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GLOBALIZING THE CARE CHAIN: REPRESENTATIONS OF LATINAS IN *MAID IN AMERICA*

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Immigrant women from Latin America and the Caribbean are gradually populating the U.S. landscape through an incorporation within the most sacred social institution; the family unit. As it has been argued by Arlie Hochschild, Rachel Salazar Parreñas and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, among other cultural critics, globalization is witnessing a vast proliferation of women traveling from the Global South—including Central America, South America and the Caribbean—in order to provide for their families and to contribute to their developing economies through the use of remittances. Although this is not the only pattern of female migration, the transformation of the family unit has been deeply affected by the women who leave their families behind and/or by those who find themselves working as *domésticas* and house cleaners in the host cultures.¹ The documentary *Maid in America* broadcasted in PBS in 2005 and directed by Anayansi Prado is a good example of the global and transnational phenomena invested in the mobilization of female bodies in search of a better life. Based on the lives of Telma and Eva—two Mexican women—and Judith—a Guatemalan mother—the documentary attempts to reflect the social injustices and sacrifices undergone by these women who have to survive in the new cultural scenario.

Telma, Judith and Eva are but three of thousands of women who arrive at foreign soil undocumented and risking their lives as illegal citizens. Although this piece of work can be considered a feminist practice that engages the visual through images and voices of culturally invisible lives eager to promote social and political action, the repetitive embodiment of motherhood in which these bodies are inscribed is purportedly hyperbolic all throughout the documentary. By projecting ideal maternal bodies, these women are rendered productive, useful and necessary within the confinements of the U.S. nation and family. Instead of being bodies “stuck” in images of fear and threat to the purity and safety of the nation, the three immigrant women are represented as angels, easily assimilated to the host country, maternal heroines and protectors of the nation; they accurately exemplify the love extracted by the Global North. Along with these depictions of transnational women, I argue how an appropriation of emotions and affect that circulate among the protagonists and the spectators allows us to convey this idea of protection incarnated in the female bodies. In this sense, emotions and affect are pretty much circumscribed to femininity, and gender binaries are therefore conventionally reified. Given the lack of male emotional responsibility within the family unit and men’s role as exclusively breadwinners, the documentary fails to call for a deep reorganization of gender roles within the family structure. Instead, it reinforces the image of the immigrant woman as the ideal mother of both her native and host countries. Moreover, the sign motherhood is mobilized through competing surrogate and biological figures. In the end, the maternal locus is more properly and effectively occupied by the biological mothers, as I will show

¹Martin Manalansan refers to queer migratory patterns that metaphorically break the chain of care. He focuses on migrations that displace maternal labor and social reproduction through the presence of queer diasporic bodies.

in certain specific moments in the documentary. Also emotions as signs that circulate and “stick” onto bodies reinstall a conservative ideology that correlates the female colonial body with the victimized “other.” In a similar fashion, the audience feels compassion and empathy for these immigrant women whose self-sacrifice places them into the space of the ideal women—mothers—of the U.S. nation.

Visual representations of domésticas have populated the U.S. media for the last couple of decades. As Yajaria Padilla argues in her article “Domesticating Rosario: Conflicting Representations of the Latina Maid in the U.S. Media”, we encounter films such as *Down and Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986), *As Good as It Gets* (1997), *Spanglish* (2004) and *Babel* (2006), for instance, that project an stereotypical image of the “good” Latina maid as the embodiment of maternity and of the “noble immigrant” (1) or, on the other hand, the “beautiful and sought-after exotic Other” (1). These misrepresentations of Latinas deprive them from a particular personal history—specifically- the gendered herstory(ies) of migration, and imposes an authoritative Western locus of enunciation from which they are spoken. The intricacies of their lives are never articulated nor their daily adventures into the predominantly white-Anglo Saxon produced spaces of the U.S. territory. Similarly, Latinas are regrouped as a homogenous category suppressing the ethnic, cultural and racial differences encompassed within that same label. In compensating with the voids created by these popular films, the documentary *Maid in America* presents a site of contestation in which the Latinas interviewed are given a voice and face to talk for themselves. In this sense, this 2005 visual production challenges conventional representations of Latina maids, although the voices of the immigrants are mediated by the interviewer’s questions and yet emphases on affect, emotions and maternity are reinforced. Along with *Maid in America*, the film *Dirt* (2004) deconstructs mainstreams representations of domésticas, as Padilla mentions.

