for the industry under the law.

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