Within Latin American and Spanish cultural analysis, studies on domésticas have proliferated centering on the ethnic diversity of maids in different countries. For example, the film *La nana* (2009) examines the identity of a Chilean maid living in a Chilean family. In this particular case, the doméstica is empowered through numerous moments of agency that disrupt with decisions taken by the family and she is given subjectivity when confronting the Peruvian maid the family just hired. *Cama adentro* (2004) is another example of the dynamics between the working class, Argentinean racialized maid who works at the apartment of a Buenos Aires solitary woman divorced from her husband and with a daughter studying in Spain. In this visual representation, Dora’s life—the maid—is visibilized and *she is given a story. However, her body responds to conventional representations of primitive maternal bodies devoid of sexuality. In Spain, Colombians, Bolivians, and Ecuadorian women specifically play the role of domésticas serving Spanish families, thus being submitted to processes of domestication. Despite the multiple cultural representations of domésticas, their bodies are constantly constructed as maternal and affectionate.

In *Maid in America*, we can easily observe how in times of globalization, affect and intimacy are publicly commodified through economic transnational structures and are transformed into a spiritual gift embodied in maternity. As a consequence, care for others becomes the core constituent of this conjunction of motherhood and female global migrancy.

Global Women as Reproducers of Mothering

As Anthony Giddens mentions in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, motherhood is a nineteenth century cultural invention that confined women—and bourgeoisie women particularly—within the parameters of romantic love, marriage, the nuclear family unit and biological reproduction. The configuration of the “ideal” woman and therefore of the feminine model for the recently born nation-states in the Western Hemisphere resided on an equation with maternity and motherhood as compulsory experiences due to women’s natural capacity for nurturance. Adrienne Rich describes through her own testimonies as a mother how cultures expect of women to labor and to reproduce for the propagation of the species and to reassure comfort to their male partners. Relying upon Marxist ideologies, women and children respond to the role of the proletariat subjugated to the power of the breadwinner—capitalist figure.

In this way, women were isolated with their children at home eluding social contacts and simultaneously forging themselves as the protectors of the family and consequently of the nation (113). According to Rich, women's primary identification is the mother, and child-care is established as their only responsibility (33). Rendered as natural "[w]e learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be "innate" in us: patience, self-sacrifice" (37). Similarly, Nancy Chodorow refers to "care" as the main quality adhered to womanhood and to her unconditional maternal love that implies devotion towards home and child-rearing. If other periods—prehistorical stages—dictated the mother-right through which social power was given to women, as Frederick Engels demonstrates, industrial and postindustrial societies embrace this womanly ideal and national ideal through the articulation of motherhood as the adequate identification and idealization of womanhood. Conventional discourses on motherhood and womanhood positioned the female body as devoid of personal care but rather devoted to care for others.

An ethics of care has produced a diversity of discourses on identity that stem from the ancient times where male gendered "care" involved issues of discipline, self-policing, control, and battle. Ancient ethos related to men's capacity to overcome his appetites and to become a moral individual has been rarely discussed in relation to women. Even in Michel Foucault's work *A History of Sexuality: The Care of the Self*, an analysis on gender remains absent. As Helen O'Grady points out, "an absence of care attention to the self can render women vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. It also has the potential to deprive women of satisfying relations with the self, or in ancient terms of full enjoyment of oneself" (84). While she celebrates an approach to an ethics of care through cultivating friendship with oneself and through love, globalization exposes an idea of care which more emphatically erases immigrant women by constantly demarcating the female body within the contours of home, protection, care for others and domesticity. Telma, Judith and Eva—the three Latinas in the U.S. that appear in the documentary—are forged as viable and "good" U.S. citizens precisely because of their surplus of care for others and their investment in domesticity. In order for these Latinas to fulfill cultural expectations on womanhood and to stand for a proper ethics of care as immigrants from the Global South, they need to be contained in a conventional notion of care that addresses women's sacrifice for others and an appropriate use of sexuality in terms of reproduction and propagation of the "protected" nuclear family unit as the trope of the nation. If Marxist ideologies conceive of the children and mother in parallelism to the figure of the proletariat, these global women's subordination—and therefore care for others—is the foundation of the socioeconomic privilege of the middle upper classes in the U.S. that hire them.

Globalization, as a consequence, reinforces the equation of care for others with gender subjugation while in ancient times a lack of care of one's self implied dominating others, as Foucault affirms. If care of one's self may derive into exploiting others as Louise McNay notes in relation to contemporary western societies, a lack of attentiveness in women's care for themselves has led to a naturalized gendered exploitation; women's view of "care" was completely disengaged from individuation but rather conceived in terms of self-sacrifice. This pattern is being constantly produced in contemporary times through the figures of the nannies and domésticas who displaced from their places of origin have to find more productive spaces to maintain their families back home. Thus, these women's itineraries reflect "the importation of care and love from poor countries to rich ones" ("Love and Gold" 17). Participating in a "global heart transplant," as Hochschild calls it, Telma, Judith and Eva personify the adequate bodies from the Global South known as a container of more loving cultures, "with its warm family ties, strong community life, and long tradition of patient maternal love of children" (23). Being a new mode of neocolonialism, these bodies become signs of primitive affect and family values doomed to replace the absence of emancipated women from the Global North who have successfully entered the public workforce and are in desperate need to fill in the emotional vacuum transferred to their children. Not only is care for others forcedly revitalized in *Maid in America*, but—what represents a common pattern in contemporary articulation of female migrants—care is publically commodified rather than being restricted to the private sphere of home. As it can be displayed in the documentary, the Latina bodies epitomize care, emotions and affect that circulate towards the audience and among the immigrants and the locals.

This proximity between alien and resident individuals prepares the setting for the welcoming of a type of “body” immersed in protecting the U.S. nation. Sarah Ahmed argues that “it is how bodies become into contact with other bodies that allows the nation as a collective body to emerge” (95). In this direction, affect, care and emotions bring together juxtaposed bodies—residents and aliens—creating a viable path to configure a sense of nation that integrates the Latina immigrant as a necessary body to perpetuate national safety which—according to Robert Harvey—equals “the preservation of the heteronormative nuclear family” (311). If as Harvey names his article “Safety Begins at Home,” it is mandatory to incorporate trusting and reliable subjects to establish national security. Since the U.S. has become obsessed with safety, as he remarks, Latinos are the “other,”—among a diversity of alien groups—who upset the felicitous and harmonious isolationism of U.S. way of life. And as “others,” they symbolize the terror that “comes from the outside Other . . . Terror is alien and aliens out there and among us incarnate terror.” (311). Considering that terror is androcentric and gendered, the migrant women from the Global South invert this binary; their preindustrial nature and loving capacities construct them as ideals bearers and sings of U.S. safety and protection. In *Maid in America* these bodies are seen as motherly substitutes or metonymic and metaphoric figures whose relations of contiguities and condensation with the U.S. mothers and fathers prove to be successful in their hyperbolization of care for others, self-sacrifice and unconditional love.

Given that these are global women who partake of the feminization of migration in globalization, their agency collapses with the commodification of their care. In other words, middle class American families—either white or black—consume their care, labor and privacy through an exchange of money—and moreover through exploitation. Being a common trend of contemporary times, their workplace is closely tied to intimacy. In her article “The Intimacies of Globalization: Bodies and Borders on Screen,” Emily Davis relates how through globalization, transnational corporations harm and take advantages of the Global South. In analyzing several films and series, she asserts that the immigrant women represented in *Maria Full of Grace* (2004) and in a particular episode of the *X-Files* complicate issues of intimacy and (in)visibility. She sees these bodies as constantly negotiating agency and commodification in the global arena. In a similar vein, Telma, Judith and Eva construct their identity through a choice to commodify their affect, which is highly visible in their testimonies, their faces, their sings of emotions and their involvement with care. Contemporary representations of Latinas have shown a repetitive pattern of maternal embodiment as Margarita Saona discusses in “Migrant Mothers: the Domestication of Latina Images for the Global Market.” As she argues, the immigrant mother is one of the main targets of the conservative political propaganda in the U.S. and “motherly traits emphasize a cultural stereotype that views Latinas as closer to the “natural” role of the female family caretaker.

To a certain extent, these films suggest that, for these women, “biology is destiny” when the market can make good use of those “instincts.” (7). Saona analyzes *Maria Full of Grace*, *Spanglish* and *Love For Rent* (2005) emphasizing how the natural instincts of these Latina women as ideal mothers are not in fact natural but correspond to the demands of the market. Prado’s *Maid in America* has the opposite purpose since it vindicates the social and personal injustices suffered by the immigrant women in her portrayal of testimonies of their lives in the U.S. In the end, the hyperbolization of motherhood and care circumscribes these bodies within the same economic and cultural expectations: as products to be consumed and as maternal subjects of the U.S. nation.

Motherly “Aliens”: Protecting the U.S. Nation through Care, Emotions and Affect.

The documentary intertwines the testimonies and daily lives of Telma, Judith and Eva. The three of them come from Latin America—Telma and Eva from Mexico and Judith from Guatemala—hoping to fulfill the “American dream” and save money to send back home. Whereas the audience does not acknowledge Telma and Eva’s lives before settling in the U.S., we hear and see a great substance of Judith’s previous live. She had three children in Guatemala and left them with her mother and sister while she and her husband moved to the U.S. in order to provide for their children. This unit stands for the product of economic globalization and for the emergence of the

“transnational families” that witness the separation and fragmentation of the family members.² Stressing out the difficulties and sacrifices of abandoning her children, Judith attempts to balance her last pregnancy in the U.S., the illnesses and sadness of her daughters, and her work as a house cleaner. Although she is married, the maternal burden seems to fall on her. Judith has found her job through a corporative coalition created by a group of Anglo-Americans and Latinos who aim at looking for solutions to regulate the political and social situation of illegal immigrants. On the other side, Telma and Eva are single women who briefly refer to their families in Mexico and focus more on their lives in the new setting. Telma devotes her whole life to the child she takes care of and to the family for which she works. As she mentions in a particular moment, she has always been a doméstica and nanny of black families and they have always been very good to her. The documentary does not show more aspects or social practices other than her “mothering” and “protecting” of Mickey—the black child. The rhetoric of safety and protection is rather peculiar and putative in the interaction between Telma and the African-American family.

In addition to being a house cleaner, Eva strives to overcome such a precarious job and to become a public accountant since she has earned several degrees in Mexico which have little value in the U.S. From the beginning, she maintains the whole conversation in English manifesting her proficiency in the language, and her capability to get a better job. Eva participates also in social events such as C.H.I.R.L.A organized by Latinos that denounce the violation of human rights in the treatment of domésticas and the socioeconomic discrimination suffered by minorities.³ Nonetheless, the documentary interestingly retrieves those moments of her work at an old lady’s house, and their intimate relation. All in all, intimacy permeates the public space reaching an audience that is constantly facing the hard times these women endure. In this fashion, Telma, Judith and Eva embody metonymically and metaphorically ideal motherly figures—not necessarily biological ones as in the case of Telma and Eva—subjected to emotions and affect that circulate due to their proximity to locals and towards the others. Moreover, they are not only emotional individuals but also objects of our emotions.

Telma is the first women being interviewed. She has been taking care of Mickey for 6 years and for her “ver que ha crecido a mi lado, me llena de satisfacción.” Since she arrived in the U.S., her proximity to an affluent and emerging African-American upper class has been prominent. She partakes of a conservative ideology of nation formation through an intense investment in care, a reliable contiguity to the local family and as a productive metaphor or substitute of other patterns of domésticas that were the engine of white American families at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ The father justifies and demands Telma’s presence due to his accurate knowledge of the

²In her book *Servants of Globalization*, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas discusses this idea of transnational family in reference to the Philippino families that are separated due to the mother’s migration to the U.S or Italy in her particular examples. Transnational families are those “whose core members are located in at least two nation-states” (80). As she analyzes, this fragmentation calls for a reorganization and redistribution of material and emotional labor. In the documentary we perceive what Salazar Parreñas denominates “the pain of family separation” (82) through the accurate representation of Judith’s live.

³Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo relates the main goals of the domestic workers’ association called C.H.I.R.L.A which is a group of women that informs isolated and exploited workers on rights and legal resources (222). As she mentions, the key materials of C.H.I.R.L.A were *novelas* and in *Maid in America*, we can see another cultural production being used strategically to vindicate the workers’ rights; theater on stage.

⁴Cecilia Marie Rio explores the works exercised by African-Americans primarily as domestics. She argues that the black body was seen as more appropriate to perform a “dirty” job versus the purity of the white home. Latinas have taken over the role of domésticas but instead of being represented as the dirt other, they are conceived as the ideal maternal bodies in charge of protecting the nation through care, affect and love. According to Padilla, “The recurring image of the Latina maid, thus, overlaps with the representation of the African-American domestic servant not just in what pertains to the depiction of a stereotypical ethnic and racialized workforce (in the case of Latin

job she performs, since “my [the father] folks, my people did a lot of domestic work, they were the previous domestic workers, I know that my grandmother... that she used to work in somebody else’s house for a while... To me it is just a stepping stone.” In order to empower the role of Telma, he mentions the rhetoric of trust and protection that demarcate her identity. In the documentary, there are some shots of Telma closing the garage door, driving the kid to school or holding his hands. Both the father and the mother create a space for Telma based on a functional proximity in which the locals demand affect, love and reliability—as if an expensive product for which they would be investing surmountable quantities of money—whereas Telma’s goal is to “give” and “care” regardless the price to be paid for: “Los llegas a querer como si fueran de uno.” This relation of contiguity is mainly based on a “give” and “take” structure that rules the dynamics between the new rich in Global North and the immigrant bodies from the Global South.

Telma treats Mickey as if he were his own son asking him everyday “¿cómo está mi niño?” and she herself shows moments of fear and uncertainty when facing her future: “Como le digo, el tiempo va pasando y va pasando, y no sé cuánto tiempo me quedará para estar con él. Me pongo triste, pues no sé cuándo lo voy a ver. Sinceramente, de sólo pensar me dan ganas de llorar. Como siempre lo he tratado bien, él ha sentido que yo soy su mamá... Le digo un día ya no me vas a ver [cries] porque tú vas a crecer y ya no me vas a necesitar y me dice ‘No, tú nunca te vas a ir de acá... porque yo me voy a casar, yo voy a tener niños y tu me los vas a cuidar.’” At the same time, Telma acknowledges Mickey as the “product” she is carefully modeling and creating in order to subsist: “Yo le digo a mi niño que ésta es mi renta. Yo le agarro y le abrazo y le digo ‘tú eres mi renta y mi comida’ porque es verdad. ¡Qué va a hacer uno sin trabajo!” Rather than manifesting woman’s natural capacity for love and nurture, I suggest that this pattern projects a commodification and performance of love that needs to be materialized as part of Telma’s investment in her new job. If Denise Brennan refers to the performance of love in the transnational romances created in the Dominican town of Sosúa between local women and foreigners, this other migratory context also raises the idea of performing love within the mother-filial attachment. Moreover, it conveys emotions as performative since love and affect are repetitive effects that depend upon previous histories—women as emotional subjects—and to follow, Sara Ahmed, involve “speech acts” (13). Nonetheless, the documentary purports a naturalization and idealization of these women as motherly figures and reaffirms gender binaries by establishing rigid family concerns in the discourses articulated by the mother and the father.

In an interview with the African-American parents, the mother justifies her lack of care for Mickey and expresses her completely reassurance on her child’s well-being:

I am in a very busy part of my career. I might not get home until eight o’clock. Last night I got home at nine o’clock and that was for the second or third night in a row. I am really busy. I know that my child is sleep; he has been fed and has been bathed... and I wanna do it. Telma does it. And I know that she has hugged him, she’s sung a song to him, or read a story to him. And that is what I would do if I were here but I am not. So I know that Telma takes care of my child. My career is important, my child is more important and she is taking care of him.

At the moment the mother is interviewed, the audience is exposed to a series of different affective shots that capture Telma feeding the child, bathing and playing with the child in a very maternal manner. The African-American mother’s words encompass a sense of guilty for not being able to attend to her child’s more natural necessities and, therefore, for not being able to “care”—conventionally—for him. Whereas the mother is more focused on her child’s affect-building, the father reinforces the idea of protection and safety: “The one thing I would say to

American women immigrants, also one that is foreign), but also in its ability to convey a “message” that upholds white privilege and which acts as a “solution” for how to incorporate—in a non-threatening manner—a foreign supply of labor on which U.S. society depends” (44). Therefore, the proliferation of Latinas as maids continues the tradition of the African-American domésticas of the beginning of the century. The access towards education and liberal jobs creates a void replaced by the Latina women. Furthermore, the hyperbolic emphasis on maternity makes both groups also constructs them as necessary for U.S. society.

anybody who has someone who's working in their home, especially working with their kids is—you know—'pay them as much as you can possibly pay them.' They are taking care of your children; they are taking care of your home. This person deserves your best." His discourse moves towards the importance of materiality and protection by using words like "pay" and "home" which immediately mercantilizes the interaction between the family and the doméstica. In the case of Judith, the audience can similarly notice how care and affect rely on the African-American mother instead of on her husband.

The relation of contiguity and proximity through which a functional collective family and by large national imaginary is created and through which aliens and locals are brought together produces a conceptualization of Telma as "real" mother: the metaphor of the nation, the family and more importantly, as the adequate substitute of the African-American mother: "I remember one day, he [the child] called Telma 'Mammie'. And I thought...Wow! He really thinks of her as his mother." Following the mother's face of surprise, Telma insists on this confusion "Cuando el niño estaba chiquito y el niño me decía a mi mamá. Ok, cuando la señora venía y el niño decía mami, y a ella le contestaba y le decía no, no te hablo a ti, le hablo a Telma" and then, the father gives his own testimony: "We really had never talked about it, because I used to hear him called Telma, mammy all the time." And the mother continues: "When I would come home and it was time for her to leave, he would grab hold of her and cry and scream." This condensation between the biological mother and the nanny is clearly resolved in the Mom's day celebration. Telma also has to work cooking and organizing the event, but through the celebration of this day in which the whole African-American family is reunited the motherly position is finally awarded to the biological mother. In this sense, the competition between these two figures announces a conservative resolution that places everyone in their social position:

Ahora que esta familia están celebrando el día de las madres, todos los años en esta casa se hace la fiesta y yo siempre vengo a trabajar y a compartir con todos ellos. La paso bien y también me pagan, estoy trabajando. Yo no los dejaría no, me han ofrecido te vamos a pagar 10 la hora pues no me pagan 10 la hora aquí pero aquí me siento bien, y que más quiero. Porque para mí el dinero, lo mucho no se valora, se valora el buen trato que le dan a uno. [Mickey] Me quiere mucho y me respeta, como paso tanto tiempo con él le doy cariño, compartimos todo, entonces él me mira como si fuese su segunda mamá.

She is finally relocated to a second place as a mother investing her life in the child regardless the material objective. In the end, Telma as an emotional subject whose last image of her records tears and cries stands for the ideal protective mother of the U.S. nation performing very productively her role as a caretaker. Her social life and leisure time appear unknown in the documentary and we rather perceive a woman devoted to "polish" her proximity with the local family and make of Mickey the most important aspect of her life; her agency to choose this migratory identity overlaps with the public commodification of her emotional labor and affective work.

The confusion generated between competing motherly figures has not been critically studied with respect to the psychological consequences in the children that are being taken care of or the children who have "two mothers." Salazar Parreñas remarks in her article "The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy" how children of immigrant women see their mothers as martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for them (47), suffer from care deficit and emotional stress (39, 42) because as some researchers affirm according to Salazar Parreñas "parental absence does prompt feelings of abandonment and loneliness among children." (44). Although this is not a universal pattern of child growing within transnational families, it really emphasizes the role of the mother as the emotional and affective container supposed to provide not only materially but also affectively. As Salazar Parreñas states in relation to children of immigrant Philippino mothers: "Their fathers are likely to hold full-time jobs, and they rarely have the time to assume the role of primary caregiver... Most fathers pass the caregiving responsibilities on to other relatives, many of whom, already had families on their own to care for..." (149). Along with the reconsideration of the figure of the father, analyses on the children with more than one mother or those who confuse them since the biological one is absent should be studied.

The lack of male emotional responsibility and the presence of competing mothers can also be traced throughout the figure of Judith. She arrived in the U.S. with her husband leaving three daughters in Guatemala. While the girls constantly claim the presence of the mother, the father is left at the margins of the transnational family unit and he is uncritically seen as the material provider—despite Judith’s struggles for money. Judith works cleaning houses but the documentary does only focus on her family life and the sacrifices she endures. As she mentions, her life is a permanent sacrifice revealing the main motifs that pushed her into traveling illegally to the U.S.:

dejé a mis niñas... ahora que están pequeñas pues viene uno para poder trabajar y sacarlas adelante, poder dales un estudio, una nueva vida... Nosotros que somos padres de familia, vemos niños... y pues yo me voy a sacrificar para cuando llegue o vengan mis hijos acá o yo allá...pues yo también voy a decorar así esto, voy a hacer lo otro... poder darles una vida así... uno viendo el futuro de ellas pues es que se sacrifica dejándolas allá para venirse uno a ganarse unos centavos más acá. Fue mi triste por la niña qué está aquí [showing pictures of her daughters], pues la chiquita...ella estaba chiquita, ella no entendía... yo le estaba dando pecho...una semana antes de venirme, yo tuve que sacrificarme en ya no verla. Tengo dos años de no verlas...lo que mando para allá con ellas es casi digamos que la mitad de lo que yo gano...es un sacrificio pues muy grande, y yo le pido a Dios que me ayude, que valga la pena.

She is finding ways to reunite her children who have been taken care of by Judith’s mother and sister. These women play the role of “adoptive” mothers finally relocated in a secondary maternal place due to Judith’s return to Guatemala. In her portrayal of an immigrant Latina, the documentary fails to question gender binaries and similarly reassesses the importance of the biological mother. As in the case of the African-American family’s testimonies where the mother responds to more emotional and affective issues and the father is engaged in concerns related to economy and protection, Judith’s husband’s role as caregiver is practically unheard. We see him in very few shots at home, at the church and by the end, at Judith’s departure. She is the true heroine who—in spite of sacrificing her life for her children—feels guilty for not being there “porque uno cuando se enferman sus hijos quiere estar allá con ellos porque es cuando más ellos necesitan de uno,” and then she starts crying. Moreover, she is pregnant again. This is a culminating stage of motherly glorification and of intimacy as a public and visible product since the audience witnesses Judith’s most private moment: the birth of her child. In addition to recording this event through which a woman fulfills gendered cultural expectations, the camera also participates in the baptism of the new born child Everest. In this sense, Judith exemplifies an ideal mother always caring for her children in Guatemala, and performing religious rituals through catholic baptism. Judith found her job through an association for social justice run by an American woman involved in the political and socioeconomic recognition of immigrant workers. Their meetings produce a relation of proximity between locals and aliens towards the configuration of an ideal nation. The American woman in charge of the organization also becomes part and parcel of Judith’s family life, as we can see them together in the baptism of Everest. Finally, Judith decides to return with Everest while her husband remains in the U.S. The camera records the sad and stirring separation of the couple with a melancholic soundtrack that emphasizes the intensity of emotions. This shot is juxtaposed with the joy experienced in the reunion of Judith’s family members in Guatemala. The small girl who was several months old when Judith left does not recognize her as her mother since Judith’s sister and mother are the ones who have been taking care of the girls living off the remittances sent by Judith and her husband.

Similar to the experience of Telma and the articulation of motherhood as a free floating signifier with multiple competing positions, the spatial relocation of Judith puts her in the right place. The girls’ aunt and grandmother function temporally as metaphors of the idealized self-sacrificing representation of Judith. Biological motherhood displaces adoptive figures as uneasily adequate. Judith and another family member ask the little girl “¿quién es tu mamá?” since she rejects looking at Judith and her aunt replies: “las dos somos tu mamá; ella es tu mamá y yo también soy tu mamá.” Referring to the camera and to the audience by large, Judith mentions: “las grandes ya entienden, ya comprenden, ya saben que yo soy su mama, que ella es su tía, pero la niña chiquita no me

vio...su mama fue mi hermana.” By the end of Judith’s portrayal, she is putting her kids to bed and tells her youngest girl to say goodbye to her mother; Judith herself: “dígame feliz noche a mamita” and the little girl finally recognizes her as her “mother” by saying: “feliz noche mamita.” In this fashion, biological motherhood is finally celebrated in the documentary together with a sentimentalized notion of maternity.⁵ The last shots of Judith’s life reflect very intimate spaces that involve domestic practices with her daughters—cleaning, cooking or eating. Moreover, we are faced with the tenderness and softness of “resting” and peacefulness; the camera focuses on a particular moment when Judith is tucking in their children. The portrayal of Guatemalan life differs from the nostalgic mood of Judith’s life in the U.S. and the music and visual scenes present family life as the desired goal. Judith supervises all the changes that the house has undergone thanks to the money she and her husband have sent and speaks of future plans to travel to the U.S. with her daughters. But up to this point, she embodies the accurate vision of sacrificing motherhood; to the extent that she and her daughters will be unable to leave the country at least for the next few years after the documentary was filmed. Judith’s agency reinscribes her within a traditional paradigm of child-rearing and care for others also at the expense of commodifying intimacy.

From happy and joyful images in Guatemala, the documentary alternates with the life of Eva. She is a single Mexican woman whose desire is to become an independent, autonomous and self-efficient woman with resources other than mothering or house-cleaning. As she herself narrates in her testimonies, she has obtained degrees on accountancy in Mexico that are unfortunately useless in the U.S. Eva speaks English demonstrating an unquestionable ability to aspire to other kinds of job that would push her into a female non-traditional position. In order to establish herself as a viable national subject, she gives up her Spanish language and therefore, she erases the concreteness of her difference. And as she affirms: “they [Americans] consider me more reliable since I speak English.” In relation to signs such as the Muslim scarf in France that fails to accommodate to French national ideal as Ahmed affirms, Eva’s particularity of being “different” through her native language is sacrificed by her use of English. In this sense, the efficiency of her English would promote a more business oriented job away from intimacy and affection, and a sense of safety and national security.

Nevertheless, Eva has to work as a house cleaner while she studies during her free time. The documentary records affective moments of her proximity to an old lady for whom she works. Like Telma and Judith, Eva embodies “care for others” and the old lady describes qualities related to emotion and need. Eva’s work means more than cleaning the lady’s house; it provides the old woman with company through communication, physical presence and with help. This is a symbiotic relationship of proximity disguised by an exchange of money. One more time, love is extracted from the Global South in order to meet the needs of the Global North. The old lady receives and consumes the care, attention and affect given by Eva who becomes more of a friend to her:

Eva is probably the closest thing to an angel that I have around me for a long time. . . . She has really saved my life by taking over things that I really wasn’t evil to do for myself. My daughter comes and does what little she can, but she is busy with her own family and life. . . . It’s absolutely essential for older people to have some kind of help. . . . She’s been more friend than anything else and I think she feels the same, I hope she does!⁶

If the Africa-American family represents Telma as the protector and ideal mother of the nation urgently installed within the U.S. collective imaginary, the testimony of the local old woman

⁵In her book chapter “Families in the Frontier,” Hondagneu-Sotelo concludes with the urgency to revisit notions of family, social relations and sentimentalized notions of motherhood that coexist with the new paradigm of *braceras* and transnational motherhood. Similarly, she refers to the children as active agents in migration: an issue that should have been more deeply represented in the documentary,

⁶Whereas many social studies such as Lynn May Rivas’ “Invisible Labors: Caring for the Independent Person” have emphasized the invisibility of the house-cleaners and particularly the labor done by those who care old people, the old lady gives Eva recognition and respect. Moreover, she is aware of her inability to provide for herself through fully crediting Eva.

similarly positions Eva in a motherly place as the unique and more effective space for Latina bodies. Instead of thinking of her as a resourceful woman rather than a “caretaker,” Eva is defined in terms of love, affection and care. In this sense, the documentary fails to encounter testimonies or representations that would open new choices and chances for these women but it sentimentalizes motherhood and presents a conservative ideology of Latina subjects in the U.S. Along with care for others, the audience attends to the narration of a traumatic event in the life of Eva; the moment of her grandmother’s death. Normally immigrants confront these events through phone calls from a family member and have to cope with that situation without family support. The documentary gives Eva a visual space to remember that private momentum of her grandmother’s death and to share it with the audience. Her cries are accompanied by stirring music, and emotions circulate among the protagonists’ and the spectators’ bodies. Depictions of care, sadness, loss and affectivity are combined with her struggles to work as an accountant. For a brief period of time, she is hired as a tax preparer but as we know at the very end, in the next years she will still work as a house cleaner. Eva is an active woman who participates in C.H.I.R.L.A events against socioeconomic discrimination. Primarily, C.H.I.R.L.A. is an association that vindicates the rights of the domesticas. They perform pieces of theater staging experiences of abuse. In this direction, the documentary shows great potential in depicting women’s roles beyond mothering. Nevertheless, its focus on these particular events is scarcely represented and it continues re/inscribing Latina bodies within domesticity, and care for others as the ideal source of economy.

As emotional subjects who cry, share their intimacy with the audience, and invest their energy and time in caring for others through self-sacrifice, Telma, Judith and Eva also “circulate between bodies” (4)—to put it into Ahmed’s words—and form responses on the part of the audience. Their testimonies, their physical emotional signs, their daily practices engaged in love and care are performatively stuck onto their bodies and simultaneously effect or affect the audience’s feelings. In this sense as Ahmed affirms “emotions show us how histories stay alive, even when they are not consciously remembered; how histories of colonialism, slavery, and violence shape lives and worlds in the present” (202). Moreover, emotions function as a way to urge the audience to mobilize both emotionally and politically for changing the socioeconomic structures of the Global North and its reordering of immigrants’ lives. Emotions, as they may appear in the documentary, are intimately associated with social (in)justice. In other words, Telma, Judith and Eva’s emotions expose stories of injustice effecting compassion and empathy on the bodies of the audience. Critically speaking, the Global South is repeatedly exposed as the container of victimization only redeemed through the articulation of maternity and motherhood as “proper” and “protective” signs of U.S. national imaginary. The three women’s public exposure turns them into objects of our feelings conditioned by compassion and empathy. Laura Berlant, Ahmed and Paul Hogget refer to the importance of compassion in politics and how it has been used by state’s conservative propaganda. Indeed, Hogget’s argument is “the need to move away from a concept of compassion which is infused with the sentimentality of pity towards a concept which is more akin to solidarity” (146). *Maid in America* brings us closer to this idea by representing abuse and discrimination, yet the portrayal of the intimate and personal lives of Telma, Judith and Eva makes us feel pity for them; they are more inscribed in isolation rather than as a part of a social collective that needs to change. Despite their suffering testimonies, the sentimentalized notion of motherhood that is presented similarly idealizes them as the perfect care takers who should not give up “mothering” and “caring.” At the same time, the emotions they perform render them as suffering human beings redeemed in the space of motherhood. Empathy—as another feeling activated in the audience—may reiterate cultural hierarchies and “can itself be imperialistic, a form of ‘falsifying projection’ in which self projects its own assumptions and values onto what it believes to be the experience of other” (150). In other words, the audience sublimates the characters’ desires and goals into the maximum axiom of motherhood and maternity. In this way, the documentary rather than avoiding a strategic representation that would overcome sentimentalized notions of motherhood—as Hodagneu-Sotelo vindicates in reference to Latina mothers—reinforces maternity and care for others as the ultimate and viable goal of these women in order to become proper and protector citizens of the U.S. nation.

Considering the positive assets of *Maid in America* with respect to the representation of a socioeconomic discrimination awareness through the testimonies and images of three Latina women who have experienced the hardships of migration, the hyperbolization of their bodies as maternal reinscribes them as the most appropriate female bodies of the U.S. nation. Through relations of contiguity and condensation that imply subordination and self-sacrifice, these “alien” subjects become viable mothers and protectors of a nation constantly threatened by the “Other.” Telma, Judith and Eva are emotional subjects who cry, tell sad stories about their pasts, and who invest their new lives on others through care and affect. As I have shown, a conservative ideology permeates the documentary by demarcating these bodies within an unquestionable domesticity and motherhood that appears to be the ideal identification for the three women. Moreover, biological maternity debunks adoptive family roles displacing and discrediting those individuals who have been in charge of the children left behind. In this fashion, *Maid in America* fails to call for a reorganization and redistribution of gender roles and praises woman’s ultimate goal: draining the care chain and the reproduction of mothering in order to be suitable immigrants in the U.S. landscape.

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